

Women have found their voices. Now it may be America's boys who need our attention.

By Terry Oxley

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After the holidays, I was catching up on some reading when I came across a community newsletter announcing the "Women's March on Olympia" scheduled for kickoff at the State Capitol.

This topic brought to mind the suffragists of the early 19th century. Interestingly, the word suffragist described both men and women who campaigned for women's voting rights. In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed support for women's suffrage, but was rebuffed by Senate Democrats. In 1919, the GOP regained congressional majorities and a voting rights amendment was advanced to the states for ratification — of the 36 approving states, 26 had GOP governors. In 1920, the 19th Amendment was officially adopted and a woman's right to vote became law of the land. A Democratic President and a GOP Congress acted in unison, the states dutifully followed their leadership and our constitutional system fulfilled its libertarian promise.

Back to the women's march. As I read through the notice I couldn't help wondering about the purpose for the event. The notice was rather general in its promotion of "unity, equity and justice." News coverage introduced a number of esoteric terminologies and not-so-catchy quotes like "it's about people having access to the things they need."

This caused me to reflect on the advancement of women in recent years. Women earn more undergraduate and graduate degrees than men and represent a majority of all students attending college. Recent studies indicate that entry pay for college graduates with similar degrees is comparable for both men and women. Women's sports are much more prominent — I'm a big fan of my college's women's basketball team. In the business world, women are increasingly present in board rooms, and in some states, women are achieving near parity in legislative assemblies. In 2016, a woman for the first time was nominated by a major political party for President. A former fighter pilot is now an Arizona congresswoman. Of incumbent female governors, four are Republicans and three are Democrats. Women (all women) have truly made great strides in my lifetime.

But something bothered me about the atmosphere surrounding the women's march. It seemed almost rudderless and perfunctory in nature, and coarse in its expression. A sense of joy or gratitude for generations of remarkable gains seemed totally absent. And sadly, there was no hint of bipartisanship — one would think only persons of an angry and partisan persuasion were welcome.

It made me wonder if advocacy movements over time lose vision and purpose. I know this is true of business and non-profit organizations. Without reinvention they risk irrelevancy and even damaging their own purposes/legacy. Is the women's movement due for introspection and reinvention?

Anyway, this got me thinking about a challenge long neglected, something that needs immediate attention and cries out for the collective energy and wisdom of both women and men. A challenge of unquestioned importance that should re-energize civic activism and purpose nationwide.

The challenge is a sacred one. It has become increasingly apparent and some believe well past the crisis point. Yes, a problem that if left unresolved has huge implication for all American men, women, families, and our very culture.

With much regret, I'm talking about our sons, our beautiful and long-neglected sons. Let's look at a sampling of alarming facts about America's boys — boys who seem wanting of committed champions:

- Boys commit suicide at four times the rate of girls.
- Boys are twice as likely as girls to be victims of violence.
- The boy-to-girl ratio in correctional institutions is 9:1.
- Boys are four times more likely to be suspended or expelled from K-12 education.
- The majority of high school dropouts are boys.
- Boys are twice as likely as girls to be labeled "emotionally disturbed."
- Predominantly male brain disorders (e.g., autism) are rising exponentially year by year.
- Fatherlessness is high and increasing among all major ethnic populations.
- Fewer than 25 percent of young men can qualify for military service.
- The World Health Organization says "Most girls and women are doing better than boys and men in both physical and mental health indicators."

Perhaps in 2018 civic energy in Olympia will be redirected to “Saving our Sons.” I can’t image a timelier and more virtuous civic purpose — our very survival as a nation is in the balance. Advocacy starts now, boys lives are in jeopardy, there’s not a moment to lose.

*Terry Oxley is a member of The Olympian’s Board of Contributors. He is retired from the military and a communications career at Puget Sound Energy.*

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