

Inspired by the Women's March

By Chrissy Houlahan



Chrissy Houlahan (left), Molly Houlahan, Carly Houlahan, and Meredith Cheney (right) at the 2017 Women's March in Washington. JILL STANTON

Almost exactly one year ago, my husband and I were standing on the banks of the Alabama River, taking in the storied Edmund Pettus Bridge and reading the inscription on the plaque commemorating Rep. John Lewis' heroic contributions to the civil rights movement. It was there that he and others were beaten bloody while trying to advance equality and to extend our nation's values and promises to everyone.

We were there as part of a series of races, one in each state, that we planned to mark our 50th birthdays. Coincidentally, we were in Selma on that hallowed ground on the very day that President Trump decided inexplicably to tweet about Rep. Lewis: "All talk" and "No Action." The irony hung in the air. I bought a T-shirt at the gift shop: The March Continues.

For me, the tweet was yet another affirmation that I, too, needed to act. I was already organizing a bus-load of women to ride to Washington for the Women's March. But was it enough?

I rode to the Women's March, now nearly a year ago, with 51 women and two men in a big bus packed with people, doughnuts, fried chicken, and colorful signs. It was positively life-changing. The march brought together so many concerned citizens with disparate issues — the commonality was a collective desire for change. The mood of the day was surprisingly positive with a strong undercurrent of resolve. Feeling unified with so many other patriots who were equally concerned about our important American values was the experience of my life.

Heading into the march, I, like many others, was deeply concerned about our fragile democracy. I ached for our nation, which was clearly hurting. I was concerned about what we as a nation had just said about our values. I worried for our institutions and protections and the progress we had made. The free press, the planet, national security, education and the promise of opportunity for all were threatened. Even the concept of reasonable and civil discourse seemed no longer to be inviolate.

I returned from the march like many others: inspired. How could I use this crisis in our democracy and turn my anxiety and concern to good? I'm an engineer, veteran, business woman and an educator.

I decided to run a different kind of race — to run for Congress right here in our district, where I have lived for the last 23 years.

But I was not the only woman who decided to focus her concern and talents on solutions. I'm joined by a virtual army of women (and so many men who love them) who have found their voice and participated in extraordinary ways to protect our values over the course of this past year. They've marched, they've phoned and canvassed, they've mailed, they've organized and networked, they've reached out to those whom they didn't understand to form new connections and solutions. And right here in Chester County, they ran for elected office in record numbers. And they won.

A year out from that historic march, I am optimistic, though I remain concerned.

Congress has been complicit both in its votes and in its silence on many issues that we care most about. Name-calling by our elected officials at every level appears still to be a thing, and Pennsylvania still remains the largest congressional delegation in the nation without a single woman representative.

Regardless, I'm enthusiastic to continue the progress we have made together into 2018 and well beyond.

We've learned our voices and votes matter. We have learned the people and the promise matters. We've learned that the journey matters. The march continues, and always will. And, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said on the steps of the Capitol in Montgomery, Ala., at the end of that fateful march that began in Selma, "the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience."

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