

Jim Robson attended NOW's 1968 national convention with his wife, Mary Jean Collins, and made an impassioned speech that NOW go on record as opposed to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Robson withdrew his motion to oppose the war as it threatened to be divisive. At that convention, he was nominated and elected to the national board, but chose to step down on the same day, at the personal request of Betty Friedan. Robson went on to set up a national NOW office in Chicago (1969) that he and Collins ran until 1975. "We were not to be employees, but independent contractors. NOW was way ahead of modern management methods as it was probably the first organization to outsource support services," says Robson. From that office, Robson and Collins provided membership services such as a national newsletter, new member packets, and membership materials for chapters. At first, they did it all by hand with the help of a second-hand mimeograph machine. As NOW grew exponentially, they had as many as 14 people on their payroll, using three offset presses, an automated machine for the mailing list, and an industrial inserting machine for mailings. Earlier, Robson had participated in various actions, including sit-ins, picketing and liberating men-only grilles, and lecturing and organizing more Illinois chapters. He also took part in attending Mass at a Catholic cathedral with women who went bareheaded to receive Communion, which was refused. The action got worldwide press and precipitated the Church's decision to abandon the centuries-old requirement that women cover their heads in church. Robson and Collins divorced in the mid 1970s. (ABS)