The 2017 session of Women in Politics invited all attendees to participate in a conversation hosted by keynote speaker, Washington State Supreme Court Justice Mary Yu. Focusing on the importance of participation in public service and the exchange of ideas from all perspectives, Justice Yu drew from her personal history to illustrate her points.

The daughter of immigrant parents from Mexico and China, Justice Yu was raised in Bridgeport, Illinois. During her school years she was encouraged to reach for a career as a secretary because that was seen as a stable and attainable profession in her neighborhood.

With encouragement from educators and mentors, Justice Yu dreamed bigger. She became the first in her family to attend college. After completing a B.A. in Religious Studies from Mundelein College of Loyola University, she took a position with the Peace and Justice Office for the Archdiocese of Chicago. During her tenure with the archdiocese, she moved from a staff position to become the Director of the office. Inspired by her experiences, she applied for and attended the University of Notre Dame Law School.

After graduating law school, Justice Yu moved to Washington State and began her legal career in King County, holding positions as Deputy Chief of Staff to King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng and as a deputy in the Criminal and Civil Divisions. Joining the King County Superior Court as a trial judge, Justice Yu spent over 14 years presiding over criminal, civil, juvenile, and family law cases. Her accomplishments in this position led to her appointment to the Washington Supreme Court in May of 2014. In 2016, she was elected to a six-year term. She is the first Asian, first Latina, and first member of the LGBTQ community to serve on the Washington State Supreme Court.

Beyond her professional duties and accomplishments, Justice Yu has maintained a strong sense of community and continues to lend her abilities to a variety of service organizations. Among other activities, she mentors young attorneys, law clerks, and students, serves as co-chair of the court’s Minority and Justice Commission and co-chair of the Washington State Bar Association/ University of Washington Law School Leadership Institute, and serves on the board of FareStart. Additionally, she is involved with the Civility Project of the Robert’s Fund Foundation, as well as the Seattle Girls’ School Mock Trials where she has served as a judge for the past 11 years.

In sharing her story, Justice Yu invited attendees to see the challenges of minority group members from another perspective. She also highlighted the importance of providing encouragement, opportunity and mentorship to assist people in reaching their goals and lending their voice to the public service arena.