



Ferial Masry

Community
Activist

Saudi-American Woman Champions Democracy

In 2010, Ferial Masry, who was born in the birthplace of the prophet Muhammad, lost her fourth bid for a seat in the California State Assembly. Believed to be the first Saudi American to run for political office in United States history, Masry campaigned on a progressive Democratic agenda in a staunchly Republican district.

As she had in 2004, 2006 and 2008, Masry supported public education, health care reform, affordable housing and open spaces. She also supported reproductive rights, embryonic stem cell research, civil unions for same-sex partners and freedom of religion.

Ferial Masry, shown in her home in 2004, explains why she ran for public office in her 2008 book *Running for All the Right Reasons: A Saudi-born Woman's Pursuit of Democracy*. Photos © AP Images



“As an immigrant (I was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia), I am thankful for the opportunities that this country has afforded me and I want to give back to my country,” she wrote in an online forum. “In particular, I want to help preserve the middle class life that is the backbone of America and our wonderful democracy.”

A naturalized U.S. citizen, Masry left Saudi Arabia at age 10 to be educated in Egypt, where she graduated from the University of Cairo with a degree in journalism and met her husband, Waleed. After living in Africa and England, they immigrated to California in 1979, where she earned a master’s degree in school administration. She teaches American government at Cleveland High School in Los Angeles.

In an interview for ABC News’ “Person of the Week” in July 2004, Masry said the U.S. Constitution inspired her. “It’s a very small document — 7,000 words, five pages — but what it had in it is something visionary and beautiful. It really emphasized not to put the power into one man or one group.”

In 2008, she published *Running for All the Right Reasons: A Saudi-born Woman's Pursuit of*



Democracy, which describes her life, her belief in the U.S. democratic process and her dedication to community involvement.

Masry became active in politics when her son, who was in the National Guard, was called to serve in Iraq in a war she did not support. After her 2010 election loss, she said she no longer would run for office but would stay involved in politics.

Masry’s candidacies stirred interest among the media in Middle East countries, where she is viewed as an authority on democracy as well as a role model for women. “I was the first woman ever to be on the cover of a Saudi magazine without a headscarf,” she told ABC News.

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Zewail



Tlaib

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Ahmed Ahmed, Comedian
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Michael DeBakey, Heart Surgeon
Farouk El-Baz, Geologist
Gaida, Singer
Kahlil Gibran, Artist and Poet
Joseph Haiek, Publisher
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Casey Kasem, Radio Broadcaster
DJ Khaled, Rap Music Artist
Khalid Khannouchi, Marathon Runner
Ferial Masry, Community Activist
Christa McAuliffe, Teacher in Space
Naomi Shihab Nye, Author
Ameen Rihani, Poet
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Kareem Salama, Singer
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Rashida Tlaib, Politician
Elias Zerhouni, Medical Vanguard
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