Women's political caucus sifts issues: 'Narrowness' charged *<span ...
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Biggest in U.S. for 101 years ?

Women's political caucus sifts issues

By Jeannye Thornton
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Boston

Now that one of the biggest U.S. women's political meetings in 101 years is over, delegates are headed back home – toward the grass roots and toward more debate on strategy and tactics.

"We have set definite legislative and program priorities, and the 'where we go from here' has taken emphasis in local caucuses and more grass-roots organizing," said Jane McMichael, national coordinator for state and local caucuses of the National Women's Political Caucus, in an interview.

The convention, which met in Houston at the weekend with more than 600 delegates and 1,400 participants, was no different from any other political convention where groups divide to pursue their own interests and come together to effect change, Ms. McMichael said.

The basic arguments were structural and organizational. However, she said, the general body approved a new steering committee of 75 – 50 members from the states and 25 to be elected by the steering committee and by the general convention.

Other arguments: Is the caucus too concerned with feminist issues, for example, as Rep. Bella S. Abzug (D) of New York and Republican members of the caucus charged?

'Narrowness' charged

Mrs. Abzug said the caucus, which was founded in July, 1971, since its inception has concentrated on "narrow" feminist issues. She accused the caucus of not fighting forcefully enough against the programs that mean the continuation of a military-oriented society, and for those dedicated toward humanitarianism.

Republican members of the caucus, who charged that they were poorly represented in the national caucus, called for broader social aims.

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UPI photo

Chisholm: grass-roots crusader

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★Women's political caucus

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What they wanted was specific stands on child-care and day-care centers, credit for women in their own names, party reform, a firm stand on various sex discrimination problems, labor—including a resolution seeking a minimum wage for domestic workers—and campaign spending, said Katie Herring, a member of the national caucus staff.

Mrs. Helen Delich Bentley, chairman of the Maritime Commission and one of the highest-ranking women in the Nixon administration, said that in certain parts of the country the caucus rebuffed Republican women as if they did not believe in human rights and did not deplore discrimination.

Another protest to the line followed by the caucus during the past 18 months was raised by black women delegates.

The black women, who made up 14 percent of the delegates to the convention also charged that the issues with which the caucus was concerning itself were not broad enough for them.

It was interesting, said one observer, that at a convention of a minority (women) another minority (blacks) would find it necessary to voice a complaint of discrimination, especially when all are supposed to be one.

Carole Ann Taylor, assistant director of the women's unit in the office of Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York, explained that black delegates were disturbed that the caucus overlooked two black women who were co-chairmen of the caucus in deference to the selection of two white women as official caucus spokespersons at both the Democratic and the Republican national conventions last summer

The two whites were Gloria Steinem and Jill Ruckelshaus and the two black women were Miss Taylor, who is vice shairman of the convention, and Gwen Cherry, a state representateve in Florida.

Other complaints voiced

Miss Taylor also attacked the caucus for not having endorsed black Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D) of New York when she was seeking the presidential nomination last November, while it did endorse the re-election of Mrs. Abzug, who is white.

Mrs. Chisholm, one of the founders of the caucus, also chided those women who did not support her presidential bid If they thought she was the best candidate they should have supported her, despite the fact that her chances appeared slim, she said.

Like many other as the convention, M.RS. Chisholm also expressed interest in what feminists members of the caucus were doing to the image of the caucus as a whole, saying she felt they were downgrading the traditional role of wonem. She said she feels it is "not the function of the National Women's Political Caucus to be the cutting edge of the women's liberation movement." She suggested the caucus serve as an umbrella to guide the political destiny of women.

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