

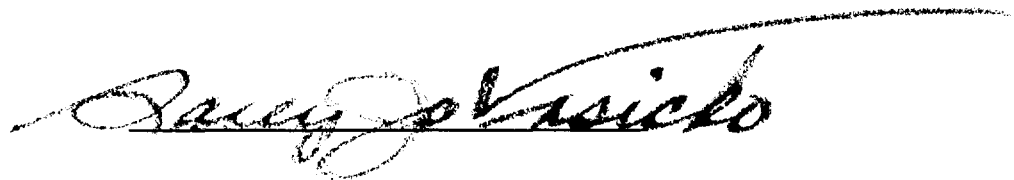
WOMEN IN TODAY'S INDIANA GOVERNMENT

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sally Jo Vasicko", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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PURPOSE OF THESIS

Women are contributing to all aspects of Indiana government. While they differ in party affiliation, age, race, and occupation, they also share some common ground. Because of their successes in the political process, these women possess an understanding of the political process, a desire to improve this process and the ability to change it. Through a series of interviews the impact of women in today's (1988-present) Indiana government will be documented, focusing on where they are today, but also touching on the past and future.

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PREFACE: A NOTE ON FEMINISM

I'm a novice historian, not a political scientist or scholar of women and gender studies. This is why I was not only surprised, but confused by references to such concepts as "gender politics" and "radical feminism" I found in my background readings. To be honest, I've always believed feminists to be overbearing, pro-choice extremists who spelled women with a "y," thought God was a She and felt the world would be a better place if there were no men.

Fortunately, I came across a definition of feminism with which I agreed. Feminism is the advocacy of political, economic, and social equality for women.¹ This definition put much of what I read into perspective. It helped me realize that every person who is a self-proclaimed feminist generally holds their own personalized beliefs and viewpoints. As with a person's political beliefs, they are often tailor-made by the individual. As a result, I am very reluctant to declare my political party preference because I find myself in agreement with some of the stances taken by each of the major parties, and on Election Day I vote for candidates of both groups. Since I face this dilemma in defining feminism (agreeing with several different views), I hate to declare whether or not I believe myself to be a feminist.

— In this case, however, I believe actions to speak louder than words. I think my decision to write a paper about women in Indiana government reveals where I stand on this issue.

On the national front, there are numerous articles and stories about role models for up-and-coming political women such as Margaret Chase Smith, Shirley Chisholm, Ann Richards, and countless others. For the women of Indiana, however, there is little if anything written about our political leaders. This thesis is an attempt to discover my role models, women from my home state who have done and are doing something that today I only dream about: having a positive impact on both Indiana and the nation through government service. If that makes me a feminist, then so be it.

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INTRODUCTION

Many of my friends do not understand my fascination with government. They see government and politics as the same, equally corrupt. I, however, differentiate between the two terms. I am pro-government and anti-politics. Our government was established to maintain order, improve the quality of life of Americans, and provide assistance to those in need. Politics, in my opinion, is what stands in the way of effective government. The dictionary gives several definitions for politics. The one I believe to be most correct is "scheming and maneuvering within a group."² Unfortunately, public opinion is such that the above definition of politics often defines government as well. I wholeheartedly disagree. Government is a necessary institution whose purpose is to make life a little easier for the people it serves. This is my personal definition of the role of government. It falls in line with one of the definitions offered by the dictionary. The fourth entry under the term govern is "to have depending on it."³ Other definitions for government imply control and domination. I believe the role of government is to **serve**, not control.

As I began exploring possible topics for my senior thesis, my mind immediately jumped to women in government. While my major is history and my minor is business, I have a deep interest in government and hope to

someday be an elected official. I went to the library and started to search for background information. I was pleasantly surprised to find an abundance of materials discussing women in government. At the same time, I was rather disturbed because there was little written about the women of Indiana. The books and articles I found talked about numerous women who have made significant contributions through government service, yet failed to discuss the talent found within our state. The more I thought about it, the more upset I became. It was then that I realized I had stumbled across my topic.

This paper will in no way attempt to document everything concerning women in Indiana government. Rather, the focus will be on the role of women today (1988-present). I hope to combine my experience in historical writing and research with my interest in political science to produce a thesis which best represents my education at Ball State University.

I will begin with some background information which analyzes the reason behind the low number of women elected officials in the United States. (The availability of sources dictated this national perspective. There is very little written on the history of women in Indiana government.) The focus will then shift to the women of Indiana government today. Through a series of

personal interviews, the impact of women in today's Indiana government will be discussed, concentrating on their current role, but also touching on the past and future.

PRECONCEPTIONS

Perhaps a more important reason for writing this thesis is to either reaffirm or dispel the preconception I hold about the role of women in government. Through personal opinion, discussions with others sharing my interest in government, and the media, I have come to believe several assumptions about women in government as truth. My generation is much more fortunate than ones before, for we have women in a variety of leadership positions (not just women involved in government) to turn to as role models. I look to these women in awe.

I was raised for part of my life by a single working mother, and witnessed first-hand the struggle and sacrifices that were part of her daily life. This early experience causes me to question how women are able to find the time and energy to balance career, family, marital, and societal responsibilities. Of

course I believe women are fully capable of doing all these things. However, I am not certain if women can simultaneously fulfill the responsibilities required of them in each role and do each well.

While the role of the husband and father has changed within the American family, the bulk of familial duties are still the responsibility of the wife and mother. For example, men are performing more household chores, but only do 20% of tasks such as laundry, cooking, and cleaning.⁴ There are sacrifices and compromises that must be made, and I think that someone (whether child, spouse, or the woman herself) will suffer in the long run.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Women's political participation has increased in the past several years. For example, the number of women elected to their state legislatures has increased five-fold since 1969.⁵ In 1969, a mere 3% of all state legislators were women.⁶ In 1994, 1500 state legislators were female. That number represented 14% of the total.⁷ Why is this number so low, considering that over half the population of the United States is female?

To find the answer we must turn to history. When this nation was founded, the *doctrine of coverture* was the legal term used to describe the status of women. The term comes from British common law and literally means that a married woman was under the protection of her husband.⁸ Women had no rights as individuals. The role of the woman in society was to be a wife and mother, and nothing more.

Gaining the same rights and privileges as men has been a gradual process over the last two centuries, and a process that is still continuing today. While the right to vote was constitutionally guaranteed in 1920, the right for a woman to be tried by a jury of her peers was not constitutionally guaranteed until 1975.⁹ This Supreme Court decision is representative of the inability of our society to cast off the totally legal and cultural traditions of the past. There is still an uncertainty about the role of women in the public sphere. This uncertainty reflects a society in transition. Political activity and interest are still viewed as masculine traits. "Political behavior, as we define it, includes autonomy, independent opinions, and aggressive action. By definition, in our society women who are aggressive and autonomous have been seen as deviant and have been considered unacceptable and undesirable as women."¹⁰ Women have not become fully part of the public sphere

because their chief responsibilities have generally been in private sphere matters such as family. "The in-between status yields philosophical and political conflict about whether it's better to move ahead or attempt to return to older patterns."¹¹

Examining women's political involvement from a historical perspective reveals the major obstacles that must be overcome before Congress or our state legislatures accurately reflect the population of the United States. Once society gives up the traditions of the past, the path for women in government will become much easier. I believe that we as a society are moving ahead, but it is taking much longer than any women could have ever anticipated to get there. A recent report issued by the Center for the American Woman and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University states that "at the current rate at which women are being elected, it will take 410 years before the proportion of women in Congress equals their percentage in the overall population."¹² More women are elected at the local or state level rather than the national level. "Using the finding that the number of women state legislators increases by one percentage point each election, CAWP predicts that by the year 2054, *half* of all state legislators will be women."¹³

ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIANA GOVERNMENT

In November 1992, 72 women were serving in a statewide executive office.¹⁴ Indiana had four women on this list: Attorney General Pamela Fanning Carter, Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Suellen Reed, State Auditor Ann Devore and State Treasurer Marjorie O'Laughlin. (Attorney General Carter was the first African-American woman in the nation ever elected to that office.) In 1994, Indiana elected Sue Anne Gilroy as Secretary of State and Joyce Brinkman as State Treasurer. Additionally, four new women were elected to the Indiana Senate, and sixteen were elected to the House of Representatives. Those numbers sound encouraging, until they are compared to the number of total seats in the Senate (50) and the House (100). In the 1993 rankings of women in state legislators distributed by CAWP, Indiana stood at number 28.¹⁵ There were 29 women out of 150 total legislators, a meager 19.3%.¹⁶

Our nation is just beginning to develop a legacy of women in government.¹⁷ A "handful of breakthrough candidates"¹⁸ has grown into a network of veteran female politicians with experience comparable to their male counterparts. The infamous "old boys club" has been in place for centuries, providing encouragement and assistance to up-and-coming male

politicians. Similar opportunities were not available to women because women were not established in the public sphere. This is why Judy Hinshaw Singleton helped to develop the Richard G. Lugar Excellence in Public Service Series. "Young men get mentored into the [political] process, unlike women," Singleton said.¹⁹ "This program was created to get women into the system."²⁰

A common starting point of a female's political career has been as a volunteer.²¹ Involvement in community organizations can help women learn about issues important to the community as well as serve as the foundation for a support network. A second route has been through local politics. Many positions such as precinct committeeperson and school board member are often held by women because the time requirements can easily fit into a young mother's schedule. "By holding local office, a woman can enhance her visibility while at the same time getting political on-the-job training that will serve her well later."²² For example, former State Treasurer Marge O'Laughlin began her political career as a volunteer for her county ward chairperson. This led her to become a precinct committeeperson. She held that position for 10 years before she was encouraged to run for Indianapolis City Clerk.²³

Another key to political success is positive reinforcement. Mentors (and other influential people) can provide encouragement and insight to women entering the political arena. Men have always been not only encouraged, but expected, to "have sandbox dreams of doing great things for themselves and for the world at large."²⁴ More and more girls are being encouraged at an early age to have similar lofty aspirations, in large part due to an increasing pool of successful female role models. Linda Witt, Karen Paget, and Glenna Matthews say in Running as a Woman:

Certainly none of the modern-day senators, congresswomen, and other women politicians who are juggling all the parts of a woman's life make it look easy. But they make it look doable, and they make it clear they believe that the many challenges of being public women and private persons have made them better representatives.²⁵

This, of course, is not to say that women are better representatives than men. Sue Thomas, in her book How Women Legislate, writes: "Evolving societal perspectives of women's role in the public sphere allow women access to an ever-expanding variety of roles; they also afford women the opportunity not just to choose public roles but to redefine them."²⁶ As women gain political influence, the course and appearance of the political system will change.²⁷ Women may not have all the answers. However, their "unique perspective on life enables them to bring a valuable new dimension to

politics."²⁸ As Attorney General Pamela Carter said, "We [women] bring different skills to the table."²⁹ Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Suellen Reed believes that, in general, women operate differently than men. She says that it is more natural for women to incorporate the Japanese model of consensus decision making into their professional lives.³⁰ Marge O'Laughlin has a very straightforward outlook on the impact of women in government. She says: "Women bring strength to government. They dig in and do it."³¹ O'Laughlin believes that men are often more concerned with "winning," even if that is not the best route for the organization. "Women don't play the 'Can you top this?' game. Women work together."³²

The unique contributions that women bring to government are being recognized and rewarded through electoral success. Women candidates from both major parties have been successful in statewide elections. For example, both a Democrat (Attorney General Pamela Carter) and a Republican (Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Suellen Reed) were elected in 1992. Attorney General Carter feels that gender was a factor in the election of 1992.³³ "There are certain unarticulated comfort zones seen in voting, perhaps due to a level of trust found in women candidates. Women are not involved in gamesmanship or deceit,"³⁴ said Ms. Carter. Even though she feels gender

played a role, Attorney General Carter attributes her electoral success to her hard work. She first became involved in government to give back to the community. From 1988 to 1992, Ms. Carter was the Executive Assistant (and later Deputy Chief of Staff) to Governor Evan Bayh. During that time she oversaw and restructured the Health and Human Services agency. Her accomplishments and credentials, as well as her gender, were recognized by the voters in 1992. Dr. Reed agreed. She said that "Pam and I were the best candidates. The voters chose the most qualified people for the positions."³⁵ (This was certainly true in the Superintendent of Public Instruction race, since Dr. Reed's opponent had never been a teacher.) Both Attorney General Carter and Dr. Reed had outstanding credentials, and that was rewarded. "In our case," said Ms. Carter, "the people spoke."³⁶

One question that must be raised is the effect of the so-called Year of the Woman. Nationally, this media phenomenon can be attributed to several factors such as "redistricting, a record number of retirements from the House of Representatives, the House bank and post office scandals, and a strong desire on the part of the electorate for a change in personnel and politics as usual."³⁷

But was there a Year of the Woman in Indiana? Three years later, the topic is still debatable. The media hype surrounding the Year of the Woman centered on Democratic candidates, yet candidates from both parties were elected in Indiana. While the women interviewed for this project discussed their gender in relation to state government, no one specifically mentioned the impact of the Year of the Woman. I do not believe that the Year of the Woman was a significant force in Indiana elections, although I feel the media attention from the national front did have some influence.

In general, the media plays an important role. By treating women as exceptions, reporters reinforce the assumption that men are the norm.³⁸ "Perhaps designating 1992 'The Year of the Woman' was journalism's way of celebrating her, but some in power saw it as another sign of exceptionalism."³⁹ I tend to agree with this statement. As Senator Barbara Mikulski said, "Calling it the Year of the Woman makes it sound like the Year of the Caribou or the Year of the Asparagus. We're neither a fad nor a fancy nor a year."⁴⁰

Pollster Celinda Lake, on the other hand, views the press in a more favorable light:

Most consultants and managers feel that press coverage of women candidates has grown more favorable over time, even if it still has a long way to go. At one time they had 'not taken women that seriously,' but now they seem more interested.⁴¹

Marjorie O'Laughlin is another person who sees the positive power of the press. During her campaign for state treasurer, Ms. O'Laughlin believed the media helped her because "they expected little. When I performed well, they were surprised and gave me fair coverage."⁴² She also feels the media was unbiased. "I did my homework and earned their respect,"⁴³ Ms. O'Laughlin said.

ADVICE FOR FUTURE WOMEN POLITICIANS

The women I interviewed were eager to offer practical advice to young women who were planning a career in government. Judy Hinshaw Singleton said she hopes that women "will approach it [government service] with a sincerity of purpose and a responsibility to share in the leadership of this country."⁴⁴ Her steadfast rule is to always evaluate what she's doing by asking herself whether or not she is improving the lives of others. Dr.

Suellen Reed cautions young women to "never confuse opportunity with temptation. A good set of moral values should be the measuring stick for all decisions."⁴⁵ Attorney General Pamela Carter encourages young women to "take on challenges. Women tend to minimize the impact we have. Don't!"⁴⁶ Marjorie O'Laughlin recommends that young women choose a career which will give them the most satisfaction. "There aren't many places to make as clear a difference,"⁴⁷ she said. "Take a serious look at it [government service], because it can be the most rewarding and the most frustrating career."⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

I now realize that my preconceptions about women in government were outdated. I took an "all or nothing" approach, believing that although women are capable of managing a multitude of responsibilities, they could not handle the pressures of career/marriage/family/society without someone being made to suffer. While I still feel that maintaining such a balance is difficult, it is not nearly as impossible as I once thought. I was in the mindset that women

had to overcome the obstacle of gender to achieve equality in society today. I now understand that my gender should be viewed as an asset instead of a liability.

While I was interviewing Attorney General Pamela Carter, we were interrupted by a telephone call from her daughter. The call was to ask permission to go to a friend's house and arrange for a ride home. The attorney general would not allow her daughter to go to her friend's house because she did not know the friend's parents. There I was, watching this woman be both the Attorney General of the State of Indiana **and** a mother. Ms. Carter apologized for the delay, but I told her it was not a problem. In fact, that phone call represented what this project was all about.

NOTES

1. New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language, rev. ed. (1992), s.v. "feminism."
2. *Ibid*, s.v. "politics."
3. *Ibid*, s.v. "govern."
4. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.
5. Lisa DiMona and Constance Herndon, eds. The 1995 Information Please Women's Sourcebook (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 434.
6. *Ibid*.
7. *Ibid*.
8. Linda Witt, Karen M. Paget, and Glenna Matthews, Running as a Woman (New York: Free Press, 1994), 21.
9. *Ibid*, 21-22.
10. Dorothy W. Cantor and Toni Bernay, Women in Power: The Secrets of Leadership (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 7.
11. Sue Thomas, How Women Legislate (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 12.
12. Cantor and Bernay, Women in Power, 6.
13. *Ibid*.
14. DiMona and Herndon, Women's Sourcebook, 432.
15. *Ibid*, 434.

16. *Ibid*, 436.
17. Hall, Beyond the Double Bind, 10.
18. Witt, Paget, and Matthews, Running as a Woman, 102.
19. Judy Hinshaw Singleton, personal interview, 2 December 1994.
20. *Ibid*.
21. Cantor and Bernay, Women in Power, 210.
22. *Ibid*, 211.
23. Marjorie H. O'Laughlin, personal interview, 2 December 1994.
24. Cantor and Bernay, Women in Power, 127.
25. Witt, Paget, and Matthews, Running as a Woman, 96.
26. Thomas, How Women Legislate, 16.
27. Cantor and Bernay, Women in Power, 68.
28. Claudia Schneider, "First Word," Omni, May 1990, 6, quoted in Cantor and Bernay, Women in Power, 67.
29. Pamela Carter, personal interview, 9 December 1994.
30. Dr. Suellen Reed, personal interview, 9 December 1994.
31. Marjorie H. O'Laughlin, personal interview, 2 December 1994.
32. *Ibid*.
33. Pamela Carter, personal interview, 9 December 1994.
34. *Ibid*.

35. Dr. Suellen Reed, personal interview, 9 December 1994.
36. Pamela Carter, personal interview, 9 December 1994.
37. Thomas, How Women Legislate, 153.
38. Jamieson, Beyond the Double Bind, 167.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Senator Barbara Mikulski, quoted in Witt, Paget, and Matthews, Running as a Woman, 183.
41. Celinda Lake, "Campaigning in a Different Voice," 1990 study conducted for EMILY's List, quoted in Witt, Paget, and Matthews, Running as a Woman, 208.
42. Marjorie H. O'Laughlin, personal interview, 2 December 1994.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Judy Hinshaw Singleton, personal interview, 2 December 1994.
45. Dr. Suellen Reed, personal interview, 9 December 1994.
46. Pamela Carter, personal interview, 9 December 1994.
47. Marjorie H. O'Laughlin, personal interview, 2 December 1994.