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THE FIRST "FIRST GENTLEMAN": THE ROLE OF PRESIDENT JANE DOE'S HUSBAND

JOHN DWIGHT INGRAM*

I. INTRODUCTION.....	524
II. FROM WHENCE COMETH PRESIDENTS?.....	525
A. <i>Sources in the Past</i>	525
B. <i>Women in Such Positions</i>	526
1. <i>Congress</i>	526
2. <i>Governors</i>	529
3. <i>Others</i>	530
III. THE ROLE OF THE "FIRST GENTLEMAN".....	532
A. <i>Hostess and White House Manager</i>	532
B. <i>Campaign and Other Public Appearances</i>	533
C. <i>Major Project and Champion of Causes</i>	533
D. <i>Homebody, Wife and Mother</i>	534
E. <i>Adviser/Political Partner</i>	536
F. <i>More of a "Spur" than a Partner</i>	536
G. <i>Foreign Relations</i>	537
H. <i>A Continuing Career for the President's Spouse</i>	538
IV. THE EXAMPLES OF FOREIGN "FIRST GENTLEMEN".....	538
V. HUSBANDS OF POSSIBLE FEMALE PRESIDENTS.....	539
VI. WHAT ROLE SHOULD A FIRST GENTLEMAN PLAY?.....	540

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I. INTRODUCTION**

It seems inevitable that sooner or later we will have a female president of the United States. A recent survey indicates that sixty-four percent of 1,000 American adults surveyed believe that a woman will be the President within thirty years.¹ Speaking at Wellesley College's commencement in 1990, then-First Lady Barbara Bush said: "Who knows . . . somewhere out there in this audience may even be someone who will one day follow in my footsteps and preside over the White House as the President's spouse." She paused briefly before adding "And I wish him well."² This article first explores the field of potential female presidents, and then discusses the role that might be played by "President Jane Doe's" husband.

Many people share the prediction of former First Lady Betty Ford when she said that the first female president will have first served as vice president.³ Presidential candidates consider many factors when choosing a vice presidential running mate in order to "balance the ticket." These factors may include geography, position on issues, religion, and gender. As more women become active in politics,⁴ gender may become increasingly important in "balancing the ticket," as evidenced by Geraldine Ferraro's unsuccessful run for vice president in 1984.⁵ Since 1984, Democrats and Republicans alike have discussed possible female candidates during their political conventions every four years, and there will surely be other women nominated to run for vice president in the near future.

The most likely scenario for a female vice president's succession to

**I was born in 1929, while Herbert Hoover was president. Through sources such as newspapers and magazines, radio, newsreels, and television, I have "known" every president and First Lady from Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt to Bill and Hillary Clinton, as well as many other public figures. There are many facts and impressions about these people which are part of my personal knowledge and recollection. As to such matters, I have made no attempt to find a source that could be cited in these notes. Where more specific information has been the basis for a statement in the text of this article, I have cited the source.

1. Michele Weldon, *Americans Envision Woman President*, CHI. TRIB., June 1, 1997, § 13, at 3.

2. EDITH P. MAYO, *THE SMITHSONIAN BOOK OF THE FIRST LADIES: THEIR LIVES, TIMES AND ISSUES* 268 (1996).

3. CARL SZERRAZZA ANTHONY, *2 FIRST LADIES* 441 (1991).

4. See generally Ronald Brownstein, *In California Money Can't Buy You Love: The Surprise Issue: Who's a Real Democrat*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., May 18, 1998, at 303 (noting that the majority of females voting in California have helped women defeat men in four contested primaries since 1990); see also Emily MacFarquhar, *The War Against Women: In Much of the World, Political and Economic "Progress" Has Been Dragging Them Backward*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Mar. 28, 1994, at 4245 (finding "in America . . . women have made great strides in politics").

5. See MICHAEL BARONE & GRANT UJIFUSA, *THE ALMANAC OF AMERICAN POLITICS* 1996, lii-liii (1985) (discussing the general election results of 1984 and noting Democrats Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro's loss to Republicans Ronald Reagan and George Bush).

the Presidency is an automatic ascension upon the death or resignation of the President. This ascension has happened many times in the last 200 years, most recently with presidents Coolidge, Truman, Johnson and Ford. Three of those four went on to win election to the Presidency in their own right at the next election. Also, many vice presidents have become the Presidential nominee of their party upon the completion of two terms by their predecessors. Recent examples are Richard Nixon and George Bush, although Nixon was not successful until his second run in 1968.

Of course, a woman can also reach the Presidency without previous service as vice president. While there is undoubtedly lingering prejudice and reluctance about a female candidate for high office,⁶ the country has seen that such feelings need not be fatal. For example, John F. Kennedy became the first Roman Catholic president. Further, in 1996, many people believed that General Colin Powell could have been the first Black president if he had been willing to accept the nomination of either party.⁷

II. FROM WHENCE COMETH PRESIDENTS?

A. Sources in the Past

As indicated above, many of our presidents first served as vice presidents, and it is likely that this will continue to be true. As we look toward the 2000 election, Vice President Al Gore is a leading Democratic candidate,⁸ and former Vice President Dan Quayle is sometimes mentioned as a possible candidate on the Republican side.⁹ Many American presidents previously served as generals in the army: Washington, Jackson, Harrison, Taylor, Grant and Eisenhower.¹⁰ In the twentieth century, some Presidents were former

6. See, e.g., Donald Baer & Mike Tharp, *Snow White's Biggest Test*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., June 18, 1999, at 2021 (noting that doubts about Dianne Feinstein's resolve in her bid for the governor's office in California would not have been visited on a "male politician"). But c.f. James Carney, *Liddy the Closet Liberal*, TIME, Mar. 22, 1999, at 54 (explaining that criticism of Elizabeth Dole by conservatives was directed at her alleged ideology and not her gender).

7. Jessie Jackson has been a continuing candidate for the Presidency, but his goal seems mainly to focus interest and awareness on issues of importance to him. I would be surprised if Reverend Jackson seriously believes that he will win the nomination of the Democratic party. Powell took significant steps in preparing for a presidential campaign, including putting fundraising and polling mechanisms in motion. See Elizabeth Drew, *The Campaign that Powell Couldn't Run*, WASH. POST, Nov. 12, 1995, at C1.

8. See MICHAEL BARONE & GRANT UJIFUSA, THE ALMANAC OF AMERICAN POLITICS 1998 45 (1997) (noting Al Gore as the obvious front-runner for the Democratic nomination in 2000).

9. See *id.* at 46 (including Dan Quayle in a list of plausible Republican presidential candidates in 2000).

10. It is interesting to note that there have been no former Admirals.