

Good Morning Friends!

My name is Susan Harden and I am a newly elected Mecklenburg County Commissioner, I am also a professor of Education at UNC Charlotte and a mom.

One year ago I announced my candidacy for office at this march. I had never run for elected office before. And guess what? I won! I was one women that was a part of a huge wave locally, statewide and nationally that brought thousands of women into elected office. We ran because we wanted to create a better community and we didn't give up on the democratic process. The organizers of today's march have asked me to speak about the steps of running for office. But because I am a professor and teacher at heart, I am going to treat this speech like one of my classes - and you are my students. And I am going to need some class participation. So class, repeat after me. The steps to successfully running for office are:

1. Believe
2. Work
3. Organize

BELIEVE

Eleanor Roosevelt said "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." So many of us believe in the beauty of our dreams for our children, our coworkers, our spouses, but we don't believe in the beauty of our own dreams. It is a dream of mine that Charlotte-Mecklenburg will be a top destination for teachers. I have worked hard as a professor in a college of education to achieve this dream but it seems like some in North Carolina have given up on that dream. We currently rank 37th in the nation in teacher pay in 2018 and I think that impact - the lack of educational opportunity for our children that policy creates - is unacceptable.

This dream required me to take steps out of my comfort zone. I'm not a politician. This is the first time I've ever run for anything. Yet, I KNEW the way to start effecting change for the future of our teachers was to get involved with the elected office that makes the decisions that impact our teachers. And now I am in an office where I can impact teachers, AND address racial and gender disparity and income inequality, affordable housing, parks and greenways, a clean environment, better health outcomes, and reducing gun violence.

In addition to believing in yourself, we must believe that change is needed and possible. After the 2016 election, I didn't recognize my country anymore. I marched at the DC women's march in January 2017, left inspired and declared my candidacy for elected office at last year's women's march in Charlotte. We cannot succumb to cynicism and marginalization. The levers of democracy and political change work - I stand before you today as proof.

WORK

But, we all know a dream is just a dream without the work. When I announced my candidacy last year, we got to work the next day. I attended candidate training workshops offered by NC LEAD. For eleven months, we knocked on doors every weekend. I met people all over the community. I knew I had to meet as many people as possible. I invited people to join me in my desire to make change. You will find that people want to support your willingness to serve your community - so many people thanked me for running and invested their time and money helping me on the campaign.

ORGANIZE AND MOBILIZE

What I learned while doing the work is I could not do it alone. Just like all of you, I am not an island of one. I have talents and I use them as effectively as I can. But, I am not gifted in all things; I mobilized people to work with me. I got experts in their field, like branding, styling, communications and

social media, to help leverage my strengths so I could be better. I had a amazing network of friends who turned into a team of volunteers, meeting weekly to knock on doors, host meet and greets, make calls, and keep us moving forward. I still have these people supporting me. They believe in what we are doing - taking back our country, moving our community forward, and electing candidates who share in this vision.

And we are not done yet - we looking towards electing more women in 2019 and 2020. Are you ready? One way to start is by serving as a political volunteer in your neighbor by joining your local precinct leadership. Precinct organizing happens the first week in February and is a great place to start and make change. Now is the time. I am hosting a precinct pep rally tomorrow, Sunday afternoon at 1:30 p.m. at Brawley's Beverage. Join us and learn what fun it is to work and organize in your neighborhood.

I also want to ask you to believe, work, and organize this spring to help ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in North Carolina. We still don't have constitutional protections guaranteeing equal rights for women. But in March, our legislators in Raleigh will have the opportunity for vote for a bill ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment in NC. We need your help to get this passed. Say it after me, we can do it if we BELIEVE, WORK, and ORGANIZE. There is a table here where you can find out how to help get this bill passed!

Women, you are surrounded by others who want to lift you into your greatness.

Say it with me class. You just need to:

Believe

Work

Organize

Thanks class - You all get A's!