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PAULINE H. MENES, 84

Longtime Member of Maryland House of Delegates

By JOE HOLLEY
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Pauline H. Menes, 84, a member of the Maryland House of Delegates for four decades and the co-founder and first chair of the Women's Legislative Caucus in the Maryland General Assembly, died of pneumonia May 16 at Holy Cross Hospital, near her home in Silver Spring.

Mrs. Menes, a Democrat and former College Park resident, represented College Park, Beltsville and other areas of the 21st District in northern Prince George's County from 1966 until her retirement in 2007. Although she worked on issues as diverse as drug and alcohol abuse, children's rights and prison reform, she told *The Washington Post* in 2006 that she probably would be remembered for "a fur-covered toilet seat."

The year was 1971, she recalled, and female delegates didn't have their own restrooms inside the House building in Annapolis, which meant they had to leave the chamber and make their way across a lobbyist-jammed hallway to use the public restroom. That occasionally meant missing a vote.

When Mrs. Menes complained, Thomas Hunter Lowe, the House speaker at the time, appointed her "chairman" of the women's restroom committee and in front of all



BY MARK GAIL — THE WASHINGTON POST

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the delegates called her up and presented her with the toilet seat.

Mrs. Menes considered the joke a small victory of sorts. She told *The Post* it was the first time that a woman had been on a male-dominated rostrum.

"It turned out to be a very poor joke," she recalled. "We were just beginning to see the women's movement come to the fore. There were some chuckles, some embarrassed laughs, but most were as outraged as I and the other women were."

The women got their own restroom a couple of years later, not long after Mrs. Menes and her

female colleagues started the Women's Legislative Caucus as a way to fight the intimidation and isolation they experienced. Several years later, she organized the Women's Legislative Network of the National Conference of State Legislators.

She was born Pauline Herskowitz in New York on July 16, 1924. After receiving her undergraduate degree from Hunter College in 1945 in economics and geography, she moved to the Washington area to work as an economist in the Office of the Quartermaster General. It was a temporary wartime job, and she trained a young officer named Melvin Menes to replace her. They married in 1946.

Her husband died in 2000. Survivors include three daughters, Sandra Ashe of Atlanta, Robin Elvord of Chicago and Bambi Menes of San Francisco; a sister; and three grandchildren.

Mrs. Menes was chief clerk of Prince George's County before being elected to the House of Delegates in 1966. She arrived in Annapolis as part of the same Democratic wave that brought Benjamin L. Cardin and Paul S. Sarbanes to the Maryland House and Steny H. Hoyer to the State Senate.

As the first woman to serve on the Judiciary Committee, Mrs. Menes used the assignment to work on juvenile justice and criminal justice

issues, as well as aging, the arts and a broad range of women's issues.

For many years, she chaired the Special Committee on Drug and Alcohol Abuse. She successfully sponsored legislation mandating AIDS testing of prisoners, setting up needle-exchange programs and requiring that suspected child abuse be reported by medical personnel, teachers and social workers.

In the mid-1970s, she fought to change the Maryland law that prevented a woman from filing a civil lawsuit against her husband in cases where there has been, in the words of a Maryland Court of Appeals ruling, an "intentional, outrageous" wrong. A 1978 court ruling upholding the law "will go a long way to helping Maryland women protect themselves," Mrs. Menes said at the time. "Just the threat of financial responsibility will stay many a husband's hand."

She also served on the Rules Committee and in her last few terms was the House parliamentarian.

Mrs. Menes, who was elected to the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame in 2008, recalled that the notorious toilet seat disappeared long ago, although a fellow legislator gave her a muskrat-skinned replacement as a retirement gift in 2006. It had Speaker Lowe's picture inside.