



Mary Cathcart interview - NEWL Women of Power 2021  
Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center

March 4, 2021

<https://youtu.be/kRvU2yu-PDI>

Run Time : 00:15:10

Award presentation and an interview with Mary Cathcart conducted by the Director of Maine NEW Leadership, Amy Blackstone. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, there was no reception for the 2021 Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center Minerva Award presentation. The Minerva Award was presented virtually.

### Transcript

00:00

hi everybody uh my name is amy

00:02

blackstone i am the director of maine

00:04

new leadership and i'm very excited to

00:08

share that with me today is the

00:10

honorable mary cathcart

00:12

mary as you know is the 2021 recipient

00:16

of

00:16

maine new leadership's minerva award and

00:20

we thought it appropriate to check in

00:23

with mary

00:24

and hear from her a little bit about her

00:26

leadership experiences

00:28

and journey and some of the lessons that  
00:30  
she's learned in her experiences as a  
00:32  
leader  
00:32  
so welcome mary and congratulations on  
00:35  
the award we're very excited about it  
00:39  
amy i'm i'm thrilled to get this award  
00:41  
i'm so honored  
00:43  
well wonderful we can't think of a  
00:46  
better  
00:47  
recipient you're the most appropriate  
00:48  
recipient uh of course  
00:50  
as the as the person who brought me new  
00:53  
leadership to  
00:54  
maine well you are a wonderful director  
00:57  
of my new leadership and  
00:58  
i'm so thankful to you for keeping it  
01:00  
going and continuing to make it  
01:02  
better and better for the students thank  
01:05  
you mary  
01:06  
well so what one of the questions that i  
01:09  
have for you  
01:10  
that i think others would appreciate  
01:12

hearing about as well

01:14

is just a little bit about your

01:15

leadership journey

01:17

and some of the lessons that you've

01:19

learned along the way

01:20

could you share that with us i think

01:23

back to

01:24

when i first volunteered i had two

01:27

little children and i was lonely i had a

01:30

husband then but

01:31

you know he had his job we had just

01:33

moved to bangor maine at that time and

01:36

i learned about spruce run which is now

01:38

partners for peace

01:41

one of the first battered women's

01:44

organizations in the whole united states

01:46

and they were looking for volunteers and

01:49

i went through that training and i think

01:51

that that

01:51

inspired me in so many ways and helped

01:54

me to grow

01:55

into feeling like i could be a leader

01:57

partly it's just

01:59

it was a consensus-building feminist

02:01

organization

02:02

of women supporting other women and

02:06

to me that's just the the basis for

02:10

helping women become leaders women have

02:11

to support other women

02:13

it and just because you're a leader

02:15

doesn't mean i can't be a leader too

02:17

so that's the way that works that got me

02:19

involved more in

02:21

political things i was on a planning

02:24

group when i worked at spruce run later

02:27

as an employee

02:29

for the first statewide conference on

02:31

domestic violence

02:32

and worked with the maine commission for

02:34

women in the men and women's lobby

02:36

and started thinking oh you know these

02:38

are really interesting

02:39

important leaders to work with and

02:43

that inspired me i think to think i

02:45

could run for office and really make a  
02:47  
difference  
02:49  
so yes and and through i mean i think of  
02:52  
my  
02:52  
experience in the house and the main  
02:55  
senate of the leaders that we had that  
02:58  
were women  
02:59  
whether they were elected to the  
03:00  
leadership positions or not they were  
03:02  
ones that  
03:03  
mattered to me and helped me to grow as  
03:06  
a leader  
03:08  
were there any surprises along the way  
03:10  
in your journey as a leader  
03:16  
surprises  
03:18  
uh it's hard to say um i surprised you  
03:21  
with that question  
03:23  
just because they're women doesn't mean  
03:25  
that they're always going to  
03:26  
be on your side but you know basically  
03:30  
it was that  
03:30  
i found that particularly when i got to  
03:33

the  
03:33  
senate and we had women in leadership  
03:38  
that i i did find that the  
03:42  
women leaders were more participatory  
03:45  
and there was more consensus building in  
03:48  
the caucus  
03:49  
the democratic caucus say back way back  
03:52  
when i first was in the senate shelly  
03:53  
pingree was our  
03:54  
majority leader the floor leader for the  
03:57  
senate democrats  
03:59  
and we actually that year had a majority  
04:02  
of women in the democratic caucus  
04:05  
which felt very empowering to us women  
04:08  
yeah so those those were good surprises  
04:11  
that  
04:12  
boy i really liked it when they were  
04:14  
women leaders  
04:15  
that's great one of the things that i  
04:18  
love about your story mary is  
04:20  
that you started as a volunteer you you  
04:22  
had an  
04:23

interest in being involved in the  
04:25  
community and  
04:26  
a passion um for for the work that  
04:29  
spruce run does  
04:30  
and and so you signed up to be a  
04:32  
volunteer and and  
04:34  
eventually that led to you serving in  
04:36  
our house and  
04:37  
in our stem it in the state um and i  
04:40  
think  
04:41  
sometimes students who come to maine new  
04:43  
leadership they come  
04:45  
and they think well i don't really know  
04:46  
why my professor said  
04:48  
i should be in this program or thought i  
04:50  
would be a good fit or  
04:52  
i don't really see myself as a leader or  
04:54  
i could never run for office  
04:56  
and um i i think your story in  
04:59  
particular just  
05:01  
exemplifies what one of the things that  
05:03  
we hope students will see is that they  
05:05

it you have you start somewhere you  
05:08  
don't necessarily start running  
05:10  
by running for senate um but you can  
05:12  
start as a volunteer  
05:13  
and there are so many places that could  
05:15  
lead  
05:16  
so speaking of our students  
05:19  
i would love to hear from you what you  
05:21  
hope students who  
05:22  
participate in the menu leadership  
05:24  
program will take from their experience  
05:28  
first i hope that they will all go away  
05:30  
realizing that it's empowering  
05:33  
when you have a group where they're all  
05:35  
women and the women are supporting the  
05:37  
other women  
05:38  
in becoming leaders the other lesson i  
05:41  
think that i remember so much from  
05:43  
speakers from brand new leadership  
05:45  
is that you shouldn't jump to  
05:48  
conclusions you should learn to listen  
05:50  
to other people  
05:51



and weigh the different arguments on  
05:54  
both sides  
05:55  
it helps if people don't make  
05:59  
the judgments and you know one one thing  
06:02  
i remember several speakers saying is  
06:03  
never burn your bridges especially if  
06:07  
you're  
06:07  
in a volunteer say the steering  
06:09  
committee the board of directors of a  
06:12  
volunteer organization that you are  
06:15  
working with  
06:17  
don't assume that because somebody  
06:18  
disagrees with you on one thing you're  
06:20  
always going to disagree or that's a bad  
06:22  
person  
06:23  
uh come away with being more open-minded  
06:26  
and being willing to listen and find  
06:28  
areas that you have in common  
06:32  
yeah yeah that's definitely um  
06:35  
one of the things that struck me early  
06:37  
on as  
06:38  
as i came on board in this role with new  
06:41

leadership is

06:42

um watching that sort of inaction

06:45

and watching students learn

06:48

how how much more effective they can be

06:50

when when they don't make those

06:52

assumptions

06:53

it was just it was the first year i did

06:56

it i know i've said this to you a

06:58

million times but the first year i went

06:59

through the program

07:00

i just left it so energized and excited

07:04

to continue

07:05

um because of of of

07:08

how you see students transform in terms

07:10

of their ability to

07:12

to stop and say hey you know i i guess i

07:15

don't agree with this person but

07:16

i've learned these things from them and

07:18

they've learned from me

07:20

and it's just uh so

07:23

invigorating and inspiring to watch

07:25

students go through that so

07:26

so thank you for for bringing that  
07:28  
opportunity to our students  
07:30  
it's great such a rewarding thing to do  
07:33  
and you know i i miss  
07:35  
the students i still stay in touch with  
07:37  
quite a few through facebook which is  
07:39  
just great to see where they are now and  
07:41  
what they're doing  
07:42  
wish i'm a happy birthday um yeah and  
07:45  
that's great you know it's wonderful and  
07:47  
rewarding to do that kind of work and  
07:49  
see the people grow  
07:51  
and um find out what they're doing later  
07:54  
that shows that they are leaders  
07:56  
and whatever they decide to do yes yes  
07:59  
it really is um final question for you  
08:03  
and anything else uh that hasn't come up  
08:06  
in our very short conversation i know  
08:07  
there's a whole lot more that we could  
08:09  
talk about  
08:10  
and that you could share but um other  
08:13  
thoughts that uh have occurred to you  
08:15

throughout our conversation  
08:16  
or other other things you want to be  
08:18  
sure to share um  
08:20  
with folks who are here to celebrate  
08:22  
with you your  
08:23  
your receipt of this award or with our  
08:25  
main new leadership students and alums  
08:29  
well the university of maine and the  
08:31  
margaret j smith policy center  
08:33  
have been wonderful over these years to  
08:36  
support  
08:37  
a program like maine new leadership it  
08:39  
took a while  
08:41  
to sort of build support and think okay  
08:43  
you know it does cost money you  
08:45  
bring 28 students to  
08:48  
umaine and they have to have meals every  
08:50  
day three meals a day  
08:52  
and rooms in the residence halls etc  
08:56  
um but it's the university's been so  
09:00  
supportive over the years  
09:01  
and the university system has been very  
09:03

supportive

09:05

i won't name names of the people there

09:07

because i'll forget somebody

09:10

but it's been just great to work with

09:12

the administration

09:13

changing administrations even have been

09:17

wonderful and i i think of eva

09:20

mclaughlin and sharon barker

09:22

is as wonderful people that

09:25

should be recognized rebecca smith i i

09:28

can't leave out rebecca because rebecca

09:30

and i founded new leadership

09:32

together and she was a policy

09:36

fellow i believe we called her with the

09:38

margaret j smith policy center didn't

09:40

come and work there she lives in union

09:42

she's an attorney but she and i got

09:46

really excited about doing this program

09:48

we started building support we got a

09:50

little grant from the community

09:51

foundation

09:52

at a couple of statewide planning

09:54

meetings in augusta

09:56

and here in oreno and rebecca stayed

09:59

with us for years and

10:00

she's much younger than i and uh in fact

10:03

she's the

10:04

daughter of george smith um who recently

10:07

passed away who was a great leader

10:09

himself

10:11

so i missed rebecca too we just

10:14

we really worked hard together

10:17

and being different in some ways but

10:20

alike in so many ways and wanting to see

10:22

young women

10:23

become leaders it was just really

10:26

important to me

10:28

that's great well thank you thank you so

10:31

much mary thank you for

10:33

for to you and rebecca both for bringing

10:35

this program to maine

10:37

um we today have over 300 students who

10:40

have been through the program

10:42

and our alum network just continues to

10:45

grow

10:46

we are offering a hybrid program in 2021

10:50

in recognition of the reality that we

10:52

live in today with the pandemic

10:54

uh we'll we'll do a bunch of virtual

10:56

programming and then

10:57

we hope covet allowing to bring students

11:00

together

11:02

for a weekend in between in the middle

11:05

of our

11:05

online programming and then we hope to

11:08

be back to fully residential

11:10

by 2022. so lots of big things uh

11:13

in the works and i thank you for your

11:16

comments and

11:17

for sharing some of your lessons i

11:20

because i'm a professor and i like to

11:22

talk and i like to share lessons too i

11:23

can't leave you all without

11:26

um sharing one lesson that i have

11:28

received from mary

11:29

and and that i continue to reflect on

11:32

uh as i continue this work and that is  
11:36  
in my very first year of involvement  
11:39  
with the program  
11:40  
um mary you and i had a year of overlap  
11:44  
where you were serving as director in  
11:45  
your final year and i was coming on  
11:47  
board and  
11:48  
we had so much fun traveling around the  
11:50  
state meeting  
11:51  
with folks who have been supporters of  
11:53  
new leadership for many years and it was  
11:56  
wonderful to watch you  
11:57  
in action i confess that uh early on  
12:02  
i kind of wondered do we need to be  
12:04  
having so many conversations with so  
12:06  
many  
12:06  
people and wouldn't it make more sense  
12:08  
for us to do a big meeting with  
12:10  
everybody and i realized after watching  
12:13  
you  
12:13  
and and participating in these  
12:15  
conversations  
12:16



uh one the importance of bringing  
12:19  
as many people to the table as possible  
12:22  
and as diverse  
12:23  
a a group as possible in terms of  
12:25  
perspective  
12:26  
and that's one of the things we did was  
12:28  
visit with people from all over  
12:30  
um with many different perspectives and  
12:33  
two  
12:34  
that it matters to really just sit down  
12:36  
and have a conversation with  
12:38  
people um because  
12:41  
once you know them in a way that you can  
12:43  
get to know them from a from a  
12:45  
one-on-one conversation  
12:47  
um it's so much easier to see the  
12:49  
similarities that you have with each  
12:51  
other even when there may be differences  
12:53  
and you disagree  
12:54  
and i think it's so much easier to  
12:57  
to make some progress together even if  
12:59  
you disagree and  
13:01

and to be willing to hear each other so  
13:03  
uh i  
13:04  
continue to reflect on that year uh  
13:06  
together with you  
13:08  
on the road and and the many  
13:10  
introductions that you made  
13:12  
um for me and with me and am so  
13:15  
appreciative of it  
13:16  
and thank you again for all of your work  
13:19  
for  
13:20  
uh women in maine and people in maine in  
13:23  
your leadership  
13:24  
um we're truly grateful for you thank  
13:27  
you so much amy it's  
13:29  
it's been great working with you and i  
13:31  
know that we will interact and  
13:33  
have more women of power receptions  
13:35  
which i look forward to  
13:37  
thank you for the nerva award it's so  
13:40  
beautiful  
13:41  
and it's it's special that it was a  
13:43  
woman artist who made it for me and i  
13:45

will treasure that

13:49

yes oh thank you for mentioning that so

13:51

mally weber of hallowell clay works

13:53

makes our a gorgeous sculpture every

13:56

year do you happen to have it handy

13:58

mirror i have it let me think about

14:00

where's the best place to put it where

14:01

it can be

14:04

i don't know if you can see it here on

14:06

my

14:07

we can it's really there is minerva

14:10

yeah it it really is so

14:13

again mally weber of hallowell clay

14:16

works um

14:17

makes these for us and because she

14:20

supports the mission of made new

14:22

leadership and is excited about the

14:24

spirit of

14:25

of this award and we're so grateful to

14:27

her

14:28

and i it's beautiful and it's just

14:31

really cool

14:33

i love it somebody asked me i said i'm  
14:35  
getting an award and she said what is it  
14:37  
and and i said it's it's for being a  
14:39  
wise woman  
14:44  
yes as i remember minerva did strategic  
14:48  
thinking too that she was noted for  
14:51  
strategy  
14:52  
and wisdom uh and a very powerful  
14:55  
reader yes so two powerful  
14:58  
women leaders right there mary cathcart  
15:01  
and minerva  
15:03  
thank you again mary and congratulations  
15:05  
yeah woman leader amy thank you so much  
15:07  
for doing this and for this beautiful  
15:09  
award