



THE  
ASCEND  
FUND

PROSPECTUS

# WHEN SHE ASCENDS

A PATHWAY FOR A TRULY REFLECTIVE DEMOCRACY

# WHEN SHE ASCENDS WE ALL RISE

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THE  
GOALS

2

THE  
BARRIERS

4

THE  
MOMENTUM

6

THE  
STRATEGY

8

THE  
INVESTMENT

10

THE  
SUCCESSES

12

# THROUGHOUT HISTORY, WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP HAVE FACED UNIQUE OBSTACLES AND BARRIERS FAR MORE NUANCED THAN THOSE OF THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS. AND PERHAPS NOWHERE IS THAT DISPARITY MORE CLEARLY REFLECTED THAN IN POLITICS.

Women represent more than half of the United States' population, but you wouldn't know that if you were to walk the halls of statehouses across the country.

While there are more women serving in elected office than ever before, true gender parity is still a point in the horizon—and the path to achieving it is as winding as ever.

That's where we come in.

*As a collaborative fund, The Ascend Fund pools philanthropic capital and makes mission-driven investments in nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations that break down the barriers preventing women from running for office... and winning.*

We believe parity is a noble goal. But we're also thinking bigger—to the impact parity incurs. In short, when women lead, our nation is transformed.

That's not a rallying cry. It's a fact.

Today, women leaders in the political world statistically accomplish more than their male counterparts. They get more bills introduced. They get more policies enacted. And they do

it by building coalitions, reaching across the aisle, and compromising.

Even more powerful than the manner in which women govern are the very reasons they choose to run.

Studies consistently show that more women enter politics because they identify a problem in their community and want to find a solution.

Perhaps she was a doctor who realized her state was not effectively addressing racial disparities in maternal mortality rates. Or a factory worker who felt government had failed to help businesses adjust to a changing economy. Or a teacher who realized access to at-home Internet (or lack thereof) was contributing to inequity among her students.

Women choose to run for these reasons and countless others. And we see it as our responsibility to help them do so more often.

We're The Ascend Fund, and we're intent on accelerating the pace of parity. Not merely because we believe it's what's fair—but because we believe it's what's smart. **A**

THE ASCEND FUND IS POWERED BY PANORAMA GLOBAL. PANORAMA GLOBAL IS A 501(C)(3) ACTION TANK WORKING TO SOLVE PROBLEMS BY INFLUENCING PEOPLE AND POLICY. PANORAMA PARTNERS WITH AMBITIOUS LEADERS TO HELP STRENGTHEN THEIR ORGANIZATIONS AND ADVANCE PRIORITY ISSUES, AND INITIATES PROJECTS WHEN THERE ARE GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED.



# THE GOALS



2018 WAS TOUTED AS THE  
**“YEAR OF THE WOMAN.”**  
BUT WITHOUT ACTION, THAT  
COULD BE AN ABERRATION.

Above all, we’re convinced  
of the power of a collaborative  
approach—and we’ve set  
three core objectives to  
guide our work. **A**



## RESOURCES

### BRIDGE THE GAP

**Women candidates often consider access to resources and training as a lever for their future success,** particularly when it comes to mobilizing voters and raising money. And while many organizations provide candidates with a high-level look at running for office, few equip women with the kinds of invaluable tools and gender-specific training needed to put them on an even playing field. We seek partner organizations who specialize in it.





02

#### RECRUITMENT

### ESTABLISH A PATHWAY

**We have a pipeline problem.** Women simply don't run at the same rates as men. If we're going to realize exponential change in the pace of parity, we need cohesive and repeatable pathways nationwide for women to realize opportunities. And we see ourselves as a conduit for these strategies.

#### BARRIERS

### TRANSFORM THE SYSTEM

**A myriad of systemic roadblocks makes it difficult for women to run.** Our partners are poised to dismantle the underlying structural issues that exist within the political system—and we're happy to help them banish barriers by figuring out ways to make it happen.



03

3

#### THE FUTURE

## PACE OF PARITY

Many call 2018 a watershed moment. But in reality, the gender balance among elected officials has improved only moderately since the 1990s.

2138

The year women would reach parity if we were to **continue at the rate seen over the last century.**

2072

The year women could reach parity if we continue to **progress at the same rate as the past 20 years.**

2050

Our accelerated target for achieving parity. Together, we are committed to **realizing a representative democracy within 30 years.**



# THE BARRIERS

## WOMEN ENCOUNTER **COUNTLESS HURDLES** IN THEIR PURSUIT OF POLITICAL OFFICE. ▶

The challenges women face run deep and wide—but collectively, they come down to five key considerations. ▣



*WOMEN MAKE UP 51% OF THE UNITED STATES POPULATION, BUT HOLD ONLY 29% OF STATE LEGISLATIVE SEATS—AND WOMEN OF COLOR ONLY 74% OF THOSE.*



### STRUCTURE

#### ◀ A ROLE FOR THE ELITE—OR AT LEAST FOR THE FLEXIBLE

From the unconventional schedule, often requiring long stretches away from home, to scant compensation, the nature of political roles is highly challenging for those without flexible, well-paying jobs. Add the likelihood of shouldering childcare duties, and women—especially those with limited means—are facing an uphill battle.

### SELF-CONFIDENCE

#### HUMILITY OR HISTORY?

From self-doubt to deference, women often struggle with a deeply embedded lack of self-confidence. And faced with few role models and generations of embedded thinking, women may default to the views of those around them or to avoiding politics altogether.



## STEREOTYPES

### A HARSH MEDIA, A HARSHER PUBLIC

**Media coverage tends to zero in on gender as a woman's primary attribute**—rather than other facets of her identity. And even as social media provides a major low-cost channel for sharing her message, women face disproportionate criticism and harassment there.



## SYSTEMIC PRESSURES

### FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT, BY THE ESTABLISHMENT

**Our political system as it stands offers little incentive** to address barriers to equal participation in politics. With limited formal support or institutional knowledge to navigate these systems, women face a narrow view of electability and even a lack of support from their own party establishment—particularly Republican women.

\$\$\$

### FUNDING IS FUNDAMENTALLY BROKEN

#### **Fundraising remains a critical hurdle for women candidates to overcome.**

Women often feel an outsized emotional burden when it comes to asking for money (a response that's societally informed from a young age). Plus, they face disproportionate challenges in accessing the same kinds of rooms and conversations where men have had a seat at the table and an upper hand in being able to capture funding.



## BEYOND PARTY LINES

We are uniquely committed to supporting organizations across the political spectrum. Why? Because if we're going to succeed, we must rise together.

When elected, women are more likely to build coalitions and compromise on divisive issues—positive actions that can only be maximized where there is parity on both sides of the aisle.



# THE MOMENTUM

## WHEN WE LOOK AT REPRESENTATION ACROSS THE COUNTRY, WE SEE OPPORTUNITY.

By looking at three states at various points of progress, we begin to see the path forward. And we are able to identify where there is still a lot of work to be done. [A](#)

### PARITY TAKES PERSISTENCE

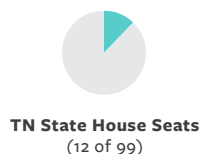
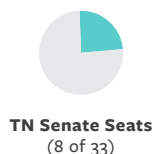
## TENNESSEE (RANKED 49)

In 2020, women account for just over 15% of state legislators in Tennessee—approximately half of the national average. Unfortunately, this isn't a new trend.

The number of women serving in the Tennessee General Assembly has never surpassed 20%—and the number of women elected has actually declined over the past decade. Plus, Tennesseans have yet to elect a woman to the governor's office.

#### Where Women Sit ▶

● Women  
● Men



### PARITY HAS PROGRESSED

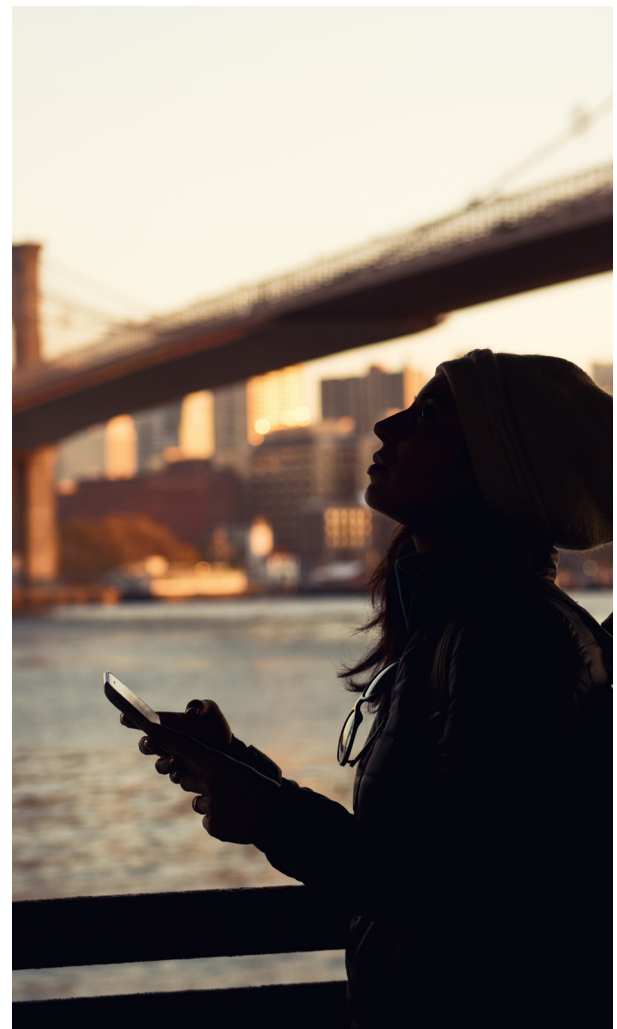
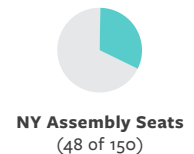
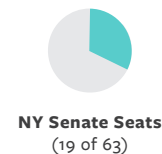
## NEW YORK (RANKED 19)

Over the course of the last decade, New York has made incremental progress toward parity.

The number of women serving in the state legislature is up from 7% to 32%. That being said, New York remains one of 20 states that have never elected a woman governor.

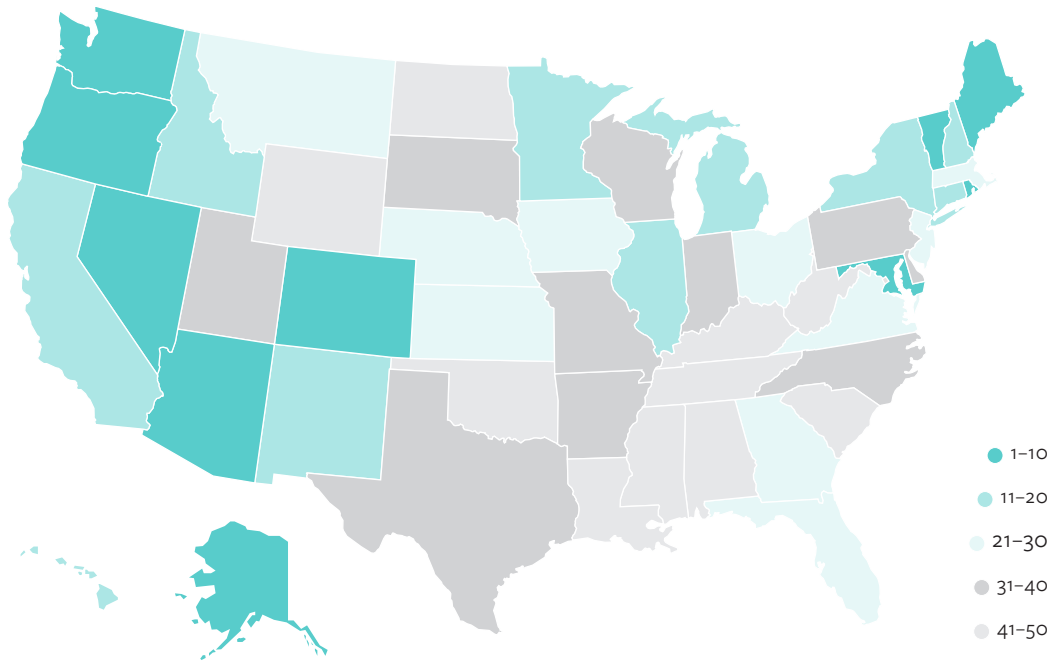
#### Where Women Sit ▶

● Women  
● Men





## WHERE WOMEN LEAD

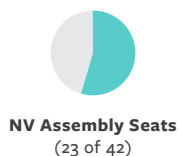
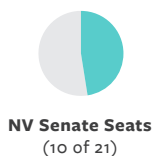
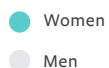
RANKING THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN  
AMONG STATE LEGISLATURES

## PARITY IS POSSIBLE

## NEVADA (RANKED 1)

**Between the two chambers, women account for over 52% of lawmakers in the Nevada Legislature.**

Nevada has long been at the forefront in electing women. Two years before women gained the right to vote, the first woman was elected to the Nevada Assembly. And as early as the mid-1990s, 35% of the members of legislature were women.

Where  
Women Sit ►STARTING  
WITH STATES

## VAST POTENTIAL

There are 8,000 elected officials serving at the state level, compared to 535 members of Congress.



## CRITICAL GROUND

Powerful policy decisions happen at the state level, and they have cascading influence upward and across our communities.



## COMPOUNDING EFFECT

State legislative campaigns operate on lower budgets than congressional ones—so dollars stretch farther and impact more seats.

# THE STRATEGY



## ABOVE ALL, WE BELIEVE IN THE *POWER OF COLLABORATION.*

We've seen firsthand how detrimental periodic or disparate efforts in this space have been—and we're committed to connecting the dots.

So as we seek to bring change-makers the funds they so desperately need to accelerate the pace of parity, we focus on a synchronized approach intended to bring us all closer—rather than pitting ourselves against others seeking to do equally good work. Throughout our efforts, we commit to four core philosophies that unify our potential. ▀

### THE PHILOSOPHIES

## ALLIES, ALIGNED



### UNITE THE VISION

**The more cohesive our outlook, the more powerful our momentum.** Because even as parity-focused organizations proliferate, these disparate groups still see a continuous flux in formulas and strategies. The more we align, the more we all rise.



### COORDINATE THE EFFORTS

**When we establish shared systems, we all operate in sync.** So we're exceptionally dedicated to data sharing and coordination—between organizers, academics, investors, and, of course, women.



### FOCUS THE APPROACH

**Many organizations focus on national races—but** we specifically commit to starting with the states. And with 15 seats in state legislatures for every one seat in Congress, the potential to elect women is great.



### DIVERSIFY THE VOICES

**Diversity of leadership leads to diversity of ideas.** So we're exceptionally dedicated to championing diversity, equity, and inclusion as a relentless pillar of our work—within our own organization and through the partners and investors we seek.



## THE ORGANIZATIONS

### PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

**We celebrate strategists.** Seek disruptors. Cultivate connections. By partnering with organizations bolstering change where it matters, we're making strides with staying power.



**Advance Native Political Leadership**  
Increasing the representation of Indigenous people in office.



**APAICS**  
Promoting Asian Pacific American participation and representation at all levels.



**Higher Heights**  
Building a national civic engagement infrastructure for Black women's leadership at all levels.



**Ignite**  
Sparking a national movement of young women to become political leaders.



**LatinasRepresent**  
Inspiring more Latina women to seek public service opportunities.



**Running Start**  
Giving young women the confidence, capabilities, and connections they need to run.



**She Should Run**  
Motivating women to explore the possibility of public office.



**Victory Institute**  
Increasing the number of LGBTQ people in office and providing tools for success.



**Vote Mama Foundation**  
Helping mothers find their political voice and making it easier for them to run.



## NEW AMERICAN LEADERS

**New American Leaders (NAL) empowers New Americans to run, win, and lead.**

NAL is the only national, nonpartisan organization focused on bringing New Americans into the political process. They accomplish these goals by:

- Training and inspiring immigrant leaders to run for office
- Building coalitions among New American elected officials
- Researching solutions to create a more diverse corps of leaders

New American Leaders believes that when our elected officials mirror the makeup of our nation, we achieve stronger communities, a more responsive government, and a robust democracy.

### OVER 1,110 TRAINED

- 127 NAL ALUMS ELECTED (106 CURRENTLY SERVING)
- 82 APPOINTED (70 CURRENTLY SERVING)
- 65 TRAINED AS CAMPAIGN LEADERS
- 61% AVG WIN-RATE OF ALUMS BETWEEN 2016-2019



## VOTE RUN LEAD

**Vote Run Lead trains barrier-breaking women to unleash their political power, run for office, and transform American democracy.**

Vote Run Lead believes there's an urgent need for an intersectional wave of women to lead within our democracy. So they're championing women ready to fight for democracy by tackling systemic reforms with bold ideas.

Vote Run Lead's award-winning Run As You Are™ curriculum guides women through a process of radical self-inquiry, wherein their backgrounds, experiences, and values become their authentic platform. Trainees emerge as grounded, effective, collaborative leaders for their communities and, with hundreds of thousands of elected offices in the U.S., there is a place for every woman to take the lead.

### 400% GROWTH SINCE 2015

- 60% OF PARTICIPANTS ARE WOMEN OF COLOR
- 20% OF PARTICIPANTS HAIL FROM RURAL AMERICA
- LARGEST SINGLE DAY OF TRAINING, REACHING 3,000 WOMEN IN 20 CITIES AND ONLINE



## WHEN WE INVEST IN WOMEN, *WE INVEST IN OUR DEMOCRACY.*

There's no question that our country has many worthy organizations working toward the betterment of our society. But when it comes to funding women, we've historically fallen short. **A**

*"GETTING MORE WOMEN IN OFFICE STARTS WITH GETTING MORE WOMEN TO RUN. THE ASCEND FUND PROVIDES ESSENTIAL SUPPORT FOR ORGANIZATIONS ON THE FRONT LINES OF THIS IMPORTANT MISSION."*  
—MELINDA GATES

### HOLISTIC SUPPORT

## HOW YOUR CONTRIBUTION CONNECTS THE DOTS

The median budget of an Ascend Fund partner is less than \$1 million. So we look at the landscape and identify opportunities where investment will have the most impact. Then, we take action in these critical ways.



FIVE- AND SIX-FIGURE OPERATIONAL GRANTS



TRAINING + WORKSHOPS WITH TOP POLITICAL MINDS



CONNECTIONS BETWEEN COMPLEMENTARY GROUPS



TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR DATA SHARING



## THE FINANCIAL GOALS

# A FUND FOR RIGHT NOW, A FUND FOR THE FUTURE

We're scaling our fundraising incrementally over the next five years.

### PHASE 1 (2018-19): LEARNING & EXPLORATION (COMPLETED)

BUDGET: \$1M

Developed a comprehensive understanding of the barriers preventing women from achieving political parity.

### PHASE 2 (2020): INVEST & DESIGN

BUDGET: \$5M

Build a portfolio of organizations working to elect women and collaboratively develop strategy for achieving parity.

### PHASE 3 (2021-22): IMPLEMENT & EXPERIMENT

BUDGET: \$25M

Invest in 10 to 12 states, with varying levels of representation, to test training and recruitment strategies.

### PHASE 4 (2023-24): REFINE & EXPAND

BUDGET: \$40M

Increase number of targeted states (25) and apply lessons learned from the previous elections to enhance our tactics.

### PHASE 5 (2025-BEYOND): IMPACT & SUCCEED

BUDGET: \$50M

Implement a 50-state strategy for achieving 50% representation by 2050.

## THE APPROACH

### POOLED FUNDING, COLLECTIVE PORTFOLIO

The Ascend Fund is made up of action-minded philanthropists whose collective investment is leveraged to maximize impact. Our method empowers three critical efficiencies.

#### COORDINATION

Ensures alignment and collaboration between partner activities to better serve the overall needs and priorities of the field.

#### DISSEMINATION

Allows for a targeted distribution of resources, increasing efficiencies and reducing redundancies.

#### DATA-SHARING

Empowers consistent measurement and evaluation across the portfolio to improve our learnings and outcomes.

## OUR LEADERSHIP

### THE TEAM

#### GABRIELLE FITZGERALD

Founder & CEO,  
Panorama Global

As the founder and CEO of Panorama Global, Gabrielle leads diverse, dynamic teams and collaborates with partners to spark global change. Prior to founding Panorama, she directed the \$100 million Ebola Program at the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and served as director of Global Program Advocacy at the Gates Foundation. Earlier in her career, Gabrielle spent five years at USAID working on HIV/AIDS and disaster response, and served as the communications director for the US Committee for Refugees. She also served as a speechwriter for President Clinton at the White House. Gabrielle holds an M.A. from the Maxwell School at Syracuse University and a B.A. from American University.

#### ABBIE HODGSON

Director,  
The Ascend Fund

Abbie brings more than two decades of experience in politics to her role with The Ascend Fund. She has worked on more than 100 campaigns at all levels across the country, and has even run for office herself. Abbie earned a PhD from the University of Kansas, where her dissertation focused on increasing the number of women in politics by improving the ways organizations recruit, train, and support women in the process of running for office.

# THE SUCCESSES



## CATALINA CRUZ

*NEW YORK 39TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT & NEW AMERICAN LEADERS ALUM*

A DREAMer now in her second term, Assemblywoman Cruz is an experienced attorney and advocate for tenant protections, immigration reform, and workers' rights. In her first term in office, she co-sponsored more than 530 bills, and she has led the charge on many historic pieces of legislation, including the Child Victims Act, the DREAM Act, and the Green Light Bill, which provides driver's licenses for undocumented New Yorkers.

**"I DON'T BELIEVE IN DOING THIS JOB FOR THE POWER. I BELIEVE IN DOING THIS JOB IN ORDER TO CREATE THE CHANGE THAT PEOPLE NEED."**

### HOW DID NEW AMERICAN LEADERS INFORM OR SUPPORT YOUR RUN FOR OFFICE?

► New American Leaders has a training where you truly get a look at what it is to run for office. A big part of it for me was the finances and fundraising. I grew up with the idea that you don't talk about your finances outside of the home. So getting over that and practicing was critical.

### WHAT DOES A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY MEAN TO YOU?

► How can you legislate about an issue properly if you haven't lived through the experiences in question? Whether it's experiences of people of color, or those of different ages, genders, or sexual identities—those who've had those experiences are going to be the most powerful figures in creating change. Those closest to the pain are closest to the solution.

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER OTHER WOMEN RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

► If you're doing it for personal reasons, you have no business doing it. If you're doing it because your community has been forgotten—then go ahead, run. Just know that everything you do and every decision you make now belongs to your community.

### FILL IN THE BLANK: WHEN SHE ASCENDS, \_\_\_\_\_.

► Her people are heard. **A**



# SARAH STANKORB TAYLOR

WYOMING, OHIO, CITY COUNCIL & VOTE RUN LEAD ALUM

A nationally published journalist, Council Member Stankorb Taylor is in her second term serving her city with a focus on the environment and equity. She first ran in 2017, and with a voice shaky from a neurological disorder, told her community how deeply she valued making sure everyone is heard. She has consistently championed other women to run, even starting her own group, Women Who Run (for Office), to support women running for local office.

*"A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IS ABOUT CLEARING SPACE SO THERE'S ROOM AT THE TABLE FOR THE PEOPLE WHO HAVEN'T BEEN HEARD YET."*



## WHICH BARRIERS WERE THE MOST DIFFICULT TO SURMOUNT IN YOUR RUN FOR OFFICE?

► Getting in front of people was terrifying. You're opening yourself to all sorts of scrutiny and judgment—not for your professional qualities, but trivial things like your hair or how you speak. Vote Run Lead taught me how to represent why I was doing this, and how to tell my story.

## WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT IN OFFICE?

► In our town, we didn't have a single playground accessible to children with mobility disabilities. So I invited a group of adults with disabilities and parents of children with mobility disabilities, and I handed over the floor. Each family described how not being included impacts them. City staff had tears in their eyes. Ultimately, we were able to work through an idea for a universally inclusive playground.

## DO YOU BELIEVE GENDER PARITY IS POSSIBLE IN THE UNITED STATES?

► It will take work, but we can get there. Part of it is normalizing that this is just what women do. I see that with my children, ages 8 and 11. They see me in this position, and it has shown them that this is what moms do.

## FILL IN THE BLANK: WHEN SHE ASCENDS, \_\_\_\_\_.

► She reaches back and pulls someone else up. I firmly believe we must do this over and over and over again until we change what it means to be in a position of power. **A**

WHEN  
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RISE



[ascend@panoramaglobal.org](mailto:ascend@panoramaglobal.org) / [theascendfund.org](http://theascendfund.org)