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Leaders of Organizations of Women Public Officials

Report from a
Conference

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A program of
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Eagleton Institute of Politics

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The Center for the American Woman and Politics (CAWP) is a research, education and public service center. It was established in 1971 as a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics, at Rutgers-The State University of New Jersey. The Center designs and sponsors a variety of programs aimed at developing and disseminating knowledge about women's participation in politics and government and at encouraging women's full and effective involvement in public life in the United States.

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Report from a
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A NOTE

In 1978-79, the Center for the American Woman and Politics (CAWP) conducted studies of women in politics and government under a grant from the Office of Policy Development and Research of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These included an examination of the status of women municipal managers across the country, and a study of the development of women's organizations in the public sector. The results of these studies were issued in a three-volume report entitled Women in Public Service.*

The second volume of this report ("Women's Organizations in the Public Service: Toward Agenda Setting") identifies various organizations of women in politics and government across the country. It describes why they have formed, how they were established, how they are structured, how they relate to their parent organizations, and what their goals and programs are.

In 1979-81, under continued HUD sponsorship, CAWP designed a program to assist and strengthen the organizations of women public officials identified in the earlier research. An important component of the program was a conference at which leaders of women's groups and organizations within government service came together to share information about their organizations and to discuss how their organizations might further common goals through mutual efforts. The Conference for Leaders of Organizations of Women Public Officials was held in Washington, D.C. on June 13 and 14, 1980. This is the report from that conference.

*Volume I, "Women in Municipal Management: Choice, Challenge and Change"
Volume II, "Women's Organizations in the Public Service: Toward Agenda Setting"
Volume III, "Changing the Opportunity Structure for Women in the Public Sector"

As a result of the conference, CAWP is working to keep the groups informed of each other's activities through a publication entitled News & Notes: About Organizations of Women Public Officials. CAWP plans to continue assisting organizations of women in politics and government in several ways, including: continuing to publish News & Notes; continuing to assist in the development of new organizations of women public officials; providing current lists of women officials from its National Information Bank at low cost to organizations of women officials; providing current information about the status of women in public life through publication of a series of fact sheets as well as News & Notes.

The Center for the American Woman and Politics is very grateful to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for recognizing the need to support this important program area. Officials of the Office of Policy Development and Research provided valuable assistance and encouragement at all stages of project development and implementation.

Kathy Ann Stanwick
Conference Coordinator

INTRODUCTION

The seventies was a decade of progress for women in government. Punctuated by the many "firsts"--women mayors of large cities, governors, senior Presidential advisors--it was marked also by increasing numbers of women at virtually every level of government. What women often found in public agencies where they served was an inhospitable environment. What they did about it was to develop mutual support groups. In 1970 there were hardly any organizations of women in government; by 1980 groups had formed in virtually every sector of government and in all regions of the country.

The Center for the American Woman and Politics studied these organizations in 1979. Its report, Women's Organizations in the Public Service: Toward Agenda Setting, analyzed the way women in public life were using caucuses, task forces, networks and other types of organization to move from isolation to mutual support and collective action.* But research for the report also revealed that though the groups had formed to reduce the isolation of individual women, the groups themselves were isolated from each other. Their goals and problems were similar; their members wanted to learn about other groups; but there were few opportunities or resources to bring them together.

Among the several recommendations for programs and policy changes to increase the participation of women in government, the report called for a conference of organization leaders. They were to be brought together in order to share information and experience and to discuss collective solutions to their common problems. In June 1980, CAWP convened the first Conference for Leaders of Organizations of Women Public Officials. The goals of the conference were:

- to bring together for the first time the leaders of all organizations which represent women in elective and appointive governmental offices and the governmental professions;
- to familiarize the organizations with each other's existence, goals and programs;
- to provide a forum for women from all types of organizations representing all levels of government to share information about how different organizations meet their expressed goals and to identify the programmatic, financial and staff resources required for furthering organizational goals;
- to discuss cooperative strategies for strengthening existing organizations and for encouraging the formation of new organizations;

*Diane Rothbard Margolis, author; Kathy A. Stanwick, project director. Available from: Center for the American Woman and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 \$5.00

- to begin establishing connections among the organizations, so that after the Conference information and resources could be shared regularly among the groups.

Seventy-five leaders from over forty organizations were represented at the Conference. The organizations ranged from: the very large to the very small; the old to the new; the broad-based to the narrowly-defined. They included:

- statewide elected women's associations ranging from the newly-forming associations in Minnesota, Nevada and Pennsylvania to the oldest--California Elected Women's Association for Education and Research, established in 1974;
- women's organizations within professional associations ranging from the Planning and Women Division of the American Planning Association established in 1979 to the American Society for Training and Development's Women's Network formed in 1968;
- statewide organizations for women appointed officials ranging from Michigan's recently formed Women in State Government and Michigan Women in Public Management to California Women in Government, an organization with three chapters, the first formed in 1974;
- organizations of women state legislators ranging from "A Group of Women Legislators," an informal network of women in the Connecticut Legislature to the oldest currently active organization of women in politics or government--the National Order of Women Legislators, established in 1938;
- women's organizations at the federal level ranging from The Congresswomen's Caucus (an association formed in 1977, to which all 17 women members of the U.S. House and U.S. Senate belonged in 1980) to Federally Employed Women, an organization with 7500 members formed in 1968.

The Office of Policy Development and Research of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development--which had funded the 1979 study--also provided funds to make this conference possible. This is the report of the Conference for Leaders of Organizations of Women Public Officials.

For a day and a half leaders of the forty organizations met in plenary sessions, in small discussion groups, and at meals. They listened to invited speakers and to each other. Participants learned how the oldest, most established organizations had begun, grown and changed, and how some of the most successful programs operated. They discussed ways of solving old, continuing problems and heard details of new difficulties that seemed to spring from the seeds of success. Outside the formal sessions, pairs of participants and larger groupings gathered to make plans for mutual aid and continued cooperation.

There were two major speeches, three panel discussions and two small group sessions.* The conference was convened at one o'clock on Friday afternoon with introductory remarks by Kathy Stanwick, the conference coordinator and Ruth B. Mandel, director of the Center for the American Woman and Politics. Donna Shalala, assistant secretary of the Office of Policy Development and Research, Department of Housing and Urban Development, welcomed participants in a talk that outlined the changes achieved over the decade by women in public life and the long road they had yet to travel. She emphasized the responsibility leaders have toward all women.

The first panel discussion followed these opening remarks. In it panelists raised many of the key issues that were to be repeatedly addressed throughout the conference. They included: 1) the costs and benefits of speaking out on issues of gender equality; 2) the differences between elected and appointed positions and the possibilities for women in both types of positions to work together; 3) the special problems of minority women officials; and 4) an increase in organized opposition to women in government that some participants brought to the attention of the conference.

When the plenary meeting was over, participants broke into four small groups which met in separate rooms to discuss the objectives of their organizations and the ways they had tried to meet those objectives. That evening participants attended a reception and heard talks by hosts Patricia Roberts Harris, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Moon Landrieu, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Saturday morning the small groups reconvened to continue their discussion. They described successful programs developed by their organizations, talked about the resources their organizations needed, and outlined the ways they had tried to develop both human and material resources. Questions of organizational needs and sources of support were taken up later in the afternoon at the final session. In between, there was a panel discussion and a luncheon address. Both departed somewhat from the central topic of the conference by focusing not on the organizations, but instead on the women who were served by the organizations. The panel, made up of campaign consultants and journalists, looked at the special difficulties women face in becoming government officials--difficulties that stem from the image the public has of women in government and the way the press builds that image. At lunch, Patricia P. Bailey, a member of the Federal Trade Commission, spoke about the difference it makes to have women in government.

*See Program of the Conference for Leaders of Organizations of Women Public Officials, page 21.

Themes of the Conference

Three dominant themes developed during the conference. The first was the changing conditions for women in politics and government. As these leaders talked about the environments in which they work, it became apparent that the nature of discrimination varies greatly from one part of the country to another and from one level of government to another. The organizations women officials have formed have helped to ameliorate some aspects of discrimination. Where women public officials have been numerous and united, there was much they could do and had done to combat discriminatory social environments. However, many leaders warned of organized resistance to their work; and in response the discussion turned to possible strategies that their organizations could use to combat the growing opposition not only to women in government but also to policies that assist women in our society.

A second theme of the conference was the developing mutual acceptance among diverse groups of women public officials. Differences among women leaders--such as those between the more and the less activist and between elected and administrative officials--were repeatedly recognized to be rooted in the different responsibilities, work requirements and social environments they faced. One result of the conference was increased understanding and a more accepting attitude among different types of officials.

The third theme of the conference concerned the building of organizations. Because the conference included representatives of well-established organizations and representatives from those just beginning to form, participants discovered that the organizations themselves pass through stages as they evolve. Leaders of newly-forming organizations could see their groups' future challenges in the descriptions of past history presented by leaders of older, established organizations.

Organization of the Report

The report will be divided into three major sections organized around the themes--the first two focusing on the more general issues facing individual women in government and politics and the third on the organizations themselves.

First, we shall look at the progress women in public life have made over the past decade. One sign of that progress is that there are now so many organizations of women in government that this conference of their leaders had become necessary. The organizations signify both the greater number and the unity of women in public office. They have done much to enhance the effectiveness of their members.

Second, we shall discuss some difficulties faced by women in government and the ways in which cooperation among women in different spheres of public life can ease these difficulties. Although this conference was designed primarily to air and explore the problems and possibilities of the organizations, and participants came as representatives of organizations, they were individual public officials as well. Quite naturally they melded their organizational and official experiences and insights, speaking both as leaders of organizations and as individual public officials. Not surprisingly, some of the

topics they raised applied to women as public officials and not directly to their organizations. These included such issues as the special responsibilities of a woman public official; the relationship between appointed and elected officials and the approach of both to the women's movement; and the public image of women officials, including problems of campaign fund-raising and the compatibility of family and public roles.

Finally, we will turn to the organizations themselves. We will look at their development, at some successful programs and at methods of raising funds. The conference program, a list of the organizations and the leaders who represented them at the conference, and some information about CAWP's ongoing activities with organizations of women public officials will complete the report.

A DECADE OF CHANGE

FOR WOMEN IN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Change for women in politics and government is most obviously reflected in their numbers. For example, in the early seventies, women held less than five percent of elected positions.* By 1980, the percentage of women in elective office had more than doubled--to about twelve percent. Collective action has been the almost inevitable result of this increase. There was hardly a formal or informal grouping of women in government in 1970, but by 1980 most women in government had some organization they could join to meet others like themselves. These organizations had varied purposes. But four goals were common to most. They were:

1. to provide a place and situation where women in government can meet;
2. to provide women with technical assistance and opportunities for professional development;
3. to increase appointments of women to governmental bodies or decision-making committees of professional and public interest groups;
4. to recruit women into elected or appointive public service.

The rising number of women in government can be seen then as not only the cause, but also as one effect of collective action and the partial achievement of the last two goals. Another effect resulted from pursuing the first two goals. Women in government, because they had support from each other and their organizations, were in 1980 far better able to speak as and for women. This is a subtle change, but one that we can measure by comparing the attitudes of the 1980 conferees with those expressed by women state legislators who attended a conference sponsored by CAWP in the spring of 1972.** According to the report from that conference, participants "were reluctant to concentrate specifically on their experiences as women." They felt that "being a woman was something to be ignored, or taken for granted, or suppressed, but certainly not a primary subject for discussion with colleagues." In 1972, women felt that they were perceived not as individuals, but as symbols in general; and they were burdened by that symbolic status. At the 1980 conference, no woman spoke as if it were a burden she bore to make her actions a credit to her sex. In fact, most women seemed to seek out and accept a special responsibility to support other women.

*Elected officials included are: members of the U.S. Congress, state-wide elective officials, state legislators, county governing board members, and municipal and township governing officials.

**This was the Conference for Women State Legislators, conducted by CAWP under a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York in May 1972. See Women State Legislators: Report From a Conference, Center for the American Woman and Politics, Rutgers University, Eagleton Institute, New Brunswick, N.J.

Most conferees seemed to embrace the challenge to women officials advanced by Donna Shalala in her opening remarks to the conference:

I believe women in power have special responsibilities-- both to their female colleagues and to the larger public. A woman in a position of power who does not bring any new sensitivity to that position is not an achievement to any of us. Women who see themselves and are perceived by others as having "made it" have obligations which go far beyond our own jobs and cooperative relations with our peers. We should not want simply to join and advance within the system but to change--to humanize it.

In her luncheon address, Patricia Bailey talked about ways in which women in politics and government have begun to change the system. "It makes a difference to have women in office," she declared, "They have placed new issues on the public agenda." She continued:

Why does anyone think that...day care facilities, nursing home care, battered wives, the problems of divorced women, and displaced homemakers, just to mention only a few, are surging forward into the consciousness of the nation as issues that need to be addressed?...Because women are more sensitive to issues and decisions...as they will affect women.... There is a group sensitiveness that comes from being a member of a legally disadvantaged group.

Support for new issues and that special sensitivity Bailey spoke of have been to some extent a response to the resurgence of feminism in the United States. Indeed, the women's rights movement has expected support from women in government, and vice versa. But, sometimes feminist activists have not found as much support as they have needed; and sometimes women officials have felt "put upon," or misunderstood.

By 1980, however, most women officials had come to see that differences between themselves and movement activists lay less in the faults of the movement and more in the constraints of their own offices. If public life has its opportunities, it also has its constraints. Sometimes movement activists have seen only the former and have thus been disappointed with women officials. Women officials, meanwhile, have had to work within official constraints and sometimes they have chafed under pressures from activists. As Charlotte Williams, immediate past president of the National Association of Counties, noted in the opening panel of the conference, she often faced a conflict between her official responsibilities and the demands made upon her by the minority groups to which she belongs. "While I was serving as president," she said, "I was requested, at times demanded, as a female and as a black to do things that I could not do at the expense of the organization."

Yet, by and large, women who are in sympathy with feminist goals both inside and outside the government have moved forward toward an understanding of each other's point of view. Adding her experience to Charlotte Williams', Susanne Wilson, County Supervisor of Santa Clara County, California and current president of the California Elected Women's Association for Education and Research, told of a time when she had to put her supporters on the spot:

My feminist constituency helped to elect me...and then when I had to go to a National League of Cities meeting that was going to be in a non-ERA-ratified state, I created some frustrations for them. I had to plead with them to understand why I was going--that I was going to chair that very vital Public Safety Committee that had never before had a woman on it. We were changing the agenda of the program so we could lobby for national legislation on violence in the home. And I said, 'It's more important for me to do that and take my lumps with you because it's going to affect what's going to happen.'

That was during my second election and they weren't about not to endorse me. Yet, they had to look at somebody who was violating one of their strong stands and still endorse me. So I placed them in a very bad position.

Equal Rights Amendment

The Equal Rights Amendment, and strategies for its support, have placed women officials in difficult positions throughout the decade. Of all issues, it was probably the most salient and the most divisive--especially for those organizations of women public officials affiliated with national associations. Such groups had to decide whether they would petition their parent organization for a policy statement in favor of the ERA. That question was often answered in the affirmative, and it just as often discomfited women from non-ratified states. Should the parent organization agree to support the ERA, the next question was whether to try to have it express that support by joining the boycott of non-ratified states. That was a much tougher question and it invariably led to hot debate within the women's groups.

The issue came up again at this conference, and when it did, the discussion that followed illustrated one of the greatest benefits of bringing leaders of women's organizations together. In that setting they could explore longstanding differences and come to an understanding of how the diversity of their work-settings often leads to a diversity in actions, even where there are no ideological differences. At first, Rosemary Ahmann, a county commissioner from Minnesota, a past member of the NACo board of directors, and a founding member of both Elected Women in NACo and Minnesota Women Elected Officials, spoke in favor of the strongest tactics and challenged those who worked against the ERA boycott. "I find it shocking that none of us are willing to put ourselves on the line to say that we support and promote women's rights, because without that you have nothing," she said. But later, she summarized the discussion that followed in the conciliatory tones that marked the conference: "What happens is we confuse strategies with the philosophy and the philosophy is: we believe in equal rights for women. The strategies, how we carry that out, may differ." The participants applauded her.

The Importance of Social Context

What she and others recognized is that strategies differ because the social context in which women and their organizations must act varies from place to place and from one level of government to another.

If in the early 1970s, the world of the woman official was an almost uniformly alien place, by 1980 there had been enough change so that in some places and at some levels of government women felt almost at home.

The contrast between the situation of women legislators in Maryland and those in Oregon illustrated this point. It also illustrated what could be accomplished by a vital organization of women officials. In 1972, Pauline Menes, a member of the Maryland House of Delegates, rose to criticize the legislative leadership for failing to appoint women to important standing committees. The speaker's response was to appoint Delegate Menes to the chairmanship of a newly created Ladies Restroom Committee. That insult sparked the creation of the Women's Caucus of the Maryland Legislature. Today women in Maryland chair some of the most important legislative committees; their caucus has developed an outstanding internship program; and male colleagues come to the caucus to garner support for their bills and to participate in the varied informational programs the caucus provides.

On the other coast, in the Oregon legislature, the men are sometimes as contemptuous of their women colleagues today as the men in the Maryland House of Delegates appeared to be a decade ago. During the 1979 session, a "poll" was distributed by some male legislators. Male colleagues were instructed to "rate Lady Legislators of the 60th Assembly" on such characteristics as "mouth, face, chest, rear, legs, and body (total)."

In such an atmosphere, women officials have little chance of working effectively toward a more humane governmental system. However, the Oregon women at the conference could take heart from the experience of women in other places. For where women officials are well organized and especially where they are seen as having powerful constituencies, they can have an important influence. Noting the changed environment in the nation's capital, Patricia Bailey said:

For a long time, there were very special outstanding women in many positions who were not able to have a maximum impact because they were so isolated. When you are isolated, you hesitate to speak up for fear people will say, 'sounds just like a woman.' You are subject to a little bit of ridicule. It seems to me that to the degree that our numbers swell and the isolation erodes, we feel better able to say what we feel and to come on with our kind of approach to thinking. Certainly that has been true for me. One of the reasons that I can say pretty much what I want to inside commission meetings and outside to the public, is because I know that there are women in my agency who look to me for my leadership and support and who will be very disappointed and vocal about their disappointment if I fail them. And, also I know that there are women all over the city, who are in somewhat the same position, that I can call and they will be supportive and helpful as I will be to them. And, that's so important because we draw strength not just by our numbers, but from each other.

Where women have not yet joined together to support each other, the work for women's rights and for human rights is not only more difficult, it can be risky. Comparing the two types of environments, a conference participant commented:

In my national organization, where we've had the trail-blazers...we can move ahead without a lot of resistance. However, within my state I'm seen as a rabble rouser and I know I'm the lightning rod and I have absolutely no possibility of moving ahead in my state.

That statement sparked a heated debate. Some panelists argued that, far from being hurt by speaking out for women's rights, a public official would be rewarded--"as long as she performed all the other duties of her office one hundred percent." "If you, as a woman leader, are effective in all the various aspects of that life," said Lynne Barrette, chairperson of California Women in Government's Northern Chapter, "then I don't believe your taking an out-front position on women's issues or the advancement of women will be a detriment to you.... Then, when they're looking to make that appointment or for someone to be on that committee, yours is the name that will be there because they know you not only do your job, but you also have some opinions that are valid." The first woman countered, "It's difficult for me to say why. Maybe it's that there are just 18 women county officials in my state out of about 450; maybe it's the times; maybe it's because I live in a rural state that's just emerging, and maybe it's my personality, but I know that I'm the lightning rod."

These two differing types of experience and points of view exemplify the variations in changes that have come over the decade. These variations have several dimensions. First, there are geographical differences. On the two coasts, especially around large cities such as the District of Columbia, women have had a stronger voice and greater opportunity for full participation in government than they have had in other regions. Second, are the changes that can be effected through legislation compared with those that cannot; the latter have been few while there have been more of the former. An example can be seen in a third dimension: the differences between elected and appointed officials. We turn to this issue in the next section.

ELECTED AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIALS: MEETING CHALLENGES THROUGH COOPERATION

The debate between participants who felt jeopardized by their outspokenness and those who thought they had been noticed and rewarded was settled when panel moderator, Betsey Wright, pointed out that those who stressed the risk tended to be elected officials while those who stressed possible rewards were administrative officials. She suggested that once again differences in opinion were rooted in differences in experience and position--this time between elected and administrative officials. Lynne Barrette agreed that this was an important difference, and noted that because of equal employment legislation, public organizations "have to take some steps toward promoting women and so naturally they look to women who have been effective." "But," she added, "in an elective situation there is no affirmative action plan which says you have to have an equal balance of elected officials."

This was just one of the many moments in the conference when the difference between elected and administrative officials came to the fore. The 1979 CAWP report, Women's Organizations in the Public Service, had analyzed the reasons why differences between the two types of public careers had led to tensions and to a pattern of separate organizations for each type. At the conference, small group sessions and the panel discussions offered opportunities to discuss and clarify the differences. Briefly summarized, they include the following:

- the elected official is often the superior and the employer of the administrative official;
- the elected official has a less certain tenure in her position than the administrator;
- elected officials are responsible for policy formation, administrative officials for policy implementation;
- elected officials attain office solely through political processes while the appointment of public administrators is based on training, credentials and experience.

The conference was the first occasion for many of the women representing these two groups of public officials to talk with each other at length. At many points they realized that although their situations were quite different, some of their problems were the same. They had much to learn from each other and much to gain from cooperation.

For example: during the discussion following the panel presentations on "The Public Image of Women in Politics and Government," a city manager rose to say, "The focus of the discussion to this point has been on the elected officials and there are quite a few administrative officials in your audience...and we come at this quite differently." She did not think that as an administrative official

she should be subjected to attacks from the press; nor did she believe she should have to worry about her public image. Yet both had been recent issues in her professional life. "We are professionals," she said. "We are trained for our jobs, and yet our qualifications are challenged.... I was selected out of 166 people, so you would think... I know what I'm doing...but I never had a chance before the press pounced."

After some discussion, she and other public administrators agreed that because they were in fact not exempt from press criticism, they had as great a need to know how to present themselves and deal with the press as did the elected women. Although the topic of the panel had, at first, seemed to address only problems faced by elected women, almost all that had been said applied as well to administrators. Those problems were identified by moderator Eileen Shanahan, Senior Assistant Managing Editor of The Washington Star and former Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at HEW. She described them as "issues that should be irrelevant, but which we know darned well are not." They fell into three categories: image, fundraising and family.

Image, Fundraising and Family

Paul Lutzker, vice-president of Hamilton and Staff, a Washington-based public opinion research organization, said that women officials' difficulties begin with the fact that "it is not normal for you to do what you are doing.... You have to overcome generations of bias." Then he explained the difficulty of overcoming those "generations of bias":

Most campaign strategies try to identify the problem areas that a candidate has and work around them. The easiest way to work around them is to ignore them and to cause the voters to ignore them.... If you're a woman candidate, the most visible, the most real, the most obvious problem about your campaign is that you're a woman candidate, and you can't hide that.

However, Leslie Bennetts, a national political reporter with The New York Times, suggested that there were signs for optimism:

When I look back over the past ten years, I find myself in the unaccustomed position of being struck by how much things have changed for the better.... I am struck... that there are so many more women out there. They are producers for the networks. They are correspondents... magazine writers...and we're out there writing about things from our perspective.

The difficulties women political candidates face when fundraising on the other hand, have remained virtually unchanged over the past decade. According to experiences related by women in the small group sessions and corroborated by the two political consultants on the panel, raising money is still far more difficult for women than it is for men. Douglas Bailey, president of the political consulting and advertising firm of Bailey, Deardourff and Associates, explained why:

Most of the money in campaigns traditionally comes either from or through the business community...from or through business leaders. That is the most sexist part of America's society.... Their attitude toward women candidates is generally that they are frivolous. They will not take you as seriously as they will take male candidates. They may give, but they're giving...just to placate you. They won't give as much.

Throughout the conference, participants recurrently voiced concerns about a national mood which might adversely affect women in politics and government in the years ahead. Their concern had to do with "the American family" an increasingly controversial topic of public discussion. The women leaders themselves did not see their families as problems. They seemed to be having no serious difficulties meeting both their official and their family responsibilities. Nor did the women officials have any problem supporting policies designed to maintain and strengthen the family and its members. On the contrary, most felt that "women's special responsibility to humanize the system" was most effectively met by the work women officials do to promote policies that protect the family.

The irony is that they face a growing faction which believes that the moment a woman steps from her home into the public arena, she is destroying the family--her own through neglect, and the American family in general by example. To add to the irony, those women who successfully shoulder the fullest family responsibilities--mothers--are the ones most vulnerable to attack. Unlike most difficulties women in government face that have either eased or remained unchanged over the decade, most participants agreed with Douglas Bailey that the sort of "affection and reverence for the family" that translates into opposition to women in government has been increasing and may develop into a serious challenge for women with leadership ambitions.

Whether or not a concerted attack on women in public life is indeed taking place (and some conferees doubted it), there was no question about where to turn to combat it--to organizations of women public officials. Those associations that had already helped to put women in positions where they thought they belonged were also the best vehicles to help keep them there and to attract new women to politics and government.

BUILDING ORGANIZATIONS

Stages of Development

Planners of the conference had assumed that problems related to the establishment and maintenance of the organizations would be a major issue. Based on observations and interviews with the founders and leaders of the organizations, the 1979 CAWP report noted the many different types of organizations that existed. Each type was the result of tough decisions that each group had made in its formative stages. If a group was to be national, then many of its potential members would not be able to attend meetings; if it was local, meetings would be easy to attend, but the group's influence on policy would be limited. If the group decided to serve women in only one type of office, its potential membership might be quite small, but gearing programs to members' interests would be quite easy. If the group was to adopt a strongly feminist platform, it would alienate many women who might be sympathetic but not activist, but the group could pursue feminist issues wholeheartedly. If a group was affiliated with a national organization or educational institution, it would enjoy staff assistance and other benefits, but lose some of its autonomy.

Such choices had to be made by each group as it formed. However, what became clear at the conference was that once these organizational decisions were made, the group would establish its place, its character and its program and move on to other sorts of issues. There was little further need to make structural choices.

At the small group sessions, leaders of established groups talked about the choices their organizations had made and gave suggestions to leaders of groups still in the throes of structural choices. First, they advised, be flexible; let the group evolve as it attracts its sort of membership. Next, they said not to expect to be able to please everybody or to satisfy anybody completely. Most leaders said they were active in not one but in several organizations, each answering a different set of needs. The plurality of organizations was a reflection of the plurality of interests of women officials.

However, while the establishment of several different kinds of organizations solved the problem of meeting the varied needs and interests of women public officials, it engendered a new sort of problem--the conferees labeled it "network overload." Many of the leaders attending the conference participate in several organizations at once. Their occupational, familial and organizational responsibilities gave them much to do and little time to do it in. They worried about the paucity of women officials willing to take on leadership roles within their organizations.

The need to replenish and expand the pool of leaders was emphasized when at the start of the small group sessions on Saturday morning, conferees were asked to list in rank order the factors they thought were most critical to their organizations' future growth. "Skilled leadership" greatly outranked other often mentioned organizational needs such as "programs and activities," "financial support," "membership" and "staff." Finding and training new leaders is a problem for all organizations, whatever their stage of development.

Another problem organizations face at all stages of development is the difficulty of attracting minority women, especially Hispanics. The few minority women active in the organizations often had to make difficult choices when their two minority statuses conflicted; and many chose not to join women's organizations in order to avoid such dilemmas. Charlotte Williams explained why she never actively participated in either the women's or the black caucus at NACo:

My feeling early on...was that as a black, I had to recognize that for many years my black male counterparts had not been able to function within the system either, so for my own sanity I had to use a sort of hold back approach to the women's caucus. I could not actually activate myself.

Some black women who were active in women's organizations said they had to decide whether to join with others of their gender or their race and had chosen gender because that was where they had experienced the greatest discrimination. Because such a choice must be made, many minority women hesitate to join women's organizations.

In contrast to these problems, which seem to defy solution, are the many areas in which the more established organizations have overcome difficulties and are now able to help solve problems. No longer do members have to search for colleagues; the organizations are the locus of their network building. No longer do the organizations need to seek out members; women officials seek them out. No longer do the organizations have to act only as petitioners; they are themselves petitioned by male public officials. No longer do women always have to prove their competence; their organizations' substantive programs get a serious hearing from men and from women.

Indeed, the very problem that prompted women to organize has proved to be an asset. Because women have had to work formally and intentionally to create the networks and information exchanges which had evolved informally for men, the women's organizations now provide well organized, open, and formal sources of information about people and issues. These benefit all officials. For example, a member of Women Legislators of Maryland described what has been happening in her state:

Some of our male colleagues came to us and asked us several questions. First, could they come to us and talk to us about a piece of legislation they were sponsoring that they thought had an impact on women? But, secondly, since this year we began inviting speakers to our meetings to discuss legislative issues, some of our male colleagues came and said, 'Can we attend these meetings? We feel the need for this information too.' And we were just delighted to have them because it proved that what we were doing was good and that we were visible and it also sensitizes them and has made them much more aware of the problems that we face, not only as women legislators, but as women legislators representing a female constituency as well as a male constituency. And, they too, represent both constituencies and their new sensitivity is important. So that in some areas where there are no female

legislators, women's groups can now go to the male representatives to ask them to sponsor legislation and to support legislation.

Needless to say, such success does not mean that established groups have solved all their problems. One difficulty that especially affects organizations of elected women is the question of membership for those women who have been active in the organization and then lose an election. Members of the California Elected Women's Association for Education and Research (CEWAER), the oldest of statewide organizations for elected women, were so engrossed in that issue and other problems that they were surprised by the trouble-free image they projected. After the conference, they wrote in their newsletter:

Two astonishing things happened at the Conference for Leaders of Women's Organizations--the first was the beautiful Washington weather and the second was the voiced perception that CEWAER "has it all together." Listening to women from around the country talk about CEWAER as the "most developed" of elected women's organizations and implying we have no problems was as unreal as finding balmy weather instead of a steam bath in Washington.

Successful Programs

CEWAER does, of course, have problems--all the organizations do; but what it and the other well-established organizations also have is a lot of experience with solutions and programs that work. Especially at the small group sessions, participants at the conference had a chance to learn about the kinds of programs and workshops other organizations had developed. Some leaders brought with them copies of their organizations' newsletters and directories, and most participants agreed that it would be a good idea to establish a newsletter exchange. In fact, that exchange began at the conference as participants wrote down each other's addresses and promised to add them to their organizations' mailing lists.

The successful programs and projects conducted by the organizations represented at the conference are too numerous to describe. Instead, we have selected two of the projects that participants felt were particularly valuable and which they felt could be adapted by other organizations. The first is the Mentoring Program developed by California Women in Government (CWIG) and the second is the Women Legislators of Maryland's Legislative Internship Program.

CWIG's Mentoring Program, as described by Sally Gutierrez:

What we did was compile a directory of professionals who agreed to give their time to people who needed help in professional development. We sent that directory to all of our members throughout the state. It contains a list of expertise for each individual, tells how they can be contacted and what hours they have available. We do not try to force a meeting of the two individuals because mentoring is a personalized thing and it's up to you to develop it on a one-to-one partnership basis.... The individual woman manager has to seek out the help. Also,

once a quarter, we have a meeting in which the topic is mentoring and its various phases.... We explain to our members exactly what mentoring is, for them to realize that mentoring is not confined just to professional development--that almost all through your life you have had mentors of various kinds; that sometimes mentors last for years and sometimes it's just a passing relationship; and that all of us, at one point of time in our lives have had a mentor in one of its various phases.

Women Legislators of Maryland--Legislative Internship Program as described by two legislators:

The internship program started in the Women's Legislative Caucus, but now it also serves the Maryland Association of Elected Women...and has started placing some interns in federal slots. The crux of an internship program is the director. Ours, Marianne Alexander, is on the faculty of Goucher College in Maryland. She is very knowledgeable about the running of the legislature, having worked in the legislature for a number of years, and she's very interested in working with young people. She chooses the interns and then assigns them either to the Caucus in general, to an individual legislator, or to one of the legislative study groups that operates in the Maryland General Assembly. She directs the interns' work. They are now putting out a very useful weekly publication during the legislative session. It is a schedule of all the legislation which they have chosen as being of interest to the Caucus--not only so-called women's issues but other issues that we have an interest in. So, the schedule tells when those hearings are being held. They also choose a subject of interest and sit in on the hearings and give a resumé of the pro and con items discussed at the hearing and a listing of the people who appeared on one side or the other. Anybody with an interest can now get a very comprehensive review of the public hearing on that matter. At the end of the session, they put out a wrap up which is a subject-indexed listing of all of the legislation they followed with the results--passed, failed, or amended. It's a very good reference many of us use when we are asked to go out to the community and speak to women's groups. Our male colleagues pick it up regularly because they find that they, too, when they go out to their constituents, want to cover the so-called women's issues or the people-oriented issues as well as other categories. We permit you to buy into the service for a very modest fee if you are outside of the legislative process; we send it gratis to the speaker and the president and to the library; and we print up enough copies so that it is out on the table and can just be picked up if you come into the legislature.

Organizational Fundraising

Programs, of course, must be funded. One persistent problem all these organizations faced is finding material support.

All participants agreed: no funding source is without problems. But there are many sources. The ones most frequently mentioned were: membership dues; parent organizations; foundations; academic institutions; and corporations. Most of these sources are specific to certain types of organizations or programs. Obviously, only membership organizations can raise money from dues, and only groups formed within larger organizations can receive support from a parent organization. Academic institutions are more likely to support organizations mostly devoted to research, such as the Center for Women in Government, which is affiliated with the State University of New York at Albany, or organizations of career public officials such as CWIG which received seed money and staff assistance from the University of Southern California School of Public Administration. Foundations and business corporations seldom support the general maintenance needs of an organization, but they are often receptive to proposals for special programs developed by established organizations. While none of the leaders of the organizations represented at the conference felt that her organization had all the material resources it needed, only ten out of fifty ranked financial support first among the critical factors necessary to her organization's future growth. Most organizations have, in one way or another, found some means to survive--albeit at a penurious level that puts a heavy burden on leaders.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude this report, we can repeat the words with which Donna Shalala opened the conference:

Not long ago, I received...a directory listing the top-level women in the Carter Administration. 'Terrific,' I thought. A dozen years ago, there was barely a woman to be found behind an executive desk in Washington, and now there are enough to fill a directory. I mused contentedly about how far we've come.

My friend Carol Bellamy (New York's City Council President) frequently reminds me, however, that as soon as you think you see the light at the end of the tunnel, it's a sure sign you're going in the wrong direction. And she's got a point. I know a lot of the women in that government directory, and I know the frustrations we share. Believe me, the system is still adjusting to our presence.

The progress is real, but the goal of full equality for women in government is still ahead of us.

And so it went throughout the conference. Leaders of the forty organizations told of a variegated pattern of success and striving, progress and backlash, acceptance of women in government and resistance to them.

There is no question today in the minds of women public officials that women should share equally with men in all the rights and privileges, all the resources and opportunities, all the positions of leadership and responsibility that our society affords. That was not always so. One woman, interviewed for the 1979 report on organizations, reflected the feelings of many women in the past when she said, "Sometimes I found myself at a council meeting thinking: I really shouldn't be here because it's not a place women should be." Such insecurities disappear when women public officials join together. Conferees expressed confidence in their own capabilities, in their legitimacy in seats of leadership and power, and in the collective strength that comes from their organizations.

However, that confidence in themselves finds no parallel in their view of the current social climate. Full equality for women in government may be the wave of the future, but there is a strong undertow. Organized resistance to women in power seems to be building. Elected and administrative women reacted differently to that resistance. Some elected officials--veteran campaigners and office-holders who had weathered many battles--felt they were facing the toughest elections of their careers and doubted they could win again. Administrative officials, on the other hand, noted their experience and professional credentials and said they had come too far to be turned back. But this was a conference in which disagreements rooted in dissimilar experience were explored and new understandings were generated. At the conference, the first in which both were equally included, the two types of women officials began to come to terms with each other; and both appeared to have come to terms with the women's movement.

The conference was short in time but long in accomplishments. These leaders of forty diverse organizations of women officials managed to do in a day and a half and on a national and multi-organizational scale what their organizations had been formed to do along more narrow lines--to build networks. Leaders of newly-forming organizations learned from the experience of leaders of established organizations; leaders of organizations of elected officials and leaders of organizations of administrative officials explored their differences and learned that their goals were the same and they could work together; and leaders from all parts of the country became acquainted with their counterparts from other regions. The isolation of their organizations was broken by the links they formed. Perhaps in their quest for new forms of cooperation, these organizations will gain strength in the eighties just as their members gained strength by forming organizations in the seventies.

PROGRAM OF THE CONFERENCE

L'Enfant Plaza
Washington, D.C.
June 13-14, 1980

FRIDAY, JUNE 13, 1980

- Introductions/Conference Overview
Kathy Stanwick, Conference Coordinator
Assistant Director
Center for the American Woman and Politics
- Welcome
Ruth B. Mandel, Director
Center for the American Woman and Politics
- Opening Remarks
Donna E. Shalala, Assistant Secretary
Office of Policy Development and Research
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Panel: Women Public Officials: Why Organize? Why Join?
Moderator: Betsey Wright
Former Executive Director
National Women's Education Fund

Panelists: Rosemary Ahmann
Olmsted County Commissioner (MN)
Women Officials in NACo (National Association of Counties)

Lynne C. Barrette
Assistant to the City Manager, San Mateo (CA)
Chair, California Women in Government,
Northern Chapter

Sherry A. Suttles
City Manager, Oberlin (OH)
Women in Management Subcommittee of the
International City Management Association

Charlotte Williams
Genesee County Commissioner (MI)
Immediate Past President, NACo

Susanne Wilson
Santa Clara County Supervisor (CA)
California Elected Women's Association for
Education and Research
- Small Group Session: Meeting Organizational Objectives

- Reception with leaders of major women's organizations
Sponsors: Patricia Roberts Harris
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Moon Landrieu
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

SATURDAY, JUNE 14, 1980

- Small Group Session: Maintaining an Organization of Women
Public Officials
- Panel: The Public Image of Women in Politics and Government
Moderator: Eileen Shanahan
Senior Assistant Managing Editor
The Washington Star

Panelists: Douglas L. Bailey
Bailey, Deardourff & Associates
Washington, D.C.

Leslie Bennetts
The New York Times

Paul Lutzker
Hamilton and Staff
Washington, D.C.

Peg Simpson
Boston Herald-American
- Luncheon Speaker
Patricia P. Bailey, Commissioner
Federal Trade Commission
- Panel/Plenary: Sources of Support
Moderator: Ruth B. Mandel, Director
Center for the American Woman and Politics

Panelists: Sally Gutierrez, Director
Professional Development and Recruitment
University of Southern California

Ann Lewis
Administrative Assistant to
Congresswoman Barbara Mikulski

Susanne Wilson, President
California Elected Women's Association for
Education and Research

Kathy Vander Horst
Director of Development
Joint Center for Political Studies

- Reception
Old Executive Office Building

Sponsor: Sarah Weddington
Assistant to the President
White House Office on Women

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Councilwoman, East Orange (NJ)

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Selectwoman, Sharon (MA)

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Barbara Geiger-Parker
Assistant Conference Coordinator

Nancy Hamilton
Secretary

Martha Casisa
Secretary

FOLLOW-UP:

ORGANIZATIONS OF WOMEN PUBLIC OFFICIALS 1980-81

This list includes organizations represented at the Conference for Leaders of Organizations of Women Public Officials, organizations identified after the conference and organizations which have organized formally since the conference.

CAWP maintains an up-to-date list of organizations and their contact persons. In addition, CAWP publishes a newsletter describing the programs and activities of these organizations: News & Notes: About Organizations of Women Public Officials.

American Planning Association
Planning and Women Division

American Public Health Association
Women's Caucus

*American Public Works Association
Women in Public Works

American Society for Public Administration
Committee for Women

American Society for Training and Development
Women's Network

California Elected Women's Association for Education and Research

California Women in Government

The Congresswomen's Caucus

*Elected Washington Women

Federally Employed Women

Federal Women's Program

A Group of Women Legislators (Connecticut)

*Illinois Conference of Women Legislators

*Organization established or identified since June 1980.

International City Management Association
Women in Management Subcommittee 1

Iowa Women in Municipal Government

Maryland Association of Elected Women

*Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators

Michigan Women in Municipal Government

Michigan Women in Public Management

*Minnesota Women Elected Officials

Minnesota Women in City Government

National Association of Counties
Women Officials in NACo

National Association of Women Judges

National Conference of Black Women Legislators

National Conference of State Legislatures
Women's Network

National League of Cities
Women in Municipal Government

National Order of Women Legislators

*Nevada Elected Women's Network

New Jersey Association for Elected Women Officials

North Dakota Women in Municipal Government

Oregon Women's Legislative Caucus

*Pennsylvania Elected Women's Association

Texas Association of Elected Women, Inc.

Washington Women in Municipal Government

Women Elected Municipal Officials (Massachusetts)

Women in State Government (Michigan)

Women Legislators of Maryland

¹In September 1980, the Women in Management Subcommittee became part of ICMA's Affirmative Action Committee for the 80s.

*Organization established or identified since June 1980.