

Winning big in Houston

By Karen Wellisch

Tens of thousands of people flocked to Houston the weekend of Nov. 18 for the most remarkable women's gathering of the second wave of feminist struggle. The occasion was the National Women's Conference (NWC), the culmination of 56 state and territorial meetings held earlier this year, and coordinated by the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year.

Anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly had confidently predicted that the NWC would mark "the death of the women's movement." It didn't. Instead, the message from the nearly 2,000 delegates and some 10-15,000 observers meeting at the first publicly funded national women's gathering was that the spirit of feminism has touched and moved a very diverse population indeed, and that the status of women in American society is, more than ever before, a serious mainstream political concern.

If the Houston conference was a significant political event, it was also notable public theater. Three days of serious discussion in plenary sessions were preceded and accompanied by dozens of celebrations and related attractions: women runners carried a torch from Seneca Falls, N.Y., to Houston, with Bella Abzug and Billie Jean King running the last mile side-by-side; continuous entertainment was offered at the Albert Thomas Convention Center; organizations and women's businesses and presses passed out literature and sold buttons, books and T-shirts in a crowded exhibit hall; distinguished women in government gave a series of "briefings from the Top."

Rosalynn Carter and former First Ladies Betty Ford and Lady Bird Johnson joined hands at the podium; Susan B. Anthony's grandniece gave an impassioned speech for ERA from the floor;

feminist celebrities were everywhere; Washington dignitaries and women office-holders abounded.

Nearly 2,000 members of the press were credentialed to cover the conference; the Houston public television network broadcast the plenary sessions live; the feminist monthly *Houston Breakthrough* published daily. Commissioners, speakers, delegates and observers were a veritable "Who's Who" of American women.

Diverse representation.

Some 130,000 women attended the state and territorial IWY conferences at which delegates to the NWC were elected.

The legislation establishing the conference called for diverse representation in state delegations, and with a few notable exceptions, it was achieved. The 1,442 elected delegates, plus the delegates-at-large appointed by the National Commission, were women of all ages, incomes, backgrounds and ethnic, racial and religious groups.

Minority representation was much higher than at other women's movement events—17.4 percent of the delegates were black, 8.3 percent hispanic and almost 10 percent members of other minority groups.

Political office-holders dominated the podium; leaders of women's organizations shared the spotlight only sporadically. Among the delegates, however, organizational presence at the conference was strong, if somewhat uncoordinated and not always publicly acknowledged.

Only a small number of delegates-at-large were specifically appointed as organizational representatives, but hundreds of delegates wore NOW, CLUW (Coalition of Labor Union Women) and AAUW (American Association of University Women) buttons. Leaders and members of BPW (Business and Professional Women),

the League of Women Voters, the Girl Scouts and a wide spectrum of other women's professional, political and religious groups were also present.

Resolutions passed at state and territorial meetings, plus recommendations contained in the National Commission's original report, *To Form a More Perfect Union*, were incorporated in a proposed "National Plan of Action," which served as the agenda for the conference plenary sessions.

The 26-point plan, which reads, as one delegate put it, like "the familiar laundry list of feminist issues," included detailed resolutions on arts and humanities, battered women, business, child abuse, child care, credit, disabled women, education, political participation, employment, the ERA, health, homemakers, insurance, international affairs, media, minority women, offenders, older women, rape, reproductive freedom, sexual preference, statistics and welfare, plus a resolution calling for the establishment of a cabinet-level federal women's department.

All but the women's department resolution, which was opposed because it would "ghettoize" women's concerns at the federal level, were adopted by overwhelmingly favorable margins. Specifics included support for inclusion of women in programs administered by the Office of Minority Business Enterprise, comprehensive, federally funded child care programs, the elimination of sex role stereotyping in educational materials, strong enforcement of anti-bias statutes, a national full employment program, national health insurance and a minimum guaranteed income.

Most resolutions were adopted in the same form that they appeared in the National Plan of Action. Where substitutions and amendments were made, they generally liberalized, clarified or extended original proposals.

Overwhelming delegate support for the National Plan of Action was facilitated by an active network called the "Pro-Plan Caucus," organized shortly before and during the conference to promote unity and an orderly progression of the agenda that would allow consideration of all the issues. The strategy was largely successful, with Pro-Plan leaders loosely coordinating floor action, explaining conference rules to delegates and generally moving the agenda forward.

The Big Three.

The most anxiety, as well as the most enthusiasm at the conference was generated during consideration of three issues—the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion ("reproductive freedom") and lesbian rights ("sexual preference").

Years of determined struggle by feminists have succeeded in making ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment a majority political concern, and a remarkable array of forces supports that effort. Never has this been more clear than at the National Women's Conference.

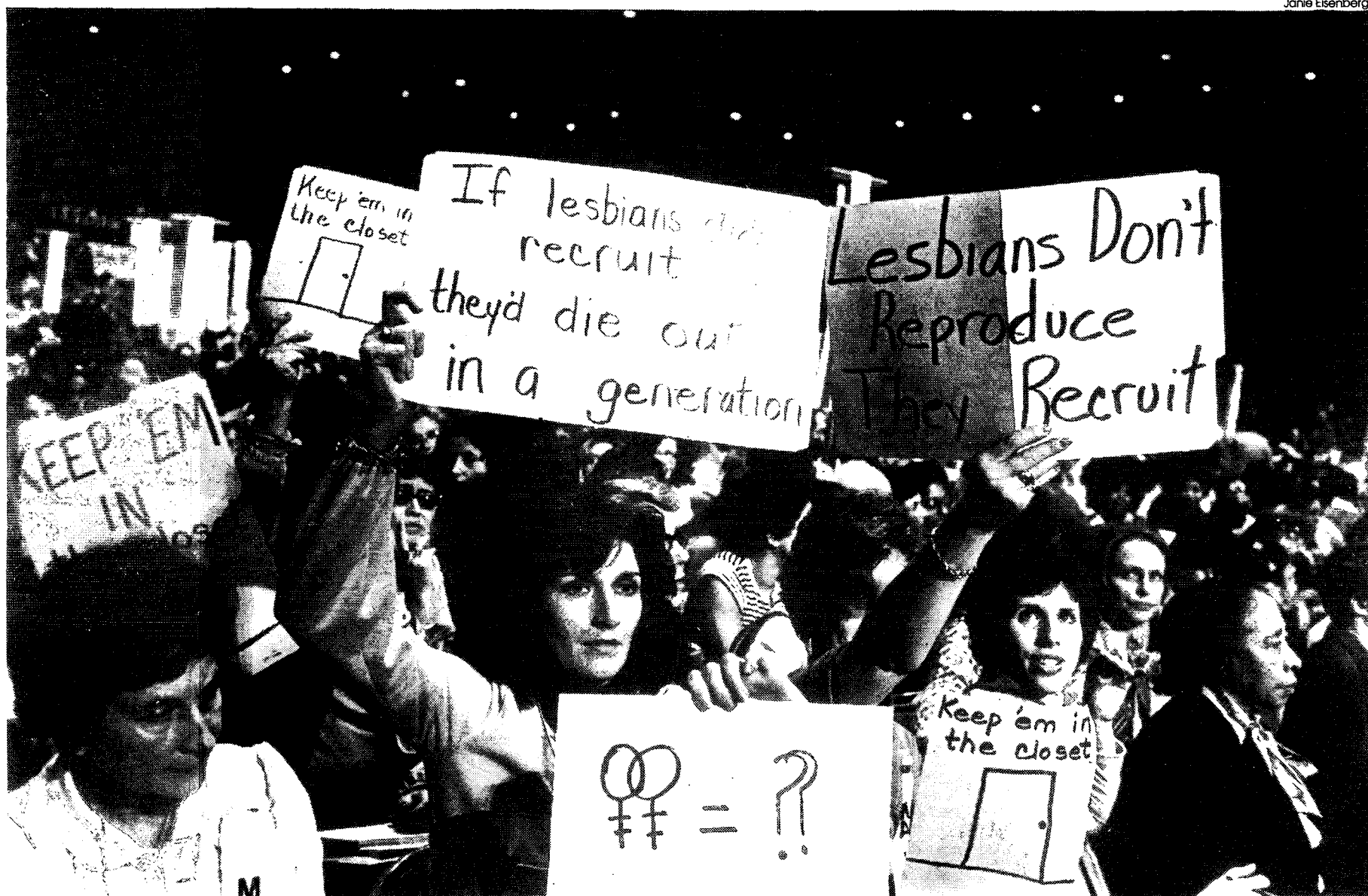
If there was one issue in Houston, everyone agreed it was ERA. The Plan of Action statement on ERA says simply that it "should be ratified," and conference delegates and observers overwhelmingly agreed. Spontaneous pro-ERA floor demonstrations erupted again and again during debate and speeches on numerous issues. Every ceremonial and substantive speaker at the podium addressed the issue.

Majority sentiment was summed up by ERAmerica co-chair Liz Carpenter, who told some 5,000 people attending that group's cocktail party fundraiser, "If I die, don't send flowers—just three more states."

The reproductive freedom plank of

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The potentially enormous impact of the modern feminist movement was made abundantly clear as members of women's organizations of the political center, union women, staunch feminists, civil rights activists and elected officials joined hands.



"Pro-life/pro-family" demonstrators and delegates strongly opposed the conference resolution on sexual preference and lesbian rights.

FULL EMPLOYMENT

Employment data under fire

Pushed by ongoing criticism of current statistical methods, Congress has created a commission

By Paul Rosenstiel
Pacific News Service

WASHINGTON, D.C.—President Carter's recently announced aim of reducing unemployment to 4 percent by 1983 may prove even more ambitious and difficult than it now appears.

Before that date the government may adopt a new way to measure unemployment that reflects growing criticism by economists that the current unemployment index drastically under-reports the true number of the jobless.

President Carter recently appointed Sar A. Levitan, a leading critic of the index, as head of the new National Commission on Employment and Unemployment Statistics. Created by Congress last year in response to growing criticism, the commission will recommend changes in the way the government measures and reports employment and unemployment.

If Levitan's thinking becomes the basis for a new official unemployment index, the new measure will show that unemployment and the hardship it creates is much more severe than the current index reflects—especially in inner cities and rural poverty areas.

The result could be massive redistribution to those areas and away from suburbs of \$16 billion a year in federal subsidies for community development, job creation, job training, revenue sharing and other programs, currently distributed on the basis of formulas that include an area's unemployment rate.

Levitan, director of the Center for Social Policy Studies at George Washington University, is a close associate of Labor Secretary Ray Marshall, who must advise Congress on whether to implement what the commission recommends. The recommendations are expected by early 1979.

According to Levitan, our manner of measuring unemployment is obsolete. When it was developed in the late 1930s, he says, it was accurate to equate joblessness with hardship. But today the situation is more complex. "What we need is an index that will more realistically reflect today's needs in today's economy," he says.

Levitan and economist Robert Taggart, a Labor department official, believe they have developed one. Their Employment and Earnings Inadequacy (EEI) index measures the inability of people "to attain an adequate standard of living through work."

In March 1974, when official unemployment was 5.3 percent, the EEI was 10.5 percent. Even in 1969, when the unemployment rate was only 3.5 percent, the EEI was 9.8 percent. The EEI also shows unemployment for some segments of the population to be particularly severe. Black EEI in 1974 was 23 percent, and among black women heading families it was 56 percent.

Other models.

Levitan and Taggart are not alone in computing alternative unemployment statistics. The AFL-CIO, for example, contends unemployment in September was really 9.8 percent instead of the official 6.9 percent. The National Urban League's measure for the last three months of 1976 was 13.7 percent for the whole economy (compared to the official 7.3) and 2.3 percent for blacks and 58.3 percent for black teenagers.

Most alternative statistics build on the

way the government now computes unemployment. Based on 47,000 monthly interviews, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) classifies people as employed if they work as little as one hour a week at a paying job, and as unemployed if they don't work but have searched for work in the past month. These two groups comprise the labor force, and the unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force that is unemployed.

Undercounts unemployed.

Critics claim this method undercounts the unemployed in two important ways. First, people working part-time but wanting full-time work should be considered unemployed—or underemployed—instead of fully employed.

Secondly, at least some of those not in the labor force who want to work should be counted—especially those not seeking jobs because they don't believe any are available.

The AFL-CIO and the National Urban League compute their rates by adding, in different ways, these two groups. Levitan and Taggart include a third group as well: full-time workers who fail to earn an adequate income.

Economist David Gordon of New York's New School for Social Research, using different standards than Levitan's and Taggart's, computed 1975 overall unemployment at 32.7 percent (compared to an official rate of 8.5) and black unemployment at 50.9 percent.

In contrast, Jack Carlson, chief economist for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, contends that we currently overestimate hardship from unemployment. Government programs such as unemployment insurance cushion the impact, he says. In the case of some low-wage workers, he adds, "The wife works, too, and both of them together are middle income."

Hurts urban areas.

Urban and minority leaders argue that current statistical methods shortchange them of federal dollars allotted on the basis of unemployment indices. The Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes 4,300 state and local unemployment figures, but most represent large metropolitan areas or whole counties where suburban economic health often statistically balances inner city economic decay.

Small cities suffer as well. "Sometimes smaller communities are completely excluded from federal programs because they have to receive a low county rate assigned to them, even though they may have very high unemployment," says Don Slater of the National League of Cities.

All these problems will be considered by Levitan's commission, the other eight members of which will probably not be appointed until early January.

The real debate, however, will take place in Congress, which must decide whether to begin using any new measure of unemployment as the basis for distributing federal money and formulating economic policy.

A decision to do so could have a significant effect on the share of federal dollars many communities receive. For example, if the commission makes the seemingly harmless recommendation that military personnel be included in the labor force (they're currently excluded), Levitan predicts that lawmakers from districts with military installations will be up in arms. As he explains, "If you include the military in a Navy-oriented place like San Diego, you increase the number of employed, decrease their unemployment and San Diego loses millions."

"The trouble with these numbers is that each one of them has a political implication," Levitan says.

Paul Rosenstiel is a specialist on urban unemployment for the Ford Foundation-funded Third Century America project.



New life for full employment

By Mary Eisner Eccles
Congressional Quarterly

WASHINGTON—Leading supporters of the Humphrey-Hawkins full employment bill have rallied behind a new version endorsed by President Carter, insisting that the revisions have not materially weakened it.

Capping months of sensitive negotiations, Carter Nov. 14 embraced a set of procedures for coordinating government economic policies to reach stated unemployment goals. The revised proposal set five-year targets of 4 percent unemployment overall and 3 percent unemployment among workers aged 20 and over. The jobless rate, now 7 percent for the work force as a whole, has not fallen below 5 percent since 1973.

The new version—like its predecessors—also aimed to guarantee employment to every adult who sought it, using public jobs as a last resort if other methods failed. To meet administration reservations, however, the proposal left the choice of approaches open, and gave the President a chance to revise the numerical goals themselves at a later date.

The chief congressional sponsors, Rep. Augustus F. Hawkins (D-Calif.) and Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.), followed Carter's announcement with enthusiastic praise for the agreed-upon draft.

"The President and Congress are provided with a more flexible, but no less effective blueprint for achieving the em-

ployment-increasing and inflation-restraining objectives of the bill," the sponsors said in a statement. The revised provisions, they felt, preserved "all of the essential elements" of the measure they had fought for in the 94th Congress.

Effectiveness questioned.

But most initial accounts of the agreement with Carter portrayed it as toothless, concentrating on the new presidential power to modify the targets and the absence of specific job-creation steps for the government to take. Most of what remained, observers suggested, were broad statements of national policy—similar to the Employment Act of 1946—which had proved insufficiently forceful in the past.

Backers quickly sought to dispel such impressions.

The bill "sets a reasonable [unemployment] figure within a reasonable date," said Murray H. Finley, president of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers union and co-director of an umbrella group—the Full Employment Action Council—formed three years ago to push for such legislation. The proposed targets, he told a press conference Nov. 22, would put to rest the idea that the country should tolerate higher levels of joblessness—such as 6 or 7 percent—or discount the employment problems of groups like women and teenagers.

"No bill is a perfect bill," added Cor-

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