

Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt Remarks at 3rd WIB Forum
November 25, 2019, Hilton Athens

Καλησπέρα. Good afternoon, everybody. Let me start, Niko, Litsa, Elias, by thanking you for inviting me to participate in this Women in Business Forum. I'm told this is the third one, I'm not sure how I missed the first two, but I suspect it has something to do with the fact that my colleague and former DCM Kate Byrnes probably scooped it on me. But I'm really delighted to be here.

I also apologize for speaking and departing. I'm just back from a fantastically successful visit to Washington D.C. with Minister Georgiadis and many other members of the government, where we were engaging in efforts to deepen the strategic relationship between our two countries. We're really moving at a record pace right now in terms of our engagement, but we're doing so this week with a short week with American Thanksgiving, so I've got to get back to the desk.

But let me say how inspiring it is for me to look out and see so many successful women with such diverse experience and expertise all around this room. It's also inspiring for me to see so many guys who are allies of gender equality: your support for these efforts to challenge myths about gender and age and to embrace a more inclusive workforce in Greece and in the United States is critical to our shared success.

Advancing women's economic empowerment in all sectors of society, at home and abroad, is a significant policy priority for the government of the United States. It's also a priority, of course, for the European Union and Greece, as the recently published EU Gender Equality Index highlighted. And it was part of the second U.S.-Greece Strategic Dialogue, which Secretary of State Pompeo kicked off here in Athens last month.

In the United States, recent statistics on women in government leadership positions are trending in the right direction. Last year, a record number of women ran for the U.S. Congress, and women now hold over 23% of Congressional seats, the highest percentage in U.S. history, compared to just 3% in the 1970s.

Notably, women also hold 50.8% of the seats in the Nevada legislature, the first time in U.S. history that a state legislature has reached parity in women's representation in the United States. So, we're getting better.

But despite this progress, there is still a clear gender gap in the United States, and one that matters to all Americans.

Why does closing the gender gap matter? Because women make up more than half of the world's population. And until we make the best use of *everyone's* talents, we are needlessly constraining our potential.

Closing the gender gap is crucial to the health of our democracies, to fostering inclusive growth, and to building trust in public institutions. Because when women have equal opportunities, communities and economies are more likely to thrive.

For the U.S. Embassy in Athens, supporting events like today's conference, working with individuals like yourselves who care about women's advancement, and collaborating with our Greek partners in civil society, government, business, and education has become a growing priority in recent years.

We share your goal of increasing women's representation across all sectors. This is fundamental to our commitment to the U.S.-Greece relationship because it contributes to regional security and prosperity.

At the Embassy, we try to do our part by ensuring that there is strong women's participation in all of our educational exchanges, entrepreneurship initiatives, and initiatives like delegations to the Global Entrepreneurship Summit and the South by Southwest Festival in Texas.

We also want to help women in Greece build business networks, to learn how to pitch and present, identify ways to attract funding, and build stronger business plans and growth strategies through opportunities such as these. So, for instance, at a recent Orange Grove event in Lamia, we facilitated a discussion for a gathering of women to speak about the challenges and opportunities they faced in the area as entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs.

Last month, together with our great partners at "Women on Top," our Embassy also organized the first very successful capacity-building and networking conference on gender equality, featuring two American experts.

And to help bridge the gender gap in science and technology, we created the CodeGirls coding workshops, one of the Embassy's flagship female empowerment programs. CodeGirls is currently in its fifth year, and more than 400 young girls have participated to date. And I will say, from having been part of these programs in Trikala and Ioannina, there are few things more inspiring in terms of the future of technology and women in Greece.

We are committed to helping our Greek partners in their efforts to give women a seat at the table. So, when I'm invited to speak at an event, we try to ask if there are women represented in the agenda and in the audience as well. That's one small way that we try to raise awareness of the need for women to have a platform to share their expertise on a wide range of issues from energy and investment to politics.

And that's why I so appreciate events like this one. By having these conversations today, we're moving the gender equality agenda forward and building networks of business leaders determined to break glass ceilings and to unleash the full potential of women in all sectors of Greek business and society.

So, thank you all for being here today, and for your efforts to promote inclusivity and gender balance. I wish you all a successful conference and look forward to seeing the results. Ευχαριστώ πολύ!