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By Elizabeth Stortroen

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Just as surely as March follows February and Women’s History Month follows Black History Month, members of The White House Project believe the election of America’s first woman president will follow shortly after the election of its first Black president.

Faith Winter, Westminster City Councilwoman, was invited to run for political office and encourages other women to accept their invitations and do the same. The mission of the national, nonprofit, nonpartisan The White House Project is to help women advance in leadership in all communities and sectors — all the way up to the U.S. presidency.

And, because all politics are local, Colorado’s White House Project held its third annual Invite a Woman to Run event Thursday, March 5, at Denver’s Gallery 1261.

The atmosphere of the contemporary art gallery buzzed with anticipation as Colorado women from a wide variety of backgrounds gathered to consider official proposals to run for office.

“It is a known fact that women tend not to run for political office until someone invites them to do so,” said Westminster City Councilwoman Faith Winter. “A lot of that has to do with visibility. When (women) are only 17 percent of Congress, it is really hard to find role models and mentors that have a similar background. It’s hard to be what you can’t see.”

The mission of The White House Project, Winter said, is to officially invite women who have been deemed leaders in their communities to run for office.

Winter, who also serves as national field director for the project, said the group works with women across the country to equip them with the inspiration, information and tools needed to succeed in politics.

Leaders of the project work on the assumption that when women bring their voices, vision and leadership into a debate, the debate is more robust and the resulting policy is more inclusive and sustainable.

Or, as their slogan says, “Add women, change everything.”

Winter is among those who entered politics through an invitation. Joan Fitz-Gerald, the first woman to become president of the Colorado Senate, invited her into the political fold a couple years ago.

“I had never thought about running for office before Joan Fitz-Gerald invited me,” said Winter, who won her City Council seat in 2007. “When someone invites you to run, it validates your ambition and gives you credibility. Therefore, when you do decide to run, it isn’t just about you, but about at least one other person who believed in you.”

Winter said a strong organizational community offers campaign support to women who decide to seek public office.

“We will help women all the way through their campaigns because we want them to know that they are not alone and that they will have our backing and help,” said Cecile Johnson, Colorado outreach director for the Center for Progressive Leadership.

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“We are a really groundbreaking state for women,” Middleton said. “We are 40 strong in the Legislature, the highest number in the nation, and there truly is strength in numbers.”

Middleton knows some women are fearful of seeking office. However, she said, if a woman can make dinner, help with the science project, work a full-time job and still manage to volunteer on the side, she has all the abilities needed for a successful career in politics.

“Sometimes we are too smart for our own good,” she said. “Sometimes we need that little reminder to make us believe we can do it.”

Westminster City Councilwoman Mary Lindsey received one such little reminder when a friend suggested that she should run for office.

“It wasn’t until one of my friends told me a couple of times I should run for office that I thought I could really do it, and that I should make time for it,” Lindsey said. Lindsey won her freshman election in November 2005 and is currently gearing up for re-election this fall.

The evening’s goal was to inspire more women to run for office through these real-life stories, and, to let them know that The White House Project thinks they have what it takes to run for office, to win and to make a difference.

“This is my first time attending such an event, and it’s fun to scope everything out,” said Chris Alexander, of Denver, who says for now she would like to begin by being a campaign manager for a candidate.

“I think it is important for women to get involved so we can make sure our issues are covered.”

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