

Weld tries to patch things up with backers

By Renee Loth
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Gov. Weld tried to mend fences yesterday with several politically active women's groups who supported him in the November election, but who have since become disillusioned by his budget slashing proposals.

Weld and his chief policy adviser, Mary Lee King, were received politely at the annual luncheon of the Women's Statewide Legislative Network, the group that cosponsored a forum on women's issues last summer that Weld himself has said was of pivotal importance to his campaign.

Diane Balsler, director of the network, reminded him that women were impressed during the campaign with his commitment to abortion rights and child care, and supported him in his battle with the Democratic nominee John Silber.

"Since then, I cannot tell a lie, many of us have had questions about the budget," Balsler said.

The women were especially concerned about cuts in benefits to poor pregnant women, elimination of general relief for teen-agers, and a return of workfare for welfare mothers, all proposed in Weld's \$2.6 billion fiscal recovery plan.

Sarah Griffen of the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute called workfare, which is not detailed in Weld's plan but generally involves a requirement that welfare mothers work in return for their benefit checks, "another Weld proposal



Gov. Weld, wearing a red armband to signal his support for battered women, sits with Rosemary Dunn Dalton yesterday during the Women's Statewide Legislative Network annual luncheon. GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JOHN TLUMACKI

that's shortsighted and counterproductive."

Weld conceded that cuts have been proposed, but said some areas of particular concern to women and children would get slight funding increases. And he said he was willing to adjust the plan if corresponding savings could be found elsewhere.

"We were at some pains to make sure we maintained a safety net," he said. "We think we did as best a job as we can in keeping the faith with many of the issues of concern to this group."

Still, Weld was adamant that he had received a mandate from the voters to reduce the size of government.

"I do think the voters opted for a different approach and for smaller government in general," Weld said.

He also said that increasing taxes is not an option because it would harm the state's faltering economy. "We think the unkindest cut of all is the loss of a job," he said.

In his remarks, Weld also pledged to appoint women in the state bureaucracy "at all levels of my administration."

He said he told his Cabinet secretaries that, as they carry out his mandate to replace Dukakis-era bureaucrats with people more in tune with his philosophy, "not to turn back the clock on progress made in the placement of women and minor-

ities in responsible positions of government."

He reiterated his support for a constitutional amendment ensuring women's access to abortion in most cases, and for the child care linkage bill, which would require developers of new office buildings to set aside space for child care centers. And he said he was determined to reduce the high rates of infant mortality in the state, particularly in the minority community.

Weld also made a strong appeal against domestic violence and abuse and asked the women for their help in passing a tough sentencing reform law that would double the penalties for domestic abuse and end parole for violent offenders.