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Failure Is Impossible If You Lift As You Climb

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DR. J. CLAY SMITH, JR.
ACTING CHAIRMAN, EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION
OPENING REMARKS
before the
NATIONAL WOMEN'S WEEK OBSERVANCE
EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION
Washington, D.C.
August 24, 1981

FAILURE IS IMPOSSIBLE IF YOU LIFT AS YOU CLIMB

As Chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, I am pleased to open National Women's Week Observance in cooperation with other government agencies in the complex; namely, the Bureau of Mines, the Office of Revenue Sharing and the National Endowment of the Arts. This week is set aside at the national level in recognition of the significant contribution that women have made to the growth and development of every aspect of American life. A presidential Proclamation is expected to be issued on August 26, 1981.

In the defense of America, women have borne their fair share of the burdens and responsibilities of war.

In sports, women have represented our country well in international competition on every continent.

In medicine, law and the arts, women have contributed to the development of science, jurisprudence and culture even though these professions and cultural institutions have been slow in recognizing their contributions.

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In government, women have made significant contribution to the management of a nation. And too, there are women who have contributed to this country by their volunteer efforts in the lunch rooms of schools, and by volunteer work in churches and synagogues, and in the political arena.

Hence, it is fitting that "Failure Is Impossible"--the theme selected for the National Women's Week Observance, be reviewed. We know that Susan B. Anthony is responsible for these valuable words. And, many are here today because our mothers did not fail; our grandmothers did not fail; and you, who sit here today, must not fail to persevere and to make your contribution in the tradition that women have done who have gone before you.

In connection with the historical role Susan B. Anthony played in the movement for equal rights for women, little has been written about Susan B. Anthony's connection with the National Conference of Colored Women founded in Boston in 1895. Fortunately, Mary Margaret Washington (wife of Booker T. Washington) recorded this connection in a paper that she wrote circa 1918. She said,

The first national meeting--1895, in the city of Boston, Mass., was called the first National Body of Colored Women. The call was made by Mrs. Josephine Saint Pierre Ruffin, who had for many years been associated with Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and other forward moving women, and from whom she had received the inspiration which led her to know and to feel that what one group of organized women could do another with equal chance could also do. For this equal chance Mrs. Ruffin knew all too well that the colored women would have to fight, not separately, but together.

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Hence, the woman's movement--its quest for success -- has been manifest by patience, vision, tenacity, hard work and cooperation--and at every step of the way, you have and must continue to "Lift as You Climb."* End

*The national motto of the National Association of Colored Women since 1895: "Lift As We Climb."