

Women fight for rights

By NATALIE HALPERN

"Women need to learn from labor unions the value of working in coalition," exhorted Patricia Silea.

Ms. Silea addressed a meeting of the Oakland Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW).

The Michigan Women's Commission, created in 1968, got initial funding in 1972, and consists of 15 members appointed by the governor.

The Lansing based commission is primarily an advocacy agency for women's rights.

It acts as an educational arm in defining and eliciting response to issues of concern to women, as well as being an administrative state agency.

"The women's rights movement has a hard time contending with labels," Ms. Silea said.

"It's time we laid to rest who 'one of them' is. We are being burdened by guilt by association.

"In some minds the terms feminist, libber, bra-burner, can't-get-a-man and lesbian are equal.

"The difficulty in getting support for programs comes with various methods of working toward that goal. That's where we could learn from labor unions about working in coalition."

The commission deals with the major areas of public information, health, sex discrimination in state government and employment.

One of the aims of the commission is to build a directory of women's organizations in the state.

"Once you get a directory of such organizations, it gives women a handle on political power. Politicians will answer a mandate of voters in their districts," she said.

She reminded her listeners that "women make up 50 percent of the population of Michigan, 58 percent of the registered voters and 58 percent of the voters in the last election."

Ms. Silea noted that Michigan is the only women's commission that has put out publications and is one of the few which is funded.

To date 30 of the 38 states needed to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment have done so. She predicts the measure will receive the necessary voters nationally.

"The State of Michigan has over 2000 laws now on the books which differentiate as to sex. The task force recommends changes in the statutes and proposes new legislation."

A statewide, state-sponsored

conference projected for this fall will deal with Michigan laws as they will be affected by the Equal Rights Amendment.

In the health field, concerns involve a woman's right to make decisions about her body, the care of her children, and the right to live out her life in dignity.

"Women are 60 percent of the population over 65 years of age, and they are discriminated against by social security, pension, insurance and credit laws.

"They have a right to a voice in policy decisions as to how they will live, in terms of health delivery systems," Ms. Silea said.

"There is sex discrimination in state government. Not enough women are appointed to boards and commissions."

"It's like a Chinese water torture — it changes one drop at a time."

The commission seeks to eliminate sex role stereotyping in the public schools, particularly in terms of text books.

In 1973 a precedent setting class suit was filed in Kalamazoo under Title 9 of the Federal Education Act which enjoined funds to the Kalamazoo school board to the tune of \$2 million. Since then, 5 other suits have been filed around the country.

Other major areas of interest are the granting of credit to women, establishing a talent bank of qualified women, and the educational and rehabilitation rights of female offenders.

She dismissed the protests of those who feel the ERA will undo existing protective labor legislation, declaring,

"That legislation doesn't exist. There's no law on the books in Michigan that has to do with the work break."

"As for weight lifting, the only law on the books in this state says a woman may not lift anything that is disproportionate to her weight, detrimental to her morals or interfere with motherhood."

"If you're talking about work hours, the law applied only to companies with fewer than 15 employees, and since the wording was fuzzy, the law has been repealed."

"It becomes important for women to be involved in women's rights," she said, "because they will reach a point in their lives when they realize it's happening to me, I'm the victim."

"Why doesn't someone do something? There's no one to do it unless we do it for ourselves."

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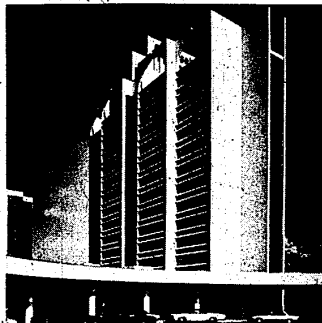
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Michigan Women's Commission Director Patricia Silea

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Fashion Calendar

DESIGNER APPEARANCE

March 8-9—John Weitz, American Men's Wear designer with his collection from 3 p.m.-6 p.m. Friday at Hudson's Northland and from 10 a.m.-noon Saturday at Hudson's Oakland Mall in the men's wear department.

SPECIAL FASHION EVENTS

March 14—Informal modeling from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. of the Stephan Casual collection at B. Siegel, Northland.

LUNCHEON SHOWS

Thursdays

By Hudson's in their Pontiac Room, Pontiac Mall.

By Montgomery Wards at Ted's, Pontiac Mall.

By Brayton's at Bloomfield Canopy.

Fridays

By Alvin's at Bedell's, Bloomfield Hills.

Tuesdays

By Alvin's at Cooper's Arms, Rochester.

By Brayton's at Duffy, Union Lake.

By Clair Kelly at Sussex House, Southfield.

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