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MEDIA CONTACT

Lisa Bennett, Communications Director
lbennett@conferenceforwomen.org

JACINDA ARDERN, MARGARET ATWOOD, AND AMERICA FERRERA ADDRESS SOLD-OUT MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN

Governor Maura Healey and Mayor Michelle Wu Also Spoke

Download Photos of [Ardern](#), [Atwood](#), and [Ferrera](#)

BOSTON, Dec. 14, 2023—In a remarkable display of women in leadership, more than 9,500 women attended the 19th annual Massachusetts Conference for Women today.

They heard from the former prime minister of New Zealand, the first female governor of the Commonwealth, the author of one of the most important books about women of all time, and the actress who delivered the most famous speech in the record-breaking film *Barbie*.

Speakers addressed the critical importance of equity in representation, the power of women as a collective force for change, and the necessity of staying optimistic in challenging times.

Dame Jacinda Ardern, former prime minister of New Zealand, talked about her “very pragmatic approach” to representation—saying she believes leadership should represent the population it serves and that doing so improves leadership.

Ardern, now a fellow at Harvard University, also spoke about how ordinary people can rise to extraordinary leadership challenges. “I’m living, breathing, incredibly flawed proof that you underestimate what you are capable of until you do it,” she said.

The Massachusetts Conference for Women promotes women in the workplace and beyond. This nonpartisan, nonprofit event focuses on leadership, career advancement, and personal development. It is the largest conference for women in the nation. *Tickets*

to next year's 20th-anniversary conference will go on sale in the spring. Sign up for updates [here](#).

America Ferrera, award-winning actor, director, and producer known most recently for her standout speech in *Barbie*, talked about the movie's significance, saying: "We're told so often that no one is interested in women's stories, whether that's in film, or books or business or politics or power. And when I read that script, I just got this tingling sensation of, oh my god, they're really going to improve on that old story. And they did."

Ferrera also spoke about the need to stop just talking about justice, equity, and inclusion. "We've spent a lot of time admiring the problem of diversity," she said. "But we know what we have to do. We just have to hire more people that look like more of us, and we have to give them power and resources to do what they do and what they do well."

In conversation with **Radhika Jones**, editor-in-chief of *Vanity Fair*, **Margaret Atwood**, two-time Booker Prize-winning author of more than 50 books, including *The Handmaid's Tale*, was asked if she ever became cynical about seeing negative historical trends repeat themselves.

"There is no point in *not* being optimistic," Atwood said because a lack of optimism leads to inaction. "I know we live in terrible times, but here's the optimistic thing: It could be worse," she said, adding: "part of the effort now should be to keep things from getting worse."

Governor Maura Healey welcomed attendees, saying: "I want to greet you as Governor and a woman leader. I know representation matters. I know seeing is believing. I know we have to do everything we can to increase the numbers of women in board rooms, spaces, and government generally."

She also celebrated attendees, saying: "Your leadership, your fight, your intentionality, your partnership makes change—transformational change—and not just here in Massachusetts but across this planet."

Mayor Michelle Wu thanked the Conference for "bringing us together each year and reminding us to mark the milestones that we can celebrate, but also to keep pushing forward."

Dr. Joy Buolamwini, an artificial intelligence expert, also spoke about the critical need to ensure that artificial intelligence is just—for women and people of color.

The Massachusetts Conference for Women, presented by State Street, is part of the Conferences for Women, the nation's largest network of women's conferences. The network's conferences in Pennsylvania, California, Massachusetts, and Texas attract more than 50,000 people annually.

On March 14, 2024, the Conferences for Women will hold the first National Conference for Women: a groundbreaking virtual gathering.

Learn more [here](#).