

# Senators: women a minority, but not underprivileged

By Cindy Coglianese

**T**hey can cook, sew and raise a family, maintain a household and keep a husband. You might say a woman's place is in the house and the Nebraska Legislature.

Sens. Carol McBride Pirsch, Shirley Marsh and Bernice Labeledz are the only women among 49 senators. They all are mothers, wives and community leaders in addition to their duties as senators. Although they have different objectives in serving, they all agree that there are a few more places for women in the Legislature.

Carol McBride Pirsch, the youngest of the female representatives at 42, is a Republican from the northwest section of Omaha. Her husband is the president of Pirsch Brokerage Company. They have six children.

Pirsch's first involvement with politics began with her election to Justice of the Peace in the 1960s. She also has helped campaign for other candidates for public office. This is her first year as a Nebraska state senator.

**S**he said her first role as a legislator and as a woman is to express her commitment to the family, the middle class, the free enterprise system and "the traditions that made, and I hope remain as the good life in Nebraska," she said.

"I truly have discovered no disadvantages in being a woman, and perhaps it is an advantage to be a minority," Pirsch said. She added that although there has been good progress in establishing equal rights for women in Nebraska, there are still areas to be improved.

Pirsch, like the other women legislators, said she is a firm believer in conservative fiscal responsibility. The major pieces of legislation that Pirsch said she will push this session are efficient taxation programs and some solutions in the water resource problems.

Pirsch serves on the judiciary, law enforcement and judicial committees and the constitutional revision and recreation committees.

She also is active with UNO Parents Association, Parent-Teacher Association, and Benson Republican Women's Organization—just a few among a long list of activities.

**P**irsch graduated from UNO and the University of Miami-Ohio. She is an office manager for her husband's brokerage firm.

"My only political aspirations are to be the best senator possible and to represent my constituents as well as possible," Pirsch said.



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Sen. Shirley Marsh



Photo by Kathy Chenault

Sen. Bernice Labeledz

Sen. Bernice Labeledz, 59, also is an Omaha representative from south Omaha. Her list of political involvement is long, since she served as an executive secretary in local, state and federal government.

"Coming from south Omaha, I am aware of the many problems of the retired elderly and with low and middle income families," Democrat Labeledz said. She said this experience comes from four years of work with Sen. Ed Zorinsky when he was mayor.

She said her role as a legislator is to check the budgeting effect on the limited-income families in her district by fighting against high taxes.

Labeledz serves on the appropriations committee and the committee on committees.

During this session, Labeledz said she will try to eliminate sales tax on utilities, which can amount to about \$4 to \$6 a month savings for limited income families. She also wants to push for legislation on a commission for the deaf, she said.

**C**oming from a family with sixteen siblings, Labeledz and her husband, a retired police officer, have four children. She said she is able to manage a household in addition to her senatorial duties because her household chores aren't that demanding anymore.

Republican Sen. Shirley Marsh, 53, has served in the Legislature seven years for the 29th District in Lincoln. She also is a homemaker and a social worker.

Marsh serves on the appropriations committee and is the chairwoman on the committee on committees.

Marsh said the major pieces of legislation that she will work on this session include a bill that would provide for permanent placement in child abuse cases and a bill that would provide more guidance on unclaimed property.

Marsh and her husband of 35 years have six children and have been parents-away-from-home for three American Field Service students. Marsh is active in her church, Girl Scouts and various advisory committees in Lincoln and Lancaster County. She said she is able to handle her non-political duties and her role as a legislator "by putting things in their priorities."

**O**n her role as a woman in the Legislature, Marsh said there are advantages because of the "thrill of serving the state of Nebraska."

"In the Legislature, it is not being a woman, but the ability to sell one's ideas on their merits that prove yourself," Marsh said.

She said her political aspirations are undecided.

"One has to be prepared for opportunities," Marsh said. "It may be that I might want to do something else."

She added that she would like to see more women in the Legislature because three women cannot represent all the women in Nebraska.

Marsh graduated from UNL with a master's degree in business administration in 1978. She was president of the National Order of Women Legislators and has served as the chairwoman of the state advisory committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights.



Photo by Kathy Chenault

Sen. Carol McBride Pirsch