Squabble Splis, Stalls Fledgling Women's Political Caucus: Squabble Stalls New Women's Political Uni
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Squabble Splits, Stalls Fledgling Women's Political Caucus



Dolores Ferrell
. . . Backs women candidates . . .

BY HOWARD SEELYE
Times Staff Writer

Twenty-nine women currently serve on city councils and school boards in Orange County. They hold 9% of the county's elective offices.

There are no women on the Board of Supervisors and no county women serve in the State Legislature or in the Congress. There have been few women candidates for these offices in recent years.

But all that will change if the Orange County chapter of th National Women's Political Caucus NWPC has anything to say about it.

The chapter, which was formed in June and will hold its first full meeting this month is part of a national women's movement which now has more than 40,000 members and chapters in all 50 states.

Its primary concerns, according to Mrs. Vivian Hall of Irvine, a member of the council, are to interest women in running for political office, to get women appointed to public positions and to support passage of equal rights legislation.

She said the group is also interested in "third world" women—Chicanos, poor whites, blacks and women farm workers.

"Any issue or question which affects women and children affects our whole society," she said.

The only public activity undertaken so far by the county NWPC chapter was opposing the recent dropping of Mrs. Miriam Kaywood from the Anaheim Planning Commission.

Now, two months after initial organizing efforts, the Orange County group is struggling to find its way, to set guidelines for the future and to determine the best method of achieving its goals.

But already there is controversy. The woman responsible for starting the chapter, Mrs. Dolores Ferrell of Laguna Beach, has become inactive and may even drop out of the chapter because of a difference of opinion over endorsing women candidates for office.

Richard Buffum is on vacation.

Mrs. Ferrell, who has considered running for county sheriff, believes that first priority should be given to female candidates, regardless of their political background or views.

Other members of the organization disagree, emphasizing that the group should endorse only qualified candidates—man, woman, black or white—but if all else is equal, then women should get the nod.

To some extent, the disagreement has centered on political philosophy, with sharp differences over political views. But local, state and national caucus officials hope this hurdle can be cleared.

Most women attracted to the political caucus appear to be political activists and the group has taken on a liberal complexion.

Mrs. Frances (Sissy) Farenthold of Texas, who was elected national chairperson of the NWPC in February, said in an telephone interview from Corpus Christi that 60% to 70% of the members are registered Democrats, but she said the goal of the group is to be bipartisan.

Mrs. Farenthold, who captured a fleeting moment in the national political spotlight last year when she finished second in the balloting for the vice presidential nomination on the Democratic ticket, said the organization is working toward attracting women of all political persuations.

Of the six members on the national board, Mrs. Farenthold and one other are Democrats, three are Republicans (one of them black) and one is a member of La Raza Unida.

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Geraldine Sandor
. . . but they must be qualified
Times photos

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Squabble Stalls New Women's Political Unit

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In Orange County, all four active members of the chapter's council are Democrats, but there are a number of Republicans among the 50 members.

The question of emphasis on political philosophy which Mrs. Ferrell raised will be discussed by the Orange County group on Thursday, and from that point on Mrs. Hall hopes the caucus will become a political force in Orange County.

"I really don't think there is a philosophical difference within the organization," she said.

Many Qualified

As for the future, she said: "There are literally thousands of women in all communities who are qualified for public office. They have been building libraries, doing volunteer work and are equipped to run and hold office."

Mrs. Farenthold said that "88.4% of the members of NWPC have been active in political campaigns and 20% of them have been candidates for office."

The latter figure, she said compares to only 1% nationwide among all women.

In Texas, where Mrs. Farenthold won 46% of the vote for the Democratic nomination for governor last year, about 6% of the elected offices are held by women, she said.

In California, Mrs. Barbara MacNab of Berkeley, the state representative on the NWPC's national steering committee, is hopeful that a state convention to be held in Berkeley late this month will help resolve problems facing the caucus.

"You must learn to compromise to get what you want," she said in an interview, adding that women are historically used to compromising.

Mrs. MacNab said the problem facing the organization is educating its members, not probing philosophical differences.

She said it would be a mistake to force a woman out—or not endorse her—because of a difference on one issue.

"We'd end up getting nowhere if we did that," Mrs. MacNab said.

Direct Positions

However, the NWPC plans to take positions on issues that directly affect women, such as the Equal Rights Amendment (which has been ratified by 30 states so far), abortion and others.

The difficulty that Mrs. MacNab sees, however, is to move a woman who has been trained to be a political activist into a more neutral position on issues affecting women.

In Orange County, the percentage of women holding office seems to be somewhat above the average, although no statewide statistics are available.

Most of the county officeholders serve on school boards. Of the 20 elected women, 22 are school trustees, six are councilwomen and one is a member of the County Board of Education.

This does not include a number of women who hold lesser elected offices, such as city clerks and treasurers.

The four active members of the Orange County council of the NWPC—Mrs. Ferrell is no longer active—are Mrs. Hall, a teacher at Westminster High School; Mrs. Helen Barrios Thomas of Newport Beach, an airline stewardess; Mrs. Geraldine Sandor of Irvine, a lawyer, and Sheila Kramer of Newport Beach, an insurance agent.

All of the women feel strongly that women should take an active role in all phases of community, business and political life.

Mrs. Kramer, for example, who is divorced and has three children, worked in administration in an insurance office.

"Several years ago I realized that I should do the other side of it—sell insurance," she said. "If men with families can get the commission jobs, I felt I should be able to do the same thing."

So Mrs. Kramer said she got up her courage and made a pitch to be an agent and since May has been selling insurance, generally to single women.

In Both Parties

Mrs. Kramer considers herself a political moderate—she's been both a Republican and a Democrat—and said that "my dearest hope for the caucus is that I can help shape and mold it into what I believe in."

She wants to get everyone—men and women—working to get qualified women into politics.

Issues that affect women, she said, cut across all political lines.

Mrs. Sandor, who teaches at UC Irvine, is strongly oriented toward issues involving women, and said she is interested in making women aware of legislation under consideration.

But while she is willing to encourage people to run for office, she said they must be the "kind of people who are qualified for the office they are seeking."

More controversial and more outspoken has been Mrs. Ferrell, who took strong objection to what she considered the philosophical bent of the organization.

"I had the feeling that if a woman ate lettuce and grapes the caucus would be against her," Mrs. Ferrell said, in reference to controversy over Cesar Chavez' efforts to organize farm workers.

(The first issue of the Orange County chapter's newsletter contained this item; "Poverty is a woman's issue. Let us support our sisters in the fields. Over 70% of the lettuce and grapes bears a union label, but only a small percentage carries the black eagle stamp of the United Farm Workers, the only genuine representative of the laborers in the fields. Ask your grocer to show you the crates the produce came in. Remember, support the black eagle. Boycott iceberg lettuce, grapes and all Gallo wines.")



Sheila Kramer
. . . she got up courage



Vivian Hall
. . . seeks united caucus.
Times photos

Mrs. Ferrell said "they (the council members) wanted women, but if they (the prospective members) didn't come before the group to express their views, they would blackball them."

For her part, Mrs. Ferrell said, "I am interested in promoting women for office. It behooves us to help women, all women."

But Mrs. Hall, Mrs. Sandor and Mrs. Kramer see the conflict with Mrs. Ferrell in a different light.

They feel that she was trying to use the women's caucus to further her own political ambitions (for sheriff) and was pushing too hard and too early to get the group to commit itself to supporting all women, regardless of their views or qualifications.

In regard to the item on boycotting certain farm products, Mrs. Hall, editor of the newsletter, said it doesn't indicate a firm political viewpoint of the group.

She said that the problems of farm workers are women's problems and she believes that it is a legitimate issue for the group to consider.

There is a danger, it is conceded by leaders of the Orange County NWPC, that too strong a philosophical viewpoint could be self-defeating.

But they hope this problem will be minimized and resolved before the political campaigns of 1974 get under way.

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