

By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON

LAST MARCH FAITH RYAN Whittlesey, the president's liaison to special interest groups, including women, spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington. Whittlesey assured the participants that the president had told her that the Washington-based feminist organizations were "adjuncts of the Democratic Party," a judgment with which many conservatives as well as some feminists might concur.

But the next day presidential spokesman Larry Speakes went out of his way to repudiate Whittlesey. "I do not think her interpretation of what he said was faithfully rendered," Speakes declared.

The Whittlesey flap was another round in the year-long gender gap battle taking place among Republicans and conservatives. While some Republicans inside the administration and in Congress want the president to take bold steps to close the voting gap between men and women, Republican and New Right conservatives either deny the gap's existence or insist that it is really working to the president's advantage. They also fear that any concession on its behalf would weaken the Republicans' "pro-family" stance.

Civil rights bill.

The gender gap became a major issue in Washington after the 1982 elections, in which disproportionate female support for Democrats seemed to make possible Democratic victories in several key gubernatorial and one Senate race. In the wake of these Republican defeats, the administration and the Republican National Committee (RNC) moved to prevent further damage.

The administration's most visible step was the appointment last summer of the president's daughter Maureen Reagan as a consultant on women's issues. Maureen, an Equal Rights Amendment supporter, immediately angered conservatives by expressing sympathy with the complaints of Barbara Honegger, a Justice Department employee who resigned in protest over the department's neglect of women's rights.

The administration also set up a Working Group on Women, chaired by presidential aide Michael Deaver instead of the outspokenly anti-feminist Whittlesey, who was repeatedly pushed into the background and pressured to resign.

This spring, the Reagan campaign set up a Women for Reagan-Bush Organization, headed by Sonia Landau, a Corporation for Public Broadcasting vice-chair. It also promoted U.S. Treasurer Katharine Ortega to keynote the Republican convention in Dallas.

But when faced by substantive proposals to improve the lot of women, the administration has balked. While the administration finally agreed to sign a bill sponsored by the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues toughening procedures for collecting child-support payments, it refused to support a revision of the Civil Rights Act sponsored by 63 Republican and Democratic senators.

The Civil Rights Act revision is intended to overturn the Supreme Court ruling in the *Grove City v. Bell* case last February. The Court ruled that, under the act's existing provisions, a college's failure to grant equal facilities to men and women could not affect government aid for the entire institution, but only aid for the specific program in which discrimination occurred. Thus a college that didn't provide equal athletic programs for men and women could be denied federal funds for its athletic program (which most don't receive anyway), but could not be threatened with a general cutoff of funds.

The bipartisan Civil Rights Act, sponsored by the Republican Senate leadership, would forbid discrimination by any "recipient" of government money—in this way, making institutions vulnerable to total cutoffs if they discriminate in any of their programs. In support of the bill, Republican members of Congress wrote the president, "We must not allow pro-

tection against discrimination to be a Democratic issue."

The administration was initially divided on the bill, with Education Department officials and some White House staff in favor of it and Justice Department and Office of Management and Budget officials opposed. (The Justice Department had submitted a brief supporting the college in the *Grove City* case.) As a result of pressure from Attorney General William French Smith, Utah Sen. Jake Garn and from the conservative movement ("Vast Expansion of Federal Power: Radical Civil Rights Bill Sailing Toward Passage," *Human Events* warned), the president decided to oppose the bill. In his May 22 news conference, the president explained that the bill "would open the door to federal intrus-

Conservatives have advanced two alternative explanations for the gender gap. According to Barr, the more important gap is that between married voters, who tend to support the president and the Republicans, and unmarried voters. "If the media wanted to cover a gap, they'd cover the marriage gap, which is twice the so-called gender gap," Barr said.

Barr cites a CBS/*New York Times* poll of the 1982 House elections that shows an 11 percent gap in married and unmarried voters' preferences, compared to a 4-5 percent gap in male-female preferences. According to Barr, the marriage gap represents support for "the pro-family policies of this administration."

Other conservatives insist that the gender gap has been caused by the shift of male voters into the Republican camp

REPUBLICANS

Whose gender gap is it, anyway?



ion in local and state governments and in any manner of ways beyond anything that has ever been intended by the Civil Rights Act."

Some conservatives have been uncomfortable even with the administration's symbolic concessions to the gender gap. The muzzling of Whittlesey, whom they regard as the only genuine conservative among the White House staff, has particularly angered them.

Many conservatives disagree with the

rather than the abandonment of the Republicans by female voters. According to RNC co-chair Betty Heitman, "The Democrats have a terrible gender gap. The majority of men in the country by far support the president." Heitman attributes male support of the president to their being "out in the workforce longer" and their appreciation of "a strong leader."

According to New Right leader Paul Weyrich, the most dramatic illustration

"The Democrats have a terrible gender gap. The majority of men in the country support the president."

White House and Senate leadership's acceptance of the gender gap as a political fact. Their reasoning recalls a defense lawyer's pleading: my client wasn't present at the scene of the crime; and even if he was, he didn't do it.

Many conservatives deny that the gender gap exists at all. Noreen Barr of Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum describes it as "media baloney." But the same conservatives also contend that even if the gap exists, it has been misinterpreted by feminists and by the "liberal media."

of a male gap is the North Carolina Senate race between incumbent Republican Jesse Helms and Gov. James Hunt. In a recent Gallup poll, Helms led among male voters by 56 to 40 percent, while Hunt led among women by 52 to 44 percent—in all, a 12 percent gender gap. Weyrich commented, "Everybody says Jesse Helms is way behind with female voters. Why not say there is a wimp gap? Gov. Hunt has a major problem with male voters."

The male gender gap theory was pion-

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eered by Kevin Phillips, the author of *Post-Conservative America*. In his post-election analysis of the 1982 governor's races in Michigan and New York, Phillips claimed that the gender gap in those races exceeded the national average because male voters were attracted to the Republican candidates' "populist outsider politics."

Immediately after those elections, most analysts dismissed Phillips' contention. In an October 1983 *National Journal* article, William Schneider rejected the male gender gap theory on the grounds that Reagan's popularity rating among men had remained constant since early 1981, while his rating among women had dipped 6 percent.

But recent polling suggests that Phillips may have had a point. According to the ABC/*Washington Post* polls, while Reagan's popularity among women has fluctuated since January 1982, his approval by men has varied more widely, from a low of 47 percent to its current 60 percent.

The pollsters' studies of reaction to the October 1983 Grenada invasion also suggests that a male gender gap may exist. According to the ABC/*Washington Post* poll, Reagan's rating among women rose from 47 percent in September to 49 percent in October—a statistically impercep-

Paul Weyrich calls men's preference for Republican Sen. Jesse Helms over challenger Jim Hunt "a wimp gap."

tible change—while men's approval rating climbed from 59 to 67 percent. The Grenada invasion may have confirmed men's appreciation of his presidency.

Barr's insistence that the married/unmarried gap is more significant than the male/female gap also merits some attention. But the married/unmarried gap is smaller than the disparity between unmarried women voters and the rest of the electorate. In 1982 House races, for instance, unmarried women preferred Democrats by 63 to 34 percent.

Reagan's pollster Richard Wirthlin has also acknowledged a similar Democratic preference among 25- to 40-year-old women. For Republicans, this group, which grew up under the influence of the feminist movement of the '60s and '70s, represents the heart of the gender gap. It is unlikely that they can be won over by the symbolic exertions of Sonia Landau and of Deaver's Working Group.

But the exertions of Walter Mondale and company may equally fail to win over the men who flocked to Reagan's banner in the 1980 elections and who found inspiration in the American invasion of a small Caribbean atoll.

Races

Continued from page 17

ing onto his seat this time around. Given zero ratings by the ACLU, the AFL-CIO, the NEA and a 5 percent rating by ADA, Smith received this quip from PEACE-PAC: "He's never met a weapons system he doesn't like." Elected on Reagan's coattails, his district was redrawn in '82, making his constituency far more moderate than he. This fact, reinforced by Oregon's slight Democratic voter registration edge (14 percent of the voters are independent), bodes well for McFarland's chances in November.

• Betty Goetz Lall, a Columbia University professor and director of its Labor and Urban Affairs Institute, is seeking a rematch against Rep. Bill Green of New York's 15th C.D. Lall won 45 per-

cent of the vote in her '82 run, despite being recruited just three months before the general election. This time she announced in January but must overcome primary opposition from well-heeled Manhattan borough President Andrew Stein. Lall, who served on the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency under President Kennedy and has been a leader of the New York Metro Freeze Campaign, has received the influential endorsements of SALT II negotiator Paul Warnke and former presidential advisor Arthur Schlesinger. Her primary is on September 11.

Of the House races featuring Republican women, four have earned notice because of the strong bipartisan support garnered by the candidates' more liberal views. Former Washington state Sen. Sue Gould, Minnesota state Sen. Nancy Brataas, Kentucky businesswoman Cissy Musselman and Sen. John Danforth's former press secretary, Carrie Francke of Missouri, all shun their party's line on

ERA and abortion rights. Because such stands often cost Republican women full party support, help from women's PACs and national networks has been particularly important.

These emerging women's political institutions are crucial, says CAWP Director Mandel: "Outside or inside government, it has been shown that where women get together and support one another, we see tremendous progress. Enormous potential power exists in the women's political community."

But she acknowledges that it takes more than that: "It takes women in male networks as well...and although even the organized women's political community is still on the outside, they are now knocking on the door."

This year many of the women knocking on the doors of the U.S. House and Senate have built up experience in their state legislatures. There, where races aren't nearly as costly, and full party support not so critical, women have made significant strides.

While in 1968 women held only 305 seats in their state legislatures, they had won 770 seats by 1979. Throughout the

'70s women's representation grew with each election, and today they comprise more than 13 percent of all state legislative seats—holding 991 seats in all.

Despite encouraging signs at the state level, the burdens of running for federal legislative positions must be eased if women are to make corresponding progress there. While some women suggest public funding for elections and many more advocate spending limits on races as ways to reduce financial constraints, most agree that party support would be a larger factor in easing fundraising difficulties. They envision parties grooming women candidates, promoting them, nominating them for "winnable" races.

But according to Ruth Mandel, that is not soon to happen. She warns: "Politics is a competitive business. No one is going to sit aside in the interests of ameliorative social change and wait for a woman candidate to be presented as the party's nominee. Men will jump into a race if they think they have a shot."

It is increasingly clear that no one wants women politicians in office as much as women do. The responsibility rests in their hands.

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Co-op America... Putting People First

By Zillah Eisenstein

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION is clearly concerned about the gender gap. In a 12-page memo compiled last year for the White House Coordinating Council on Women, Ronald Hinckley stated, "The continued growth of the 'gender gap' in its current form could cause serious trouble for Republicans in 1984."

The memo defines the gap as reflecting differences between men and women "in the way they judge political morality, their economic vulnerabilities, their levels of political awareness, variations in the impact of education on them, and their perceived self-interests." The gender gap also reflects "the changes in population characteristics, particularly the rise of single-parent families headed by women, many of which are dependent on government subsidies," and also "reflects the president's policies on the budget and foreign defense."

But while the memo seems to recognize that the gap reflects real issues specific to women's changing lives, it concludes that the problem is primarily one of perception and that a communications plan must "target" women to change the way they think about the administration.

In part the gender gap reflects the fact that Reagan is caught between his commitment to sending women back into the home and the widely accepted tradition of equality of opportunity for all. The liberal notion of women's legal and economic equality is accepted by a majority of the public. The capitalist need for women wage workers only exacerbates the tension between the notion of equality of opportunity for women and the male privilege defined and protected by the state. The Reagan administration is divided about how best to deal with this dilemma—hence divisions, even within Republican circles, over abortion, pay equity, affirmative action and other "women's issues."

Part of the gender gap is women's coming to consciousness as a sexual class—understanding their particular economic vulnerability as secondary wage-earners who suffer from unemployment, underemployment or 61 cents-to-the-dollar wage gap when employed. These realities define their relationship to the social welfare state, which either aids them while unemployed, subsidizes them while underemployed, assists them in getting new jobs and promotions through affirmative action or hires them (and now fires them).

The dismantling and reorganization of the social welfare state by the Reagan administration has affected poor, working-class and middle-class Third World and white women in various ways. Third World and white poor, and working-class women have lost welfare benefits, food stamps and legal services. Many middle-class women have lost their jobs providing those services.

Through the '70s, government employed 49.9 percent of all female professionals in the U.S. With the cutbacks, "minority employees of the federal agencies have been laid off at a rate of 50 percent greater than non-minority employees, women administrators have been laid off at a rate 150 percent higher than male administrators," said Rep. Augustus Hawkins (D-CA).

The dismantling of the social welfare state can be seen as an attack on the gains made by Third World and white poor and middle-class (professional) women. This assault on equality of opportunity for women in the public sector is part of the Reagan administration's covert antifeminist politics. Its overt program is against the ERA and abortion rights.

The gap and feminism.

Feminist leaders like Eleanor Smeal and Bella Abzug argue that the gender gap reflects women's particular economic interests and their commitment to issues like the ERA and abortion rights. Smeal believes women's rights issues have gotten short shrift as a principal cause of

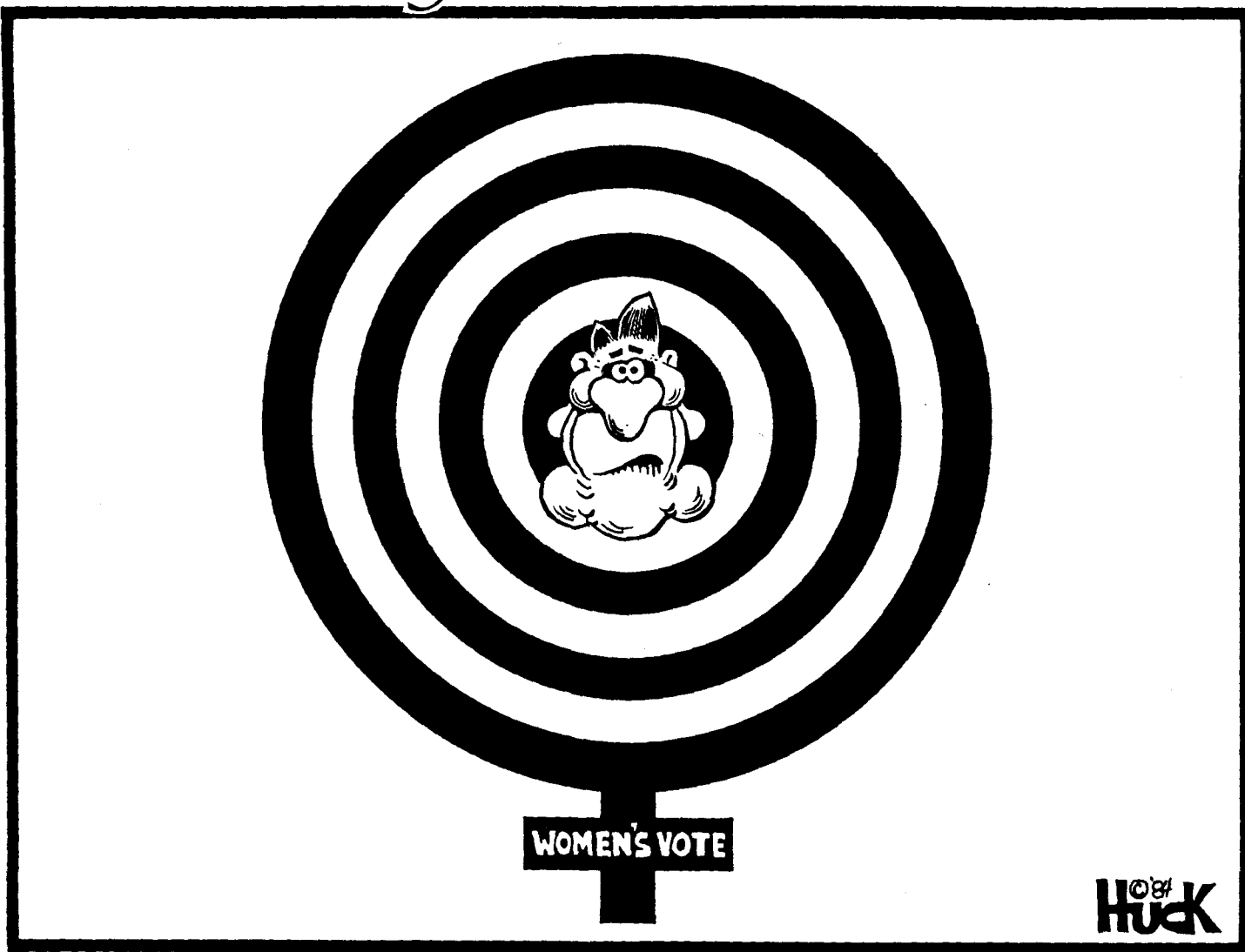
the gap. She sees sex discrimination running through all its issues.

Both Smeal and Abzug in their recent books try to show that women's "compassion" can often be better understood as a position that correlates with their particular needs. For Smeal, women are antimilitarist because military spending cuts social spending and the services that they need and that employ them. The military, she notes, holds out few job options for women.

On the other side, Jean Bethke Elsh-

Why does one need to adopt and either/or standard to explain the gender gap? Anti-Reagan women are neither merely nurturing nor merely feminist. They are both—and something more.

GENDER GAP



THE FUTURE

Contradictions inevitable as women become political force

tain argues that women's traditional values—their commitment to peace and social compassion, not feminist concerns, best explain the gap. She argues that differences between men's and women's attitudes do not differ much on the ERA and abortion, but rather on foreign policy and war-related concerns. Frances Fox Piven as well has argued in *Socialist Review* that "the emphasis on peace, economic equality and social needs associated with the gender gap suggests the imprint of what are usually taken as traditional female values." She states, and Elshain agrees: "There is not much correlation between the largely middle-class constituency of the movement and the cross-class constituency of the gap, or between the issues emphasized by the movement and the issues highlighted by the gap."

But why does one need to adopt an either/or standard for explaining the gender gap? The women who comprise the anti-Reagan vote are neither merely traditional and nurturing nor merely feminist. They are both—and something more. Women reflect the particular history, traditions, activities, vulnerabilities of being women in this society, and they can never be completely outside this context.

Yet they are simultaneously in conflict with a society that limits them to patriarchal traditions. To this extent they are demanding equality—an economic and political sameness with men and a sexual and gendered particularity. The gender gap reflects the complicated reality that women simultaneously live in and against patriarchal society. As a feminist, one can never be completely inside or outside it. Contradictory and complicated consciousness is part of this reality. The gender gap is part of this consciousness.

A *Women's Day* magazine survey of 115,000 women in April 1984 found: while desiring peace, 75 percent of women think the U.S.'s position as a world power is slipping and it worries them; a majority think the American posture toward the Soviets is correct; a majority

support a nuclear freeze only if other nuclear powers agree to a verifiable pact; 79 percent supported abortion; 68 percent supported ERA; 61 percent supported federally subsidized day care.

But a CBS news poll of 1,367 that same month found only 25 percent of women approved of U.S. policy in Latin America (whereas 34 percent of the men did); 22 percent of the women favored the overthrow of the pro-Soviet government in Nicaragua (31 percent of the men did) and only 8 percent of the women supported the harbor mining in Nicaragua (19 percent of the men did).

Clearly, sweeping generalities about women's attitudes are inappropriate. If the gender gap can be explained simply in terms of the greater nurturing capacities of women and their anti-war stance, why are pro-ERA women more critical of Reagan than anti-ERA women? Why are wage-earning women more critical of the Reagan administration than housewives? Or why do women appear to be more critical of U.S. involvement in El Salvador than critical of an anti-Soviet stance?

Women's consciousness reflects in part the varied realities of women's lives, through their sexual class identity and the changing feminist discourse. This consciousness develops within a society that has legitimated (liberal) feminist discourse. This has deradicalized aspects of feminism and made it more subversive because a language of equality starkly contrasts the inequalities women face in the courts, in the labor force and at home.

The gender gap is not a completely new phenomenon but part of women's historical effort to challenge male power and privilege and the political institutions that define it. What is new is that women are opposing a specific administration along these lines. It reflects the changing nature of women's lives over decades—women's greater participation in the labor force, different family forms, the development of the social welfare state (and its present dismantling), the Vietnam war (and the

Continued on following page