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Newsroom

RWU Law Series Highlights Women in the Law

Women's role in law growing

By Denise Perreault, PBN Staff Writer

To highlight the increasingly significant role of women in the law, Roger Williams University School of Law in Bristol is presenting a year-long series of seminars on "Women Who Lead," which kicked off Oct. 29 with an address by **Margaret H. Marshall**, chief justice of the Supreme Judicial Court in Massachusetts.

David A. Logan, dean of the law school and a law professor, said he proposed the series in part as a result of the discussions earlier this year regarding the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, discussions that involved heated debate over the role a judge's life experience should play in rendering judicial decisions.

"The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience," Logan said, directly quoting an 1881 statement of the great American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. That's a sentiment with which Logan fully agrees. "Deciding cases is not purely mathematical," Logan said. "Judges make choices that are not all based upon a set of understandings in law books," but bring a "rich array" of life experiences to the job.

Women on the bench "absolutely" can help open the door to wider acceptance of life experience in the law, Logan said. "And, by the way, it's the life experience of half of our population," he added, "so it seems particularly dumb not to want to have it on the bench. To imply that a woman's life experience is the same as a man's is foolish. It's different, not better or worse, just different."

Rhode Island Supreme Court Justice **Maureen McKenna Goldberg**, who has been a judge for 19 years, pointed out that various groups underrepresented as judges can bring "so much dimension and depth to the bench," such as members of minority groups, trial lawyers and women, especially in an appellate court. "Each constituency is very important," she said, "but women sometimes cross so many of those dimensions."

"More women are entering law school, but few become partners and few become judges," Goldberg observed, "and yet, according to some, a woman's perspective can only broaden and enrich the legal profession." [...]

Cynthia Thomas Calvert, deputy director of the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California Hastings College of Law and author of several books and articles on women in the law, is studying what she called “the hidden bias” involving female associates at law firms across the country. She spoke Nov. 10 at a Roger Williams’ “Women Who Lead” seminar. [...]

Other speakers in the “Women Who Lead” series will include: **Angela Ciccolo**, interim general counsel/secretary to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Full story: http://www.pbn.com/detail.html?sub_id=b0fb262eca12