

# Women's Unit Broke And Split on Future

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 27—The National Women's Political Caucus, after achieving some significant victories at both national political conventions, is broke and uncertain about its future course.

There is no lack of ideas among the members of the year-old organization about what the caucus should be doing, both in the political campaign and afterwards. And there is disagreement in its ranks on only one significant question.

But without money, which has proved almost impossible to raise in this election year, the caucus is in danger of not being able to continue at all. Its five staff members at national headquarters here, whose stated salaries range from \$9,100 a year to \$12,000—all but one is a college graduate—have been paid only a few hundred dollars each since May.

The major policy dispute that lies ahead for the caucus involves its role in the political campaign.

## Separate Political Aims

Some of the members of its national policy council, notably Representative Bella S. Abzug, Democrat of Manhattan, believe that the caucus should set up two separate political arms, one Democratic and one Republican, for the duration of the campaign.

Mrs. Abzug believes that this is the only way that women are going to be able to continue to make a drive toward greater representation in government.

"Unless we utilize the political power of women in the national political campaign, we will not have any basis on which to say 'We helped to elect you and we are entitled to be represented in your government, in your cabinet,'" Mrs. Abzug declared.

One of those who disagrees with Mrs. Abzug is Midge Miller, a Democratic state legislator in Wisconsin, who is also a member of the national policy council of the caucus.

## Power in Unified Stand

While individual caucus members will obviously work for specific candidates, she says, "the caucus is a great deal more of a threat to the establishment if we stay together, as a multipartisan organization, because that always implies a threat to cross party lines if one party or the other won't pay attention to our desires."

There are other reasons, too, why she wants the caucus to stay united and multipartisan.

"It really helped me, for example, when I was trying to pass the equal rights amendment here in Wisconsin to be able to call Republican women in other states that I knew through the caucus and ask them to call their Republican legislators here." Wisconsin has ratified the amendment.

Exactly when the issue of splitting into partisan subdivisions may come before the caucus is not altogether clear. The policy council may not meet again until the end of September, by which time it could be rather late to establish any major campaign structures.

## Ideas for Campaign

Women in the caucus have dozens of ideas of things they would like to do during the campaign if they had the financial resources. Among them are the following:

¶Start compiling lists of women who are qualified for appointive jobs at every level of government, so that these can be presented, right after the election, to the victorious candidates for governor, mayor, county executive and legislative bodies all over the country.

¶Set up a speakers bureau to dispatch the "stars" of the women's movement to speak anywhere in the country for women candidates who want such help, at least paying the expenses of these figures.

¶Put professional organizers in the field to help women's groups that want to work, as women, in campaigns.

¶Copy everywhere what the caucus leaders consider a model job of candidate-rating done in Michigan by LaVonne Bleisner, who worked for the Republican central committee there. The Michigan brochure identifies 14 issues regarded as important to women—ranging from welfare to the equal rights amendment—and rated all current members of the Legislature according to their votes on these issues. Most of the women members, incidentally, got indifferent scores.

¶Establish a clearing house to exchange information among the different state and local caucuses about programs and tactics that have proved effective.

¶Set up a formal coordination with other women's groups, such as the business and professional women, the League of Women Voters and the Women's Equity Action League, to exchange information and stop the duplication of effort that is currently going into such activities as analysis of the impact on women of pending legislation, both national and state.

## Money Is Crucial Need

None of this will be possible without money, however. And the most urgent financial question facing the caucus at the moment is whether it will even be able to continue to operate its Washington headquarters.

It is behind in its \$650 month-

ly rental for its office in an old building at 1302 18th Street, N.W., in the Dupont Circle area.

Several staff members have given notice because they say what they are getting paid does not even cover their expenses of working.

Several small fund-raisers that have been attempted lately—one in New York and one during the Republican convention in Miami Beach—have flopped, with only a few hundred dollars collected.

Elizabeth Carpenter, the former aide to President and Mrs. Johnson, also a national policy council member, explained the problem this way:

"There are many women, here in Washington and elsewhere, who are making good salaries, in spite of discrimination in pay. We're fighting their fight, and they know it. But they're just not used to paying \$25 for a ticket to a cocktail party to benefit a cause. They can afford it. Many of them have three pairs of \$40 boots in their closet. We have to make paying for a cause part of their life's experience."

## Fund Events Pondered

Various fund-raising events are under consideration at the moment, largely under the direction of Ronnie Feit, a New York member of the policy council.

The caucus may also decide to "sell" a national membership, though individuals would still be able to be members of state and local caucuses without paying dues to the national organization. The caucus does not want to impose charges that would discourage membership by poor women.

The caucus has also received feelers from two large corporations that are offering it money to keep going. But caucus leaders are not yet sure just how much the companies will want in return by way of public identification with the caucus and thus they are not sure whether they will feel able to accept the money.

There is a very strong sense of the need to keep the caucus in operation on the part of politically active women.

All mention its key role in raising the proportion of women delegates at the party conventions from 13 per cent and 17 per cent for the Democrats and Republicans, respectively, in 1968, to 39 per cent and 30 per cent this year.

## Successes Recounted

Jill Ruckelshaus, one of the leading Republican women on the policy council, speaks glowingly of other caucus successes.

"I don't think there's any question that we would not have had a women's plank in either party platform without the women's political caucus," she said. "I think both parties were stunned at just how organized and determined the women were. We got everything we wanted except planks on abortion and we started a lot of people thinking about the abortion issue who had never thought about it before."

Mrs. Ruckelshaus was particularly pleased that the Republican platform had made a commitment to ratification of the equal rights amendment "since there seemed to be some question about our party's commitment to it" and also that the party committed itself to placement of qualified women in the cabinet and on the Supreme Court.

"I think we'll beat both of those things in the next four years," she said.

Others in the caucus noted that the platform plank, sponsored by women, demanding expanded day-care facilities, was the only in the Republican platform that even implicitly criticized any action by President Nixon. He had vetoed a major day-care bill, calling it too expensive and a threat to family life.