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Highland Park mayor to lead U.S. delegation to U.N. panel

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BY TOM HAYDON

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Highland Park Mayor Meryl Frank yesterday was sworn in as the United States representative to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

Frank, who is in her third term as mayor, will be the nation's official representative to the U.N. commission and head of the U.S. delegation, said a spokesman at the U.S. Mission.

"If you know Meryl, this appointment is really not a surprise. She's always been a mover and shaker in the state and on the national level. I think this has always been her dream. She cares deeply about women's issues," said Debbie Walsh, a friend of the mayor's and the director of the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics in New Brunswick.

Frank will be thrown into her work when the U.N. commission's annual two-week conference starts Monday in New York City. The commission, located within the U.N. Economic and Social Council, is dedicated to examining gender equality issues and drafting policies focused on advancing women's issues worldwide.

"There's at least 10 to 15 members of the delegation and Meryl will be at the head of it. It's pretty big," said Charlotte Bunch, executive director of the Center of Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University in New Brunswick.

Bunch, who attended past conferences as non-governmental policy expert on issues involving women, will be at the conference for the next two weeks. As part of the conference, Frank is scheduled to address delegates, government staff members and non-government experts from the United States.

Delegates and policy experts from around the world will be in New York City for the commission meeting.

Frank's credentials include authorship of the New Jersey Family Leave Act of 1989 and the federal Family and Medical Leave Act signed into law in 1993. She has also built strong political connections. In 2004 she worked on John Kerry's presidential campaign. Last year she was a strong Hillary Clinton supporter, and when Clinton lost the party nomination, Frank placed her support behind Barack Obama.

Frank is a graduate of Rutgers University's Livingston College and has graduate degrees in Public Health, International Relations and Political Science from Yale University.

She was president of the Parent-Teacher Organization and the school board in Highland Park before seeking the mayor's office in 1999, running without party backing to unseat an incumbent.

"She ran off the (party) line and put together a campaign of largely women," said Walsh.

Frank is now in her third term as mayor. She has served on the Democratic National Committee's Women's Leadership Forum and on the Bipartisan Commission on the Appointment of Women. She has also been president of the Women's Division of the American Jewish Congress.

Frank and her husband, Steven Gabel, President of Gabel Associates, an energy and public utilities consulting firm in Highland Park, have four children.

Attempts to contact Frank yesterday were unsuccessful.

Officials at the federal Department of State said Felice Gaer, of Paramus, the director of AJC's Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights in New York, was also appointed as a United States delegate to the U.N. commission.

Attempts to reach Gaer yesterday were unsuccessful.

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