



SHORT CIRCUIT

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Judge Betty Binns Fletcher convened the first all-woman panel of judges on Wednesday, March 11, 1981, in San Francisco. The *Short Circuit* is pleased to share her opening remarks on the occasion with all those who could not be there to hear them in person.



"We understand that this is an historic occasion. Not only is it the first time that three women have sat together as a panel of appellate judges in the Ninth Circuit but, we believe, in the United States and perhaps in all the world. Judge Dorothy Nelson of this Court and Judge Judith Keep of the United States District Court from San Diego join me on this happy occasion. We wish to take note of it and to let all of you know, not only on behalf of all the women judges, but of the women lawyers and of the women of the world, that we rejoice in it, and we hardly believe it. Speaking from my own perspective, when I graduated from law school in 1956, not only was it legal to discriminate against women, but discrimination was rampant. My law school advised me that, although I had been first in my class, it was unlikely that they could help me get a job with a law firm and that I must make my own way.

In my home state of Washington women were at first cherished. In the time of the pioneers, when women were few and the tasks at hand were many and arduous, they were even allowed to vote under an act of the territorial legislature. Then came a challenge to the act as being inconsistent with the Organic Act for the Territory passed by Congress. In respect to voting it provided that all citizens over the age of twenty-one could vote. And yet when Nevada Bloomer sought to vote in Spokane, Washington in 1888, she was denied that right, and in her law suit, which is included in the court reports of the territory of Washington, it was stated that perhaps for certain purposes women might be citizens, but surely it was never intended that they vote.

So it is a long road we have travelled and it is with great pride that today we sit here, the first all-woman panel of judges. Let me close by saying that we will be content when 51% of the judges are women."

