



CONSTANCE VAN FLANDERN



BETHANY GRACE HOWE

# THE RISE OF THE WOMAN = THE RISE OF THE NATION

## The Women's March on Washington in Eugene and across the country

BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

**“H**ere I am at 79, I’m going to be an activist,” says Deanna Eisinger, a retired grade school teacher. “I think we need to ruffle feathers and raise some consciousness.”

Recently out of the hospital after an asthma attack triggered her atrial fibrillation, Eisinger is not going to let something like an irregular heartbeat stop her from speaking up. She is going to carry a sign in the Jan. 21 Eugene sister march to the Women’s March on Washington, the day after Donald Trump’s presidential inauguration.

“I’m planning to go; I may not be able to walk the whole route but I’m going to go,” says Eisinger, who lives on a farm in Lorane. “We have to keep resisting and speaking out. I’ve never been a loudmouth but I’m changing. At my age I don’t care what people think.”

Trump’s election means that Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton did not break that final glass ceiling and become the first woman president. According to the World Economic Forum, 59 other countries have had a female head of state, but not the U.S.

Trump’s election also means that the man who once bragged that when he sees good-looking women, “I grab them by the pussy,” is our nation’s leader.

His election, despite losing the popular vote to Clinton by more than 2 million ballots, put a man in office who has vilified Mexicans and Muslims and whose campaign statements won Pulitzer Prize winner PolitiFact’s 2015 Lie of the Year award.

The post election worries are well-known: The hateful election cycle rhetoric, fears that women’s reproductive rights will diminish and chances for equal pay will be reduced, worries about immigrant rights and anxiety Trump will start World War III with a tweet: The list goes on.

As a result, a lot of people — and women in particular — woke up in the days after the Nov. 8, 2016 election motivated to speak up, act out and make changes. So the Women’s March on Washington was born.

**“I’VE BEEN A WOMAN NOW** for 53 weeks,” Bethany Grace Howe muses. “And now I’m hopping into the deep end of the pool.”

Howe is one of a group of eight Oregon women who decided after Donald Trump’s November election that they needed to stand up for women’s rights — all women — and recognize “that our vibrant and diverse communities are the strength of our country,”

as the official statement for the national Women’s March on Washington goes.

Howe, who is a doctoral student in journalism at the University of Oregon and is transgender, says that while the march is not a protest, “It is naïve to pretend it’s not a response to the election.”

The national march came together, if not spontaneously, then organically, nearly overnight. A retired attorney and grandmother living in Hawaii named Theresa Shook created a Facebook event page for a march before going the bed election night and invited 40 of her friends, who invited their friends.

The idea hit the “Pantsuit Nation” Facebook page and the numbers exploded, (though the march itself is unrelated to Pantsuit Nation). More women began to create pages to sign up to march.

Fashion entrepreneur Bob Bland was one of those women who administered a page early on. In a statement on its origins, the march’s website says that, “The reality is that the women who initially started organizing were almost all white.”

Many of the organizers refer to themselves as admins, taking the language from Facebook where administrators run pages.

In addition to the exploding number of marchers, what also soon exploded was a discussion of issues such as diversity and racism — the name that Shook chose, Million Woman March, is also the name of a 1997 gathering of about 750,000 African-American women in Philadelphia, and some saw using the same name for the new march as cultural appropriation.

And as the Women’s March origin statement says, “It was, and is, clear that the Women’s March on Washington cannot be a success unless it represents women of all backgrounds.”

By Nov. 11 the name had been changed to the Women’s March on Washington, and as Oregon organizer Erin Barnhart wrote that day on the state march admins’ page, “This cannot be a white feminist march; it must be intersectional, in name, participation and spirit.”

Intersectionality is way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power, and is the theory that people have multiple intersecting identities that reflect related systems of oppression, domination or discrimination. Oregon admin Howe calls it “the ability to understand there is more than one lens through which to view things.”

Barnhart had an Oregon Facebook page up for the event by Nov. 10.

PHOTOS: TODD COOPER