

Preparing for Houston

by Janet Wilson

With the International Women's Year (IWY) Conference in Houston only two weeks away, Washington delegates are hastily preparing for what may be the most important forum on women's issues for years to come.

The 24 delegates met for the last time this weekend to discuss key issues, choose liaisons to other state delegations and to learn about parliamentary procedure.

Many delegates who represent special interest caucuses raised issues they want addressed at Houston. Although most delegates agreed on the issues raised, Kay Regan (Seattle), the sole conservative member, voiced strong opposition.

Regan opposes many of the prominent issues that will be addressed at Houston such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and lesbian rights. Conservative women, she said, seek community or state remedies to women's problems and not federal legislation.

But Thelma Jackson (Olympia), spokesperson for the Black Women's Caucus and Lilly Aguilar (Yakima), of the Hispanic Caucus protested Regan's "band-aid" remedies. They explained that relief for minorities and women has historically come from increased federal intervention, not local government.

Several delegates expressed a desire to seek common ground among conservative and liberal people and not dwell on the differences. However, it is predicted that conflicts between the two political bases will probably be aired at Houston.

Jackson said a national Black Women's Hook-up has been formed so black women will be united on concerns like increased child care and step ups in affirmative action. A resolution to overturn the Bakke decision, which upholds the concept of reverse discrimination in affirmative action, will be proposed by the Black Hook-up.

Those same issues raised by the Black Caucus are identified as paramount by the Hispanic and Asian-Pacific Women's Caucuses. Both caucuses will also focus on a resolution to implement bilingual and bicultural emphasis in education and social services like child care, April West (Ollala), of the Asian Caucus said.

Lesbian issues were addressed by Kathy Boyle (Seattle), co-director of the Lesbian Resource Center at the University YWCA. She said the Lesbian Caucus is concerned

about lesbians' inaccurate media portrayal. The caucus also wants wide ranging laws prohibiting discrimination against gay people in education and employment.

Elsie Schrader spoke to concerns of union women, with the ERA and adequate child care being primary. Maternity benefits and a national health care plan are also targets of ERA and adequate child care being primary. She said the concept of equal pay for "equal worth" as developed in the Willis Comparable Worth study should be addressed.

The Willis study, which points out discrepancies between men's and women's pay for the same "physical or mental stress", will be presented in a conference workshop by Helen Remick, director of the Office of Affirmative Action for Women at the University of Washington.

Marian Ballantine (Spokane), representing older women, asked that the delegates bring attention to the deplorable conditions under which all people, but particularly women, live in nursing homes.

Women are hit harder by inadequate nursing home care than men because women outlive them. Usually, Ballantine said, older women are poorer than their counterparts because they receive minimum social security benefits since they were on the bottom of the economic ladder as workers.

Jacqueline Delahunt (Tumwater) explained the perspective of Native American women. She said many of the concerns raised by feminists seem "like only so much frosting on the cake." Indian women are fighting for their very survival, not luxuries, she said.

Their concerns center on maintaining treaty rights and implementing good programs in education and health, she remarked. Delahunt said Indian women have not felt a part of the women's movement because they consider themselves part of a sovereign nation.

Once in Houston, the delegates plan to caucus among themselves and with other states to assure good communication and unification.

IWY resolutions will be sent to Congress as recommendations on how to improve the status of women.

In addition to the 24 elected delegates from the state of Washington, five additional women have been chosen by the National IWY Commission as delegates at large. They are: Nancy Hawkins of Lynnwood, Anne Hecker from Seattle, Armita Harness of Richland, Jill Ruckelhaus of Bellevue and Paula Gibson from Spokane.



IWY Statistics

The voices and faces of American women delegates to the National Women's Conference will reflect the diversity of this country's female population. Self-descriptions of the delegates indicate a myriad of women's roles and occupations. There are single and married women, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers. Delegates include a number of nuns, secretaries, teachers, nurses, lawyers, ministers, factory workers, handicapped women, technicians, and women from urban, rural, farm and ranch areas of this country.

The Houston conference, to be held November 18-21, at the Albert Thomas Convention Center, will consist of 1,442 elected delegates as well as at-large delegates, special guests and thousands of observers.

Available data on the delegates selected at this summer's state women's meetings indicate they are concentrated in the 26-55 age-range and in middle-income brackets.

Larger states with delegations of fifty or more, such as New York, Pennsylvania, California and Texas, made special affirmative efforts to reach out and elect delegates who represent low-income women, members of diverse racial, ethnic and religious groups, and women of all ages. As a result, a comparatively high percentage of minority and ethnic women will be delegates at the conference.

Though complete information is not available on every delegate, present data show (from information on 1349 delegates) 795 or 64.5% are Caucasian; 214 or 17.4% are Black; 102 or 8.3% are Hispanic; 33 or 2.7% are Asian American; 42 or 3.4% are American Indian; 7 are Hawaiian and 4 are Alaskan Native. (Thirty-five listed themselves as "all other"; while 117 did not report the information.)

Historically, there has never been a conference of this nature with this diversity of representation. It is the first women's conference to be held since the Women's Rights Convention met in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. But unlike the 1848 convention, this one is being held by Congressional mandate and is federally funded. It was preceded by State Women's Meetings which drew more than 130,000 women—many of whom had never attended any kind of women's meeting.

At the National Women's Conference, the delegates will vote on recommendations in a National Plan of Action to be presented to the President and Congress for the elimination of barriers that still prevent women's equal participation in all aspects of American life.

Throughout the meetings leading to the National Women's Conference, the IWY

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Counter-Convention

by Colleen Patrick

Right-wing women and men will be holding at least one counter-convention in Houston, Saturday, November 19, while nearby the National International Women's Year will be conducting their formal conference, November 18-21.

According to the *American*, "official organ of the American Party," the rally is expected to draw thousands of people from throughout the United States who call themselves "pro-family." They have drawn up their own resolutions to be voted on at the gatherings and are now circulating them throughout the country to collect signatures from sympathizers. The resolutions will be sent to Houston, where following the rally they will be sent on a special plane to Washington, D.C. for presentation to President Carter.

In addition to the resolutions, the right-wing groups are circulating a "Blue Sheet" which purports to outline the "problems" with the IWY conference and those who are working for the goals of women's liberation. For a copy of both the resolutions and the Blue Sheet, write the Association of the W's (Women who want to be Women), PO Box 2324, Fort Worth, Texas 76101.

The purpose of these resolutions is presumably to counteract any progressive measures pertaining to women's issues passed by the National IWY convention, since the right-wing resolutions will possibly gain the attention of President Carter and Congress before the results of the formal conference are decided.

The counter-convention is designed to attract media attention away from the IWY conference. If, in fact, there are more right-wingers than pro-ERA representatives in Houston, the right-wing groups will claim that their anti-ERA and anti-humanist resolutions are the "real" desires of American women.



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