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Press Release

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Madeleine Kunin Shares Words of Wisdom with Gender Studies Class at Vermont Commons

Madeleine Kunin, former governor of Vermont, visited Vermont Commons School yesterday to meet with a small group of teenage girls taking a special week-long class called Gender: Identity and Power. Governor Kunin shared a few details of her recent book, *Pearls, Politics and Power*, and answered questions from the group. The main focus of her visit, however, was to convey her sense of optimism and hope and inspire her audience to lead an active life and get involved – an appropriate message for the students to hear on Martin Luther King Day, the National Day of Service, and the eve of the historic inauguration of Barack Obama.

Kunin posed numerous questions to the group: “What makes you step over the line of being a private person versus being a public person?” She described her own inspiration: being the daughter of immigrants who instilled in her the belief that America is truly the land of opportunity, that anything is possible and that anyone can make a difference and *should* make a difference. The former governor also described three “boxes” people need to be an activist: anger, imagination and optimism. “It’s okay to be naïve,” she reassured students. “Hold on to your idealism and optimism. Trust in your beliefs.”



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Kunin also asked the group why it is important for women to take an active role in government to which the students recognized that females bring different sensitivities to the table. Then the former governor posed a question that she's been grappling with for quite some time: Why is it that so few women hold elected office in the United States? Why will women serve when asked (her own cabinet included roughly 50% women) but seem reluctant to seek office on their own? Why does our country rank 69th out of 172 nations in the percentage of women in government (currently women represent only 17% of Congress). Kunin encouraged the girls to seek leadership roles at Vermont Commons and in their community. "Go to the edge of your confidence," implored Kunin. "That's the only way you'll grow."

About Vermont Commons School: Vermont Commons School is an independent day school for college-bound students in grades 7 – 12. The school offers a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum that includes a focus on community service and experiential education. The mission of the Vermont Commons School is to provide a vision of education that crosses traditional boundaries and develops ecological citizenship, with the goal of empowering students with the knowledge, character, skills, and moral vision necessary to become responsible, pro-active members of the world community.

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