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League honors Potter, Koss for public service

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The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County honored Neal Potter and Helen Koss Friday for their public service contributions at the annual Lavinia Awards presentation.

In addition, former presidential candidate Patricia Schroeder delivered a rousing keynote address during the "Making Democracy Work" luncheon at the Bethesda Marriott.

Potter, 84, is a former county executive and longtime county councilman who retired from the council last year. Koss, 76, is the chairwoman of the Maryland State Board of Elections and served 16 years in the House of Delegates.

The Lavinia Awards are named for Lavinia M. Engle, a suffragist who founded the county League of Women Voters and was the first woman elected to the Maryland legislature from Montgomery.

Potter, of Chevy Chase, was honored "for the human qualities that made him such an outstanding public servant -- fairness, thoroughness and honesty." He served an unprecedented six terms on the council and one term as county executive. He had a powerful hand in a wide range of matters, including growth controls, budgets, farmland preservation, sewage and transportation.

Potter said it was "wonderful" to be honored by the league, which he has supported for decades. Potter now works on behalf of world federalism, the United Nations and other pet projects.

Koss was honored for her legislative work on lobbying and financial disclosure requirements, the open meetings law, the state ethics law and sweeping changes in state procurement to fight discrimination.

Koss was the president of the state League of Women Voters from 1963-67 and was inducted into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame in 1997.

"I started out with the League of Women Voters and I'm ending up with voters," she said. Koss said she met Engle and called her "a mentor for all of us who've gone on to public life in

Maryland."

Koss, who also received an honorary award from the legislature, asked, "Can I tell them to pass a decent ethics law?"

Community Ministry of Montgomery County received an award recognizing its advocacy for the poor.

The ministry was called the "conscience of the community."

In her keynote speech, former Colorado representative and presidential candidate Patricia Schroeder highlighted the need for campaign finance reform and more power for women in politics.

Schroeder said the 535 members of Congress get up every day with a number in their head -- the amount of money their campaign strategists tell them they need to raise that day.

"You want to know why we never get to quality of life issues?" Schroeder asked. "Toddlers don't have PACs."

Schroeder said rich people have adopted politics as a hobby: "Their only qualification is they belong to the lucky sperm club."

She argued for spending caps and a taxpayer checkoff for public funding of campaigns.

Schroeder had the aisles roaring with laughter as she took aim at Bob Dole's Viagra commercials.

"My advice for Elizabeth Dole is to tell your husband to get off TV. ... Is she running to get out of the house? What will she do if he gets to the White House? Take away his pills?"

Schroeder said women should use their purchasing power -- they do 85 percent of the shopping -- to bring about social change for women.

"Men buy beer and they buy underwear and women buy almost everything else," she said.

Schroeder also pushed her book, "24 years of House Work ... and the Place is Still a Mess."



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