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Women's caucus picks Texas 'phenom' as leader

By Louise Hutchinson
Chicago Tribune Press Service

HOUSTON, Feb. 11—A lot of them are not yet political pros, but delegates to the National Women's Political Caucus convention today proved they know the name of the game.

They elected to their four top positions a white Texas political phenomenon, a black Republican, a Mexican-American, and a Jewish lawyer.

They opened this first women's political convention in more than a century Friday in a storm of parliamentary confusion and general uncertainty and they ended it tonight a little surer and a lot wiser.

By a 315 majority [456 to 141], the voting delegates among the more than 1,200 women who attended chose Mrs. Frances [Sissy] Farenthold, 46, of Houston, as caucus chairwoman over Mrs. Martha McKay of Chapel Hill, N. C.

MRS. McKAY ran on a platform of grass roots strength and power for the 18-month-old caucus, but Mrs. Farenthold who last year won a place in a runoff for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in Texas and got 46 per cent of the vote, had what the delegates sought.

As vice chairwomen they chose Audrey Colom, a black Republican legislative representative for a Washington, D. C., public interest law firm; Rhea Mojica Hammer, a Chicago Chicana, a Democrat, and a leader in Illinois' La Raza Unida movement; and Bobbie Kilberg, former aide to John Erlichman, President Nixon's domestic affairs chief, and now a Washington attorney. She is Jewish and a Republican.

For Mrs. Farenthold, married and the mother of four, whether to run or not was a grueling choice. After her spectacular Texas showing, she was the runnerup in votes to Sen. Thomas Eagleton [D. Mo.], the Democratic National Convention's Vice Presidential choice.

She wants to run again some day for elected office, and could not afford to lose this N. W. P. C. race. She now moves into a two-year term heading an organization moving into a crucial period in its short life.

AMONG others elected to the N. W. P. C.'s steering committee today were Mary Ziegenhagen of Burnsville, Minn., and Rose Economou of Chicago. They represent a four-state Midwest region, one of 10 regions new to caucus organization.

The final convention day opened with a frank and stirring appeal from Mrs. Jill Ruckelshaus, wife of William Ruckelshaus, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Mrs. Ruckelshaus, who is a caucus leader, moved to diffuse hostility between Democrats and Republicans within the caucus, a situation that has simmered since the convention opened here.

As a spokeswoman for the Republican caucus members who are a minority, she spelled out a legislative agenda for the caucus, supported by the G. O. P. women, that included child care, minimum wage, welfare reform, credit reform, and other measures.

SHE URGED unity and asked the Democrats to help support the Republican women who wanted to use resolutions passed here "to move our party in the direction we ought to move it."

Burdened with organizational problems, the convention ran out of time and had to refer the resolutions to its steering committee.

But Mrs. Ruckleshaus' speech, greeted by warm applause, signaled that the Republican women, whose caucus membership she said was not approved by some in their party, were in the caucus to stay.

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