

Major Jewish Women's Organizations Unite On Issues Of Women And Work

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Representatives of more than two million Jewish women met on Capitol Hill to discuss issues concerning women and work. The participants, from 14 national organizations, agreed to concentrate their efforts for the coming year on three issues: parental/family leave, pay equity and pension reform.

The day-long conference, convened by the Leadership Conference of National Jewish Women's Organizations and hosted by B'nai B'rith Women, heard several speakers discuss political empowerment and its impact on the family, and drafted the following statement:

"We, as a coalition of Jewish women's organizations representing approximately two million members, have a concern for the condition of women, and their families and for the economic and social stresses upon them. Therefore, we have agreed to direct the full force of our efforts toward attaining parental/family leave, pay equity, and pension reform. We will move forward to educate our constituents and motivate them to involve themselves in the political process to achieve these goals.

The participants are taking the statement back to their respective organizations for endorsement. Although most of the groups are working on these issues independently, it was the first time that they had agreed to focus their efforts in these areas.

"The way we resolve the issues that families must confront as more and more women enter the workplace will affect our lives, as well as the lives of our children and grandchildren," B'nai B'rith Women President Irma Gertler told the gathering. "These are not just women's issues; they are everybody's issues."

Congresswoman Pat Schroeder (D. CO.) keynote speaker and co-chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women, said that "the past few years haven't been good years for women because they haven't felt empowered." She added that almost every country in the world has dealt with the issue of parental/family leave, but not the United States, despite the fact that less than 13 percent of American women can afford to choose whether or not to work after they have children.

Pat Reuss, legislative director of Women's Equity Action League, agreed that "we have to empower ourselves. No one will do it for us," adding that "our strength lies in women's religious groups" like those represented at the Conference.

Ann Lewis, national director of Americans for Democratic Action, said "the time is right" for women to deal with these issues because of the growing advances women have made on the state and local level. In contrast, she said too few women are in Congress. "We must work to elect more women, and insist on the appointment of women to policy-making positions," she added.

Jinx Melia, author of Why Jenny Can't Lead, said that women must learn how to exercise power by being able to adapt to new strategies. "If one strategy doesn't work, try another one," she said. Kathleen Frankovic, director of polling for CBS, said recent polls show a concern among voters about women's issues, a factor that can help women in the upcoming elections. She was optimistic that there is "clearly a chance for major gains for women."

The group is appointing an ad hoc committee to formulate an action plan. Members of the Leadership Conference represented at the meeting were: American Jewish Congress; Amit Women; B'nai B'rith Women, Emunah Women of America; Hadassah; National Council of Jewish Women; National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods; National Ladies Auxiliary, Jewish War Veterans; Pioneer Women/Na'Amat; Women's American ORT; Women's Branch, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations; and Women's League for Conservative Judaism. Also represented were the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Women's Caucus.

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Friday Evening—October 3 8:00 P.M.
Saturday Morning—October 4 10:00 A.M.
Children's Service—October 4 2:00 P.M.

YOM KIPPUR
Kol Nidre' - Sunday Evening, October 12 8:00 P.M.
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