

Betty Schlein, Political Activist



April 1, 1931 - June 29, 2018

Betty Goldman Schlein, a political activist who helped found and later led the Long Island chapter of the National Organization for Women and was a founding member of Eleanor's Legacy, an organization named for the first lady that helps recruit and train female Democratic candidates, died of a stroke at her Manhattan home on June 29. A Southampton resident as well, she was 87.

Ms. Schlein was compelled to enter politics following the deaths of children hit by trains at unsafe railroad crossings. She was living in Merrick at the time. She soon focused on the civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War. In 1968, she helped Allard Lowenstein, an antiwar activist, win election to Congress. She worked consistently to help empower women and provide them with lobbying and organization skills.

In 1972, she became vice chairwoman of the New York State Democratic Committee, a position she used to help provide women with organizing and lobbying skills. She was appointed a top aide to Governor Hugh Carey of New York in 1978. Later, she started the Long Island Community Foundation, the Women's Fund of Long Island, and helped restore Eleanor Roosevelt's home, Val-Kill Cottage.

Leading up to the Democratic National Conventions in 1976 and 1980, she worked to make sure women had equal representation. She also mentored rising female politicians, including Representative Geraldine Ferraro, the first

woman to run for the vice presidency, Representative Elizabeth Holtzman, and New York City Council President Carol Bellamy.

In a 2003 essay posted on the Veteran Feminists of America website, she wrote, “I think I was born with a latent political gene in my DNA, but it took the women’s movement to wake that dormant drive.”

Born on April 1, 1931, in Brooklyn to Estelle and Paul Goldman, she grew up in the Manhattan Beach neighborhood and graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School. She attended Smith College before transferring to Cornell University. After receiving her degree, she moved to Washington, D.C., where she hoped to find serious work, but discovered that only secretarial jobs were available to her. Moving back to New York she earned a master’s degree in early childhood education at Columbia University’s Teachers College.

In 1954, she wed Richard Schlein, the man to whom she would be married for 48 years, and with whom she raised three children.

Ms. Schlein is survived by Fred Weinberg, her partner for 15 years; Mr. Schlein died before her. Other survivors are her children, Carol, of Montclair, N.J., Alan, of Los Angeles, and Michael, of Brooklyn, and four grandchildren. The family received visitors on July 2 in Brooklyn — followed by a funeral at Mount Lebanon Cemetery in Queens, where she was buried — and on July 7 in Southampton.