DURING THE 1973 OREGON legislative session, a bipartisan group of female legislators — almost half in their first session — worked with political activists and allies in the state capitol to pass eleven explicitly feminist bills into law. That such a small number of relatively inexperienced legislators was able to pass such a substantial portion of a feminist legislative agenda in just one session is unprecedented in the history of the Oregon legislature and is due some historical analysis. It also makes for a great story.

Oregon’s female legislators were successful in the 1973 session because that unique window of time produced a favorable political climate, support of the male governor and male legislators, organizational strength of Oregon’s women’s organizations, and a sense of overall optimism within the Oregon women’s movement. Because of their experience, organizational competence, and ability to work together as a woman-identified group, female legislators were able to utilize this brief period of ideal conditions to pass feminist legislation rapidly into law. These conditions have not been replicated since in Oregon. This story is especially relevant to the historical record because general assessments of female state legislators in office during the 1970s describe only “token” female legislators who were characterized by unobtrusiveness, isolation from other women, and an inability to advocate for group interests — demonstrably not the case during the 1973 Oregon legislative session.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSSCRIPTS from Norma Paulus and Betty Roberts — both members of the legislature during the 1973 session — and Gretchen Kafoury, who worked closely with the women legislators as a lobbyist, provide a general picture of the political climate and women’s movement in Oregon in the 1970s and also reflect the considerable expertise and analysis of those involved. The oral history transcripts are supplemented by boxes of old papers, memoranda, and news clippings from the personal archives of Kafoury and Maurine Neuburger (who served in the legislature from 1950 to 1954), now archived at Portland State University and University of Tom McCall signs equal rights legislation. Witnesses are (left to right): Senate President Jason Boe, Speaker of the House Richard Eyman, Secretary of State Clay Myers, Representative Nancie Fadely (Chair of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee), Representative Norma Paulus, and Representative Grace Peck. McCall’s note on the bottom reads, “Warm thanks, Norma, for championing equal rights! Gov. Tom McCall Feb, 1973.”
feminism is heavily utilized in this article and is often misunderstood in contemporary discourse. The various American women’s movements lack consensus regarding this term and have continually reinterpreted its connotations throughout their history. We utilized Tuor’s explanations in the 1973 Oregon Women’s Political Caucus Quick Look booklet to create historically grounded and contextually appropriate definitions for the narrow purposes of this article. The booklet is dedicated to “feminists, women and men” and defines feminism as the process of “creating a world of liberty and justice for all persons.” Given this context, we believe the women profiled in this article interpreted feminism as a broad process of creating equality between the genders. They viewed feminist legislation, another term found in this article, as legislation that supported equality between the genders by opening opportunity, preventing discrimination, and addressing policy issues that had previously been ignored by male legislators. Work to pass feminist legislation was just one part of the many formal and informal efforts by Oregonian women during the late twentieth century to improve the lives of women. All of these efforts, electoral and non-electoral, cumulatively created the public opinion and social shift necessary to pass feminist legislation.

On January 18, 1854, the Oregon Territorial legislature adopted the state motto “She Flies with Her Own Wings.” In a 1973 article, historian D’Ann Campbell utilized the data from a 2,800-person sample of face-to-face interviews with women from California, Washington, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico to “reconstruct a profile of a western woman — her lifestyle, attitudes, plans for the future.” In analyzing the data, Campbell found a surprising “egalitarian bent” in roughly one-third of Western women, who stated, “men’s and women’s moral standards should be the same.” These regional attitudes of egalitarianism, excitement about life, and optimism had a significant impact on the continued activism of Oregon women into the mid-twentieth century, because they all contributed to a larger social message of Oregon women’s worth in the construction of a vibrant civil society and to Oregon’s formal and informal political process. Most significantly, recent scholars have found an increased number of female legislators in states, like Oregon, with a strong cultural emphasis on fairness, equality, and morality. That emphasis on an ethic of fairness and equality was present very early in Oregon history. Prior to achieving suffrage, Oregon women organized around the 1905 Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition, working collaboratively to bring greater attention to women’s issues through suffrage activities and the construction of a Sacagawea statue. A year later, Portland nurses traveled to San Francisco to assist in the rescue effort following the San Francisco earthquake and fire. At the same time, Oregon women organized for suffrage. Frustrated that several surrounding states had granted women the right to vote ahead of Oregon, local suffragists pressed ahead, ultimately winning the right to vote in 1912. That victory was before women won on the national level in 1920 through the Nineteenth Amendment but behind Idaho, Washington, and California.

True to the regional emphasis on female activism and the “new morality” of optimism in the West, the Oregon legislature has almost always had at least one female legislator since 1915 — only three years after Oregon voters granted women suffrage (the one exception is the 1927 session). One of these notable female state legislators is the Honorable Betty Roberts, who acted as a bridge between the earliest cohort of female legislators, who were elected as “placeholders” to replace husbands or fathers, and the next generation of female legislators, who were elected in their own right, beginning in larger numbers in 1972. Looking back on her transformation from private citizen to public official, Roberts commented that, “it just seemed to fall into place,”
which suggests she benefitted immensely from regional social mores about the public role of women that Campbell noted in her study and from the continual presence of female legislators in Oregon since 1929.6

Roberts, who went on to become Oregon’s first female state Supreme Court Justice, got her formal political start like many female activists of the 1960s — as a volunteer.7 Her interest in politics was piqued as a returning college student at Portland State College (now Portland State University) in the 1950s. With her “growing interest in politics,” Roberts decided to run for the Oregon House of Representatives in 1962. In 1961, The Oregon House had a total of six female Representatives, out of sixty total seats, and eleven women in the entire legislature (Figure 1). Disappointed when she lost this first race, Roberts decided to pursue a doctorate in political science. Though she was highly qualified, she was nonetheless denied the chance to apply to the Political Science doctoral program at University of Oregon. The chairman of the department thought Roberts, at the age of thirty-nine, was “too old” to be worth the “Oregon’s taxpayers investment.” She was furious; however, she was able to gain admission to a nighttime law school program in Portland, setting her on a path of legal activism and scholarship. Newly determined and wiser to the pervasive nature of gender discrimination, Roberts won a seat in the 1965 Oregon House of Representatives in 1964, out of a competitive field of nine contenders.8

From the 1950s onward, women such as Roberts had become important to the electoral strategy of Oregon Democrats, as the party struggled to find male candidates who had time to serve in Oregon’s citizen legislature and who could afford to serve for the low pay. This influx of female legislators helped the Democrats gain control of the legislature in the mid 1950s and retain it until the 1960s. In 1965, when Roberts first took office, there were seven other women in the Oregon legislature.9

Newspaper articles from both national and local outlets about Oregon’s early (pre-1970s) female legislators were rife with stereotypes, and these women were reluctant to identify with a larger women’s collective. In statements to the Oregon media, they strove to maintain an outwardly positive appearance and glossed over any incidences of discrimination. Political scientists generally refer to this balancing as “role incongruity,” or the tension between “social norms of femininity and the norms of power.”10 Because these early female legislators had broken the most important tenet of appropriate femininity — namely, confinement to the private sphere — they managed their sense of role incongruity by shaping their public image very carefully, sometimes by emphasizing the exceptionalism of Oregon women or by outwardly conforming to stereotypes of hyper-femininity. Attempts to delve into feminist legislation were tentative, with Oregon’s female legislators of the 1960s expressing their role incongruity conflicts through individualistic actions and legislation. Roberts notes that there was “little

Betty Roberts is photographed here on September 24, 1964, the year she won her first election.
conclusive action on women’s issues” in the Oregon legislature during that decade and earlier because “women as a group were not organized, did not have a unified political agenda, and were still thinking individually.” Roberts also found the legislature lacked the meaningful mentoring and collectivism necessary for a distinct feminist agenda to emerge. The esteemed Oregon Congresswoman Maurine Neuberger, for example, had been recognized in 1955 by the Christian Science Monitor because she “was responsible for [legislation] putting color into Oregon’s now colored margarine.” The legislation allowed women to avoid the laborious process of coloring margarine by hand, but Neuberger and the other female legislators of the 1950s did not typically support or propose legislation that challenged the status quo of normative gender roles. One notable exception is Neuberger and Oregon Congresswoman Edith Green’s public support of equal pay legislation. These first steps were telling, as they showed recognition of and a desire to address systematic discrimination women faced in the workplace, a phenomenon that these women sometimes discounted in public interviews. The local media, however, decided to pick up on a perceived lack of collectivism with articles such as reporter Harold Hughes’s “Dedicated Male Hunts in Vain for Legislative Bills Giving Aid to Women,” in which he wrote: “It is easier to find a woman wearing a below-knee skirt at the Oregon Legislature than it is to uncover a bill that gives aid and comfort to females.” But with an increased demand for “government accountability” from constituents, Roberts concluded, the 1965 legislature was significant in that it “provided an early glimpse of an old era dying and a new one being born.”

THE FIRST GROUP OF FEMALE political leaders to make the transition to mainstream political feminist action began their activism during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In Oregon living rooms far from Washington, D.C., a group of young, politically active Oregon women began to meet once a week. Calling themselves the “Wednesday Winos,” they met to discuss their lives, families, and experiences over glasses of wine. They concluded that, as empowered college graduates, the women’s movement “didn’t have much to do” with their lives. Gretchen Kafoury was among the regular Wednesday Winos, having begun her political career as an activist in the Civil Rights and anti-war movements during the 1960s. After graduating from Whitman College and working on her then-husband’s campaign and other local and national races, she soon began to notice that women were “behind the scenes” and “did basically all of the organizing, all of the work, but got none of the credit.”

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Across the city of Portland, Vera Katz also honed her political acumen while “licking stamps and soaking up the atmosphere of the high-charged Kennedy campaign.” As she tended to her family and stuffed campaign envelopes, Katz also began to realize that she was not fully content in her role as a housewife and campaign volunteer, something she had in common with other educated and ambitious women of her time as described by Betty Friedan’s 1963 The Feminine Mystique.

Kafoury recalls that it was not until the Wednesday Winos learned that the Portland City Club, an exclusive political club to which many of their husbands and male friends belonged, had voted down a proposal to “[admit] women at a January 1971 meeting” that “we got kind of active.” Astute and savvy from their volunteer political campaigning and lobbying, the Wednesday Winos realized that one of the reasons the vote did not pass was no one had taken the time to organize support and publicity for it. A coalition emerged,
initially unsuccessful, the Portland City Club protest played an integral role in awakening and organizing the POWs to advocate collectively against gender discrimination. As scholars Verba, Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady have argued, the perception that one has a “direct stake in a particular policy” creates “a strong additional impact on the likelihood of being active on issues related to that policy.” There is also evidence that suggests “local activism is the pathway” to elected office for the “less credentialed ambitious.” Such characterizations fit these women, and it was the first of many formal political, feminist actions they would take.

IT IS NO COINCIDENCE that the increase in female elected officials in 1973 happened as local female activists began to work collectively to address sexist laws and institutions. Many scholars have compiled a compelling body of evidence that suggests “particular socio-demographic groups are best able to represent the policy preferences of that group.” What is surprising is how initially effective these female legislators were. In her book *How Women Legislate*, political scientist Sue Thomas analyzes questionnaires and surveys of female elected officials nationwide to assess national trends among female legislators in the 1970s and 1980s. Thomas’s study provides us with a tool for determining the effectiveness of Oregon’s first generation of female political leaders as compared to their nationwide peers. It appears Oregon’s female legislators were ahead of their national peers in experience, organizational competence, and effectiveness in passing feminist legislation.

Only five female legislators, or 3.6 percent of the entire Oregon legislature, held office in 1969 (Figure 2, below). After 1969, however, the number of female legislators began to increase steadily. One of these women was Norma Paulus, who had been born in Belgrade, Nebraska, and then migrated west with her family, settling in Oregon. In school, Paulus was lauded for her incredible intellect, but she was unable to afford a college education. Instead, she became the assistant to Leland Duncan, the District Attorney of Harney County, Oregon, at the age of seventeen. She then moved to Salem, Oregon, to work as a legal secretary on the Oregon Supreme Court. Hired, as she tells it, for her “great legs,” Paulus again proved a quick study in awakening and organizing the POWs to advocate collectively against gender discrimination. As scholars Verba, Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady argue, the perception that one has a “direct stake in a particular policy” creates “a strong additional impact on the likelihood of being active on issues related to that policy.”

Gretchen Kafoury dons a “security officer” costume for one of the Politically Oriented Women’s (POW’s) weekly protests of the City Club in 1972 and 1973 as other marchers picket with her outside the Benson Hotel in downtown Portland.
first elected as a Republican to the Oregon State Senate in 1970, having won her race with her usual aplomb.

The 1970s emerged as a heady time for Oregon women in elected office. The increasing ascension of women into mainstream state politics during the decade was part of a national trend of increased female representation. Nationally, the new women's movement began to receive widespread recognition in the United States and the public was increasingly supportive — at least theoretically — of its basic tenets, including "women working outside the home, female political candidates, gender equity . . . and the Equal Rights Amendment itself."²⁵ Most important, there was a "dramatic increase" in "egalitarian attitudes toward women in the early 1970s," a change that mirrored a similar regional trend in the West years before. These changes were vital to the success of female legislators in the 1973 legislative session.²⁶

Oregon female legislators in particular were experienced and politically savvy. As Roberts recalled, "many of them had been to the legislature before and testified on bills or worked on campaigns."²⁷ Katz decided to take on Republican incumbent State Representative Fritzi Chuinard in 1972 and won by tirelessly "walking door-to-door through the district."²⁸ In the 1973 session, Katz was joined by a new coterie of young female state legislators who succeeded the retiring female legislators of the 1950s and 1960s. This new generation of female legislators and lobbyists decided to expand their legislative focus beyond margarine.

In 1972, eleven women were either re-elected or newly elected to the 1973 Oregon legislature (Figure 1), comprising 12.2 percent of the entire Oregon legislature (Figure 2). They were: Senators Betty Browne and Betty Roberts, and Representatives Mary Burrows, Peg Dereli, Nancie Fadeley, Vera Katz, Norma Paulus, Grace Peck, Mary Rieke, Mary Roberts, and Pat Whiting. As Roberts puts it, these were not just "women to fill seats."²⁹ Indeed, 1973 is remembered by them as a pivotal year for feminist legislation, the year when, as Kafoury put it, Oregon went from "no acknowledgement that sex discrimination even existed" to a wave of feminist legislation that by 1977 had given Oregon "the most progressive women's legislative accomplishments in the country."³⁰

In the early 1970s, women formed four organizations that would be integral to the success of the feminist legislators who challenged the status quo in the 1973 Oregon legislature: the Equal Rights Alliance, the Oregon branches of the National Organization for Women and the Oregon Women's Political Caucus, and the Women's Caucus in the Oregon legislature. Kafoury,

Images from the Oregon Blue Book, courtesy of the Oregon State Archives

The eleven female members of the 1973 Oregon legislative session broke barriers and advanced women's policy interests.
Katz, Paulus, and Roberts were “right in the middle” of these groups and the feminist activism work in the 1973 Oregon legislature. These groups gained legitimacy with the inclusion of “radicals” such as Kafoury and with more cautious women such as Eleanor Davis, who brought with them more traditional organizational skills. Davis organized the Oregon Council for Women’s equality in 1970 and had chaired it since then, and in November 1972, she helped found the Equal Rights Alliance — purposefully created with the same acronym as the Equal Rights Amendment — with the goal of ratifying the ERA and lobbying for feminist legislation in the Oregon legislature. Thanks to Kafoury’s experience with the Portland City Club desegregation campaign and as a political campaign worker, the Equal Rights Alliance (directed by Davis) hired her as its first lobbyist, and she stepped into the Oregon Statehouse in that role in 1973. With a burgeoning number of female representatives in both the Oregon House and Senate, the legislators joined together to form the Women’s Caucus in the 1973 session. The caucus, with all eleven female members of the legislature, could pass “anti-gender discrimination bills” by threatening to “hold up other legislation.” Both inside and outside the statehouse, the women formed a strong bond, cemented by their desire to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment.

If the Portland City Club protest brought many of these women together, the drive to ratify the proposed national Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was the force that compelled them to create a strategic political action plan. Though the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment was the foremost priority of the Equal Rights Alliance in 1973, several female lawyers active in Oregon’s women’s movement also created a strategic plan to prioritize additional pieces of feminist legislation, having identified existing areas within Oregon law that discriminated against women. They chose a platform comprised only of legislation that had the potential to affect positively the “largest number of women.” This primary focus on feminist issues, and subsequent political strategy to advance these issues, is unusual in comparison to female legislators in other states at the time. Earlier studies of female state legislators in the 1970s found that, in general, they “expressed more liberal attitudes than men on feminist issues . . . [but] when asked to rank their political priorities, [those] priorities were not significantly different from the legislative focus of their male colleagues.”

The Oregon Women’s Political Caucus ultimately supported fourteen pieces of feminist legislation that came to a floor vote in the Oregon Senate and twenty pieces that came to a floor vote in the Oregon House in 1973. Of that legislation, eleven bills were signed into law with a success rate of 79 percent in the Senate and 55 percent in the House. More important, with rare exception, all of the women in the legislature — Republican and Democrat, urban and rural, secular and religious, conservative and liberal — were united to pass the proposed feminist legislation.

The content of the successful feminist bills included legislation on civil rights, family planning, childcare, several bills on employment, and even an anti-prostitution measure. The civil rights legislation, House Bill 2116, prohibited discrimination based on sex or marital status in public accommodations, housing, and education. The two family planning bills included SB 713, which increased access to voluntary sterilization, and SB 25, which provided for the sale of condoms outside of pharmacies and in vending machines. The childcare legislation marked the first time the State of Oregon “made a significant monetary commitment to child care.” Several pieces of employment legislation were successful in the legislature, including provisions in SB 2354 to update discriminatory insurance code conditions; SB 555, which gave monies for affirmative action policies; HJR 31, a “legislative mandate for equality in job classifications”; SB 46, which introduced gender-neutral language so that “workmen’s compensation” became “worker’s compensation”; and HB 2237, a bill that remedied an unfair wage regulation from the Attorney General. Perhaps the most radical legislation these women passed was a clever prostitution bill that “made the purchaser of a sexual act as guilty [criminally liable] as the person who sells.” Together, these bills addressed many longstanding discriminatory laws and practices in Oregon. Despite the lack of economic and cultural diversity among Oregon’s female legislators and the women’s movement more broadly at this time, the laws addressed wrongs that affected working class women, people of color, and sex workers. Additionally, most of the legislation passed with broad support from male legislators. That such a large bloc of comprehensive feminist legislation on a broad array of topics spearheaded by a minority group of political newcomers passed through the Oregon legislature in one session is highly unusual and worthy of close examination.

SEVERAL FACTORS CAN HELP explain why 1973 was such a pivotal year for feminist legislation in Oregon. Despite the emphasis on gender in this article, a body of scholarly work has shown that gender is not the sole, or necessarily the most significant, analytical tool for understanding “difference in power usage in organizational settings.” In her analysis of the second-wave women’s movement of the late 1960s to the 1970s, Inviting Women’s Rebellion: a Political Process Interpretation of the Women’s Movement, political scientist Anne N. Costain found Process Theory, referred to in this article as Political Opportunity Theory, to be a good fit for analyzing the rapid change that resulted from the women’s movement. This particular framework takes into account the multiple effects of political climate, organizational strength,
and psychological state within the movement. Using Political Opportunity Structure as an analytical frame, three important factors explain this gendered phenomenon: a favorable political climate, the organizational strength of women’s organizations, and the general optimism within the movement. Together, these three factors allow for a fuller explanation of success in passing feminist legislation during the 1973 session.

Favorable political climate can determine whether or not a social movement will have a significant impact on policy and legislation. 4 One significant change in Oregon’s political climate that created the opening for the ERA ratification, and other feminist legislation, was a meaningful increase in the number of female legislators. It has been well documented that as the percentage of female legislators increases, so does the introduction and “rate of enactment” of feminist legislation. The Oregon legislature experienced a significant increase in the number of female elected officials after 1969 (Figure 1). Sue Thomas determined that a mass of 10 percent female representation is initially “necessary for women’s distinct interests to emerge.” 5 From 1971 to 1973, the percentage of female legislators in Oregon increased from 8 to 12 (Figure 2), well above the national average of 4.2 percent in 1971. 6 Thomas notes that in the case of a “skewed” group of 15 percent female representa-

tion or less (which was characteristic of the Oregon legislature in between 1973 and 1975), women would be perceived as tokens, and this status alters behavior. Rather than blending into the mainstream, the female tokens continuously respond to their differential status—usually in some extreme fashion, such as isolation or distancing themselves from other women. 7

Thomas’s predictions do not hold to the qualitative or quantitative data on Oregon female legislators in 1973. Research on tokenism by political scientist Jocelyn Crowley, however, does illuminate why Oregon’s female legislators were so effective at only 12 percent representation. Crowley defines tokens as “members of a small minority in an overwhelmingly majority organizational culture.” She finds:

- under the fifteen percent threshold, token women [in legislative office] simply have the impact of the percent women variable . . . Once women cross the fifteen percent threshold, their impact on the passage of [group-determined] legislation is still positive but lower in magnitude . . . There are, in other words, diminishing returns to adding additional women to already higher levels of women in office. 8

Crowley suggests that when the number of female legislators starts to increase toward the point at which they are no longer perceived as tokens, “members of the majority . . . face a real threat to their dominance. They react to this threat by increasing the barriers to legislative success for the tokens.” It is only until proportions reach approximately 35 percent representation that the prospect for “coalition building” emerges. 9 In other words, though Oregon’s female legislators did not have enough representation to transcend the “token” label, they were positioned under the fifteen percent threshold, and therefore in a statistically perfect spot during that session to affect change.

Around the nation, Thomas finds that only when legislatures develop “tilted groupings” of 15 to 30 percent representation or achieve “balance” at 40 percent or more of the total legislators can the female legislators “respond to the environment in an unrestrained fashion.” 10 The highly active role of Oregon female legislators in the 1973 session bucked general national trends in which 10 percent representation only marked the beginning of a group consciousness. Because group consciousness within the Oregon legislatures had begun to be developed in previous sessions. Given that Oregon did not reach levels of “tilted representation” until 1979, at 15.6 percent representation (Figure 2), and has not reached “balance” to this day, there must have been supportive structural forces other than increased representation that allowed Oregon’s female legislators to achieve their political objectives in 1973.
Beyond representation, several other factors created a supportive political climate. Earl Blumenauer, who began his political career in 1973 as a state representative and early ally of feminist legislation in the Oregon legislature, reflected on the time period in an *Oregonian* interview: “With moderate Republican Governor Tom McCall in office . . . the floodgates opened” for progressive legislation. Not only was there a moderate governor who was willing to support and sign feminist legislation into law, there was also a Democratic majority in the Oregon House and Senate in 1973. This first Democratic majority in fourteen years created a political climate generally more sympathetic to more progressive feminist legislation. Roberts also notes that there were several moderate Republicans in the Oregon legislature in 1973. Because the party caucus “wasn’t where the business was done” during the early 1970s, according to Kafoury, partisanship certainly existed but did not drive the political process in Oregon at that time. Republicans in the Senate voted for 67.53 percent of the feminist legislation in 1973, while Republicans in the House voted for, on average, 61.4 percent of the feminist legislation. The Republicans were not as supportive of feminist legislation as the Senate and House Democrats, who voted for 80.08 percent and 77.1 percent of the legislation. Nevertheless, because of the absence of a large number of far-right conservative opponents, a wide majority of the feminist legislation was supported by a plurality of the legislature. Additionally, research on “backlash,” defined as “any form of resistance . . . towards policies, programs, and initiatives undertaken by organizations to promote the hiring and advancement of marginalized [people],” suggests that, because of the rapid speed with which the Oregon’s women’s movement was able to coordinate its 1973 legislative platform, there was not sufficient time for a highly organized activist movement to emerge in opposition. Existing research on the extent of backlash to the feminist movement is mixed, but the lack of organized opposition certainly facilitated passage of much of the feminist legislation in 1973.

Male legislators in 1973 also became dependable supporters of the women’s movement, showing a willingness to vote across gender lines. As women became a more powerful post–World War II constituency, it became increasingly risky to vote against policies perceived to be important to them. Roberts maintains that with the “new crop” of younger legislators in the 1973 session came willingness among some of the male legislators to support feminist legislation. At the beginning of 1973, Roberts counted ten male senators whom she thought would “consistently” vote for feminist legislation and “about twenty men in the House who could be counted on” as well. Though the number of supportive males combined with the female legislators did not constitute an outright majority, it placed the Women’s Caucus and female lobbyists in a position where it was possible to gather the necessary majority votes from various legislators interested in particular legislation. Some men, such as Senator Ed Fadeley (D; husband of Nancie Fadeley) and Representative Bill Gwinn (R), even sponsored affirmative action and anti-discrimination bills, two key pieces of feminist legislation that became law in 1973, and Senator Keith Burbidge (D) also introduced “two bills that [the Women’s Caucus] adopted” as part of their platform. This support of feminist legislation is especially significant because the female legislators tended to “claim ownership” of the entire package of feminist legislation, which meant that the male legislators’ contributions had the potential to be overlooked. Statistics from 1973 support Roberts’s assertions: of the fourteen pieces of feminist legislation that came to a floor vote in the Senate, an average 75.4 percent of male legislators voted in support of it. Similarly, almost 70 percent of male legislators voted for One of the most significant pieces of legislation passed in the 1973 session, House Bill 2116 banned discrimination based on sex and marital status. Many female legislators were sponsors of the bill, and Stephen Kafoury, former husband of lobbyist Gretchen Kafoury, was also a sponsor. Stephen made his office available to Gretchen while she was lobbying in the legislature.
the twenty pieces of feminist legislation that went to a floor vote in the House.34

The combination of a progressive governor, a slight progressive-Democratic majority in the House and the Senate, a crop of new and young legislators, increased female representation in the legislature, lack of backlash or organizational opposition, and significant support from key male allies created a favorable political climate for feminist legislation to thrive in 1973. Many of these individual conditions were apparent within other states; however, the combination of these factors allowed for Oregon’s rapid policy change.

SEVERAL PROMINENT WOMEN’S organizations in Oregon, including the Equal Rights Alliance and the Women’s Caucus in the Oregon legislature, came into prominence during the early 1970s. The formation and existence of these groups in and of themselves suggest the growing organizational power of female legislators in Oregon, but they also made an important impact on the success in the Oregon legislature by supporting the candidacies of female elected officials and by lobbying determinedly for the feminist legislation.

One indicator of organizational strength is the ability to create and articulate a cohesive public image and disciplined messaging strategy. Such discipline is evident in the public statements of Oregon’s female legislators regarding the ERA ratification and other successful legislative and activist efforts. That messaging strategy was coordinated by Oregon’s women’s organizations. In contrast to the East Coast women’s movement, whose inchoate organizational strategy and anti-hierarchical focus allowed individual women to create their own (sometimes unproductive) talking points, the public testimony during the Oregon House and Senate hearings in support of the ERA was highly focused.35 Oregon’s female political leaders stuck to a script of rationality, anti-emotionalism, and practicality. A typical example is Kafoury’s remarks to the Oregonian in support of the ERA: “[Kafoury] fears that ‘emotion, rather than reasonable facts’ will dominate the testimony at the ERA hearings. ‘I suspect they [the opponents] will not concentrate their arguments on legal things.’” Kafoury stated that the women testifying in support of the ERA would “stick to the facts.”36 Roberts also elicited applause during testimony in the House and Senate hearings, in which she urged the members of the panel to “not be stirred by [the opponents’] issues of emotionalism.”37 Opponents of the ERA displayed the indulgent “bad behavior” often stereotypically associated with “pushy” or “crazy” feminists. At the Oregon Senate hearing for the ERA, for example, a woman identified as “Mrs. Peck Reeder” allegedly shoved an elderly senator after she accused him of not paying adequate attention to her testimony opposing the ERA.38 Kafoury and Roberts’s carefully cultivated talking points helped them obtain a measure of respectability and admiration as professionals inside the Oregon legislature. Women’s organizations outside the legislature not only helped craft strategy but also supported women who ran for political office and lobbied legislators.

In 1973, a true milestone in the women’s movement was the formation of a women’s interest group inside the Oregon legislature — the Women’s Caucus, which was established that year. Roberts remembers how Paulus, a prominent Republican, put the Women’s Caucus in motion when she told Roberts, “I think we need to form a Women’s Caucus to talk about getting the ERA passed” and suggested that Roberts chair the bi-partisan group.39 This caucus rapidly gained power, which helps explains why female legislators were successful so quickly and with such small numbers of female elected officials. Thomas notes that of the states that were most successful in passing feminist legislation, most of them had a vibrant Women’s Caucus. The only state that was successful in passing feminist legislation without a Women’s Caucus was Washington, but at 30.6 percent female representation in 1973, Washington was at the precipice of gender “balance” and thus could use political clout to pass feminist legislation.40 Because Oregon did not have “balance” or even a “tilted” grouping at the time, passing feminist legislation required a strong and functional Women’s Caucus. The success of the Women’s Caucus also gave individual women the ability to promote additional legislation. Paulus and Katz, for example, forced a bill to the floor of the Oregon House that “allowed women to wrestle.”41 Declared Paulus, “[Katz] and I threw that in just to kind of flex our muscles.”42 The legislation had not received the support of the rest of the Women’s Caucus or the Equal Rights Alliance, because the groups supported only bills with the greatest reach.

The Women’s Caucus certainly was important in female legislators’ ability to press legislation forward, but the true test of legislative strength is getting legislation to the floor for a vote. Traditionally in the Oregon
legislature, female legislators were scattered in various committees, which diluted the strength of the movement by preventing the formation of a voting block of female legislators. In 1973, however, Speaker of the House Richard Eyman “appointed five women to the eleven member House Environment and Land Use Committee,” with feminist activist Nancie Fadeley as the chair. This is unusual because, at the time, “women were disproportionately concentrated on committees that incorporated the traditional concerns of women, such as education, health, and welfare.”

Because of the organizational strength of the Oregon women’s movement, these female legislators had the support to pass legislation, plan strategy, and thwart potential opposition.

Sociologist Doug McAdam defines “cognitive liberation,” a concept to measure activist optimism, as the positive effect of “favorable shifts in political opportunities.” This effect was exhibited within the Oregon women’s movement when female legislators strengthened the future of the movement through mentoring and fostering the ability to work together. Oral histories from Roberts and Kafoury (who joined the legislature in 1977) reveal the importance of mentorship to their legislative success. Roberts formed a bridge between the early female legislators who shied away from a distinct feminist agenda or identity and the new generation of leaders who wanted to address the inequalities they faced through their role as legislators. In the beginning of her tenure, Roberts explained, she was “either the only woman or one of a few women” in most of her political and public life. Because of those difficult days as an “only,” Roberts made a concerted effort to mentor, help, and be helped by other female activists. Kafoury remembers how, in the early 1970s, Roberts worked to mentor and guide young female legislators. In preparation for important votes such as the ratification of the ERA, for example, Roberts would call the female legislators together to guide them in planning a strategy and getting votes together. This mentorship and burgeoning group identity created a solid foundation for a united front to pass legislation, and within this group of women there was what Kafoury described as a “balance of tremendous euphoria and power, a feeling that you could really make a difference.”

Due to a favorable political climate, the support of the male governor and male legislators, the organizational strength of Oregon’s women’s organizations, and a sense of overall optimism within the Oregon women’s movement, the first generation of political activists who defined themselves as “feminist” were able to exceed even their most ambitious expectations in the 1973 Oregon Legislative session. More important, these politicians were able to bring Republican and Democrat, urban and rural, secular and religious to the table with a sense of overall optimism within the Oregon women’s movement.

1973 Women Legislators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Committee(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth W. “Betty” Browne</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Oakridge, Lane County</td>
<td>Environment and Land Use Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary McCauley Burrows</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Eugene, Lane County</td>
<td>Environment and Land Use Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret U. “Peg” Dereli</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Salem, Marion County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancie Fadeley</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Eugene, Lane County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vera Katz</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Portland, Multnomah County</td>
<td>Environment and Land Use Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma Paulus</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Salem, Marion County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Olivier Peck</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Portland, Multnomah County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary W. Rieke</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Portland, Multnomah County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Roberts</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Portland, Multnomah County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Wendy Roberts</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Portland, Multnomah County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat Whiting</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Tigard, Washington County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Oregon Women Legislators, Legislative History, http://www.leg.state.or.us/history/womenlegislators.htm (accessed February 2, 2010); personal communications; Oregon History Project. Compiled by Robyn Conley Downs and OHQ staff.

Note: There is no comprehensive source documenting these women’s political careers, and while extensive research was conducted, this table should not be read as definitive.
igious, and male and female together to support ambitious and far-reaching feminist legislation.

The 1973 legislative session completed a trajectory of early women’s political achievement in Oregon set in motion 100 years prior. Through the collaborative efforts of women legislators, activists, and allies, a feminist legislative agenda advanced earlier and more effectively than in other states, defying the predictions of social movement mobilization theory and political science in general. The result was that women’s lives changed measurably and rapidly.

It is worth repeating that, although this article thoroughly examines the topics at hand (political feminist activism resulting in feminist legislation in Oregon in the early 1970s), the article is limited because the focus of the research encompasses a highly specific topic, population sample, and location. Additionally, we do not address the experiences of racial, sexual, and class minorities in Oregon during the 1970s, nor their correlated social movements, owing to the homogeneity of this early group of female legislators. This article also does not survey the radical feminist organizations in existence in Oregon at the time, those who advocated for change outside of the Oregon legislature, or the activities leading up to this incredible burst of feminist legislative achievement. A more complete analysis of feminist activism in Oregon would benefit from an in-depth examination of these topics. Future researchers would do well to focus on such tasks.

IN KEEPING WITH 100 YEARS of progressive feminist advancement, Oregonians might logically expect subsequent cohorts of women legislators to carry the torch of their forebears and advance their own numbers dramatically. But the rapid advancement of women and a feminist legislative agenda witnessed in 1973 has not been repeated since with such force. The representation of women in the state legislature grew steadily but slowly since 1973, but has plateaued in recent years, and even receded since the high-water mark in 2001. While Oregon ranked ninth for women’s representation in the state legislature in 1977 (at 13.3 percent), and peaked in the 2001–2002 cycle in fifth place (with 33.3 percent), by 2009, women constituted only 25.6 percent of the state legislative seats, putting Oregon in twenty-first place for inclusion of female state legislators.

Strikingly, Oregon has fallen far behind our neighbor to the north, where women were 40 percent of the legislature during the 1990s (reaching “balance”), putting them in first place among U.S. states for female legislators, and today still hold 32.7 percent of the seats there.11 Looking beyond the state legislatures, the contrast is even more striking: while Oregon has only two statewide female officer holders (beyond the judiciary) and not one woman in our congressional delegation, Washington currently has a female governor, two female U.S. Senators, and one congresswoman. Why have the states, once so similar in their inclusion of political women, parted company? In trying to make sense of this contrast, Oregonians would do well to find inspiration in the dynamic 1973 session, when the Oregon state motto seemed never more apropos. She — or rather they — flew with their own wings.

NOTES

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3. It should be noted that in 1937, the state motto was changed to “The Union.”
4. Oregon’s first woman governor, Barbara Roberts, is credited with reverting the motto back to its original in 1987, while serving as Secretary of State.
9. Betty Roberts, interview by Tina Gentzkow and Sunny Petit, April 15, 2005, transcript, Mark O. Hatfield School of Government’s Oregon Political Women’s Oral History Collection, Portland State University, Oregon.
10. Gretchen Kafoury, interview by Tina Gentzkow and Sunny Petit, February 9, 2005, transcript, Mark O. Hatfield School of Government’s Oregon Political Women’s Oral History Collection, Portland State University.
27. Roberts interview, 5.
29. Roberts interview, 5.
31. Ibid., 1.
33. Kafoory, 8. See also Roberts, With Grit and By Grace, 203.
35. Kafoory interview, 8.
36. Roberts, With Grit and By Grace, 159.
38. Tuor, Oregon Women’s Political Caucus, 2–3.
41. Soule and Olazak, 476.
42. Thomas, How Women Legislate, 94.
44. Thomas, How Women Legislate, 87.
47. Ibid., 114.
50. Kafoory interview, 15.
51. Tuor, Oregon Women’s Political Caucus, 2–3.
54. Roberts, With Grit and By Grace, 159, 162.
55. Tuor, Oregon Women’s Political Caucus, 2–3.
59. Roberts, With Grit and By Grace, 148.
60. Thomas, How Women Legislate, 100.
61. Roberts, With Grit and By Grace, 162.
63. Kafoory interview, 10; and Roberts, With Grit and By Grace, 147–48.

64. Swers, The Difference Women Make, 173.
66. Roberts interview, 4.
67. Kafoory interview, 2, 15.

Watson and Rose, Women in the 1973 Oregon Legislative Session

Oregon, 2.
10. Roberts, With Grit and By Grace, xi, 70.

13. Roberts, With Grit and By Grace, 72, newspaper quoted at 88.
14. Ibid., 142.
17. Kafoory interview, 11.
18. Roberts, With Grit and By Grace, 142.
20. Ibid., 12. See also “Women’s group assails City Club, calls for resignation of president-elect,” Oregonian, November 9, 1971; and City Club of Portland, bulletin, vol. 54 no. 22, October 26, 1973.