

Ellen Campbell: My Eagle Forum Story

Growing up in a conservative and politically active family, I knew of Phyllis Schlafly since my childhood. She was a conservative heroine and well known in our circles for her 1964 political classic *A Choice, Not an Echo*, as well as pro-defense books such as *The Grave Diggers* (1964), *Strike from Space: How the Russians May Destroy Us* (1965), *Safe Not Sorry* (1967), and *Kissinger on the Couch* (1974). We held her in high esteem for her valiant fight against President Carter's giveaway of the Panama Canal. Then came the fight over the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which Congress sent to the states for ratification on March 22, 1972. As Phyllis explained in 1986: "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." As you can imagine, it was such a thrill when I, as a young woman in my twenties, got to actually meet Phyllis in 1977. The occasion for this meeting is the beginning of the story of my 40-year association with Phyllis and Eagle Forum.



Somehow I ended up at the Mississippi state convention to elect delegates to the National Women's Conference, held in November 1977 in Houston. Congress had allocated \$5 million to celebrate International Women's Year, with a conference held in each of the 50 states, culminating in a national conference. Conservatives in my state and Oklahoma took over the state conventions and elected only pro-family delegates, of which I was one. We were decidedly outnumbered, as there were 2,000 delegates elected to the Houston conference – a last-ditch effort to push for ERA ratification. Every well-known feminist participated, including Gloria Steinem, Betty Frieden, Eleanor Smeal, and Bella Abzug. A family friend who was Phyllis' contact in Mississippi told me that I needed to go to St. Louis to a special Council that Phyllis was holding to train pro-family delegates and others for Houston. That's where I first met Phyllis. Being a properly raised Southern girl, I addressed her as "Mrs. Schlafly." She promptly told me to call her "Phyllis," which endeared her to me.

After surviving the Houston experience (I took a body guard with me), Phyllis asked me to head up Mississippi Eagle Forum, which I did until I got the Reagan bug. Before leaving home in 1982 to move to Washington to work in President Reagan's Administration, we were able to prevent ERA from being ratified and had a lot of other successes. Both Phyllis and Eleanor Schlafly were featured speakers at fund raisers, receiving great media attention. It was really hard to leave my Eagle friends and move "up North," but the Washington experience was one I will always cherish. After Reagan's term, I became a career federal employee and often saw and worked with Phyllis and her Washington office executive directors on pro-family issues in our Nation's Capital. She used to call me "her favorite bureaucrat"! In 2013, I finally came to my senses and moved back home to Mississippi. My life has truly been richer for having known and loved Phyllis and for my involvement in Eagle Forum.