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“The world is changing fast, and women will be on top”

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“The world is changing fast, women will be on top”

*Interview with Congressman Sam Farr**

On March 12, 2018, Hastings Women’s Law Journal conducted an interview with Congressman Sam Farr. Rep. Farr has committed his life to public service, which included serving in the United State House of Representatives for 23 years from 1993-2016.

During his time in service, Congressman Sam Farr had the opportunity to travel the world while representing the United State of America. Being an avid photographer, Congressman Farr captured images on these trips, which he now shares.

* Sam Farr was born in San Francisco Children’s Hospital on July 4, 1941. *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen said the Farr’s had given birth to a “Farr Cracker.” Sam was raised in Carmel, California in a politically active family; he graduated from Willamette University and attended Santa Clara Law School, and the Monterey Institute of International Studies, now Middlebury.

After school, Sam entered the Peace Corps and worked in a poor barrio in Medellin, Colombia. In 1975, Jerry Brown appointed Sam to the Monterey County Board of Supervisors. He went on to serve for 13 years in the State Assembly, where he wrote one of the nation’s strictest oil spill liability laws in the country, after the Exxon Valdez oil spill disaster.

Sam served 23 years as a Member of Congress, representing the Monterey Bay Area. He was elected to Congress in 1993, and rose to become a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, and ranking member of the Appropriations Sub-Committee that had jurisdiction over the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. Sam also founded the Congressional Oceans Caucus, and several other congressional caucuses for Travel and Tourism, Defense Communities, Organic Agriculture, and Unexploded Ordinances.

In international affairs, Sam became a leading voice for Columbia, where he had served in the Peace Corps, and was asked by President Obama to accompany him to the Summits of the Americas. Sam visited Cuba seven times, the last time with President Obama.

After 40 years of public service, Sam is retired and lives with his wife Shary in Carmel—close to daughter Jessica, and grandchildren Ella age 15 and Zachary age 9.

CUBAN CIGAR MAKER (2004)

As a former Peace Corps volunteer in Congress, Rep. Sam Farr worked to reestablish relations with Cuba. He was able to visit Cuba on several separate occasions, including accompanying President Barrack Obama during the signing of the Trade Accords in 2014.



Q: Where was this photo taken?

A: In a cigar factory in Havana, Cuba.

Q: Why did it capture your eye?

A: I was surprised to see most cigar making production is hand done—the dried tobacco leaves are rolled out and hand filled with tobacco. It struck me that most cigars were made by women while mostly being smoked by men—this picture is an exception.

Q: Having visited Cuba over half a dozen times, what are your major takeaways?

A: All the members of congress who have visited Cuba are universally surprised how their education system has reached every child—this includes having solar operated laptops in mountainous areas throughout Cuba. Additionally, Cuba's universal healthcare system has OBGYNs riding circuits in the mountains to visit the homes of pregnant women to conduct prenatal examinations. There is also a strong national emphasis in Cuba on family planning, including an annual international conference on family planning in early January—it seems the only country in the Western hemisphere that does not attend is the United States. This focus on healthcare also includes government funded gender reassignment surgeries.

Q: What were the roles of women in Cuba?

A: The majority of teachers in Cuba are women, and many women are members of the party hierarchy and leaders in the neighborhood associations. There is also a strong emphasis on women in sports and culture. One has to

remember the president's daughter is a published author and international spokesperson on women's issues, so women's issues are very much part of Cuban politics.

ISLAND OF EAST TIMOR, USAID CLINIC OPENING (2012)



Q: Where was this photo taken?

A: Island of East Timor, it is between Indonesia and Australia. It became an independent country recently after fighting a civil war within the last 20 years.

Q: What is going on in this photo?

A: A USAID-sponsored birthing center was being opened in a rural community. USAID provided money to build and construct hospitals in the area with an emphasis on prenatal and birthing care.

Q: Why were members of the United States Congress there?

A: The House Democracy Committee works with counterparts in other countries to encourage them to develop their own Congressional professionalism by creating independent intellectual resources such as a Library of Congresses and budget offices- this ensures checks and balances between the branches. We were there because East Timor had just built its own Library of Congress—this was very significant because it is a government office independent from their Executive Branch.

Q: Why are independent government offices important?

A: Aside from checks and balances, most countries do not have rules on conflicts of interest, disclosure of assets, and general ethics. Independent government offices are key to ensure transparency and decrease corruption.

Q: How did you end up at this clinic opening?

A: First, it was sponsored by USAID. Second, it was a significant event for the rural community in East Timor. Women's prenatal care and birthing centers are very important because there are a lot of at home births in East Timor and women do not have access to emergency hospitals if something goes wrong, which can result in both the baby and mother dying. This clinic was important because it

was an opportunity for women to have a safe place to go and not be scared- it was built for the women.

Q: Why would the women be scared?

A: In a culture of poverty, the most threatening thing can be change because it is unknown. Even in developed cultures, doing something different created lots of fear. These rural communities have been conducting at home births for centuries, and now they are being told to go to hospitals —one needs to establish trust if you are going to change their way of life. This clinic opening was the first step in doing that. However, it isn't just the clinic that is needed, one needs to build relationships with these rural communities, and the women have to start seeing positive results. The more good care the women receive, the more they will welcome the change and get the much needed prenatal and birthing care they deserve.

BANDA ACEH, INDONESIA PRESS CONFERENCE (2004)



Q: Where was this photo taken?

A: Banda Aceh, Indonesia

Q: Why were U.S. Members of Congress there during 2004?

A: We visited Banda Aceh after a large Tsunami killed thousands of people. We were there as part of the post-Tsunami aid program to see if U.S. disaster aid money was being spent effectively.

Q: Was the aid money being spent effectively?

A: Yes, the money was being spent effectively in comparison to what we have seen in Haiti.

Q: Why are trips like this important?

A: Until you see the amount of damage and death firsthand, you cannot comprehend how an entire region can be destroyed. As Members of Congress, we visited mass graves and attended schools where the children no longer had any living relatives.

Q: Why did you take this photo?

A: This photo was taken during a press conference with the governor of the state. The press corps was all men minus the one woman shown. The woman was asking us the toughest questions—in English too!

Q: What role did you see women play in Indonesia?

A: Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation in the world, and it very progressive for women. There are no prohibitions on women from the government regarding what women can do.

Q: Do women exercise these liberties?

A: Yes- there are more women in Indonesia's Parliament than in the United States Congress.

Q: Having traveled to multiple regions throughout the world, where do you see women in the future?

A: With many women in blue collar jobs internationally, conducting manual labor, and women in various powerful positions both politically and professionally—the world is changing fast, women will be on top.
