

Indian Health Service

Women's History Month Commemorative Program

March 17, 2010

“Writing Women Back Into History”

by

Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, Indian Health Service

I am honored to be here today at this event to recognize the role of women in history. Women have been making huge strides in recent history, as has been noted here today. I am living proof of that, as the first female director of the Indian Health Service (IHS).

But I would not be standing here today as Director of a major federal agency if it were not for the hard work, courage, and accomplishments of American Indian and Alaska Native women who came before me – women such as Susan La Flesche Picotte, the first female Native American physician and a member of the Omaha Tribe, who was a pioneer in her field and instrumental in improving health conditions for her Tribes; and Susan Walking Bear Yellowtail, a member of the Crow Nation and the first Native American Registered Nurse, who was named **Nurse of the 20th Century** by the American Nursing Hall of Fame.

And I would like to acknowledge all the non-famous, unsung Indian women, indeed all the women throughout history, who, one-by-one, little-by-little, helped us to move forward in our efforts to empower individual women, advance women's rights, and obtain recognition of women's place in history – women such as Dr. Joan Reede, dean for diversity and community partnership at Harvard Medical School, who served as my mentor and whose support and encouragement helped me to advance on my career path.

Currently, nearly 72 percent of the entire IHS staff and over 50 percent of IHS senior leadership is female, making women a vital and powerful part of the IHS mission. I am hopeful that this level of female leadership will soon be echoed throughout the government and the private sector, as women increasingly assume positions of authority and responsibility across the nation. Progress is certainly being made, thanks to all the women who fought for equal rights throughout history, and to the efforts of a new, progressive administration. I would like to acknowledge and thank President Obama and his administration for placing so many women, including myself, Secretary Sebelius, Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, and many others, in key positions of leadership in this administration.

I believe this is the beginning of a glorious time in history for women. We are truly beginning to “Write Women Back into History.” Thank you.

The text is the basis of Dr. Roubideaux's oral remarks at the Women's History Month Commemorative Program on March 17, 2010. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.