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A TRIBUTE TO ROSALIE E. WAHL

Hon. Esther M. Tomljanovich[†]

When I think of my good friend Justice Rosalie Wahl, I do not think first of the talented jurist, which she was, nor do I think of the gifted orator inspiring yet another class of students and lawyers, which she did. Instead, I remember my friend at my kitchen table during our more than thirty year friendship where we dreamed of women taking their place in policy making positions in business and government, and of women as law firm partners, law school professors and even judges (not supreme court justices, of course—not in our lifetime).

The kitchen table dreams were not only of women taking their rightful place in the world, but of a world where there would be no barriers based on race or religion.

My first political caucus in the mid-1960's was in our rural township. It took a hardy soul to venture out on a cold February night to meet in a town hall where the voters had not yet seen the need for electricity or running water. Rosalie Wahl was there, fortified by and sharing a thermos of tea, urging us to adopt resolutions providing for equality and justice for the poor and those who had been shortchanged in life.

In the early 1970's, we decided to act on our conviction that women belonged where the decisions were being made. I filed for the city council of our newly consolidated city. Rosalie Wahl was my campaign manager. I remember her dismay when she was told her candidate would not be welcome at a local service club luncheon because: "One of our members is a candidate." Of course, women could not be members of the service club—a clear reminder of how much needed to be done before we could ever get inside those places where decisions were made, let alone have our voice heard.

In 1977, when it became known that Governor Perpich would appoint the first woman to the Supreme Court, we were rivals for the position. Our friendship remained solid. Governor Perpich appointed Rosalie Wahl as a justice. When she

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made her acceptance speech, eloquently pledging to dedicate herself to the cause of justice for everyone regardless of social or economic status, race, religion or gender, I was confident the Governor had chosen wisely. We celebrated together.

After Justice Wahl's appointment to the supreme court, she did not abandon the kitchen table strategy sessions. She often stopped on her way from work for long talks on progress in the fight for equal justice for all.

When my son was in high school, he became a Saturday morning regular at the table in Justice Wahl's book-lined kitchen. There, over bagels and coffee, he would discuss philosophy and politics with Justice Wahl and the young graduate students with whom she shared her home. That was an important time in helping him to develop a philosophy of life and a social conscience to guide him. Could he have had a better teacher?

My friend Rosalie Wahl is a good, decent, caring human being who has the intellect and the energy to carry out her dreams, who is able to inspire the rest of us to care a little more, to try a little harder, to be a little better.

As I grow older I measure my success by the friends I have made more than by the jobs I have had or the offices I have held.

One of my greatest successes has been my friendship with a woman who is kind and compassionate—a woman who cares to her core about the poor and unfortunate—a woman who believes passionately in equal justice for all.

Thank you Justice Rosalie Wahl for being my friend.