

# Women — shortchanged in politics

by Carol Strasser

It's been over 50 years since women were enfranchised. In those years, no major political party has nominated a woman for president. Nebraska, like most states, has never elected a woman to the House of Representatives or the Senate.

In a recent student poll conducted by the Nebraska Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), 79 per cent said they would vote for a woman president if she were qualified and nominated by their party.

If their party nominated a woman for the House of Representatives 90 per cent said they would vote for her if she were qualified, and 91 per cent said they would vote for a woman senator.

When the male and female response to the questions was compared, the percentage of males registering approval of a woman candidate was from 10 to 17 per cent less than the female percentage.

The survey was conducted to gauge women's attitudes towards women in politics, the status of women and family related attitudes.

The sample was heavily weighted with University of Nebraska female students—150 females to 50 males. Males were included in the survey for a comparison of male and female attitudes on the same questions.

The students were chosen at random from the University registration booklet and 85 per cent responded. The respondents were then interviewed.

The survey still has to be compared to national figures, said Celeste Wiseblood, who collected the data with the help of other University students and adviser Susan Welch, assistant professor of political science.

Wiseblood said the response probably is fairly representative of Nebraska public opinion since 24 per cent classified themselves as somewhat conservative, 37 per cent somewhat liberal and 17 per cent middle of the road.

Although a clear majority said they would vote for a woman for President or Congress, only 29 per cent of the males and 46 per cent of the females said they would vote for a woman nominated by their party for county sheriff.

Because of the stereotype of sheriffs and women, "people just can't picture a woman as sheriff," Wiseblood said.

Women now are beginning to group together to

question why more women aren't in office and to open the political structure so women aren't afraid to run, Wiseblood said.

The goal of the bi-partisan NWPC, and that of the national caucus, is to make women aware of their power and to participate in politics, she said.

NWPC workshops were held in February in Lincoln to discuss women's issues—child care, divorce and abortion laws, low income and minority issues, and the Equal Rights Amendment. A policy committee meets each weekend.

The emphasis was on action, Wiseblood said, and many women were encouraged to file for an office or as a convention delegate, and to work for candidates.

Problems women have to overcome before they can equalize the power structures are apathy, family pressures, stereotypes promoted by the media and attitudes of men who are afraid of competition from women, she said.

Women don't get as good a break as men, according to 69 per cent of the men and 72 per cent of the women surveyed.

Women are able to understand politics as well as men, said 78 per cent of the men and 91 per cent of the women.

Kathryn Braeman, chairwoman of the caucus's



temporary steering committee who is running against Rep. Charles Thone for the First Congressional District seat, said she doesn't expect attitudes towards her as a woman candidate to be a problem.

The problem for women candidates is to find financial backers, she said, since women don't have contacts in the business world as men do.

"Women don't realize the cost involved. You can find many women involved and concerned with politics who don't have political know-how," she

said.

To get something accomplished in politics, you have to have contacts with a party, Braeman said. Many women's political organizations, like the League of Women Voters, are bi-partisan.

Braeman is the wife of a University history professor John A. Braeman.

Other questions in the survey were family-related issues. A law which would permit abortions during the first three months of pregnancy, with no restrictions stated, was favored by 82 per cent of the males and 73 per cent of the females.

A reform bill making abortions legal in the cases of rape or incest was approved by 92 per cent in case of birth defects by 84 per cent and by 91 per cent in case of danger to the health of the mother.

The percentage dropped to 67 per cent in cases where the child is unwanted.

Seventy-eight per cent of the males and 84 per cent of the females were in favor of the federal government providing funds for day-care centers.

However, the percentages dropped to about 50 per cent if the expense per child were as much as a welfare payment or if similar centers were financed for middle-class children.

In the survey, 45 per cent agreed that government has the right to limit family size, 55 per cent opposed the system of contractual marriage where the marriage can be dissolved at the end of a set period and 69 per cent approved of alimony only under special conditions.

A similar survey is being conducted by Bellevue College, Wiseblood said, and the caucus is attempting to have it conducted in other Nebraska communities as well.

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