

#MeToo? It's Time to Demand #NoMore in Illinois.

If you're one of the 6.9 million Illinois residents on Facebook¹, your news feed has undoubtedly been inundated with a stream of #MeToo posts, ranging from daily microaggressions to acts of pure viciousness. This should not come as a surprise. Every industry has its own version of the casting couch. Illinois politics is no exception. Ask any woman who has lobbied the halls of the Capitol, staffed Council Chambers, or slogged through brutal hours on the campaign trail. Misogyny is alive and well in this industry.

It looks like The Globe on any given session night in Springfield, where it's clear that a woman must endure the crude jokes and untoward advances of male colleagues and legislators if she wants to garner support for her work.

It looks like a male legislator -- a chamber leader -- asking a female staffer out to dinner under the guise of offering mentorship, then proceeding to explain his "open marriage" to her and ask if she's single.

It looks like a female staffer leading a complex bill negotiation, and the male legislator whose assent is crucial to her success starts texting her late at night asking what she's doing. (The answer? She was sleeping. Because she was working with dogged pursuit to accomplish her goals.)

It looks like a committee chairman, with the power to kill her bill, telling a female staffer "nice ass" as she walks through the hotel hallways fresh from her morning workout, the forced intimacy of staying in the same hotels leaving little room for privacy or refuge.

It looks like the candidate who slides his hands across the body of his fundraising consultant during call time. Who calls and texts her in the middle of the night, and refuses to pay her what she is owed because his advances are rebuked.

It looks like the popular downstate (married) county chairman, who while walking down Michigan Avenue late one evening after attending a campaign fundraiser with a much younger female campaign staffer, asks if she'd like to come upstairs to his hotel room for a "night cap".

It looks like the female colleagues who advise the next generation of women to "flirt back" and to "smile and shrug it off" because "that's what I had to do to get ahead."

It looks like the willful ignorance of every colleague who sees this behavior and ignores it, dismisses it as "locker room talk," and shrugs it off because, "boys will be boys" and that's "just how men talk."

We see it. We live it. We power through it. Every day.

With each act of aggression, a woman internalizes the idea that she's not enough. That she somehow deserves this or simply has to accept it as the status quo. That the only way to get ahead is to endure this type of dehumanizing behavior, with a smile no less. It's truly exhausting and utterly defeating. And for many, it's not a sustainable way to live. So women choose to leave careers in public service, and all Illinoisans suffer the loss of their brilliance and commitment to creating a better Illinois.

¹ <http://www.internetworldstats.com/unitedstates.htm>

Let's be clear: every woman you know, in every industry -- regardless of age, race, physical appearance, gender expression, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation -- has a #MeToo story. Even if they don't feel safe enough to share it in a social media post. So why the silence up until this point? The reality is that telling the truth can still cost you your career. Unless enough of us speak up.

Empowered by the the brave women who represent California, women who've done their part to help make Illinois run are taking a stand. The time has come for us to raise our collective voices, share our stories, and say #NoMore. We need our male allies to commit to saying #IWill do better. And men, if you're reading this and thinking "that's not me" -- perhaps not, but have you ever witnessed a microaggression and not called it out? Have you heard a male colleague judge a female colleague on anything *but* her ability to do her job effectively, and said nothing? Then yes, it's also you. And your silence is deafening.

This election cycle, we need to commit to challenging every elected official, every candidate, and every participant in our democratic process who is culpable. Illinois deserves responsible stewards of power. Let's demand better.

Sincerely,
The Women Who Make Illinois Run

-- JOIN US AND ADD YOUR NAME TO THE LIST OF WOMEN WHO MAKE ILLINOIS RUN, WHO SAY
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! DETAILS HERE: goo.gl/MuTgCN --