



JOY PICUS

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JOY PICUS BIOGRAPHY

City Councilwoman Joy Picus assumed her seat representing the Third District on July 1, 1977. Aided by strong community support and an enthusiastic volunteer campaign, Mrs. Picus was voted into office by a substantial margin (57.5%).

Mrs. Picus made her first try for the seat in 1973 when her grass roots campaign fell a mere 500 votes (1%) short of defeating the incumbent. Since then she has served as a director of the West Los Angeles County Resource Conservation District. She was elected president of the Board in 1976.

As a vice-president of the Los Angeles League of Women Voters, Mrs. Picus was instrumental in revising the Los Angeles City Charter in order to streamline departments and increase efficiency. Long active in community affairs, she has served as chairperson of the El Camino Real Community Adult School Advisory Council, as president of Hughes Junior High School PTA, as a member of the Mayor's San Fernando Valley Advisory Council, and as vice-chairperson of the San Fernando Valley Section of TOWN HALL of California. She also served as president of the San Fernando Valley branch of the American Association of University Women.

Of utmost importance to the Councilwoman is to continue her close contact with the people of the Third District. "I firmly believe that the first obligation of any elected official is to listen and be accessible." In addition, Mrs. Picus will maintain regular hours in her Valley office where constituents may offer suggestions and voice complaints.

Mrs. Picus was graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a degree in political science. Before her election to the City Council, she worked professionally as a community relations director for the San Fernando Valley Jewish Federation Council. Councilwoman Picus and her husband, Gerald, a physicist, have been married twenty-five years. They have three college age children and have lived in Woodland Hills since 1962.

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Spotlight on...Third District Councilwoman Joy Picus

The Council's 'Mother Hen' Tackles Family Issues

When editors at Ms. magazine sat down to name the "Women of the Year" for 1985, they chose a comedienne, a presidential daughter, a basketball player, an author, a police chief—and Los Angeles City Council Member Joy Picus.

What earned Picus—who has represented a West Valley council district since 1977—the attention of the national women's monthly was her successful effort to include a historic "pay equity" plan in the city's collective bargaining agreement with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

Pay equity, also known as comparable worth, refers to the effort of women in the public sector to upgrade the status of occupations for which pay rates have been held down because the jobs have been traditionally filled by women. The Los Angeles plan, Ms. said, was the first negotiated by a major city.

None who know her were surprised at the ability of Picus to take on something that hadn't been done before and do it. It's something the council has gotten used to over the last several years.

The only woman ever to represent the Valley on the city's governing body, she had been heavily involved in family issues—not surprising for a woman who grew up in a single-parent household and raised three children before she ever ran for public office.

Picus is a native of Chicago, where her father died a month after she was born, following a long illness. Helping her mother survive by managing an apartment building, the brainy youngster went off to the University of Wisconsin at age 16, majoring in political science.

Fascinated With Politics

She recalls:

"I was fascinated with politics ever since I can remember. In Chicago, when you had a problem, you always knew where to turn—the precinct Democratic committeeman."

After completing her degree, she went back to Chicago and married Gerald Picus, a physicist and graduate of the University of Chicago. After living in Washington, D.C., the young family came west when Gerald Picus joined Hughes Aircraft in 1959. He's worked for that company ever since.

The young mother didn't just sit home and bake cookies, though. She became an active member of the American Association of University Women, vice-president of the local chapter of the League of Women Voters, and became heavily involved in PTA work.

Her path to City Hall was illuminated by her experience with the LWV.

She remembers:

"I came down here frequently, so I got to know the council members very well. I knew who the good ones were, and I knew which ones weren't so good."



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The latter category, she decided, included the member from her own district, Donald Lorenzen.

Calling the incumbent "an unresponsive, inaccessible councilman who does not care about the residents and their concerns," Picus threw her hat into the ring.

She recalls launching her campaign by walking down Burbank Boulevard, talking to residents upset about the recent widening of that thoroughfare and handing out a leaflet entitled "What Could Have Happened if Your Councilman Had Cared."

That initial foray into elective politics ended in frustration, as Picus lost to Lorenzen by 551 votes.

Anxious to stay involved in public affairs, Picus promptly accepted a position as community relations director for the Jewish Federation Council, an umbrella group of local Jewish organizations.

Great Experience

She recalls:

"It was a great experience. I stayed three years, I saw how fundraisers worked and met a lot of people who were helpful when I ran the second time."

Picus obviously learned something in the interim, because when she faced Lorenzen the second time, she led the primary field and took 58 percent in the runoff.

A Democrat of liberal bent, Picus

may seem an odd match for her district, where voters heavily favored former President Reagan and former Governor Deukmejian, among other conservatives.

She comments:

"My district doesn't have a clear political profile like Hal [Bernson]'s or Marvin [Braude]'s.

Bernson, a conservative Republican, represents the neighboring 12th Council District, while Braude's more liberal 11th District also includes part of the Valley.

She continues:

"The residents of my district are concerned with the quality of life, with the preservation of their neighborhoods and the delivery of services."

Picus has addressed those needs with an attention to detail that led one aide to call her "the mother hen" of the City Council.

Times have changed in Los Angeles since 1977, when Picus defeated an incumbent who called her a "wild-eyed environmentalist." Her avowed willingness to "twist builders' arms" to get more open space for parks, her support for transportation projects, and her status as one of the first local officials to address waste recycling have made her a hero of local conservationists.

At the same time, however, she's been criticized for taking campaign contributions from developers and other business interests.

She responds:

"I'm not anti-developer. I just tell them if they want to develop in my district, they have to meet my terms" with regard to a project's effect on the surrounding community.

Her involvement in recycling stems from 1981, when Joel Wachs replaced John Ferraro as council president and appointed her to chair the Public Works Committee. Under the council's committee system, each member serves on three of the 15 committees, chairing one. Picus had chaired the Energy Committee for two years before drawing Public Works.

Mission Canyon Opposition

Picus says her opposition to renewing the county's permit to dump refuse in Mission Canyon drew a good deal of attention at the time because "garbage wasn't yet thought of as a public policy issue."

Since chairing the Personnel (now Human Resources) Committee from 1985-1987, Picus has devoted considerable energy to the advancement of what she calls "family-friendly workplaces."

She comments:

"Parents whose children come home from school at 3:30 every afternoon, and people who care for ill and elderly parents in their own homes, should be given the chance to balance work and family."

Long active in the National League of Cities, Picus studied existing programs

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Staff Writer

Photos by AMBER ECK

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in Milwaukee and Seattle which encourage employers to assist employees with child care as well as elder care. She then

"deceptive and duplicitous" during the 1983 controversy which led to the dismantling of the department's Public Disorder Intelligence Division.

Nemo elaborates:

"Picus was the most anti-police member of the council. She was hoping to get elected mayor by attacking Daryl Gates.

between that stance and her earlier criticisms of Gates, explaining:

"I criticized the chief [in 1983] because I didn't think he was telling the truth when he denied knowing that [Lt.] Jay Paul, [a member of PDID] was taking files out of Parker Center and using them for political purposes."

reform the department from within and then let him retire." Picus says she continues to support the idea of amending the City Charter to make department heads—including the police chief—subject to review and possible removal at periodic intervals, although three previous efforts to do that have been rejected by voters. She was also a strong backer of the charter amendment which allows the council to overturn actions of the city's independent boards and commissions by a two-thirds vote.

The latter became law when city voters approved it June 4, after the mayor mistakenly signed it and lost a court battle to remove it from the ballot.

While denying that her recent actions are designed to create a platform to run for higher office, Picus acknowledges an interest in a possible campaign for mayor, Congress or the Board of Supervisors.

She explains:

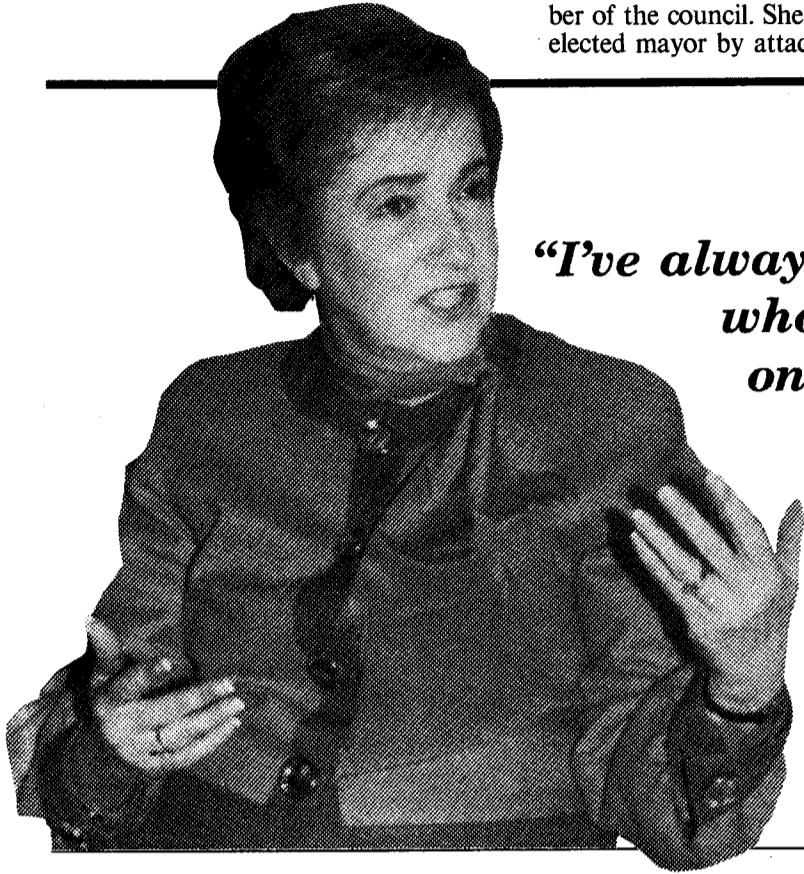
"I've always agreed with Jesse Unruh [the late state treasurer and Assembly speaker] who said that 'you want to be on the right corner, with the right change in your pocket, when the right street car comes along.'"

Of Picus' three children, one remains a Los Angeles resident. Larry Picus is associate director of the Center for Research in Educational Finance at the University of Southern California.

An active participant in political campaigns himself, he is an unabashed booster of his mother's career.

He recalls:

"I wasn't surprised when she decided to run for office, because it seemed natural given everything she'd been involved in. I've worked in all of her campaigns, and I'm ready to go out and help her run for whatever she decides to run for."



"I've always agreed with Jess Unruh, who said that 'you want to be on the right corner, with the right change in your pocket, when the right street car comes along.'"

—Third District Councilwoman Joy Picus

authored the city's Child Care Policy, which made Los Angeles one of the first cities in the country to hire a full-time child care coordinator.

She also pushed successfully for the opening of a child care center for Civic Center employees, jointly financed by the city and the federal government, and two years ago convinced the council to create preferences for companies which offer child-care benefits to employees in the granting of city contracts.

While devoting most of her attention to local issues, Picus has remained a party loyalist. She is close to Democratic figures such as former San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein, whom she supported for governor and now backs for the U.S. Senate, and Rep. Anthony Beilenson.

She was also an early and active backer of former Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis in his bid for the presidency.

Those stands, along with her support for rent control and other social initiatives, have made her a lightning rod for conservative opponents, who challenged her in 1985 and 1989.

Drawing five opponents in each of those two contests, Picus polled 52 percent each time, escaping the task of a one-on-one confrontation with an opponent from the right side of the political spectrum.

Picus chuckles as she recalls how she responded to conservative attacks in the 1985 contest:

"My opponents were sending partisan mailings to registered Republicans, so I did my own mailing, signed by Maureen Reagan [daughter of former President Ronald Reagan], who's been a friend since we campaigned for the Equal Rights Amendment."

She recalls that Jeanne Nemo, a Republican activist from Reseda who challenged Picus in 1985 and 1989, "was so mad" about the endorsement that she tried to persuade Frank Fahrenkopf, then chairman of the Republican National Committee, "to remove Maureen from her position at the RNC."

Nemo, who says she has no plans to take on Picus a third time, remains critical of her district's representative at City Hall.

She comments:

"Joy Picus is far too liberal for this district, and I still don't think she has a competent grasp of the issues."

Among her reasons for challenging Picus, Nemo says, were the incumbent's attacks on Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates, whom Picus criticized as

After that [1985] election, she did a total about-face, and became very pro-police, which wouldn't have happened if she hadn't been seriously challenged."

Picus, who has emerged since the March 3 police beating of motorist Rodney King as one of Gates' staunchest allies on the council, sees no inconsistency

She adds:

"I'm very concerned about what the [King] incident tells us about the department. But it's a great department, it serves the people well, and trying to remove the chief through civil service—which the mayor seems intent on—isn't going to work. I'd rather give him a year to try and