

"It certainly increases the number of people who come to your door," says McAllister of her appointment as transportation appropriations co-chairman. "Becoming chairman of the group gives you a much broader perspective." In the Senate, all appropriations subcommittees are headed by men.

In its effectiveness rankings surveys, the Center also asks respondents to rate which of the General Assembly's committees were most powerful. Of the 12 committees designated most powerful in the 1991 session by respondents, only one was chaired by a woman. Barnes headed the House Education Committee, rated the House's fifth most powerful committee.²⁵

In the Senate, Democrats ignored women in selecting officers for the 1993 session, choosing Sen. Marc Basnight (D-Dare) as president pro tempore of the Senate and Sen. Ralph Hunt, an

African-American from Durham County, as majority whip. Cochrane, the Senate's sole female officer, was chosen Republican minority whip. Basnight says the fact that women hold fewer leadership positions in the Senate has more to do with seniority than gender. "You look first for competence and not for [gender]," Basnight says. "There has to be some experience in the office."

The seven women serving in the Senate, while promising, "haven't been there any period of time," says Basnight. "There's no seniority there. In the Senate, you have to *compete* for committee assignments and chairmanships. To be able to do the job takes experience and time."

Adds Sen. Leslie Winner, a freshman Democrat from Mecklenburg, "In the Senate, no freshmen—male or female—were selected to chair standing committees, and all Democrats who were not freshmen—male and female—*were* selected."

Women's Issues? Yes and No

Are there really such things as women's issues? I put the question to 16 Democratic and Republican lawmakers. Of the dozen who responded, the consensus was "not really."

Issues that were once considered important only to women—such as child care—have become more relevant to male politicians in recent years. Even issues like abortion, domestic violence, and problems associated with displaced homemakers—once depicted solely as "women's issues"—now also are being cast as human rights and public health issues.

Still, there's something paradoxical about the responses of female lawmakers to this question. They say there are no women's issues, and then they go on to name some. Most women could think of only one or two, but string them together and you get a list of women's concerns, with few differences between the two parties.

That list includes domestic violence, pay equity, abortion, mandatory insurance coverage for mammograms and pap smears, breast feeding in public, and child care and other child

advocacy issues.

Several of the female lawmakers said they are the ones who promote and best understand these issues. In that limited sense, they *are* women's issues. Still, they say issues that affect women generally affect everyone. "These are people's issues," says Rep. Joni Bowie (R-Guilford).

Rep. Bertha Holt (D-Alamance) says elimination of the spousal defense in rape prosecutions during the 1993 session of the General Assembly was the closest she could come to identifying a woman's issue. As for domestic violence, she says, "I think it's a family issue. I think it's a public health issue. The chief reason for women going to the emergency room is that they have been beaten."

"Women have been painted into a box," says Rep. Connie Wilson (R-Mecklenburg). "Women's issues encompass the whole scheme of what we deal with in Raleigh. All the issues are intertwined. I see all the issues as women's issues."

—Betty Mitchell Gray