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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor's Conference on Women: An Economic Perspective

Gov. Christie Whitman today highlighted the expanding role of women in New Jersey's economy and discussed her initiatives including programs to help women gain access to state contracts and obtain financing to start new businesses when she delivered the keynote address at the Governor's Conference on Women: An Economic Perspective.

The Governor addressed the conference, which was held in East Rutherford, and discussed her administration's efforts to promote women in business, protect women's health and safety and help women raise their families.

"Women have made great achievements in economic equality, but we still have a long way to go," said Gov. Whitman. "When the economy is growing, women have a great opportunity to grow along with it. With unemployment at a six-year low in New Jersey and an added 195,000 new jobs over the last three and a half years, now is our chance to grow."

"This conference provides us with an unparalleled opportunity to share information and goals and to strategize about how women can more effectively compete in today's business economy," said Gov. Whitman.

During the address, the Governor presented the New Jersey Association of Women Business Owners (NJAWBO) with a check for \$75,000 dollars to fund their EXCEL Entrepreneurial Training Program. The program will offer training to low-income and disadvantaged women. NJAWBO is a demonstration site for the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The conference, which is coordinated by the New Jersey Division on Women, Department of Community Affairs and hosted by the new Jersey Chamber of Commerce, brought together women from throughout the state to discuss career and business strategies to help them get ahead. The conference included workshops on money management, technology, marketing, contracting and personal financial management.

In addition to hearing from Gov. Whitman, the group was also addressed by Dr. Mae Jemison the first woman of color to travel into space on the Space Shuttle Endeavor and Community Affairs Commissioner Jane M. Kenny.

"Women in New Jersey are fortunate to have a Governor who recognizes their concerns and takes action to address them," said Commissioner Kenny. "Gov. Whitman has provided unprecedented leadership for women, signing legislation to protect their health, improve their safety and expand their opportunities in the workplace."

Throughout her administration, Gov. Whitman has made helping women succeed a priority.

- She has enacted programs to help women prosper in business, including programs to guarantee financing for women or minority owned small businesses to help defray start-up costs.
- The Governor signed legislation that doubled the threshold value of contracts for public works projects for which the state can wave bond contracts - allowing smaller, women owned firms greater access to the process.
- Gov. Whitman established a state contracting set-aside goal for women at 3 percent. The state greatly exceeded that goal last year by reaching 5 percent -- which translates into more than \$100 million in business for woman owned firms.
- The Governor also changed procedures to ensure that under competitive contracting rules the state will no longer rely on a contractor's intention to sub-contract to women or minority owned firms. Instead, the state will follow the actual sub-contracts awarded.
- The Governor has been a vocal proponent of affirmative action to expand opportunities for qualified women and minorities. She has made the appointment of women a priority within her administration, on the bench and on boards and commissions throughout the state.
- Gov. Whitman appointed the first woman Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court, the first woman attorney general and the first woman as her chief of staff. Gov. Whitman has named women for nearly forty percent of all judicial appointments and thirty-seven percent of all gubernatorial appointments to boards and commissions.
- The Governor has enacted legislation to preserve the health and safety of women in New Jersey. She signed legislation that strengthened the state's stalking law to allow for permanent restraining orders and expanded domestic violence laws to protect minors and those in dating relationships.
- The Governor also eliminated the statute of limitations on the prosecution of sexual assault - to allow victims to come forward at any time. She also tightened restrictions on the use of a victims past history in court.
- Gov. Whitman put an end to drive through deliveries when she enacted a law requiring insurance companies to provide new mothers with at least 96 hours of hospital coverage for cesarean section deliveries and 48 hours for normal deliveries.
- Whitman created a tax return check off to benefit breast cancer research and signed a law requiring health insurers to cover at least 72 hours of hospital care for mastectomy treatment and to cover reconstructive surgery to restore symmetry.