

Political power strategies not just for men—speakers



Photo by Bob Pearson

Gina Dunning and Kandra Hahn of Lincoln told an audience in the union at Women/Speak that politics is a power game and women need to jockey for this power in the political world of men.

By Lucy Bighia

Politics is a "big power game" that operates on a definite spoils system, two Lincoln women active in local politics said Wednesday at Women/Speak.

Gina Dunning, an attorney for the Legislature's Health and Welfare committee, and Kandra Hahn, clerk of the District Court, said women need to realize the way the political system works.

Both women said the assumption that people get political appointments based solely on their qualifications for the job is false.

"It's not what you know, it's who you know," Hahn said.

Advising women

The Carter campaign commission, for example, solicited resumes from "qualified" women for possible appointments to advising positions, Dunning said. But the women who were selected were those who had done the "ugly, dirty work" in the campaign, she said.

Another misconception is that people in politics are not interested in power, Hahn said. People wouldn't enter politics unless they enjoyed and wanted power, she said, adding that traditionally, women refused to admit this to themselves or their constituents.

High motivations

"Women candidates seem to think that they have to have these high, sparkling

motivations that don't apply to male candidates," Dunning said.

Women also are traditionally reluctant to use their political connections to further their careers, although this is a common practice among men, Dunning said.

Many women hesitate to ask their friends and co-workers for money or help, Hahn said, although men regularly do.

Things done in politics are never done in good taste; but they're necessary, and women have to get used to them, she said.

Three categories

Dunning said politics could be broken down into three categories: campaign, party and issue politics.

Campaign politics are the most exciting and social of the three, she said.

Party politics tend to be the most frustrating to newcomers. People at party conventions spend hours arguing about platforms that nobody pays any attention to, she said.

"It's a celebration, but little more than that," Hahn said.

Issue politics are "devastating," because in such cases a candidate is judged by his position on a single issue, she said.

The "issue campaign" often clouds the real issue, which is the candidate himself, she said.

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Local pre-trial diversion evaluated

By Val Swinton

The concept of pre-trial diversion is good, but Lancaster County's program should be modified, according to the Lincoln corrections coordinator.

"I think the pre-trial diversion concept is excellent,"

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Pat Rackers said. "But there are as many kinds of diversion as jails and I would want such a program to reach as many people as possible."

Rackers said he does not think the Lancaster County program reaches those who really need it.

"I think it should be expanded to include those other than first-time offenders," he said. "There are people whom I think are still salvageable."

Pre-trial diversion is a program that allows a person charged with a felony or misdemeanor to do community service, receive more education or vocational training, or drug or alcohol rehabilitation. If the accused completes the program, the charges are dismissed.

Rackers said he thinks it would be cheaper to require a first-time offender to stay out of trouble for a certain period of time, and then the charges could be dismissed. That way, he said, pre-trial diversion could concentrate on other persons.

"I would like to see the program have a great impact on people in jail, who are unable to post bond," he said.

Rackers also said that poverty should not eliminate a person's chances of participating in the program.

Rackers also feels there is too much personal discretion involved in deciding who enrolls in the program and who doesn't.

"I'd like for program policies to be as narrowly defined as possible," Rackers said.

Currently, the county attorney decides who can enroll, based on recommendations from deputy prosecutors and the pre-trial diversion program director, Eric McMasters.

Rackers says he feels the program also is not cost effective, and feels most placed on diversion could have been placed on probation or fined, which would cut down on costs.

"Actually it's a good program," Rackers said. "It's much better than not having a program at all."

He also said that if pre-trial diversion in Lancaster County is to survive, it must continue to grow and expand.

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