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Maryland's Six Women Legislators



Mrs. Edna Cook was elected to the House of Delegates in 1958. She is a Montgomery county delegate and a former mathematics teacher.

Among the handful of women legislators now in Annapolis is Mrs. Margaret Schweinhaut, an attractive white-haired grandmother. She is chairman of Commission for the Aged, a one-time champion golfer and the wife of a former Federal judge.



They Do Their Job In 'Man's World' With Feminine Touch And Philosophy

By MURIEL DOBBIN



The only woman in State's upper chamber is Senator Mary Nock, of Wicomico county. She is the second woman to be a State senator.



Baltimore city's delegation has three women members. From the left are Mrs. Irma Dixon, Mrs. Frances Holub, Mrs. Verda Welcome.

THE way of a woman in politics appears to be peppered with pitfalls.

She may be feminine, but she should not be frilly, and she must be firm. She may be aware of political machinations around her, but she should not be obviously embroiled in them. She may learn to compromise with details, but not with principles. And while she must remember that politics is still a man's world, she can cherish the thought that one day a woman may be Vice President.

This is the general philosophy voiced by the handful of women legislators among the 150 men now attending the General Assembly at Annapolis. Five of the feminine politicians are members of the House of Delegates, and one is a senator. All Democrats, they include former teachers, an ex-mathematics professor, a clubwoman, and three grandmothers. They are evenly divided on the pleasures of housework and cooking, and whether it is a handicap for a politician to be a woman. They agree that women legislators should wear simple clothes. And they are cautious about discussing the attitude of the men legislators toward the women of the Legislature.

Wife Of Contractor

Senator Mary L. Nock from Wicomico county is the only woman in the upper chamber, and the second woman ever elected to the State Senate. She traces her interest in politics back to 1928, when her mother took her to a Democratic rally. Later, she became secretary to a State legislator, and ran for office in 1946. She was the first woman from Wicomico county to hold elective office, and has been a member of the Senate since 1955.

The wife of a Salisbury contractor, Mrs. Nock said, "Political work fits in with my home life. My husband likes it as much as I do." The Senator, who has placed 46 bills before the Legislative body — all of which have been passed — said firmly, "I have never found political work difficult. I grew up around politics, and I like it." She reflected, "There is a need for women to share in Government today, because the world is so much more complex, and I feel women have a greater aptitude for detail than men."

She hastened to add, "But when a woman gets into politics, she must not put aside her femininity. She must measure up to the responsibilities of her task, but she must do it in a feminine way, and she must never copy men. My motto is that in politics you must apply the same principles of fair play you apply in everyday

dealings with people. One must never compromise on principles . . . although one may compromise on details."

Mrs. Nock, an attractive, well-groomed woman who evidently bears the femininity motto in mind, said with a smile, "Throughout my years in politics, I have received all the consideration anyone could wish for."

Mrs. Edna Cook, a Montgomery county delegate is a former mathematics professor and a grandmother. She has been a member of the House of Delegates, only since 1958, but she can list membership in congresses, boards, commissions, committees and councils covering education, P.-T.A., juvenile delinquency and atomic information dating back over 30 years. She said she went to her first political convention when she was 3. "My father was in politics in Ohio, and he took me everywhere with him. I grew up in a political atmosphere."

Married to a retired research chemist, Mrs. Cook admitted that her political work took her away from home a good deal. "But my husband is interested in politics too. He comes to the Legislature to see me." She said she regarded housework and cooking as a "necessary pleasure." She added, "When a woman isn't tied down, she has more advantages than a man in political work, because she can devote more time to it. After all, a man has to take time to make a living."

Grooming Grandson

A brisk-mannered woman wearing diamond donkey earrings, Mrs. Cook said she was training her grandson to follow in her political footsteps, and at an even earlier age. "When he was 10 months old, I took him campaigning with me, and put a placard on his stroller saying 'Please vote for my grandmother.' He attracted a lot of attention."

She summed up her views about women in politics with the adage about acting like a lady, thinking like a man, and working like a horse. "Somebody else said it, but I believe it."

The other woman representative from Montgomery county is Mrs. Margaret Schweinhaut, an attractive, white-haired grandmother who talks with no effort and little pause. Mrs. Schweinhaut, who is chairman of the Commission for the Aged, and the wife of a former Federal court judge, used to be a trophy-winning golfer, but now doesn't have time.

"My political education started with my grandfather who was in Montgomery

county politics," she said. "He was the only man I know who even then maintained that one day women would have the right to vote." She said of her political work, "Politics give you scope to accomplish more good on behalf of people than any other job. Politics can touch everything."

Constant Cooperation

Mrs. Schweinhaut went on, "Politics is one place where sex should not predominate. This is a man's world, but I have never found being a woman to be a handicap. I have received constant cooperation. My advice to any woman entering politics today is to play it straight. A woman must be aware of all the machinations going on, but she should not be too involved in them. She can be more effective if she is completely sincere about what she wants to do, and approaches it in a straightforward manner, although she must learn to accept the process of compromise."

She leaned forward earnestly, "At present women don't realize what good politicians they are. They haven't enough confidence in themselves." Mrs. Schweinhaut predicted, "There is nothing women can't accomplish in politics. . . . I think the day may come when we have a woman Vice President — that is within the foreseeable future."

Three of the members of the Baltimore City delegation at the General Assembly are women. One of them is Mrs. Verda Welcome, a former teacher and wife of a surgeon. A representative of the Fourth Legislative District, she said she "skidded into politics." Mrs. Welcome, a sleek figure in a beige sheath dress and gold costume jewelry, related, "I said definitely no when I was first asked to enter politics. Then I said I'd try it for a week. That was in 1958. . . ."

Soothed By Husband

She observed, "The most interesting and surprising thing about this work is the things that people expect you to do. The telephone rings constantly, and requests for help pour in." She said her husband was not interested in politics personally, but took a "great deal of interest" in her work. She laughed, "I don't think I could keep on with it if he didn't back me up. He is the one who calms me when I get upset about things going wrong."

Her husband does not visit the Legislature to watch his wife in political action. "He came to see me sport it and hasn't

been back." Mrs. Welcome was candid about her views on housework and cooking—"I don't like it. I have a housekeeper."

Her political motto, she said, was "honesty and sincerity." She explained, "People respect these qualities, and even if you don't succeed, they know you did your best." She mused, "I would like to believe that being a woman in politics is an advantage, but it has its drawbacks. I don't think men have enough confidence in women to accept them on an equal footing. . . ."

Qualified Support

She received qualified support on this theory from her fellow delegates, Mrs. Frances Holub of the Second Legislative district, and Mrs. Irma Dixon, also of the Fourth district.

Mrs. Holub, gray haired and vigorous—"I am a clubwoman and have been for years"—said she thought men politicians occasionally felt that women were invading their world. She added, however, that "most of the time" they were "cooperative and helpful."

Mrs. Holub, who in 1959, introduced a bill which, had it been successful, would have legalized politically organized bingo in Baltimore, said thoughtfully, "I believe you can't be too forceful in politics if you are a woman. It is a great mistake for a woman politician ever to try to impress her male colleagues with what she thinks she knows. . . ."

Mrs. Dixon, another former teacher, joined the discussion, "I guess we all get into politics because it seems it will be easy to help others and to correct archaic laws. But you find after you do get into it that it isn't as easy as you believed. We are working in a man's world, in a new field for women."

Fond Of Cooking

Mrs. Dixon, who is in favor of further State contribution to education and a commission to study tax sources, went on to talk about her home in Baltimore—"I love housework and cooking." As the men of the delegation began to trickle in, she was describing a special recipe which she had invented for a "lemon-filled, meringue-shelled Christmas pie."

The men exchanged greetings with the women legislators, and began forming small groups to discuss the day's business. Mrs. Dixon stopped discussing the merits of pies, and the women of the Legislature checked their lipstick and moved over to the man's world.