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Foreword

The Honorable Lynn Fitch

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FOREWORD

*The Honorable Lynn Fitch**

It is my distinct honor and privilege to open this issue of the *Mississippi College Law Review* dedicated to my colleague and friend, Chief Judge Sharion Aycock.

Judge Aycock is building an incredible legacy as a woman of many Mississippi firsts. She is a brilliant scholar, a sharp lawyer, and a respected jurist who has lent her talents to this State with great distinction, honor, and integrity.

When Judge Aycock ran for judge in the First Circuit in 2003, she was the first woman to run for circuit court judge in the history of the District. Distinguishing herself on the bench, only five years later, President Bush appointed her to serve as the first Mississippi woman Article III federal judge, an honor to which she was confirmed unanimously.

During her Senate confirmation hearing, Judge Aycock recalls Senators Lott and Cochran making personal presentations on her behalf, touting that she would be the first female district court judge in Mississippi, to which Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson of Texas added, "It's about time."

Senator Hutchinson was right. It was well past time for women in Mississippi to have a seat at the head of the table.

As a young attorney, I remember going to Mississippi Bar events where all the women lawyers were able to sit around a single table. I recall being in meetings surrounded by suits and ties in my first job at the Mississippi Attorney General's Office, an office that I proudly and humbly returned to this year as the first woman in Mississippi's history to serve as Attorney General.

* Lynn Fitch is Mississippi's 40th Attorney General and first ever woman Attorney General. Before becoming the State's chief legal officer, General Fitch served as Mississippi's elected State Treasurer for eight years, from January 2012 to January 2020. She was selected as Outstanding Woman Lawyer of 2012, recognized as a Woman Trailblazer by the Mississippi Bar Association, honored as a Mississippi Business Journal Leader in finance in 2016 and Leader in Law in 2010, and named a 2015 Honoree of the Women in Government Leadership Program by Governing Magazine. In 2017, Lynn was named one of Mississippi's Top 50 Most Influential and was honored with the prestigious Susie Blue Buchanan award by the Mississippi Bar Association's Women in the Profession Committee.

There are certainly more women in the legal profession today, but according to the American Bar Association, the percentage of female lawyers has only slowly risen over the past decade. In 2010, women made up less than a third of all lawyers, a statistic that has increased to just above a third, at 37 percent this year.

The bright spot appears to be on the bench, where the number of female federal judges has increased dramatically over the decades. The first woman was appointed to the federal judiciary in 1928, a time when the ratio was 1 woman to 217 men. In 2020, nearly one in every four judges on the federal bench is a woman, accounting for more than 380 across the country.

Judge Aycock has presided over some of the largest cases in our State's history, including the largest drug trafficking case in North Mississippi history, a landmark case on Medicaid fraud, and innumerable cases that touch the lives of Mississippians today and pave the way for Mississippians tomorrow. As Chief Judge for the Northern District, Judge Aycock adjudicates felony cases, as well as significant civil cases, all argued by some of the most talented attorneys in the country.

Her leadership on complex and multi-faceted legal issues has established her reputation as a tough but fair judge, always excelling as a prudent and scholarly jurisprudential thinker.

I have known Judge Aycock to be very practical, well-rounded, and worldly in her understanding of law and life. She approaches each case with an open mind, always following the law to a well-reasoned opinion.

I am fortunate to also know Judge Aycock as a friend, and I am in awe of her humility and integrity. It is rare to find someone who has achieved as much as she has, while also exemplifying service and grace.

Those who have clerked for Judge Aycock have fondly said, "When you clerk for someone who doesn't see any barriers for women, you don't see any barriers for women." Judge Aycock leads the way, not because she is a woman, but because she is leading in the right direction.

In fact, earlier this year, another Mississippi College alumna and former clerk of Judge Aycock was confirmed to the federal bench. Mississippi's first Solicitor General, Kristi Johnson, became the first female federal district judge for Mississippi's Southern District.

Judge Sharion Aycock is a pioneer and a leader, a woman of enormous talent, and a trailblazing Chief Judge who has won the admiration of women across the State and the country. Walking along such greats as Susie Blue Buchanan, Mississippi's first woman admitted to the Bar; Judge Zelma Wells Price, Mississippi's first woman trial judge; and Evelyn Gandy, Mississippi's first statewide elected woman, Judge Aycock is helping to lead our State down a historic path of women in law.

I am grateful to have gotten to know and appreciate Judge Sharion Aycock over the years. She is a woman of great character and a model to follow both personally and professionally. It is with joy and honor that I call her friend.

