**Discussion Questions**

resource

The following questions are organized by segment of the film, so you can select questions that match the segments that you showed in class. We think many of the questions are useful no matter in what class you are showing the film, but a few are keyed to particular courses (C=civics/government, H=history, P=psychology).

**Introduction**

* Why do you think the filmmakers chose the Ruth Stockton quote to open the film? (“The other 90 legislators don’t see my way all the time, but I’m ready to sit down and work it out. When the going gets rough, they know I’m not the weak sister.”) What quote would you use if you were making the film?
* What do the images the filmmakers use in the Introduction tell you about the film? Would you choose other images to represent the content of the film? What would they be?
* Did you know that Colorado was the second state where women could vote? The first state where men voted for women to have the vote? Based on what you learned, how would you explain that achievement?
* According to the women interviewed, what does a woman “have to have” to serve in elected office? Would you agree with those statements?

**Western Women**

* In the film, Dottie Lamm said that people who have come to Colorado have “an independent nature” and Joan Fitz-Gerald said that “women have been tougher out here.” Do you agree with these comments? Think about Colorado in the past and today. What evidence can you give to support your position? Use evidence from the film and from your own experience. (H)

**Suffrage and First Elected Women**

* How did women in Colorado gain the right to vote? (H, C)
* What role did populist politics play in the campaign for women’s suffrage? What role did organizations such as the Equal Suffrage Association and WCTU play? (H, C)
* When the economy collapsed in 1893, some people said it wasn’t a good time for women to seek the vote. How did women prove this to be wrong? What strategies did they use to capitalize on the state’s economic problems? Do you think their experience is relevant to other periods of history or today? (H, C)

**Housewives Cleaning Up Politics**

* What changes occurred in the legislature when the first three women were elected? What significance do you think such changes have? (H)
* Why was the broom a symbol for women’s role in politics? Would that be an appropriate symbol today? Why or why not? (H)
* How did use of the term *housewife* with respect to elected women change over time? What does this change show about larger changes in society? (H, P)

**Getting Involved**

* According to the women interviewed in the film, what motivated them and other women to run for public office? List as many different motivations as you can. Whose motivation is most meaningful to you? Why? (C, P)
* What is the importance of trust in political life? Some of the women interviewed seemed to suggest women have an advantage when it comes to gaining trust. Do you agree? Why or why not? (C, P)
* Why did people tell Pat Schroeder she shouldn’t run for the U.S. House of Representatives? Do you think those people were right? (H, C)
* Why do you think several women interviewed initially said they didn’t want to run or weren’t qualified? Do you think men have similar feelings about running? Why or why not? (P)
* Peggy Kerns talked about a sense of service and ambition as being in opposition. Do you think that these two motivations can exist together? Why or why not? (P, C)
* Norma Anderson reported that her family talked about politics throughout her childhood. Research shows that young people who talk about politics at home are more likely to be politically active as adults. Why do you think that might be the case? How can we be sure that young people whose families don’t talk about politics still become politically active? (P, C)
* One interviewee called herself a “recovering politician” while another said politics was like alcoholism—addictive. Why do you think politics is compared to an addiction? (P, C)

**Why Colorado?**

* How is Colorado different from other states in terms of elected women?
* What are some of the explanations given for Colorado’s record in this area? Which seems like the best explanation to you? Why?

**Patriarchy and Sexism**

* What evidence of sexism did elected women report?
* Peggy Kerns stated that “gender did matter” with regard to leadership in the legislature in the 1990s when she was in office. Do you think a representative elected to the Colorado House today would say the same thing? Give reasons for your hypothesis.
* A newspaper headline characterized a race between a man and a woman as “high heels versus manhood”? What does that phrase mean to you? How do you think a race between a man and a woman ought to be described?
* Amy Stephens described a number of things women did that “got the job done” in terms of electing people to the legislature. What were these actions? Why do you think they were important?

**Family**

* Describe the impact of political life on the families of elected women. Given these effects, would you want your mother—or your father—to run for office? (P)
* Many women waited until their children graduated from high school before they ran for office. What attitudes or values might have prompted that decision? What effect might this have had on women’s political careers? Do you see a generational difference in terms of this decision? (C, P)
* Speaker Hullinghorst stated that more male legislators are now dealing with family issues as they serve. Do you think this change will affect the roles of men and women in politics? Why or why not? (P)

**Glass Ceiling**

* The glass ceiling is a metaphor for the upper limits on women’s careers. What metaphor does Pat Schroeder use? Which of these metaphors do you think better captures these limits?
* People interviewed in the film mention that women need to be asked to run, that they don’t feel comfortable promoting themselves, and that they don’t like to ask for money. What might account for these psychological differences with male candidates? Dottie Lamm talks of training programs for women candidates. How might a training program address these issues? (P)
* What role does money play in limiting women’s political careers? (C)
* What role does a caucus system play in determining who runs for office? How does a primary system make it easier for women to be nominated for office? (C)

**Why Does It Matter?**

* Does it matter if “all kinds of people” are elected to public office? Use quotes from the film to support your answer? (C)
* According to the people interviewed in the film, what strengths do women bring to the table? Why are these skills or traits important in law-making? Are these skills or traits also important for executive office? (C, P)
* According to the people interviewed in the film, how do women lead or work differently than men? How might these differences make contributions to law-making? (C, P)
* Wilma Webb says “We’ve educated men to the issues of women.” What do you think she means by this? Do you think working with women has changed men in the legislature? (C, P)
* Irene Aguilar says that women “overcompensate” in their work lives. What do you think she means by this? What experiences might cause women to overcompensate? (P)
* Elected women in the film share different opinions about showing emotions (specifically crying) in their work. What are some of the reasons a person might cry while doing political or governmental work? If you were an elected woman, which approach to showing emotions would you take? Why? (P)

**Issues**

* What does the term *women’s issues* mean to you? Compare your definition with the examples of issues important to elected women mentioned in the film. How does the film change your thinking about the idea of women’s issues? (C, P)
* Several of the women interviewed in the film mentioned instances in which women in both parties stood together on difficult issues. What, in your view, is the importance of these examples? (C, P)
* Dottie Wham spoke of a “critical mass”—having enough women working together to stop legislation they regarded as harmful. What is the importance of a “critical mass” of elected women—or of any other group of legislators? How might this change your thinking about who should be elected? (C)
* Think about the case study of civil unions presented in the film. How does this case study inform your thinking about the role of elected women? (C)

**Decline of Republican Women**

* Describe how the number of Republican women in the Colorado legislature has changed since 1985. What are the reasons for this change? (H, C)
* What is a RINO? What do you think about the strategy of labeling people in this way? (P)
* Describe Kiki Traylor’s experience. What does her story suggest about politics today? (C)
* Recently, many people have commented on how polarized our society has become. How does the decline of Republican women reflect this polarization? Is there a place for moderates in today’s politics? (C)

**Sisterhood**

* Is there a sisterhood of elected women? What is the importance of “women supporting women”? Use evidence from the film to support your answer.
* In what ways is a sisterhood different from or similar to an “old boys’ network”? Is this comparison important? Why or why not?