



The Phyllis Schlafly Report



A Short History of E.R.A.

The Equal Rights Amendment, a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution, was born in the era of the women's suffrage amendment and first introduced into Congress in 1923. For nearly 50 years, all those Congresses had the good judgment to leave ERA buried in Committee. Almost no one of importance or prominence in either political party supported it.

During most of those years, ERA had attached to it the Hayden Clause which read: "Nothing in this Amendment will be construed to deprive persons of the female sex of any of the rights, benefits, and exemptions now conferred by law on persons of the female sex." Then, as now, the advocates were unwilling to compromise for anything less than a doctrinaire equality, and so ERA went nowhere. In 1971, when feminism first rushed onto the scene in the United States, a little band of women stormed the corridors of Congress and demanded the discharge from committee of the long-dormant Equal Rights Amendment. The House passed ERA on October 12, 1971, after rejecting the Wiggins Amendment which would have exempted women from "compulsory military service" and which also would have preserved other laws "which reasonably promote the health and safety of the people." Only 23 Congressmen voted no, of whom one was the senior female member, Representative Leonor Sullivan (D-MO), who made a strong speech opposing ERA because it would harm the family. In the Senate, Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr., (D-NC) proposed nine separate amendments to ERA to protect the traditional rights of women. Every one was defeated on a roll-call vote on March 21 and 22, 1972. These nine amendments established the legislative history that ERA was intended to do exactly what the Ervin Amendments would have prevented ERA from doing.

The Ervin amendments would have exempted women from compulsory military service and from combat duty; they would have protected the traditional rights of wives, mothers and widows, and preserved the responsibility of fathers to support their children; they would have preserved laws that secure privacy to males and females; they would have continued the laws that make sexual offenses punishable as crimes. All these modifying clauses were defeated. When ERA was passed in strict, absolute language, only nine Senators voted "no." Congress sent ERA out to the states on March 22, 1972. Within twelve months, 30 states

had ratified ERA. Then the disillusionment set in. In the next six years, only five more states ratified ERA, but five of the 30 states rescinded their previous ratifications of ERA, leaving a net score of zero for six years of lobbying for ERA. The five states that rescinded their previous ratifications were:

Nebraska	3/15/73
Tennessee	4/23/74
Idaho	2/08/77
Kentucky	3/16/78
South Dakota	3/01/79

The following 15 states never ratified ERA:

Alabama	Illinois	North Carolina
Arizona	Louisiana	Oklahoma
Arkansas	Mississippi	South Carolina
Florida	Missouri	Utah
Georgia	Nevada	Virginia

Most of the 15 states which never ratified ERA were forced by the ERA advocates to vote on ERA again and again. The Illinois Legislature voted on ERA every year from 1972 through 1982, the Florida Legislature nearly every year, the North Carolina and Oklahoma Legislatures every two years. Most of these votes were highly controversial, intensely debated, with much media coverage and many spectators present.

During the ratification period, ERA was enthusiastically supported by 99 percent of the media, the Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter Administrations, most public officials at every level of government, and many wealthy national organizations. ERA enjoyed the political momentum of what appeared to be inevitable victory.

A small group of women in 1972, under the name "Stop ERA," took on what seemed to be an impossible task. In 1975, they founded "Eagle Forum" — the genesis of the pro-family movement, a coming together of believers of all faiths who, for the first time, worked together toward a shared political goal. Eagle Forum volunteers persevered through the years and led the movement to final victory over ERA.

The last state to ratify ERA was Indiana in January 1977. There have been perhaps 25 different votes on ERA since that time (in legislatures, committees, referenda, and Congress), but Indiana was ERA's last success.