

**Press Release
From the Office of
State Representative
Gale D. Candaras**

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CANDARAS WOWS WILBRAHAM MEMORIAL SCHOOL STUDENTS

WILBRAHAM, MA -- Representative Gale D. Candaras (D-Wilbraham) engaged Wilbraham Memorial School fifth and sixth graders in their Wild Over Wilbraham (WOW) project in which students show-cased their work for the school-wide celebration of Wilbraham held earlier this month.

Candaras met with eleven- and twelve-year-old students at Memorial School to help educate them about Wilbraham's history and government, cultural norms and traditions, and the impacts that agricultural, technological and sociological changes have had on the Town in the past generation.

In discussing Wilbraham's history and government, the students learned about how Candaras' life has woven into the fabric of the community since moving here in 1988. "My career in public service began in Wilbraham, where I served on the Planning Board, the Finance Committee and three terms as a Selectman," she said. Candaras is only the second woman to serve as Selectman since the Town's founding in 1763 through the present; Louise Voss was the first woman Selectman in Wilbraham's history. She served two terms as Selectman from 1984 to 1990. Voss, a veteran Wilbraham school teacher, retired with her husband Jim to the family farm in Indiana. Voss, who is the mother of astronaut Janice Voss, visits Wilbraham several times a year and the two women still get together on those occasions. In January, 1997, Candaras was sworn in as State Representative and is now serving her fifth consecutive term.



Candaras explained to the students that the term "Selectman" remains the only title available in the general laws of the Commonwealth and that there is no such thing under the law as a "Selectwoman." "To make all the laws of the Commonwealth gender neutral on their face would be an enormous effort but it could be done. Women have only served in the Legislature since 1923 and we have never been more than 25 percent of the Great and General Court. In the 375 year history of the legislature, we have never had a woman Speaker or Woman Ways and Means Chair so we have bigger problems than what we are called," she said.

The students' inquiries into the Representative's childhood experiences in sports, hobbies and family traditions provided them with a comparative analysis of cultural norms and traditions across time and ethnic continuums. Candaras told the students that when she was a girl, "...there were not a lot of organized sports for young women and it was only after the passage of Title IX in 1972 that provided equal access to sports in public schools for both genders." She informed the students that unlike today, cheerleading was one of the few sports available to young women. Learning of her interests in cheerleading, dancing and violin playing, the students also got a snap-shot of Candaras' heritage as a first-generation American and the traditions of her Greek Orthodox Irish Catholic upbringing celebrating events such as Name Days, the Greek Easter and Christmas. "Life in my home was very different than yours," she said. "I had far less freedom." Candaras laughed when one of the youngsters asked her what designers she wore when she was young. "I didn't know there were designers. It simply wasn't an issue in my life."

Candaras left the Memorial School students with a reminder of their good fortune not only as members of the Wilbraham community but, as citizens of the United States as well. "My father told me every week that the most precious gift is to be an American citizen. As an American, you must always remember how privileged you are to be a part of this community and this country."