

# Remarks Delivered by CIA Director John O. Brennan and Dr. Madeleine Albright at the CIA Women's History Month Celebration

## Excerpts of Remarks Delivered by Central Intelligence Agency Director John O. Brennan and Dr. Madeleine Albright at the CIA Women's History Month Celebration (March 19, 2013)

**D/CIA Brennan:** Good morning CIA! I can't tell you how wonderful it feels to say that. [*Laughter*] Thank you.

It is wonderful being back here at CIA, and to participate in this event. I also would like to welcome back to the Agency my wife Kathy. She is here with us today and is looking forward to once again participating in Agency activities, as she and I did for 25 years.

I'm especially happy to be part of a celebration that honors women in the federal service. During my three decades in government—including 25 years here at CIA—I've seen firsthand the knowledge, leadership, courage, and dedication that women bring to the table in meeting the most difficult missions, including the intelligence mission.

Years from now, when enough time has passed so that authoritative histories of the post-9/11 counterterrorism campaign can be written, they will tell the story of how quite a few extraordinary women, here at CIA and elsewhere in the government, made truly decisive contributions to the war effort against al-Qa'ida and its affiliates.

And just this year, we said farewell to a CIA legend, Jeanne Vertefeuille. An acknowledged expert on counterintelligence and an East Bloc specialist, Jeanne led the unit that identified Aldrich Ames as a mole.

She joined CIA in 1954 as a GS-4 typist and blazed a trail for women in the Directorate of Operations—the forerunner of the National Clandestine Service—at a time when it was overwhelmingly a male enterprise. She worked her way up to leadership positions and retired as a member of the Senior Intelligence Service in 1992.

In 1976 ... our History Staff says that of the Agency's 98 key officials at that time, only one was a woman. Some might regard that as ancient history, but it was only four years before I joined CIA. [*Laughter*]

The situation is considerably different now, of course—you're laughing because I joined CIA that long ago? Yes, I am part of ancient history! [*Laughter*]

This situation is considerably different now, of course, thanks in part to leaders ... [who] paved the way for the likes of Sue Bromley, Fran Moore, Sue Gordon, Jeanne Tisinger, ... and so many other women who are part of the Agency's leadership team today.

But, as an organization, we can and must do better, leveraging the talents of women in our workforce.

Nearly a year ago, David Petraeus asked our keynote speaker, the Honorable Madeleine K. Albright, to head up the Director's Advisory Group on Women in Leadership, also known as the DAG. Her mandate was to examine why more women GS-13 and above were not achieving promotions and positions of greater responsibility at the Agency.

The DAG published its findings last month. ... I was not here for the launch or completion of the study, but I have spoken to Secretary Albright about the report several times and I fully support and endorse the DAG's findings and recommendations.

And I would like to thank Secretary Albright and all the members of her team [names removed] for all their hard work and dedication to this project. And now I'd like to ask all of the DAG members to stand up so that we can give them a richly deserved round of applause. [Applause]

What Secretary Albright and the other senior advisors, such as Michèle Flournoy, Justin Jackson, John McLaughlin, Mike Mullen, Fran Townsend, and the DAG members came up with isn't a generic re-telling of where the Agency is, or just another study to put on the shelf. It goes beyond numbers and statistics to address some very important aspects of our Agency's culture.

The DAG drew on the opinions of a great many officers ... through a survey, focus groups, interviews, meetings with Senior Advisors, and the DAG's blog. They put a tremendous amount of work into this effort, and the final report reflects it.

And perhaps the most important point I want to make here is that the recommendations will benefit not just women of our workforce, but the entire workforce. These recommendations are about developing and managing all of our people in a way that optimizes talent.

And I want all our Agency's leaders to embrace the standards outlined in the DAG's report—like providing actionable and timely feedback; being candid with officers about the impact of the choices they make on their career; and seeking creative, flexible workplace strategies that allow us to meet our mission.

Two of the DAG's ten recommendations—establishing clear promotion criteria from GS-15 to SIS and expanding the pool of nominees for promotion to SIS—are already in effect. But I must tell you that full implementation of all ten recommendations will take years to accomplish.

Some of these—like promoting sponsorship—are long-term initiatives intended to change certain aspects of our culture. They'll require sustained attention—and sustained attention we will give them.

Accordingly, I have directed that the report's ten recommendations and as much of the report as possible be issued in unclassified form. While most aspects of our intelligence mission need to remain classified, we should be open, honest, and proud of our efforts to ensure that all employees have the opportunity to reach their full professional potential.

[A senior officer] has been named to lead the implementation of the DAG's recommendations, and she has my full and sustained support. I look forward to working with her in applying these initiatives across the Agency. If we can get the implementation right, we'll meet our mission even better.

And, of course, on behalf of all of us at CIA, I want to express my deep gratitude to Secretary Albright for her tremendous leadership and for providing such a great service to our Agency. Her experience and knowledge were invaluable to this project, and we could never have achieved as much as we did without her.

Secretary Albright was, of course, America's first woman to serve as Secretary of State, and, at the time, the highest ranking woman in the history of the United States Government. She remains a widely admired and highly respected authority on international affairs, national security policy, and diplomacy, as well as a committed advocate for democracy and human rights worldwide.

... So please, everyone, join me in giving a warm Agency welcome to one of the Nation's greatest public servants and a true friend of CIA: The Honorable Madeleine K. Albright. [Applause]

**Dr. Albright:** Thank you. Thank you very, very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I am delighted to be here and to welcome the new Director—really a very, very kind introduction.

And I take to heart very much what you have said in terms of the report and your support for it, because leadership comes from the top and you are providing it in so many ways. So thank you—thank you so much.

I am certain that the President made the right choice for our country in nominating you; whether you made the right choice for your mental health in accepting it [*Laughter*] only time will tell! But you did survive the Senate, which shows your grit and your capability of succeeding. So I wish you the very, very best.

And this morning, I am delighted to join with you here in observing Women's History Month.

I say that not because I recognize any distinction between world history and women's history or, for that matter, men's. In my view, these are really not separate categories but should be considered part of a complete whole. I feel this very strongly and may even write about it in my next book, so stay tuned.

Meanwhile, I want to thank each of you for what you and the Agency accomplish on behalf of our country. I know that, in the popular media, the CIA is often portrayed as either evil or angelic, with a large dose of drama and glamour part of every day. But what is almost never emphasized is how much time and labor goes into the routine but vital job of collecting and analyzing information.

In my earlier life, as UN Ambassador and then Secretary of State, I was known as a consumer of intelligence—and I always had a voracious appetite. Each morning, I read your briefings and special reports, and consulted with CIA experts on everything from the Middle East and Central Asia to what sounds like the world's worst law firm: Mobutu, Mugabe, Milosevic, Kim Jong-il—and sons. [*Laughter*]

I always wondered why the briefers stayed and watched me read—to see if I was moving my lips. [*Laughter*] But I know—was there in order to answer my questions. Along the way, I did ask many questions and I received many helpful—although carefully hedged—answers.

I left office believing that the CIA is imperfect—as any human organization is—but that, collectively, you still know more about everything than most of us know about anything, and that you make enormous contributions each day to the safety and security of our people.

In the years since, nothing has happened to change my opinion. So I was intrigued when, last spring, former Director Petraeus invited me to participate in the Director's Advisory Group on Women in Leadership. And I want to thank everybody that worked so hard on the DAG .... Really, you worked so hard, and we have now become good friends, and thank you for all your work.

We were joined by several outstanding outside advisers, and—some of whom are here today—and finally, I would also want to thank the ... senior Agency leadership, and have been—who have been so supportive in all the work. I think it really was remarkable.

Our mandate was to examine and recommend changes in the Agency's personnel practices as they relate to the careers of women. And, to that end, we consulted widely, and I really am so grateful to many of you that participated. The final report does include these recommendations, and I think that they need—there is need for significant reforms in how people are managed.

Employees deserve to be judged fairly, rewarded equitably, and informed how and on what basis decisions affecting their careers are made. Overall, there is a requirement for better accountability, more transparency, and a greater willingness to adapt to new circumstances.

I hope that the report will be received in the same spirit with which it is offered, and that its implementation will benefit both the Agency and its vital mission. And so, I really am so encouraged by your remarks, Mr. Director,

and—I guess you’ve ordered everybody to call you John? *[Laughter]* So, *[thank you]* for everything that you have done and will do.

So this morning I was also invited here to share with you a bit of my personal history and to offer my insights, any of which might be of interest to you. Time is limited, so I’ll begin with the Twitter version of my biography. *[Laughter]*

Like many Americans, I did not begin my life in this country. Instead, I was born in Czechoslovakia only a few months before Hitler’s troops marched into the capital city of Prague.

My father was a diplomat at the time and unwilling to cooperate with the Nazis. And so my parents and I fled to England, which is where we spent World War Two.

I was just eight years old when that conflict ended and we returned to Prague. And because the fighting was over, my parents and I expected to be able to settle in. But within a couple of years, the government of Czechoslovakia was taken over by the Communists. And once again, my family was forced into exile, this time sailing across the Atlantic to a new and welcoming home.

We soon moved to Colorado, where my father helped to establish a school of international affairs at the University of Denver. And my own highest ambition was to fit in with my classmates and become a bona fide American teenager.

My parents weren’t a lot of help in the “blending in” department. *[Laughter]* Mainly because my mother was this delightful nut who actually read palms at dinner parties *[Laughter]* and would say to men while sitting next to their wives that they were going to meet mysterious women. *[Laughter]* She also predicted that I would have three sons and I have three daughters. *[Laughter]*

Meanwhile, my father also wanted to fit in but he was very, very serious. In Colorado, fitting in meant you went fishing. It’s just that he wore a coat and tie when he fished. *[Laughter]*

In high school, when I went out on a date, he’d follow along behind in the family car, later inviting the poor boy in for milk and cookies. So I didn’t have a lot of second dates until I went away to college. *[Laughter]*

When I did go away it was to Wellesley, a women’s college in Massachusetts. And I had a wonderful time and I received a fine education. But young women of that era were being groomed more for marriage than for anything else.

We were part of what we called the Silent Generation, but there were also a time and process of transition, and my own feelings were certainly mixed. I hoped to pursue a career that reflected my interest in journalism and world affairs. But I was also in love and planned to get married right after graduation. I waited actually three days. *[Laughter]*

Unfortunately, my new husband happened to work for a newspaper in Chicago where I also wanted to work. And I had done the right thing by working on a small paper in Missouri while he was in the Army.

And then we went to have dinner with his managing editor in Chicago, and he said, “So what are you going to do, Honey?”

And I said I’m going to work on a newspaper. And he said, “I don’t think so. You can’t work on the same paper as your husband because of guild regulations.”

And even though there were three other newspapers in Chicago at the time, he said, “Well, you wouldn’t want to compete with your husband.”

So, instead of saying what I might say now—or you might say [*Laughter*—I basically saluted and went home. But I really didn't—was not able to forget about it. But what's interesting is I recently came across a letter that I had written when I was 24 and out of college for two years, sitting at home with my twin daughters.

I concluded that I had been naïve to think that I could compete in the job market with men. And any competent interviewer would want to know what I would do if an emergency arose with the babies, or if my husband switched jobs and I had to leave town. I described myself as “a housewife who is dissatisfied with housekeeping and who doesn't know how to get out of the rut.”

Over the next decade or two, as my husband and I raised our family, we did move whenever he changed jobs. And I kept busy doing volunteer work, arranging car pools, navigating a double-wide stroller through the streets of Georgetown.

There were many satisfactions in being a mother, but I eventually decided to return to school and started my PhD work. And I used to get up every morning at 4:30 to write my dissertation. I finally finished—I started when my children were two, I finished when they were in junior high—when my daughter said, “Mom, if you can't finish your paper, we're never going to finish ours.” [*Laughter*]

When I was—when my children were older, I took a job in Washington with then United States Senator Ed Muskie, and then I later served in the Carter Administration on the National Security Council. And in all that time, I never imagined that I would one day become Secretary of State. And it wasn't that I lacked ambition. It's just that I had never seen a Secretary of State in a skirt.

I'll never forget what it was like the first day after I was sworn into my job and walked down that mahogany hallway at the State Department where all the portraits of my predecessors were hung. And the only difference among them was those who were clean-shaven and those who had beards.

And I imagined that my—that when my portrait went up, that the walls would shake a bit. Actually they did. [*Laughter*]

Obviously, this was a pivotal moment that altered perceptions and changed history. And in fact, given what has happened more recently with secretaries Rice and Clinton, we can now say that John Kerry is a source of inspiration for little boys everywhere. [*Laughter, applause*]

And by the way, my youngest granddaughter—when she turned seven, which is about three years ago—she said, “So what's the big deal about Grandma Maddy being Secretary of State? Only girls are Secretary of State.” [*Laughter*]

But looking back on my career, you might detect a lot of juggling, which all people who work—and especially women—have to do.

And as my career progressed, I had my share of setbacks and inner doubts, but I was also stubborn. When criticized by the media, I explained that the reason that I looked fatter was that I had grown a thicker skin. [*Laughter*]

I was also determined to succeed and felt after a while that I had truly found my voice and that some people, at least, were listening to it. And that's why I remain truly grateful to President Clinton, not only for nominating me to two cabinet-level positions, but for backing me on many of the key decisions during our years in office. I was proud to be in his administration and absolutely loved my job.

To me, a career in public service, especially as a representative of the American people, is all anyone can ever ask for. And in that spirit, I offer my respects to all of you, for what—that you would not be here if you had not earned the trust of our government.

The challenge, always, is to make the most of the opportunity. And that requires both that you do your job to the best of your ability, and that you stand up for your rights.

And this in turn demands leadership, which has been the subject of countless self-help books—none of which I have read. *[Laughter]*

Unlike some public speakers—Donald Rumsfeld for one—I never developed a catchy list of leadership rules. I don't have any favorite motivational slogans or quotations from Napoleon. And I find a lot of standard advice to be self-evident, useless, or worse.

For example, I have found that telling a person who is chronically indecisive to be confident does little good, and that advising a person to trust her instincts can actually cause harm when addressed to someone who has extremely strong opinions that are usually wrong. *[Laughter]*

I do, however, have a few suggestions, which you can take for what they're worth.

Years ago, I noticed that, in the classes I teach at Georgetown, female students were generally more polite than boys. And then I also remembered myself sitting in meetings and thinking that I might want to say something, and then thinking, no, I won't say it because people will think it's stupid.

And then, two people later, some man says it and everybody thinks it's brilliant. And you sit there and you're so mad at yourself for not having spoken up. And everybody thinks that whatever Bill said had been so smart.

Now in my classes, the girls tended to sit quietly and raise their hands. And this often meant that the boys were able to dominate the discussion. Ever since then, I have told my female students not to be afraid to interrupt. They don't raise their hands—my classes are a bit of a zoo. *[Laughter]*

But the bottom line is that they learn to speak up. In our era, it's better to risk being thought rude than to give the impression that you have nothing to say.

A second lesson I learned when serving as America's ambassador to the United Nations. And that—I have to say here I had given all this advice about not sitting in a meeting and not speaking and telling my students to raise their hands, but I walk into my first meeting at the Security Council—not in that big fancy room, but in that—the room where we have our informal discussions—and I sit there, and there are 14 men looking—sitting there and looking at me—and I'm thinking, well, I think I'll just wait, and see if they like me *[Laughter]* and what the mood of the room is.

And then I looked at the sign in front of me, and it said, "United States." And I thought if I didn't speak on that day, then, in fact, the voice of the United States would not be heard. And—I really—it was kind of an out-of-body experience.

I couldn't sit around and play it safe. I had to plunge ahead. After a while I got used to it and, before long, nobody could shut me up! *[Laughter]*

My point is that, in any group, someone has to lead and it might as well be you—when if you—and you have to be prepared to do so.

A third lesson I learned is not to be obsessed by the clock. I was 39 years old before I had my first professional job. I was 55 when I became UN ambassador and four years older than that when I became Secretary of State.

My friend, Senator Barbara Mikulski, says she worked for a quarter of a century to become an overnight success. *[Laughter]*

There is no question that we live in a youth-oriented culture. But when it comes to generating results, experience and character count far more than a wrinkle-free face.

My fourth point is not to let anyone else tell you what you can do and where you belong. You may have ambitions that go beyond what others expect. These desires may surprise your friends and inconvenience some who are close to you. But you have to make the choice.

You have to decide whether to allow others to define the boundaries of your life—or to chart your own course even if you're not entirely sure where you're going. No one can make that choice for you—and no path is inherently right or wrong.

My only advice is to act out of hope, not fear, and to take responsibility for whatever you decide.

Finally, I have one message that I always insist on sharing with professional women, and that is to look around the room at the faces of your colleagues and remember that there is a special place in Hell reserved for women who refuse to help one another. [*Laughter, applause*]

None of us—none of us get to where we are on our own. And none of us will get to where we want to go unless we move forward together.

And if you remember nothing else from what I've said this morning—remember that.

So thank you very, very much, and thank you all for giving me the opportunity to be a part of your family. I hope I get to stay. Thank you very much. [*Applause, standing ovation*]

Posted: Mar 22, 2013 10:48 AM

Last updated: Mar 22, 2013 11:51 AM

Last Reviewed: Mar 22, 2013 10:48 AM