

SEMINOLE BEACON

Waters busy with speaking events

By BOB McCLURE

SEMINOLE – Seminole Vice Mayor Leslie Waters admits she has always enjoyed travel but the insight she has gained in the last six years has been more rewarding than any family vacation.

It all began in 2004 when Waters, the former speaker pro-tempore of the Florida House of Representatives, was approached by former Florida Speaker of the House Tom Feeney about participating in a women's conference in Indonesia organized by the International Republican Institute, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C.

Waters jumped at the opportunity to speak on the topic of how to be an effective leader.

Since then she has been a speaker on various topics at international women's conferences in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Morocco and Jordan.

Most recently, she addressed a group of female elected officials in Sudan, speaking on the topic of building business relationships, networking, coalitions and communication skills.

"It was quite an experience," said Waters. "They (Sudanese) have a way to go but they were anxious and very receptive to learn."

The women, members of the Sudan government and representatives of the country's state governments, listened to speakers on a variety of topics dealing with women's security and health.

Waters spoke in July at a similar workshop in Jordan and addressed a group of 37 Egyptian women in February in Morocco.

"They (Egyptian women) were enthusiastic," said Waters. "There were 37 of them and I must admit it, I met my match with them."

Waters said all of the participants had to receive permission from their husbands and sons to attend the conference but the opportunity was well appreciated, she said.

Waters was one of several international speakers to address more than 100 attendees of the Southern Sudan Women's Legislators Conference in Juba.

The goal of the gathering, which was hosted by the Women's Democracy Network, a division of the IRI, was to teach women legislators to contribute effectively to the government of Southern Sudan.

Waters joined speakers from South Africa, Uganda and Nigeria who discussed issues on how to prioritize issues regarding the health and security of women, and gender-sensitive legislation.

Among those in attendance were top government officials. They included South Sudan vice president Rick Teny Machar, James Wannu Igga, Speaker of the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly; Michael Makuel, minister of parliamentary affairs; and a number of government ministers. Each spoke on the topic of the evolving role of women in the Sudanese government.

The concept of the international conferences goes back to the days of the Reagan Administration when the former president expressed an interest in expanding democracy worldwide.

"The idea is to help small business develop and help third-world countries become more stable," said Waters. "Ultimately, you want these third-world countries to be stable to help lead to world peace."

Waters said the IRI and the National Democratic Institute, along with groups representing labor and business, were formed to achieve the goal.

Waters said the three conferences will likely be all for her this year as she switches gears and focuses on her latest duties as an adjunct professor at the University of South Florida where she is teaching a class this semester titled Practical Politics.

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