



Women's rights lobbyist Yvonne Leung and daughter Nha Dine.

Feminist: all can influence legislation

By Jane Owens

What lures a woman into politics? For the founder of the Nebraska Women's Lobby, the explanation is simple.

"I'm power hungry," Yvonne Leung said.

"Seriously, though, most women don't realize that almost anyone can have input into government," the Lincoln feminist said. "I really enjoy the power involved in lobbying and influencing legislative decisions."

Representing the National Organization of Women (NOW) and the Nebraska Women's Political Caucus, Leung began lobbying at the Nebraska Unicameral in January.

She discovered that lobbying "is definitely not a one-woman job" and soon began training about 30 women.

"We're planning to lobby for the interests of Nebraska women in general, as opposed to representing a specific organization," she said.

However, the Women's Lobby plans to form temporary coalitions with organizations to work on specific issues. Many organizations concerned with women's issues are tax exempt and cannot lobby themselves, Leung said.

What lobbying techniques does she use?

One-to-one confrontations with senators seem to work best, Leung said.

"This year has been primarily an educational year," she said. "Most senators don't even realize a women's side to issues exists. I'm trying to make them aware of that side."

"I don't try to be hostile or make a senator back up when I lobby. Maybe next year we'll be prepared to attack more aggressively, but right now I have very good relationships with some senators."

Asked about the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), Leung said she "only worked quietly" on the issue, along with other feminists.

"We wanted senators to think ERA support was coming from a broader coalition of 'establishment-type' women. That was obviously a mistake," she said.

The Nebraska Unicameral rescinded the amendment last March.

According to Leung, the Women's Lobby will work on three major issues this year: child care, health care and raising the minimum wage level.

"My biggest problem in lobbying has been getting outstate support, she said.

"Women living in small towns often are afraid to speak out on women's issues," according to Leung. "We want to develop a strong pressure group of Nebraska homemakers, but they aren't too courageous."

Leung and two other women publish a monthly statewide newsletter. The Women's Lobby also held an August meeting for women in Grand Island. About 120 attended, according to Leung.

Leung is not the first feminist in her family. Both her grandmother and mother were working women.

"Grandmother was lame, had seven children and lost two husbands, yet she still managed to work in a bobbin factory and march for women's rights," she said.

"My mother brought me up to believe I could achieve any goal I worked for," she said. "At the age of 12 I wanted to be a lawyer, and I received only reinforcement from her."

Leung's husband, Kam-Ching, also supports her feminist activities.

"If anything, my husband has pushed me because he comes from China, where women are more professionally oriented. He believes that women who stay at home become 'emotional sponges' and experience life only through their husbands' work."

The Leungs share housekeeping duties, she said, and both try to spend equal time with their 5-year-old daughter, Nha Dine.

In addition to her political activities, Leung has been a school teacher in New Zealand and has tutored.

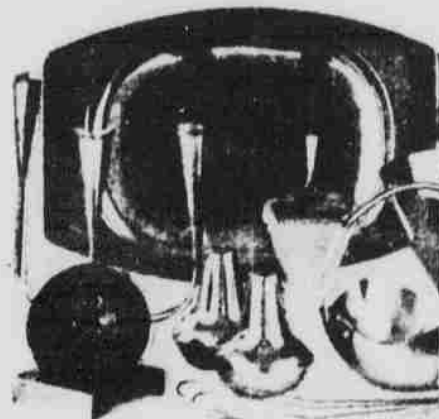
"We've moved 24 times in 10 years," she said, "so I usually work as a volunteer in professional jobs. I don't get paid because we never stay long enough."

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