

Misogyny: A cultural, not a partisan, problem

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In 2016, I first volunteered with the Pueblo Democrats as I felt morally outraged by the Republican nomination of Donald Trump; the only reason I ever filed to run for HD 47 was because the then-incumbent was chairwoman of Latinas for Trump. I didn't understand how a woman, particularly a Latina, could support the raging, blatant misogyny of Trump; I was proud to be part of the political party that trended #believewomen.

Over the years, I learned campaign management, grassroots fundraising, community organizing, and built my own professional network. I had to learn this because I was told explicitly many times by Democratic leadership not to expect institutional support in what many insiders called my "no-hope" bid for a House seat in southern Colorado. Years later, I now work full time in politics; when I'm not working, I volunteer as the chairwoman of the Pueblo County Democratic Party.

And the truth is misogyny isn't a Republican problem; it's a cultural problem that is indeed shared by Democratic men. It's extremely difficult to write about; as young girls we're taught to manage the emotions of others and to dutifully and uncomplainingly manage multiple tasks, then we grow up into women who are constantly told not to be "dramatic" regardless of how severe the behavior of men. But I'm not going anywhere, and this isn't the kind of culture I want for my goddaughters.

Since becoming chairwoman, I've been publicly attacked multiple times, with seemingly small lies about endorsements to the most egregious gaslighting about communicated expectations, party votes, or even publicly-witnessed events. An excellent first example of this was the rambling, vitriolic op-ed published in Colorado Politics on Nov. 24, blaming me for the loss of Democratic control on Pueblo City Council.

As the party Chairwoman, I don't expect to be immune from criticisms about party performance. What surprised me was the sheer volume of inaccuracies in the allegations leveled in a published piece. The author also began the piece by comparing me to a former House colleague who has

openly advocated for civil war if Trump loses. If such a hyperbolic comparison was made by a woman author, they'd be accused of hysteria and I doubt it'd be published at all.

That same op-ed, like a recent letter to the editor, also attacked me personally on the now infamous confrontation between Eppie Griego and Vicente Martinez Ortega, where Commissioner Griego used a homophobic slur.

Both pieces blasted my decision to condemn Commissioner Griego's actions and demand his apology, neither criticizes the slur. Instead, they've accused me of lying about the incident, despite multiple witnesses to the event, including a much louder, more public confrontation, where Griego didn't deny using that slur and instead rambled about his entitlements as an elected official. These are published criticisms by Pueblo men because of my firm response, but not Griego's public display of homophobia at an event where we were honoring a gay man's contributions to the union cause.

You might think that with my husband entering the profession that this misogyny would get quieter, or at least more subtle. In reality, I've had multiple men try to schedule a meeting with him as though I was the senator's secretary or legislative aide. There were several high-ranking members of Democratic leadership that assumed that I was on his campaign staff criticizing my professional capabilities on his performance; we had actually decided that I wouldn't be involved in his campaign. I've even had peers try to lobby me regarding bills, nominations, or Hinrichsen's votes in front of my boss, which absolutely mortified me.

It's like it's 1973 and a woman can't possibly be her own professional and person; that my husband's title, aspirations, and professional goals can't possibly be just his own. To be clear, like every professional, I've made a few mistakes and like an adult, I've owned up to them.

In a public line of work, one expects to face public criticism, but this thinly-veiled vendetta has never been about my mistakes. It's also certainly not a unique experience. In six years, I've seen disgusting behavior towards other women in politics, especially towards Democratic women such as the previous chair and the county commissioners. It's the multiple cyberbullying campaigns; those disgusting, hateful comments running the gamut from questioning their integrity, qualifications, or even the truth of their lived experiences. It's the judgements that we

put on these professional women as wives and mothers, publicly questioning their ability to “take care of a family” as they pursue their professional dreams.

And the essential question I have for Pueblo is: Do we believe women can be professionals with learned opinions and valid, lived experiences, and sound judgment? And more directly to Pueblo men, do you believe women when they say these things are happening? Do you step in when you see it, and push others to do better?

Because misogyny can't be fixed solely by women.



Bri Buentello Courtesy of Bri Buentello

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