Celebration of Women's History Month

On Friday, 24 March 2017, the First Mississippi Chapter of Blacks In Government hosted a Luncheon and Panel Discussion at the Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC), US Army Corps of Engineers. The National President of Blacks In Government, Honorable Dr. Doris P. Sartor, gave the opening presentation and participated in the Panel Discussion on "Mentoring, Leadership and Career Development." Honorable Dr. Sartor's opening presentation was as follows:

Thanks to all of you for being here as we celebrate Women's History Month. It is my pleasure to join this distinguished panel as we honor the accomplishments of incredible women whose courage, determination and dedication have sustained the American spirit not just throughout our history, but also through these present times. Today, we honor those women by focusing on "Mentoring, Leadership, and Career Development." Those who came before us paved the way and made significant progress; now we intend to go even further.

Yes, it is during Women's History Month, we recognize the victories, struggles, and stories of the women who have made our country what it is today. This month, we are especially reminded that even in America, freedom and justice have never come easily. Women have broken down barriers, created new opportunities, championed justice and risked their lives for the greater good. Throughout our Nation's history, they have led movements for social and economic justice, made groundbreaking scientific discoveries, enriched our culture with stunning works of art and literature, and charted bold directions in our foreign policy. They have served our country with valor, while leaving enduring imprints upon our history. Women such as Brig. Gen Diana Holland who was the first female commandant of cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York; and Navy Officer Melissa Rose Barnes, who was preparing for her first assignment at sea when she died at her post at the Pentagon during the 9/11 attack.

In the political arena, some of these women are very well known... Like our former First Lady Michelle Obama, or Hillary Clinton or, the first woman National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, or The Honorable Shirley Chisholm who was the first black woman elected to the United States Congress, or Charlene Mitchell, the first black woman to run for president of the United States.

Others are unknown outside of their families and communities. Women such as the New York Police Officer, Moira Smith, who perished at the World Trade
Center as she directed others to safety or Ms. Darlene H. Young, the former president and current Board Chair of National Blacks In Government (BIG) who has put her life on hold and given countless hours to further the mission of BIG and fight against racial inequalities and gender disparities...and this list goes on and on. All deserve our recognition and our heartfelt praise and appreciation.

Regardless of all their accomplishments; there is still significant gender disparities which still exist that prevent women from living up to their full potential. Some of these challenges of the new generation are:

* Cultural stereotypes. When women act in gender conscious ways (cooperative and relationship-focused); they are often perceived as soft leaders by men and women alike. But when they are "authoritarian" (outspoken) they are often viewed as overly aggressive ("acting like a man"). Therefore, women have to adjust their behavior based on the situation.

* Unemployment/underemployment. Millennials are the largest generation at over 85-90 million in the US and the most educated generation in history. We have a supply of educated workers much higher than the demand for them in the workplace. Forty percent (40%) of unemployed workers are Millennials (born between 1981-2000 - ages 17 - 36 or 18-32 depending on the source). Sixty-seven percent (67%) of Millennials in the labor force are women.

* Gender wage gap. Millennial women face a gender wage gap (In 2015, women working full time in the U.S. were paid just 80% of what men were paid, a gap of 20 percent).

To quote Shirley Chisholm, "Tremendous amounts of talent are lost to our society just because that talent wears a skirt." As the current administration remind us, to make America Great again requires all of us working in tandem with each other. Former President Obama put it so succinctly when he said, "Let us remember that when women succeed, America succeeds. From Wall Street to Main Street, in the White House and on Capitol Hill -- let us put our Nation on the path to success."

Therefore, today in moving toward that brighter future; we will focus on "Mentoring, Leadership and Career Development." Our panelists will discuss topics relevant to women in the 21st century.