

Why This Nonprofit, Nonpartisan Newsroom Is Focused on Gender, Politics and Policy

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During Emily Ramshaw's maternity leave four years ago, she heard many conversations around electability and likeability. These gendered conversations sparked an idea.

"We were having those conversations because there was a woman running for president," Ramshaw says. "And I thought to myself, 'What would the news environment look like if there was a news source, a politics and policy news source, that was by women and for women?'"

With a newborn at home, she put her idea on pause.

"But four years later, it came back to me in another election cycle, a historic election cycle where we had more women running than we'd ever seen before, and these same conversations around electability and likability were at the forefront. And in that moment, I just thought, 'You know what? I thought about this four years ago, I can't wait another four years. I have to get this off the ground.'"

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Ramshaw talks with Jessica Abo about The 19th*, a nonprofit, nonpartisan newsroom focused on women, politics and policy.

She also shares tips on how to get involved in the political process and provides details about The 19th*'s upcoming virtual summit.

Jessica Abo: When people go to your site, what will they find?

Ramshaw: What they will find at our site is not the day's news but pink. They will find serious journalism that really aims to expose the disparities, the ways that women remain at a disadvantage in virtually every arena, whether it's the healthcare system, whether it's the economy, whether it's representative government and the ways that women of color, in particular, have faced the hardest hits.

Where do you have staff around the country?

Ramshaw: We are launching with what is probably the most diverse newsroom staff of any news organization in America. These are predominantly women of color who are based all over the country, whether that's Des Moines, whether that's Orlando, whether that's here in Austin, Texas, in D.C., L.A. We're across the country and aiming to truly reflect the nation's women by being scattered around the places where the nation's women live.

You've spent many years working as a journalist. Tell us a little bit about what you've learned when it comes to entrepreneurship.

Ramshaw: First of all, I had never raised a single dollar before we decided to start The 19th, which I describe as really an entrepreneurial nonprofit. I knew how to run a newsroom. I knew journalism like the back of my hand. I knew storytelling. What I didn't know was really how to start a business from scratch.

One of the things that I've learned in the last year that we have been trying to build this venture is how to make a compelling case for the work that you're trying to build. It's

how to ensure that people financially get behind your message and your mission. It's building a sustainable business plan, an organization that is self-sustaining and really encourages extraordinary women journalists to leave their jobs to come work for us – that sort of pathway and a track record of success.

It's been an unbelievable year, a really steep learning curve for me, but really thrilling all the same.

If someone is thinking, "Wow, getting involved in the political process is so overwhelming," what are some small steps that people can take to get involved?

Ramshaw: The first is to vote in every single election. No election is too big or too small. That means everything from your school board to president. It is the absolute best way that we can extend our voice and our collective strength, and so that's the first place to start.

The second is it's really meaningful to go to your local city council meeting and see how the sausage gets made in person. The legislative policies that most directly affect women's lives are happening in their home communities. Start there, and if you're feeling ambitious, head up from there to your state legislature, testify before a legislative committee. You will never see government in more direct action than you will there.

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Three for me would be get out of your echo chamber. We all spend a lot of time in our own curated Facebook feeds, reading the news sources that we really trust. We aren't going to move the needle, particularly on gender equity, if the same women are talking to the same women all the time. We need to understand what the people who disagree with us think, why they think that way, empathize with their decision-making. That starts with leaning on and learning from sources of news

and information that you aren't totally comfortable with.

And then the final thing is if you check all of those boxes and you're still wanting to get even more engaged, run for office. We know that at virtually every level of government, women are underrepresented, whether that's running for city council or running for the presidency. An organization that's doing really great work in this arena is All in Together. You can check them out on their website. They're working to get nonpartisan women more deeply civically engaged, encourage them to run. It's a really great starting point if you're looking for information on how to get more involved.

For the people who want to get involved from the comfort of their home, you have a virtual summit coming up. Tell us a little bit about that.

Ramshaw: The 19th obviously is launching its news platform, but the week of August 10 through August 14, we are hosting a week's worth of virtual programming aimed at really elevating women's voices around the anniversary of the Centennial of the 19th Amendment. You can expect to see Hillary Clinton, Kamala Harris, Stacey Abrams, Elise Stefanik, Melinda Gates, dozens of first-time elected officials, the first trans woman to be elected to a legislature, the first Native American woman in Congress in this country. And beyond that, some incredible arts and performances. Meryl Streep doing some really amazing suffrage readings with Zoë Saldaña. We'll have the entire New York Philharmonic Orchestra performing the work of Black women composers. The Go-Go's are getting back together, the first all-female band to top the *Billboard* charts. It's free, you don't want to miss it. You can check us out at 19thnews.org.

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