

# Freshman legislator ready to act as catalyst for district changes

By SANDRA McDONOUGH and CONNIE HOFFERBER of The Oregonian staff

She labeled herself a "homemaker and mother of three" in the 1978 Voters' Pamphlet, but when Jo Simpson takes her seat as state representative Monday it will be with the distinction of being nine-term representative of Multnomah County District 10, and House speaker, Phil Lang.

The only Republican to win a seat in Multnomah County for the 1979 session of the Oregon Legislature, Mrs. Simpson said she capitalized on the fact that voters in her district were "ready for a change" in their legislative representation.

"Phil Lang's length of time in office hurt him. When a person has been in office that long, they forget about the people. They get too involved with committees and not with their constituency," said the 41-year-old resident of the Riverdale district.

The lone bill she has considered introducing this session would limit the number of consecutive terms a state legislator may serve.

"I don't see why we shouldn't have a limitation on the number of terms; we do in our higher offices. Some people say that's why we have elections every two years, to let the voters change their representation, but too often name familiarity allows the same people to be elected over and over.

"I originally thought we should limit it to four terms, but after talking to people in Salem, I don't think any proposal under five terms would pass," she said.

According to those who have worked with her on other campaigns as well as on her own, it was a combination of Lang's lack of support and her hard work that enabled her to win.

"She covered almost her entire district door to door. She had a strong base on the west side of the river where she lives and worked hard to get the votes on the east side in the Sellwood area," said Stan Baumhoffer, executive director of the Council of Elected Representatives.

Winning her post was no easy task, Mrs. Simpson said. Including the primary and general elections, she spent nine months campaigning in her district and

doing research on her opponent. Weeks after the election, she could discuss Lang's voting record with anybody who cared to ask about it.

When Election Day finally rolled around, Mrs. Simpson said, she wasn't sure whether she was going to be the winner. In addition, the results of the race seemed as the returns came in. Finally, when all the votes were tallied, Mrs. Simpson was declared the winner, beating Lang by 621 votes.

Mrs. Simpson said people had been trying to get her to run for a political office "for a long time." But before she took on such a time-consuming proposition she wanted to wait until her children were old enough to handle the change in their home life. Finally, after a family conference last winter with the children, Jennifer, 18, Tom, 16, and Mary, 13, and her lawyer husband, Robert, Mrs. Simpson decided it was time to run for the Legislature.

"The kids were great. They were very enthusiastic about the idea," she said.

In fact, her children were eager to help with the campaign work. They made lawn signs, knocked on a few doors in the district and helped build up support for their mother. Jennifer, a Lake Oswego High School student, kept track of campaign contributions and expenditures, which must be reported to state elections officials.

Seeing her family work together to accomplish one goal is not unusual for Mrs. Simpson. Born in Colorado, but raised on a farm in Milton-Freewater, Mrs. Simpson said that, in her family, everybody had to work together to get all the farm work done.

She attended Willamette University in Salem, majoring in sociology and journalism. It was during her college years that Mrs. Simpson got her first close-up glimpse at how the Oregon legislative system works, listening to floor debates in her free time.

It was also while she was at Willamette that Mrs. Simpson met her future husband. They were married on the evening of her college graduation day.

The couple moved to Portland, where Mrs. Simpson worked in a loan office until she had her first child. She has not worked in a full-time, paid position since then.

However, she has not been a sit-at-home housewife. She was particularly active in Camp Fire Girls and in 1970 was a key organizer of a movement to establish Tryon Creek State Park in Southwest Portland.

For the past several years, Mrs. Simpson also has been involved in Oregon Republican Party work. She was a volunteer helper on the campaigns of such veteran politicians as Roger Martin and Lee Johnson. In 1968, she helped with Bob Packwood's first race for the U.S. Senate, which her husband managed.

In the late 1960s, Mrs. Simpson also ran two of the early Dorchester conferences, the Oregon Republicans' annual meeting for discussing political issues.

"When I first got into politics Jo was the person I wanted to grow up to be just like," said Karen Whitman, president of Fair Management Ltd. who also worked on Mrs. Simpson's campaign. "I met her at the Dorchester Conference. She had a real sense of the important issues and the resource skills to pull it all together. I wanted to run the Dorchester just like she did, and I eventually did," said Ms. Whitman.

For the most part, Mrs. Simpson said, people both within and outside the party reacted "very positively" to her candidacy, and she received financial support from the Republican Party. Occasionally, she said, she ran into conservative thinkers who raised their eyebrows at the idea of a woman seeking a political post.

"It was annoying how many Republicans were shocked when I won," she said.

The new legislator said she has asked for a spot on the Intergovernmental Relations Committee, an assignment she believes appropriate for a representative from a district which touches on four governmental jurisdictions.

"I didn't campaign on bills that I would introduce," Mrs. Simpson said. "In fact, the attitude of many people is that there are too many of them already."

Regardless of what eventually happens in the 1979 legislative session, Mrs. Simpson is certain of one fact. In the 1980 race for the seat in House District 10, her opponent will be looking at her voting record just as she looked at Phil Lang's.

"My race will be harder in two years," she said.



Staff photos by RANDY WOOD  
NEW CAREER — The comfort of her home and family in Dunthorpe will have to be exchanged for the excitement and assembly meetings of the 1979 Oregon Legislature for first-time representative, Jo Simpson. Around piano at left are (from left) husband Robert, Tom 16, Jennifer, 18, Mary, 13, and Jo Simpson.

# Women outline issues of great concern, set legislative goals

By JUDY McDERMOTT of The Oregonian staff

The 1977 session of the Oregon Legislature brought legislation in the area of women's rights: a \$100,000 program for displaced homemakers, recognition of and potential funding of shelters for victims of domestic violence, a law recognizing marital rape, consideration of domestic service in divorce property settlements and job-sharing programs for state employees.

For the 14 women elected to the state Legislature last November (all in the House of Representatives), those victories are still vivid memories. But freshman and veteran legislators alike, the nine Democrats and five Republicans have set new goals for women's legislation for the 60th Legislative Assembly that convenes Monday.

Oregonians may be assured certain legislation will be unofficially tagged "women's" and women legislators will fight for those issues as two organizations, the legislators' own informal caucus and the more formal Women's Rights Coalition, gear for action.

Nancie Fadeley, D-Eugene, unofficial dean of the caucus as the state's senior female legislator, recalled the total cooperation of the women of the 1977 Legislature on two key women's issues, displaced homemakers and reaffirmation of the Equal Rights Amendment. "In Oregon, we've traditionally worked together on legislation of interest to women. Partisanship hasn't been an issue."

In 1977, the Democrat said, "I went to the other women legislators on the displaced homemaker bill and said this was a piece of legislation I'd like to see sponsored by all of them. All signed it and were most supportive of it."

"Later, at an informal gathering, we agreed that there were pieces of legislation that all of us as women were interested in and should work together on."

Although the 1977 Legislature appropriated \$100,000 for a displaced homemaker center in Eugene, further attention to the needs of the woman alone must be forthcoming from the 1979 Legislature, said Gretchen Kafoury, D-Portland.

"The problem with the funding is that it all went to Eugene. What we need now is not a new but an expanded program."

Ms. Fadeley said that she has "counted on the initial program expanding. There are so many people we're not serving. Unless a woman alone at 50 can find a life, it's not safe for a young woman to be married."

The Eugene Democrat said that in an effort to get marriage recognized as an economic partnership, she would introduce a bill this session making it possible for state employee retirement benefits to be divisible in the event of divorce.

Ms. Fadeley and other female legislators called domestic violence "the really important issue" for women in the 1979 Legislature. "It's something we've not faced up to, an issue women legislators need to take leadership in. Even a kind man has difficulty handling this one. But we will have male support." (Senate Bill 789, which passed the 1977 Legislature, made it possible to fund shelters for victims of domestic violence through the Department of Human Resources, but a requested \$100,000 for financing was not granted.)

Ms. Fadeley said she would also be looking at counseling for battered women and children who are victims of domestic violence, and "some provision for violent men, who often need more help than the women."

Freshman legislator Donna B. Zajonc, R-Salem, said her primary women's issues would be battered women and violence in the family.

"Unfortunately, we have had a so-



GRETCHEN KAFOURY



DONNA ZAJONC



NANCIE FADELEY

ciety that seems to turn its back on violence," said Ms. Zajonc, a Marion County psychiatric nurse who works with battered women and abused children.

Veteran and novice female legislators alike are looking to the caucus to provide a cohesive front for the women's issues likely to come before the Legislature, although Ms. Zajonc said she is "watching and observing all of the coalitions at this point. I'm very supportive of the caucus, but we're seeing fewer and less well-defined women's issues to rally around."

The fact that the caucus remains informal, said Ms. Fadeley, reflects the fact that "we've done well in this state

erasing discrimination as we've found it on the books." Saying the number of Republican women legislators this session is significant, she noted that "if we can work together on issues, it will be even more obvious that we can work across party lines."

Freshman legislator Joyce Cohen, D-Lake Oswego, said that while she campaigned on and has a strong interest in environmental and local government issues, she will be looking closely at the issue of child care funding, "a problem that's never been addressed effectively or adequately," during the 1979 session. The caucus, she said, could be "a focus to be reckoned with" when it addresses such an issue.

First-time legislator Jane Cease, D-Portland, expects to take some cues on women's issues from the Women's Rights Coalition, an organization of several women's groups which will have a full-time lobbyist at the session.

After last session's landmark reaffirmation of the Equal Rights Amendment, Oregon's female legislators aren't expecting further challenges. But if problems arise, warned Ms. Fadeley, "We'll (reaffirm) again and again and again."

Neither Ms. Fadeley nor Ms. Kafoury expects a formal women's legislative caucus to come out of the 1979 session. "What you generally find with caucuses is that they're formalized in states

where women haven't much to do because they haven't been given significant appointments," said Ms. Fadeley. "I'd rather be too busy than have time to sit in caucus."

Ms. Kafoury agrees. "Quite a few of us feel that until we get under way, it's not appropriate to come in with another divisive force. If women were not receiving responsible assignments, though, we'd certainly be frustrated."

"Considering my interest in women's issues, if anyone were motivated to formalize the caucus, it would be me. But I've been very content with the role women are playing in the Legislature."