Abstract: The papers of Delaware legislator and women's leadership advocate Myrna L. Bair (b. 1940) comprise legislative, topical, and constituent materials from her career in the Senate of the Delaware General Assembly (1981-2000), as well as records from her professional involvement with national legislators and government organizations.
Descriptive Summary

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Title: Myrna L. Bair papers
Inclusive Dates: 1980-2008
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Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Myrna L. Bair (b. 1940), was elected as a Republican to the Senate of the Delaware General Assembly in 1980 and served 10 terms until 2000. She represented the 5th district, Foulk Woods (north Wilmington), and held Senate leadership positions for 16 of her 20 years in office. The Myrna L. Bair papers comprise legislative, topical, and constituent materials from her career in the Senate of the Delaware General Assembly, as well as records from her professional involvement with national legislators and government organizations.

Bair was born in Huntington, West Virginia, on October 26, 1940. In 1962, she graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry (Phi Beta Kappa and Summa Cum Laude). Bair received a Ph.D. in inorganic chemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1966. She was married to the late Thomas Irvin Bair II, Ph.D., a chemist whose research led to the commercial process for Kevlar. They had two children: Thomas I. Bair, III and Catherine L. Keaty, Ph.D.

After earning her Ph.D., Bair taught at Beaver College in Pennsylvania as an assistant professor of chemistry. In 1974, Bair became an instructor in chemistry and energy education at the University of Delaware. Before she was elected to the Senate, Bair spent a year as assistant director of public information in the Delaware Energy Office. In 1980, Bair was elected to represent Delaware's 6th district. After reapportionment in 1981, Bair's district was shifted and renumbered. Therefore, starting in 1982, she was considered the representative of Delaware's 5th district, Foulk Woods (north Wilmington). For 16 years, Bair held a legislative leadership position, including 14 years as Senate minority leader and two years as minority whip. She served on committees such as Education, Health & Social Services, Legislative Council, Administrative Services/Energy, Community Affairs, Ethics, Revenue & Taxation, Small Business, Youth Services, and the Executive Committee. She also worked on various commissions and task forces, including the Children at Risk Implementation Task Force, Joining Generations Steering Committee, Family Preservation Project, Family Law Commission, Homeless Task Force, Commission of the Courts 2000, and the Public Utilities Task Force.

Concerning economic issues, Bair sponsored the Financial Center Development Act which incentivized banks to establish offices in Delaware. In 1983, she assisted in the formation of a Senate Ad-Hoc Task Force on Export Trade. Additionally, Bair sponsored the Blue Collar Jobs Act (1984), which provided retraining opportunities and granted tax credits to certain firms for hiring new employees.

Taking a special interest in children's issues, Bair was an integral force in the creation of two of Delaware's most significant child welfare entities. These are the Office of the Child Advocate and the Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families. Bair was honored by the Foster Parents of Delaware in appreciation for her support of Foster Family Care in Delaware. She also received the 1999 Ron Fioravanti Award from Grassroots Citizens for Children, in recognition of "her unwavering commitment and dedication to raising the standard of protection for Delaware's children.”

During her time in office, Bair played an active role in the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). This includes serving as a member of the NCSL's Executive Committee and serving as chairperson of the Economic and Cultural Development Committee in the Assembly on State Issues. Bair was also
elected President of the Women's Network, which is a national organization of women legislators affiliated with the NCSL.

After retiring from public service, Bair began teaching at the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration (IPA). She was appointed as director of the IPA's Personal Leadership Development Program (formerly the Women's Leadership Development Program).

**Sources:**


Scope and Content Note

The papers of Delaware legislator and women's leadership advocate Myrna L. Bair comprise legislative, topical, and constituent materials from her career in the Senate of the Delaware General Assembly (1981-2000), as well as records from her professional involvement with national legislators and government organizations.

The collection is organized in four series: I. Legislature files, II. Topic files, III. Conferences, and IV. Correspondence, largely preserved in original order as maintained by Dr. Bair.

The first series, Legislature files, consists of files related to legislative work. Materials include legislation, press clippings, correspondence, personal notes, event programs, and memorabilia. These files are organized chronologically and provide an overview of each year's prominent issues through materials such as Bair's annual Senate newsletters, legislative agendas, and press clippings. The files also include yearly summaries of legislation sponsored by Bair, as well as materials supporting her work in areas such as economic development, education, energy, and family issues.

The second series, Topic files, consists of materials providing information about legislative issues related to Bair's work in the Senate of the Delaware General Assembly. Materials included are press clippings, correspondence, legislation, court filings, personal notes, speeches, information booklets, event programs, conference materials, projector slides, maps, charts, and invitations. Also included are stickers and postcards from an National Conference of State Legislatures meeting in Texas. Files are primarily related to education reform, including issues of desegregation in which Bair fought for local school board control; economic development; and children's issues, such as Bair's role in the formation of the Office of the Child Advocate.

The third series, Conferences, consists of materials from professional conferences attended by Bair during her time in office, including the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the State Government Affairs Council (SGAC), the Council of State Governments (CSG), and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). Materials included in these files are event programs, correspondence, personal notes, photographs, schedules, and maps. Also included are name badges with pins representing various states and organizations, which Bair collected at the conferences.

The fourth series, Correspondence, is comprised of thank you letters received by Bair for her work in the Senate of the Delaware General Assembly.
Selected Search Terms

Corporate Names

Delaware. General Assembly. Senate.
National Conference of State Legislatures.
State Government Affairs Council.
Council of State Governments.
American Legislative Exchange Council.

Topical Terms

Educational law and legislation--Delaware.
Leadership--Delaware.
Legislation--Delaware.
Women in public life--Delaware.
Women legislators--Delaware.
Child welfare--Delaware.
Children--Legal status, laws, etc.--Delaware.

Geographic Names

Delaware.
Delaware--Politics and government.
Delaware--Politics and government--1951-

Form/Genre Terms

Bills (legislative records)
Clippings (information artifacts)
Correspondence.
Memorandums.
Photographs.
Reports.

Speeches (documents)

**Occupation**

Politicians.

Legislators.

**Related Materials in this Repository**

MSS 135 Frank R. Zebly papers

MSS 527 Gwynne P. Smith papers
Arrangement

The papers are arranged into four series, and three series have been arranged further into subseries. The original order was largely maintained, especially in the Legislative files, Conferences, and Correspondence series. Legislative files are arranged chronologically, and Topic files are arranged by subject. The Conferences series is arranged by professional organization.

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