

*Legislators and Politicians: Iowa's Women Lawmakers*, by Suzanne O'Dea Schenken. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995. xx, 228 pp. Illustrations, tables, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY SUSAN M. HARTMANN, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Iowa's twenty-three women lawmakers in 1994 constituted just over 15 percent of the state legislature, slightly less than the national average. These women were part of a tradition that began in 1928 and that by 1994 had seen 86 women serve for varying lengths of time in Iowa's statehouse. *Legislators and Politicians* provides an overview of these women's presence in the legislature and relates the stories of Iowa's most influential female legislators, including Democrats Minnette Doderer and Jean Lloyd-Jones and Republicans Betty Jean Clark and Joan Lipsky.

The book examines women's backgrounds and motivations in becoming candidates, their election campaigns, and their particular experiences as women in a male-dominated assembly. The largest part of the book describes and analyzes how women shaped legislation dealing with women, children, individual rights, agriculture, the environment, and revenue policy.

Suzanne O'Dea Schenken brought unique qualifications to her study of the legislature. In addition to serving as a floor clerk in the Iowa House, a columnist for the *Sioux City Journal*, and a lobbyist, she earned a Ph.D. in history. She conducted extensive research in state documents and newspapers as well as lengthy interviews with sixty female legislators. Moreover, Schenken's familiarity with research on women and politics across the nation enabled her to place her findings in a larger context. An appendix with biographical notes on the female legislators as well as tables charting women's service provide valuable information for future researchers.

As was true elsewhere, women's paths to Iowa's statehouse differed from those of men. Although she does not quantify her evidence, Schenken asserts that women's prior experience was not, for the most part, in law or business but in voluntary organizations such as the League of Women Voters (LWV), church groups, or the PTA. Even after the resurgence of feminism in the 1960s, the typical woman legislator had been attached to the LWV rather than the National Women's Political Caucus. The vast majority of Iowa's female lawmakers were wives and mothers, "a generally conservative group of women . . . like those who live next door" (39).

Yet, as Schenken shows, once they got through the statehouse door, many of these generally conservative women displayed elements of feminism. They all experienced "exclusion, derision, and suspicion"

(66), which silenced some but raised the consciousness of others and led them to learn the rules of power and stand up against the male leadership. Paralleling developments in other states and in Congress, in 1981 Minnette Doderer (Democrat, Iowa City) and Sue Mullins (Republican, Corwith) organized a women's caucus across party lines. Although not all female legislators joined, the caucus proved effective enough to win legislation on key issues dealing with women and children, including equal pay for work of comparable worth.

Schenken asserts that women brought "an additional perspective and an additional set of experiences" (xvi) to lawmaking, a proposition that she amply demonstrates for individual women. Mullins, for example, sought greater state regulation of day care providers; Johnie Hammond (Democrat, Ames), worked for a bill to require gender balance on state boards and commissions; a nurse, Jo Ann Zimmerman (Democrat, Waukee) pushed legislation to provide health care locally for pregnant women and their newborns; Joan Lipsky (Republican, Cedar Rapids) advocated reforms in the juvenile justice system; and Mary O'Halloran (Democrat, Cedar Falls) left her print on a bottle and beverage-can deposit law.

While women's stamp on Iowa policy resulted primarily from key individuals, in some instances female legislators acted in (near) unison. In order to gain a major transformation of the criminal code dealing with rape, they endured and answered comments that women lied about rape and/or provoked it by their appearance. All but one of the eight female lawmakers supported ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, and most rallied behind a state ERA in 1978 and 1990, only to see voters defeat it both times.

Organizing her book topically gave Schenken the opportunity to describe women's contributions to a host of legislation too large to be fully mentioned here. Yet the topical organization also leaves readers with fragmented images of female legislators and wishing for more complete biographies of some of them. Readers may also wish that the author had drawn more statistical data, indicating, for example, the precise proportion of female lawmakers who were married, were mothers, or worked outside the home and at what occupations. Nonetheless, this book provides fascinating detail about some remarkable women and men. It makes a valuable contribution to Iowa history and to the ongoing story of women's coming to power.

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