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## OUT<sub>of</sub> ORDER

Opinion • Commentary • Humor

### Hoping for a ‘Men’s Movement’ for Gender Equity

By Kathleen J. Wu

Just when I think things are getting better about the state of gender equity in the legal profession, some new study comes out that makes me lose hope. I’m starting to feel like Michael Corleone in “The Godfather, Part III,” when he tries to go straight but the mob won’t let him: “Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.”

In my case, I was starting to feel encouraged about these positive developments:

#### ON THE LEVEL

First, both U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan and Vice President Joe Biden let the world know that their families—not their personal ambition—would be the deciding factor in whether they would seek higher office (Speaker of the House and the presidency, respectively). For his part, Ryan, who made having sufficient family time a condition of accepting the speakership, received the “Lean In Award of the Day” from none other than Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg. True, I suspect she made up this so-called award, but I get her point.

It’s nice to see men making their families a priority and making sacrifices (or, in Ryan’s case, being



prepared to say no to a job he didn’t really want in the first place) to keep their families front and center. Ryan didn’t want to give up more time away from his kids, and Biden wanted to spend more time with his now-fatherless grandchildren (since the death of his son, Beau, in May), something a run for the presidency wouldn’t leave much time for.

The other nice news from the gender equity front is that the Dallas Women Lawyers Association gave its annual Raggio Award—which honors a lawyer for extraordinary contributions to women lawyers—to a man this year, the first time in the award’s 23-year history. I’ve long said that women won’t truly reach parity in this or

any other profession until men realize that it's in their and their firms' best economic interests to recruit, develop and retain the talents of women.

Of course we need women speaking out, speaking up, mentoring, sponsoring and doing all the other work we've been doing to support other women. But until those who maintain the grip on power stand up and let it be known that they are as invested in the women around them as the women are, we aren't going to see much progress.

Clearly, the world needs more men advocating for women, and we need more men saying, as Biden and Ryan did, that their family time is important. Just as

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crucially, we need more men who take paternity and family leave, and we really, really need more men who will downshift their own careers (or devote themselves full-time to childcare) and allow their wives to be the main family breadwinners.

It's not enough for women to be welcomed into the halls of power and be successful in "man's work." We also need to celebrate men who proudly take on the mantle of "woman's work." As Anne-Marie Slaughter writes in her exceptional new book, "Unfinished Business," "the next phase of the women's movement is a men's movement."

I considered the Ryan/Biden/Raggio trifecta positive signs that Slaughter's "men's movement" is, if not imminent, then a little closer than it was.

And then I saw this headline: "Women in Big Law Are Losing Ground," by The American Lawyer's Vivia Chen. And I was pulled back, Michael Corleone-style, into discouragement.

Chen's recent column detailed findings of the National Association of Women Lawyers report, which surveys Am Law 100 and 200 firms. And the news is not good. As Chen writes, "the situation is dire." Here are the bullet points (which her column goes into in depressing detail):

- Women equity partnership ranks have barely risen in 10 years.
- Men far outnumber women among lateral equity partners.
- The gender gap in pay for equity partners has widened.
- Women logged more hours but got paid less.
- Men outpaced women in rainmaking credit.

The only good news is that, in those law firms with three or more women on comp committees, there is a smaller gender wage gap (87 percent vs. 77 percent at firms with two or fewer women on the committee). However, given the rate at which women are gaining power in Big Law, it doesn't look like that small glimmer of hope can be coaxed into much more than a glowing ember anytime soon.

As discouraged as I am by this news, however, I'm not inclined to give up. It's a setback, certainly, but progress is rarely linear—or so I tell myself when life hands me a bag of rotting lemons.

We have to keep working, celebrating the positives when we find them, and continue our efforts to close the profession's gender gap.



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