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Panel asks women leaders how times have changed

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COEUR d'ALENE - Suffrage, the equal **rights** movement, and advances in science and technology were just a few of the answers Bob Bennett received when he asked a panel of local leaders, all women, why they think there are more women in positions of leadership today. "There is a subtle change going on in this country, I'm convinced of it - a transformational change," Bennett said. "It is happening when we have this many women in this many roles of leadership." Bennett, director of the **Human Rights Education** Institute, posed the question during "Journeys in Leadership: A discussion with Inland Northwest Women," a free public forum held Tuesday at North Idaho College. About 75 people attended.

The seven-member panel included Coeur d'Alene Mayor Sandi Bloem, Sandpoint Mayor Gretchen Heller, North Idaho College President Priscilla Bell, Lewis-Clark State College President Dene Thomas, incoming superintendent of the Coeur d'Alene School District Hazel Bauman, North Idaho Title President Michelle Fink and Beverly Walker-Griffea, a former counselor at Spokane Community College and current vice president of Student Affairs at Thomas Nelson Community College in Virginia.

At Bennett's prompting, each woman shared about how she got to where she is today.

"It was passion. You need to know I grew up in the years of the civil **rights** movement and I grew up in Texas.

What I saw around me every day was not necessarily a pretty sight. There was lots of discrimination and not much interest in change," Bell said.

She first learned about community colleges she was 16 years old and there was a local bond issue being floated in her county to create the first junior college.

One of Bell's mother's friends was a key person in that effort.

"I saw at that age that what we are, what community colleges are, institutions of hope and opportunity and choice for people," Bell said. "That passion gave me a focus to pursue the dream of making a difference through working community colleges."

Mayor Sandi Bloem said having a family which never expected her to achieve less because she was a woman was a big part of her success.

Bennett asked the panelists a series of questions ranging from who their role models were to how they felt about quotes made by famous women about women.

Dene Thomas mentioned Malcolm Gladwell's book, "The Tipping Point," about the levels at which the momentum for change becomes unstoppable.

Thomas said all it takes is one person to do something first to make that happen.

A common theme from each of the panelists throughout the discussion was the importance of focusing on individuality before gender.

"We're all different," said Gretchen Heller.

Beverly Walker-Griffea, vice-president of student affairs at Thomas Nelson Community College in Virginia, answers questions Tuesday at North Idaho College.

JEROME A. POLLOS/Press

Bell

Bloem

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