



March/April 2006

Through Rainbow-Colored Glasses

By Christine Dinsmore

No two ways about it. I'm SAD—seasonally affective disorder. Clearly too few hours of sunshine must be the root of feeling so low. Can't imagine why I would be discouraged because 2006 has been quite spectacular for women on the international scene.

On January 16, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was inaugurated as president of Liberia, the first woman to head an African nation. Who couldn't be moved watching Liberians dance in the streets with renewed hope that the 67-year-old grandmother will heal their war-torn country?

Three days after we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, Michelle Bachelet will be sworn in as Chile's first female president. This is particularly heartening because, unlike Sirleaf who has a conservative bent (Sirleaf is a Harvard-educated economist who has worked for Citibank and the World Bank), Bachelet is a socialist and former political prisoner under Augusto Pinochet's brutal regime. What makes her election so dazzling is that the socially conservative country has elected a divorced, single mom to help keep Chile left of center.

Another bright light on the global feminist front is the likelihood that Finland will reelect its left-leaning president, Tarja Halonen. As we go to press, she faces a runoff election against the runner-up. The fact that she garnered 48 percent of the vote and her challenger, conservative Sauli Niinistö, barely eked out 21 percent bodes well for Halonen.

In our own backyard, Christine Quinn became the first woman and openly gay speaker of the New York City Council.

With all these hopeful signs, surely my malaise must be weather-driven. Could it be that my lackluster spirit is not lifted by these events because I'm not Liberian, Chilean or Finnish? Or that New York is not Kansas?

Perhaps the sun-depleted winter skies have been further darkened by vacillating Democrats who have failed to penetrate the GOP's stronghold of Middle America. A mother lode of Republican corruption and lies surfaces every day, yet this country keeps marching further to the right.

Republicans are purging their campaign war chests of Jack Abramoff contributions, producing a windfall for charities. The White House is doing a search-and-destroy mission on all photos of Abramoff with Bush and Cheney. Without a smoking gun, when Jack starts naming names, the president can stand by his claim that he doesn't "recall" meeting the corrupt lobbyist.

The White House got caught spying on U.S. citizens when Russ Tice dropped a dime on his former agency to the *New York Times*. The National Security Agency's warrantless eavesdropping, perhaps on journalists, activists, lawyers, and individuals opposed to the Bush-Cheney agenda, smacks of Richard Nixon's enemy list. Nixon's domestic surveillance led to the passage of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which created a secret intelligence court and made it a felony to conduct surveillance without a warrant. (To ensure that the government wouldn't lose precious time in shadowing threats to our security, FISA allowed for a three-day grace period when clandestine wiretaps could begin while the justices evaluated the merits of the government's case.) Despite breaking the law, the cagey White House has come out swinging, ratcheting up fears that exposing their illegal spying aids terrorists.

And with perfected obfuscation, Samuel Alito danced circles around the droning Democrats during his confirmation hearings. The Supreme Court will take a seismic turn to the right.

Republicans deftly craft themselves as the straight-talking party of the average Joe, while Democrats can't shake their image of representing the elite. The plumber from Des Moines doesn't realize he has more in common with a single mother in Brooklyn than an oil tycoon in Houston. Perhaps I'm suffering from SID—stupidly inept Democrats.