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### **PROMINENT WOMEN DISCUSS PATHS TO SUCCESS AT WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH EVENT**

Women have made some splashes in the headlines lately – nabbing the most college diplomas, outnumbering men in the American workforce and seeing a surge in recent wage gains that is leaving their male counterparts in the dust.

Still, a panel of prominent female panelists gathered in Oakland on Monday night said many women continue to struggle with the belief that the big financial decisions should be left to the men.

This aversion of matters financial could explain why women, despite rapid advances in the business world, still find places in the top floor offices and board rooms few and far between.

“There’s no doubt that women are making gains, but it still strikes me how few women there are in the financial sector,” said Rosie Rios, Treasurer of the United States, who took time out during a visit home to her East Bay roots to participate in the panel discussion titled, “Women Who Dare to Lead.” Rios, who was raised in Hayward, was joined on the panel by Nicole Taylor, President and CEO of the East Bay Community Foundation and Ophelia Basgal, Regional Director for the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development for the western states. About 100 people attended the panel discussion, which was co-hosted by the East Bay Community Foundation and the County of Alameda. Attendees included a diverse group of women leaders from the private, public, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors including some young students who participate in local programs like Girls Inc. and the East Oakland Youth Development Center.

The discussion occurred at an invitation-only reception attended by about 100 people, mostly women. It was moderated by Alameda County Administrator Susan S. Muranishi, who said the three women share a sense of generosity toward other women seeking to succeed professionally.

“These women are friends, colleagues and mentors to many of us and they always seem to find time in their incredibly busy schedules to provide inspiration and support to other women and young leaders,” Muranishi said.

Addressing the gathering held in honor of Women’s History Month, Taylor said: “Too many women, even well-educated women, do not take the initiative when it comes to decisions involving budgeting, investing and retirement. It’s one area where women still sell themselves short – and it explains in a big way why too few women have places at the table where decisions in the business world are made.” Basgal, longtime former head of the Alameda County Housing Authority before her appointment to the HUD post in 2010, said women should feel bolstered by changes occurring within the federal government – including her agency. She noted that a majority of HUD Directors serving under Housing Secretary Shaun Donovan are women.

But Basgal, who worked for PG&E between her stints in the public sector, agreed that “women have stayed out of the finance area for too long.”

“If there’s one lesson for the younger generation, it’s really about furthering education for women in areas of math and technology,” she said.

Rios and Taylor both said they were raised by single mothers who stressed education as the springboard to success.

Rios said her mother not only put her and eight siblings through college, but she also raised her to believe that barriers that hinder women in the professional world need not apply.

“I was raised to believe that you ask for what you want and, taking it a step further, that it’s really important how you ask,” Rios said. “Over the years I’ve really come to understand the power of self-confidence, of believing in yourself.”

Basgal said she was lucky enough to find male mentors who saw her potential and nurtured her as a professional.

“We all may take different paths, but it’s important to acknowledge that the barriers are there,” she said. “Only by doing so can we come up with the strategies we need to overcome them.”

Taylor said it’s incumbent on strong women leaders to help others find their way. “You need to help other women out,” she told the gathering, “because if you don’t, who else is going to do it?”

Rios said the psychological barriers that have stymied the women in the workplace may be slowly fading away.

Where the thought of men working for women once was an anomaly, Rios said her young daughter sees nothing out of the ordinary with such an arrangement.

In fact, Rios said that at the ceremony where she was sworn in as Treasurer by her boss, US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, her daughter peered at the event program and asked:

“Mom, why is your secretary swearing you in?”