

Tanya Domi: Hi. This is Tanya Domi. Welcome to The Thought Project, recorded at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, fostering ground-breaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences, and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting-edge research, informing New Yorkers and the world.

Carol Robles-Román is the co-president and the chief executive officer of the Equal Rights Amendment coalition, and the Fund for Women's Equality. She was the former president and the CEO of Legal Momentum, the leading legal defense fund for women's equality in the United States. She served as Deputy Mayor under Mayor Michael Bloomberg for 12 years and is a former trustee of the City University of New York. So welcome to The Thought Project podcast Carol Robles-Roman.

Carol Robles R.: Hello.

Tanya Domi: Thank you for being here today. Earlier this year, when you joined the ERA Coalition, Gloria Steinem said in a formal statement, "To be equal in the US Constitution is the oldest Me Too movement, and the ERA Coalition aims to get us there. Carol Robles-Roman is a national leader with the vision and experience to explode the myth of equality and make it a constitutional reality at last." Wow. That is high praise coming from Gloria Steinem who really is one of the mothers of second wave feminism. How does it feel to be on the cusp of obtaining constitutional equality in an effort of more than 80 years and counting?

Carol Robles R.: It's a great question. I'll tell you what it feels like, Tanya. It feels like it's about damn time. This has been a long time in coming. A lot of folks really put the issue of constitutional equality to bed. They didn't realize that there were women all around the country, right? Even when the "political movement" let it go, they didn't know that there were women and men still working for constitutional equality, the ERA, and it was the ERA Coalition in 2014 that kind of brought everybody together and said, "You know what? We're not going to be quietly doing this anymore. We're going to come out of the shadows," and that's where I like to point to, at least in terms of sort of a flash point, and Gloria Steinem was one of those leaders.

As you know that she's on the board of the ERA Coalition and is one of the founding board members as well as sort of this whole intergenerational, intersectional group of leaders, and it's a different face of constitutional equality than we're traditionally used to thinking about, and it's interesting. Many times when I do do interviews, and they'll run photos, and they won't run photos of our current movement or the things that we're doing. They still want to run photos from the '60s and the '70s and the '80s. So I like to really reinforce the point as Gloria did. We're going to explode the myths, but we're moving forward in a really proactive way.

Tanya Domi: Yes, I think ... Well, I call it third wave feminism. That's what it really is, and I think it runs parallel to and reflects a broader movement across the country. Social movements are intersectional, and they're multiracial, and they're dominated more by millennials. A lot of these movements that are younger, like the LGBT movement, is very intersectional, very multiracial. There is an age range, but what you see at the grassroots level, Black Lives Matter, you're seeing much younger people, but with feminism, it makes sense to me that as you reconstitute it, the ERA Coalition, you brought all these people together, it would be intergenerational because so many second wave women that have worked in it are still alive, and they're still working on it. So it's pretty remarkable, and we cannot talk about this moment without talking about Donald Trump being the president of the United States. In my more positive moments, I see him as a bookend to an era of male dominance in the culture that is really completely ... has jumped the shark. It's at the extreme end of the spectrum of male dominance, and maybe that's what it takes to awaken people even more so to understand that American women have been quite unequal for a long, long time.

Carol Robles R.: You're absolutely right. I think we saw a series of movements kind of coming into play at the same time. I mentioned that the 2014 efforts of combining and really trying to shoot out of a rocket the issue of constitutional equality. I think the issue of Donald Trump ... Donald Trump pulled the curtain back, but make no mistake, he represents something that's very, very real, and he didn't invent it. He didn't embottle it. He just embodies it, and he's bold and brash about it. The misogyny-

Tanya Domi: Without a doubt. Without a doubt.

Carol Robles R.: Right? So on one hand, and this may be controversial to say, but he almost did us a really good favor because it was happening. I describe to folks ... I was Deputy Mayor of the city of New York for 12 years, and towards 10 and 11, you know you need to start looking for other employment, and everybody is sort of talking about what they want to do when they grow up, right, when they leave the administration, and I had seen so much going on around the country in my travels. Where I saw we were almost regressing, I would walk into rooms, and some of them were with important people that do important things, thankfully, not at the city hall level, saying and doing things that would not have been said 5 and 10 years before, right? Because we had made "some progress." And I would look around and say, "Did you hear him say that? Am I dreaming?"

And it was happening with such regularity that I made the decision that when I left city government, I would go into women's rights, and I started interviewing to become the CEO of the country's oldest women's civil rights organization, and when I took that position, I will tell you, the number of people who said to me, "Oh, that's so weird. Why are you doing that? That's so retro," and I explained at the time, and so now, people are coming back to me saying, "Wow. What did you see?" And now, when Donald Trump was elected, they know what I saw. I

said, "There is a tsunami coming towards us in the world of women's rights, in the world of equality of all of our rights, and I want to be in a position to do something about the tsunami." They're like, "Oh, don't you think you're overstating it? Aren't you exaggerating a little bit?"

So when we saw the election, we saw the pre-election things that occurred and the misogynistic comments towards Hillary Clinton. It started kind of percolating, and then after the election, we saw the women's march and that power and those numbers and those messages that were coming to the fore, and then, you combine that, which what had already been percolating, right, the resurgence of the ERA in the background, but for whatever reason, the media didn't want to write about it or talk about it because they just had that rest in peace, and they couldn't understand that resurgence. And so, what came next, Me Too and Time's Up and Harvey Weinstein combined with what we had already seen happening with Bill Cosby. Now, understand something, Tanya, those of us who have been doing violence against women, who have been doing Title IX, Title VII ... I oversaw the New York City Commission on Human Rights and the Office of Immigrant Affairs.

We knew what was going on. We understand these issues, but we also saw that there were less friends that were coming to the fore. We knew that with this new election, violence against women, which had made so many strides under the Obama administration and even under the Bush administration. He established the Family Justice Centers. Well, we had a little bit of an inkling that under Donald Trump that was not going to happen and that he was not going to be starting any Family Justice Centers or any centers at all, and sure enough, as soon as he took office, they were cut to the violence against women funding, and right now, that statute, which we hold close to our hearts because it has done so much and saved so many lives, is now at risk. So that's where we find ourselves. So that's the bad news. Now, what's the good news?

The good news is ERA Coalition, ERA moving forward, Me Too movement has finally pulled a curtain back, Time's Up stating boldly, unafraid. That has been one of the major issues when we discuss sexual discrimination, sex discrimination, issues on inequality around women. People walking and saying, "Well, says who? Where are the complaints? What are you talking about?" Meanwhile, we're thinking, "Well, there's Mary, and there's Joe, and there's the 15 people from ... " but they're not on pieces of paper, and they're not on people's metric sheets because most people do not report, and I've been saying and giving the Do Not Report speech for years. And so the resurgence of Tarana Burke's message through Alyssa Milano and that famous tweet ... It's the one year anniversary this month, one year anniversary, which gave women permission, safety to come forward and say, "Me, too." And then the numbers were just spiraling out of control, famous people, not famous people.

I saw last week, Connie Chung, the famous revered broadcaster.

Tanya Domi: Yes. Yes. She came out.

Carol Robles R.: She came out saying this happened to me 50 years ago, and it was my doctor, and it was the doctor who delivered me, and he did it when I was 20 years old, and she's, I think, 72 now. So those powerful stories are now at the fore, and nobody can no longer look at us and say, "What sex discrimination? What are you talking about?"

Tanya Domi: It's true, and I would say that in 2010, the CDC did this study on intimate partner violence, and the numbers are at epidemic levels. I mean, there is an epidemic of violence in America directed at women, and I would repeatedly refer to this study over and over again. Then, you move to the military and the issue with military rape, and those numbers are at epidemic levels. Disproportionately, rape is inflicted upon women, but actually, men are raped in aggregate numbers more than women because there are more men than there are women, but women disproportionately ... because of the smaller population in the military, are disproportionately victimized. So these things have been generating. I mean, Kirsten Gillibrand was working on this with Claire McCaskill and Jackie Speier in the House. I mean, this also goes back to even Pat Schroeder. When I worked on the Hill, these are issues. They reflect the broader society and the out picture in the military, on college campuses, some of the worst sexual assault cases, Michigan State, Penn State. These are examples where it's just ubiquitous. It's all over the place. I think you're right. It has exploded. This issue has exploded the idea that it doesn't happen.

Carol Robles R.: And says who? So now, those arguments that push back is no longer on the table, and it's-

Tanya Domi: So you think it clears the way? It absolutely clears the way.

Carol Robles R.: It absolutely clears the way, and so now it's, now what? And so the-

Tanya Domi: So my question is, now what? What is the legislative strategy of the ERA Coalition to obtain that last state to get it to the US Senate for ratification?

Carol Robles R.: Well, the theme that the advocates in the field have, the rallying cry is one state to 38, and it's these advocates who have been, frankly, toiling in the vineyards for the last 20 years who came up with the strategy of picking up the original ERA advocacy in 2017 with Nevada, to get Nevada almost seemingly out of nowhere.

Tanya Domi: There was like the three state strategy.

Carol Robles R.: There was the three state strategy. In other words, you need 38 states to pass a constitutional amendment, and 35 states had passed. The deadline had passed, and it did not go through, so RIP, rest in peace. So Nevada came up with the novel strategy of saying, "You know what? We think we can do this." There had

been another amendment passed in the interim, the Madison amendment, which was 200 years old, and they go, "Wait a minute. If that can pass, we're going to-

Tanya Domi: Why not the ERA?

Carol Robles R.: ... we're going to pick up where we left off. Thank you very much." So led by Senator Spearman who's going to be in New York City next week and is going to be speaking with us on our women of color panel.

Tanya Domi: Oh, she's fantastic.

Carol Robles R.: She's unbelievable and led many advocacy groups and intergenerational, intercultural. Just like everybody got involved in this in Nevada, and they passed it, and everybody said, "Oh, that was just kind of like a one off, a fluke."

Tanya Domi: A fluke, one off.

Carol Robles R.: Oh, well, that's something for the history books. So what we saw in May, Illinois did the same thing. So that was-

Tanya Domi: So why Virginia? So the rumors are Virginia's going to do this. The House of Delegates, now has-

Carol Robles R.: Well, don't tell North Carolina because I was just in North Carolina three weeks ago, and they just kicked off their rally.

Tanya Domi: Okay. Okay. Well, let it be a race. Let it be a race.

Carol Robles R.: That's what it is, and they're actually betting each other. We have monthly partner calls, and at the last call, the same thing, somebody said, "Well ... " Virginia and North Carolina said, "Excuse me." And so then, the other one said, "We're going to crush you." So they-

Tanya Domi: Let it be a competition.

Carol Robles R.: They've started bidding wars at this point. So it is going to be a competition, and Arizona ... There is actually right now the Equal Means Equal, which is one of our coalition partners, is actually doing a bus tour throughout Arizona. I was just looking on my Twitter feed, and they're posting videos of themselves, and they're going throughout Arizona getting people and getting legislators signed up and excited, and I'll tell you why this is-

Tanya Domi: Well, that would give it more impetus as well, right? That would give it much more substance if it ... come in more than 38.

Carol Robles R.: Exactly.

Tanya Domi: Gives it more power.

Carol Robles R.: So Virginia has a belt, and it was in the legislature last year, didn't pass, looks very good for this year, and the legislature reconvenes in the beginning of 2019, but what we're encouraging them is Virginia, North Carolina, Arizona ... Florida's also talking about motivating and inspiring their legislators to do this as well, is we're not going to stop at 38.

Tanya Domi: We're going to keep going.

Carol Robles R.: We're going to keep going. We are going to keep going. There were 13 states that didn't ratify. We're going to get all 13, probably not, but we're not going to stop at 38 if we don't have to.

Tanya Domi: Because that will send a message to the US Senate.

Carol Robles R.: Well, the Senate, once it's ratified, technically, then the archivists in congress ratifies, signs it up and does all the seals. There is the issue of the deadline, and there are two bills in Congress now, one supported by Senator Cardin, and the other one in the House by Jackie Speier, which would extend the deadline. So those-

Tanya Domi: So that would be the next challenge.

Carol Robles R.: That's exactly right, and then, that's the other congressional advocacy piece. So when I travel around the country, and I speak to different states, and people say, "Well, what can I ask my legislator for? We already passed, right? My state already passed the ERA."

Tanya Domi: Yeah, but ask your member.

Carol Robles R.: Ask your member have they signed on to the Cardin bill and the Jackie Speier bill. That's exactly right.

Tanya Domi: So my question is, knowing the Hill, I used to work there, and watching this Hill in particular, and we'll see what happens in the midterms. We knock on wood, hope that the House comes back into the D column. The Senate's going to be really, really close, I think, but my question to you is, and I know you know this, is that the United States Senate has failed to ratify the international Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, a lot of us who do international work. So they have refused to do this. They have never ratified it. Jimmy Carter tried to do it, and it didn't go anywhere. Given that and given the bills now, the Cardin bill and the Speier bill, why would you expect a closely split Senate to pass this or to support this bill? especially the Republican makeup of this body, which is probably not going to change that much.

Carol Robles R.: The issue of the Equal Rights Amendment, historically, right? Back in the day, the original movement had a lot of Republican support. It started with a lot of Republican support. It got a little bit muddy when you had Stop ERA pop out because they were afraid that women and men may have to use the same bathroom.

Tanya Domi: The Schlafly Factor.

Carol Robles R.: The Schlafly Factor, and serve in the military. I was speaking to a-

Tanya Domi: Yeah, the military, Elaine Donnelly who I used to debate often.

Carol Robles R.: Right. So those issues are gone. We're seeing, in the states now in question ... for example, Illinois. You had very strong Republican support, male Republican support, that led to that recent ratification in Illinois in May, and those leaders, for example ... You have one legislator, Mr. Anderson, who was actually in Virginia with us when we did the huge launch with all of the Ratify Virginia's partners in August, and somebody asked him, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I'm here to speak as a Republican man about how important the Equal Rights Amendment is to me, to helping it get passed, speaking to other Republican men that I asked to support this."

Tanya Domi: Okay, that's very interesting.

Carol Robles R.: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: That's very interesting. So you think those state legislators are going to be great advocates for you at the congressional level?

Carol Robles R.: They are. I think they will. I think post-Kavanaugh, there's a lot of creepy feeling going on in the Senate, and I think they know it. I think they made a deal with the devil, and they had a-

Tanya Domi: So you think they're going to be ready to sign on.

Carol Robles R.: I think they're going to be ready to understand that the Equal Rights Amendment is really simple. It's 24 little words that say, "You can't discrimination against someone on the basis of gender." I mean, it protects men and women at the same time. It doesn't even use the word "woman". It just says everybody's going to be treated equally, and that's a basic principle of equality and respect. Okay, raise your hand. How many of you don't think that's a good idea. No one's going to raise their hand on that one, right? There's nothing controversial about it.

Tanya Domi: So maybe in post-Kavanaugh environment, they're going to be ready to sign on. I do recall that in the post-Anita Hill period, any bill that said the word "woman" in it, they were ready to sign on. I mean, Joe Biden personally advanced the-

Carol Robles R.: Violence against women.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, Violence Against Women Act, and that's when you were able to get the former Senator from Pennsylvania ... He signed on to everything. We got him signed on to everything, just like, "Here's the bill. It's says women. Please sign." And they would do it. So maybe that's the environment we're potentially walking into.

Carol Robles R.: I think there was a lot of shame that just went on in DC. I was there. I was there for the hearings. I wasn't inside the chamber. I was outside. We did solidarity circles. I had to keep texting my husband because he kept saying, "Don't get arrested." I hope not, and thankfully, that didn't happen, right? But we were just praying and holding signs of support, and there was, on the one hand, incredible sadness and just a sense of, even in the legislature itself, there was a mission that many of them had signed on to do or felt that that's what they were elected to do, to support this person for the Supreme Court who was summarily unqualified, putting Dr. Ford aside, and I think they know that there's ... justice needs to be had at this point, and I think they're ready to listen.

Tanya Domi: So just speaking about this, I mean, you and I were talking about rape and violence. We mentioned a couple areas, but right now, in your view, and I mean, you're an expert, what are the top areas of discrimination facing women in America? How would you categorize those?

Carol Robles R.: The top areas, the one that is not open for debate is pay equity. Either get paid a certain amount or you don't. The violence against women piece, for whatever reason, and this piece I have never understood. People feel that that's subject to debate, but that's huge, and the reason why that area of sex discrimination is so insidious is that it is so hidden on the one hand, and it happens across the board to women at all areas-

Tanya Domi: Ages and all ages.

Carol Robles R.: ... all ages, all of the economic spectrum. When we saw Me Too sort of playing out, and on the one hand, obviously it had an incredible impact, a positive one in terms of letting women know it was okay to either self-report or not to report, but to tell others, but it did send a little bit of a skewed message to many because it had a very sort of glitzy, Hollywood-esque feel to it because it was a lot of celebrities coming forward, and for those of us who have been helping women in this situation, I had spent many years doing a lot of Title IX work, and my heart was kind of breaking because I know 16, 17, 18, 19, 20-year-old girls who don't tell anybody. I mean, I can tell you the number of hours I spent, talking to them, begging them to tell their parents, and I always ... My husband would explain to me. He said, "You're just a lawyer. You're not supposed ... " and maybe I broke an ethical cannon or two, but I would say to them, "Unless your mother or your parent is ill-equipped, do you think they would help you?"

And they go, "Yeah, but I'm so ashamed," and so I would offer to help broker that conversation.

So imagine, they're not even telling their parents. So we're breaking through that, but the other area where we see a lot of discrimination, sex discrimination, which I've spent also a lot of time focusing on, which doesn't get any attention, is in the area of sex trafficking, sex trafficking of young girls. It's happening at such a rate because of how easy it is to do, right? We see it happening online, and I've done a lot of work and published a lot of-

Tanya Domi: I've done a lot of work on this issue internationally. I think it's ... They estimate 50,000 women and girls are trafficked into the United States annually. You'll see these houses. They have raids. You'll see a report like in Kansas or somewhere else in America. It's a deeply disturbing phenomenon, and it speaks to the second class citizenship of women globally, globally.

Carol Robles R.: You're absolutely right, and I'll take it a step further. I mean, we were doing very innovative, very pushy work, I will say, and imagine sitting across the table with a US attorney, with an Attorney General, with the Attorney General, not an Attorney General, with the Attorney General of a state and coming forward and saying, "These are statistics that we have. These are inside information that we have from some of the people in your social services entity that's running it. We have a legal strategy for you," and they would kind of say, "Oh, this is too hard, or the legal issues are too complicated, or we think the courts would reverse us if we did that." And so, "Well, okay. So you'll come up with a better idea?" But this is happening. Your professional people are talking about it. They have data and stats and little checklists, right? But nothing is being done to stop the trafficking? That's number one.

Tanya Domi: Because it's what? Discretionary, this is like a discretionary ...

Carol Robles R.: A lot of the trafficking that we were uncovering was due to online service providers, and so there was a statute, and there is a statute called the Communications Decency Act, and there was a section 230 issue. So people were arguing, well, first amendment, dah dah dah. So I would say, "Oh, my God." I wasn't number one in my class in law school. I confess, and I didn't go to Harvard, but I went to NYU law, we were number four, and Harvard was number one. So I'm a pretty darn good lawyer.

Tanya Domi: You're well-trained.

Carol Robles R.: I'm well-trained and pretty darn smart, and I know that the first amendment does not apply to criminal behavior. So here I am kind of lecturing these top officials, and at the end of the day, you'll leave those meetings knowing there was not the directive. There was not the intestinal fortitude. There wasn't the desire-

Tanya Domi: To take it on.

Carol Robles R.: ... to take it on. Now, I say that with a footnote, right? Kamala Harris, when she was the Attorney General of California, was the only Attorney General to take that on. Soon there, her successor continued that work, and the Attorney General of Texas, last year, filed suit, but these were outliers, and that's happening in probably just about every state in the country, and it happens on the trafficking level, and it happens on the Title IX level with these young women. There are some schools where, frankly, the district attorney knows. Now, I've had a meeting in one state where the district attorney told me, "Well, when I come in on Monday, I know I'm going to get five reports from X school on a rape." Can you imagine?

And so it's like, "Oh, so you're going to ... Oh, so wow, what are you going to do about it."

"Oh, well, we process, and we do, and we ... "

Yeah, but don't you want to ... If you know you have a school that you're getting five-

Tanya Domi: In your jurisdiction.

Carol Robles R.: In your jurisdiction, doesn't that call for affirmative and preventive ... and that's not necessarily the way we've been oiled, and so when I think about the Equal Rights Amendment, when think about constitutional equality and equality and how it affects women, I talk about the preventive measure. I talk about what's going to happen when-

Tanya Domi: The affirmative measures, right?

Carol Robles R.: Absolutely. I'm a government expert, and I can tell you my expert opinion is that when you have an Equal Rights Amendment, government will have an obligation, a positive obligation. It's not a thing that's like, "Oh, now we have to spend \$50 million dollars to do, blah blah blah blah." No. You're going to have an obligation to do your job and to do it right the first time, and we are going to know that it's a heck of a lot cheaper, more efficient, and more equitable to handle something at the front end than to deal with the trauma, the problem, and the tragedy.

Tanya Domi: At the back end.

Carol Robles R.: At the back end.

Tanya Domi: So pregnancy discrimination, I mean, I just think that's a huge issue for American women.

Carol Robles R.: Oh, boy.

Tanya Domi: There's like four states now with family paid leave, New York being one of them, California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, and it's very clear, when you look at this issue compared to Europe and the commonwealth states where you have very progressive, affirmative social welfare system that says, "Okay, father or mother can leave the workplace for a year," and in Canada, the government will top off your pay for that year while your taking care of your newborn child. The United States probably has the least development on this issue of any western country.

Carol Robles R.: I have done several pregnancy discrimination matters when I was with the Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund, and I will tell you what's very difficult about these cases, very similar almost ... and this is my personal experience. I can't speak for other lawyers. It's very similar to women who have been victimized by violence. They don't want to report it, and they're embarrassed. They're ashamed. They really don't want to sue, and many times, they don't even have a job, and so I'm saying, "Well, let's sue to get your job back," and they don't want to be tainted. And I think employers know this, and so they-

Tanya Domi: They're vulnerable. They're vulnerable.

Carol Robles R.: They're vulnerable, and they have the upper hand, and so what is inspiring for me, what has been inspiring for me as a lawyer is to be able to represent the woman who says, "You know what? I'm going to take this on."

Tanya Domi: I'm going for it.

Carol Robles R.: And we had such a plaintiff a couple of years ago. She was a New York City police officer who was pregnant, and she wasn't terminated, but it was a pregnancy discrimination case because she wanted to take the sergeant's exam, and wouldn't you know it? The date of the exam falls on her due date, and so there's some reasonable accommodations, and they denied her a reasonable accommodation to reschedule the sergeant's exam. Meanwhile, the gentleman who need to be rescheduled because it was Uncle Phil's funeral and the guy who pulled his back-

Tanya Domi: Or he might've broken his leg or whatever, right?

Carol Robles R.: ... they got them rescheduled. So the city of New York, in its infinite wisdom, decided it would give her an accommodation, and the day she was literally being wheeled into the emergency to have the baby, they called her on her cell phone to tell her that they would give her a pillow, that that was the accommodation. So we brought an action, and so the good news is not only did Officer Thompson's case result in her being allowed to get an accommodation, the city of New York changed their policy for every individual in the city of New

York that works for the city of New York. The city of New York is 350,000 employees.

Tanya Domi: That's great. Yeah. That's a great decision.

Carol Robles R.: So it's a great decision, powerful lady. It gives you a lot of ... We took that decision and sent it to just like every big city mayor and said, "Hey, what are you doing?" And they all wrote us back saying, "Oh, we're doing this. We're doing that." But at the end of the day, so I go back to my Equal Rights Amendment points, I don't want the Officer Thompsons of the world to have to turn themselves into pretzels to figure out how they can get promoted and how they can rise the ranks. They should be able to do that as a matter of course. It shouldn't be something that anybody would have to be giving it a second thought, and those are the no-brainers. Those are the no-brainers that an Equal Rights Amendment would bring forth.

Tanya Domi: Is going to address.

Carol Robles R.: Yes, because it would create a culture of equality. That's what we're looking for. We're not looking for more charts and graphs and metrics and EO consultants to come in and get paid lots of money to teach us the obvious. Don't say this, and don't say that, but to reinforce a culture of equality in the workplace.

Tanya Domi: Okay, so this is an interesting situation that we're in. It's believed that more than one woman will be running for president next year in the democratic party. There's a lot of speculation going on about that. One of the biggest obstacles to women's equality in America, I would assert, has been its dearth of women's elected leadership in political bodies, not only nationally, but at the local and state level. The city council of New York City has 11 women or 21% representation. What would a woman president mean to the ultimate passage of the Equal Rights Amendment?

Carol Robles R.: Well, I think a woman president, just generally, would be a very powerful message and would be ... I hate to sound trite, but what a role model to get that 21% that you cited from the city of New York, which is supposed to be the most progressive city in the country. It's outrageous.

Tanya Domi: Right. The city I love. This is my home. I love New York City. I couldn't live anywhere else, and yet, the political representation of women is just ... I think it's atrocious.

Carol Robles R.: That breaks my heart. Having been, not necessarily a politically elected person, but work in that milieu, I can tell you it's a tough town, and I don't mean New York. I just mean that political avenue, and so to have a woman as president would send a signal to all of us that elected office, that political office, is an important place for us to be. Now, for the Equal Rights Amendment, you would have to assume on some level that that would give us added leverage to help

create that culture of equality that I'm talking about, and I'm banging my drum on, but it's got to be the right woman. I mean, if Susan Collins runs for president, no thank you.

Tanya Domi: I don't think that's going to happen, Carol.

Carol Robles R.: I'm not buying that.

Tanya Domi: I don't think that's going to happen. I think women actually are endangered in that party. It's a really difficult place for women to be right now in elected Republican party. Wow, this has been a great conversation. It's going to continue. I want our listeners to know that on October 29th at the Graduate Center, Carol Robles-Román will be moderating a program of state legislators, A New Era for the ERA: Women of Color Leading the Way, next Monday night at the Graduate Center. Carol Robles-Román, thank you so much for being with us today.

Carol Robles R.: Thank you so much as well, and anybody who wants more information, certainly check out our Twitter feed and ERA Coalition, www.eracoalition.org, and certainly, the CUNY Graduate Center website has the information about Monday's upcoming program as well, and we hope people register and attend.

Tanya Domi: Thanks for tuning into the Thought Project, and thanks to our guest, Carol Robles-Román, the co-president and CEO of the Equal Rights Coalition based in New York City.

The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering, and technical assistants by Sarah Fishman. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.