

# They Try Harder, Because They're 'Number 2'

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ATLANTA (UPI) — Although outnumbered by 80 to 1 in the General Assembly, Georgia's two women legislators are undaunted: "We try harder — we're No. 2."

Ash - blonde Rep. Janet Merritt, a mother of three in her mid-50s, and gray-haired Grace Hamilton, 60, the state's first woman Negro lawmakers, are completing the current session with choice committee assignments and pet projects to work on for next year.

"Being a good legislator these days is a full time job, and sitting in the House is the easiest part," says Mrs. Merritt, a for-

mer junior high school teacher and native of Americus, where she still lives.

"In fact, I'm thinking ahead for constructive bills for next year."

Mrs. Merritt's special concern is pre-school enrichment programs and higher education projects. "I'm vitally interested in secondary school systems too, but plenty of people are looking after that," she explains. "The two ends need organizing and streamlining."

Mrs. Hamilton of Atlanta, whose four grandchildren dubbed her "the honorable grandmother Gracie," is concerned about community development and human welfare.

"The focus of government

ought to be toward helping the bulk of Georgia's people where they live, and that's more and more in the cities," she says.

She thinks women have a special contribution to make to the process of creating laws. "Women are apt to be more sensitive to some human needs. They have special insights to bring to government."

Mrs. Merritt, however, doesn't see a need for any great influx of females in the Legislature. "More women? Why? What we need is more good legislators," she says.

Both find their 157 male counterparts friendly, helpful, and cooperative, but Mrs. Merritt, the first woman representative in many years when she assumed office in 1965, says it took them a while to get used to her.

"Nobody is going to hand you

this job and acceptance on a silver platter," she adds. "But if you can stick it out long enough, they'll come to you." She adds that she stays on good terms with her peers, many of them young bachelors, by never trying to interfere with their social activities.

## UNDERSTANDING HUSBANDS

Both women also say they never could have done it without understanding husbands. "I don't think it would be possible for women to be active in politics unless their husbands supported them," said Mrs. Hamilton. Her spouse is a faculty member at Atlanta University. A graduate of Atlanta University and Ohio State, she was also a college professor and social worker for a number of years.

Mrs. Merritt said her husband, a general insurance dealer and farmer, "shocked me when I

first said I wanted to run by telling me go ahead — I'd do a better job than any man he knew."

Both women had no political experience when they ran for office, but did have legislative know-how from long years with service organizations. They advise any prospective women lawmakers to work very hard at

learning such things as parliamentary law, and "find out as much as they can about the system of government at all levels," Mrs. Hamilton says.

"You don't just jump into this as a career," Mrs. Merritt warns. "You've got to convince the voters and the legislators you're taking it very seriously."