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CREATING A DIFFERENT PATTERN: FLORIDA'S WOMEN LEGISLATORS, 1928-1986

by MARY CAROLYN ELLIS AND JOANNE V. HAWKS

FLORIDA in the nineteenth century was a traditional southern state. The legacy from the Civil War and Reconstruction lingered into the early decades of the twentieth century, principally with regard to cultural expectations, racial prejudice, and one-party Democratic politics.¹ Women's roles in the society were carefully defined, and there was not much divergence from cultural expectations.² Florida Congressman Frank Clark expressed this traditional attitude in 1915: "Let us then leave woman where she is— the loveliest of all creation, queen of the household."³

The Nineteenth Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote was ratified in 1920 without the support of Florida.⁴ It was another half century before Florida took positive action. In the aftermath of enfranchisement, the first woman, Edna Giles Fuller, was elected to the state legislature in 1928.⁵ The same year, Ruth Bryan Owen of Miami, daughter of William Jennings Bryan, was elected to Congress.⁶

As the twentieth century progressed, Florida evolved from a fairly typical southern state into one more akin demographi-

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1. David Colburn and Richard Scher, "Florida Politics in the Twentieth Century," *Florida's Politics and Government*, Manning J. Dauer, ed. (Gainesville, 1984), 35-36.
2. Anne Firor Scott described the image of the southern lady in *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago, 1970), 4-21.
3. Kenneth R. Johnson, "Florida Women Get the Vote," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 48 (January 1970), 301.
4. A. Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 36 (July 1957), 42-60.
5. Allen Morris, "Florida's First Women Candidates," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 63 (April 1985), 414.
6. Joan S. Carver, "Women in Florida," *Journal of Politics* 41 (August 1979), 945.

tally and economically to the sunbelt states of the southwest.⁷ During this time the profiles of Florida's legislative women reveal a different pattern from those of the other states of the Old Confederacy, including other southern rim states such as Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina.⁸ Those variances, the reasons for them, and the story of the women involved are the focus of this study.

As in other states such as Tennessee and North Carolina, geography has affected the political balance in Florida. For decades, when south Florida was largely undeveloped, north Florida's so-called "pork-chop gang" dominated state politics. This phrase was used by a Florida journalist to describe "a group of northern Florida legislators . . . who flaunted their rural backgrounds and preferences and were remarkably unsympathetic to the needs of Florida's growing urban population."⁹ During this period, the political climate was not conducive to an influx of women into state-level politics. The few women who entered the legislature came not from the rural northern counties but from central Florida. The first woman in the Florida legislature, Edna Giles Fuller, was from Orange County, and the second, Mary Lou Baker, was from Pinellas County.

In 1963 following *Baker v. Carr*, the Supreme Court's 1962 one-man-one-vote decision, reapportionment occurred in Florida.¹⁰ That year Dade County voters elected two women—Maxine Baker and Mary Ann Mackenzie—to the legislature. But it was only after the 1967 United States Supreme Court decision, *Swan v. Adams*, concerning reapportionment of the Florida legislature, that a significant number of new districts were created, providing increased opportunities for women candidates.¹¹ During the next decade most of the women elected came from central and south Florida, regions where many of the new districts lay. A picture emerged over time which showed few women legislators from the west Florida panhandle but a larger group from the more recently-developed areas, a phenomenon brought about in part by Florida's economic growth.

7. Colburn and Scher, "Florida Politics in the Twentieth Century," 35.

8. Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South* (New York, 1984), 10.

9. Colburn and Scher, "Florida Politics in the Twentieth Century," 51.

10. 369 U.S. 186 (1962).

11. Manning J. Dauer, "Florida's Legislature," *Florida's Politics and Government*, 141; 385 U.S. 440 (1967).

After World War II, non-Floridians flocked to central and South Florida, creating a population explosion which has not yet abated. Areas such as Brevard County (Cocoa Beach) and the Miami satellite localities attracted highly-educated, highly-motivated non-Floridians. These non-natives, many from the northeast United States and other cold climate areas, brought with them ideas about women's roles which were sometimes different from traditional Southerners' ideas. The newcomers did not seem reluctant to elect women to public office.¹²

Two ethnic groups entered the legislature, bringing a wider diversity than was generally seen in the rest of the South's legislatures. Jewish women, originally from the northeastern states, began to win elective offices in districts where there was a large Jewish constituency, mainly in south Florida. They brought to the legislature educational and philosophical diversity. Much later, in 1982 and 1984, two Hispanic women from Dade County, Ileana Ros and Arnhilda Gonzales-Quevedo, entered the legislature. They were representatives of the Cuban middle class, a group whose views regarding women's roles were similar to the traditional southern view. In 1982 as Miami elected its first Hispanic woman to the legislature, Pensacola, in the most tradition-bound section of the state, elected its first woman, Virginia Bass.

The women elected from what Professor Manning Dauer of the University of Florida described as an urban horseshoe were very often not only Republicans but also transplants.¹³ Many were not Goldwater Republicans or recruits to Nixon's "southern strategy" but, like Jane Robinson of the Brevard County area, were more oriented to Eisenhower Republicanism. Many were deeply motivated by a desire to see a real two-party system in Florida.

Women legislators as a group tended to be more educated than the state's general female population. Even before the post-war migration into Florida, the few women serving in the legislature were well-educated. Of the five women who served in the

12. Carver, "Women in Florida," 941.

13. According to Dauer's description, one leg begins at Fort Lauderdale and Palm Beach, runs up the east coast to Daytona Beach, then inland to Orlando, curves to St. Petersburg on the west coast, and descends to Fort Meyers and Naples. Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence Since 1945* (New York, 1976), 117.

first four decades after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, four were college graduates. The fifth, the only one of the early group to become a candidate after her husband's death, had some college background. The arrival of many non-Floridians in the state has not diminished the high educational level of women legislators; it has merely diversified it.

The women had used their education in a myriad of endeavors prior to their legislative service. For many of them, political service was simply the next logical step. For example, the first woman in the Florida legislature, Edna Giles Fuller, elected in 1928, had been heavily involved in leadership roles in public service, notably welfare and education, for twenty years before she was elected to office.¹⁴ A member of several women's clubs and community boards, she had also worked as assistant food administrator for Florida during World War I. She demonstrated her interest in woman suffrage and a broader public role for women by serving as president of the Florida Woman Suffrage Association. Fuller exemplified a certain type of legislator, an educated woman who devoted many productive years to public service before moving into electoral politics. A fifty-four year old Orlando widow, Fuller campaigned in 1928 on her long record of public service. She shared a background with other pioneer southern women legislators, like Nellie Nugent Somerville of Mississippi and Hattie Hooker Wilkins of Alabama, who were well respected, known for their concern for public improvement, and interested in using the legislature as another forum to continue work begun earlier in churches, women's clubs, and civic organizations.¹⁵ Also, like most of the earlier legislators, Fuller served only a short tenure. She was reelected in 1930 for a second two-year term, and was defeated in 1932 in a depression-year election that unseated many incumbents in Florida. For some women getting elected seemed to be its own reward. After the election, the mundane aspects of the legislative process, the fact that freshmen, and particularly women freshmen, had little clout, and the frustrations of political maneuvering probably dampened their enthusiasm for serv-

14. Morris, "Florida's First Women Candidates," 414.

15. Joanne V. Hawks, M. Carolyn Ellis, and J. Byron Morris, "Women in the Mississippi Legislature (1924-1981)," *Journal of Mississippi History* 43 (November 1981), 267, 274; Joanne Varner Hawks, "A Select Few: Alabama's Women Legislators, 1922-1983," *Alabama Review* 38 (July 1985), 177-78.

ing longer terms of office. Of course, some served a short time because, like Fuller, they were defeated. Another possible reason for short-term service was the relatively advanced age of some of the women at the beginning of their first terms.

One particular profession, law, has traditionally been a useful background for legislative service. The second woman elected to the Florida legislature, Mary Lou Baker, was an attorney. Baker, who retained her maiden name professionally, has worked extensively indexing house journals before her election, and had, therefore, acquired a working knowledge of legislative procedures. While in office she identified herself closely with women's issues, sponsoring bills to allow jury service for women, granting married women property and contractual rights, and giving wives the right to exercise power of attorney. Her major triumph was the passage of a married woman's rights law in 1943. It was later upheld by the Florida Supreme Court. An editorial in the *Florida Law Journal* credited Mrs. Baker for "accomplishing the most historic change which has occurred in the State of Florida in the past generation."¹⁶

Three female lawyers followed Baker in the legislature in the next forty years. This number is lower in Florida than in some of the other southern states. Given the relatively large percentage of women in the Florida legislature and their high level of education, it is surprising that so few have been attorneys. Of course, only a small number of women attended law schools before the early 1970s.¹⁷ This explains in part why only a handful of women legislators have been attorneys, but it does not tell the whole story. Attending law school and practicing the law enables a person to establish contacts. The women in the Florida legislature, many of whom were non-Floridians, apparently operated without the benefit of these Florida connections.

While there were relatively few women attorneys in the Florida legislature, other professions were represented, education in particular. Women with a background in business also served in the legislature. Mary Grizzle and Toni Jennings are

16. Morris, "Florida's First Women Candidates," 418, citing *Florida Law Journal* 17 (July 1943), 191-93.

17. Joan Carver, "'Women in Florida,'" *Florida's Politics and Government*, 298. Carver notes a "sharp increase in women law students in the decade of the 1970s; in 1966 there were only 16 women in Florida's two state law schools, or 2 percent of the total number of law students; by 1978 there were 418 women students, or 37 percent."

examples of businesswomen legislators. Jennings, a Republican from Orlando, served in the house for two terms before being elected to the senate in 1980. In 1984 she was chosen minority leader pro-tempore. A partner in a family construction firm, Jennings has focused particularly on issues relating to business, insurance, banking, and finance.

In examining the backgrounds of women legislators, one notes the frequent presence of the so-called clubwoman in politics. The woman who spends a significant amount of time and energy on civic matters is usually able to gain valuable insight about societal and political needs. Participation in clubs has often been a factor in women's decisions to run for office.¹⁸ Florida has been no exception. The clubs from which these women came were the usual assortment of Business and Professional Women, General Federation of Women's Clubs, League of Women Voters, and the American Association of University Women. Where Florida seems exceptional is in the number of women who were heavily involved in the League of Women Voters. Eight of the forty-nine women in the legislature had served as president of a state or local League chapter prior to their legislative service; eleven others also were members. When one considers the League's influence since 1970, the figures are even more striking.¹⁹ The post-1970 League became more activist in its lobbying efforts, particularly in Florida on the Equal Rights Amendment. This political activity provided a training ground for women who believed that the best way to effect change was by getting elected rather than through lobbying efforts.

A forceful personality with a club background was Maxine Baker from Dade County, seated in the special 1963 reapportionment election. Baker's desire to enter the legislature grew out of her work as a member and president of the Florida League of Women Voters. During her ten years of legislative service (1963-1972) she helped to draft and pass a new state constitution which guaranteed home rule for Florida counties. She expressed concern about "state help for all the 'little people'

18. Ethel Klein, *Gender Politics: From Consciousness to Mass Politics* (Cambridge, 1984), 9-31.

19. At least fifteen of the post-1970 women legislators have been members of the League and six have been state or local presidents.

who had no high-priced lobbyists helping them."²⁰ She focused most of her attention on health and welfare matters. Her most notable legislation, which carried her name, strengthened the legal and civil rights of mental patients, required the provision of community clinical services for most mentally-ill persons, and provided confinement only for patients considered dangerous to themselves or others.²¹

The challenges of political life may be either eased or exacerbated by an officeholder's marriage. A married male officeholder usually has the support of his wife; for the married female the situation is sometimes more problematic. Oftentimes, her spouse will be supportive. For other women the demands of family life may be oppressive. Children, particularly young children, invariably present difficult choices for the mother, who is also an office holder.

A spouse can provide support in several ways, physically, emotionally, and monetarily. Some husbands have urged their wives to run for office. Mary Grizzle's husband, Ben, was such a man. Grizzle was the first Republican woman elected to the legislature. Involvement in the local PTA and the Florida Federation of Republican Women whetted her political appetite, motivating her to run for the county commission and later the legislature. Wife of a wealthy petroleum executive, Grizzle was a forty-one year old mother of six children ranging in ages from five to twelve when she was elected to the house in 1963 as a representative of Pinellas County. With her husband's financial assistance she was able to maintain a full-time housekeeper and a Tallahassee residence. Ben later urged Mary to run for Congress, but she declined. After eight terms in the lower house, Grizzle ran successfully for the state senate in 1978 and was reelected to a second term in 1982.²²

Some husbands, and often the entire family, will be actively involved in the campaigns.²³ Some families will absorb many of

20. Questionnaire completed by Maxine E. Baker, January 21, 1986 (copy in possession of authors).

21. Unidentified newspaper clipping, May 10, 1971.

22. Lake City *Floridian*, October 19, 1980; interview with Lila Henley, aide to Senator Mary Grizzle, May 8, 1986.

23. Interviews with Helen Gordon Davis and Betty Easley, May 7, 1986 (All oral interviews used in this article were conducted by the authors and copies are in their possession).

the household tasks, thereby freeing the wife and mother for the campaign and political office.²⁴ Husbands can also provide emotional support for their politician wives.

Many women candidates do not have the financial assets to mount aggressive campaigns. If a husband helps provide financial support, it can be invaluable. Grizzle, Helen Gordon Davis of Tampa, and Lori Wilson of Merritt Island, all had access to family funds in running their campaigns. In one of Grizzle's races for the legislature, she spent \$34,000, something that might have been impossible without her wealthy husband's help.²⁵ Lori Wilson expended \$54,652 on an election, a large portion of which may have come from her husband, Al Neuharth of the Gannett newspaper chain.²⁶ Helen Gordon Davis had access to family money which was helpful in her campaigns. The easing of financial worries allowed some women to run who otherwise might not have had the opportunity. As is generally the case for male legislators, women who are financially comfortable are more likely to be in the legislature than women who are not. Some legislators, both male and female, having embarked on a political career, may have to abandon it because of their economic situation. Beth Johnson (Mrs. Peter Johnson) from Cocoa Beach, widowed while in office, cited financial reasons for leaving politics: "As a widow, I could not raise my family on \$12,000 a year."²⁷

For some Florida women, family support has not been present or it has been ambivalent. The wife has either stayed in politics at the cost of her marriage or has abandoned elective office to devote more time to family life. When there are children located in a distant district, the strain may be too difficult for the mother-politician.²⁸

While the incidence of divorce among women in the Florida legislature may not be unrepresentative of the general Florida population or of women in the South, it appears to be uncharacteristically high in comparison with women legislators in other southern states. In some cases in which the divorce occurred

24. Interview with Elaine Gordon, May 7, 1986.

25. *Lake City Floridian*, October 19, 1980.

26. Opponents spent \$12,557 and \$3,424. *Miami Herald*, May 23, 1976. Wilson and Neuharth were later divorced.

27. Interview with Beth Johnson, May 7, 1986.

28. Questionnaire completed by Jane W. Robinson, September 21, 1985 (copy in possession of authors); interview with Robinson, May 7, 1986.

during the woman's legislative service, she has attributed the breakdown of the marriage to its inability to survive her career. The demands of political life were not compatible with the demands of family life. A husband might feel he needed more time with or attention from his wife. While some of the women were divorced prior to their political involvement, it does not appear to have interfered with their careers.

Whatever the legislator's marital status, there are some women who can maximize it. One married woman, Mary Grizzle, was able to utilize a familial support system; Carrie Meek and Beverly Burnsed exemplify divorced women who devoted themselves extensively to their jobs. For Toni Jennings, a single woman, the freedom from domestic responsibilities, coupled with her family business interests, allows her to pursue a legislative career and also manage a business. In this respect, Jennings more closely fits the mold of a male legislator.

With the exception of Mary Patton of Appalachicola, who succeeded her husband, all of Florida's women legislators were elected in their own right. The so-called widow's route, considered by some to be a usual means of access for women, has been a negligible factor in Florida.

As a rule, women enter politics at a later age than men.²⁹ There are various reasons for this, but generally, women have spent their twenties and thirties rearing a family. As they get older and familial responsibilities decrease, they are able to focus on careers and other interests. Some women who earlier showed little interest in politics were motivated by involvement with the League of Women Voters and other organizations. In Florida, seventeen of the forty-nine women legislators to serve began their terms after age forty-five. Twenty began their service between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five. Only three had entered the legislature by age thirty. (The ages of five women are not readily available.)

Women entered Florida politics relatively late in their lives. Ordinarily a late start in elective politics limits upward political mobility. However, the experience of some Florida women has been different. Most women generally began their state political careers in the house; only five have been elected to the senate

29. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *Political Woman* (New York, 1974), 55.

without any legislative experience.³⁰ Furthermore, their political ambitions have sometimes stretched across the state. The widespread news coverage of women legislators suggests the voters' acceptance of them as public officials.

Two women— Betty Castor and Mary Singleton— have run for lieutenant governor; others have been candidates for education commissioner, public service commissioner, and various judgeships. Only a few have been elected. The point is that Florida women have sought office beyond the legislature. When Betty Castor of Tampa was elected to the state senate, she was one of only five women serving in that chamber without previous experience in the house. A former county commissioner and president of the Florida League of Women Voters, Castor was elected to her first term in the senate in 1976. Two years later, she ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor on the Democratic ticket. During the next few years, she held several administrative positions. In 1982 she was elected to the senate again; two years later she became the first woman president pro-tempore. In 1986 she ran successfully for education commissioner and assumed that office in January 1987. Castor advocated a more participatory, consensus-oriented leadership style. Cool and competent, she was considered detached— even something of a “queen bee” — by some of her colleagues.

Serving as a chair of an important legislative committee can also provide a means of upward political mobility. Historically, women were not appointed committee chairs. In fact, many of the early women politicians in Florida were not even appointed to serve on important legislative committees. This situation has changed in recent years; women have achieved committee leadership roles in the Florida legislature. Almost twenty per cent of women legislators have served as chair of committees, including Beverly Burnsed of Lakeland who chaired the House Commerce Committee, a post usually regarded as a “male” assignment.

A former high school government teacher who was encouraged by her students to run for the legislature, Burnsed was seated in 1976 in her second race. She said she had no

30. Dauer, “Florida’s Legislature,” 144. The five were Beth Johnson (Mrs. Peter Johnson), Lori Wilson, Betty Castor, Jeanne Malchon, and Karen Thurman.

paramount causes and no particular legislative interests; rather she tried to become an expert on the issues considered by the committees on which she served. Burnsed did not want to be regarded as a woman legislator but as a legislator who happened to be a woman. She has attributed her success in the legislature to her cooperation with "the leadership." She chaired three significant committees: Higher Education (1978-1980), Health and Rehabilitative Services (1980-1984), and Commerce (1984-1986).³¹

Florida women have also risen to leadership roles within their respective chambers. In 1984 Elaine Gordon of North Miami was appointed by James Harold Thompson as speaker pro-tempore of the House. Gordon played an activist role. She did not passively wait for a leadership appointment. Rather, she told the speaker that she wanted the job, and he responded favorably. As speaker pro-tem, she has been a staunch and vocal advocate of women's rights. She has, as a result, been subjected to abuse by some of her colleagues. A newspaper reported: "Rep. Elaine Gordon. . . was standing on the House floor a few sessions ago. She had just suggested an amendment to a bill. When legislators want to kill someone's amendment, it is common for them to make a motion to 'Lay So-and-so's amendment on the table.' But Rep. Ray Mattox. . . saw a perfect opportunity to put Gordon in what he thought was her proper place. He grabbed a microphone and made a motion to 'Lay Miss Gordon on the table.' The room exploded with male laughter. Gordon, usually brash and aggressive, was stunned speechless."³² Gordon's new status made her less vulnerable to such attacks.

Concurrent with Gordon's leadership in the house, Betty Castor became the first woman elected president pro-tempore in the senate. The combination of women in both chambers in such high leadership roles was unparalleled in the South. Betty Easley, a Republican from Largo elected in 1972, is another woman who held a leadership position. After serving as vice chairman of her party's county committee for several years, Easley decided to run for public office. She thought first of the local school boards, but determined that the state made the "real" decisions. Her particular areas of interest have been ad

31. Interview with Beverly Burnsed, May 7, 1986.

32. *Cocoa Today*, May 29, 1984.

valorem taxation and education funding.³³ A 1977 newspaper profile observed that Easley “has never passed a major bill or dazzled the house with brilliant oratory. . . . Her bailiwick is behind the scenes and in committee. . . and there she has become one of the House’s most respected Republicans.”³⁴ In 1982 her colleagues voted her an award for most effective legislator in committee. In 1986 she became minority leader pro-tempore.³⁵ A 1982 article offered the opinion that she “would be speaker, if only she were a Democrat.”³⁶

The vast majority of women in the Florida legislature have been white: forty-three of the forty-nine were white, four black, and two Hispanic. Black women made their first appearance in the legislature in 1970 when Gwendolyn Cherry was elected. All the black women legislators have come from urban districts. Three entered the legislature in the 1970s. The first, Cherry, was a lawyer and former teacher from Miami. Considered “a fighter for the rights of the people” and a champion of the “downtrodden,” Cherry earned the respect of her colleagues.³⁷ Her career ended in 1979 when she died at the age of fifty-five as the result of an automobile accident.

The second black woman was Mary L. Singleton of Jacksonville, elected in 1972. Her background was similar to that of many other legislative women. A former teacher and business woman, she had participated in a variety of organizations, including the Florida Women’s Political Caucus, the Urban League, and several Democratic organizations. In 1967 she was elected vice president of the Jacksonville City Council. Singleton served almost two terms in the house before resigning to become state director of elections under Secretary of State Bruce Smathers. In 1978 former Republican governor Claude Kirk chose her as his running mate in his unsuccessful Democratic gubernatorial race. In 1979 she was appointed director of the Division of Administration in the Department of Banking and Finance, a post she was holding at the time of her death in 1980.³⁸

33. Questionnaire completed by Betty Easley, February 20, 1985.

34. Tallahassee *Challenger*, March 1983, citing *St. Petersburg Times*, 1977.

35. Tallahassee *Challenger*, March 1983.

36. Lake City *Floridian*, February 21, 1982.

37. Tallahassee *Democrat*, February 9, 1979.

38. *Capitol Outlook*, December 10-16, 1980; resumé of Mary Littlejohn Singleton, in vertical file at State Library of Florida, Tallahassee.

The third black woman is Carrie P. Meek, elected in 1979 to fill Gwen Cherry's unexpired term. Meek, an educational administrator, has been called "the most powerful black politician in Florida." A former speaker of the house described her as one of the five or six people who could turn votes. While in the house, she successfully sponsored several important measures including the Community Revitalization Act, the Hospice Act, and the Performance Bond Exemption Amendment. In 1982 she helped to shape the legislation which created a predominantly black senatorial district in Dade County. Later that year she was elected to fill that seat.³⁹

The first of two Hispanic women, Ileana Ros, was elected in 1982 twelve years after the first black woman. Both Hispanic women who served in the legislature have been Republicans from Dade County. Redistricting probably made their elections easier, but their victories were notable nonetheless because of the relatively traditional views of women held by a large segment of the Hispanic community.

A few women in earlier years were interested in women's issues. Mary Lou Baker, for instance, in the 1940s sought to improve the legal status of women. In the early 1970s several women who were directly involved in the women's movement, or at least affected by it, were elected. Elaine Gordon and Helen Gordon Davis, both Democrats, were encouraged to run by women's groups with which they had worked, and they continued to push women's and children's issues in the legislature. Gordon admitted to being considered a "women's libber," and both have been criticized for their strong advocacy of women's rights.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Gordon has risen to a position of leadership in the house.

These women have urged the passage of legislation that they felt was important, including measures dealing with day-care, abortion, domestic violence, and most particularly the Equal Rights amendment. Many of their proposals were successful, such as women serving on juries, maternity leave for teachers, spousal abuse and child care legislation. Others, such as the proposed Equal Rights amendment, were not successful.

Most of the women who served in the legislature in the

39. *Orlando Sentinel*, December 12, 1982.

40. *Cocoa Today*, May 29, 1984; interview with Elaine Gordon, May 7, 1986.

1970s, whether Democrats or Republicans, were supporters of the federal Equal Rights Amendment, although Republican opposition, both male and female, had increased by the end of the decade. In her article on "The Equal Rights Amendment and the Florida Legislature," Joan Carver found that all six women in the house at the time of the 1973 vote were pro-ERA. Most of them participated in the debate. Six years later when the amendment came up for another vote, twelve women supported and three opposed it. Three women in the senate, all supporters of the measure, were unable to swing the vote in their favor.⁴¹

After the final defeat of the ERA, the loosely-knit and informal network of women members suffered a collapse. In 1986 it was difficult to find a real women's caucus. When a notice went out during the 1986 session that women members were invited to breakfast together, only a few attended. Many who received the notices showed varying degrees of disinterest. If any network existed in 1986, it was loose.

As the number of women entering the legislature increased in the 1970s the group became more diverse: Of the twenty-four women elected for the first time during the 1970s nineteen were Democrats and five were Republicans, twenty-one were white and three black, and about one-fourth were Jewish.⁴² Several factors contributed to the increased number of women in politics: legislative reapportionment as the result of a growth in population, increased civil rights activity, and a burgeoning of the Republican party vote. That women were the beneficiaries of "Florida's uncrystallized social structure" was first noted by V. O. Key in 1949: "In politics loyalties have not been built up, traditional habits of action with respect to local personages, leaders, parties, and issues have not been acquired. Social structure, to use a phrase of perhaps ambiguous meaning, has not taken on definite form in the sense of well-recognized and obeyed centers of political leadership and of power. Flux, fluidity, uncertainty in human relations are the rule. Whether it can be proved, there is plausibly a relation between a diverse, recently

41. Joan S. Carver, "The Equal Rights Amendment and the Florida Legislature," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 60 (April 1982), 455-81.

42. Two women were elected to the lower house in 1970; three in 1972; six in 1974; eight in 1976; two in 1978; and one in 1979. Four women were elected to the senate, including two who had previously served in the house.

transplanted population and a mutable politics."⁴³ In addition, the women's movement stimulated political organizations to sponsor candidates and lobby for issues.

By the 1980s the Florida legislature contained a strong bloc of women with seniority. At the beginning of the decade, nine of those elected in the 1970s were no longer in office, but seventeen remained. Beginning in 1982 their numbers swelled with each election. Twelve new women entered in 1982, ten in the house and two in the senate. Four more entered in 1983, two in special elections and two in the regular election. By 1985 after the reentry of Elaine Bloom of North Miami Beach in a special election victory, thirty-two women held legislative seats, twenty-three in the house and nine in the senate.⁴⁴

The proportion of Republican women increased in the 1980s. Four of the ten elected to the house in 1982 were Republicans as were three of the four elected in 1984.⁴⁵ The effect of generally more conservative women will be an interesting phenomenon to observe.

In 1982 reappointment of the legislature into single member districts opened up some new seats, especially in south Florida, and discouraged a few incumbents from seeking reelection to existing seats. Both of these trends provided openings for women. Several of the candidates, especially Democrats, were supported by the League of Women Voters. Others came out of a background of work in their political party, local office, and various women's organizations.

By the mid-1980s women seemed more firmly ensconced than previously in the Florida legislature, serving effectively and, in some cases, moving into leadership positions. In 1986

43. V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York, 1949), 86.

44. Women elected to the house of representatives in 1982 included Elizabeth Metcalf, Ileana Ros, Deborah P. Sanderson, Peggy Simone and in 1984, Irma S. Rochlin, Dixie N. Sansom, Arnhilda Gonzalez-Quevedo, and Frances L. Irvine. Serving in the senate were Elizabeth J. Johnson (1966), Lori Wilson (1972), Elizabeth B. Castor (1976), Jeanne Malchon (1982), and Karen Thurman (1982). Beth Johnson (1962), Pat Collier Frank (1978), Mary R. Grizzle (1978), Toni Jennings (1980), Gwen Margolis (1980), Roberta Fox (1982), and Carrie P. Meek (1982) served in the house of representatives before their terms in the senate.

45. In 1982 Republican women elected were Carol Hanson (Boca Raton), Ileana Ros (Miami), Deborah Sanderson (Fort Lauderdale), and Peggy Simone (Bradenton); in 1984, Dixie Sansom (Satellite Beach), Arnhilda Gonzalez-Quevedo (Coral Gables), and Frances L. Irvine (Orange Park).

women held the majority and minority leader pro-tempore positions in both houses, a situation which had never existed before in Florida and had not been duplicated in any other southern state.⁴⁶ They also held more chairmanships than ever before. The women in these leadership roles illustrated in microcosm the diversity among all the legislative women. They differed markedly in focus and style, ranging from ultra-conservative to liberal. Many insisted that there was no such thing as a woman's voice or vote in the legislature. Some of the women consciously avoided informal women's agenda meetings, because they felt that too close an identification with women's issues was detrimental to their ability to function effectively. Nevertheless, many women and men acknowledge that the presence of women has changed the way the legislature functions and the issues that are considered.

46. In the senate Elizabeth B. "Betty" Castor was president pro tempore, and Toni Jennings was Republican leader pro tempore; in the house of representatives Elaine Gordon was speaker pro tempore, and Betty Easley was minority leader pro tempore.