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THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT CAMPAIGN IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1972-1982

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BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Abstract

In “West of Feminism: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment Campaign in the American West, 1972-1982,” I argue that the battle to ratify the ERA was not carried out within organizations or through feminists on the East Coast, where the amendment had already passed, but instead the unratified western states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah. In these states, pro-ERA activists, especially movement leaders, drew on pioneer and suffrage imagery to campaign for the amendment, and utilized their statuses as mothers and religious people to distance themselves from “radical” feminism. This fear of radicals and feminism, two all-encompassing terms for liberalism by conservative, anti-ERA leaders like Phyllis Schlafly highly influenced women’s rights activists in the West and put them on the defensive. Yet the ERA debate in the unratified western states shows that western activists did not retreat from the feminist platform, as other scholars have argued, but instead their leaders rejected the term feminism as a strategic attempt to pursue gender equality in the region. This version of feminism, which invoked the legacy of suffrage and extended older rhetoric about political motherhood, is what I call western feminism. This project reenvisions the role and geography of second wave feminism’s pinnacle piece of legislation, the ERA, and illuminates the forgotten role of feminism in the long history of the western women’s rights movement.

Introduction

Feminism Through Western Eyes

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

-Full text of the Equal Rights Amendment

In 1977, US Senator Sam Ervin (D-North Carolina) called the Equal Rights Amendment, or the ERA, "the most dangerous piece of legislation ever enacted by Congress."[1] Opponents of the amendment, especially STOP ERA leader Phyllis Schlafly, re-quoted these words constantly over the ten-year period that the amendment was up for ratification. By the end of the debate in 1982, many Americans, especially in the West, had come to believe these words. Those familiar with the political landscape of the American West in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s might not be surprised by this fact. The histories of the region are filled with stories of conservative, New Right women who worked to solidify the ascendancy of the Republican Party in the 1970s and 1980s. But this is not the only story of women's activism in the West during this period. During the campaign for the ERA from 1972 to 1982, a powerful second wave feminist movement bloomed in the unratified states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, where activists, coming from various political organizations, united together to advance women's rights.

[1] US Representative Eldon Rudd to Arvid L. Smith, November 29, 1977, folder 3, box 33, US Representative Eldon Rudd Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

In “West of Feminism: The Equal Rights Amendment Campaign in the American West, 1972-1982,” I argue that the battle to ratify the ERA was not carried out within organizations or through feminists on the East Coast, where the amendment had already passed, but instead the unratified western states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah. In these states, pro-ERA activists, especially movement leaders, drew on pioneer and suffrage imagery to campaign for the amendment, and utilized their statuses as mothers and religious people to distance themselves from “radical” feminism. The ERA debate in the unratified western states shows that western activists did not retreat from the feminist platform, as other scholars have argued, but instead their leaders rejected the term feminism as a strategic attempt to pursue gender equality in the region. This version of feminism, which invoked the legacy of suffrage and extended older rhetoric about political motherhood, is what I call western feminism. This project reenvisions the role and geography of second wave feminism’s pinnacle piece of legislation, the ERA, and illuminates the forgotten role of feminism in the long history of the western women’s rights movement.

The full text of the ERA is quite simple. Far from the most “dangerous” legislation, the first line and true heart of the amendment reads: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” The ERA would have protected Americans from sex discrimination via a constitutional amendment. The ERA was not a new phenomenon in the 1970s, either, but was written and presented to Congress by Alice Paul’s National Woman’s Party in 1923 as a sort of “next step” after the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Yet as with suffrage, the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment would face

major obstacles. Focusing on equal rights for women meant that protective labor legislation (regulation of women's hours and working conditions) would end, which for many years alienated working class women and their allies from the ERA coalition. Women's trade unions, labor, and major organizations like the League of Women Voters all expressed disdain for the amendment, turning activist women against each other after a successful battle for suffrage.[2] Despite this pushback, women's organizations continued to bring the ERA before Congress every year, but for fifty years legislators dismissed it. In 1967 the newly formed National Organization for Women (NOW) argued that the amendment was a necessity for American women, and the largest women's unions, the American Federation of Labor and the United Automotive Workers, soon added their support.[3] With this boost, finally, in 1971, the ERA passed in the US House of Representatives, and then in the Senate a few months later in 1972.

When the amendment was sent to the individual states for ratification that same year, the postwar women's movement had already had some major successes: the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or EEOC, was recently established and evaluating cases of sexism in employment, the National Women's Organization was nearly eight years old, and Representative Shirley Chisholm had just announced her candidacy for president. To many US legislators, the ERA was a straightforward way to show support for the women's movement. Within the first two years after the amendment had passed through Congress, thirty-three states had ratified the amendment. Thirty-eight were required for an amendment to be added to the constitution, or a three-fourths majority. The regions with the most states unratified were the West – with Arizona,

[2] Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 64-5. For more on the early history of the amendment (1923-1971), see Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women's Issues, 1945-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Joan Hoff-Wilson, ed., *Rights of Passage: The Past and Future of the ERA* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).
[3] Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 66-69.

Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah uncommitted– and the South-where almost none approved the amendment.

While ratification would ultimately be decided by state legislatures, it was grassroots organizations that led the movement to ratify the amendment. In many ways, ERA mobilization in the West was both similar and unique to mobilizations in other parts of the country. Similar to other regions, pro-ERA groups in the West were and remained largely bipartisan and built on existing political advocacy groups. A majority of these activists came to formal politics through civil rights work, anti-war protesting, and community service; this was true in the West as well. Pro-ERA organizations were made up overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, of middle-class, educated white women with a variety of religious backgrounds. Women of color and working class women were an essential part of the movement as well. Real-world experience with sexism and racism motivated many of these activists to get involved in politics, and they used these experiences to connect with other activists, legislators, and the public. Although not always explicitly organizing on behalf of women's rights, pro-ERA activists often came to the movement through their own experiences with discrimination.

Yet for western ERA activists, the legacy of settler colonialism and its ties to early suffrage campaigns shaped their ERA activism in ways it did not for their eastern counterparts. Settler colonialism in the American West, the violent taking and keeping of Indigenous and Mexican land, was largely reliant on white women's voting rights. By expanding the vote to women, white settlers could more easily control the land and politics in western territories, furthering their settler goals.[4] This land-grab has been re-remembered over time. Rather than

[4] Patrick Wolfe writes, "Land is settler colonialism's irreducible essence in ways that go well beyond real estate. Its seizure is not merely a change of ownership but a genesis, the onset of a whole new way of being—for both parties." See Patrick Wolfe, "The Settler Complex: Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Alternatives in Global Contexts *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (2013): 1-22.

basing their arguments in outright feminist or women's liberation terms, many western women maintained that the ERA was in-line with the values of suffrage and the "pioneer spirit" of the region that supposedly rewarded women for their part in settling the West.[5] When western leaders harkened back to these pioneers of suffrage, they never mentioned the racial exclusions around western settlement and the "universal" right to vote. White women all had the right to vote by 1920 but that was not true for Black, Asian, Indigenous, and ethnic Mexican women.[6] For them, the right to vote depended on their state of residence or citizenship status. ERA activists also did not discuss how western expansion required the violent taking of Indigenous and Mexican land in the region. It is no surprise, then, that this rhetoric was produced where white women led and made up the majority of activists. Although ERA activists held close ties to the civil rights movements in the West, in this instance, activists instead chose to highlight a whitewashed and mythic version of western suffrage that connected earning the right to vote to westward expansion.

As the campaign for the ERA in the unratified West began to grow, a sort of "western feminism" began to develop through the efforts of ERA leadership in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah. As opponents began to link the amendment to radicalism, western

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[5] For more on challenging these debates of western exceptionalism, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West?1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 4-6. See also, Joan M. Jenson and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (1980): 172-213; Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

[6] For more on women of color and suffrage, see Cathleen Cahill, *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Lynda F. Dickson, "Lifting as We Climb: African American Women's Clubs of Denver, 1880–1925" in *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West*, edited by Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, 372–392 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Faye E. Dudden, *Fighting Chance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Evette Dionne, *Lifting as We Climb : Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020); Kif Augustine-Adams, "Women's Suffrage, the Anti-Chinese Campaigns, and Gendered Ideals in Sonora, Mexico, 1917–1925," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (2017): 223-58.

feminists drew on many activists' statuses as mothers and as church members in order to relate to the public and distance themselves from "radical feminism." Western feminists continued to draw on the legacy of suffrage in the region, and this pioneer imagery aligned well with the "moral mother" image leaders put forth. Although women's activists had used similar tactics for centuries, it was unusual for second wave feminists to make political claims based on motherhood. Instead, many 1970s feminists promoted women's rights based on their humanity and authority as individuals. Overall, western feminism, like feminism at its core, celebrated both equality and women's rights, but, also, moderation. ERA leaders, who were mostly state legislators and presidents of local women's organizations, pushed this image as a way to distance the amendment from the rising opposition, but it was not representative of all western ERA activists.

This style of western feminism first developed outside the ERA debate, in state election campaigns in the 1970s. As the initial optimism of those early ratifications began to fade, western ERA activists began putting forward their own candidates for public office. Many constituents immediately criticized female candidates, not for their experience or even their political party, but for their families. Constituents asked, "Where are your children?," and "Has your husband given you permission to run?" To combat such questions, many pro-ERA candidates put their family life front and center in their campaigns, which would also carry over into how they campaigned for the ERA. Western feminists focused of the needs of mothers, from housewives and farm wives to single mothers.

Western feminists leveraged not only their status as mothers, but also worked to reclaim the idea that homemakers and farm wives could be ERA supporters, too. This was an important demographic in the West. Activists would hold workshops to help displaced homemakers,

meetings on the rights of farm wives and how to draw up a will, charity fashions shows to raise money for battered women's shelters, and even ERA "bake-offs." While activists on both sides of the ERA debate in the West leveraged motherhood, western feminists expanded the definition beyond the married mother. In their attempt to create a more equitable society for women and sway legislators to pass the ERA, supporters included single mothers, displaced homemakers, and working mothers as mothers, who often needed more support in their communities. Still, this definition of motherhood was moderate, with women defining it within heterosexual relationships and largely to biological children. Through their rhetoric, leaders in the western ERA movement claimed that the amendment was moderate, ultimately benefiting mothers and families. In so doing, they sidelined a broader campaign for women's liberation.

While a majority of ERA supporters in the unratified West worked overtime to prove their loyalty to their families, children, and the home in the face of conservative opposition, these strategies led other pro-ERA activists to worry about their place in the ERA movement. Many activists in the West still proudly supported a multitude of women's liberation causes, including reproductive rights, lesbian rights, and women's sexual freedom alongside the ERA. As those opposed to the ERA became more and more successful in their use of the media, western feminist leaders increasingly separated the ERA from talks of expanded abortion protections or gay rights out of fear of being labeled "radical." The category "radical" expanded in the West in these years to include a host of liberal activities, including joining national or popular liberal organizations, challenging religious organizations or churches, or simply not wearing a bra. This effort by ERA leaders in these states to dispel a radical image and create a perception of the amendment as moderate or mainstream began to alienate some supporters. By the end of 1975, some ERA supporters in the West were wary to even call themselves feminists while clearly

supporting and campaigning for gender equality. This tension between ERA activists who supported a range of women's rights and those who pushed a single, moderate ERA led to personal discord and organizational obstacles for pro-ERA women in the four unratified western states.

Although not without internal divisions, ERA activists in the remaining unratified western states-Arizona, —Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah—created an impressive grassroots campaign in the 1970s. Through creative fundraising endeavors and campaigning techniques, including grocery store leaflets and ERA coffees, activists utilized existing organizations and successful tactics of the past. Some also embraced more assertive techniques, including lobbying legislators, public protest, and running for office. Western ERA activists were successful organizers, but so was the opposition. In response to the growing influence of conservative women who opposed the amendment, these activists were very quickly put on the defensive and forced to campaign on terms set by their opposition.

The ERA debate brought women and gender issues, from the rights of housewives to reproductive rights, to the main stage of modern politics in the West. Like many scholars of feminism and antifeminism, I show that women, both liberal and conservative, became more intimately connected to local politics and became important political and community leaders through their activism in the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike other scholars of feminism, I show how many pro-ERA (or "western feminists") activists—especially regional leaders—imagined their statuses as mothers, religious members, and community organizers as the driving forces for their work. Conservative women were not the only activists who drew on ideas of "moral motherhood" in their political work. Many of the women who led the ERA movement in the West had a hard time relating to the more liberal national ERA leaders like Gloria Steinem and

Bella Abzug, while other ERA supporters on the ground, especially lesbians, pro-choice advocates, and nonreligious members of the women's movement, continued to connect with the more expansive feminist agenda represented by national leaders. This multifaceted and conflicted pro-ERA coalition faced incredible hurdles most especially from a growing and powerful anti-ERA movement. Ann Poag, co-founder of Housewives for the ERA, said it best when she stated, "the opposition always identifies itself as a group of wives and mothers. We had to point out that that's what we are, too."[7]

This dissertation intervenes in three important historiographies: the histories of second-wave feminism, histories of the ERA, and the histories of women's activism in the West. First, "West of Feminism" challenges not just the argument that there wasn't a second-wave feminist movement in the West, outside of California, but that these other western women worked to transform the very definition of the term in Middle America. Feminism was supposed to be about breaking away from women having to justify their place in the public sphere through their statuses as mothers. In Nancy Cott's foundational work, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism,* she writes that feminism by the early 20th century "stood for self-development as contrasted to self-sacrifice or submergence in the family."[8] Many have seen second-wave feminism as a full and absolute articulation of this earlier trend. The ERA's demand for equality among the sexes under the law fit nicely within second wave feminists' demands, and yet how feminism was transformed during the ERA debate remains understudied. The amendment is often a footnote in the history of feminism. In the Intermountain West and the Plains, feminists insisted that religion

[7] Claire Safron, "What You Should Know About the Equal Rights Amendment," *Redbook*, June 1973.
[8] Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 39.

and motherhood motivated them to embrace feminist activism. This was not a minor argument for western feminists, but rather *the* campaign tactic for the most important piece of second-wave feminist legislation.

This dissertation contributes to a small but growing number of works on feminism outside eastern urban centers. Finn Enke's *Finding the Movement* focuses on how women in the Midwest—the Twin Cities, Chicago, and Detroit—created feminist spaces in the 1960s and 1970s in places feminism was thought to be absent. Similar to this work, Enke argues that whether women were self-proclaimed feminists or not, their everyday activism is key to understanding women's liberation as a widespread, transformative movement. This idea of "finding" the women's movement or feminists in places and people that do not openly claim to be so strikes closely to many of the arguments ERA leaders in the West made, as they identified with women's issues and joined organizations but sometimes struggled with calling themselves feminists. Many western ERA activists' stories, like those in Enke's work, have yet to be told [9] Similarly, Annelise Orleck's *Storming Caesars Palace,* which examines the 1972 protests of black mothers in Nevada against the state's racialized welfare discrimination, is another rare example of non-conservative female activism in the postwar West. Like Enke's work, many of these women did not consider themselves outright feminists at the time, but found support among liberal women with the founding of Operation Life, one of the most successful antipoverty organizations in the country during its prime. While both of these works highlight the activism of postwar women outside of the conservative arch, they also make important contributions to the lack of histories on women of color and queer activists.[10] These stories also

[9] Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[10] For more on the work of women of color and queer people in the West in the postwar period, see Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerva No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Vietnam War Era* (Berkley: University of

exist within the history of the ERA campaign despite the efforts of leaders to portray the amendment as largely moderate and "straight." "West of Feminism" further complicates the narrative of this white-led women's movement to include the contributions and sacrifices of non-white, queer, and radical ERA activists in the West.

This work challenges the history and legacy of the ERA itself. "West of Feminism" reorients the story of the ERA from East Cost organizations and leaders, to the kitchen tables, streets, and legislatures of the West. While most books on the women's movement from this period include discussion of the ERA, it is often portrayed as a sort of death knell to second wave feminism, or is presented from a very top-down perspective. Groups like the National Organization for Women or specific leaders on the East Coast are the focus, rather than the activists working in the remaining unratified states. For example, in Sara Evan's *Personal Politics*, she writes "the feminine mystique laid the basis for the more explosive readjustment of a feminism reborn," largely pinpointing the founding of second-wave feminism with Betty Friedan.[11] Other full-length books also make this argument. There are three published legal studies on the amendment, including Mary Francis Berry's *Why ERA Failed*, which all were

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California Press, 2005); Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (University of Texas Press, 2011); Bradley G. Shreve, *Red Power Rising: The National Youth Council and the Origins of Native Activism* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011); Mary Crow Dog, *Lakota Woman* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld Press, 1990); Margaret Rose, "Traditional and Nontraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America, 1962 to 1980" in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 11, no. 1 (1990): 26-32; Matthew C. Whitaker, *Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Josh Sides, *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[11] Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 14.

either written in the immediate aftermath of the campaign, or addressed the structural challenges of amending the US Constitution. [12]

A handful of books have looked beyond eastern organizations, towards the campaign in a single city or state. These include Donald G. Matthews and Jane DeHart's, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA* (North Carolina), Judith Ezekiel's *Feminism in the Heartland* (Cleveland, Ohio), and Martha Sonntag Bradley's *Pedestals and Podiums* (Utah).[13] While Matthews and DeHart maintain that their study of North Carolina is largely representative of the larger, national ERA movement, both Ezekiel and Sonntag Bradley argue that spaces outside of the East Coast also experienced important but unique feminist movements. By moving away from the frame of one state to the most important battleground states, "West of Feminism" exposes broader trends in the history of regional feminisms and the far-reaching effects of the ERA on women and politics. It also looks at New Right grassroots conservative campaigns, so well documented by recent historians, through the eyes of their feminist neighbors. This work reorients the history of the amendment, as the battle for the ERA did not take place in the states that ratified quickly, but these four western states where the debate raged on for ten years while the rest of the nation watched and waited.

This dissertation also intervenes in the historiography of the politics in the American West. In this broad field, two western women's movements have been carefully studied. One is the suffrage movement, which holds many similarities to the Equal Rights Amendment debate. Most recently, Rebecca J. Mead's *How the Vote Was Won* details the history of suffrage

[12] Janet K. Boles, *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment: Conflict and the Decision Process* (New York: Longman, 1979); Gilbert Y. Steiner, *Constitutional Inequality: The Political Fortunes of the Equal Rights Amendment* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985); Mary Francis Berry, *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
[13] Donald G. Matthews and Jane DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA: A State and the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Judith Ezekiel, *Feminism in the Heartland* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002); Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005).

campaigns in the West state-by-state, focusing on not just how the amendment process unfolded in the West across numerous states, but also the complicated history of race in western women's activism.[14] Western historians continue to claimed suffrage as a movement of this region, but not feminism.

The second movement that western historians have seen as born in the region is New Right conservatism. The historiography of the postwar West is brimming with studies of conservative women's activism and the rise of the New Right. Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors* argues that the New Right was a highly successful but misunderstood conservative coalition that is often overshadowed by the liberal movements of the late 1950s and 1960s. This success is owed largely to grassroots activism in California and the greater West (McGirr looks specifically at Orange County) and this region's combination of a postwar thriving economy, social conservatism, and populism.[15] Similarly, Michelle M. Nickerson's *Mothers of Conservatism* focuses on both place and women's political work within the New Right's mobilization in California. Nickerson details how the twentieth-century conservative movement in the U.S. began, largely focusing on what she calls "housewife populism" in 1950s Southern California, and argues that the conservative women who would later lead the opposition to the ERA began two decades earlier through anti-communism groups in their communities and fighting the desegregation of their children's schools. Historians have rooted conservative women in western places like California, while ignoring their feminist counterparts, even though many feminists had extremely similar backgrounds to conservative women. These two groups of women engaged in a pitched battle over the ERA and gender politics, but only one side has been claimed by historians as truly western. "West of Feminism" expands our view. It rejects the narrative put

[14] Mead, *How the Vote was Won*.
[15] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New America Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

forward by the cultural wars themselves, that there was a vast cultural and social chasm between feminists and social conservatives. It also claims that the West was uniquely important to feminism in the 1970s and early 1980s The ERA debate in the West expands our understanding of women's political activism and motivations in the region, complicating our understanding of western women as the new western historians called for three decades ago.[16]

To write this history, I utilized a wide variety of primary sources, including organization minutes, pamphlets, newspapers, and oral histories, many of which I had the pleasure of conducting myself. In gathering these primary sources, I visited numerous archives across the region. Consulting nineteen archives across ten states, much of the sources I draw on are from university and local archives in the four unratified states, and a few national and presidential archives. These include the National Women's Conference Collection at the University of Houston (the city where the conference was held), the papers of national feminist leaders at Harvard's Schlesinger Library, the National Archives, and collections at the libraries of presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, whose policies were both influential during the ERA campaign. I also visited Vassar College in New York, which houses many of the National Women's Conference records in the Caroline Bird papers. The vast collection includes national papers as well as state questionnaires and surveys from Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah attendees.

"West of Feminism" examines the ERA movement in the West chronologically, divided between five chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. Each main chapter focuses on one

[16] See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *A Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987). Patricia Limerick, Elizabeth Jameson, Susan Armitage, and Virginia Scharff have all worked to challenge and complicate the limited view of women in the region.

larger theme or event in the ERA ratification movement, highlighting how Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah activists responded to challenges and worked with surrounding state organizers and national leaders. Chapter one, titled, "'Thirty Down, Eight to Go': Grassroots Activism in the West, 1972-1973," focuses on the early wave of ratifications, the initial popularity of the amendment and the optimism of ERA supporters, and how local women's organizations in the West transitioned their existing social efforts to the ERA. Although not always embracing feminism as a label, pro-ERA activists working towards a more just society often came to the movement through their own experiences with discrimination and sexism. Yet for western women, the legacy of western women's suffrage and its settler colonial roots also played an extremely important role in the arguments put forth in favor of the ERA.

The second chapter, "'A Family Photo Seemed Appropriate': Gender, Motherhood, and the Campaign for the ERA, 1973-1975," looks at the unique issues western women faced in the early 1970s during their first run for political office. As the initial optimism of early ratification began to fade, ERA activists began running their own candidates in legislative races, many of which had no experience in this realm. This chapter argues that western ERA leaders learned early on in the movement that they had to combat the growing image of the ERA as a liberal or even radical issue. To combat this, many pro-ERA candidates put their family life front and center in their campaigns and developed a "western feminism" which would also carry over into how they campaigned for the ERA. Although motherhood became the face of many ERA leaders in the West as a way to combat the opposition's "lesbians and libbers" stereotype, this face was certainly not representative of all western women in support of the amendment, creating tensions and setbacks for the movement.

The next chapter, "Church Women United: Religion and the Meaning of Equality, 1975-1977," explores how the growing western feminist image that promoted motherhood also required the foregrounding of ERA supporters who were religious. This became especially important after 1976 when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints officially declared its opposition to the amendment and joined Phyllis Schlafly and the New Right's campaign against the amendment. As conservatives loudly declared that the ERA was harmful to the Christian family, leaders in the unratified West doubled down on their mainstream image that promoted motherhood and religiosity alongside feminism through ERA prayer vigils and multi-denominational religious ERA groups.

Chapter Four, "'Sisterhood of '77': Tensions Inside and Outside the National Women's Conference, 1976-1977," looks more closely at the challenges ERA supporters faced not just with the conservative opposition, but within the pro-ERA movement itself. As each state began organizing their own state conferences and delegate nominations as part of the United Nation's International Year of the Woman, western women faced tenuous and very public growing pains. At each individual state conference, Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah women dealt with a highly organized and unexpected showing of STOP ERA and other conservatives who viewed the conference as serving only as a government-funded campaign for the amendment and other "feminist" issues. Yet overall, the massive conservative pushback at the state and national conferences brought ERA activists, from moderate, mainstream western feminists to more radical women, together. Although not without their localized disagreements, the activists in the unratified western states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, when forced to meet their conservative opponents face-to-face at each of these events, chose to come together.

The final chapter, "'Down With ERA!': The ERA Countdown Campaign and the Conservative Ascendency in the West, 1978-1982," details the intense final years of the ERA movement, the pressure put on Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah legislatures, and the breaking point between many local western leaders and on-the-ground activists with national groups. Although ERA leaders in the West tried to portray the amendment as both mainstream and based in local needs and not outside interests, influence from national organizations became unavoidable. Instead of strengthening support for the ERA, the National Women's Conference created publicity for the New Right and gave anti-ERA activists more ammunition to portray ERA supporters as anti-family, radical, and immoral. The interest of national leaders and organizations continued to raise tensions in the West even higher as the ERA Countdown Campaign commenced. NOW sent celebrity speakers and hundreds of thousands of dollars in radio and television ads to evangelize to westerners, and to Mormon women in particular, to whom they sent ERA Missionaries. There was a clear disconnect between the state and national groups; western women insisted not only that these national groups did not understand how to present the amendment to western women, but that they were actually hurting the movement by bringing in outsiders.

The dissertation ends with a conclusion examining the massive impact the ERA had on women's rights and women in politics despite its failure, including the mobilization of many women as activists on both sides of issue. In an ironic twist, the ERA movement gave political experience and political careers to many conservative women who came into politics solely to take the amendment down. The West that so many women in the region and across the country thought would be sympathetic to women's rights would look very different in 1982, as the New Right had all but fully planted its roots in the region for decades to come. This work examines

western feminism's role in the region and nation today, and challenges whether or not the West is still a "progressive" place for women's rights. It also complicates the definition of feminism by expanding it to include activists motivated by their motherhood. Overall, "West of Feminism" establishes how women's activism in the 1970s West operated, and challenges that notion that the ERA, second-wave feminism's key piece of legislation, was solely an East Coast-led movement.

Chapter One:

"Thirty Down, Eight to Go":

Grassroots Activism in the West, 1972-1973

"It would seem we have an obligation to our heritage and our future to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment."

-Beatrice Marchant, Utah ERA Activist

In 1974, barely two years into the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) debate, activists in Nevada had already connected the amendment to the West's past. A pamphlet from Nevadans for ERA told readers, "ERA is Nevada's opportunity to continue its early, western tradition of individual liberty... Only through ERA can Nevada confirm its commitment to the principle of equality for women and men in Nevada."[1] In this sweeping statement, ERA supporters harkened back to a mythic image of the West, centered on individual and regional independence and support for women's suffrage. While the movement to ratify the ERA was national, its most contentious battles played out in the West, the region where women first won the right to vote just fifty to one hundred years before. The ERA debate that took place between 1972 and 1982 challenged westerners, especially those in the unratified states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, to grapple with the region's past, but also its present. As activists would soon learn, mass migration during and after World War II, suburbanization and urbanization, and the civil rights movement had remade the West politically.

[1] NERA pamphlet, folder ERA Literature 1974, box 1, Janet MacEachern Collection, UNLV.

Between 1972 and 1973, ERA supporters in Arizona, Oklahoma, Nevada, and Utah organized statewide and prepared for an easy victory. Those in favor of the amendment were extremely optimistic and for good reason. For decades, western women had organized and led grassroots social reform movements in their states, mostly in attempts to address race and sex discrimination. All four states still had outdated and sexist laws in their statutes, giving ERA supporters ample proof that western women needed this amendment. A blanket constitutional amendment would force legislators to address all sexist laws, and in a timely manner. Western women quickly reorganized already existing women's organizations into strong lobbying groups, including Arizona Coalition for Equal Rights, Nevadans for ERA, OK-ERA, and Equal Rights Coalition Utah. Although the Democratic Party seemed the amendment's stronger advocate, both parties supported the ERA; it was not a partisan issue in 1972. With ten states in the West approving the amendment within the first year, the activists in the four unratified states got to work in hopes that they could raise that number to fourteen.

While ratification would ultimately be decided by state legislatures, it was grassroots organizations, some old and some new, that led the movement to ratify the amendment. ERA mobilization in the West was both similar to mobilizations in other parts of the country, and also unique. Similar to other regions, pro-ERA groups in the West were and remained largely bipartisan, built on existing women's groups.[2] Since the 1950s activists had been leading a movement to pressure both parties to include women's issues in their platform and more women

[2] Contrary to the long-held "waves" theory of activism, women never stopped working for political and social change in the twentieth century. See Nancy A. Hewitt, *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of US Feminism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex* (Sacramento: University of California Press, 1989); Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: Harpers Collins, 1993); Mary Crow Dog, *Lakota Woman* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld Press, 1990).

in leadership. A majority of these activists came to formal politics through civil rights work, anti-war protesting, and community service; this was true in the West as well. These organizations were made up overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, of middle-class, educated white women with a variety of religious backgrounds. Women of color and working class women were an essential part of the movement as well. Real-world experience with sexism and racism, and the poverty that often accompanied both motivated these activists to get involved in politics, and they used these experiences to connect with other activists, legislators, and the public. Although not always explicitly organizing on behalf of women's rights or gender equality, pro-ERA activists often came to the movement through their own experiences with discrimination.

Yet for western ERA movements, the legacy of settler colonialism and suffrage also played an extremely important role in the arguments put forth in favor of the ERA. Two "theories" of the mythic West remained popular among women in the region. The first was that by "civilizing" the West women had gained more economic and political freedom than their eastern sisters. The second was that, because of direct democracy measures including women's suffrage, the West was more progressive than other regions of the United States.[3] Many activists in the West viewed themselves and their work to ratify the amendment as progressive, or based in social reform and fairness, and within "traditional" western values for women by connecting their movement to the region's popular past. For other activists, this argument was also a strategy more than an ideology, especially for those ERA supporters in the West who came directly from the civil rights movement or were people of color themselves. Rather than basing their arguments in outright feminist or women's liberation terms, many western women maintained

[3] For more on the mythology surrounding of western women's suffrage, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 4-6. See also, Joan M. Jenson and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (1980), 173-213; Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

that the ERA was in-line with the values of suffrage and the "pioneer spirit" of the region that supposedly rewarded women for their part in settling the West.

Coming to the Movement

When the United States Senate approved the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) on March 22, 1972, the short, fifty-two word document was already fifty-years old. Since its inception in 1923 by famed suffragist Alice Paul and her National Women's Party, the ERA had been brought to Congress every single year, in one form or another, for approval. The amendment remained controversial not just for Americans who believed in a gender hierarchy, but also for women and labor organizations that favored protective laws for working women. In 1971, U.S. Representative Martha Griffiths had to do significant political legwork, petitioning 218 of her colleagues, to even get the amendment on the floor for a vote. Yet the following year, with the rights revolution hitting its stride and labor-conscious groups like the National Organization for Women convincing unions to abandon protective labor legislation, the ERA was finally approved. State legislatures were given seven years (which was eventually extended to ten) to approve the amendment. If thirty-eight states passed the ERA before the deadline, the amendment would be ratified and added to the U.S. Constitution. With both major political parties' support and thirty state approvals in the first year, those in support of the amendment were optimistic.

When the ERA issue came up for debate in 1972, the West, like the rest of the country, was still dealing with its own miscarriages of justice. Many supporters who would eventually come to the ERA movement were no strangers to political activism. Some western pro-ERA women had been a part of women's organizations like the National Federation of Business and

Professional Women (BPW) or the League of Women Voters (LWV). City and state chapters of the LWV involved themselves early on with supporting the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and school integration as well as welfare rights for women. The non-partisan organization acted as a sort of political watchdog, with each chapter choosing their own issues.[4] Other ERA activists came to politics protesting the Vietnam War and the draft or the lack of economic opportunities for women. What unified these disparate people was common experience with sexism and discrimination. Each activist felt their identities as women limited them in some way. No matter the background, these western activists utilized their familiarity with grassroots organizations and lobbying to work towards equal rights for men and women under the constitution.

Issues of race were particularly important in the West and eventually in the ERA movement. World War II had accelerated migrations to the West as military bases, defense contractors, and private sector businesses all set up shop in the region, which offered an abundance of cheap, open land.[5] The US military built Luke Air Force Base near Phoenix and Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, for example, among countless other bases and nuclear test sites in the region. At the same time, the tourist industry in places like Nevada exploded.[6] Young white professionals made up the majority but African American men and women also left the South for these new opportunities; the black population alone increased by thirty-three percent in the region in the 1940s.[7] While Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah have been largely populated by white Americans for the last century, Chicano/a, African American, and

[4] League of Women Voters Newsletter, n.d., folder 10, box 5, League of Women Voters Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada (hereafter UNLV).
[5] Matthew C. Whitaker, *Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 2-9, 41, 90, 133.
[6] Michael S. Green, *Nevada: A History of the Silver State* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2015), 304.
[7] Whitaker, *Race Work*, 80.

Indigenous populations have always been a significant part of these states as well. With people and power shifting to the West, the civil rights movement would not be ignored.[8]

Racism shaped almost all parts of the 1950s and 1960s West. It led to segregated jobs and schools, housing and neighborhood redlining, restricted voting rights, and the denial of state and federal benefits. Each state hosted its own civil rights movement, which was most prominent in major cities. Each had its own National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapters.[9] Memberships for the NAACP tripled in the American West from 1940 to 1946 alone.[10] These local movements were eventually successful in desegregating schools and redistricting to allow minority populations political representation. In Arizona, Nevada, and Utah, each state elected their first African American representatives in the 1960s and 1970s, but the broader process of digging out culturally and politically imbedded racism was slow and painful.[11] The West was not without violence, either. For example, a large race riot broke out in Phoenix in 1967.[12] Like so many other parts of the country, racial justice activists experienced disillusionment by the end of the 1960s. Phoenix, like Watts, Harlem, and Detroit, saw one expression of this discontent in a race riot in the late 1960s.

Those of ethnic Mexican and American Indian descent were not immune to institutionalized racism in the West either. While Arizona and Nevada allowed Chicano children to attend public schools, the Latino/a population was still largely banned from many public and private institutions, including many pools, parks, and businesses. At this time, ethnic Mexicans comprised a substantial amount of the region's population (20% of Arizonans by 1970, for

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[8] For more on the civil rights movement in each state, see Green, *Nevada*, 314-319; Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *The Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 49-54;Whitaker, *Race Work*; 89-130.
[9] Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 35; 314-6; Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls* (Oklahoma City: Jim Wire, 1979), 7;
[10] Whitaker, *Race Work*, 80.
[11] Carol S. Palmer, "Challenging Tradition: Arizona Women Fight For the Equal Rights Amendment" (Masters Thesis, Arizona State University, 2007), 36; Green, *Nevada*, 319.
[12] Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 36.

example).[13] There was also a large amount of discrimination in employment. Chicano protestors joined forces with United Farm Workers chapters to demand equal treatment under the law and the right to unionize.[14] American Indians, encouraged by the federal government to leave reservations during and after the war to fill jobs, live in cities, and move away from "government assistance" found western cities difficult to manage as well. Native peoples across the West dealt with pay discrepancies, poverty, poor government housing, and denial of voting rights.[15] Numerous ERA activists, including Ruby Duncan, LaDonna Harris, and Hannah Atkins, cut their political teeth working in movements for racial equity and justice before eventually coming to the ERA.

Before Ruby Duncan became involved with the ERA, she helped bring about change for poor women of color in Nevada. Long known as the "Mississippi of the West" for its stubborn hold on segregation and discriminatory labor practices, Nevada and, more specifically, Las Vegas had for decades thrived on the underpaid and behind-the-scenes labor of African Americans desperate to escape the South. One of those workers was Ruby Duncan. Born in 1932, she worked on a Louisiana cotton plantation throughout her childhood. When she was barely out of her teen years Duncan was raped, an attack that left her pregnant and with little options. After being coerced into giving her son to distant family in Las Vegas, she decided to follow her child there in 1952 and hopefully find better employment opportunities. She found work as a maid, waitress, and cook on Vegas's west side, but between the insecure nature of the

[13] Ibid, 37; Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerva No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Vietnam War Era* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005), 38-9, 49

[14] Margaret Rose, "Traditional and Nontraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America, 1962 to 1980." (*Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, La Chicanas (1990): 26-32, 26-30.

15 See Nicholas Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

work, divorce, and a job injury, Duncan eventually found herself relying on welfare on-and-off in order to raise her six children.[16]

Nevada's legislators firmly opposed welfare, refusing federal funds and minimizing existing benefits to the state's most vulnerable citizens: women and children of color.[17] Postwar suburbanization had already widened racial lines in the state, making the integration of schools and neighborhoods contentious. The state lagged behind most of the West in terms of economic services to the poor, especially for people of color. In 1971 the state cut welfare benefits to mothers by a staggering 75%.[18] After efforts to police welfare escalated to the point of random "welfare checks" by state officials looking for potential violations (mostly unclaimed, live-in boyfriends), black women began to organize. The local NAACP went to the capitol to speak with state leaders about the discriminatory practices, but to no avail; leaders in Carson City would not be deterred. Director of the Welfare Department, George Miller, continued to raid Black women's homes and cut their already sub-par benefits without warning. Fed up with this treatment and the discrimination of Black women specifically by the state, Duncan and other Westside mothers began to organize.

On March 6, 1971, the mothers responded by organizing a massive 1,500-person march down Las Vegas Boulevard towards Caesars Palace. The march, which also included national

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[16] Interview with Ruby Duncan, July 10, 2017, Women in Nevada History Legacy Digital Project, UNLV, https://womennvhistory.com/portfolio/ruby-duncan/. See also, Joanne L. Goodwin, "Women at Work in Las Vegas, 1940-1980" in *Oral History, Community, and Work in the American West,* ed. Jessie L. Embry (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013); Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

[17] For more on the history of welfare for women and children, discrimination, and the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program itself, see Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Duncan Lindsey, *The Welfare of Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Phyllis J. Day, *A New History of Social Welfare* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989); Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard, "*Want to Start a Revolution?": Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

[18] Interview with Ruby Duncan.

celebrities and civil rights leaders like Jane Fonda, Caesar Chavez, and Reverend Ralph Abernathy, shut down the city's busiest street and grabbed the public's attention. Duncan founded Operation Life in 1972, an organization dedicated to educating women and the greater public about welfare and a political arm for those who relied on these services.[19] After other subsequent marches and final Supreme Court ruling, the Operation Life women received the benefits they deserved, although legislators continued to refuse the Food Stamp program and passed a law that allowed prison time as a punishment for cheating state-funded programs. The women responded again by staging eat-ins with their children at various casinos and sending the bills to the State House. Because welfare rights was a key issue for Nevada women, Duncan became an experienced and important leader for the ERA and growing women's rights movement in the state. She understood how the disadvantages women faced, especially single mothers, and how gender inequality and poverty could not be alleviated without the other.[20]

[19] Ibid.
[20] Emmily Bristol, "The Mothers Who Marched," *Vegas Seven*, March 3, 2016; Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace.*

Figure 1.1. Ruby Duncan leads the protest on the Las Vegas Strip for the rights of welfare mothers. Courtesy of the *Las Vegas News Bureau.*

The march of the mothers got the attention of white activists in the Nevada as well. Numerous League of Women Voters (LWV) chapters in the state released statements on the failures of the Nevada Civil Rights Act, including the slow school integration process. School districts in Southern Nevada were particularly resistant to these changes.[21] Dorothy Eisenberg, President of the Las Vegas Valley LWV chapter and a Jewish activist, led the charge within the LWV to desegregate schools.[22] Vivian Freeman came to the civil rights movement through her dedication to women and children. The state representative and US Army cadet-trained nurse founded the pregnancy center at the Washoe Medical Center, where she aimed to create a safe

[21] Caryll Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics: The Equal Rights Amendment Ratification Campaign, 1973-1981" (PhD Dissertation, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, 2010), 24.
[22] Ibid.

and equitable place for women to give birth. She also served at the chair of her local Women's Political Caucus chapter, where she was encouraged to join the Reno-Sparks NAACP and eventually the Northern Nevada Black Cultural Center. When she passed away in 2013, a friend commented on her civil rights work, "Despite ourselves and because of her we moved from the Mississippi of the West to becoming a better place."[23] Whether local chapters were dedicated to issues surrounding poverty, environmental preservation, or children, social justice was always the priority. These same women utilized their skills in organization and activism to campaign for the ERA.

In Oklahoma too, Black women took the lead in the early pro-ERA movement. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the redistricting of highly populated African American districts, four Black legislators were elected to the Oklahoma House in 1964, the first time in the state's history. Four years later, Hannah Atkins became the first African American woman elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives. Atkins was unique from her earlier male counterparts because she ran on a platform of supporting both people of color and women's rights. Proving her support for the amendment, she became the first member of the House to sponsor and present the ERA.[24] Atkins would go on to have a long and successful political career in Oklahoma as a staunch social justice leader. To her, the ERA was an extension of the larger civil rights movement in the state and the nation.

When Atkins first moved to Oklahoma in 1951, the state was highly segregated; Oklahoma was a Jim Crow state after all. Atkins and her family were only allowed to visit public parks on Thursdays and were barred from most restaurants and shops. While her husband worked to build up his medical practice, other local doctors protested his admittance to the City

[23] "Vivian Freeman, 1927-2013," *U-News*, December 5, 2013. http://nevadalabor.com/vivian/vivian.html
[24] Kay M. Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), 228-231.

Medical Society. Hannah Atkins, with a graduate degree herself, struggled to find an employer who would hire her. When their son, Edmond, applied to Casady High School in 1954, he was denied admittance based on his race. Although the *Brown* decision was already in effect, Casady was a private Episcopalian school, and thus not covered by the ruling. Atkins and her husband had been dedicated Episcopalians their whole lives and even attended Episcopalian colleges. Eventually, Hannah found a job in the state capital, first as a law librarian, and served Oklahoma as both a state representative and as the first female Secretary of State for the next three decades.[25]

Atkins credited her first campaign victory to her investment and grassroots organizing in the black neighborhoods of Oklahoma City. She argued that many of the "big money" politicians before her rarely appealed to African Americans as potential voters. To solicit support, Atkins campaigned door-to-door in all of her constituents and set up voter registration booths in black communities and churches. As a politician dedicated to truly representing the people, she also refused campaign donations over $100 dollars as a statement against big business and the corruption of public servants. Despite accusations by her all-male opponents that she was only a "tea-sipping lady," Atkins was elected and sworn-in as an official Oklahoma state representative in 1968, a position she would utilize to serve the community for the next twelve years.[26] During her first year as a legislator, one member of the House flashed her a picture of a few KKK members in hoods, explaining "that is me…I just wanted you to know what I think of you being here." Although his actions deeply disturbed her, Atkins did not let the man intimidate her. Often called a "yellow-dog Democrat," a political dig from conservatives about her dedication to the

[25] Hannah Atkins to Attorney General Robert Henry, April 11, 1988, folder 1, box 1, Hannah Diggs Atkins Collection, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma (hereafter OSU).
[26] Interview with Hannah Atkins, by Tanya Finchum, June 22, 2007, Women of the Oklahoma Legislature Oral History Project, OSU.

Democratic Party, Atkins set out to end discrimination against women and minorities in the state.[27] Only four years later, she would be the first legislator to introduce the ERA for ratification in the Oklahoma State House.[28]

Another Oklahoma woman, LaDonna Harris, also used her experience in the civil rights movement to lobby for the ERA. Raised by her Comanche grandparents on their farm in Cotton County, Harris experienced firsthand the prejudice and racist stereotypes rampant in 1940s Oklahoma. Once she married state senator Fred Harris, she was also exposed to the persistent discrimination against African Americans in Oklahoma.[29] While living in both Lawton and Norman, Oklahoma, Harris took part in local civil rights movements in both cities, and even helped establish an unofficial community organization to integrate Lawton called "the Group" in 1963. In the living rooms of the various white, Native, and black members of "the Group," Lawton citizens from all walks of life worked to make integration in their city a swift and safe reality.[30]

When Harris's husband, Fred, was elected to the US Senate, their lives were once again upended and she faced living among people who understood little about Native people. Even among congressmen and women in Washington, DC, Harris spent a good amount of her time trying to correct racist stereotypes. For example Senator Robert F. Kennedy's five-year-old daughter asked Harris about life in a "tent" and if she knew how to use a bow and arrow.[31] This and many other interactions inspired Harris to found Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity and

[27] A "yellow-dog democrat" is a nickname given by conservative Republicans to Democrats who often vote strictly on party lines. The name comes from the joke that Democrats would rather vote for a yellow dog rather than a Republican.
[28] Atkins to Attorney General Henry, April 11, 1988.
[29] Sarah Eppler Janda, "'Her Heritage is Helpful": Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Politicization of LaDonna Harris," *Great Plains Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2005):. 211-227. See also Sarah Eppler Janda, *Beloved Women: The Political Lives of LaDonna Harris and Wilma Mankiller* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007).
[30] Janda, "'Her Heritage is Helpful," 214.
[31] Ibid., 211.

eventually Americans for Indian Opportunity, an advocacy group that highlighted the needs of Native people, their unique experiences and challenges with racism, the continued and rampant issues with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and eventually an international scholarship and leadership group for indigenous people around the world. Harris challenged the boundaries of appropriate behavior for a senator's wife with her political activism. She became Washington's "Indian expert" throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and was the first wife of a legislator to testify before Congress.[32] Her political work and the pushback she received from it influenced her decision to help found the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971. The organization pushed the Senate to ratify the ERA in March 1972, and its state chapters would become some of the most, if not the most, powerful local ERA organizations. For example, in Harris's home state, the Oklahoma Women's Political Caucus would become the fastest growing women's caucus in the nation. Although she stayed busy as executive director of Americans for Indian Opportunity, Harris remained active and highly important in the ERA ratification movement in Oklahoma and at the national level.

For Utah ERA leader Eloise McQuown, political activism began with protesting the draft in the 1960s and the inhumane treatment of the North Vietnamese during the war. Her "radicalization" as she sarcastically called it, or her first taste of political activism, was the realization of the lack of power and representation women had in her state.[33] McQuown transitioned from her antiwar work to focus on electing delegates to the Utah Democratic State Convention, who were dedicated to women's issues. "What they [the local Democratic Party] hadn't counted on is the fact that women have talent, confidence, and they are not going to take a

[32] Ibid., 219-220.
[33] Interview with Eloise McQuown, by Kathryn Mackey, November 16, 1976, and May 18, 1977, Tapes 5 and 8, Women in Utah Politics Oral History Project, American West Center, J. Willard Marriott Library Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter UU).

second place role anymore," she recalled.[34] It was through this work that she and a few other activists heard about the National Women's Political Caucus. In 1969, McQuown helped found both the Utah Women's Political Caucus and a National Organization for Women (NOW) chapter, the first chapter of each organization in the state. Both of these organizations were small (she recalls only five to ten women in the first year), bipartisan, and focused on advancing the rights of women and minorities under the law. In both organizations, the ERA became a priority. This work would eventually birth yet another organization: Equal Rights Coalition Utah.[35] The coalition united labor, professional, religious, and women's organizations interested in passing the ERA in Utah under one umbrella group that lobbied legislators.

Some ERA supporters, like Arizona Senator Sandra Day O'Connor, championed women's equality without supporting "feminism."[36] As an early female graduate of Stanford University School of Law, O'Connor thoroughly supported the idea that women should be afforded the opportunity to pursue careers. She faced discrimination on the job market after graduation in the 1950s, working first in civil service, but quickly built a career in law and politics.[37] A rising star in the Republican Party, O'Connor became the first female Senate Majority leader in Arizona history in 1973.[38] She supported and introduced the ERA in the Arizona Senate, as well as an equal pay bill and legislation that removed an eight-hour work limit for women. And yet she also held strong convictions about women's roles, often insisting

[34] Ibid., 10.
[35] Ibid., 8-9.
[36] I use the term feminist and feminism to describe activists that both believed in the equality of men and women and viewed themselves as a part of the greater women's liberation movement. Men and women labeled as such here are only done so if the person themselves embraced/self-identified with that label.
[37] Sandra Day O'Connor, Remarks to Associated Women Students at ASU, May 77, 1973, item 1001, folder 1, box 1, sub collection SG006, collection RG097, Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records, History and Archives Division (hereafter AZ State Library) https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/digital/collection/archgov/id/480/
[38] Palmer, "Challenging Tradition, 94.

that they held a special role in society as mothers.[39] In an address to female students at Arizona State University, O'Connor stated, "Do marriages, families, and careers for women mix? It depends, of course, on the personalities of the husband and the wife, and the special needs of the children."[40] In this same speech, given in 1973, she ended with a plea for listeners to support adequate daycares so that mothers can become more reliable workers. She also added that employees should embrace part-time work for women, so that they may fully serve their children in the evenings. Even in her support of the ERA, this support was complicated. Although she introduced the amendment and voted in favor of it, despite criticism from her own party members, O'Connor remained skeptical of its true necessity under the law. She told constituents that she hoped the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would be used to establish gender equality under the law, making the ERA unnecessary.[41] As she often stated, "A woman's place is in the home, but it is in other places, too."[42] One reporter notably labeled her, "both liberated and feminine," reflecting clearly the image that the then-Senator hoped to portray.[43]

When Congress sent the ERA to states for approval in 1972, women in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah already had decades of political activism to draw from. Some began fighting vestiges of Jim Crow and the persistence of racial discrimination and segregation. Others marched for welfare rights, the rights of mothers and homemakers, or to end the draft. These women didn't just expand their purview to women's issues. In the process of campaigning

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[39] Sandra Day O'Connor, Remarks to Associated Women Students at ASU, May 77, 1973, item 1001, folder 1, box 1, sub collection SG006, collection RG097, AZ State Library; Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 73.
[40] Sandra Day O'Connor, Remarks to Associated Women Students at ASU, May 77, 1973, item 1001, folder 1, box 1, sub collection SG006, collection RG097, AZ State Library.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ginger Hutton, "Equal Rights Laws Being Considered," *Arizona Republic*, March 13, 1974. For more on feminism and Sandra Day O'Connor's legacy, see Margaret A. Miller, "Justice Sandra Day O'Connor: Token or Triumph from a Feminist Perspective," *Golden Gate University Law Review* 15 (1985), 524-525.

on other issues, they ran into sexual discrimination. The hurdles they faced in their pursuit of other causes led them to a critique of sexism in politics. Many western women, Democrats and Republicans, began to steer their focus away from other social issues to the ERA in hopes of alleviating the legal discrimination women faced in all sectors, private and public, of their lives.

Why ERA?

By 1972 activists were keenly aware of how sexist legislation in their states put women at a disadvantage. Most blatant were the laws that directly and indirectly allowed for discrimination in the workplace, unequal pay, and a dependent status that left all women, working or not, vulnerable to economic ruin. Additionally, Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah women suffered from weak rape and domestic violence protections, a lack of education opportunities and the persistence of sex quotas at universities, and a dearth of power within their church and community institutions. Women activists in the West saw the ratification of the ERA as a concise and efficient way to force their states and cities to address these issues.

Three federal laws existed in 1972 to protect women's employment rights: the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Executive Order 11246.[44] Despite these laws, sex discrimination continued through hiring practices, unequal pay, marriage laws, and college and secondary school admittance and treatment.[45] Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed sex along with race discrimination, sexism cases were not taken as seriously as

[44] As stated by the U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission: "The Equal Pay Act, which is part of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as amended (FLSA), and which is administered and enforced by the EEOC, prohibits sex-based wage discrimination between men and women in the same establishment who perform jobs that require substantially equal skill, effort and responsibility under similar working conditions." Also, Title VII of the Civil Rights' Act reads as follows: "Title VII prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin." Executive Order 112246, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, extends the Equal Pay Act to include government contractors.

[45] "Effects of the ERA on OK Laws," *League of Women Voters of OK Newsletter*, November 12, 1973, folder 10, box 52, Equal Rights Amendment Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (hereafter OHS).

those of race. Even if the Civil Rights Act of 1964's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission agreed to hear a sex discrimination case, the extremely overloaded board often took years to hand down a decision. Punishment in Oklahoma, for example, for violating the Equal Pay Act was only a misdemeanor and a fine between twenty-five and one hundred dollars, creating little incentive for employers to pay women an equal wage.[46] ERA supporters also called to attention to protective labor laws, like weight lifting requirements or limits to the number of hours women could work, which employers often used as a reason not to hire women. While older generations of women activists argued that these protections should remain, those in support of the ERA often stated that, if these protections were necessary, they should extend to men as well.[47] There was also a certain amount of instability in state and federal laws. Unlike a constitutional amendment, which is designed to be difficult to both amend and repeal, any state or federal law mandating legal equality on the basis of sex could be repealed with a single vote. Even the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a piece of federal legislation, was violated by the state of Nevada over and over again throughout much of the 1960s and 1970s, and with few repercussions. After extensive documentation of labor and credit discrimination towards women and minorities in the state, the federal government eventually intervened by threatening to sue.

Although women's movements had already made incredible strides, sexist laws were rooted in centuries old ideas about women's bodies and their dependence on a male breadwinner. Historian Nancy F. Cott argues that even after 1964, "women's reproductive and childbearing roles counted heavily in keeping sex differentiation alive in the law."[48] In 1973 Arizona women

[46] Kathy Callahan, "Researcher Finds Status of Women in the State 'Troubling,"' *Tulsa Tribune*, August 16, 1978.
[47] Ginger Hutton, "A Rational Approach Needed on Equal Rights Amendment," *Arizona Republic*, April 14, 1972.
[48] Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 205.

already made up 40% of the state's workforce.[49] The US Census Bureau reported that in the 1970s, 40% of Utah women (over the age of 16), worked outside of the home.[50] Just ten years earlier, that number was only 30%.[51] The number of women as sole providers of their children was also increasing nationwide, adding to the urgency of the ERA.[52] Across the nation, women were entering or remained a large part of the workforce, which proved to activists that the "family wage" excuse for hiring women less and paying them a lower wage was not a viable argument.

Lucile Kaufman of Arizona experienced sex discrimination when she applied for her dream job; her potential employer was the federal government. Since the early 1900s, the US Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation had been in charge of a massive water share program that transported water from the Colorado River to the upper and lower basin states. In 1950, Arizona and other western states began lobbying the federal government to update this process through state-based projects that would more efficiently retrieve and transport water to their destinations, and with less waste and contamination. Hoping to be a part of this project, Kaufman sent in an application to the Central Arizona Project. As a mechanical engineer, she easily passed the civil service application required for her field, and eagerly waited for a response. After not hearing back from administrators, Kaufman decided to visit the Project's office in Phoenix. There, she learned from federal officials that her record had been sent to the central office in Denver, filed under "women applicants"; she would be contacted as soon as the

[49] Steven Tragash, "15 percent of city employees are women," *Arizona Republic*, March 24, 1973.
[50] "Legal Status of Homemakers in Utah," Homemakers Committee report, National Commission of the Observance of International Women's Year, folder 17, box 4, IWY Collection, UNLV. See also, "Highlights of Women's Employment and Education, 1972," Women's Bureau, Employment Standards Administration, U.S. Department of Labor.
[51] Jennifer L. Holland, "Salt Lake...is Our Selma": The Equal Rights Amendment and the Transformation of the Politics of Gender in Utah" (Masters Thesis, Utah State University, 2005), 51.
[52] Sue Sloog, "Women's Dream Delayed," *Tulsa Tribune,* September 15, 1978.

Central Arizona Project or other civil service sectors requested a "woman mechanical engineer" specifically. She never heard back.[53]

This experience stayed with Kaufman for the rest of her life. In 1977, nearly thirty years after the incident, she wrote "For 71 years I have not had the liberty to do what I wanted to do nor received justice for the work I have done, because I was born to become a woman."[54] Kaufman, like so many others, was frustrated with the continued and legal discrimination in the workplace, and being denied opportunities not because of her skills or merit, but because of biology. The ERA was a way to remedy some of these issues, or at least begin the process. Kaufman added: "I am an ardent conservative but it grows harder to vote for and contribute to those conservatives who are against the ERA. Perhaps I will have to change and vote for liberals who are for the ERA."[55] Her experience with sex discrimination motivated her political action and a reassessment of her partisan affiliation.

Outside of the loss of employment opportunities, marriage laws in the West also put women at an economic disadvantage. Such laws assumed that women were dependents of their husbands. This status gave a man legal control over his wife, her body, children, and place of residence. One example of this was Oklahoma's Head of Household statute, a law older than the state itself. Passed in 1890 during the territorial days and then added to the official state statutes in 1910, it read: "The husband is the head of the family. He may choose any reasonable place or mode of living and the wife must conform thereto."[56] Because of the law's proscription of male

[53] Lucile Kaufman Personal Recounting of the Central Arizona Project, folder 3, box 11, Lucile Kaufman Papers, Arizona State University Special Collections (hereafter ASU). For more information about the Project itself and its history see "Background and History," Central Arizona Project, Accessed January 25, 2020. https://www.cap-az.com/about-us/background

[54] Lucile Kaufman to Dale Bell, Regional Director of Conservative Caucus, Inc., August 6, 1977, folder 4, box 11, Lucile Kaufman Papers, ASU.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Head of Household, Oklahoma State §32-2 (1910). Repealed by law, 1988, HB 1193, c. 17, § 1, emerg. eff. March 16, 1988.

domination within the marriage and the family, the Head of Household statute became a target of those arguing in favor of the ERA.[57] A woman from Ardmore, Oklahoma, explained her support for the ERA to her local paper stating, "because there is no single law or constitutional amendment requiring courts to treat men and women as equals before the law, women find themselves in a strange quandary when they go to court."[58] In Arizona, a woman's identity was so tied to her husband that he could legally be charged with his wife's crimes if found that he "commanded her to do so."[59] Another Arizona law removed a woman's state residency status and replaced it with her husband's home state, hurting Arizona students who qualified for in-state tuition.[60] Despite being able to vote and hold their own citizenship status, elements of coverture remained into the 1970s; in the eyes of the state, women were still "covered" by their husbands in many ways.

Marriage inequality played out most strongly in matters of inheritance and property.[61] Unless specified otherwise in a will, the death of the husband resulted in the equal division of the estate between the wife and her children, all as equal dependents. The law excluded the possibility that wives were co-producers of that estate. All recipients then paid an inheritance tax on top of that.[62] In Utah, under the Married Women's Property Act, wives did have some agency when it came to keeping personal property out of their husband's control. All of a wife's property that she desired to remain separate after marriage had to be written up in a new and separate document. Even with such a contract, Utah women still had a hard time using this

[57] For more on how women's economic dependency on their husbands evolved after women were granted the right to vote, see Cott, *Public Vows,* 157.
[58] "ERA Explained By Area Woman," *The Daily Ardmoreite,* January 21, 1975.
[59] Ginger Hutton, "Equal Rights Laws Being Considered," *Arizona Republic,* March 17, 1972.
[60] Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 63.
[61] Ginger Hutton, "A rational approach needed on equal rights amendment," *Arizona Republic,* April 14, 1972.
[62] "Women Advocate the ERA Bill from Both Viewpoints," *Daily Oklahoman,* October 23, 1981.

property as collateral for loans.[63] Another example, NRS 123.250 of the Nevada Revised Statutes stated that community property between a husband and wife automatically transfers to the husband after forty days in the event of the wife's death, but if the husband dies, the wife had to go through probate court, similar to a dependent, in order to legally keep her marriage property unless stated differently in a will.[64] If the couple did not have any children, the wife could only keep up to $100,000 worth of their estate, with the rest divided up between any other "heirs" the husband may have had.[65]

The distribution of social security and obtaining of credit were also highly gendered and discriminatory. If a woman chose to be a homemaker or, like many women in the West, worked alongside her husband on their farm or ranch, she would have no right to social security or retirement funds, leaving her dependent on her husband during the marriage and extremely vulnerable in the case of his death or divorce. Obtaining credit or loans without a man co-signing was also an issue for women, especially single mothers, who often lacked wages large enough or independent collateral to establish credit in their own right. It was also legally required in Nevada for a married women to have her husband co-sign on business or credit loans, meaning that women could not own businesses, credit cards, or loans independent from their husbands.[66]

Divorce could also be difficult. Like many other states, Utah still required a legal "fault" before the state would grant a divorce petition, meaning documented charges of "impotency, adultery, willful desertion for more than one year, willful neglect to provide, habitual drunkenness, insanity, three years under a decree of separate maintenance, or mental or

[63] National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, "Legal Status of Homemakers in Utah," Homemakers Commission Report pp. 3-4, 7, folder 17, box 4, IWY Collection, UNLV.
[64] Ibid., 13.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Government Research Newsletter, University of Nevada Reno, vol. 12, no. 6, March 19, 1974, folder 1, box 1, Dorothy Eisenberg Collection, UNLV.

physically cruelty." In a ten-year period of study, between 1965 and 1975, the majority of Utah women seeking a divorce claimed mental cruelty as the "fault" or grounds for their request.[67] Essentially, women continued to be considered dependents of their husbands in the eyes of the state and discriminated against in instances of divorce. Western women had much to gain through the ERA.[68]

Many ERA supporters including Oklahoman Wanda Jo Peltier hoped the ERA would address these many problems. Peltier supported the ERA because of her experience with sexism and marriage law in the state. Essentially, Peltier became involved in the movement after she learned firsthand of the unequal treatment of wives in Oklahoma in 1960. At the age of twenty-nine when she was a stay-at-home mother of two, her husband, a Baptist preacher, died unexpectedly. Had she not urged him to write up a will years earlier, she would have likely lost her home and farm. Now a widow, Peltier realized that her service as a mother held no monetary value in the labor market. She found herself without any marketable skills and few options in the "real world."[69]

Despite this tragedy, Peltier found work, earned her master's degree in English, and eventually took a tenure-track position at Oklahoma Baptist University. After years of being passed over for tenure by men with less experience and the same degree, Peltier realized she was being discriminated against based on her sex. She filed a class-action lawsuit with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in April 1973, and eventually won. In order to get to that victory, however, she spent thousands of dollars taking the university to court in order to receive

[67] National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, "Legal Status of Homemakers in Utah" Homemakers Commission Report, p. 16, folder 17, box 4, IWY Collection, UNLV.
[68] Cott, *Public Vows*, 210.
[69] "Complaint charges OBU with Sex Discrimination," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 14, 1973.

just compensation. On top of that, the EEOC took four years to rule on her case because it was so bogged down with reports of sexual discrimination in the workplace from across the country.[70]

Peltier's story highlights another form of discrimination that women believed the ERA would alleviate: sexism in education, in both admissions and faculty treatment. While the 1950s saw an unprecedented number of women attending colleges and universities, a quota system still limited the number of women in majors not viewed as traditionally "female" like the hard sciences. Graduate programs almost universally capped their female acceptance rate at a small percentage of the pool. Years before the ERA came up for debate in the state of Arizona in 1972, the local NOW chapter made it their public mission to fight for equal education not just at the collegiate level but in every classroom. "We have to start with the schools," Chairwoman Maria Richards told the *Arizona Republic* in 1970.[71] Some of the earliest "women's liberation" action in Arizona covered by the media related to education at Arizona State University. In 1970, female graduate students and the few female professors protested the gender quota at the university. These protests expanded to the second-class status of female professors at the university, the lack of childcare options, and discrimination with tenure and promotions. The movement was publicly supported by some faculty but was overwhelmingly a student-led movement. The ASU activists quickly drew the ire of the media, who accused one woman of being a lesbian and another of disgracing her husband by wanting to keep her maiden name.[72] Clearly, the protest had hit a nerve in the community, but the movement for education reform and support for faculty mothers continued. A year later in 1971, ASU held its first Annual Women's Conference in hopes to "provide a means for the average citizen to gain insight into

[70] "OBU Accused of Sex Bias," *Oklahoma Journal*, April 1973.
[71] "How NOW Stands on the Women's Liberation Movement," *Arizona Republic*, October 4, 1970, section M-13.
[72] April Daien, "Liberationist refused name change," *Arizona Republic*, March 29, 1971; Pinny Laureman, letter to the editor, *Arizona Republic*, March 29, 1971.

various public issues relating to the problems of women at work." Some students at the university transitioned their activism in 1972 into groups like Students for ERA and Babysit for ERA, which offered childcare for working mothers and those lobbying for the amendment.[73]

Other legislation that desperately needed revising in western states concerned violence against women, including rape, spousal rape, and domestic violence. Western women had already began providing services to battered women before 1972, but hoped that states would contribute to shelters and aid. In Nevada, Florence McClure and Sandy Petta made history when they established the first rape crisis center in the state, after witnessing numerous women abused and left without any resources or advocates in hospitals or the courts. Although not directly related to equality under the law, activists argued that the ERA could at least draw attention to the lack of protections for women. The state could offer more support and funding than existing volunteer organizations and private facilities. Activists also hoped the ERA would motivate lawmakers to add men as possible victims of assault and rape. Other western women, like Oklahoman Pat Reaves, heard about these issues through their involvement in the ERA campaign and followed in their footsteps.[74]

Laws against domestic violence and spousal rape were virtually unheard of in the 1970s. There were not even protections if the couple was separated or in the process of getting a divorce. Under the laws that declared wives dependents of their husbands, it was extremely hard for a woman to press charges against the man or the state to prosecute the person who had legal rights over her. In the late 1970s, Oklahoma Representative Hannah Atkins presented a bill making spousal rape against the law and a separate bill addressing domestic violence and a woman's right to prosecute her husband if he was deemed "violent." Both bills died in the

[73] Students for ERA flyer, no date, folder 6, box 3, Maureen Murphy Papers, ASU.
[74] Interview with Pat Reaves, by the author, March 15, 2019, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

House, and it would be decades before any such legislation would be taken seriously in the state. In a public speech in May 1978 titled "Close Encounters of the Domestic Kind," Atkins stated, "I intend to bring [the spousal rape and violence bills] both back, and back, and back until they are passed. There is a case pending now in which a husband has been charged in the gang rape of his wife because he assisted two other men. We will see if the charges stick."[75] Hoping to make some kind of head way on spousal rape prosecution, Atkins authored a bill which "provided that a person could be a convicted of the rape of a spouse if the act was corroborated by an eye witness." Even with this limiting clause to the law, the Oklahoma House still voted the bill down. During the discussion on the floor an unnamed lawmaker argued that "in a marriage contract, sexual intercourse is just a part of the deal."[76] Despite her best efforts, the majority of legislators in Oklahoma did not consider spousal rape as a serious or punishable offense because of their more conservative views of marriage and gender roles.

Women throughout the West who volunteered within and worked for their respective religious organizations also recognized their lack of representation in leadership positions. For the growing evangelical sects across the region, heteropatriarchy was culturally and institutionally central. Women could not serve as pastors or even preach in many cases. Southern Baptists, for example, prevented women from baptizing their own children. Women's service was often limited to traditional female work: teaching Sunday school classes to children, volunteering in the nursery, doing bookkeeping and clerical work, and preparing meals. These gendered roles were not unique to evangelicals. Catholic, Mormon, and even the more liberal Episcopalian and Unitarian churches upheld many of these same gender norms, preventing

[75] Hannah Atkins, "Close Encounters of the Domestic Kind," speech, Oklahoma Health and Welfare Association, May 4, 1978, folder 14, box 11, Hannah Atkins Collection, OHS.
[76] "House Derails Measure on Rape of Wife," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 3, 1977.

capable women from assuming important religious positions that provided financial compensation.[77]

For the numerous women within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), leadership and community service through the Relief Society, the women's organization within the Church, provided women with a sense of accomplishment and empowerment even as they worked within a very patriarchal religious structure. Although never equal, many LDS women were ardent feminists and trailblazers for western women's rights. In the 19th century, women within the church founded some of the first women's newspapers in the West, led suffrage campaigns, and found support from LDS men. Patriarchy had always been a part of LDS doctrine, but so had female independence. Although the Relief Society historically operated independently from the Church's Council of Twelve, a sort of governing board for all LDS programs, this changed in the 1950s. Under the church's new "Correlation," the Relief Society was now under the control of the all-male council, with four men in particular chosen by the council to be in charge of the women's organization.[78] This change drastically altered the already deteriorating balance of power between men and women within the LDS Church. The Correlation, while influencing some Mormon women to abandon their Relief Society work and

[77] Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 108-110, 214, 271; Ruth Murray Brown, *For A "Christian America:" A History of the Religious Right* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002) 8-10, 15-25; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 32-34; Interview with Jean Ford, by Victoria Ford, 1988, "Jean Ford: A Nevada Women Leads the Way," pp. 61, University of Nevada Oral History Program, Reno, Nevada. https://contentdm.library.unr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/unohp/id/2567; Interview with Frankie Sue Del Papa, by Roselyn Richardson-Weir, 2007, "An Oral History of the Nevada Women's Conference," University of Nevada Oral History Program, Reno, Nevada. https://contentdm.library.unr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/unohp/id/448

[78] Holland, "Salt Lake... is Our Selma," 25. See also Martha Sontag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005); Neil J. Young, '"The ERA Is a Moral Issue': The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment," *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (September 2007): 625.

involvement in other church programs, would also influence how much the church leaders would be able to flex their political muscles when the ERA debate began.[79]

Outside of the real benefits of the Equal Rights Amendment for women, supporters and organizations also highlighted those that would accrue for men as well. Oklahoma ERA activist and journalist Junetta Davis argued in the *Norman Transcript* that men, too, were often denied their spouses' benefits in the event of death. She also touched on the few protective labor laws still in existence that benefitted women over men in the workplace, including earlier retirement.[80] The League of Women Voters also argued that gender equality could improve men's lives in the workplace as well as their homes. State laws protected women from rape, abduction, forced marriage, and violence (although only when the perpetrator was not her husband), but had little to say about sexual violence against men. By focusing on the benefits for men, supporters of the ERA argued early on that both women and men would have to work together in order to secure the amendment's passage in their state. Men for ERA groups would eventually organize in every western state in response.[81]

Educating legislators and Americans on the necessity of the Equal Rights Amendment was a challenge, but activists remained hopeful, as the ERA's passage through Congress was a historical feat in itself. Alice Paul's National Woman's Party, a suffrage association, wrote and promoted the first and only Equal Rights Amendment, introducing it to Congress on December 10, 1923.[82] In subsequent years, the ERA was challenged by legislators, feminists, and working-

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[80] Junetta Davis, "Similarities Seen in Past, Present Women's Amendment Action," *Norman Transcript*, January 16, 1975.
[81] "Effects of the ERA on OK Laws" *League of Women Voters of OK Newsletter*, November 12, 1973, folder 10, box 52, ERA Collection, OHS.
[82] Susan D. Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 18-9; Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 124. For more works on women's suffrage and its connection to the ERA, see Eleanor Flexnor, *Century of Struggle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Doubleday,

class women alike. The amendment's largest problem had always been protective legislation. Women's rights activists debated whether or not repealing special labor laws for women was actually more helpful or hurtful in the long run. By the 1960s, though, protective legislation seemed unnecessary and a hindrance to many women workers. Although introduced to Congress every year since its conception, 1972 was the first year both houses of Congress expressed majority support for the amendment.

When the National Organization for Women (NOW) first organized in 1966, members remained unsure if they should support the ERA as some members saw utility in protective legislation for women. By 1967, though, NOW firmly stood behind the amendment as a necessity for American women, dubbing protective labor legislation outdated and a tool used for workplace discrimination based on sex. After NOW's support of the ERA, the unions with the largest female membership, the American Federation of Labor and the United Automotive Workers, soon followed.[83] At the end of the 1960s, after a decade of protest and progress, reforming outdated and gendered laws seemed reasonable. With such institutional support and the support of most of the American population, it seemed the amendment would finally pass.[84] Legislators had no problem backing such a popular resolution. Both the national Democratic and Republican Parties endorsed the ERA in 1972. President Richard Nixon advocated for the amendment and subsequent presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter followed suit.[85] If at least thirty-eight state legislatures could get a majority of its members to support it, the ERA would

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1971); Kristi Andersen, *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics Before the New Deal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Christine Lunardini, *Alice Paul: Equality for Women* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2013); Jad Adams, *Women and the Vote: A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Trisha Franzen, *Anna Howard Shaw: The Work of Woman Suffrage* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014); Lisa Terault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

[83] Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 66-69.

[84] Jerry Searbrough, "Poll Shows Growing Support for Rights Amendment," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 19, 1974.

[85] Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 232-4.

become the 27th amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Originally, the ERA was given a deadline of March 22, 1979, but this was eventually extended to June 30, 1982.[86]

At the moment the ERA passed through Congress, the amendment was popular with both parties, and throughout every region of the nation except the South. The Oklahoma Senate was one of the first state legislative bodies to approve of the amendment, giving the ERA a voice vote of "yea" that very same day. In the first month, fourteen states voted for ratification. After one year, that number had risen to thirty. This included ten states in the West: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming.[87] Because of the existing women's organizations and the concrete evidence of discrimination in multiple sectors, Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah activists had boots on the ground almost immediately. Pro- ERA men and women across the country felt confident that, if presented with the volumes of evidence about sex discrimination, their side would win out. Influenced by its sweeping and bipartisan support, many state agencies endorsed the amendment initially. For example, the newly established Governor's Commission on the Status of Women in both Oklahoma and Utah made the ERA a priority issue. To keep bipartisan support, early pro-ERA activists continued to frame their argument in matters of economic fairness and discrimination.

[86] For more on the ERA as a constitutional amendment and the legal interpretations of the debate, see Mary Francis Berry, *Why ERA Failed* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Janet K. Boles, *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment* (New York: Longman, 1979); Gilbert Y. Steiner, *Constitutional Inequality: The Political Fortunes of the Equal Rights Amendment* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985).
[87] For a list of states that ratified the ERA by date, see "Ratification By State," Equal Rights Amendment, accessed January 28, 2020. https://www.equalrightsamendment.org/era-ratification-map

Perpetuation and Pioneer Women of the 1970s

For activists in the few remaining unratified western states, supporters argued that gender equality was in-line with the progressive spirit of their region, and linked the ERA directly to another important amendment: women's suffrage. Western women called on their neighbors to ratify the ERA in the name of their suffragette ancestors. Some were old enough to have fought for suffrage themselves. Others had watched their mothers and grandmothers with pride as they participated in state and national elections before the passage of the 19th Amendment. In the West, they had been told, white women received the right to vote because they helped build their states. As the story went, western women played an important and special role in the American story and they had been rewarded. For these mostly white women who embraced the term "pioneer" in the 1970s, the ERA was the next step in this story and duty entrusted to them. It may have been a new decade and a new constitutional amendment up for ratification, but the legacy remained the same. And yet as western leaders harkened back to these pioneers of suffrage, none of them mentioned that while white women had been voting for over fifty years by 1972, women of color, and especially black women and Indigenous women, exercising the right to vote had not been that simple. The "progress" white western women heralded was settler colonialism and the violent taking of indigenous and Mexican land in the region.

Perhaps then, it is no surprise that mostly white ERA activists embraced this image, but many Oklahoma American Indian women did as well. Oklahoma was unique in that unlike other western states, it allowed numerous tribes the right to vote in state elections, including Native women.[88] While some Oklahomans like, LaDonna Harris, avoided this colonial language, other

[88] Native people in Oklahoma had American citizenship before many others because they were allotted. American citizenship and voting were a part of the Dawes Act package. See David A. Chang, *The Color of the Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Edward Everett Dale, *A History of Oklahoma* (New York: Row, Peterson, and Co., 1939); Edward Everett Dale, *The Indians of the Southwest: A Century of Development Under the*

Native women in Oklahoma embraced it. At one ERA rally in Chicago, for example, Oklahoma activists Wanda Jo Peltier dressed as a pioneer woman and Kay Suchy (Pottawatomie) as an American Indian woman in celebration of the amendment. Although the ERA held close ties to the civil rights movements in the West, in this instance, activists instead chose to highlight a whitewashed and mythic version of western suffrage that connected earning the right to vote to westward expansion.[89] This vision also suggests westward expansion and women's suffrage immediately benefitted all women.

Figure 1.2. Wanda Jo Peltier and Kay Suchy (Pottawatomie) at an ERA Rally in Chicago, n.d. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

United States (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949); W. David Baird and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008); Angie Debo, *A History of the Indians of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970)

[89] For more on the history of western suffrage as a whole see, Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote was Won* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

In Utah, one of the first states to approve women's suffrage, activist Susana Mae Grua had been working to ratify the ERA almost as long as the amendment had been around. Grua was one of only a handful of women to earn a scholarship to the University of Utah in 1912; as one of eight children, this was a welcome relief to her and her family. Yet when her mother passed away only a few years later, Grua paused her college studies to help take care of her siblings.[90] After finally graduating and earning her teaching certification, Grua led a fairly typical life for a young Utah woman: she married, had four children, and utilized her skills in education to teach for the Relief Society.[91] When her husband died suddenly and she was left to care for her four children alone, Grua became more involved with women's issues and the lack of resources even for college-educated and experienced working women like herself. Grua was first introduced to the amendment in 1932 when she joined her local Business and Professional Women's Foundation (BPW) chapter.[92] BPW was one of the few women's organizations in the early twentieth century to focus on the professional and economic advancement of women.

Through the BPW, Grua and other Utah women became convinced, even in the 1930s, that the ERA was necessary for the betterment of not just women's lives, but their communities as well. Knowing first-hand the dire choices single women faced, the BPW in Utah focused on electing women legislators, lobbying for the Equal Pay Act, and pushing for the ERA. In 1949 she also joined the Women's Legislative Council, a bipartisan group that served as watchdog for Utah legislation concerning women. And yet as this activism on behalf of vulnerable women grew through formal women's organizations and politically lobbying, Grua began to distance herself from LDS service. Those literary lessons for the Relief Society shifted, according to

[90] Interview with Susana Mae Grua, by Kathryn MacKay, Eloise McQuown, and Gregory C. Thompson, March 31, 1977, tape 6, folder 5, box, 1, Women in Utah Politics Oral History Project Collection, UU, 1, 6.
[91] Ibid., 15-6.
[92] Ibid., 8.

Grua, from a place of compassion for women from all walks of life to only those who dedicated their lives to family. Working mothers, even those working out of necessity, were overlooked.[93] After Congress ratified the ERA in 1972 and the debate over the amendment began to heat up, Grua situated her support squarely within the legacy of western expansionists. She stated, "It's silly for people in Utah who have been brought up to respect women and to feel that women were good pioneers as men were and then turn down the ERA... It doesn't make sense to me and they'll probably cut me off [sic] the Church."[94] Grua viewed her support of the amendment as in line with LDS Church doctrine, often citing the work ethic that Brigham Young encouraged in his own daughters and granddaughters. She was sure early LDS pioneers would have supported the ERA.

Utah's female legislators, too, used the legacy of suffrage in the West to justify their support of the ERA. In a special edition of *The Women's Chronicler*, the Utah Order of Women Legislators gave the amendment their full endorsement, and every state representative interviewed about their support of the ERA mentioned suffrage or a reference to women's rights as a western tradition. Representative Lois B. Christensen, after proclaiming that she was not a "women's libber," spoke about how proud she was to be from a state that fought for women's suffrage before statehood itself. She added, "Since 1896 valiant women in our state legislature have become leaders in better conditions...for women," highlighting not just suffrage, but the long and important legacy of female political participation in Utah.[95] Another legislator, Beatrice Marchant, also connected the ERA to suffrage in the West by reminding readers that although Wyoming was the first state to grant women the right to vote statewide in 1869, women in

[93] Ibid., 15-6.
[94] Ibid., 42.
[95] "Develop Women's Full Potential," *The Women's Chronicler*, September 1974, p. 3, folder 13, box 7, Equal Rights Coalition of Utah Collection, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, UT.

present-day Utah got to the ballots first. She added, "It would seem we have an obligation to our heritage and our future to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment."[96]

Other members of the Utah Order of Women Legislators connected women's rights more broadly to pioneer and LDS history. Utah legislator, Mary Lorraine Johnson, highlighted the pride she felt in being a part of a "lineage of great pioneer women who were willing to sacrifice all they possessed in the world for the building of this great state." She added that, despite their personal sacrifices on behalf of their communities, these women "did not sacrifice their personal independence." Utah women did not stop at suffrage, but continued to organize around women's issues. In fact, as the article reminded readers, the first women's newspaper in the West, *The Woman's Exponent*, was published by Mormon women in 1872. During its long publication, the paper always included this statement of purpose: "The Rights of the Women of Zion and the Rights of the Women of all Nations." In the October 1894 edition of the paper, *The Woman's Exponent* was already calling for the equal rights of men and woman. Representative Marchant reminding fellow Mormons that Brigham Young advised his brethren to council with their wives; she hoped her fellow male legislators would do the same before they voted on the ERA.[97] When House member Rita Urie, along with other female representatives, presented the ERA to the Utah legislature for the very first time, she told reporters that the amendment was a new part of the legacy of Utah's suffrage pioneers.[98]

Nevada's umbrella organization for ERA supporters, NERA, also made direct ties between the amendment and pioneer women. Members viewed themselves as the daughters of the trailblazing suffragists of the West who came before them, and believed the American West should continue as a progressive place for women. A NERA pamphlet issued in 1974 noted,

[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Holland, "Salt Lake...is our Selma," 11.

"Nevada's early history is one of women and men laboring side by side for the prosperity and well-being of the state. Nevada was among the first states to give women the vote and to allow women to serve on juries." The pamphlet went on to add, "ERA is Nevada's opportunity to continue its early, western tradition of individual liberty.... Only through ERA can Nevada confirm its commitment to the principle of equality for women and men in Nevada."[99] These women, like their earlier suffragist counterparts, understood their ERA activism in terms of loyalty to their state and region, as well as equality of the sexes.

Arizona and Oklahoma pro-ERA women also appropriated pioneer and suffrage imagery in their arguments for ratification, although not as commonly as Utah and Nevada did. Oklahoma and Arizona also granted women the right to vote before the 19th amendment was ratified. OK-ERA, the OKWPC, and other ERA groups in the state used an image of The Pioneer Woman Statue in Ponca City, Oklahoma, a massive thirty-foot tall ode to white mothers who participated in the land grab of present-day Oklahoma, as the logo for pro-ERA shirts, buttons, and banners. In the OKWPC's most popular ERA pamphlet, which highlighted how the amendment would help and protect homemakers and farmwives in the state, the statue is front and center under the title: "In Oklahoma, Just Because They're Women."[100] In Arizona too, suffragists were raised from the dead, although interestingly by someone who was not even from the state. Liz Carpenter, a leading feminist in the 1970s and Press Secretary of Lady Bird Johnson, encouraged Arizona activists to "take on" their legislators and remind them of who they were dealing with. She told them, "When the West was settled, men and women came into this state as partners. They were equals in carving out this country and they should be equals now in this state's

[99] NERA pamphlet, folder ERA Literature 1974, box 1, Janet MacEachern Collection, UNLV.
[100] Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 4.

maturity."[101] Even those outside of the region easily made the connection between suffrage and the ERA, and viewed the West as an easy win for the amendment. This belief made the first ERA votes in the unratified states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah that much more shocking for activists.

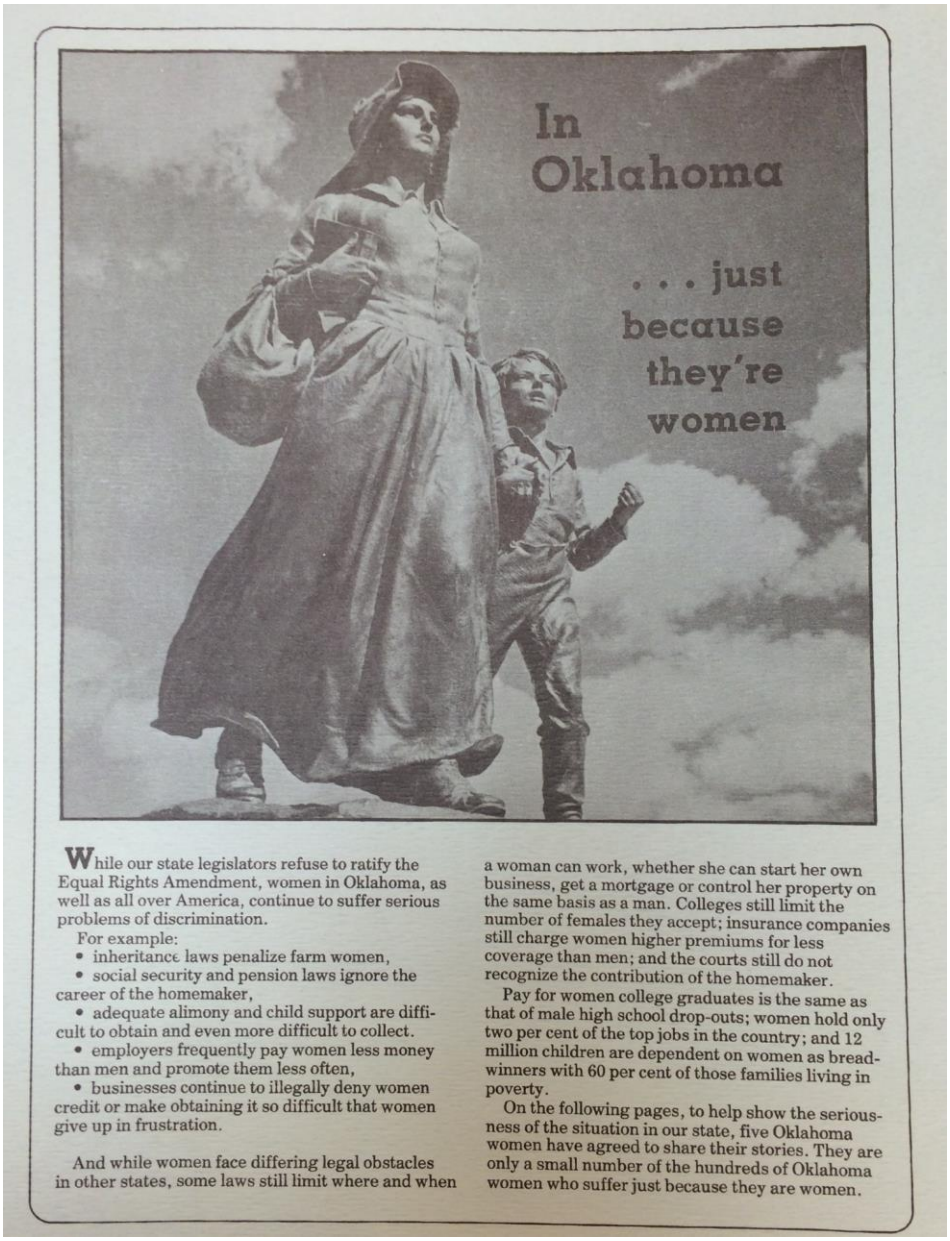
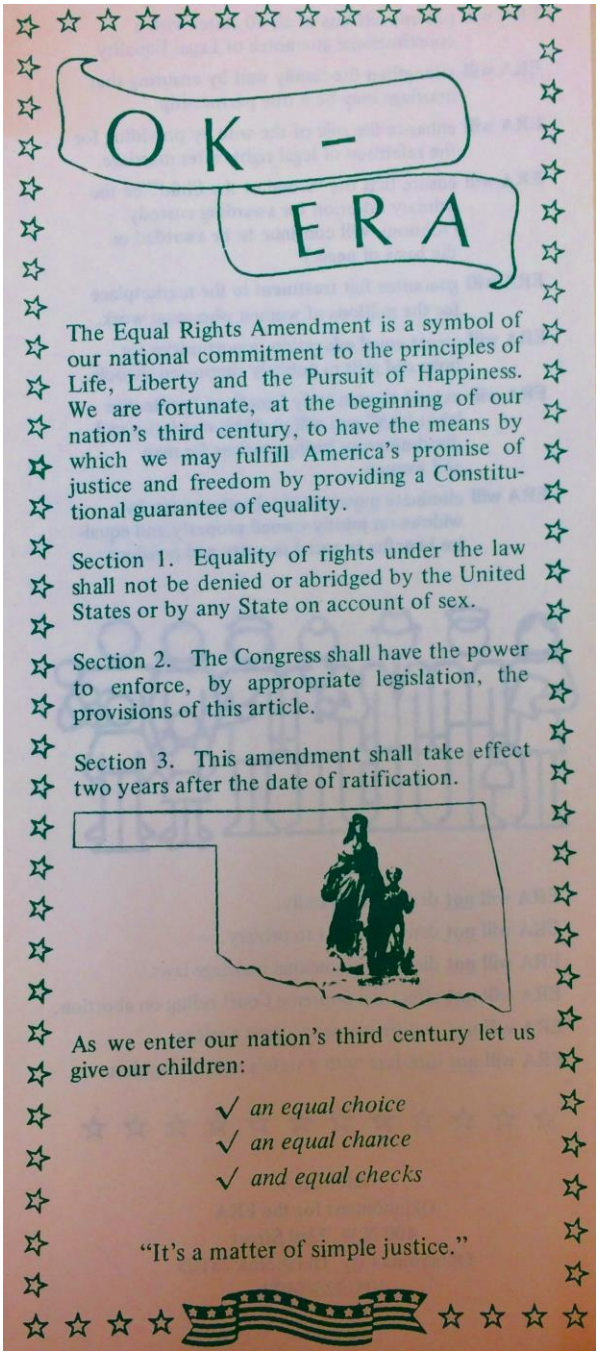
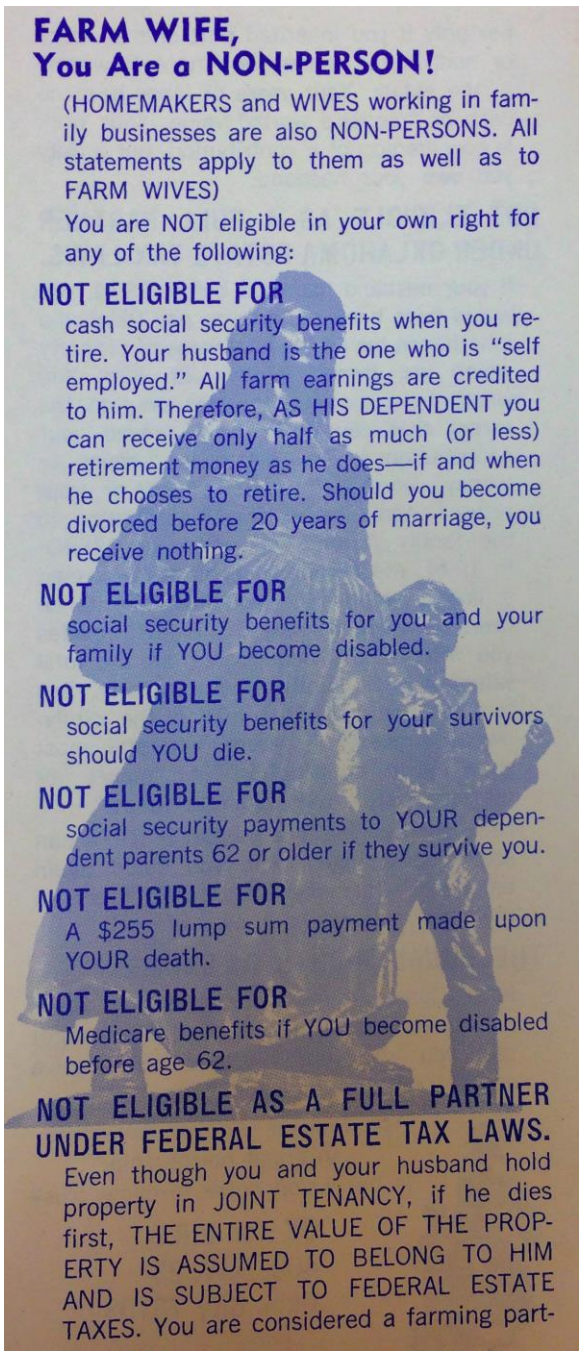


Figure 1.3. An ERA flyer utilizing The Pioneer Woman Statue in an appeal to Oklahoma's early suffrage and "pioneer" history. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

[101] John W. Schwada, "Champion of women calls doting dad natural ally of liberation," *Arizona Republic*, June 29, 1977.





Figures 1.4 and 1.5. ERA pamphlets produced by OK ERA utilizing The Pioneer Woman Statue in an appeal to Oklahoma's early suffrage and "pioneer" history. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

Despite all of the positive signs, in 1972 the Oklahoma House of Representatives became the first legislative body in the nation to vote the ERA down.[102] ERA activists in the state were surprised, as many had spoken directly to legislators. Activists were encouraged by the perception that there was little to no organized opposition. This perception was wrong. A month earlier, in February 1972, the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* featured an article titled "What's Wrong with the Equal Rights Amendment?" to the homes of conservative Oklahoma subscribers. After successful appearances on several Republican and religious radio shows in the 1960s, Phyllis Schlafly had begun a monthly newsletter in 1967. By that time, Schlafly was already a successful author and lawyer who was heavily involved in the emerging conservative movement within the Republican Party. Schlafly's article assured its readers that the passage of the ERA would "absolutely and positively" make women subject to the draft, put single mothers at risk of losing custody of their children and child support, and force women into the workforce.[103]

Ann Patterson, a local woman who would eventually lead the Oklahoma anti-ERA forces, read the article and immediately called her representative when she heard about the upcoming vote. In an interview with sociologist Ruth Murray Brown, Patterson explained her initial understanding of the ERA before Schlafly's article: "We didn't know anything about the amendment at all. In fact, I thought it was a good thing until I read Phyllis' *Report*." Patterson

[102] "Opponents Celebrate ERA Demise," *Tulsa Tribune*, July 11, 1982.
[103] For more on Phyllis Schlafly and the ERA, see Carol Felsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority: The Biography of Phyllis Schlafly* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981); Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism;* Marjorie J. Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017). You can also find a number of her speeches in Phyllis Schlafly, *Phyllis Schlafly Speaks, Volume 1: Her Favorite Speeches* (Dallas: Skellig America, 2016).

passed out Schlafly's article to legislators before the vote.[104] On March 29, the ERA failed in the House, 36 to 52. Democratic Representative C. H. Spearman, Jr. explained that the amendment needed to be researched further before the House could approve it.[105] Still, ERA supporters remained positive; the gallery was filled with those in favor of the amendment while only five anti-ERA activists showed up.[106] Angered and unwilling to give up so soon, Representative Hannah Atkins blamed "frightened housewives" for the ERA's defeat and vowed to pre-file another ERA resolution so that the ERA would be the first resolution considered in the next House session.[107] Needing a majority vote from the Oklahoma House, pro-ERA continued organizing, while anti-ERA forces began their work in earnest.

A few months later, in 1973, as Utah and Nevada activists prepared for their first votes, a strikingly similar turn of events occurred. Utah ERA supporters, including Eloise McQuown and Beatrice Marchant, had spent the previous months meeting with Utah House and Senate members. A phone survey tallied the "yea" votes at 15 of 29 in the Senate and 46 of 75 in the House.[108] Yet a small but organized opposition, which included a good number of Mormon women, protested outside of the capitol. LDS members in Nevada as well appeared at the capitol in Carson City to oppose the amendment. In that state, the Senate brought the ERA up for a vote first and invited members of the public to come discuss the amendment on the floor. Women in opposition cited their desire to remain housewives and mothers, as well as their allegiance to the

[104] Brown, *"For a "Christian America,"* 29; Phyllis Schlafly, "What's Wrong with the Equal Rights Amendment?," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, February 1972. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 217-8.
[105] David Craighead, "Rep. Atkins Vows to Make Rights Campaign Issue," *Oklahoma Journal*, March 30, 1972.
[106] Kaye Teall, "First Anniversary," *Oklahoma Observer*, July 25, 1973.
[107] Craighead, "Rep. Atkins Vows"; John Greiner, "Rep. Atkins Serves Notice on Equal Rights Foes," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 30, 1972.
[108] Holland, "Salt Lake...is Our Selma," 18.

LDS Church. On February 6, when the final Senate vote was cast, the amendment was defeated 16-4.[109]

These early defeats did not break the hopeful spirit of ERA supporters in the West. Activists in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah had political experience and a mountain of evidence of sex discrimination's damage. The opposition, at least this early in the debate, seemed to have neither evidence nor experience. Pro-ERA women also found comfort in the fact that, despite the early defeats, the amendment had not turned into a partisan issue. In Arizona, the majority party in the legislature changed throughout the 1970s. Neither party endorsed or opposed the amendment, but a few anti-ERA legislators successfully stalled any votes in 1972 or 1973, claiming, like in Oklahoma and Nevada, further research was necessary.[110] With seven years to prove their case, and to legislators who appeared interested, activists remained optimistic. To ERA organizers, this defeat merely was merely the beginning of the Equal Rights Amendment battle in the West.[111]

While early western activists argued that their region's past, mainly the suffrage movement and colonial ideals of expansion and individualism, proved that westerners believed in women's rights, they greatly misjudged the present, as the first votes on the ERA illuminated. The West had changed in many ways from the 1920s to the 1970s. World War II and the massive influx of military bases, defense contractors, other industries brought thousands of people to the region. Phoenix, Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, and Oklahoma City bloomed into modern

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[109] Anne Kosso, "Case Studies From the Nevada Legislature," May 9, 1973, folder 18, box 2, Jean Ford Collection, University of Nevada Reno Special Collections (Hereafter UNR).
[110]Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 55.
[111] For more on the Oklahoma ERA debate see Chelsea Ball, "From Red Dirt to Red State: Oklahoma and the Equal Rights Amendment, 1972-1982" (Masters Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2016); Jana Vogt, "Oklahoma and the ERA: Rousing a Red State, 1972-1982" (PhD dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2010); Jana Vogt Catignani, "Conservative Oklahoma Women United: The Crusade to Defeat the ERA," in *Main Street Oklahoma: Stories of Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Linda W. Reese and Patricia Loughlin (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 221-238.

metropolitan cities even as large parts of the these states remained rural.[112] This shift in population in the United States from the North to the Sunbelt states in the West and the South also shifted regional political power and partisan affiliations.[113] While Democrats had gained traction in the West during the Great Depression, supporters in the region were not always loyal.[114] By the 1970s, Republicans, especially the conservative wing, was becoming more popular. Conservative Democrats, unhappy with the increase in federal power in their states, urban growth, and increased civil rights, began moving to the Republican Party.[115] Even when the Watergate scandal rocked the Republican Party in 1974, Democrats in places like Nevada and Arizona still continued to struggle to remain in the majority. Even with those majorities, neither legislature was able to pass the ERA that year.[116] In Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, the divide between rural and urban areas would be far more powerful than the party lines in the 1970s.[117] While ERA supporters took comfort in the fact that the amendment held bipartisan support, many failed to fully understand a historic political shift was underway.

Although the Equal Rights Amendment held a long and complicated history well before it ever reached legislators in the early 1970s, the amendment's most important chapter was just beginning. Achieving ratification through Congress in 1972 was a major feat in itself and almost

[112] Thomas Sheridan, *Arizona: A History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 270-280; Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics," 66;
[113] Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2011), xv, 330-2; Bruce Shulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 113-4, 170; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 26-9.
[114] Green, *Nevada*, 356.
[115] McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 14.
[116] Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics," 76; Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 80-1.
[117] Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics," 3; Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 103-4; Interview with Pat Reaves; Green, *Nevada*, 319.

fifty years exactly in the making. At seventy-seven years old, Alice Paul lived to see the ERA sent off to the states, but the battle was not over yet; a three-fourths majority approval was still needed for equal rights to become the 27th amendment in the U.S. Constitution.

The passage of the ERA remained promising during that first year. Thirty state legislators had already approved the amendment, meaning the amendment had only eight more states to go. Support from federal politicians and a majority of the public, as well as the amendment's bipartisan support created a sense of hope for the ERA in the remaining unratified western states, making this battleground all the more important.

Activists like Ruby Duncan, Hannah Atkins, Eloise McQuown, and Lucile Kaufman all fought for the ERA because many western women had a real interest in its passage. Sexism through outdated marriage laws, social security, inheritance, unequal pay, domestic abuse, spousal rape, and lack of benefits for housewives and farm wives all needed to be addressed in the region, and a blanket amendment outlawing sex discrimination would force lawmakers to reform these statutes. Although many women looked hopefully to their legislators who supported the ERA, a new and growing political revolution was about to transform western politics. The ERA would soon undergo an impressive rebranding within the media at the hands of these grassroots religious conservatives who would completely change the image of the ERA's supporters and, in turn, both their optimism and tactics within the region.

Chapter Two

"A Family Photo Seemed Appropriate":

Gender, Motherhood, and the Campaign for the ERA, 1973-1975

"The women's libbers are radicals who are waging a total assault on the family, on marriage, and on children."

-Phyllis Schlafly

On Mother's Day weekend, 1975, a large group of women gathered in Sparks, Nevada, not to spend time with their children or families, but to protest. The event, titled, "You Can't Fool Mother Nature- STOP ERA Mother's March," was a gathering of conservative, anti-ERA activists who went door-to-door speaking with members of their communities. In an attempt to demonstrate to the public "their concern as mothers over the potentially harmful effects of the amendment on the family," the group impressively distributed over three thousand pieces of literature and reconvened again the following weekend for the Las Vegas STOP-ERA Family Rally.[1] This specific use of Mother's Day and the multiple allusions to families and motherhood were not a coincidence, but a clear message to ERA supporters in their state and region. These STOP ERA members were working to reclaim the rhetoric of motherhood from ERA activists that utilized it to campaign on behalf of the ERA, arguing that the amendment was beneficial to women and children.

[1] Caryll Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics: The Equal Rights Amendment Ratification Campaign, 1973-1981" (PhD Dissertation, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, 2010), 132.

When activists began working for the ERA in the early 1970s, they mobilized a widespread women's movement much like the campaign for suffrage. Although men were certainly a part of the movement and active participants, ratification was planned, operated, and executed almost exclusively by women, and from various backgrounds. The movement to ratify the amendment was a grassroots campaign, with women utilizing grocery store leaflets, ERA coffees (or "juices" in Mormon areas), bake sales, and door-to-door campaigning. Pro-ERA women in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah all rallied around their supportive governors and legislators while also working to elect their own members. The movement to ratify the ERA created local opportunities for women to learn about the political process, from how to run for office to seminars on public speaking and lobbying legislators. In these early years, pro-ERA activists were aware than not all women were on their side. ERA activists spoke out publicly against female legislators and leaders who opposed the amendment and who opposed women's liberation.

As the campaign for the ERA in the unratified West began to grow, a sort of "western feminism" began to develop and become mainstream through the efforts of ERA leadership in Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and Oklahoma. Western feminism celebrated both equality and motherhood, but also moderation. ERA leaders, who were mostly state legislators and presidents of local women's organizations, pushed this image as a way to distance the amendment from the opposition's growing accusations that the ERA was a tool of radical feminism. This style of western feminism that attempted to separate moderate activists from radicals first developed outside the ERA debate, in state election campaigns in the 1970s. As the debate over the amendment became more contentious, many western ERA proponents, even those who were more progressive or initially opposed to this moderate image, began to embrace western

feminism as the best way to move the amendment forward in the region. When moderation and motherhood eventually became the dominant rhetoric in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, activists were forced to sidestep other important women's issues like abortion access and lesbian rights in order to maintain the amendment's moderate image. Western feminism was, of course, not representative of all ERA supporters in the West. Numerous activists and groups remained dedicated to a range of women's issues and publicly challenged their community and ERA leaders.

This chapter is organized around the unique issues western, pro-ERA women faced in the early 1970s. As the initial optimism of early ratification began to fade, ERA activists began putting forward their own candidates, most of which had no experience in this realm. Many constituents immediately criticized female candidates, not for their experience or even their political party, but for their families. Where were their children? Had their husbands given them permission to run? To combat such questions, many pro-ERA candidates put their family life front and center in their campaigns, which would also carry over into how they campaigned for the ERA. This chapter will also explore the grassroots aspects of the movement, including how ERA supporters trained one another on how to run a political campaign, speak with representatives, give a speech, and engage with the press. Western feminists focused on the needs of mothers, from housewives and farm wives to single mothers. The ERA campaign created a generation of female politicians in the West that represented their own brand of women's activism, one that wed motherhood to feminism. It also created some tension between those who embraced the moderate image and those believed it limited radical potential of women's liberation, and this tension would only increase as the ERA debate raged on in the West.

The western feminism that ERA leaders and many grassroots supporters embraced was markedly different from the ERA movements in other regions, especially those that ratified the amendment early on. Within the first three years of the movement, thirty-three states had ratified the amendment. This left the four western states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, and a large portion of the South as the only regions without widespread ratification. Because the East and West coast states ratified quickly, these regions were largely able to avoid the long, drawn-out, and tense debates over the amendment. Places like California and Idaho were the exception, as anti-ERA activists built a movement from existing conservative women's organizations and pushed for recension of their state's ratification vote, but these were still not as polarizing as the battles in the unratified West.

While ERA supporters in the West dealt with opposition from conservative groups like the John Birch Society, organized Protestant churches, and even the Farm Bureau, these same organizations held much more power in the South. For example, the Farm Bureau used its platform to influence men and women in both Oklahoma and Mississippi to campaign against the amendment. This was highly successful in Mississippi, especially because of the Farm Bureau's overlap of members with the John Birch Society.[2] In Oklahoma, though, this connection was not as strong, and many ERA activists turned this campaign on its head through flyers and ads that specifically reached out to women Farm Bureau members and farm wives by listing all of the ways the ERA would aid women who worked from home or on their farm rather than in a traditional job.

Anti-ERA activists in the South also utilized the segregationist Right in its successful attempt to suppress support for the ERA. Women for Constitutional Government became a

[2] Marjorie J. Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 84.

national organization for conservative women that believed in protecting the "integrity" of the constitution by, among other things, upholding racial segregation.[3] Several prominent STOP ERA leaders and members were heavily involved in Women for Constitutional Government, building their movement to kill the amendment on another long-standing point of contention for Southerners, and this strategy was successful. Southern anti-ERA activists also drew on the support of Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina, arguably the most vocal opponent of the amendment in Congress.[4] Similar to the members of Women for Constitutional Government who came to oppose the ERA, Senator Ervin argued that the amendment was another example of federal oversight and a misinterpretation of the constitution. Fighting passage of the amendment since the 1950s, Ervin was "the personification of male resistance to the Equal Rights Amendment."[5] In 1973, Phyllis Schlafly convinced the senator to mail out his anti-ERA speeches to her STOP ERA subscribers from his office free of postage using his franking privileges. His closely edited works, curated by Schlafly, landed in the mailboxes of anti-ERA activists and state legislators in twenty-five states in the first year alone, many of them in the South.[6] Senator Ervin's belief in "moral" gender distinctions, that is, the "physiological and functional differences" amongst the sexes that mandated women have children and men serve as protectors, fueled the Senator's opposition to the ERA, and many of his male colleagues and constituents agreed.[7] As Matthews and De Hart argue, southern ERA proponents also had the difficult task of facing a culture of masculinity in the region that, perhaps more than any other region, held onto the idea of protecting women rather than liberating them. Southern men in

[3] Ibid., 85.
[4] Donald G. Matthews and Jane DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 36, 40.
[5] Ibid., 52.
[6] Ibid., 51.
[7] Ibid., 214.

general, through a regional culture of upholding patriarchy, contributed to the lack of power for ERA supporters in these states. While these ideas of "southern masculinity" certainly carried over into the West, ideas of "western independence" and women's advancement through suffrage, while mostly based in myth, still loomed large in the regional consciousness, challenging patriarchal norms in ways the South had not experienced.

The largest and most powerful roadblock for Southern ERA activists was the supremacy of evangelical churches and activists, particularly the organizational skills of Lottie Beth Hobbs. While Western ERA supporters had their own set of obstacles concerning evangelical churches and especially The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), the sheer number of church members alone was not comparable to southern states. Western activist were also more successful than Southern pro-ERA activists at not only making a space in their churches for women's rights, but actually utilizing churches as a space for campaigning and holding meetings for pro-ERA groups. In the South, the lines were much more black and white concerning the evangelical church and where it stood on the ERA, and gender norms in general. The Church of Christ in particularly was set on its interpretation of women's roles, which was ultimately submission to their husbands. In Texas alone, membership to the Church of Christ made up almost 60% of the state's population. Only Oklahoma came close to the sheer number of evangelical memberships of southern states in the 1970s. Lottie Beth Hobbs was one of these Texas church members, and her organization Women Who Want To Be Women (WWWW) became the leading anti-ERA organization in the South. The organization also worked closely with Phyllis Schlafly and STOP ERA, with Schlafly utilizing Hobbs' southern charm to appeal

to anti-ERA women in the West who might not be as sympathetic to Schlafly's Catholic background.[8]

Ultimately region mattered in the ERA debate and the regional variation of feminism it created. Previous historians of the ERA have downplayed these differences. In their same work, Matthews and De Hart write, "The issues [in North Carolina] were not Southern issues; the same arguments were used in Massachusetts, for example." The duo points to the power of the mass media, accessible coast-to-coast travel, and the rise of national organizations and pamphlets during the ERA debates of the 1970s as evidence of the lack of distinctions between regions. They add, "Proponents thought of themselves as a part of a general social trend; their ideas, values, expectations, and sense of themselves were part of a broad ideology that knows no sectional or state boundaries."[9] While it is true that proponents may have thought of themselves as a part of the national ERA movement, the battles they faced in their individual locales were vastly different. ERA activists utilized distinct tactics in their fight for the amendment based on how they understood the values of their communities.[10] While many ERA activist were highly unprepared for the extremely difficult feat that is ratifying an amendment to the US Constitution, western activists, more than others, *were* familiar with the history and hardship that came with obtaining the vote, another important amendment. Western activists utilized the legacy of suffrage because of the region's unique relationship to the amendment. They drew on the rhetoric of moderation because of their escalating battle with conservative activists.

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[8] Ibid., 86-7.
[9] Ibid., xi.
[10] Another historian, Mary Francis Berry, also makes general arguments about how ERA activists failed to learn from the past, particularly the suffrage movement. She states, "As they pursued the quest for the ERA, proponents seemed to be unaware of everything that could have been learned from history about how to achieve ratification." See, Mary Francis Berry, *Why ERA Failed* (Indiana University Press, 1986), 56, 120; Matthews and De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, xii.

In summation, ERA supporters in the West had vastly different experiences than their West Coast counterparts, as well as those on the East Coast and the South. The debates over the amendment played out most powerfully in the regions where ratification stalled, specifically the non-coastal West and the South. In the South, powerful religious organizations and lingering tension over segregation and patriarchy left ERA supporters with few organizations or allies to turn to. In the unratified West, organizers in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah did not deal with these obstacles on the same scale as their Southern sisters. In these states, a type of feminism unique to the region was able to thrive, as leaders and many activists were able to build a movement through moderation, one that challenged sexism and fought for equality without disturbing, too much, local religious norms or ideals about family and motherhood.

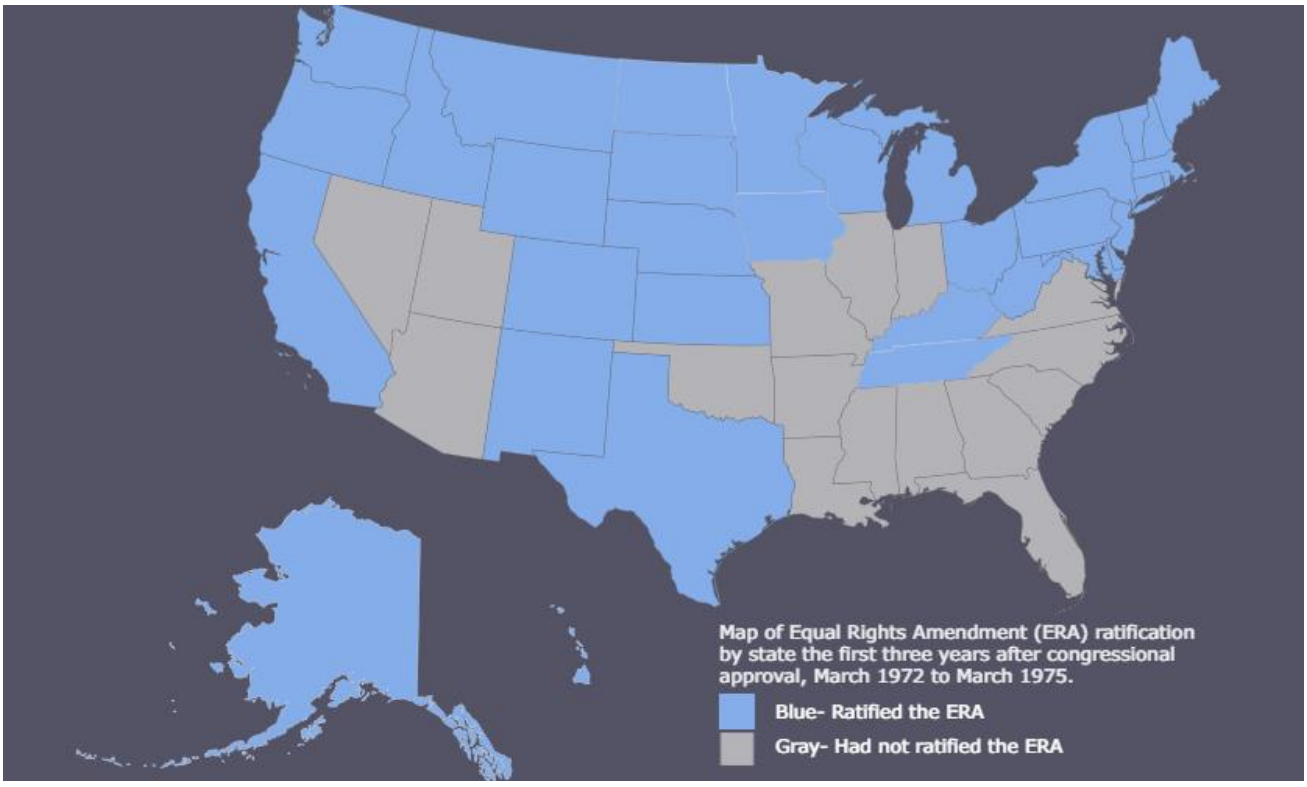

Figure 2.1. A map showing ERA state ratifications the first three years after congressional approval (March 1972 to March 1975). Map created by the author.

"Make Policy, Not Coffee"

After the Oklahoma House became the first state body to reject the ERA in 1972, proponents in the unratified West spent the next three years organizing grassroots campaigns and running their own candidates for office. Each state developed an ERA umbrella organization that encompassed new amendment-specific groups and long-established women's organizations like the League of Women Voters (LWV), Business and Professional Women (BPW), and National Women's Political Caucus chapters. Through a variety of tactics, ERA supporters worked to meet with and educate voters on the amendment, raise funds for fliers and campaign donations, and lobby legislators. What they soon discovered, though, was that running their own candidates for office was the most precise way to accomplish all of these goals. Pro-ERA women, many who had never organized a campaign or even volunteered for one, began bids for seats in their state's House (Assembly in Nevada) or Senate.[11] These women faced numerous challenges, many of which stemmed from their gender, including questions about their husbands and children. In an attempt to address these issues, many western, pro-ERA women running for office in the early 1970s began organizing their campaigns around motherhood. By foregrounding their children, candidates hoped to both connect with more conservative voters and promote the image that ERA supporters in the West were moderate and supportive of families, rather than radical. The roots of western feminism emerged in these early campaigns, and solidified as these movement leaders and successful candidates continued to build on the image of motherhood and moderation.

After a whirlwind of ratifications in the first two years since Congress passed the ERA and sent it to the states, supporters in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah began organizing

[11] The Nevada Legislature, unlike Arizona, Oklahoma, and Utah, is a traditional or "citizen legislature." This means that the Nevada Senate and the Nevada Assembly do not meet every year for a legislative session like most states, but every two years, as legislators are classified as part-time employees.

unified umbrella organizations in order to effectively execute a campaign plan. While each state's activists worked diligently to encourage the public and their legislators to support the amendment, they utilized different tactics. In this early period, ERA supporters in Oklahoma and Nevada focused on raising funds and reaching out not just to those in their respective capitols and urban areas, but to rural citizens in their states as well. In Utah and Arizona, activists focused more on working with local universities in their campaign efforts. Despite these different approaches, supporters in each of these states were in constant communication with one another, with each state's leadership eventually reaching the conclusion that they needed to run their own members as candidates for state office.

Coming from various and already established women's organizations, churches, and professional groups, Oklahoma women and men alike formed numerous lobbying and support groups. The two most powerful local ERA groups were OK-ERA and the Oklahoma Women's Political Caucus (OKWPC). OK-ERA was an umbrella organization that united over fifty local groups such as the Oklahoma League of Women Voters, Common Cause, and the American Civil Liberties Union.[12] OK-ERA was a bipartisan group co-chaired by National Democratic Committeewoman Edna Mae Phelps and former National Republican Committeewoman Dorothy Stanislaus. Honorary co-chairs included Republican Senator and former Governor Henry Bellmon and then Democratic Governor David Boren. Because of the number of allies involved, OK-ERA remained the most powerful lobbying organization for ratification up until 1980. OK-ERA was a self-proclaimed grassroots organization that made "education and the continued use of political pressure" its main goals.[13] OKWPC was co-founded by important women's rights activists Cleta Deatherage, Representative Hannah Atkins, and American Indian

[12] Meeting notes, 1971, OKWPC, folder 4, box 1, Hannah Diggs Atkins Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (hereafter OHS).
[13] OK-ERA Newsletter, n.d., folder 19, box 1, Equal Rights Amendment Collection, OHS.

activist LaDonna Harris in 1971; it was an offshoot of the Oklahoma Coalition for Equal Rights.[14] OKWPC began by focusing broadly on projects that assisted Oklahoma women, but would gradually narrow its focus largely to the ERA. By 1975, pro-ERA activists in Oklahoma had organized statewide.

Activists utilized grassroots tactics to increase support, education, and membership for pro- ERA groups as well. Organizers for OK-ERA, OKWPC, and local NOW members were almost all volunteers, using their own funds to organize supporters and new pro-ERA groups in smaller towns all over the state. To drum up and organize support, pro-ERA forces knocked on doors, made cold calls, lobbied legislators, and distributed ERA literature at grocery stores and shopping malls.[15] One of Wanda Jo Peltier's favorite tactics was going door-to-door in the district of a legislator who claimed his constituents did not support the ERA. She would have those in favor sign postcards stating their support and mail them to the legislator every day until she ran out of cards.[16] In order to connect new and old supporters, OKWPC members began printing *The Oklahoma New Woman*, a "feminist monthly for the movement," in March 1976.[17]

While those in Oklahoma City focused their efforts on legislators in the state capitol and recruiting members around the metro area, organizers in Tulsa and Bartlesville worked on enlisting new supporters in the more rural areas of the state. OK-ERA member Charlotte Bailey was the group's media liaison, and was responsible for press releases and acquiring free radio and television spots for ERA advertisements.[18] Leading Bartlesville recruiters Holly Childs and Harriet Guthrie worked as a team, looking for women to start local ERA groups in the more rural

[14] Warren Vieth, "Starting Over," *Oklahoma Monthly*, March 1976.
[15] Randy Splaingard, "ERA Camp Leaders Plan Alan Alda's Return to State," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 1, 1982.
[16] Interview with Wanda Jo Peltier Stapleton, by the author, February 29, 2016, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
[17] Junetta Davis, "The Shakers and Movers," *Oklahoma Monthly*, March 1976. *The Oklahoma New Woman* eventually changed titles *Sister Advocate.*
[18] Interview with Charlotte Bailey, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, April 4, 2010, Red Dirt Women and Power Oral History Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (hereafter Red Dirt Oral History).

southern and eastern areas of the state. Each week they would pick a new area on the map to visit, and then ask Tulsa OK-ERA leader Penny Williams for any leads on supporters. If they had no leads, Childs would sometimes resort to recruitment at the town cemetery. There, the two would look for reoccurring last names or prominent markers that might lead them to a town founder or prominent person in the area. Once they had obtained a few names, they would turn to the local phone book and make cold calls. Childs and Guthrie also began what they called "ERA Coffees" in which they would invite local women (usually those already members of the League of Women Voters) to have coffee and discuss the Equal Rights Amendment in hopes of convincing these local women to start their own OKWPC or OK-ERA chapter.[19] The pair even got first female principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation Wilma Mankiller to attend a few of their meetings and offer her support for the amendment.[20]

In Nevada, women's organizations also formed a grassroots umbrella group, Nevadans for the Equal Rights Amendment (NERA), in 1974, and focused on grassroots outreach and fundraising. NERA set up shop in a small office in Carson City to assist lobbyists, stay up-to-date on what was going on in the state house, and give out-of-towners a place to stay when meeting with legislators.[21] NERA organizers realized early on that they would need money to influence the ERA's passage in the state. The men and women of NERA held garage sales and bake sales in order to raise money to print ERA literature and for campaign contributions. One chapter of the group advertised a Polaroid camera raffle at a local state fair.[22] They also participated in local events like marathons and set up an ERA booth at the Nevada Day Parade to

[19] Interview with Harriet Guthrie, by Julie Stidolph, April 17, 2009, Red Dirt Women Oral History.
[20] Interview with Holly Childs, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, March 13, 2009, Red Dirt Women Oral History.
[21] NERA Newsletter, December 1974, folder 5, box 10, League of Women Voters Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collection and Archives, Las Vegas, Nevada (hereafter UNLV).
[22] NERA Newsletter, (no month) 1974, folder 2, box 1, series 4, Isabel Kimbel Collection, University of Nevada, Reno Special Collections and University Archives, Reno, Nevada (hereafter UNR)

pass out literature and discuss the amendment.[23] NERA quickly grew from a small organization run through a phone tree to something much more complex, and included urban and rural members. Soon, there were NERA leaders in every region of the state with explicit assignments as to which representative to lobby and where to host ERA coffees or "juices" for the non-drinking communities.[24]

Activists in Utah approached ratification through similar means like organizing an umbrella organization, but they also worked early on to establish a relationship with professors at Brigham Young University. At BYU, ERA supporters recruited members and organized a large ERA conference. While women in Utah had been lobbying for the ERA through their local Business and Profession Women (BPW) and Utah Women's Political Caucus (UWPC) chapters since the 1930s, the failed House vote in 1973 sparked the formation of an umbrella group of organizations that would be dedicated to passing the amendment. The Utah Equal Rights Coalition (ERCU) formed in September of 1973 at the Crossroads Urban Center in Salt Lake City, where local women from numerous women's organizations agreed to meet once a month to strategize for their ERA lobbying. Carrol McGill, a member of NOW, was elected president of the ERCU, and the group immediately began planning the first ERA conference in Utah in hopes of gaining more members.[25] The new group raised money to print pamphlets and make campaign contributions through grassroots fundraisers, which largely consisted of small speaking events and dinners that supporters paid small amounts to attend. Along with door-to-door politicking, the members also collaborated with local artists and writers to publish *Images of Women*, a book

[23] NERA Newsletter, August 1977, folder 3, box 1, series 4, Isabel Kimbel Collection, UNR.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Interview with Eloise McQuown, by Kathryn Mackay, November 16, 1976, and May 18, 1977, Tapes 5 and 8, p. 13-14, Women in Utah Politics Oral History Project, American West Center, J. Willard Marriott Library Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter UU).

of local art and poetry whose sales went directly to the ERCU.[26] The UWPC, in collaboration with the ERCU, also continued to throw an annual birthday celebration for Susa Young Gates, an event that raised funds and honored local women activist in the community.[27]

In January of 1974 ERA supporters held the Utah ERA Conference, which, despite a snowstorm, had a decent turnout of almost 130 attendees.[28] Long-time ERA activist Eloise McQuown chaired the conference, which was held at the Northwest Multipurpose Center. In a strategic move, Virginia Cutler, Professor Emeritus of Family Development at Brigham Young University, was billed as a main speaker. In many ways Professor Cutler represented a large majority of early Utah ERA supporters. As a widow and single mother, she understood the practical need for the amendment. She was also an LDS woman, who was unwavering in her support of the amendment despite the Church's uneasiness with the amendment. A leading expert in the state on child and family development, Professor Cutler offered strong counter-arguments to those who claimed the amendment was harmful to women's roles as mothers and the patriarchal family structure.[29]

By 1975, the ERCU included over thirty-three organizations, many of which were not overtly feminist or women's groups; ERCU utilized its diverse supporters and groups to promote the amendment as moderate. The ERCU helped form a Men for ERA chapter in Utah. (Every state, including Arizona, Nevada, and Oklahoma, eventually had a Men For ERA group in some form.) As with the other Men for ERA groups, the Utah chapter showed that men, although they were mostly husbands of activists, could support equal rights as well.[30] Most importantly during

[26] Ibid., 62.
[27] Ibid., 53-5.
[28] Ibid., 14.
[29] Ibid., 13-4.
[30] Ibid., 15. Actor Alan Alda of M*A*S*H fame would, in the latter part of the decade, bring the group national fame as its most vocal member.

this period, ERCU members organized a statewide speaking and education campaign on the ERA, which focused specifically on the benefits the amendment would bring to the state. In this campaign, they emphasized the amendment's historic connections to suffrage. Early on, activists portrayed the amendment over and over again as logical, non-threatening, and within the western and pioneer tradition that many Utahans held dear. By promoting the ERA as a helping hand to women and mothers and as a natural next step to suffrage, activists hoped to dismiss any qualms about radical feminism or women's liberation.

ERA supporters in Arizona focused their grassroots efforts under a group very similar to the ERCU in Utah: the Arizona Coalition for Equal Rights, or ACERA. This group initially consisted of mostly local LWV and AAUW activists, and was a mixture of mostly white, middle class women with a few Latinas.[31] Through lobbying and public speaking, ACERA worked to educate Arizonans about the amendment and drum up support.[32] Arizona's blossoming NOW chapter worked along with ACERA and also held independent events in support of the amendment, including a large state conference in 1974 that brought in speakers from other NOW chapters to present on their states' successful grassroots ERA strategies.[33] Arizona activists also campaigned for the ERA under local National Women's Political Caucus chapters, or special ERA commissions within long-established women's groups. Some women, like retired US Army veteran Maureen Murphy, participated in the grassroots ERA campaign through multiple organizations. At one time, Murphy was a member of the Maricopa County Women's Political Caucus and the ACERA, the ERA Commission Chair in the LWV Phoenix chapter, and

[31] Carol S. Palmer, "Challenging Tradition: Arizona Women Fight For the Equal Rights Amendment" (Masters Thesis, Arizona State University, 2007), 61-2.
[32] Ibid., 64.
[33] Conference notes, no date, folder ERA Issues, League of Women Voters Arizona Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona (hereafter ASU).

President of ERA Arizona.[34] In 1975, Arizona Governor Raul H. Castro created the Arizona Women's Commission, whose members also supported the ERA.[35] Overlapping activism was common, and often an ERA supporter's organization of choice came down to what was popular or the most prosperous in their specific town or city.

There was also a growing women's liberation movement among students and faculty at Arizona State University (ASU), which focused on a host of issues including the ERA. ASU's only female law professor, Susan I. Spivak, made headlines when she started a petition for the Arizona legislature to pass the ERA. She and the eighteen other professors who signed the petition told the *Arizona Republic*: "Only a constitutional amendment-with its decisive legal, moral, and symbolic impact- can provide the impetus for the necessary changes in our laws."[36] For Professor Spivak, her support was not just about addressing the sexist hiring practices in her department. She had a moral responsibility to utilize her experience as a woman in this profession and her expertise as a law professor to draw attention to the importance of the amendment to the greater public.

The university also made media headlines when it began its Annual Women's Conference. ASU's yearly conference was "designed to provide a means for the average citizen to gain insight into various public issues relating to the problems of women at work," including the ERA and other women's liberation issues.[37] Although it began in small form in 1971, the large public turnout in 1973 and 1974 created an important space for ERA activists to speak about the amendment and meet up with other grassroots activists across the state. The conferences opened up a dialogue between Arizona women and national leading experts about

[34] Patricia Walsh, "ERA Coalition speakers discuss pros and cons," *Arizona Today*, October 22, 1975.
[35] Personal notes of Lucile Kaufman, folder 2, box 12, Lucile Kaufman Papers, ASU.
[36] "Law profs petition for rights law," *Arizona Republic*, January 1, 1973.
[37] "The Sixth Annual Women's Conference" advertisement, 1976, folder 4, box 12, Lucile Kaufman Collection, ASU.

issues unique to them, and provided different perspectives for the largely middle class, white students and faculty to better understand issues of poverty and racial injustice. For example, the 1973 Annual Women's Conference highlighted the legal rights of women in the state and provided free legal advice for women from local lawyers.[38] ASU also sponsored a public talk titled, "Equal Rights Amendment: Fact or Fiction," which focused on the hotly contested issue of whether or not women could be subjected to the draft if the amendment passed. Brigadier General Jeanne M. Holm, Director of Women in the Air Force, explained that Congress alone had the right to draft American citizens regardless of their gender, but in practice, it had only ever drafted men. The ERA could potentially change that. She also informed the over 300 attendants that there were approximately 45,000 women waiting or expected to enlist in the US Air Force alone at the moment, and that each of these women would receive unequal benefits compared to their male colleagues.[39] The ERA could change that too. The early activism of students and faculty at ASU created an important university and public space for grassroots ERA activism in the state. Through various conferences and public seminars, Arizona women had a space to ask questions and receive answers and advice from legal experts and community members on their status as women and how the ERA might change this.

In this early grassroots campaigning, activists across the four states came to the consensus that they could do more than just raise dollars and work with legislators already in power. Despite their often localized approaches to grassroots politicking, ERA activists in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah were in constant communication with one another, on issues from familial connections in the West to national leadership in their respective women's organizations. Some women subscribed to other state's chapter newsletters and made donations

[38] Ibid.
[39] Barbara Shumway, "Courts to rule on lady GIs," *Arizona Republic*, January 12, 1973.

or sent letters of support to ERA activists when the amendment was up for a vote in those states. Despite positive poll numbers in all four states, the ERA had made little progress in 1973.[40] While working for passage locally and communicating with ERA activists around the country, it became clear early on that leaflets, coffees, and contributing to ERA-friendly campaigns would not be enough; ERA activists in the West needed to run their own candidates.

When women ERA activists began campaigning for office, many realized early on that they had to be strategic in how they presented their motivations for office. During the door-to-door process and community meetings, candidates were often asked who would be taking care of their children and why they thought running for office was more important than being at home. To counter this implied criticism, as well as those that charged the ERA as anti-family, many on the campaign trail began to frame their politics around motherhood. Some, like Jean Ford and Sue Wagner in Nevada, utilized family photographs in their campaign materials and brought their children or husbands to meetings with them to demonstrate their family's approval. Others, like Cleta Deatherage in Oklahoma, who did not then have a husband and children to show off, still utilized this image of supporting mothers and families by promoting the positive changes the ERA would bring to homemakers and farm wives. In this process of balancing a campaign for women's equality with everyday sexism, these state representatives and leaders in the ERA movement cemented the narrative that the ERA was moderate, and separated the amendment from other, more controversial women's issues like abortion and lesbian rights. It was in these early campaigns that western feminism, and its claims to motherhood and moderation, began to dominate the ERA debate in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah.

[40] J. Roy Bardsley, "Utahans Favor Equal Rights Plan," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 31, 1973; Speech to Nevada Legislature by Mary Gojack, 57th Session, 1975, folder 2, box 12, Mary Gojack Collection, UNR; Barbara Shumway, "Report on Reader Survey: Women's Issues Get Arizona Answers," *Arizona Republic*, September 22, 1972, p. 49.

Despite women holding a tiny fraction of seats in each house and senate chamber in the early 1970s, activists were no strangers to campaigning or providing support for those interested in running for office. Utah activists had been supporting "pro-women" female candidates through the Business and Profession Women (BPW) since the 1930s. Through the ERCU, women's organizations began to run candidates supportive of not just women's issues, but the ERA specifically. With the help of Representative Beth Jarman, the ERCU hosted a workshop in 1973 at the University of Utah titled, "Women in Politics: How to Have Your Say." The goal was to inform women on the basics of running or aiding a political campaign, and what discrimination in politics and the party system looked like. The group also printed two booklets, "How Do You Run a Campaign?" and "How Do You Run for Office?," which included bipartisan information for interested women.[41] In Arizona, too, activists swiftly organized a support system for interested candidates. The AZWPC took the lead by holding workshops on the election process. Their theme became "Make Policy, Not Coffee," which was a jab at both the role female activists were often subjected to in male institutions and an homage to the numerous kitchen table meetings women all over the state had held in the grassroots effort to get the ERA ratified.[42]

The sexist and invasive questions about family life still surprised many of the ERA candidates. There were five women in the Assembly and only two in the State Senate--seven women total out of sixty state representatives--and even getting that many women elected had been a challenge.[43] Jean Ford decided to run for an Assembly seat after serving as the President of the LWV Nevada State Chapter. She quickly realized that her constituents were more

[41] McQuown interview, 50-2.
[42] Ibid., 77-8.
[43] Interview with Jean Ford, by Victoria Ford, 1988, "Jean Ford: A Nevada Women Leads the Way," pp. 151, UNR. https://contentdm.library.unr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/unohp/id/2567

interested in who was going to watch her children (who were both teenagers at the time) and if her husband approved of her political career. Ford explained, "one of the things that we felt we needed to portray was that I had a family-that I wasn't just 'Miss League of Women Voters' running around town. And so a family photo seemed appropriate...they were used in the professional brochure...I had children, and the photo would imply that my family supported what I was doing."[44] Unlike her male counterparts, Ford had to prove that her family was taken care of and supportive of her campaign at every turn.

Sue Wagner also faced similar obstacles in her Assembly campaign in 1974. "There were two things I had against me. One, I was very young. I was the youngest woman elected in Nevada when I got elected," she remembered. "And I was the only woman in the country, I believe, who had preschool children, who was successful in an election."[45] While campaigning door-to-door, she was constantly asked, mostly by women her age, who was going to care for her children if she was elected. She assured them that her husband, Peter, and her neighbors had volunteered to step up. Constituents and the press also quizzed Wagner as to whether or not her husband approved of her running for office. Eventually she made him come along with her on door-to-door canvassing as proof that he did.[46]

Serving in the Nevada State Assembly was not much easier than campaigning for it. Wagner was seated next to Jean Ford in a space previously occupied by another woman who had moved on to the State Senate. According to Wagner, other legislators treated her and Ford as if they represented a singular, one-dimensional topic: women's issues. With a masters degree from Northwestern University in political science and a deep interest in fiscal policy, Wagner held

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[44] Ibid., 127.
[45] Interview with Sue Wagner, by Victoria Ford, 2000-2003, "Through the Glass Ceiling: A Life in Nevada Politics," pp. 125, University of Nevada Oral History Program, UNR. http://contentdm.library.unr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/unohp/id/5147
[46] Ibid., vii.

several political aspirations outside of the ERA; she would eventually become Lieutenant Governor of Nevada. Ford, too, campaigned not just on women's rights, but also for environmental protections and stricter regulations in the state. The women were not easily deterred, though, and realized early on that women truly needed to be in Carson City participating in Nevada lawmaking. Looking back on her career as an assemblywoman, Wagner commented:

> Women needed to be there, or these issues that we cared about would never be dealt with by men, [sic] because they would not be on their radar screens. Yes, the Equal Rights Amendment would have come up, because it was a constitutional amendment. They had to deal with it. But would they have heard another side? Would they have dealt with domestic violence? Would they have dealt with all the sex discrimination that was pervasive throughout our Nevada Revised Statutes? Probably not- because they were all led by women.[47]

Like many activists at the time, Wagner understood that women represented a unique point of view that needed to be heard in the places where powerful decisions were being made, and this voice went beyond women's issues alone.

[47] Ibid., 150-1.

Figure 2.2. Photo from Sue Wagner's first assembly campaign in 1974. Courtesy of the University of Reno, Nevada.

Single women and women without children running for office were also subject to sexist scrutiny, and found ways to utilize motherhood despite not having families of their own.[48] As a student at the University of Oklahoma, Cleta Deatherage followed the early stages of the ERA debate closely and motivated the student council and other university groups to send their support to legislators. She was later asked to serve on the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women for her dedicated work in helping homemakers left without financial support. After graduating from law school in 1975, Deatherage decided to run in her home city of Norman (District 44) to join the Oklahoma House of Representatives. Her close interest in women's issues and support of the Equal Rights Amendment led the twenty-five-year-old Democrat to fight for change by becoming a legislator herself. Only eight months after passing the bar,

[48] Interview with Janice Drieling, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, April 17, 2009, Red Dirt Women Oral History.

Deatherage was sworn in as an official state legislator, and she made the ERA a top priority.[49] Over the next few years, as she served as one of the few female legislators in the state, Deatherage was barraged with questions from the media and constituents on how abortion and homosexual rights would change if the amendment passed. Out of concern that these issues would taint the ERA in some way, Deatherage learned to masterfully disassociate the amendment from other "controversial" topics. Instead, she focused on the ERA itself and what it would do for Oklahoma's most vulnerable women: farmwives and housewives, those without social security or retirement to fall back on. Deatherage and others often emphasized protections for those women would also carry over to their children. For many of these new western female legislators, the image of moderation and motherhood and a disassociation with eastern feminism became an important tactic in order to win a political seat, hold on to seat, or keep the ERA popular with the public.

The tactic of moderation was not only used in states with few female lawmakers, like Nevada and Oklahoma, but also occurred in Arizona, a state with a long history of female service in the capitol. In fact, the first woman in the US to serve as a justice on a State Supreme Court, Lorna Lockwood (elected in 1970), was from Arizona and, at one time, served in the Arizona House. US Senator Carl Hayden recommended Justice Lockwood to President Lyndon B. Johnson for a position on the US Supreme Court, but of course it would be another Arizona woman and former legislator, Sandra Day O'Connor, in 1980 instead. Yet even with this impressive state tradition, many Arizonans continued to hold sexist ideas about female public servants. In 1968, the *Arizona Republic* described another female candidate for the state supreme court as "tall and vigorous" and "cheery, her hazel eyes sparkle with intelligence and humor...She is kindly, pragmatic." The detailed descriptions of appearance as well as the

[49] Ibid.

highlighting of traditionally passive traits like kindness and humor makes this article read more like a personal ad than a campaign interview. The candidate, Marilyn Riddle, seemed to understand the delicate balance she had to strike as a woman running for a court position; she represented herself as assertive but also non-threatening. She stated, "I favor a strong approach to problems facing the bench. By strong, I mean active rather than passive." And yet Riddle ended the interview by reiterating the perspective that women could bring to the bench as women.[50] Here, we can see the gendered tight rope women often felt they had to walk as public figures, as to not come off as too fervent.

ERA activists dealt with sexist pressure even from their allies. On April 2, 1973, the Arizona House actually passed the ERA, although not without the male legislators having a bit of "fun" first. Female House members worked hard to secure the votes necessary for its passage and to bring the amendment to the floor. When the time came to cast their votes, the male legislators held off. After a pause and an eruption of laughter, the nearly fifty male legislators who agreed to vote in favor of the ERA finally entered their "yays." One female reporter for the *Arizona Republic* described the scene as "a put-on by the men and typical of the light-hearted, good-humored manner in which representatives have dealt with House Bill 2280 (the ERA)." This was also accompanied by "teasing wolf-whistling from her fellow legislators" as the bill's presenter, Representative Diane McCarthy, took the floor.[51] These women were successful in their work to pass the ERA in the Arizona House despite being sexualized and mocked by their male colleagues, many of whom claimed to be their allies in the ERA fight and on other issues.

Not all of the ERA supporters running for office embraced the image of the moderate, western feminist wholeheartedly. One woman, Sue James, relied more heavily on her

[50] Jeanne Tro Williams, "She'll Campaign for the Superior Court Judgeship," *Arizona Republic*, June 9, 1968, pp. M-11.
[51] Ginger Hutton, "Rights bill rides wave of humor," *Arizona Republic*, April 4, 1973.

connections in her church and her working-class roots. In 1974 twenty-five women ran for seats in the Arizona House and Senate, and a remarkable eighteen were successful. James was one of those women, securing a seat in the Arizona House. Interestingly, James ran against her husband in the Democratic primary for the seat, beating him. She was supported by the Arizona Women's Political Caucus, and when interviewed in 1975, credited women's groups for her victory. She said ERA organizations like her own had done a great job of getting more women involved in politics and registered to vote. She stated, "Women need to be in politics...they have something to offer and different experiences."[52] In the general election for her conservative Phoenix district, James ran a door-to-door campaign. When asked about where her children were, she would explain that she did not have any but was hoping to adopt a Vietnamese child refugee, which seemed to shock people out of asking her anymore personal questions. As a former gas station manager, James did not know much about running a campaign, but she was a politically active and engaged "liberal." Despite her district's conservative feel, her constituents connected with her dedication to women's equality and the rights of the working class. "People call me at home more than they call me at work," she said of her work as a new House member. "They talk to me as a person. We talk politics at church." James, who ventured to call herself a radical at times, was able to find a common ground with people in her district through a focus on justice for working people and women. She also claimed to have little issue early on with her constituents being against the ERA. It was not until around 1975, after STOP ERA sent out flyers in her area, that she began to hear real opposition. While campaigning for the amendment one woman scoffed at the word "equality" and proclaimed to James, "I enjoy scrubbing the floor." Although James led a successful campaign that was not built on motherhood, the growing criticism that she

[52] Interview with Sue James by Patricia Horstman, 1975, folder 5, box 1, Patricia Horstman Oral History Collection, Cline Library Special Collections, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona (hereafter NAU).

received from conservative women was the exact issue that other ERA-supportive candidates were hoping to avoid. They argued that by connecting with conservative women through motherhood, they could relate to these women whom disagreed with them concerning the amendment.

Women interested in politics in the unratified western states faced two opposing cultural messages. On the one hand, they often grew up being told that western women were more hearty and independent than women in other regions. On the other hand, they faced sexism in their daily lives, especially as more women began running for office. Many pro-ERA candidates found that by placing their families at the center of their campaigns, it demonstrated to constituents not only that their families supported their political endeavors, but that they were running for office because they wanted to build a better world for their children. Unlike feminists before them, who argued women were no longer justifying their right to public spaces because of their benevolence or motherhood, western activists were expanding the meaning of modern feminism by arguing for women's equality alongside their roles as mothers.

"ERA for Our Children"

Pro-ERA women were not the only activists utilizing the rhetoric of motherhood in the ERA debate. Conservative women began to mount an opposition in the West in 1973 and 1974, trying to reclaim their dominion over the discourse of family. Through various local and national organizations, activists against the ERA increasingly vocalized their disdain for "libbers." Radical feminists, the opposition argued, would not dupe housewives, farm wives, and Christian mothers into thinking the ERA would help them. In response to these developments, ERA

leaders in the West doubled down on their moderate approach. While each group leveraged motherhood in the debate over the amendment, western feminists expanded the definition. In their attempt to create a more equitable society for women and sway legislators to pass the ERA, supporters extended the traditional focus of the married, middle-class, stay-at-home mother to include single mothers, displaced homemakers, and working mothers, those that often needed more support in their communities. Leaders in the western ERA movement mobilized motherhood by making the term more inclusive and, in turn, further cemented the movement's strategy of moderation, rather than the greater women's liberation campaign.

While a few ERA opponents were able to block the amendment in Oklahoma under the influence of Phyllis Schlafly, anti-ERA women in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah were also building a movement. In 1973 a group called Arizona Coalition of Organizations Opposing the ERA (which seems pointed, if by name alone, as a dig against the Arizona Equal Rights Coalition) emerged in the state. The group boasted the membership of ten organizations, including the Homemakers' United Efforts.[53] In their official statement, the Coalition wrote of the ERA, "We submit that the CREATOR of this UNIVERSE in HIS wisdom created the two sexes in order to provide for the continuation and advancement of the human race and that each sex was endowed with separate but equal abilities to better promote these aims." The document later adds that equality was "not in harmony with natural laws...and does seek to pervert the purposes for which the two sexes were created."[54] Using the rhetoric of "natural law," the Coalition and Homemakers' United Effort argued that the ERA promoted an artificial, gender-neutral world in which natural sex difference was completely erased. Using moral and religious language, they

[53] Connie Koenenn, "League joins equal rights push," *Arizona Republic*, January 6, 1973, p. 38.
[54] Homemakers'' United Efforts and the Arizona Coalition of Organizations Opposing the ERA, "Statement of Opposition to the Proposed 27th Amendment to the United States Constitution, January 8, 1973," folder 3, box 20, John Williams Papers, ASU. Emphasis in the original.

placed the amendment squarely in opposition with Judeo-Christian beliefs about procreation and the family structure.

Such arguments were very much a part of a growing movement almost exclusively organized under New Right leader Phyllis Schlafly and her STOP ERA and Eagle Forum groups. As early as 1974, widespread opposition mounted in the form of these conservative women's organizations that offered themselves as the "alternative" to women "libbers."[55] Conservative women, a politically active sect of the Republican Party that had grown quite vibrant since the 1960s, began mounting an impressive media-oriented campaign against the amendment. As a result of this onslaught, the perception of the amendment began to evolve. Many came to believe the ERA was radical, another example of the new liberal agenda, another move away from "traditional" Christian moral and gender values, another incursion into family life, and another overreach by the federal government.[56] Through local chapters of STOP ERA and other conservative and religious-based opposition organizations, conservative women worked to change the perception of the amendment from a mainstream extension of the rights revolution to a radical intrusion into American private life.

Conservative opposition to the ERA built on the existing fears many western communities already held concerning young women and families turning away from religion. In Utah, the rising teen pregnancy and divorce rates of the 1970s sent the largely conservative state into a panic. Dr. Herbert Larsen, a sociologist for the Community Services Council, wrote in the *Deseret News* in 1974 that, in Salt Lake City, "family breakdown is the number one problem."[57]

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[55] Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 221.
[56] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-10; Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), xiv.
[57] Dale Van Atta, "Salt Lake divorce: A growing problem," *Deseret News*, July 31, 1974.

Within a few months, Utah's first permanent STOP ERA headquarters opened in the city.[58] Before the rise of conservative women's groups, even the prominent Relief Society--the women's charity organization within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints-- supported and voted in favor of the amendment. LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball initially called the ERA's motives "praiseworthy," but just two years later in 1976, with the rise of conservative opposition, held a different opinion: "A blanket attempt to help women might bring far more restraints and repressions." He concluded: "We fear it will even stifle many God-given feminine instincts."[59] This equation between the ERA and ungodly and unnatural gender formations was a huge success. Under the influence of the Church, which would eventually come out in opposition of the amendment, more and more Utahans and westerners began to associate the ERA with radical feminism rather than equality.

STOP ERA chapters found success with the large Mormon populations in Nevada as well. The chairwoman of the state chapter, in fact, was a political trailblazer herself. Helen Herr was the state's first female State Assembly member and first State Senate member. She ran on women's equality-- one reporter even called her a feminist-- and in 1973 she sponsored an equal pay bill.[60] Yet when it came to the ERA, Senator Herr was one of the first to speak out against it. She became involved in the conservative women's movement through HOW, or Happiness of Women, which worked to ensure that women's ideal place in society, the home, was preserved. Many smaller fringe groups like HOW eventually joined STOP ERA. Herr told her constituents, "I'm in favor of equality for women-I've worked for it my whole life. But ERA would cause

[58] "Utah group balks at ERA," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 9, 1975.
[59] "Against ERA: Church's Stand Draws Opposition," *Equal Rights Monitor,* November and December 1976 issue, folder 3, box 30, Jean Ford Collection, UNLV.
[60] Ed Koch and Cy Ryan, "First woman state senator, real estate broker Herr dies." *Las Vegas Sun,* July 1, 1999.

more problems than it would solve."[61] Herr and members of the LDS church were already separating the ERA from women's equality.

For leaders like Herr, the issue with the ERA was not necessarily the power it would give women, but the power it would give the federal government. The second clause of the ERA reads, "The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article," and gives states two years to amend any state statutes violating gender equality. Building on white conservative disdain for civil rights legislation and federal busing, New Right leaders like Schlafly and Herr utilized the anger and fear many westerners held in the 1960s and 1970s; many hewed to the libertarian idea that federal intervention was never good for the individual and that the ability of states to govern independently was increasingly being assaulted. In a speech given in 1975 Senator Herr makes this clear: "Do we want the federal government telling us what we can and cannot do?" Herr's colleague, Senator Carl Dodge, added that if the ERA passed, "we will become workers for the state and our children will be cared for by the state."[62] New Right women's groups capitalized on this fear of federal intervention to work against the newest liberal agenda: women's equality.

In other western states, politicians may have valued women's equality, but they valued their state's independence from federal oversight more. In Arizona, Representative Anne Lindeman, like many pro-ERA women, ran a grassroots, door-to-door campaign that included living room chats with constituents and local coffees. A widow, she waited until both of her sons were teenagers before she ran for the House in 1972 in West Phoenix. And yet Lindeman maintained in a 1975 interview that there were no "liabilities" of being a woman in government. "I am not an opponent of equal rights," she maintained, but then added, "I don't feel that

[61] Ibid.
[62] "ERA comeback still remains possibility," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, February 21, 1975.

throwing the exercise to Washington, eliminating the state's ability and its response to take the lead in doing something in our own state is the way to go. We need to deal with it right here."[63] Like Senator Herr, Representative Lindeman attempted to toe the line by claiming to support equality, but only when it did not involve federal intervention in her state. Yet in the same interview she made clear that she was not sold on the usefulness of the women's liberation movement, calling activists "militant," "abrasive," and "hurtful to their own sex." Women in politics used to be the "civilizing influence," according to Representative Lindeman. "But with some of these newer gals I'm not so sure that's true anymore."[64] Many women in the past justified their entrance into political life through arguments of female difference. This is especially true in the West, where one hundred years earlier white women claimed to "tame" or "civilize" the unruly and corrupt politics in their communities as a way to justify their presence in these public spaces.[65] Representative Lindeman viewed herself in line with this legacy; she saw herself diligently serving her communities and not creating upheaval, unlike those unruly feminists. Just speaking up about difficult subjects like rape or abortion, common women's liberation topics, was enough to create a clear line of difference even for female leaders who viewed equality as a major part of their political platform.

Western conservatives began connecting the ERA to other community fears and slowly generated more outrage against the amendment. While debating the ERA on the floor of the

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[63] Interview with Anne Lindeman by Patricia Horstman, 1975, folder 3, box 1, Patricia Horstman Oral History Collection, Cline Library Special Collections, NAU.
[64] Ibid.
[65] For works on challenging old archetypes and colonial ideas of women "civilizing" or "taming" the West, see Julie Roy Jeffery, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing the West?"* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988); Joan M. Jenson and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49:2 (1980); Virginia Scharff, *Twenty thousand Roads: Women, Movement, and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Susan Armitage,"Through Women's Eyes: A New View of the West" in *The Women's West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Lesley Poling-Kempes, *The Harvey Girls: Women Who Opened the West* (Cambridge, MA: Da Campo, 1989); Sheila McManus, *Choices and Chances: A History of Women in the U.S. West* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2011); Linda Williams Reese, *Women of Oklahoma, 1890-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

Nevada Senate in 1975, anti-ERA Senator Carl Dodge argued that the amendment was not just for gender equality, but it would change the entire gender structure. He stated that all bathrooms would have to be unisex and that children would be required to attend state-run daycares because gender equality would mean men and women working equal hours. These arguments came directly from Schlafly and the anti-ERA forces. "The rearing of children will again revert to a communal effort, socialistically [sic] financed." He then added, "The demise of the home as the basic social unit could signal the demise of the greatest expression of freedom in the history of mankind."[66] According to Dodge, children, homes, gender-segregated bathrooms, and freedom itself were at risk because of the ERA, and these arguments did not go unnoticed.

Countless Nevadans wrote to their local papers and to their representatives that they feared what the ERA would do to their families. These letters were overwhelmingly written by women. One female constituent wrote to ERA supporter and Assemblywoman Mary Gojack that, "if ratified, [the ERA] will destroy the God-given right that American women have long enjoyed, which is simply to be women."[67] One female elementary school teacher read an anti-ERA editorial to her twelve-year-old students and asked them to all write letters to their representative as a class project. One child's letter asked if the ERA would make rape no longer punishable by law, force co-ed bathrooms, and compel the military to draft women. The student wrote, "If women were drafted and captured by the enemy, the men would use them for sex in prisons...Women are going to be ashamed to go into the restroom for fear of being raped by some badly desiring man waiting in there." Only one student in the group of forty, a young boy, wrote in favor of the amendment, stating simply, "It would serve women right."[68] While attempting to

[66] "Last shot not fired in ERA ratification," *Nevada State Journal*, February 21, 1975.
[67] Letter to Assemblywoman Mary Gojack from Olive D. Casey, February 26, 1973, folder 19, box 2, Mary Gojack Papers, UNR.
[68] "First ERA hearing 'circus' gets serious," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, February 21, 1973.

convey their disdain and opposition to the amendment, the young boy displayed clearly the misogyny and equation of women as sexual objects in his mind already. The general level of outrage in the class letters showed how politically charged the amendment had become.

As conservatives laid claim to the mantle of political motherhood, western feminists continued to leverage their identities as parents in support of the ERA. Schlafly and other STOP ERA proponents liked to remind the public that "all women's liberationists hate men and children." Western feminists included parents of many stripes, mothers in traditional nuclear families, single mothers, lesbian mothers, religious and non-religious mothers.[69] Many also held positions in local churches and schools. In fact, their identities as mothers and spiritual people often informed their interest in supporting the ERA. Many said they worked specifically on behalf of their daughters. In a widely read *Redbook* article, co-founder of Housewives for the ERA, Ann Poag, stated "the opposition always identifies itself as a group of wives and mothers. We had to point out that that's what we are, too."[70] In response to charges from their opposition, ERA leaders in the West often promoted their statuses as mothers to undermine the anti-family or radical image.

A majority of the pro-ERA men and women in the unratified western states were parents, and many of their children rallied for the amendment right along with them. In Oklahoma, Holly Childs and Harriet Guthrie often brought Child's three-year-old son, Bill, on their recruiting quests. Eventually, they put him to work at their ERA Coffees by reading to the spectators a mother-goose-like story of the top ten arguments made against women's suffrage in the earlier part of the century. In a Victorian-style costume, Bill would read, "Women are too emotional. If women get the vote they will neglect their husbands and children and they'll start smoking

[69] Dale Wittner, "All women's liberationists hate men and children," *Chicago Tribune*, May 20, 1973.
[70] Claire Safron, "What You Should Know About the Equal Rights Amendment," *Redbook*, June 1973.

cigars...” According to Childs, these arguments against suffrage were “exactly the same kinds of arguments we were getting about the Equal Rights Amendment,” and she hoped participants would see the parallel as well.[71] Margaret Cox, an ERA supporter from Tulsa, Oklahoma, often brought her pre-teen daughter to events including a large protest rally held at the capitol on June 6, 1982. Even 25 years after the amendment’s defeat, Cox proudly displayed a photograph of her daughter holding one of the banners in her living room.[72] Marvin York, who was president pro tempore of the State Senate from 1980 to 1982, credited his support for the ERA because to his mother, wife, and teenage daughter who influenced his politics. York’s daughter also often accompanied him to ERA meetings and fundraisers.[73] Most notable was Wanda Jo Peltier’s toddler grandson, who often wore ERA t-shirts to his elementary school and attended a rally with Peltier and his mother (Peltier’s daughter) in Chicago.[74]

Oklahoma Representative Hannah Atkins, too, leveraged her multiple identities of ERA supporter, mother, and church member in the work to ratify the amendment. During her first campaign Atkins’s oldest son, Edmund, created a youth support group of junior high and high school kids called “Hannah’s Helpers.” The boys and girls in the group would dress up in bright neon colors, hold signs, and sing cheers of support for Atkins. As her reputation in Oklahoma City as a staunch defender of children grew, so did Hannah’s Helpers, with many of the young female participants earning internships in politics.[75] It was her children, two sons and one daughter, who largely inspired her fight to ratify the ERA in the state. Speaking to the OKWPC, she stated, “The time for sleeping beauties is passed. We cannot afford to sleep our lives away.

[71] Childs interview.
[72] Interview with Margaret Cox, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, May 23, 2009, Red Dirt Women Oral History Project.
[73] Interview with Marvin York, by the author, January 28, 2016, Norman, Oklahoma.
[74] Peltier Stapleton interview.
[75] Interview with Hannah Atkins, by Carol Koss, n.d., folder 12, box 8, Hannah Diggs Atkins Collection, Women’s Archive, Oklahoma State University Archives, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

We cannot afford to sleep our daughters' lives away. We cannot afford to sleep our futures away. So much is at stake."[76] Atkins understood not only the importance of equal rights in Oklahoma, but also the rare opportunity her generation had to pass the ERA and secure the rights of many generations of women to come.

Figure 2.3. Oklahoma Representative Hannah Atkins at a campaign event with her daughter. Date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Oklahoma Women's Coalition.

Because so many ERA supporters were parents and viewed the amendment as a direct and necessary change for their children's futures, they took it personally when the amendment came under attack. In Nevada, State Senator Mary Gojack was crushed when the ERA failed in

[76] Hannah Atkins, "Atkins' speech to the OKWPC," November 5, 1972, folder 12, box 11, Hannah Diggs Atkins Collection, OHS.

the Nevada Senate in 1973 after several of her fellow male representatives let her down. "Immediately after the vote, in the hall, a Senator who had both spoke and voted nay, tried to pat me on the shoulder, and said, 'Don't take it personally.' What could be more personal? The rejection of me, my daughter, all daughters, wives, mothers, all women, is acutely personal, for I am a human being of the feminist sex."[77] Representative Sue Wagner also held similar feelings of frustration with Nevada representatives about the ERA and what it meant to her not just as a woman or state representative, but also as a mother. In her oral history she stated, "... we're talking about equality of rights guaranteed under the United States Constitution for every woman, every young girl, every granddaughter. It just seems to me to be something that I could not quite understand how people-men- didn't think of their wives or their daughters or their mothers in this way, that it would be guaranteeing them something very, very important that they had."[78] There were male representatives, some of the most powerful in the state, including Governor Mike O' Callaghan, Lieutenant Governor Robert Rose, Attorney General Robert List, and several state and U.S. Senators, including Howard Cannon and Strom Thurmond, who supported the amendment. In fact, Senator Thurmond's support for the ERA was also motivated by his role as a father, stating, "I want my daughter, Nancy, to grow up with a full guarantee of every right and opportunity that our great country provides for all of its citizens."[79]

Western feminists leveraged not only their status as mothers, they also worked to reclaim the idea that homemakers and farm wives could be ERA supporters, too. One of the tactics used early on by conservative women in Oklahoma was to bake breads, cookies, and other treats and distribute them at the state capitol. Not wanting to come off as masculine in their direct lobbying of legislators, they would set up big tables with anti-ERA signs along with their goodies, and the

[77] NERA pamphlet, 1974, folder ERA Literature 1974, box 1, Janet MacEachern Collection, UNLV.
[78] Wagner interview, 181.
[79] NERA pamphlet, n.d., folder ERA People of Faith Miscellaneous, box 1, Dorothy Eisenburg Collection, UNLV.

strategy was fairly successful. To counter this, pro-ERA women also began delivering baked goods and pies. According to Mattie Morgan, the women mimicked STOP ERA's big tables of food, only their signs read, "Baked By Liberated Women." ERA supporters also pinned white flowers to the lapels of legislators for the amendment (white and green were the colors of those for the ERA, similar to the suffragists, while the antis always wore red).[80] As the lively competition of baked goods between the factions escalated, Wanda Jo Peltier challenged the anti-ERA women, who called themselves the Housewives League, to a bake-off. She also challenged Ann Patterson specifically. Although none of the anti-ERA members would join Peltier, she did have several other volunteers, including the president of the Men for ERA Oklahoma City chapter, join her in the bake-off. Peltier won, and was awarded an Equal Rights Amendment apron.[81] In another sarcastic jab at the opposition, the OKWPC held a fashion show fundraiser in the Governor's Mansion in 1978. Modeling high-end clothing from Ruth Meyers, a prominent dress shop in downtown Oklahoma City, the organization attracted an impressive crowd of men and women. Above the catwalk hung a banner that read, "Current Trends in Fashion and the Law."[82] Not only were these grassroots campaign techniques good for public support, they also gave ERA supporters a chance to appeal to housewives.

[80] Interview with Becky Patton, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, March 9, 2010, Red Dirt Women Oral History; Interview with Mattie Morgan, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, November 16, 2009, Red Dirt Women Oral History.
[81] Peliter Stapleton interview.
[82] Interview with Penny Williams, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, April 8, 2010, Red Dirt Women Oral History.

Figure 2.4. Wanda Jo Petlier and her competition for the ERA Bake Off, a member of Men for ERA Oklahoma City. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

Figure 2.5. Wanda Jo Peltier posing with her victory ERA apron and rolling pin after winning the ERA Bake Off. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

Local pro-ERA organizations also worked to reach housewives by studying and advertising the benefits and protections the amendment would offer women without social safety nets. In their leaflets and pamphlets, Nevadans for ERA (NERA) would often advertise the respect the organization had for homemakers and how the ratification of the ERA would give these women the legal recognition they deserved, including social security benefits and job training in the event that their family system was disrupted. One pamphlet stated "Through ERA, Nevada can ensure revision of federal laws that discriminate against Nevada citizens and cause economic injustices to Nevada families."[83] Western feminists focused not just on how the ERA would be beneficial to women, but also their families.

ERA activists not only worked to bring housewives into the movement, but they expanded this definition and their support to also include "displaced homemakers," or housewives who, through death or separation, found themselves unprepared for the job market. Oklahoma activist Wanda Jo Peltier was a pioneer in assisting women and mothers in these types of situations. One of her proudest moments was when she partnered with the State of Oklahoma's Department of Education to create an entire free program for displaced homemakers that would eventually be used nationwide. As a homemaker once herself, who had to brave the job market with little work experience and a gap in her employment record, Peltier's curriculum included how to create a résumé apply for jobs, prepare and answer interview questions, locate childcare, and enroll in local vocation programs. Through her experience with hundreds of vulnerable women, Peltier became even more convinced in the necessity of the ERA, and she promoted the positive changes the amendment would create for the numerous homemakers and farm wives in the West.[84]

[83] NERA pamphlet, 1974, folder ERA Literature 1974, box 1, Janet MacEachern Collection, UNLV.
[84] Wanda Jo Peltier, *Displaced Homemakers: Vo-Tech Workshop Guide*, 1978. In author's possession.

Western ERA activists also expanded their support of families and mothers to include not just housewives, but women who chose to work. In Arizona, the state National Organization for Women (NOW) President Maria Richards told the Arizona Republic that the organization was, first and foremost, dedicated to helping working mothers. Without childcare support, she argued, working mothers did not have the opportunity for full employment. While daycare facilities were still not all that common in the early 1970s, NOW hoped to change this. This, of course, was controversial in itself, as the opposition argued government-sponsored or publicly funded childcare was federal overreach at best and an opportunity to reprogram children at worst. Richards sarcastically countered, "To those who argue that the child is better off in the home than it is the center, I can only say we reared children at home for a long time-and we did a lousy job of it."[85] Here, western feminists aligned closely with women's liberationists in that they supported the idea that women should not be forced to choose or feel ashamed for working as mothers. Women who wanted to stay home with their children were making a good choice for their children, and mothers that worked were as well. Mothers that did choose to work deserved quality childcare options and support at their places of employment.

Those in support of the ERA in the West expanded the definition of motherhood by pushing the boundaries of family gender norms. In Utah, Equal Rights Coalition Utah (ERCU) leaders made waves with their ERA lobbying style in 1974. After calling representatives and tallying possible votes, the organization concluded that they had thirty-three of the thirty-five necessary "yay" votes needed to pass the ERA in the Utah House. Then, when the *Deseret News* published a poll claiming seventy-four percent of Utahans supported the ERA, the women of ERCU decided to strike.[86] Hoping to "educate" legislators about the amendment before the

[85] "How NOW stands on the women's liberation movement," *Arizona Republic*, October 4, 1970, pp. M-13.
[86] McQuown interview.

upcoming 1975 session and flip three votes, organizers held a breakfast event for lawmakers, which included a question and answer session about the amendment that aimed to contest the recent popularity of the opposition. It was men, mostly the husbands of activists who cooked and served breakfast to the legislators, while the women of ERCU ran the program.[87] Here ERA leaders in Utah were sending a clear message to the mostly male politicians: women, who are usually in the serving role and go unnoticed, had something to say.

For some, their motherhood-based feminism included open criticism of other feminists. Eighty-four-year-old Republican and longtime ERA supporter Susana Mae Grua argued that the amendment was absolutely necessary to protect hard-working but legally unprotected women like herself.[88] Pushing back against arguments that pro-ERA women neglected their children, Grua firmly established her support of the amendment as separate from women's liberation. She stated, "[the opposition] relate us immediately with women's liberation and burning bras...that isn't what we do."[89] Grua was also critical of divorce and single mothers who did not try and "better" their position, especially through education. That Grua's support of equality was contingent on doing things the "right way" highlights the deeper tension that emerged out of western feminists' mainstream politics. This type of thinking replicated older ideas that separated good or "worthy" women from those "unworthy," of aid.

[87] Ibid.
[88] Interview with Susanna Mae Grua, by Kathryn MacKay, Eloise McQuown, and Gregory C. Thompson, March 31, 1977, Women in Utah Politics Oral History Project, UU.
[89] Ibid.

Radical American Feminist

While a majority of ERA supporters in the unratified West worked overtime to prove their loyalty to their families, children, and homemakers in the face of conservative opposition, activists who did not share these identities worried about their place in the ERA movement. Many activists in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah still proudly supported a multitude of women's liberation causes, including abortion rights, lesbian and gay rights, and women's sexual freedom alongside the ERA. As those opposed to the ERA became more and more successful in their use of the media to make the amendment seem too radical for westerners, western feminists began to separate the ERA from expanded abortion protections or gay rights out of fear of being labeled "radical." Activists could be called radical for a multitude of reasons in the West: joining a national or popular leftist organization, challenging religious organizations and churches, or simply not wearing a bra. This effort by ERA leaders to capture the mainstream began to alienate some supporters. It also sometimes made some ERA supporters more cautious about other women's liberation topics. For example, many supporters in Oklahoma were pro-choice, including Wanda Jo Peltier and Hannah Atkins, but viewed the ERA and abortion as separate issues. Keeping them separate they hoped would mean an easier passage for the amendment. Despite most national ERA supporters arguing for equal rights, access to safe abortions, and increased rights for the gay community on separate arenas, these issues continued to be purposely collapsed by the opposition to discredit the amendment. By the end of 1975, some ERA supporters in the West were wary to even call themselves feminists while clearly supporting and campaigning for gender equality. This tension between ERA activists who supported a range of women's rights and those that pushed for moderation created personal discord and organizational obstacles for pro-ERA women in the four unratified western states.

In many parts of the West at this time, being called a radical had less to do with one's actual politics and more to do with how the local community related to activists. Local organizations and those with historic roots in the region like the League of Women Voters were more popular with western activists and received less criticism. There were National Organization for Women (NOW) chapters in each state, though they initially enjoyed less success than other state-based organizations. Some western women remained skeptical of national organizations, as they were often associated with "radical" feminism on the East and West Coasts. In fact, NOW was a mainstream and liberal feminist organization that embraced equality through the current political system, not the radical structuring of it. By supporting a constitutional amendment to evoke change, NOW reinforced their moderate policy of working within established political forums to produce change. Phyllis Schlafly and anti-ERA supporters simply called NOW and their supporters radicals.

For many westerners, NOW's radicalism was in their self-presentation. According to activist Junetta Davis, the Oklahoma NOW chapter was not, in her opinion, radical but more "outspoken" than more popular groups like the OKWPC. Their association with radical feminism apparently came from some members' choice of dress that included jeans and sometimes no bras.[90] Still, countless archival and personal collections of activists show photographs of NOW and other women's organization members dressed professionally in mostly slacks and blouses. ERA supporters lobbied often at the state capitol, and they were extremely aware of the importance of presentation. Oklahoma activist Wanda Jo Peltier described one of these experiences: "We thought if we looked good, if we smelled good, if we made sense, it was a done deal. Well, about all we got at first were pats on the head. That is, until we organized."[91]

[90] Junetta Davis, "Breaking the Bonds," *Oklahoma Monthly*, n.d., folder 26, box 37, ERA Collection, OHS.

Bras or no bras, the mere accusation of such a look invoked backlash from conservatives because of what it represented: gendered difference and freedom from patriarchal restraints. Whether it really was the youthful clothing of some or their challenging ideas to the status quo in the state, some locals feared membership to a powerful national organization like NOW might lead to interference or influence from outsiders. The accusation of NOW's allegedly radical activity seems to be rooted more in a comparison to the ideas of traditional femininity and gender roles in the state rather than any real extremist or militant agenda.

A majority of western pro-ERA activists felt more comfortable creating their own organizations with their own established identity that was, more or less, in their control. National feminist organizations often received questionable or negative publicity, and this was something many activists were well aware of by the early 1970s. In a 1971 newspaper article the OKWPC stated that their purpose was "to elevate the status of all women by working through the legal channels," and was sure to include that they were "neither passive, nor excessively radical" and wanted to unite those from both parties. Being labeled "radical" in Oklahoma and the Intermountain West invoked an un-American image, an image that pro-ERA women consciously tried to avoid.[92]

To counter this idea of gender equality being "radical" some ERA activists refused to even address other women's liberation issues when the opportunity arose. Oklahoma Representative Cleta Deatherage prioritized presenting the ERA as mainstream when structuring her arguments. Deatherage had an interview or quote about the ERA featured in an Oklahoma paper almost every week in the late 1970s. She would calmly explain that the ERA would not

[92] "Monks' Quiz Request Upsets Rights Group," *Oklahoma City Times*, March 5, 1981; Peltier Stapleton interview.

create government oversight or "affect laws pertaining to biological differences or privacy."[93] If passed, she argued, the Oklahoma laws that violated the ERA would be voted on and changed by its own state legislators such as herself. Deatherage was also quick to defend the ERA against association with abortion or gay rights. As far as the public was concerned, pro-ERA activists did not discuss abortion for fear that it would become even more associated with the ERA. Hannah Atkins also followed this rule, although she did correspond with Wanda Peltier on abortion rights in private.[94] Quoting National Woman's Party president Elizabeth Chittick, Deatherage declared publicly, "Until men can have an abortion, it has nothing to do with sex discrimination. ERA is to prevent discrimination between the sexes with equality under the law."[95]

Other state leaders, like Nevada's Jean Ford, utilized a similar tactic. Assemblywoman Ford stated, "I still would not have called myself a feminist at all in 1976. But I could see inequalities in the law, and that was my current job-to work on law-and so I really went to bat on that. And then women came to me and told me their stories about all the discrimination and abuse, and things like that. So my own awareness was getting raised on problems that people had."[96] Ford, who called herself a feminist later in life, initially protested a speaking engagement in her state by famed women's rights leader Gloria Steinem. "I believed in E.R.A., but Gloria Steinem I wasn't sure about," she said.[97] Many pro-ERA Nevada women still viewed themselves as socially conservative, or at least disconnected from national leaders and self-proclaimed feminists like Bella Abzug and Betty Friedan. Some women, including Ford, did not feel

[93] "Several groups backing ERA, city reader says," *The Norman Transcript*, n.d., folder 10, box 52, ERA Collection, OHS.
[94] Wanda Jo Peltier to Hannah Atkins, November 9, 1981, folder 11, box 11, Hannah Diggs Atkins Collection, OHS.
[95] Malvina Stephenson, "Soothing Troubled Waters: ERA Aftermath," *Tulsa Tribune*, April 4, 1982.
[96] Ford interview.
[97] Ibid.

comfortable discussing or using the term feminism because of its negative connotations and the feeling that at the time it did not represent her. The potential influence of "feminism" and national or outside agitation would continue to plague the ERA campaign in the West for years to come, especially as the region moved into the national spotlight.

Other women within these same communities continued to organize for the "radical" issues that mainstream leaders sidelined. Wanda Jo Peltier proudly called herself a feminist and publicly campaigned for women's right to choose into her nineties. When called a radical by John Monks, a state representative from Muskogee and perhaps the most notorious anti-ERA legislator in the capitol, she embraced the term.[98] Monks was also known to keep an American flag in his desk and a recording of the national anthem in case anyone speaking sounded "radical" or "communist." After throwing both Mattie Morgan and Wanda Jo Peltier out of his office and accusing them of being communists, some of the women decided to take a jab at him. Calling themselves Radical American Feminists or RAF (according to Peltier, you have to growl when you say RAF to fit the "intimidating" description), the group sent Monks a "stuffed toy rat with a yellow stripe down its back," a reference to his cowardice. Enraged by their actions, Monks demanded that the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation find the members of RAF as they might be dangerous to him and the public. When it came to light that the investigation would be paid for out of taxpayers' pockets, Monks eventually dropped the idea.[99] Other activists, like Oklahoman Pat Reaves, did not let the more conservative image of women at the top affect her activism. For Reaves, being a lesbian and an ERA supporter in the state had never been an issue because the women on the ground that she worked with every day had her support,

[98] Lee Hockstader, "Okl. Initiative Tackles Tradition," *Washington Post*, November 2, 2012.
[99] "Monks' Quiz Request Upsets Rights Group," *Oklahoma City Times*, March 5, 1981; Peltier Stapleton interview.

and she had theirs.[100] In fact, the connections Reaves made while working to ratify the ERA eventually lead her to help found, along with other ERA activists, the first lesbian co-op in the state.

In Utah, framing support for the ERA in terms of human rights rather than women's rights was extremely important, as challenging church authority over women would be considered radical on its own terms. In a letter to Church President Spencer W. Kimball, the most powerful man in the LDS hierarchy, the Equal Rights Coalition pleaded with him: "Utah has a rich tradition of leadership in human rights. The LDS Church now has the opportunity to further this tradition."[101] Within the activist groups that made these claims, political differences around feminist issues remained. LDS member Eloise McQuown described herself and her organization, the UWPC, as feminist and largely pro-choice.[102] Others in the state, Susa Mae Grua included, were adamant that the ERA and feminism were not connected. All activists pushed the boundaries of what was considered "radical" behavior in the state. They openly campaigned for an issue the church had deemed immoral. All pro-ERA activists were radical in their own way.

In Arizona, some feminists publicly bucked the sexism inherent in many marriage customs. In an article by the *Arizona Republic*, ASU student and ERA activist Pinny Lauerman, although married, decided she wanted to change her name back to her maiden name. Little did she know that this would upset a local judge. Judge Edwin Thurston, of the Maricopa Superior Court, denied her name change because he thought it would "confuse creditors and the Internal

[100] Interview with Pat Reaves, by the author, March 15, 2019, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
[101] Irene Fischer, President of ERCU, to LDS President Spencer W. Kimball, January 16, 1975, folder 4, box 1, Equal Rights Coalition Utah Collection, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.
[102] McQuown interview.

Revenue Service."[103] Yet when Lauerman contacted the IRS, they adamantly disagreed. The representative stated that as long as she registered with the Social Security Administration, there would not be a problem. While Lauerman continued her name change battle, her husband was baffled. He wrote to the *Republic* that the issue was "incredible": The idea that the bond of marriage is so fragile that it requires a common name for both husband and wife to cement the relationship is self-evidently false."[104] Clearly the judge's issue with Lauerman's request was not a legal one, but a cultural one. By disrupting the gendered tradition of the wife giving up her last name, she also directly challenged the idea that women should lose their independence and authority in a marriage as well.

In the same article, the reporter strangely attempted to prove that women's rights activists were not radical because they did not let lesbians join them, a completely inaccurate representation that ASU students quickly rebuffed. *Republic* staffer April Daien made this comparison in her article: "many women's liberationists say that lesbian feminism is about as representative of women's liberation as Black Panthers are of Negroes or Weathermen are of middle America."[105] Instead of letting this comment stand, Laureman defended lesbians in the movement. In a response letter to the editor she wrote, "At no time during Miss Daien's interview...did any woman say she was 'offended' by the charge of being a lesbian. What does offend us is that the word 'lesbian' is being used in a contemptuous manner. We do not hold our lesbian sisters in contempt, for we are united with them as women in our common fight to end our oppression."[106] Laureman added:

> This is a threat to the male ego-that a woman would reject a man in favor of another woman. Because women's liberation demands that women be able to control their own

[103] April Daien, "Liberationist refused name change," *Arizona Republic*, March 29, 1971.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Pinny Laureman, Letter to the editor, *Arizona Republic*, March 29, 1971.

> lives. Men go to the extremes and say that all women will become lesbians and not "need" men anymore. There is a difference between needing someone and depending on someone... What a person does with love in bed does not deserve condemnation, nor does a person's sex life reflect her worth.[107]

While some ERA activists in the West turned to their status as mothers and wives as a tool to thwart the opposition, others rejected this narrow view of "feminism," especially at the expense of abortion rights and the demonization of lesbian members.

ERA activists in the four remaining unratified western states created impressive grassroots campaigns in the years following the amendment's first defeats in 1972 and 1973. Through creative fundraising endeavors and campaigning techniques, including grocery store leaflets and kitchen table talks, activists utilized the existing women's organizations and successful tactics of the past in order to ratify the ERA. Some also embraced more assertive techniques, including lobbying legislators, giving public speeches, and running for office. Western ERA activists were successful organizers, but so was the opposition. In response to the growing influence of conservative women against the amendment, many pro-ERA activists fought back by promoting their roles as mothers and wives in an attempt to quell an "anti-family" stereotype. This response strengthened the already growing tactic by western ERA leaders to promote the amendment as mainstream and within western traditions. While some activists rejected the mainstream image, others embraced the marriage of feminism and motherhood, and created a kind of "western feminism" where women could be both, and supported the ERA *because* of their children.

[107] Ibid.

Despite these valiant efforts and growing pains, activists in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, or Utah were unable to persuade legislators in their states to pass the Equal Rights Amendment in the early years leading up to 1976. In Oklahoma, Nevada, and Utah, there was no legislative action whatsoever on the amendment in 1975. While the Arizona House passed the amendment in 1974, the Senate did not follow suit. And yet for each vote in each state, the amendment only lost by a few votes. Activists remained optimistic and devoted to the ERA's passage.[108] When the year came to a close in 1975, thirty-four states had ratified, meaning only four more states stood between the ERA and the constitution.

[108] Karen R. Kessling, "State-by-State Analysis," 1976, E.R.A. Ratification in the Unratified States, Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, folder 20, box 175, Eldon Rudd Papers, ASU.

Chapter Three

Church Women United:
Religion and the Meaning of Equality, 1975-1976

"Both male and female citizens of the State shall enjoy equally all civil, political, and religious rights and privileges"

- Utah State Constitution (1895)

When members of a local Men for Ratification of the ERA group approached Arizona Governor Jack Williams about becoming an honorary member, they expected a receptive, if not warm, welcome. Governor Williams had recently made August 1st "Women's Day" in the state, which he hoped would call attention to the continued need for women's equality under the law. Yet when interviewed on the record, the governor had a very different opinion of the Equal Rights Amendment than he did for "equality." He told reporters that he was against the ratification of the ERA because he "believed in the Bible." Quoting the book of Genesis, Governor Williams added, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."[1] With this verse, the Arizona governor echoed a growing argument by religious conservatives who were against the amendment and the women's movement in general: equality with difference was fine, but men and women would never be the same in God's eyes. Husbands and wives had separate roles in the Christian family, and this formulation of the family was rapidly growing in popularity through numerous New Right associated religious denominations.[2]

[1] Connie Koenenn, "High public office denied to women, caucus declares," *Arizona Republic*, December 16, 1972.
[2] For more on women, gender, and the rise of the New Right, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New Right* (Princeton, Princeton University, 2001); Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and*

Opponents of the amendment were strengthening the link between the amendment and feminism. While arguments against the ERA were already heavily focused on gender and motherhood, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' official opposition to the amendment in 1976 reinforced the ERA movement as a target for conservatives. The New Right brought together Protestants, Catholics, and Mormons against the amendment and significantly altered the ratification debate in the West. The Mormon Church in particular severely undercut the ERA campaign in Utah, Nevada, Arizona, Florida, and Virginia. Those against the ERA claimed that their issue with the amendment was feminism and its challenge to the religious, conservative family. Equality was not necessarily a problem. In fact, it was a western tradition to be touted by conservative and liberal women alike. Feminism, though, was entirely different. Feminism, which was now taking over the United States like a plague, would be the end of the Christian nuclear family, according to opponents. Oklahoman Joan Johnson, founder of the Tulsa Eagle Forum chapter and sister of conservative US Senator Jim Inhofe, summed up her critique of feminists this way: she said they demanded "homosexual rights, reproductive freedom, federal daycare centers and the ERA."[3] By the mid-1970s, conservative opposition had successfully packaged the numerous worries many white westerners had, namely increasing urban populations, a rise in minority populations, the civil rights movement, abortion legalization, the women's movement, and increased federal power and subsidies, into a single political problem: liberalism. And while there was not much to be done about many of these proposed issues by the 1980s, stopping what conservatives viewed as feminism through the defeat of the ERA became an achievable and highly visible goal. The campaign against the ERA in the West was not about

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the Postwar Right (Princeton: Princeton University, 2012); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

[3] Debbie Jackson, "Throwback Tulsa: Battle over ERA was highly emotional in Oklahoma," *Tulsa World*, March 12, 2017.

preventing constitutional equality, but about stopping feminism and all that it represented to religious fundamentalists.

By claiming absolute religious authority in the ERA debate, anti-ERA women erased the many religious women, western women in particular, who supported the amendment. As a result, many still believe to this day that the ERA debate was a fight between religious housewives in Middle America and coastal liberal feminists. In reality, many pro-ERA women, especially those in the middle of the country, were highly religious, serving in and even heading their local churches. For these activists, the ERA provided a concrete vehicle for the abstract principles of equality they heard preached in their churches, and that they preached themselves. Their churches influenced and encouraged pro-ERA activism because many had worked with women who faced a variety of crises, from economic vulnerability and poverty to domestic violence. The ERA represented protections for women that many churches recognized as essential, and had been working to provide for decades. Western ERA leaders, in an attempt to "reclaim" their status as religious believers and separate themselves from the "radical" label, often made religion front and center of their campaigns in the mid to late 1970s, which aligned with the moderate, western feminism that was already dominating the local pro-ERA movement.

Yet not all pro-ERA activists were agreed with this strategy. For those who were not religious or did not believe that religion should play an active role in the campaign, this foregrounding of religious identity was alienating. Lesbian women were some of the activists who felt this most keenly. While women like Wanda Jo Peltier and Sue Wagner were both highly involved in their churches and supportive of lesbians in the women's movement, this was not always the case. Many lesbians and gender queer activists felt that their oppression was rooted in organized religion, and the people that called themselves Christians were those who argued

against their human and civil rights. This made the relationship between religious and non-religious members tense.

The equality versus difference argument that the New Right used to strengthen the oppositional movement and unite multiple denominations was not a new argument, but one that had plagued the women's movement since the 1920s. As Nancy F. Cott argues in her work, feminists working to ratify the 19th amendment dealt with this same issue.[4] The question of whether women are fundamentally the same or different from men split women in the 1970s as well. Most feminists believed that women were capable of the same activities as men, and that it was society that created and designated gender roles that continued to constrain women. Those against the ERA thought that men and women were different beings completely, and that biology rendered women more suitable for motherly roles and housework. Phyllis Schlafly maintained that women are fundamentally different from men. In her article "A Different View of Women's Nature," she argued that the difference between the sexes was biological. "Women are simply not the equal of men," she stated; men were physically stronger and more competitive because of their increased sex drives.[5] Schlafly constantly accused ERA supporters of wanting to make the United States "gender free," which she claimed would put an end to single-sex schools, clubs, bathrooms, and prisons.[6] She also maintained that "unsexing" the nation would force housewives into the workforce and eliminate the tradition of the man taking care of his wife and family.[7] Schlafly viewed gender difference as a vital, God-made distinction within society. The

[4] For more on same v. difference debate see Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 138-42.
[5] Phyllis Schlafly, "A Different View of Women's Nature," in *Modern American Women: A Documentary History*, ed. Sarah Ware (Columbus, Ohio: McGraw Hill, 2001).
[6] Phyllis Schlafly, "How ERA Would Change Federal Laws," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, November 1981.
[7] David Wilson, "ERA Debates Play to TU Audience," *Tulsa Tribune*, October 26, 1977.

world needed men and women to perform their ascribed roles in order to function. She also argued that this would lead women to marginalize men and children, causing a dip in childbirth and increased numbers of abortions.[8]

In order to defend these beliefs and their way of life, ERA opponents organized largely under the umbrella organization STOP ERA. As the most powerful anti-ERA group in the country, it attracted support from other groups including Women Who Want to Be Women, the Farm Bureau, and most importantly the Eagle Forum. STOP ERA owed much of its fame to Schlafly and her conservative and national Eagle Forum subscribers. During the 1970s Schlafly went on multiple speaking tours, several of which landed her in the West, where she urged women to stay in the home, where God wanted them.[9]

The anti-ERA arguments about religion were especially important in the Bible Belt states of the West, which were dominated by evangelical Christians and Mormons. Most opponents of the amendment disagreed with constitutional equality of the sexes because anti-ERA activists convince them that it went against God's word. According to historian Darren Dochuk, evangelical Christians, those who "focus their attention on missions, evangelism, and any endeavor that gave priority to spiritual revival and personal salvation," viewed the ERA as a direct attack against their religion and the morality of the nation.[10] These conservative Christians (largely Church of Christ, Baptist, and Methodist members) accounted for 43.3 percent of Oklahoma's total population and 74 percent of Oklahoma's anti-ERA protesters.[11] Political scientists Samuel A. Kirkpatrick David R. Morgan, and Thomas G. Kielhorn assert that 32

[8] Schalfly, "Different View of Women's Nature."
[9] David Wilson, "ERA debaters play to Tulsa university audience," *Tulsa Tribune*, October 26, 1979.
[10] Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2011), 121, 348-9.
[11] Ruth Murray Brown, *For A "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002), 69-71.

percent of Oklahomans polled in 1971 claimed membership to a fundamentalist Christian church (almost half identified as Southern Baptist), making Oklahoma the third largest fundamentalist state in the nation behind Mississippi and Alabama by less than three percent.[12] The opposition's portrayal of the ERA as immoral, anti-Christian, and anti-family resonated with those living in the Bible Belt. Evangelical Christians in the West would come to make up a majority of those opposed to the ERA but, unlike the stereotypes the New Right would advertise, many western men and women who supported the ERA were church members as well.

The LDS Church and the ERA as a "Moral Issue"

Perhaps the greatest strength of the anti- ERA movement was its leaders' ability to bring together multiple and quite distant Christian denominations together, which would in turn help build the broader New Right coalition. Sociologist Ruth Murray Brown argues "the anti-ERA organizations, which became the nucleus of the pro-family movement, was born the weekend after the ERA's defeat in Oklahoma."[13] Although attributing the New Right's birth to 1972 and in Oklahoma specifically is an overstatement, the ERA did play a large role in uniting conservatives and, in turn, mobilizing the New Right. Phyllis Schlafly became the matriarch of the grassroots conservative movement against the amendment, utilizing the fear of the nation's morality to impressively connect with already prosperous and powerful churches like the Mormons.[14] In the West in particular, this alliance would prove advantageous as members of the LDS Church had already dabbled in right-wing politics and, in the 1970s, was reforming church structures to become even more patriarchal. By 1976, LDS Church President Spencer W.

[12] Samuel A. Kirkpatrick, David R. Morgan, and Thomas G. Kielhorn, *The Oklahoma Voter: Politics, Elections, and Parties in the Sooner State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 29-30.
[13] Brown, *For A "Christian America*, 30.
[14] Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 52.

Kimball would fundamentally alter the ERA debate in the West and the nation at-large by mobilizing his church in the fight alongside the New Right.

Schlafly began working to bring Mormons into the ERA fight as early at 1974, when she met with LDS Relief Society President Barbara Smith. Smith, as the new president of arguably the largest women's organization in the world, was in a position of power. With 1 to 1.5 million members and countless resources, the Relief Society made an incredible ally for those against the amendment.[15] A Catholic herself, Schlafly understood how to connect religious women and make them feel heard, while downplaying the vastly different doctrines that had divided Catholics, Protestants, and Mormons for so long in the United States. Jennifer L. Holland writes, "In focusing on 'morality' instead of doctrine, Schlafly attempted to create a political partnership that broke out of strict religious boundaries. Her rhetoric foreshadowed the character of the emerging New Right, a movement that centered on politics and morality rather than denomination."[16] This emphasis on morality rather than politics was not just a tactic used by Schlafly's organizations; LDS President Spencer W. Kimball would utilize this exact phrasing in his first official address against the amendment in 1976.

The LDS Church already had connections to the growing conservative movement by the 1960s and 1970s. This connection began a decade early in the 1950s with the prominent political careers of Church Elders Boyd K. Packer and Ezra Taft Benson and their anti-communist work. A vocal educator and speaker on behalf of the Church's views and a voice for the general authority, Elder Boyd Packer was a prominent member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Ezra Taft Benson, also a member of the Quorum, served as President Dwight D. Eisenhower's

[15] Barbara Smith, "ERA-A Family Concern" speech, Newport Beach, California, June 4, 1977, folder 17, box 14, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections Library; "Church News Editorial Page: ERA," *Deseret News,* January 11, 1975.
[16] Jennifer L. Holland, "Salt Lake…is our Selma," 23.

Secretary of Agriculture. These men, who would both go one to serve as presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the highest earthly position of authority, held ties to the growing anti-communist movement and the John Birch Society. These close ties made some Church members uneasy, in part because of the secrecy of the Birchers and because this relationship left the door open for political influence over LDS people. The issue was important enough that in 1963 Church President David O. McKay issued a statement on the matter: "We deplore the presumption of some politicians, especially officers, coordinators and members of the John Birch Society, who undertake to align the Church or its leadership with their partisan views." The statement continued, "We denounce Communism as being anti-Christian, anti-American, and the enemy of freedom, but we think they who pretend to fight it by casting aspirations on our elected officers or other fellow citizens do the anti-communist cause a great disservice."[17] The President reiterated to bishops and other Church leaders that chapels and cultural halls were not to be used for political meetings or fundraising of any kind.

Despite the strongly worded statement, many members were not convinced that the ties between the Church and the John Birch Society were ever severed. Former ward Relief Society President Beatrice Marchant wrote to Church leaders and local papers constantly about the dangers of the Church getting too close to conservative politics, foreshadowing the ERA fight that was to come. As a certified librarian and county record's employee, Marchant collected an impressive intelligence file on Ezra Taft Benson and others' connections to far-right movements, and wrote to then LDS President McKay about her findings and concerns. When Marchant heard that her own bishop was a Bircher and running for state office in 1969, Marchant ran against him on the Democrat ticket- and won.[18]

[17] President David O. McKay, "Statement From the First Presidency," *The Messenger*, February 1963.
[18] Solveig Torvik, "Mormon Mother," *Seattle Times*, July 13, 1980.

Neither the President's statement nor Marchant's campaign against the Birchers deterred Elder Benson, though. A group of politicians calling themselves "The 1976 Committee" released a press statement in 1966 declaring it their mission to begin a "10 year crusade to assure a conservative executive branch of the Federal Government" that included electing Ezra Taft Benson President of the United States in 1968. They suggested the staunch racial segregation defender Strom Thurmond as Vice President. When asked about the Church's view of Benson possibly running for president, Church President McKay simply responded that the Church would not get in the way of Benson's political aspirations.[19]

Benson also held ties to another conservative group, the local Freeman Institute. Founded in 1967 by a Brigham Young University professor W. Cleon Skousen, who also formerly worked with the FBI and served as the police chief in Salt Lake City, the organization promoted conservative ideals through educating southern Utahans on the federal government's degradation of the Christian family. These goals mirrored those of the John Birch Society.[20] The group, now known as the National Center for Constitutional Studies, further connected influential Church members with right-wing politics. Both the Freeman Institute and the John Birch Society were adamantly against the ratification of the ERA, declaring early on that it was both socialist and communist propaganda and a way to undermine the "traditional" family.[21]

While the Church Presidency made comments discouraging its members from aligning themselves with political groups like the Birchers in 1963, this caution would diminish significantly in the next decade. President Kimball, who led the Church beginning in 1973, seemed to initially continue this policy when he quoted Joseph Smith in 1974, stating, "The

[19] Press Release, "The 1976 Committee Launch," Holland, Michigan, November 15, 1966, folder 1, box 6, Beatrice Marchant Collection, University of Utah Special Collections.
[20] Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums*, 118.
[21] Ibid.

Church does not engage in politics; its members belong to the political parties at their own pleasure."[22] And yet several weeks later Elder Benson told members that a Church president "may one day endorse a political candidate," later adding that it would be "difficult for a good Mormon to be a liberal Democrat."[23]

While leaders like Benson and Boyd as well as Barbara Smith spoke publicly on their opposition to the ERA and encouraged others to join a now decades-long movement within the Church towards right-wing politics, before 1976 the LDS Church itself had not released an official position on the subject. In 1975, the weekend before the ERA was up for a vote in Utah, *Church News* released an editorial criticizing the amendment. Yet later that same year, President Kimball refused to make an official comment. It was not until October 12, 1976, that *Church News* released the "First Presidency Statement Opposing the Equal Rights Amendment." The statement reiterated the Church's long commitment to women's legal rights, focusing on the early suffrage movement as well as its supposed commitment to equality. But, the statement made clear, the ERA was "not the answer." The amendment would "stifle God-given feminine instincts" and "strike at the family" by removing the legal recognition of gender difference, an argument Schlafly and other New Right leaders had been touting for years.[24] This, President Kimball argued, would take away from the benefits women held in society and erode the gendered family structure.

Opposing the ERA became Church doctrine for two reasons. First, the words of the First Presidency were considered by devout Mormons to be revelations from God and thus official doctrine. Historian Neil J. Young argues that the importance of this understanding of the Church Presidency cannot be overstated, writing, "By strengthening the president's role as God's

[22] "Mormon chief denounces divorce, drugs, abortion," *Las Vegas Review-Journal,* April 5, 1974.
[23] Ibid.
[24] "First Presidency Statement Opposing the Equal Rights Amendment," *Church News,* October 12, 1976.

mouthpiece on earth, rather than simply the administrative head of His church, the church's leadership strengthened its influence over all matters, including political issues, in the lives of Mormons."[25] This would become especially important a few years later in 1978, when President Kimball had a revelation from God that African American men could finally join the priesthood, a major position of authority for men within the Church.[26] This occurred after years of scrutiny and protest by numerous members, including ERA activist Beatrice Marchant's son, Byron Marchant, who was excommunicated for publicly criticizing segregation in the Church.[27] With this single revelation, President Kimball transformed one-hundred-year-old church doctrine, illuminating just how powerful the president's words were to members. His ruling on the ERA was no different. The second reason why this statement formed new doctrine was how it built onto the already existing doctrine concerning marriage and the family. While the LDS Church was similar in many aspects to Protestant and Catholic doctrines when it came to family and gender, there were also differences. In Mormon theology, O. Kendall White, Jr and Daryl White argue, "the family is not just a priority, but an 'eternal institution.'"[28] They write, "The temple (celestial) marriage among Mormons joins them for time and eternity… Ultimate salvation, or 'exaltation,' the goal of Mormonism- requires marriage… the family- not the individual- is the unit of ultimate salvation."[29] Neil J. Young adds: "Mormon women reach exaltation only by

[25] Neil J. Young, "The ERA Is a Moral Issue": The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment," *American Quarterly* Volume 59 Number 3, September 2007, 628.
[26] Spencer Kimball, "Official Declaration 2," read at the 148th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, September 30, 1978. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/od/2?lang=eng
[27] Lynn Berk, "Utah Era Leader," *Las Vegas Sun*, July 16, 1978; "LDS Member Votes 'No,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 2, 1977.
[28] O. Kendall White Jr and Daryl White, "Perpetuating Patriarchy: The Mormon Church's Anti-ERA Campaign," paper presentation, 4, Southern Sociological Society annual meeting, Memphis, Tennessee, April 14-17, 1980, folder 19, box 7, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collection.
[29] Ibid.

submitting themselves in marriage to a priesthood-holding Mormon man."[30] By linking this idea to the argument that ERA activists did not support the traditional family or the gender roles that supported it, Church leadership further bolstered LDS disapproval of the amendment. This disapproval of the amendment only strengthened the bond between Mormons and the New Right.

The Church President's condemnation of the ERA sent a clear message to leaders: speaking out against the amendment at private and public church events was now appropriate and even encouraged. *Church News* and the Mormon Council on Public Information published pieces on the dangers of feminism and its connections to the ERA. In one of the Council's information booklets titled, "Mormonism and the Women's Movement," feminists were labeled "careless and reckless" for their support of "radical behavior igniting public anger."[31] Early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were ridiculed for their supposed lack of hygiene or attractiveness, criticisms of marriage, and belief in female superiority. In this and many other LDS publications, authors extended the New Right argument that men and women could be somehow equal while remaining in distinct, rigid gender roles.

"You sort of hear things you don't feel good about," 46-year-old Dorothy Ward Vogel told a reporter in Illinois when asked how she, a Mormon, became involved in the New Right. "There was abortion and then the homosexual movement was getting *so big*...The ERA is an attack on our system of life- call it tradition- the way that God intended it to be."[32] Ward Vogel found solace in Phyllis Schlafly's writings and pamphlets, which she passed out diligently from her car everywhere she went. Because of the early connections between the LDS Church and conservative organizations as well as a clear statement on the ERA from the prophet, the alliance

[30] Young, "The ERA is a Moral Issue," 631.
[31] Mormon Council on Public Information, "Mormonism and the Women's Movement" (Zion's Distribution Center: Orem, Utah, 1981), 26.
[32] Andrew Kopkind, "America's New Right," *New York Times*, September 30, 1977.

between Mormons and Schlafly's anti-ERA groups came easily. Schlafly herself began including Mormon women specifically in her newsletters, reporting that ERA supporters were attacking the LDS Church for taking a stand against the amendment.[33] In 1977, Barbara Smith and Schlafly gave a joint speech together in Newport Beach titled "ERA- A Family Concern," warning Mormon women that the ERA was dangerous to the stability of the family and the development of children "by putting women's status as homemakers at risk."[34] Brigham Young University brought Schlafly to campus for a paid speech criticizing the amendment, at which she was well received.[35] Smith, as President of the Relief Society, embraced many of STOP ERA and Eagle Forum's arguments. In one public speech, Smith maintained that the amendment was unnecessary because "a women who has chosen to give herself willingly and with love to the roles of wife and mother is a women who *earns* the protection of the law by her valid contribution to society," clearly emphasizing not just motherhood, but homemaking as the optimal route for women to earn respect. [36] Elder Boyd Packer also spoke publicly against the amendment in church forums and at anti-ERA rallies. At the same event in Newport Beach with Smith and Schlafly, Packer told the crowd that "We have the lingering, ominous suspicion the proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment have paid little, if any, attention to the family at all."[37] Clearly, ERA supporters could not be good, Christian mothers in his eyes. Packer also campaigned against the amendment in Idaho during a movement to rescind the state's earlier ratification of the ERA, which was largely led by LDS members.[38]

[33] Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums*, 120.
[34] Barbara Smith and Phyllis Schlafly, "ERA- A Family Concern," Newport Beach, California, June 4, 1977, folder 17, box 14, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections.
[35] George Raine, "Loudest Anti-ERA Voice Speaks at Y," *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 12, 1978.
[36] Barbara Smith and Phyllis Schlafly, "ERA- A Family Concern," Newport Beach, California, June 4, 1977, folder 17, box 14, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections.
[37] Ibid.
[38] "LDS leader to at anti-ERA rally," *Deseret News*, January 1, 1976.

Individual church wards, or local Mormon congregations, were strongly influenced by President Kimball's statement as well. Numerous reports, from Utah to Virginia, detailed Mormon women being asked to participate in anti-ERA activity. While some bishops highlighted that activism by men and women was action taken by individuals and not a church duty, others did not draw that line. In Nevada, Stake Relief Society President Arda Harman first learned about the amendment when State Senator and prominent LDS member James I. Gibson called her home, at the encouragement of Harman's stake president. Gibson asked her to get in touch with another State Senator, Helen Herr. Senator Herr informed Harman that the ERA was dangerous and probably going to be ratified in Nevada if they did not act. Despite making up only about ten percent of the state's population, Mormons were a powerful force because of their extremely strong voter turnout and high-profile LDS legislators like Senate Majority Leader Gibson.[39] Harman began calling all the ward presidents and LDS education counselors that she knew, impressively organizing hundreds of members in North Las Vegas.[40] Harman received literature directly from STOP ERA and, as Stake Relief Society President, shared it with fellow Relief Society members at special meetings. Harman's group raised over five thousands dollars for anti-ERA campaigning, and she was eventually named co-chair of the North Las Vegas chapter of STOP ERA.[41]

Another woman, Renee Rampton, had a similar experience that exposed a church-organized group against the amendment. In 1976 her bishop, Mahlon Edwards, asked if she would join Citizens Quest for Quality Government, an "unaffiliated" anti-ERA group made up almost exclusively of LDS women. Bishop Edwards then showed Rampton a letter from their

[39] Caryll Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics: The Equal Rights Amendment Ratification Campaign, 1973-1981" (PhD Dissertation, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, 2010), 114-5.
[40] Arda Harman, "Report on the Defeat of the ERA in Nevada," 2, taken July 1984, transcript, Manuscript 7793, Secure Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
[41] Ibid., 3-7.

stake president asking each bishop to appoint two women from each ward to join the organization.[42] Rampton, whose mother, Beatrice Marchant, was a strong ERA supporter, avid anti-Bircher, and former state representative in Utah, was appalled. While supposedly unaffiliated with the Church, Citizens Quest for Quality Government actively recruited members and distributed anti-ERA literature at church events. The group handed out lists of anti-ERA candidates to vote for, calling into question the supposed distance between the LDS Church and state politics altogether. Rampton wrote a letter directly to President Kimball with these concerns, but she did not receive a response.[43]

Perhaps the most prominent Mormon anti-ERA group was the LDS Citizens Coalition in Virginia. Beverly Campbell, a longtime church member and owner of a public relations agency, headed the organization. The LDS Citizens Coalition raised funds to purchase and share anti-ERA literature, held meetings in church-owned buildings, and even utilized church services to circulate political petitions.[44] One petition asked that all signatories commit to voting only for anti-ERA candidates; the complete petition was over twenty pages long.[45] At one ward in Hamilton, Virginia, the names of pro-ERA legislators were posted on Church bulletin boards along with sample letters urging the legislators to change their vote and oppose the amendment.[46] The LDS Citizens Coalition was so influential that the State of Virginia ordered the group to register as lobbyists. Campbell's successes did not go unnoticed by church leadership, and she

[42] Renee M. Rampton, affidavit, September 17, 1980, folder 13, box 10, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections.
[43] Renee M. Rampton to President Spencer Kimball, November 27, 1976, folder 3, box 3, Beatrice Marchant Collection, University of Utah Special Collections.
[44] Meeting Minutes, Latter-day Saints Women's Coalition (LDS Citizens Coalition), Vienna, Virginia, November 8, 1978, Manuscript 243.3 M6680, Secure Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
[45] Petition, Virginia LDS Citizens Coalition, 1978-9, folder 16, box 7, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections.
[46] White Jr and White, "Perpetuating Patriarchy," 5.

would eventually be tapped by the LDS Church to serve as the official spokeswoman on the ERA.

"THOSE AREN'T PRAYER MEETINGS THEY HOLD ON SUNDAY. THOSE ARE PRECINCT MEETINGS."

says Joe Neal, the only Black in the Nevada Senate

By Kay Mills

Reprinted as it appeared on September 14, 1977, by permission of the Newhouse News Service.

The women's movement has discovered a new enemy—the Mormon Church—because the church has found a new evil—the Equal Rights Amendment.

Officially, the Mormon Church opposes the amendment because it feels it will weaken the family, a basic element of its faith.

But Ezra Taft Benson, probably the best-known Mormon nationally and next in line to head the church, acknowledged he felt the amendment would "weaken men." Men are dominant, he said, because "someone must be in charge and take leadership."

Another church official said the question has nothing to do with male supremacy.

"We simply think the family garden is the best place to grow happy humans, and that garden is already in trouble," said Neal Maxwell, a member of the Presidency of the First Quorum of Seventy.

Mormons started drawing intense feminist flak when they turned out by the thousands at several state meetings held this summer as follow-ups to International Women's Year (IWY) and helped defeat Equal Rights Amendment resolutions. Leaders in the women's movement fear conservative elements will turn the national meeting in November into a media event of "women against women."

The amendment would encourage women to go to work, Maxwell said.

"It will create a suction that will pull people out of the home at a time when they are most needed as mother and wife, scramble the aspirations of our daughters and create a generational gravitational pull from the home," he said.

A pro-amendment group known as Mormons for the Equal Rights Amendment puts the matter bluntly. "Much opposition to the amendment is rooted in resistance to change, and we profoundly believe many societal attitudes about men and women are unhealthy, unrealistic and need changing."

Elizabeth Chittick, head of the National Women's Party and an Equal Rights Amendment backer, says, "The Mormons, I believe, are frightened of any challenge to the man as head of the household."

The church rarely ventures into politics so publicly although it has enormous clout. Its position was clear earlier when the amendment was up for ratification in Utah, where Mormons comprise more than 70 per cent of the population. The amendment lost.

This summer Mormon women, often directed by men with walkie-talkies, came to sessions in Utah, Washington, Montana and Hawaii.

In Utah, where 3,000 to 5,000 women were expected, nearly 14,000 showed up and voted down most key International Women's Year resolutions, including the Equal Rights Amendment, sex education, state or federal funds for abortions and additional federal money for more conferences. Congress has appropriated $5 million for these meetings.

In Ellensburg (Washington), 2,300 women pre-registered; 2,000 more, many of them Mormons, turned up to vote down endorsement of the ERA and officially ignore abortion, day care and gay rights resolutions.

The turnouts surprised planners of the state meetings and enraged feminist leaders.

Previously, the principal religious foe of feminists was the Roman Catholic Church. The issue was and is abortion. But it was the newly-surfaced Mormon opposition which ignited the fiercest passions at the recent National Women's Political Caucus convention in San Jose.

"I do not think we should allow Salt Lake City, where the church leaders historically over-married, or Rome, where the head of the church never marries, to delineate what the American family is," thundered Liz Carpenter, co-chair of ERAmerica, the coalition pushing for ratification.

"In Utah, a resolution actually reached the floor calling for the repeal of women's right to vote. Also a resolution was passed to dissolve the IWY altogether..."

"We have a right to know whether a tax-exempt church is using its two years of servitude"—young Mormons spend two years in missionary work—"to go out to preach on a political issue," Carpenter told an ERA workshop. "I want to ask these young men in blue suits I see at these meetings, 'Who paid your way?' "

Neal Maxwell spoke against the ERA in Florida last March. Boyd K. Packer, a church elder in the second-level governing body, has spoken against the amendment in Idaho and South Carolina.

Asked whether the church paid for his trip to Florida, Maxwell said, "Yes, because I did some church work as well while I was there."

Benson, agriculture secretary under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, explained Mormons believe the first obligation of a woman with children "is in the home with her family. We encourage them to broaden themselves but not to neglect home and family."

"I have yet to be shown one legitimate argument that the ERA will weaken the family," Christine Durham, a Salt Lake City attorney and pro-ERA Mormon, said. The amendment symbolizes attempts to encourage women to share economic responsibility with men and to allow men to spend more time with their children, she says.

Durham, mother of four children and an active church worker whose husband is a great-great-grandson of Brigham Young, Mormon founder, thinks the ERA will slow down movement of many young people away from marriage and children.

With 2.3 million members in the United States, Mormon clout stems not from size but from devotion of its members. "Our church is so organized that everything moves very quickly down the chain of authority," said a Quincy, Grant County, woman who attended the Ellensburg conference.

In Utah, for example, the IWY planners asked Barbara Smith, head of the church's women's organization, the Relief Society, to invite Mormon women to the conference. So the church sent a letter over Benson's signature to its wards—or parishes—suggesting each send at least 10 women and urge them to invite their friends.

But Smith admits now the Relief Society "didn't give specific directions and so created a vacuum into which various conservatives stepped to advise on voting and strategy."

Smith says she has no apologies for what happened at the IWY meeting because "we were invited."

Asked whether he feared Mormons might be used by extremists as a "front," Wendell Ashton said, "Our people are counseled not to align themselves with extreme organizations on either right or left.

"Some of the extremists on the right at the meeting said, 'We're carrying the mail with you on that.' But the women are counseled against that."

Durham says she has had no trouble with her church or its members because of her pro-ERA stand. Jan Tyler, chair of the Utah IWY coordinating committee and a Mormon ERA backer, says she received no pressure from anyone in a leadership position.

Advocacy of the ERA and other liberal positions cost Beth Jarman her seat in the Utah Legislature from the conservative Salt Lake City suburb of North Bountiful. Jarman said Relief Society women went door-to-door in her district saying she was an "evil woman."

In the election after the ERA defeat, her neighbors put up large signs endorsing her opponent. After the election, she and her husband moved from the neighborhood in which they had lived 11 years. "It hurt . . . it took a real toll on my family," said Jarman, now a state cabinet member as director of community affairs.

Jarman, brought up *in the church,* said, *"Just don't underestimate them. If they tell their members to respond, they will respond. They do not regard it as a secular issue. They regard it as a calling."*

"Hawaii elected a 63 per cent Mormon slate, despite the federal guidelines for ethnic balance and despite the fact that the state's Mormon population is only 3.2 per cent. Non-citizen women were brought in from a Mormon-owned Polynesian cultural center . . . . . "

"They are doing everything to offset the onslaught of the women's movement—which they think is ERA—but the movement is going on."

Benson, Maxwell, the Mormon Relief Society president Barbara Smith and a Mormon public relations official, Wendell Ashton, all insist the church simply thinks the amendment is too broad. "There are a lot of laws already on the books but we don't enforce them," Smith said.

Maxwell, a political scientist, said the amendment "would create a sense of security, but as court decisions come, it might create consequences they don't want."

The First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints, as the Mormons are formally known, issued a statement which said in part, "While the motives of its supporters may be praiseworthy, the ERA as a blanket attempt to help women could indeed bring them far more restraints and repressions. We fear it will even stifle many God-given feminine instincts. It would strike at the family, humankind's basic institution."

Quotes taken from "Countdown to Houston" by Lindsy Van Gelder, MS., November 1977.

"A NEW ENEMY — THE MORMON CHURCH"

DAILY BREAKTHROUGH NOVEMBER 19, 1977 PAGE 3

Figure 3.1. ERA supporters, including reporters for the *Daily Breakthrough*, the official publication of the National Women's Conference, became frustrated by the LDS Church's use of power to recruit ERA opponents. Nevada Senator Joe Neal is quoted here in reference to church meetings turning political. Courtesy of the J. Willard Marriott Library Special Collections, University of Utah.

Sweeping changes in church authority and structure also played an important role in encouraging churchwomen to unite against the ERA. While LDS men and women alike enjoyed recalling the Church's early commitment to women's suffrage and economic independence,

much had changed since the 1870s. Since the 1920s in particular, the Church had become highly patriarchal, especially in terms of women's domestic roles and ties to the family, and this trend only heightened in the 1960s and 1970s.[47] In fact, in 1970 the Church revoked the independent status of the Relief Society, meaning the women's organization now had to answer to male leadership in all aspects.[48] This decreased autonomy and power within the Church led many women to exert power in a new way and jump at the chance to aid in an important directive. Neil J. Young writes, "For Mormons, particularly the women who constituted the bulk of Mormon grassroots anti-ERA efforts, opposing the ERA allowed them to demonstrate to each other their right standing with the church through their obedience to its directives, both religious and political."[49] In an ironic turn of events, the LDS women actively organizing against the amendment and the expansion of women's rights became the vital, necessary factor needed for the Church to prove that women were best left in the home and out of politics.

The statement opposing the ERA by President Kimball did address women in the Church who supported the amendment as well. He included that while some women might support the ERA for "praiseworthy" reasons, the amendment's implications were unknown and risky. Although the Church maintained that members were open to choosing their own political parties and issues to support, the ERA was different. Rather than being a political issue, the LDS Church now labeled it a "moral" issue, one that required Church guidance. Mormon supporters of the ERA could technically continue on in this support, but many in their communities considered this defying the prophet and God himself.

By the mid-1970s, the LDS Church had made its stand on the ERA well known. When it did, it joined numerous Protestant, Evangelical, and Catholic churches in the Religious Right

[47] Young, "The ERA is a Moral Issue," 630.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 624.

coalition. Schlafly's expert networking combined with the already growing right-wing sympathies within Mormon leadership produced a fruitful relationship. Despite numerous LDS members supporting the ERA, President Kimball's revelation against the amendment and instructions to bishops to aid in the building of anti-ERA organizations all but made the ERA's defeat in Utah a certainty. It also cut the ERA's chances of passage in other western states with large Mormon populations, including Nevada and Arizona. The ERA movement in the unratified western states had now hit a massive roadblock, but the fight was not over. Mormon women who supported the amendment, like their sisters in the opposition, began to organize in support of the ERA and join forces with other religious, pro-ERA groups.

Church Women United

In response to the growing number of religious organizations and churches across the West organizing against the amendment, religious pro-ERA women became more vocal as well. Episcopalian, Baptist, Jewish, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Mormon activists for the amendment organized locally, joined national groups, worked within their own denominations, and built cross-religious organizations. While evangelical sects dominated Oklahoma and parts of Nevada and Arizona, LDS activists were extremely influential in the remaining western unratified states. Western feminists before the mid-1970s had not been shy about their religious beliefs, but the anti-ERA campaign to portray the amendment as immoral and in direct violation of the "Christian" family encouraged activists, especially in the West, to counter these accusations and make their religion a public and integral piece of their support for the ERA.

In Oklahoma, those in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment quickly became aware of the impact that STOP ERA and Eagle Forum members were having on the state. For backers of the amendment in Oklahoma, the anti-ERA arguments about morality seemed fundamentally untrue. Almost every man and woman ERA supporter interviewed by the University of Oklahoma Women's and Gender Studies Department's oral history project on the amendment claimed a religious affiliation.[50] The percentage of ERA supporters who named themselves religious were significantly higher in Oklahoma than the national average of 31-48 percent.[51] Also, a large majority of those who participated in interviews had children at the time of the debates, with some even bringing their children along to ERA rallies and events. To counter the rhetoric of their opposition, many Oklahoma ERA supporters proudly declared their Christianity, Judaism, or Mormonism and openly dedicated themselves to motherhood, or got their churches and pastors involved in ERA activism.

In Oklahoma, OK-ERA, local Women's Political Caucus chapters, and National Organization for Women had members from various religious denominations. The most notable religious supporters were Baptist minister Gene Garrison of Oklahoma City, Catholic nun and professor Dr. Marie Lueke, and University of Tulsa Law School Dean and lifelong Mormon Frank Reed.[52] Many churches around the state, including Church of the Servant in Oklahoma City, University United Methodist Church in Norman, and All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa also allowed local ERA organizations to use their grounds for activist meetings, ERA prayers, or

[50] "Red Dirt Women and Power: A Video/Oral History of Activists in Oklahoma's Campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment," Under the Direction of Dr. Martha Skeeters, Women's and Gender Studies Department, University of Oklahoma. https://www.ou.edu/cas/wgs/projects/oral-history-project
[51] Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 221.
[52] "Who's Who" *Oklahoma Monthly*, n.d., miscellaneous box 1, Wanda Jo Peltier Stapleton Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

meet ups after rallies.[53] The most popular events were the ERA prayer vigils held every year at the state capitol by the Oklahoma Religious Committee for ERA (OKRCERA). This organization was "an interfaith coalition of major religious groups proposing a national effort to demonstrate widespread religious support" and maintained affiliations with over thirty denominations. Led by Reverend Dianna Moore, the Sunday, November 15, 1980, rally attracted more than five hundred participants in a candlelit prayer for passage of the ERA and legal justice for women.[54]

Churches in Oklahoma were not afraid to state their support for the ERA publicly either, and many included press releases or resolutions announcing their views on the amendment. Mattie Morgan was the spokesperson for Oklahoma United Methodist Church and an outspoken defender of the ERA in the state. In an "Equal Rights Resolution" that Morgan oversaw, the Oklahoma United Methodist Church, which "consisted of about 1200 laymen and ministers," unanimously adopted a church resolution supporting the Equal Rights Amendment. The resolution stated:

> Particularly significant about this adoption is that the delegates to this conference represented a definite cross-section of Oklahoma- persons of small, rural areas; delegates from liberal and conservative churches; ministers who serve in small parishes; ministers from the metropolitan areas.[55]

The ministers' emphasis on the ERA's support from all different locales and political backgrounds was a conscious decision to portray the amendment as mainstream. The ministers

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[53] "Equal Rights Action," *Oklahoma Coalition for Equal Rights Newsletter*, March 1976, folder 19, box 1, ERA Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; "Meet Up in Tulsa," *OK-ERA Newsletter*, November 1978, folder Oklahoma 2, box 32, Sarah Weddington's Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.
[54] "OKRCERA," *OK-ERA Newsletter*, January 1979, folder 11, box 19, Hannah Diggs Atkins Collection, Oklahoma State University Archives; "Equal Time," *OKWPC Newsletter*, November 1980, miscellaneous box 1, Wanda Jo Peltier Stapleton Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
[55] "Oklahoma United Methodists Adopt Equal Rights Resolution" Department of Family Life Ministries, May 30, folder 10, box 19, Hannah Diggs Atkins Collection, Oklahoma State University Archives.

also claimed that "a majority of the delegates were men," purposely dispelling the notion that the ERA was only a women's issue, and that supporters hated men or hurt families. After her success with the United Methodist Church's leadership, Morgan moved on to coordinate all of the churches in the state that supported the ERA in 1977.[56]

Nevadans for the ERA (NERA) and its members also justified their support of the amendment through their religious beliefs. The organization often partnered with local churches, pastors, and other religious leaders to hold meetings and speak about why they supported the amendment. NERA made public their religious supporters in the state including the Universal Fellowship of Metro Community Churches, United Presbyterian Women of Nevada, and the Episcopalian Church of Nevada.[57] Most of the pro-ERA leaders in Nevada were upfront with how their beliefs inspired their support of the amendment; those advocates came from an eclectic mix of religious backgrounds including Jewish, Catholic, Mormon, Protestant, Episcopalian, and Unitarian, to name a few. Nevada Senator Jean Ford was very open about her Unitarianism beliefs, and Frankie Sue Del Papa was active in both the Catholic Church and the Center for Religion of Life, a non-denominational religious organization on campus at the University of Nevada, Reno.[58] Assemblywoman Sue Wagner was both a trailblazer in the statehouse and in her local Episcopal Church. In her oral history interview, she proudly remembered "in my church here, Trinity Parish, I was the first woman lay reader in the 1970s, and then I became the first

[56] Interview with Mattie Morgan, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, November 16, 2009, Red Dirt Women Oral History Project.
[57] Florence Drake, Nevada Presbyterian Assembly, to Assemblywoman Mary Gojack, January 4, 1973, folder 19, box 2, Mary Gojack Collection, University of Nevada-Reno Special Collections.
[58] Interview with Jean Ford by Victoria Ford, 1988, University of Nevada-Reno Special Collections, 61; Interview with Frankie Sue Del Papa, by Roselyn Richardson-Weir, 2007, "An Oral History of the Nevada Women's Conference," University of Nevada Oral History Program, University of Nevada-Reno Special Collections. https://contentdm.library.unr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/unohp/id/448

woman to pass the chalice."[59] Wagner's experience breaking barriers in her church motivated her work to pass the ERA in the Nevada legislature.

Women in favor of the amendment were very vocal as to how their religious beliefs led to their support for women's equality. Numerous articles appeared in local and state newspapers, religious publications like *Christianity Today* and *U.S. Catholic,* and even the National Organization for Women (NOW) newsletter on topics like "Why Jesus Would Have Voted for the ERA." Some highlighted the deep historical connections between the women's movement and organized religion, pointing to everything from the abolitionist movement to prayer at the Seneca Falls Convention.[60] NERA, taking the lead from NOW, liked to remind its readers of the quote by British writer Dorothy L. Sayers' regarding how women were "First at the cradle, last at the cross."[61] One NOW newsletter sent to Nevada women reminded readers of the Gospel of Luke, stating, "At a time when women's only value was bearing children, a woman said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the womb of your mother,' but Jesus…replied 'Bless her instead because she hears the word of God and keeps it.'"[62] Activists took comfort in this verse, as it proved to them that Jesus wanted his followers to love and support women because they were his children and not just because they were mothers.

Religious supporters of the ERA also included numerous Mormon men and women, from Utah, Virginia, Florida, Idaho, Washington, and other states. LDS ERA supporters in Nevada and Utah in particular kept in close contact as their acquaintances and even familial relationships often overlapped. For example, Beatrice Marchant, one of the leading LDS supporters of the

[59] Interview with Sue Wagner, by Victoria Ford, 2000-2003, University of Nevada-Reno Special Collections, 46-7.
[60] Letha Scanzoni, "The Feminists and the Bible," *Christianity Today*, February 2, 1973.
[61] "First at the Cradle, Last at the Cross," n.p. March 16, 1973, folder 8, box 4, NOW of Las Vegas Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
[62] Joyce Slayton Mitchell, "Would Jesus Have Voted For the ERA?," NOW Newsletter, n.d., folder 8, box 4, NOW of Las Vegas Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

amendment in Utah and President of Equal Rights Coalition Utah, shared ERA literature, letters, and newspaper clippings with supporters in Nevada, including her daughter Renee Rampton. Nevada Senator Jean Ford was in close contact with Marchant, sharing the news Marchant sent her from Utah with other Mormon and non-Mormon supporters in Nevada. Ford also persuaded Marchant to speak at a NERA event during a trip to Las Vegas to visit her daughter.[63]

Marchant, who campaigned for the ERA in her seventies, was one of many Mormon women over sixty who supported the amendment. With 15 children of her own and 130 grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Marchant had lived a full life even before the ERA debate. She worked as a teacher, librarian, Relief Society Ward President, and served in the Utah State House. While devoted to her church and family, Marchant was also fiercely independent, as she demonstrated in her loud opposition to the John Birch Society twenty years earlier.[64]

Another Mormon supporter in her seventies, Helen Candland Stark, also openly opposed the disturbing new trends in leadership within the Church. Stark, in an interview in 1977, expressed a deep concern over the loss of autonomy of women and girls within the Church. She recalled how, in her experience in the 1940s and 1950s, the Church encouraged women to take on marriage and motherhood, but not until they were in their twenties at least. Stark argued that the pressure for women to marry out of high school and have children right away was damaging to women and their families in the long run. "The pressure into early marriage and childbearing makes women not capable of making some of the contributions except do housewify [sic] things."[65] She also suggested early marriage accounted, in part, for the growing divorce rate

[63] Assemblywoman Jean Ford to Beatrice Marchant, September 7, 1974, folder 3, box 2, Beatrice Marchant Collection, J. Willard Marriot Library Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter UU).
[64] Solveig Torvik, "Mormon Mother," *Seattle Times*, July 13, 1980.
[65] Helen Candland Stark Oral History, interview by Jessie L. Embry, 1977, transcript, p. 25, The James Moyle Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

among LDS people. The Church's changed views on birth control and family planning for married couples was another issue of concern for Stark. In the 1950s, President David O. McKay had stated that family planning was a private matter between a husband and wife, but this standard was no longer practiced in the 1970s. Stark explained that for some couples to get a recommend for marriage, or official permission from the Church, they were asked to commit to not using any form of contraceptive. She stated, "…I don't think that the Church should confine people in such a narrow groove that they can't do some family planning, that you can't marry later without feeling guilty, and that women who feel a calling to something else can't do it and feel accepted."[66] Here, Stark argued directly against the New Right and LDS notion that homemaking and strict gender roles were the best and only way to honor one's family and church. She also directly contradicted the conservative argument of the 1950s "traditional family" that New Right supporters claimed Americans needed to return to. For Stark, the LDS Church in the 1950s was not exactly this "traditional" oasis, but instead placed more trust in individuals and those in within the marriages to make the best decisions for their families.

For Stark and other older women who witnessed the Church change it stance on women-related issues, the ERA was both a practical solution to legal inequality and an opening to challenge LDS leadership. Made up almost exclusively of women over sixty, the small feminist collective Alice Louise Reynolds Women's Forum became a safe space for Mormon feminists and "ex-Mormons" to meet monthly and discuss important issues affecting LDS women. The Salt Lake City-based group included women from all over the state, and focused on a variety of topics including Planned Parenthood, the ERA, women and depression, and the Church.[67] While the group originally met at Brigham Young University in the Alice Louise Reynolds Room (from

[66] Ibid., 26.
[67] Algie Balif, "Report on the Alice Louise Reynolds Women's Forum," n.d., folder 1, box 1, Algie Balif Collection, University of Utah Special Collections; Evelyn Carter Willis, "Sisters of Faith," *Network*, February 1982.

which the group got its name), the university eventually denied the group use of the room after word got out that they discussed the ERA and had invited the leader of Mormons for the ERA, Sonia Johnson, to speak.[68] Some Mormon leaders viewed just the discussion of these issues in an organized fashion or the entertainment of the idea that the Church's stance could be wrong as a direct challenge to LDS authority.

When it came to challenging LDS authority, Mormons for ERA, or MERA, was not shy. Dr. Sonia Johnson, a mother and teacher who was extremely active in her LDS Church in Sterling, Virginia, co-founded the organization in 1978.[69] It began one morning during a normal Sunday service when a church leader read aloud the text of the ERA and President Kimball's statement against it. Expecting to be appalled, Johnson was instead completely inspired by it, leading her to found the organization with three close friends. She served as the organization's national president.[70] MERA was unafraid to challenge the First Presidency and the increasing, Church-grown organization against the amendment. When describing her vision for the group, Johnson explained, "Mormons come out of a tradition of vigorous freedom of thought and speech and respect for equal rights. It is that venerable tradition that Mormons for the ERA represents."[71] As evidence that the ERA and Mormon doctrine were complementary, MERA highlighted the LDS Church's commitment to suffrage and to early equal rights clauses in the Utah State Constitution. Members also used their platform to discuss the continued discrimination and sexism within the Church. One button MERA commonly gave out read "Ordain Women or Stop Baptizing Them."[72] This was a direct challenge to the image that the

[68] "Alice Louise Reynolds Club to Hear Dr. Sonia Johnson," *Utah Daily Herald*, October 16, 1979.
[69] Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums*, 332.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Press Release, Mormons for ERA, "Mormons for ERA Organize in Nevada," Las Vegas, Nevada, October 24, 1978, folder 13, box 12, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections.
[72] MERA buttons, miscellaneous box 24, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections.

LDS Church promoted: that women held equal rights within the Church hierarchy. In fact, women were barred from becoming priests and holding any leadership role over men. Even the Relief Society, the women's organization within the Church, answered to all-male leadership.[73] Any woman that faced an ex-communication trial would answer to a panel of all men, a fact that Johnson would soon experience personally.

MERA also worked closely with other faith-based organizations. Church Women United and the United Church of Christ joined in MERA's support of the ERA. Groups like Religious Committee for the ERA (RCERA) and Religious Advocates for Equality (RAE) joined women from different churches across the country. RCERA in particular included a council of twelve women, including national coordinator for Catholic Acts for ERA Maureen Fielder, Dr. Sonia Johnson of MERA, and Reverend Betty Bone-Schiess, the first woman ordained as an Episcopal priest. The council criticized those using religious arguments against the ERA, stating "those of us who are women of faith are particularly appalled that certain elements in the United States, who shroud themselves in the mantle of Christianity, are using religion to deny half the human race equal rights."[74]

Pro-ERA "church women" also practiced public protest and civil disobedience. In September of 1974, RAE, made up of Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, and Mormon women, joined their MERA sisters in protest at the Eastern Regional Conference of the Church, a major LDS religious event. Picketing outside the conference of 20,000, women flipped the anti-ERA script, chanting "An attack on ERA is an attack on the family!"[75] Mormon temples in particular became

[73] White, Jr and White, "Perpetuating Patriarchy," 22.
[74] Press Release, "Religious Women Prominent in Civil Disobedience Action for the E.R.A.," August 26, 1980, folder 6, box 7, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections.
[75] Press Release, Religious Advocates for Equality, "Interfaith Group to Picket Mormon Conference Which Features Prophet and President Spencer W. Kimball," September 9, 1974, folder 8, box 7, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections.

common places for religious women to protest the Church's stance on the ERA. Temple Square in Salt Lake City, the heart and ground zero of the worldwide Mormon Church, was a place where activists regularly picketed, chained themselves to the gates, or held signs in silence similar to the suffragists before them. Twenty-one women were arrested in front of the New Mormon Temple in Bellevue, Washington, for chaining themselves to the building and refusing to leave until church leaders met with them.[76] In a publicity stunt, religious activists, including Sonia Johnson, conducted a days-long ERA fast at the Illinois Capitol. Twenty-three Catholic bishops wrote in support of the women and the amendment, with one commenting that "I'd sin if I did not support (the women)."[77] Others took less extreme action. Ecumenical prayer vigils were held every year and in all four states. The capitol buildings in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah all became quasi-sacred ground where individuals and religious leaders alike met to pray for a change of heart from their legislators. Activists often coordinated prayer vigils in unratified states so that they occurred at the same time. In 1981, the RCERA organized an inter-faith prayer vigil that included the White House and several state capitols.[78] Other prayer vigils were held at significant religious or cultural spaces in each state, including churches and parks.

[76] Press Release, "Tri-City NOW Chapter of Arizona, "Candlelight Vigil at Mormon Temple, Mesa, Arizona," January 15, 1981, folder 6, box 3, Maureen Murphy Collection, Arizona State University Special Collections.
[77] "23 Catholic bishops back ERA fasters," *Deseret News*, June 3, 1982.
[78] "2 vigils tonight for ERA," *Deseret News*, July 1, 1981.

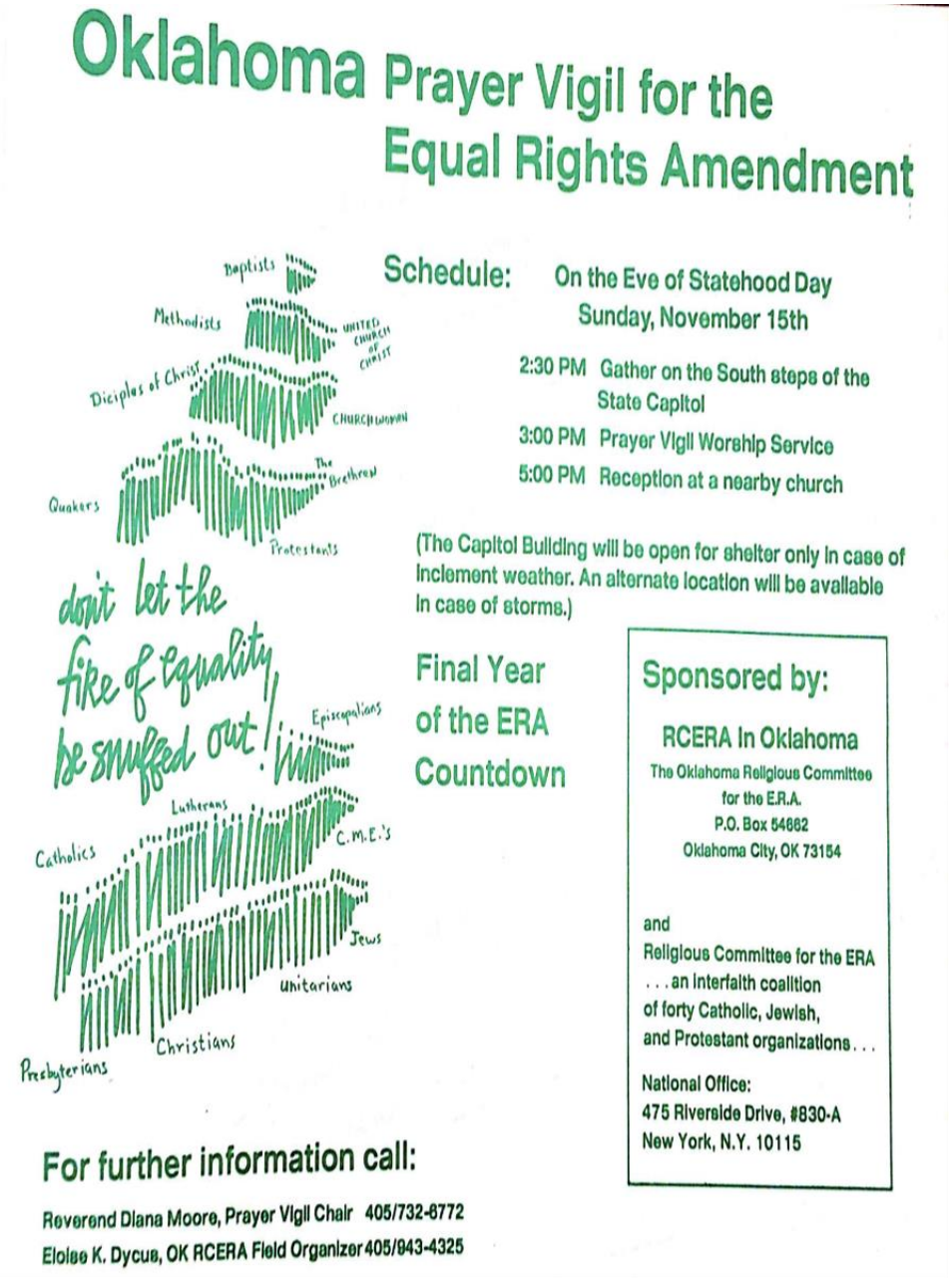

Figure 3.2. Flyer for an ERA prayer vigil at the Oklahoma State Capitol, sponsored by the Religious Coalition for the ERA (RCERA). Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

Housewives for the ERA, although nonreligious in name, also promoted the image that Christian mothers and housewives could, and should, support the ERA. The Illinois-based group's first newsletter read, "The primary purpose of our organization is to demonstrate that

homemakers want and need the Equal Rights Amendment."[79] This included utilizing churches to recruit members and hold meetings. Homemakers for ERA's signature pink rose and pink stationary symbolized its members "femininity," and soon became recognizable across the West and even the nation, as the group became a sub-organization under ERAmerica.[80] Housewives for ERA attracted religious western women, particularly in Oklahoma and Arizona, because it created space for them within the ratification movement. Many western women had more in common with Phyllis Schlafly than they did Gloria Steinem, and this group encouraged Christian mothers who "felt they didn't fit in with ERA support efforts."[81] The organization also appealed to western women by connecting its values with suffrage and western independence. In a press release promoting Mother's Freedom and Equality Day in Arizona, Housewives for ERA reassured its members that "American women, from the pioneers to today, had traditionally fought for their families." The ERA, they argued, was the best way to protect the Christian family by legally recognizing the economic contributions of homemakers.[82]

Housewives for ERA and religious organizations were not the only groups to contend that the ERA would support the Christian family; numerous state-based and national groups utilized this argument as well in the mid-1970s as a way to combat the growing popularity of the anti-ERA movement. The Arizona Coalition for the ERA told *Arizona Today* that its members were not radical but "housewives or mothers."[83] They sent "speaking teams" of these housewives to canvas the entire Paradise Valley and win ERA support. Two years later in 1977, the same

[79] Housewives for ERA, "Suggestions on How to Start a Local Housewives for ERA," n.d., folder 11, box 2, Maureen Murphy Collection, Arizona State University.
[80] Ibid. ERAmerica was a national umbrella organization for ERA supportive groups that was headed by Democrat Liz Carpenter and Republican Elly Peterson. Actor Alan Alda was also a prominent member and supporter.
[81] Anne Follis, President of Housewives for ERA, to members, October 20, 1977, folder 11, box 2, Maureen Murphy Collection, Arizona State University Special Collections.
[82] Housewives for ERA, "Mother's Freedom and Equality Day" press release, May 17, 1977, folder 11, box 2, Maureen Murphy Collection, Arizona State University Special Collections.
[83] Patricia Walsh, "ERA Coalition speakers discuss pros and cons," *Arizona Today*, October 22, 1975.

coalition sent a letter to President Jimmy Carter urging him to hold a national fireside chat on the amendment, and to reiterate how it would benefit homemakers.[84]

Mormon supporters, too, worked to make the ERA mainstream by connecting it to the Christian family. In a letter to US Congress members, MERA wrote, "As family-oriented Mormons and parents, we feel certain that strengthening the mother's position in the home and in society will strengthen the entire family."[85] National political figures from the West, including Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Jean Westwood and former US Department of Labor employee and consumer advocate Esther Peterson, made known their support of the ERA and MERA.[86] In fact, the president of Housewives for ERA, Joelle Runkee, distributed MERA pamphlets and information throughout Arizona with the help of Westwood.[87]

Western ERA activists highly encouraged national leaders to promote the ERA as being in harmony with the Christian family. Women in Arizona, Oklahoma, Nevada, and Utah understood that this connection was vital to winning over the leaders in their states, as well as others, as the only regions left unratified by 1976 were these western states and the South. That year activists traveled to Denver, Colorado, to attend the Western Regional Conference on the ERA, where they discussed the importance of national ERA groups like NOW working harder to appeal to religious women and housewives, a demographic that conservatives in the West continued to win over. Only two organizations held workshops at the Western Regional Conference on the ERA: Religious Committee for the ERA and Housewives for ERA. The choice to include these specific groups makes clear that western activists took these populations

[84] Arizona Coalition for ERA to President Jimmy Carter, May 20, 1977, folder 1, box 2, Maureen Murphy Collection, Arizona State University Special Collections.
[85] Mormons for ERA to US House of Representatives and US Senate Members, April 4, 1979, folder 6, box 28, Jean Westwood Collection, University of Utah.
[86] Robert Sherrill, "The Prime Time of Mrs. Jean Westwood," *Washington Post*, October 1, 1972.
[87] Joelle Runkee to Jean Westwood, April 2, 1978, folder 5, box 28, Jean Westwood Collection, University of Utah.

of women seriously as allies and potential supporters, and hoped their national leaders would do the same. ERA activists from Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, and Wyoming utilized this meeting to discuss and write a letter to the National ERA Steering Committee on how to strengthen leadership within their western ERA efforts, as well as their own priorities as a region within the movement.[88] This request was taken seriously. The following year at the National Women's Conference, which heavily promoted the ERA, organizers assigned researchers to thoroughly investigate the lives and needs of housewives in every single state and produce individual state reports for women to utilize. Numerous religious-based meetings were also included on the conference's agenda as well.

In their attempt to portray the ERA as compatible with the Christian family, activists hoped to gain supporters within their churches and dispel the radical, anti-family and anti-Christian image cultivated by the New Right. Western feminists promoted their "Christian family values" and femininity, particularly in the West, where religious women found growing pushback from their communities and churches, especially evangelical sects and the LDS Church. These women neither conformed to the New Right image of a religious mother or the stereotypical feminist image either. Mormon ERA supporter Jan Tyler summed it up this way: "I do not speak for any particular Mormon point of view, but my own…I am certain my remarks will be viewed by those in or outside of the LDS Church and in or outside of the Women's Movement [sic] as anything from unorthodox and liberal to very conservative and ridiculous."[89] To some, western ERA supporters were radical feminists. To feminists both within and outside their regions, these ERA supporters were viewed as sometimes too conservative or religious-

[88] Western Regional Conference on ERA participants to the National ERA Steering Committee, Denver, Colorado, 1976, folder 1, box 2, Maureen Murphy Collection, Arizona State University Special Collections.
[89] Jan Tyler, "Dedicated To Those Who Have Vision," speech at the fast vigil, Utah State Capitol, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 2, 1978, Manuscript 243.3 T982d, Secure Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

focused. This reinforces the true importance of religious groups like MERA and Housewives for ERA, and how they were able to successfully showcase to national ERA organizations like NOW and ERAmerica the importance of including western homemakers and religious leaders in the quest for ratification of the ERA. Recognizing how to appeal to the women in their own region, western feminists utilized their religious backgrounds and connections to housewives as a strategy to garner more support in the West for the ERA. They also successfully influenced national ERA leaders to alter their approach to campaigning for the amendment.

"I Oppose the ERA, but I Do Approve of Equal Rights for Women"

The religiously-based anti-ERA argument that men and women should be equal but remain in distinct, God-given gender roles did not remain on the pages of LDS booklets or STOP ERA pamphlets, but entered state capitols across the West. Despite remaining popular with a majority of those polled in the four unratified states, the ERA's association with violating Christian values began to influence legislators in the mid-1970s. Trying to appeal to both the demands for equality and for protections of religious-based gender norms, elected officials in each state began pushing legislation reform as an alternative to the ERA. In light of the shifting political terrain and growing opposition from churches, some ERA activists began to wonder if addressing sexist legislation piece by piece was now more viable than a constitutional amendment. Others remained steadfast that the amendment was the only way to guarantee equality so that a state legislature could not repeal these changes later. Either way, the debate over the ERA between New Right religious conservatives and western feminists spurred important conversations about gender equality in each state, and pushed legislators to address

some sexist legislation while they continued to ignore the amendment itself. It also incited an evolution of the meaning of equality in these states.

While the ERA itself remained popular with a majority of westerners polled in the four unratified states, a majority of legislators there did not feel the same. Polls showed that support for the amendment dipped from 65% to 49% in Utah after President Kimball's statement in 1976, though those for the amendment's ratification still outnumbered those who were against it. Some remained undecided.[90] State polls in 1974 reported that a majority of Nevadans also supported the ERA.[91] Despite Governor Mike O'Callaghan's public support for the ERA (it received a mention in his 1975 "State of the State Address"), legislators did not pass the ERA.[92] In February of 1975 the Nevada Senate voted 12 to 8 against the amendment. Of those twelve "no" votes, five were Mormon.[93] ERA supporters were optimistic in Oklahoma, but the House still lacked a two-thirds majority in support. They had 51 for the ERA and 45 against with a "large number of House members undecided on the issue."[94] In the Republican-controlled capitol in Arizona, the amendment was not allowed even a debate on the floor. When party control flipped in 1974, legislators still did not ratify the amendment in either the House or the Senate. The public image of the ERA had taken a real hit by the end of 1975, but remained popular with a majority of westerners in the remaining unratified states. Because of this, legislators had to act quickly. Many came to the conclusion that revising a few of the most egregious sexist statutes might appease ERA activists, without angering social conservatives. They could garner political clout from both sides as supporters of equality.

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[90] Holland, "Salt Lake...is Our Selma," 31.
[91] "ERA still faces tough state vote," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, November 11, 1974.
[92] Russell Nielson, "Senate defeats ERA in 12-8 vote," *Nevada Appeal*, February 19, 1975.
[93] Anne Ehrenburg, "Religion hits ERA issue," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, February 23, 1975.
[94] Richard Tapscott, "Top salons offering ERA bills," *Tulsa Tribune*, January 23, 1979.

New Right opponents also supported revising certain sexist statutes if it meant avoiding the ERA. This type of legislation allowed conservatives to show evidence of their public support for a version of equality that did not violate their religious ideals. Nevada State Senator Helen Herr was adamant that she supported women's equality, despite being the chairwoman of Nevada STOP ERA.[95] Herr served first in the Nevada Assembly from 1957 to 1961 before moving to the Senate. When elected in 1966 she became the state's first female state senator.[96] In 1973 Herr sponsored an equal pay act in Nevada and even told stories of her own experiences with sex discrimination on the senate floor, but the ERA was not something she could support.[97] She claimed women and men were physically very different.[98] Herr echoed the LDS Church's and other churches' stances against the amendment. She stated, "I have always believed in the division of church and state, but how in the world can churches stand by and see the family structure threatened?"[99] Herr, like many others, claimed supporting equality was fine, but the ERA was a threat to her religious values and the Mormon family. For many legislators and citizens during this period, the ERA was no longer associated with equality alone. It was now something bigger and much scarier. Federal intervention and radical feminism, in the Trojan horse of the ERA, would not be tolerated, but equality, in the hands of local people, was different. Senator Herr told reporters, "I'm in favor of equality for women- I've worked for it my whole life. But ERA would cause more problems than it would solve."[100] This would become a common argument against the ERA in the mid-1970s as legislative support began to dwindle and as the anti-ERA movement remade the amendment's image.

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[95] Ed Koch and Cy Ryan, "First woman state senator, real estate broker, Herr dies," *Las Vegas Sun*, July 1, 1999.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Russell Nielson, "Senate defeats ERA in 12-8 vote," *Nevada Appeal*, February 19, 1975.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ed Koch and Cy Ryan, "First woman state senator, real estate broker, Herr dies," *Las Vegas Sun*, July 1, 1999.

In order to appease activists on both sides of the issue, legislatures in all four states worked to amend sexist laws in some form. Some ERA activists were happy to see any kind of progress, while others became frustrated with the continued refusal of their state leaders to ratify the ERA. In all of this, legislators like Nevada Senator Helen Herr, who claimed to support equality, utilized the piecemeal amendments and state ERA discussions to further derail the ratification of the ERA.

While Senator Herr worked to defeat the amendment in Nevada, legislators who supported the ERA worked to pass state reforms as well, but for different reasons. By now, many believed it was their only current option for change. Laws that modernized credit regulations, community property rules, divorce and alimony statutes, among others, were brought before the Nevada Assembly and Senate, and passed. The legislature also ordered a detailed study on the Nevada State Statutes that mentioned sex or discriminated between men and women. All of these reforms came from people on both sides of the ERA debate.[101] For ERA opponents like Herr, the motive was to fix the most egregious examples of sex discrimination and make the argument that a constitutional amendment was no longer necessary. For many ERA supporters, like Nevadans for ERA members, these changes were small but important victories. With or without the ERA, Nevada's laws were becoming more equitable and less sexist.[102] Still, ERA supporters were frustrated. In 1975, the year the ERA failed to obtain enough votes, the same legislature approved the creation of an Equal Rights Commission that would handle specific sex discrimination issues.[103]

[101] Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics," 89.
[102] Nevadans for ERA newsletter, Vol. 1 No. 3, November 1975, folder 2, box 2, series 4, Isabel Kimbel Papers, University of Las Vegas-Reno Special Collections.
[103] Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics," 89.

In Oklahoma, too, pro-ERA legislators and activists backed the strategy of revising discriminatory laws within their own state, motivated to remedy sexism any way they could. A few months after the Oklahoma House voted the amendment down in 1973, ERA activist Hannah Atkins put her past experience as a law librarian to use, compiling a comprehensive list of every mention of sex on the state books. After finding almost thirty sexist statutes, Atkins began to focus on the laws that disturbed her most, including the legal sex discrimination of state and public school employees.[104] The first bill Atkins proposed and passed was one that forbade sex discrimination in state agencies, most notably in the employment of House pages. A similar bill allowing women to serve as pages also passed in Arizona.[105] Atkins succeeded in the passage of thirteen bills addressing sex discrimination in Oklahoma while still actively campaigning for the ERA in the House.[106]

Other state leaders took this reform alternative a step further by ratifying an equal rights amendment to their state's constitution as a way to placate activists and prove that the federal amendment was unnecessary. Just a month after the Arizona legislature voted down the ERA in 1975, the state Senate passed Concurrent Resolution 1003, "adding an equal rights provision to the Arizona constitution."[107] This resolution came about after two former law professors from the University of Arizona completed a massive, statute-by-statute study to track each piece of sexist legislation in the state. After Representative Diane McCarthy read the report on the sexist statutes, she immediately met with leadership to discuss how it could be used to get rid of the ERA. She stated, "All we have to do is take this report and flip it...change all the laws in Arizona

[104] Memorandum, "State Legislative Council, Legal Service Division," December 12, 1972, folder 19, box 4, Hannah Diggs Atkins, Special Collections and Archives, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma.
[105] Ginger Hutton, "Views of a Black Woman Politician," *Arizona Republic*, July 8, 1972.
[106] Warren Vieth, "Starting Over," *Oklahoma Monthly*, February 1981.
[107] Carl S. Palmer, "Challenging Tradition: Arizona Women Fight For the Equal Rights Amendment" (Masters Thesis, Arizona State University, 2007), 104.

and then we don't have to do anything at the federal level or ratify (the ERA)."[108] With the ratification of the national ERA, the Arizona Legislature would have two years to address each of these issues.[109] Without the amendment, lawmakers would have to pass new legislation for each statute issue, a gargantuan task. While the authors of the study saw it as evidence that the ERA was needed in Arizona, legislators opposed the amendment utilized it to pass a state ERA instead.

Passing at state ERA in the name of not passing a national one was not easily accomplished. For example, Representative Charles King, a Republican from Tucson, complained that a state equal rights amendment would allow his wife to take out debt in her name and without his consent.[110] He failed to explain why husbands like him, who enjoyed this right already, deserved that power within a marriage while their wives did not. Another male representative, Republican Tony West of Phoenix chimed in, "Men have given a lot in this bill. *We* ought to have equal rights."[111] He did not elaborate as to what he believed men were giving up, or why allowing women equal rights to men would take away from the privileges men in Arizona already held. Despite protests from some conservative legislators and a majority of ERA supporters, the state amendment passed. The Southern Arizona Coalition for the ERA commented, "We do not advocate state ERAs in place of a Federal Amendment because many states would never act. Only the Federal Amendment will cure all the discrimination now on the books put there by individual laws."[112] This was true. The state ERA did not mandate a time frame for sexist legislation to be updated; in fact, it said nothing at all about past laws complying

[108] Ibid., 75-6.
[109] Ginger Hutton, "At the Capitol: Opposing ERA forces continue to clash," *Arizona Republic*, February 8, 1974; Charlene M. Taylor and Stuart Herzog, "Impact Study of the Equal Rights Amendment: The Arizona Constitution and Statutes," Arizona State Historical Society and Archives, 1973.
[110] "House panels Oks bill to give men and women equal rights," *Arizona Republic*, March 17, 1977.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Southern Arizona Coalition for the ERA Newsletter, undated, folder 1, box 2, Maureen Murphy Papers, Arizona State University Special Collections.

with the new resolution. The Arizona legislature also added equal pay measures to its state statutes that year.[113]

While leaders in the LDS Church supported and encouraged the ideological separation of equality from the ERA in hopes of discrediting the amendment, amendment supporters worked to turn this tactic on its head. On the national television program *The Phil Donahue Show*, LDS Relief Society President Barbara Smith told viewers, "We really do believe in equal rights. We just think the Equal Rights Amendment isn't the way to achieve them."[114] Beverly Campbell echoed Smith's words and added that the ERA was inappropriate because it made laws "sex blind," suggesting that Utah legislators change sexist laws individually instead.[115] Representative Georgia Peterson also spoke of her commitment: "I am emphatically for equal rights, not the ERA."[116] In the same interview she added that women often were not put into leadership positions because they are "too petty." These three women were arguably the most powerful women in the state working against the ERA. Their use of the equality versus ERA debate was no coincidence, but a tactic used to appropriate the message of equality without taking concrete steps to provide it. While some activists for and against the ERA in Utah considered a state amendment, Beatrice Marchant pointed out that the state already had similar wording in article four of the Utah State Constitution, which read "Both male and female citizens of the State shall enjoy equally all civil, political, and religious rights and privileges."[117] This article, which has existed since 1896, had not prevented sexist legislation from passage in Utah. Instead of a state

[113] Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 74. See also Charlene M. Taylor and Stuart Herzog, "Impact Study of the Equal Rights Amendment: The Arizona Constitution and Statutes," Arizona State Historical Society and Archives, 1973.
[114] The Phil Donahue Show Transcript #02180, February 18, 1980, WGN-TV, Chicago, Illinois, Multimedia Program Productions, MS 24650, Beverley J. Campbell Papers, Secure Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
[115] Interview with Beverly Campbell by Craig Clyde in *Contact*, January 13, 1980, transcript, 2, AV 4937, Secure Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
[116] Charles Seldin, "Solon Backs with Women's Rights," *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 13, 1975.
[117] Yvonne Johnson, "Extension gives Utah another chance for ratifying ERA," *Post-Register*, October 17, 1978.

ERA, legislators focused on amending the age of consent to marry in Utah from eighteen for women and twenty-one for men to eighteen across the board.[118] The Utah Supreme Court also overturned two state laws in 1975. One set the age of support by a father at eighteen for daughters and twenty-one for sons. The second overturned a law banning women from drawing unemployment in their last three months of pregnancy.[119]

The tactic by New Right opponents to utilize equality without supporting the ERA also helped spur a change in how westerners understood and approached gender inequality. This bipartisan discussion about discrimination actually raised awareness of sexism and motivated leaders to take action. In Utah, for example, in an interview with the Utah Advisory Commission to the US Commission of Civil Rights, the director claimed sex discrimination cases had exploded from 1970 to 1975. He stated, "Now about seventy-five percent of the 650 cases before the office each year concern discrimination by sex," mostly within education and work environments.[120] It would take time--eight years after the ERA's deadline came and went--but the Utah legislature successfully passed legislation that removed gender-based or sexist language in the Utah State Statutes. Despite the New Right's successful campaign to block the ERA from ratification in these western states, the agitation by western feminists and their demands for change helped pressure conservatives to take a stance on equality and spurred real change through reformed legislation.

Legislators and private citizens alike remained committed to basic equality measures for women in their states, even as the New Right convinced them that the ERA and feminism more broadly corrupted Christian family values. The New Right, which united various religious denominations in the 1970s, successfully convinced many westerners, including legislators, that

[118] Rod Decker, "Utah's equality battle," *Deseret News*, October 8, 1975.
[119] "Equality and Common Sense," *Deseret News*, January 1, 1976.
[120] Rod Decker, "Utah's equality battle," *Deseret News*, October 8, 1975.

the ERA was a vehicle for radical social change. Oklahoma ERA activist Penny Williams stated, "That was something that we were trying to do, was to show that the Equal Rights Amendment was just this mainstream American 'blah, blah, blah' to make it so boring. I remember one of the things I did was never call it the ERA, always [sic] call it the Equal Rights Amendment."[121] While pro-ERA activists were not ultimately successful at selling the amendment as "boring," they did influence state legislatures to evaluate and change numerous sexist laws. ERA supporters pressured conservatives to take a stance on equality, and in so doing encouraged westerners to combat gender inequality in their everyday lives. Even with these successes, by 1977, the ERA was now securely linked with anti-family and anti-Christian values.

The meaning of the Equal Rights Amendment, what it proposed and what it would *do*, changed massively in the public mind in the mid-1970s. Only a few years away from that early, exhilarating confidence, pro-ERA activists now watched in disbelief as the amendment and their identities were distorted by those on both sides of the ERA debates. Schlafly, the LDS Church, and a host of religious conservatives declared that the end of Christian America and the traditional nuclear family was coming in the form of a simple, 58-word-long commitment to equality before the law. The New Right convinced numerous westerners that ERA opponents like themselves were not against equality, but the sacrilegious idea that men and women were the same in God's eyes. The ERA could not be in harmony with the Christian family.

A majority of western ERA supporters found themselves fighting a losing battle. While many could easily identify with STOP ERA members because of their similar religious

[121] Interview with Penny Williams, by John Erling, April 11, 2012, *Voices of Oklahoma* oral history series, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Accessed March 12, 2016. http://m.voicesofoklahoma.com/interview/williams-penny/

backgrounds and dedication to their families, the two groups were completely at odds over what constituted the legal, inalienable rights of women. Those in support of the amendment hoped to make women's equality the new status quo through the promotion of religious ERA support and groups like Homemakers for ERA. This idea of the Christian mother and ERA supporter did not represent all amendment activists in the West, though. For some supporters, including lesbians, single women, and non-religious members, this mainstream image of the ERA could be alienating and symbolize a watering down of broader feminist principles.

The hope and effort of both sides did not end here, though. The battle for ratification in the region was just heating up. The 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston and the extension of the ERA's deadline to June 30, 1982, would reinvigorate and accelerate, in some cases, the tensions between amendment supporters and the New Right. The image of the ERA and what it represented would be up for constant debate by its supporters and opponents, showcasing most prominently not just at the National Women's Conference but local, state-based conferences around the county. This would also be the moment where the West took center stage, as the time for ratification was coming to a close.

Chapter 4

"Sisterhood of '77":

Tensions Inside and Outside the National Women's Conference, 1976-1977

After coming here and seeing that they had sympathy and empathy, I have a feeling of sisterhood... I think we have many more things in common than I thought we had.

-Janice Kissner, National Council of Negro Women

In November of 1977, Nevada ERA activists Ruby Duncan, Renee Diamond, and Elaine Mills found themselves in a peculiar and dangerous situation. Far from home in the city of Houston, Texas, the women were delegates to the International Women's Year (IWY) National Women's Conference, a once-in-a-lifetime event that brought women from every state and territory together to discuss and vote on women's issues. In a place that should have been uplifting and inspiring, in this particular moment, walking back to their hotel room, Duncan, Diamond, and Mills were instead face-to-face with the Ku Klux Klan. The men, donned in robes, held a sign up to the women that stated, "Get out of town- Niggers, Dykes, and Kikes." As a working-class Black mother, Jewish mother, and lesbian NOW leader respectively, this moment must have been a shock.[1] Just months earlier at Nevada's own IWY conference, ERA activists were at odds over the use of the term "feminism" and whether to invite feminist leader Gloria Steinem to the meeting. The debate had been intense, with coordinating president Jean Ford adamant that

[1] Caryll Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics: The Equal Rights Amendment Ratification Campaign, 1973-1981" (PhD Dissertation, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, 2010), 169.

Steinem's presence would hurt the ERA's image in the state. Now, facing not just the Klan, but also thousands of anti-ERA, "Pro-Family" conservative activists determined to undermine the women's conference in Houston, this disagreement seemed trivial. As the women faced down white supremacists, locked arms, and strode away, they represented not just a building unity between Black and white women, religious and non-religious women, or even Nevada ERA activists, but a unification of women from various backgrounds to ratify the ERA in the face of this vocal opposition.

The IWY National Women's Conference, as well as the local conferences held in each state, brought ERA activists, from moderate, mainstream western feminists to more radical women, together. Although not without their localized disagreements, the activists in the unratified western states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, when forced to meet their conservative opponents face-to-face at each of these events, chose to come together. At the media-heavy and tense national conference in Houston, leading feminists and conservatives each argued that they were the true voice of the American woman; this standoff was not abnormal to the western delegates. While East Coast conference organizers and attendees from states that had ratified the ERA were shocked at the massive turnout of conservative women protesting the IWY's planks, which included the amendment, activists from the four unratified western states had been dealing with these challenges for years at this point. For those close to the ERA movement in the West, the power and strident nature of the "Pro-Family" anti-ERA movement was no surprise.

Each state-based conference in the unratified western states brought moderate and even conservative-leaning ERA activists together with more radical women, but in different ways. At the Arizona conference, activists built strong ties with Republican attendees and further

solidified the bipartisan ERA movement. Nevada activists prioritized unity between attendees over most else by highlighting women's issues that many could agree on, including support for homemakers and battered women, and downplaying the ERA. The conference organizers in Oklahoma utilized a similar tactic and focused on the needs of rural women in an attempt to appeal to non-partisan attendees, although backlash from the anti-ERA activists that showed up would unify western feminists there more than anything else. Lastly, the Utah IWY conference foreshadowed what was to come at the national conference. Utah's conference organizers combined many of the same strategies as their sisters in Arizona, Nevada, and Oklahoma, but the LDS church's mobilization of women to undermine the conference would completely overwhelm IWY leaders. At each meeting the level of hostility between pro-ERA and anti-ERA women eventually brought ERA activists together. This unity would only be solidified at the national conference. While activists in each state had openly disagreed on the image of the movement, the state and national IWY conferences were moments where those in attendance felt more unified in "feminism" than ever before.

In order to call attention to women's issues around the world, the United Nations General Assembly declared 1975 "International Women's Year" (IWY). In celebration of this new holiday, the UN sponsored a conference in Mexico City that same year, the World Conference for Women, in which over 1,300 people represented 130 different countries.[2] Deemed a success due to the turnout and variety of issues raised, specifically those of working class women and women and color, the celebration extended from "International Women's Year" to the "Decade

[2] "History of the U.N. Decade for Women," *The UNESCO Courier*, November 1978.

of the Woman," with UN delegates urging attendees to return to their home countries and organize national and local discussions on women's issues. In response, President Gerald Ford signed an executive order on January 9, 1975, establishing the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year. President Ford appointed thirty-nine commissioners to oversee the goals of this new commission, which were mainly to unite women, hear the voices of as many as possible, facilitate discussions about common issues, and crowd-source solutions to these issues amongst women across the US and around the world.[3] In order to accomplish this large goal, the president and the commissioners decided to hold their own National Women's Conference in which democratically elected delegates from every US state and territory would vote on recommendations covering a variety of women-related issues to present to the president and Congress. This national meeting would be the first of its kind in US history, and was eventually slated for November 1977 in Houston, Texas. This would give each state time to organize their own commissions, set up numerous local meetings, and hold their own state conference to vote on recommendations to send to the national conference and elect state delegates. With Public Law 94-167, Congress appropriated $5 million dollars for women to facilitate local, state, and the national meeting, with most of the funds going to grants to help elected delegates travel to Houston to attend the conference. President Ford named Bella Abzug, a U.S. House Representative and long time women's and gay rights activist from New York, to chair the conference.[4] Two thousand delegates were chosen from the fifty-six states and territories, but an estimated 18,000 more people would show up to observe or protest the

[3] Final Report to the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year by the Arizona Coordinating Committee, June 1977, folder Arizona, box 3, National Women's Conference Collection, Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York (hereafter VC).
[4] For more on the life and political career of Bella Abzug, see Bella Abzug, *Gender Gap: Bella Abzug's Guide to Political Power for American Women* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984); Alan Howard Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug, 1920-1976: Political Passions, Women's Rights, and Congressional Battles* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013).

conference; fifty charter buses arrived from Tennessee alone.[5] The biggest names in women's rights attended, including Rosalynn Carter, Gloria Steinem, Shirley Chisholm, Betty Ford, Lady Bird Johnson, Maya Angelou, Barbara Johnson, Betty Freidan, and of course important opponents like Phyllis Schlafly came, too.[6]

The announcement of a women's conference immediately spiked the interest of conservative activists, and for a number of reasons. First, the growing New Right, which had a deep suspicion of most government-sponsored programming, argued that these local meetings and state conferences on women's issues were a complete waste of taxpayer dollars. If that was not bad enough, conservatives argued, this conference would not represent the voices and views of all women, but would become a parade and free advertising for issues like the ERA, reproductive rights, and gay rights. Because leading organizations like the John Birch Society, Conservative Caucus, and Eagle Forum built their authority through blaming government intervention for the nation's problems, the IWY became an easy target for grassroots conservatives. Phyllis Schlafly had for years warned her readers of the dangers of a large federal government that lay behind the ERA. For Schlafly and others, this presidential and Congressionally-supported commission headed by self-proclaimed feminist Bella Abzug, was confirmation. New Right organizers also pointed to the commission's ties to the United Nations, arguing that this was yet again another thinly-veiled liberal attempt at promoting globalism and putting Americans at risk to communism.

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[5] Jim Barlow, "Conference's foes pack arena, attack ERA and its supporters," *Houston Chronicle*, November 20, 1977.

[6] Peggy Simpson, "2,000 Women to Map Future in Houston," *Tulsa World*, November 11, 1977. For more on the history of the National Women's Conference see, Shelah Gilbert Leader and Patricia Rusch Hyatt, *American Women On the Move: The Inside Story of the National Women's Conference, 1977* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016) and *Sisters of '77,* produced and directed by Cynthia Salzman and Allen Mondell (Dallas: Circle R Media and Media Projects Inc., 2005), medium.

As other historians have noted, pro-ERA activists initially viewed the national conference as an opportunity to revitalize the movement and gain more publicity and supporters, but it eventually became a spectacle for the New Right. Martha Sonntag Bradley writes, "These IWY conferences paraded women in front of television cameras, across stages, and onto convention floors, demonstrating to the public the widespread support for the amendment." This, of course, is what conference organizers has hoped for: a united front and a bringing together of women from all walks of life in a strong showing for the ERA. Yet Sonntag Bradley also adds, "There could not have been a louder warning cry to the new right, inviting opponents to leap onto the bandwagon and combat not only the ERA but everything feminism seemed to embrace."[7] In his biography of Phyllis Schlafly, Donald T. Critchlow also argues that, in the end, the IWY actually helped conservative women who were against the ERA more than it did those advocating for it. He writes, "For Schlafly, Houston became the 'Midway' battle, the decisive turning point in the ten-year ERA struggle."[8] Others, including Marjorie J. Spruill, take this argument a step further, asserting that not only was the conference a "turning point" for the conservative women's movement, it was the moment of mass mobilization. She writes that the IWY conference "sealed the fate of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and gave rise to the 'Pro-Family Movement.'"[9] In her later book on the women's movement in the 1970s, Spruill adds that the IWY "galvanized opponents of federally funded feminism who vowed to remain active and reap the political benefits of their newfound solidarity."[10] According to Critchlow, Schlafly's ability to transfix the media and bring in thousands of conservative activists to protest the conference created a new

[7] Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 405.
[8] Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 247.
[9] Marjorie J. Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn" in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 72.
[10] Marjorie J. Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 292.

level of power and presence in the national consciousness, and her message resonated with many Americans who were not yet familiar with the women's movement.

For those living in the unratified western states, though, this argument does not hold. Rather than rising alongside the conference in 1977, conservative groups like STOP ERA, Eagle Forum, and Women Who Want To Be Women, as well as LDS women, were already highly organized and with several victories under their belts in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, Utah. Schlafly's anti-ERA forces were on the ground in force, and had mobilized successfully years before. They had already changed the minds of legislators and many westerners. The state and national IWY conferences would help galvanize the pro-family forces, but they were already strong and growing in the places where it mattered- at least to the ERA.

In the unratified states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, the stakes were high for these local meetings and conferences. While the suggested conference topics ranged from issues like diversity, women and aging, the needs of housewives, balancing work and home life, and how to run for office or buy a home, it was the ERA that became a lighting rod of controversy. The national commission encouraged each state to hold its own conference, and included a recommendation for the amendment's passage in three more states. New Right and religious leaders in the unratified western states, like Phyllis Schlafly and LDS Relief Society President Barbara Smith, decided that the risk of ratification of the ERA and the passage of liberal recommendations to the national conference was too great; conservative women would have to show up to these events and show up they did. Conservatives refused to let IWY attendees speak on behalf of western women.

In all four unratified states, the turnout for the state conferences was much larger than the organizers anticipated, adding chaos to the already tense political situation. In order to begin

organizing the local conferences, the national commission appointed women from each state to decide collectively who would fill leadership positions in the state commission and recommend other women for the remaining seats. The bulk of the work done by state committees was to organize a statewide conference on women's issues, including a variety of workshops and speakers, organize local meetings to drum up interest for the state conference and record the interests of women who would be unable to attend the state conference, keep the public updated on different events and meetings, and begin developing a list of nominated candidates to attend and vote at the National Women's Conference in Houston. The appointed commissioners in each state had to be thorough and conscious in their nominees as the national commission, under public law, legally demanded that each state's slate of elected representatives include "members of the general public, with special emphasis on low-income women, members of diverse racial, ethnic and religious groups, and women of all ages." Many states began compiling candidate nominations early in order to meet this goal.[11] Still, conference goers were allowed to nominate their own candidates as well during the state conferences. While Arizona and Nevada's commissions succeeded for the most part in electing diverse delegates, it would become a major problem in Oklahoma and Utah. In those two states, conservative organizations and churches railroaded conference proceedings and elected their own nominees who were largely white and middle class. These official meetings would wreak havoc in almost every western state as women on both sides of the ERA in particular were now forced to face each other, and in a highly public way, creating even deeper distrust and anger between liberal and conservative women. But through this common and very present enemy, ERA activists across the spectrum came together at the state and national conferences.

[11] Oklahoma Women's Conference, "News Release: Deadline to Nominate Delegates to the National Women's Conference," May 27, 1977, folder Oklahoma Meeting, box 3, National Women's Conference Collection, VC.

Arizona Women's Conference, June 3-4, 1977

As Arizona activists prepared for one of the earliest state IWY conferences in the country, both diversity and unity became the goals of organizers. Taking to heart the national IWY commission's call for representation, Arizona women included not just racial minorities, but also lesbians in their workshop priorities. Representation also meant including women from all political affiliations, moderate and radical, Republican and Democrat. Through open dialogue, personal testimonies, and a bit of luck with the early timing of the conference, the Arizona IWY conference largely succeeded in its early stated goals. Although conservative opponents would later object to many of the conference's approved resolutions after the fact, the women that attended the meeting were able to find common ground and unity at a time when the definition of "women's rights" was debated endlessly everywhere else.

Arizona's IWY commission held several "mini" conferences around the state, and began compiling delegate nominations into a diverse slate of black, Chicana, and American Indian women. Yet before the conference had a chance to begin, controversy erupted over the use of the term "minority" in one of the scheduled workshops that planned to focus specifically on the needs and issues of ethnic minority women in the state. While the law governing the conference process demanded racial, religious, and political diversity in each state's slate of delegates, there was no explicit mention of sexual orientation. A small number of lesbian activists requested that the state commission include sexual orientation as a minority classification as well, as they were far outnumbered and had legitimate claims of discrimination. The commission, not wanting to further alienate the women of color slated for delegate nominations, decided on a compromise:

the title of the minority workshop would change to "ethnic minority," while issues pertinent to lesbians and sexual orientation would be given their own separate workshop.[12]

When the Arizona Women's Conference convened on June 3, 1977, at the Phoenix Civic Plaza Convention Center, the committeewomen were extremely pleased with the 1,100-person turnout. The agenda of speakers was also exciting, as many important local female political leaders were scheduled to attend. The conference opened with a welcome speech from the chairperson of the conference and committee, Trudy Multine, who was a member of the Board of Directors of the Phoenix Indian Center. The honorary chairwoman, Mayor Margaret Hance of Phoenix also spoke, along with First Lady of Arizona Patricia Castro. Attendees were mostly excited, though, to hear Mary Crisp, co-chairperson of the National Republican Committee, and Margaret Bruce, United Nations Secretariat and head of the first unit focused on women's rights. The combination of Crisp's authority within the Republican Party and Bruce's defense of human rights around the world seemed to smooth over the friction between liberal and more conservative Arizonans in the room.[13]

Despite the range of political affiliations, the scheduled workshops and resolution votes moved along without issue. The registered conference attendees passed every national IWY core agenda resolution, two to one.[14] The body as a whole expressed an emphasis on the needs of low-income women and accessible healthcare. The voting participants asked that Arizona create a "Presidential Commission on Women's Health." They also recommended that the national conference highlight not only women's historic inequality in seeking medical treatment, but the low number of medical studies on women and women's issues, and sexism in the field

[12] Final Report to the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year by the Arizona Coordinating Committee, June 1977, pp 1, folder Arizona, box 3, National Women's Conference Collection, VC.
[13] Ibid., 2.
[14] Leader and Hyatt, *American Women On the Move*, 49.

altogether. They asked that medical care be extended to female inmates.[15] Attendees also included a resolution protesting Arizona's frequent placing of Native children in white homes, citing the need for the state to value the children's cultural needs as well.[16] In an even more surprising turn of events, men and women at the Arizona Women's Conference voted not just to reaffirm a woman's right to choose, but ranked it "as one of the top five most important resolutions to be taken to the national conference."[17] Of the thirty-six resolutions proposed and passed, the only two amended were those that included language or recommendations limiting women's access to reproductive healthcare. Even the ERA workshop, which was arguably the most controversial of all the offered workshops, ended with an affirming vote to include the amendment with the national resolutions. In fact, one woman cited the only chaos as that "created by the unexpected turnout." The workshop ended with Republican Women's Caucus member Mary Peace Douglas announcing, "This is the party of Lincoln, our union did not fall when we abolished slavery, and it will not fall if women are free."[18] Even though Douglass invoked her party, the conference as a whole was a moment where women in Arizona pushed party aside and focused on the issues they could agree on.

In the immediate aftermath, conference organizers deemed the Arizona meeting as a success: the workshops seemed useful to conference-goers, all of the proposed resolutions received floor time and a vote, and no major controversies were reported. The elected delegates from the state were also arguable the most racially diverse group from the West with six Chicana, four American Indian, one African American, one Japanese American, one Chinese

[15] Carol Sowers, "Women's Forum," *Arizona Republic*, June 6, 1977; Human Rights of Arizona Newsletter 12, no. 1, June 1977, folder 14, box 52, Human Rights of Arizona Collection, University Archives and Collections, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona (hereafter ASU).
[16] Leader and Hyatt, *American Women On the Move,* 52.
[17] Final Report to the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year by the Arizona Coordinating Committee, June 1977, pp 1, folder Arizona, box 3, National Women's Conference Collection, VC.
[18] Ibid.

American, and five white women. In the conference's final report to the national commission, chairwoman Trudy Multine expressed that the conference was successful because women gave their own, personal testimonies on each of the issues highlighted in the workshops. This connected women who might otherwise hear information that they disagreed with as propaganda. By meeting together in one place and having honest conversations, women who might have disagreed about resolutions were able to empathize with each other.[19] One attendee argued that the strangely peaceful weekend in which "the silent majority met the radical feminists" would have never come together otherwise, succeeded in "discussing the issues." She added, "It was a surprise to some that they agreed on almost all points...and had a damned good time. Lesbians and conservative housewives all joined hands to work for one goal-to form a more perfect union, with justice for American women."[20]

Of course, solving these issues, especially in the conservative state of Arizona, were not that simple. Within days of the conference's closing, a petition challenging the legitimacy of the nomination and election process of delegates at the state meeting as well as a call for total nullification of the delegates arrived at the Arizona Women's Conference's committee headquarters as well as the Arizona State Capitol. The petition, written by conference participant Kathy Crandell, charged that the diversity requirement for delegates was in fact not met because the "Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, LDS women's Relief Society, and Church Women United" were not represented in the delegation. She also added that the political views of "Birthright, Arizonans for Life, Right to Life, STOP ERA" as well "Black community leaders" were also not represented. Other complaints include late and little advertising of the conference, unfair biases by the appointed committeewomen for their nomination slate, and acts of

[19] Ibid., 5.
[20] Regina Nelms, "...To form a more perfect union..." *Arizona Republic*, June 6, 1977.

intimidation through "storm-trooper tactics" conducted by "militant feminists." Of the 1,100 registered attendees, Crandell was only able to obtain sixteen signatures for her petition.[21] Three months later on September 14 and 15, 1977, the Arizona Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, run largely by conservatives, called for an investigation into the conference's funds and resolutions. President of the Commission, Representative Donna Carlson of the Arizona Legislature, led the charge, arguing on the floor that the "radical resolutions passed by the various IWY state conferences are indeed a fraud perpetrated on the American public on tax dollars wantonly appropriated by the 94th Congress." The real reason for these conference at the local, state, and national levels, what she referred to as a "nationwide circus," was not about understanding and accelerating women's rights, but about convincing legislators that the public supports the ERA when, in Arizona, it did not.[22]

In light of the response to the conference well after-the-fact, it is clear that many of the Arizona women who would have protested the IWY planks were not in attendance that evening in June. Because Arizona's conference was one of the first meetings held, many STOP ERA women who would come to protest other state meetings had not been called to action yet. This would come later. Still, the women who met at the Phoenix Civic Plaza Convention Center were not a monolith. Moderates and radicals, straight women and lesbians, were able to use their personal experiences to connect with one another and find common ground. They were also able to produce one of the most diverse delegations in the nation. These connections would stay with

[21] Petition by Kathy Crandell to the Arizona International Women's Year Coordinating Committee, Challenge to Election of Delegates and Protest Against Women's Meeting, n.d., folder 5, box 171, Eldon Rudd Papers, ASU.
[22] Commission on the Status of Women, Statement Before the IWY and Ad hoc hearing, September 14 an 15, 1977 by Representative Donna J. Carlson, 29th District, folder 5, box 171, Eldon Rudd Papers, ASU; Historian Stacie Taranto also writes of the connection that social and fiscal conservatives made in their protests against the financing of the International Year of the Woman conferences. See Stacie Taranto, *Kitchen Table Politics: Conservative Women and Family Values in New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 173-182.

many of the Arizona delegates through not just the National Women's Conference months later, but also years later in the final days of the ERA campaign.

Nevada Women's Conference, June 17-19, 1977

As organizers of the Nevada State Women's Conference, ERA activists Frankie Sue del Papa and former state senator Jean Ford prioritized unity over specific issues, and this included the ERA. The ERA as a resolution was not promoted or given a "workshop," or a priority meeting with expert speakers and guided discussion. Experiencing first hand the division between conservative activists and western feminists over the amendment, the organizers decided that any issue that Nevada women could agree on a move forward with would be a victory.[23] In the spirit of compromise, the conference highlighted several local businesses as well as churches that supported the Nevada IWY Conference, including the Center for United Campus Ministry at UNLV and the Lutheran Council of America.[24] Members of a local LDS choir were also pointedly invited to perform. A host of moderate and more progressive activists in attendance were able to come together and find common ground, but only outside of discussions on the ERA and other more controversial topics. Still, this was an important moment for Nevada ERA activists, as leaders of the movement and activists on the ground had, up to this point, been engaged in a tense power struggle over the image of the movement, while facing mounting ERA opposition.

Like in Arizona, one of the first actions the Nevada Women's Conference commission took was to travel to rural areas of the state and set up "mini" conferences in order to connect

[23] Interview with Jean Ford, by Victoria Ford, 1988, "Jean Ford: A Nevada Women Leads the Way," University of Nevada Oral History Program, Reno, Nevada, 181. https://contentdm.library.unr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/unohp/id/2567.
[24] Nevada Women's Conference 1977 pamphlet, folder 6, box 33, Jean Ford Collection, Las Vegas Special Collection and Archives, Las Vegas, Nevada (hereafter UNLV).

with women geographically far away from metros like Las Vegas and Reno, and to drum up interest for the official state conference. The committeewomen did not want the conference to fall into a northern Nevada versus Las Vegas split. They were also acutely aware of the need to bring a diverse group of women to the meeting and a diverse group of delegates to the national conference. Ford and Del Papa decided that the rural conferences would focus on three broad topics: women's health needs in the state, the needs of women in the home, and the needs of women in the workplace. The mini conferences took place in libraries, elementary schools, and museums, in the towns of Tonopah, Carson City, Fallon, Winnemucca, Elko, Ely, and Caliente. In Cason City and Ely, the committeewomen were pleased to see several mothers in attendance with their children, and encouraged the young mothers to stay even when their babies became disruptive. Although some of these sessions were sparsely attended, overall the evaluations from the attendees were positive and provided a great foundation of issues and lectures to focus on for the statewide meeting.[25]

From June 17 to June 19, 1977, over 1,300 Nevada women and men from across the state gathered at the Las Vegas Convention Center to meet and discuss the status of women and girls in their communities and the needs that they would like to see met.[26] The three-day conference consisted of several themed sessions, lectures, meetings, film screenings, and public speakers that participants could choose to attend based on their needs and interests. The sessions included "Becoming a Successful Businesswoman," hosted by the Department of Commerce, "Myths and Realities in the World of Work," hosted by the U.S. Women's Bureau, "The Legal Status of Homemakers in Nevada," hosted by the International Women's Year Homemaker Committee

[25] "To Form a More Perfect Union: Issues For Nevada Women," Nevada Women's Conference grant evaluation, part 2, folder 6, box 33, Jean Ford Collection, UNLV.
[26] Interview with Frankie Sue Del Papa, by Roselyn Richardson-Weir, 2007, "An Oral History of the Nevada Women's Conference," University of Nevada Oral History Program, Reno, Nevada. https://contentdm.library.unr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/unohp/id/448, 199-200.

and chair Martha Griffiths, as well as several parenting and family life topics like "Single Parenting" and "Marriage Enrichment." Minority women's issues, abuse, and handicapped and homebound women's issues were also addressed in sessions. Ruby Duncan, co-founder of Operation Life and the Black Mothers March several years earlier, spoke on minority women's issues in Nevada while Gloria Steinem and local activist Maya Miller discussed assertiveness training, how to raise money for causes, and how to conduct a successful meeting.[27] US Senators Howard Cannon and Paul Laxalt as well as Congressman Jim Santini were also in attendance as a show of support for the conference.[28]

From its inception, organizers of the Nevada IWY conference did not want to make the event solely about the ERA out of fear that the issue would derail the discussion of other women's issues. No sessions or lectures were offered on the amendment itself, but the issue was voted on to add to the national agenda on the last day of the conference. As another "olive branch" effort, the committeewomen invited the Regional Ladies Chorus, eighty or so singers from the Mormon Church, to sing at the opening ceremony of the conference. Ford commented, "We had deliberately asked them to be a part of the program because we were wanting to rise above or beyond the Equal Rights Amendment fight."[29] It was not just the fear of hindering fruitful conversations that kept the conference organizers from discussing the ERA, though. Many pro-ERA Nevada women still viewed themselves as different from East Coast feminists, or at least disconnected with the national leaders of the ERA like Bella Abzug and Betty Friedan. Some women, including Ford, felt that at the time the term "feminism" did not represent them.

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[27] Nevada Women's Conference 1977 pamphlet, folder 6, box 33, Jean Ford Collection, UNLV; National Conference on the Observance of International Women's Year Report, folder 5, box 7, Renee Diamond Collection, UNLV; Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).
[28] Betty Malmgren, "Nevadans Reminded of Struggle for Rights," *Nevada State-Journal*, June 18, 1977.
[29] Interview with Jean Ford by Victoria Ford, 1988, 200-1.

Ford was even hesitant to bring Gloria Steinem to the conference. “I believed in E.R.A., but Gloria Steinem I wasn’t sure about.”[30] While other state conferences experienced significant interruptions by STOP ERA, other organizations, and churches against the amendment, the Nevada conference moved along smoothly. Many anti-ERA women did attend the conference in Nevada, but only to vote for delegates in hopes of removing the ERA from the agenda. Many of these attendees did not register and therefore were not allowed to vote.

Figure 4.1. ERA activists Maya Miller and Josephine Gonzales introduce Gloria Steinem at the Nevada Women’s Conference in Las Vegas, June 18, 1977. Courtesy of the University of Nevada Reno.

[30] Interview with Jean Ford by Victoria Ford, 1988, 201.

On the last day of the Nevada Women's Conference, commissioners distributed packets of information about each nominee to the national delegation to registered participants. The packets listed each woman's occupation, race, political party, social interests, and religion, which included Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Unitarian, and Mormon affiliations. The twelve women with the highest amount of votes became the delegates to the National Women's Conference and included familiar faces like Jean Ford, Ruby Duncan, Sue Wagner, Mary Gojack, and Frankie Sue Del Papa, as well as Chicana activist Josephine Gonzales, vice chairwoman of the Amiga's de la Raza, and American Indian activist Lois Whitney.[31].

Despite the tensions raised by the "f" word and the STOP ERA members who showed up at the last minute, conference attendees were able to agree on essential issues to put forth for the national conference. Some of the more important resolutions approved at the conference were to establish women's centers across the state, subsidize childcare for working women, end sex-discrimination in the credit industry, focus on care for older women, maintain legal reproductive rights in the state, and support the ERA.[32] In all, Nevada women approved, or slightly amended and then approved, every recommended measure from the national IWY commission and were able to come together. To-date, Nevada's IWY held the largest attendance of any state conference.[33] This, of course, was only accomplished through compromise. By downplaying the importance of the amendment at the conference and working hard to include more conservative-leaning women, moderate and liberal ERA activists were still able to get the votes to approve the amendment as a resolution.

[31] Report on the Workshop Resolutions Adopted by the Nevada Women's Conference, folder 3, box 1, Nevada State Women's Conference Collection, UNLV.
[32] Interview with Frankie Sue Del Papa, by Roselyn Richardson-Weir, 2007, UNR, 11.
[33] Report on the Workshop Resolutions Adopted by the Nevada Women's Conference, folder 3, box 1, Nevada State Conference Collection, UNLV.

Oklahoma Women's Conference, June 16-18, 1977

While conference organizers in Arizona and Nevada found unity by focusing on the issues moderate and more liberal women had in common, activists in Oklahoma had to unite in the face of an organized and much more visible enemy: STOP ERA. Overrun by conservative opponents who were more interested in upending the conference rather than participating in it, Oklahoma ERA activists in particular had to pull together. Even though Oklahoma IWY organizers used similar tactics to other western states, focusing on rural women and more moderate issues, the conference was overwhelmed by STOP ERA and other groups, including numerous men who showed up in protest. The differences between western feminist leaders and more radical activists became much less important in the face of ERA opponents there to subvert the conference as a whole.

With only nine regional "mini" meetings, a much smaller number than other western states, Oklahoma's IWY commission worked hard to accumulate as much information as they could from the few women who attended. Spread out across the state from Guymon in the panhandle, to the southern cities of Anadarko, Altus, Ardmore and McAlester, and far east in Muskogee and Miami, the mini meetings were advertised heavily with flyers, focusing on local issues what the IWY could do for women. In order to attract as many men and women as possible, some organizers highlighted studies on the needs of homemakers and farm wives, while others focused more explicitly on women's rights under Oklahoma law and the issues women still faced in the state. One topic in particular, the ERA, was always left out of the highlighted topics up for discussion. Advertisements for every meeting always made one thing clear: all

voices were wanted. One flyer stated, "The regional meetings are for rural and urban women of *all* racial and ethnic groups, religions, ages and incomes."[34]

Local meetings encompassed a number of topics and brought together women of various backgrounds, including many ERA opponents, and they carried on quite smoothly. In a few areas, including Ardmore, the meetings were advertised a few days or just hours ahead of time to local conservative organizations by the leaders, and members were encouraged to attend in a sort of watchdog role. One woman claimed her local Eagle Forum chapter warned her that the Ardmore meeting would include a discussion of "homosexuals in schools." After sitting through the meeting, the woman was a bit annoyed that nothing so "sensational" was ever brought up. Overall, attendee evaluations were fairly positive. The meetings were small, usually consisting of twenty to sixty participants, two committeewomen from the commission, and presenter (which was sometimes one of the committee women). While many of the attendants expressed that they could not afford to take off work, travel, or secure childcare for Oklahoma IWY conference, committee women recorded their concerns regarding the issues and encouraged them to apply for an assistantship through the committee that covered travel fees as well as childcare. This was how a majority of the Oklahoma Women's Conference spent their allotted funds from the national commission.[35]

Held in Stillwater, the Oklahoma Women's Conference lasted three days. Organizers began the conference on a hopeful note. The opening program read, "Our diversities give us strength, our common concerns give us unity."[36] The first two days ended peacefully with the

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[34] Oklahoma International Women's Year (IWY) Coordination Committees, Regional Meeting for Women, in Preparation for the Oklahoma Women's Meeting, n.d., folder Oklahoma Meeting, box 3, National Women's Conference Collection, VC (emphasis in the original).
[35] Oklahoma International Women's Year (IWY) Coordination Committees, News Release: Pre-Registration for Oklahoma Women's Conference Underway, May 9, 1977, folder Oklahoma Meeting, box 3, National Women's Conference Collection, VC.
[36] Leader and Hyatt, *American Women On the Move,* 44.

over 500 attendees agreeing to make the ERA a priority of the meeting. On the last day, when delegate nominations and resolutions were scheduled for a vote, the conference atmosphere transformed overnight. Between 1,300 and 2,000 people showed up and crammed into the Student Union at Oklahoma State University where the meeting was held. The newcomers, who were mostly evangelical Christians and STOP ERA members, were allowed to participate because they were registered Oklahoma voters. The anti-ERA women watched the few men they had come with attentively. When a resolution was up for a vote, the men would raise their hands, clothed in red gloves, and the women would vote accordingly. The newcomers to the meeting voted down almost every presented platform, and succeed in securing many of their own as delegates to the national conference.[37]

The OK-ERA and Oklahoma Women's Political Caucus (OKWPC) members in attendance were both dismayed and fearful of their safety with the arrival of the new guests. Although activists on both sides of the ERA had met at television tapings or passed each other in the halls of the capitol, this was the first time the opposing sides met directly over the issue that divided them. OK-ERA leader Ann Savage recalled the event: "…we could feel tension, the hate, it was nasty, it was frightening. And then, all of a sudden, we saw these big-bulky men were walking up and down the [aisles]. I remember I called Bob, my husband, and was like, 'Can you come up and be our protectors?'" Harriet Guthrie also had a similar experience at the meeting, stating, "I felt hated. I had never felt hated before." Many of the planned speakers became uneasy about giving their presentations to the new crowd. One unnamed women confessed to Savage and the others that she was too afraid to give her speech, muttering, "I can't

[37] Interview with Janice Drieling, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, April 17, 2009, Red Dirt Women and Power Oral History Project, Women's and Gender Studies Department, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma (hereafter Red Dirt Women Oral History); Interview with Harriet Guthrie, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, April 17, 2009, Red Dirt Women Oral History.

do it." Trying to mend the situation, Savage asked for volunteers to replace the woman, but the group fell silent. "No one was really saying anything about it and suddenly this woman stepped up and she said 'I'll do it,'" Savage recalled. The brave woman was Sister Mary Luebke, a nun and avid ERA supporter.[38] In response to the disruption and take over of the conference, two hundred pro-ERA men and women walked out, hoping to halt the meeting and any progress those against the amendment were making. In the end, all twenty-two chosen delegates for the national conference were anti-ERA representatives.[39] Janice Drieling, the nationally appointed delegate to the conference and head of the meeting, spent thirteen hours on the stage trying to manage the event.[40]

ERA activists in Oklahoma were highly affected by the tense showdown that occurred at the state's IWY conference, with many now more concerned with the conservative ascendancy than their disagreements over feminism and the image of the movement. As in Nevada, not all Oklahoma ERA proponents were sure if they considered themselves feminists or even activists at all. While leaders like Representative Cleta Deatherage argued that the ERA was moderate and unaffiliated with other women's issues or feminism, other Oklahoma activists were not in agreement, and resented the attempt by "western feminists" to disconnect the amendment with feminism. Now, after every national conference delegate nominated from the state was actively campaigning against the ERA, this no longer seemed as important. As one woman, Kathryn Compton Smart of Oklahoma City, wrote to the *Oklahoma Journal*, "Merchants of venom effectively killed the conference. But they did not represent the Oklahoma woman... Being nice and hoping equality will somehow happen because it's just right hasn't worked...So Listen Up [sic], all you antis. I've been pushed too far. I'm going to fight back. I'm throwing my lot in with

[38] Interview with Ann Savage, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, April 6, 2010, Red Dirt Women Oral History Project.
[39] Debbie Camp, "Delegates will 'speak out' at conference," *Tulsa World*, November 3, 1977.
[40] Interview with Harriet Guthrie, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, April 17, 2009, Red Dirt Women Oral History Project.

NOW, the YWCA, and anyone else in this city who [sic] is pro-women's rights. Thanks for helping me decide."[41] After being railroaded by STOP ERA and other conservatives, ERA supporters left the Oklahoma Women's Conference much more united than they were before.

Utah State Women's Conference, June 24-25, 1977

From the outside, the promotion of Brigham Young University professor Jan Tyler to be chair of the Utah IWY coordinating committee did not seem controversial. As an expert in child development and active LDS member, Tyler could not easily be labeled "anti-family" or a "feminist"- a label she did not claim. She did, however, openly support the ERA, which made her an excellent compromise in the eyes of the national IWY committee hoping to attract the input of both conservative and liberal women in Utah.[42] Despite Tyler and others' careful planning and hopes for unity, they could not anticipate the fourteen thousand Mormon men and women who would attend the Utah conference and vote down every plank in the proposed "Plan of Action."[43] When the dust settled and all of the elected fourteen Utah delegates to the national conference were opposed to the ERA, activists in support of the amendment had a choice to make. In the face of this showing by the LDS Church, many amendment supporters, some of whom were Mormon themselves, decided to push on and grow louder. Even though they had been steamrolled at their state conference, Utah pro-ERA activists attended the national conference as delegate-at-large or just as spectators, united in a showing of support for the amendment and other women's issues. Unfortunately for the many ERA supporters in the West

[41] Leader and Hyatt, *American Women On the Move,* 52.
[42] John M. Crewdson, "Mormon Turnout Overwhelms Women's Conference in Utah," *New York Times,* July 25, 1977.
[43] Leader and Hyatt, *American Women On the Move,* 49.

who would join them there, the Utah conference would also foreshadow many of the issues that were to come in Houston.

Tyler worked tirelessly to put together a politically and geographically diverse state committee, although it remained largely white and middle class. Katie Dixon, a member of the Republican State Committee, worked closely with Tyler in organizing the state conference budget and setting up local "mini" meetings before the end of June like other western states. On March 24, 1977, the Utah IWY committee held a press conference at the Utah State Capitol announcing the state conference meeting on June 24 and 25, as well as forty-eight smaller meetings across the state in order to obtain a wider variety of input concerning women's issues in Utah and opinions on the national recommendations. Most of the meetings had low attendance and little controversy. Yet as June approached, this would drastically change.[44]

After receiving direct instruction from Ezra Taft Benson, Council of Twelve apostle and future president of the LDS Church, Relief Society President Barbara Smith went into action. Benson was not only powerful within the Church, but also politically connected.[45] In an attempt to encourage more involvement in the upcoming Utah Women's Conference from LDS women, both Benson and Smith approved letters and information packets on the conference and many of the issues on the agenda. The packets focused on the ERA specifically, with opinion articles from *Deseret News*, the First Presidency's official statement declaring the ERA a moral issue dangerous to traditional family values, statements against the amendment by Smith herself and

[44] Susanna M. Grua, "History of the Utah IWY Conference, Held at the Salt Lake Palace, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 24-24, 1977," folder 1, box 8, International Women's Year Collection, J. Willard Marriott Library Special Collections, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter UU); Interview with Susanna Mae Grua by Kathryn MacKay, Eloise McQuown, and Gregory C. Thompson, March 31, 1977, Women in Utah Politics Oral History Project, UU.

[45] For more on Ezra Taft Benson's work to solidify Mormonism with conservatism, see Matthew L. Harris, *Watchman on the Tower: Ezra Taft Benson and the Making of the Mormon Right* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020) and Andrea G. Radke-Moss, "Women and Gender," in *Thunder From the Right: Ezra Taft Benson in Mormonism and Politics*, ed. Matthew L. Harris (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 178-207.

Elder Boyd K. Packer, and an excerpt from a Benson speech. It stated "we suggest that you urge members of the Church, as citizens of this great nation, to join others in efforts to defeat ERA."[46] These letters and packets also encouraged each ward to send a minimum of ten women to the state conference as "registered participants" and at least one "capable woman" that could speak on behalf of the group. Although the packet asked readers to look over the articles and "inform themselves" on the pressing issues, it ended with a call for women to "vote for the correct principals." This left little to the imagination concerning the church's intentions.[47]

While the packet's instructions were clear, the LDS Church displayed some public concern that encouraging specific political viewpoints in the name of the church was problematic. In a follow up letter, Smith herself wrote "our approach apparently made some feel that they could contact Relief Society sisters with our tacit approval and imply that their information was Church-sanctioned. When we read that the name of the Relief Society or the Church was being used, we asked that this be stopped. We did not want to affirm any particular strand either actively or by implication."[48] Yet by providing church members with anti-ERA articles by members in authority, this "problem" should not have come as a surprise to Smith and others. In a time when women's leadership roles within the Church were dwindling and women were at risk of losing control of the Relief Society itself, the pressure for LDS women to both perform their duty and capitalize on the power they had left raised the stakes even higher.[49] One woman, Lou Ann Stoker, was appalled when her fourteen-year-old son informed her that he and

[46] Lou Ann Stroker to Sonia Johnson, letter and copy of the IWY packet from Relief Society President to All Regional Representatives in Utah, n.d., folder 1, box 7, Sonia Johnson Collection, UU.
[47] Relief Society General Presidency to All Regional Representatives in Utah, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, June 3, 1977, folder 4, box 7, International Women's Year Collection, UU; Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, p. 4, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU: John M. Crewdson, "Mormon Turnout Overwhelms Women's Conference in Utah," *New York Times*, July 25, 1977.
[48] Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, p. 12, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[49] For more on the changing role of women within the LDS Church and its relation to the ERA debates, see Neil J. Young, '"The ERA Is a Moral Issue': The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment," *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (September 2007): 623-44.

other boys had spent their time at a church meeting putting together the Utah IWY informational packets for mailing to all families in the ward. The Bishops argued that this was not a direct encouragement by the church itself, as the copies, envelopes, and stamps were all paid for by private citizens that also happened to be church members.[50] Others too, like Janath Cannon, Counselor in the General Relief Society, argued that this was not a violation of church and state or an abuse of church power because these packets were not exclusively sent to Mormon women only, but other women's religious organizations in Utah. Cannon stated, "The presidency became convinced that the convention provided an excellent means for Mormon women to become more involved and informed... No specific opinions were encouraged."[51] This "encouragement" by church members—in the name of the church—only increased as the conference approached, with many making their presence and stance against the ERA widely known at the few local meetings on the agenda.

In response to this call to action by their church, LDS women began organizing in their specific wards. Two major conservative Mormon organizations concerned with the Utah IWY conference also formed: Let's Govern Ourselves and Conservative Caucus. Both focused their attention on getting their own members on the nomination list of delegates to the National Women's Conference. Rumors began to spread of possible organized voting fraud, intimidation of attendees, a lesbian "takeover" of the convention, and even the use and "distribution of knives" by the liberal attendees. In order to combat this, Let's Govern Ourselves encouraged women to register and attend the state meeting and nominate their friends to run as delegates. At the meeting in Provo, one woman reported that Amy Valentine, a member of the Relief Society

[50] Lou Ann Stroker to Sonia Johnson, letter and copy of the IWY packet from Relief Society President to All Regional Representatives in Utah, n.d., folder 1, box 7, Sonia Johnson Collection, UU.
[51] Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, pp. 3-4, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.

General Board, told the meeting that she was voting against all the national resolutions. She also argued that, "Barbara Smith took the same position but couldn't say so publicly" and was "letting it be known through the General Board meetings."[52] The organization submitted forty-two delegate nominations, but only four received approval from the Utah IWY committee.[53]

Conservative Caucus members also made a showing at the Provo meeting, as well as the meetings in Highland and Ogden. Director of the organization, Dennis Ker, informed attendees that he had spoken directly with Barbara Smith. One woman reported that at the Ogden meeting "they passed out the Phyllis Schlafly and anti-ERA material and generally told us how to vote against all the national resolutions and the state IWY committee resolutions, too."[54] He employed a similar tactic at the Highland meeting, reading from *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* and declaring his interest there as "a concerned parent of five children and an official in the LDS Church."[55] Another woman recalled, "I attended a meeting in Kearns where they tore the national IWY book in half- sort of an anti-IWY ritual, I guess."[56] Overall, the encouragement of ten members from each ward by church authority equated to at least an expected 7,000 Mormon women in attendance at the Utah IWY meeting. When the conference convened on June 24, almost 14,000 women and men had registered, twice the number of registrations of any other state meeting in the country. Mormon women outnumbered non-Mormons ten to one.[57]

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[52] LDS woman, anonymous, on the Let's Govern Ourselves meeting in Provo, Utah, n.d., Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, p. 2, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[53] Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, p. 7, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[54] LDS woman, anonymous, on the Conservative Caucus showing at the Ogden meeting, n.d., Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, pp. 2, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[55] Jennifer L. Holland, "Salt Lake...is Our Selma": The Equal Rights Amendment and the Transformation of the Politics of Gender in Utah" (Masters Thesis, Utah State University, 2005), 56; Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, p. 11, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[56] LDS woman, anonymous, on the Conservative Caucus showing at the Kearns meeting, n.d., Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, p. 4, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[57] Susanna M. Grua, "History of the Utah IWY Conference, Held at the Salt Lake Palace, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 24-24, 1977," folder 1, box 8, International Women's Year Collection, UU; John M. Crewdson, "Mormon Turnout Overwhelms Women's Conference in Utah," *New York Times*, July 25, 1977.

The Salt Lake Palace in Salt Lake City was chaotic on the morning of June 24th, 1977. The Utah IWY committee was not nearly prepared or could have prepared for the thousands of men and women streaming in. As the registration rose in the previous weeks, the committee requested multiple times for more booklets and copies of the official resolutions so that each participant could study them, but the national committee was never able to send them enough. This added to the confusion, distrust, and anger of many of the participants. Journalists accentuated the feeling of division by asking women inside the conference, "Which side are you on?"[58]

When the Utah Women's Conference came to order and the workshops began, these "sides" were forced to face each other directly. Chairwoman Jan Tyler attempted to have an orderly and even-handed debate on the resolutions by was having a representative of each side of an issue included as a workshop speaker, but things continued to unravel. In some workshops, speakers took turns debating an issue and then allowed the audience a chance to ask questions or respond, and things moved along cordially. Then, when it came time to vote, women and men not present for the workshop would pack the room and vote down the resolution. Numerous conference attendees reported that male church officials were using color-coded cards to direct women and men on how to vote, as had happened at the Oklahoma Women's Conference.[59] In others, the speakers were shouted down and unable to complete their presentations. During the presentation on diversity and bilingual education, one woman shouted, "Go back to Mexico," while in another workshop there was name-calling and charges of "lesbianism" directed at women who voted in favor of resolutions. Conservative women tore down a National Organization for Women booth, while others refused to leave that evening for fear that the "libs"

[58] Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, pp 1, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[59] Ibid., 12-3.

would pass measures without them.[60] At the most hotly contested workshop, the Equal Rights Amendment, Gloria Steinem and then Columbia Law professor Ruth Bader Ginsburg presented the benefits of the amendment, while Phyllis Schlafly represented those against approving the ERA as a recommendation to the national meeting. Not only was the ERA resolution overwhelmingly voted down, the workshop attendees began to raise their own recommendations unrelated to amendment that included dissolving the authority of the Utah IWY committee and a complete defunding of the IWY altogether. One group shouted a proposed reversal of women's suffrage. Although they were dismissed due to improper protocol for presenting resolutions, the atmosphere in the workshop was incredibly tense.[61] The chairwoman, after sensing "hatred," felt the need to justify her position: "I support the ERA with idealistic motives. I love my children and my husband."[62]

Perhaps the most important and controversial outcomes of the Utah Women's Conference were the actions of male participants and the complete rejection of every single national and state recommendation. Outside of voting instructions and color-coded cards, a group of LDS men argued on the conference floor the first day of the meeting, demanding the conference schedule be changed so that the "important issues" be dealt with first. They suggested a whole new line up, with the discussion of the workshop report on minority women's issues in Utah at the bottom of the list. Conference goer Louise Bolin Hawkins reported that, upon learning of this snub, the "entire minority women's caucus walked out of the conference."[63] Conservative Caucus leader

[60] Louise Bolin Hawkins, "Report on the Utah IWY Conference," p. 8, folder 5, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU; Holland, "Salt Lake...Is Our Selma," 56-8.
[61] Utah IWY Coordinating Committee, ERA Taskforce Minutes, folder 12, box 4, International Women's Year Collection, UU; ERA Workshop, Motion 3, June 25, 1977, folder 2, box 4, International Women's Year Conference Collection, UU.
[62] Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, pp. 21-2, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[63] Louise Bolin Hawkins, "Report on the Utah IWY Conference," p. 7, folder 5, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.

and Mormon Bishop Dennis Ker made his presence known at the Men in the Women's Movement workshop. Omar Kadar, a professor at Brigham Young University, served as moderator for the workshop and, seeing the chaos of other workshops earlier in the day, presented resolutions he was sure conservative and liberal attendees could agree on, namely how to limit the sale of pornography and the building of more domestic violence shelters for Utah women and children. For both resolutions, Ker held up his yellow card and each resolution failed miserably, 100 to 15. Baffled, Kader asked Ker why he and the other Mormon attendees would vote against such measures. Ker replied that the feminists could not be trusted, and that they would surely "pervert" any measure passed by the conference.[64]

Although later Ker apologized to Kadar and some protections for domestic violence survivors did pass the following day, the overall divisiveness of the conference remained. Every single federal proposal, even those aimed at helping children, vulnerable mothers, economic inequality, and family violence, all failed by at least 7,000 votes. In order to pass *something*, each proposal was reread and reworked, line-by-line, so that pieces of recommendations could be included at the national conference.[65] It was not that the overwhelming majority of Mormon women and men did not agree with these issues, it was that they thought those issues were connected in some way with the ERA and the host of political ills that had come to be associated with it: reproductive rights, gay rights, expansion of the federal government, and the waste of taxpayer dollars. One attendee wrote to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, "We were not voting against the issues or the programs. We were voting against federal intervention and funding."[66] In fact,

[64] Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, pp. 20-1, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[65] Emma Lou Thayne, "Women need to reach across the Valley, try again," *Deseret News,* September 13, 1977; Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, pp. 15-6, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU; Holland, "Salt Lake... Is Our Selma," 61.
[66] Anonymous, Letter to the Editor, "On the IWY Conference," Salt Lake Tribune, 1977, folder 15, box 7, International Women's Year Conference Collection, UU.

many of the measures being voted down already had support from the church, including public and private funds for battered women. The church's official stance on abortion, which made allowances for cases of rape or incest, was also voted down. Mormon and non-Mormon women alike seemed baffled by this, remarking, "How can they vote against any child care facilities and then vote that women who are heads of families on welfare had to go out and work?"[67] Even Belle Spafford, a member of the Utah IWY coordinating committee and former General President of the Relief Society, could not call the conference to order. On stage she urged, "the time is now when the individual women in every nation is [sic] called upon to think clearly, uninfluenced by propaganda, and to act with discretionary judgment in relation to current demands."[68] When it came time to vote on and elect delegates to the National Women's Conference in November, not much changed. Eighteen of the nineteen delegates were Mormon, white, middle-class, from urban areas, and registered Republicans. Despite this clear violation of the diversity of delegates mandated in the bylaws of the IWY's public funding, the delegate slate remained.[69]

Once the Utah IWY meeting adjourned, the debate over the conference and the role of the ERA continued in the media. Asking for responses to and first-hand accounts of the conference, the *Salt Lake Tribune* received several hundred letters, which it published in a "Letter to the Editor" series. One LDS attendee charged that the church had exposed the conference for what it really was, a "collectivist, leftist movement that endorses abortion, federal daycare centers, the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexual marriages, and other favorite liberal causes." Other

[67] Louise Bolin Hawkins, "Report on the Utah IWY Conference," pp 6, folder 5, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.
[68] Emma Lou Thayne, "Women need to reach across the Valley, try again."
[69] Jan Tyler to Utah Women's Conference Attendants, "The Voice of Womankind," June 26, 1977, folder 2, box 8, International Women's Year Collection, UU; Linda Sillitoe Report on the Utah IWY Conference, p. 17, folder 4, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU; Louise Bolin Hawkins, "Report on the Utah IWY Conference," pp. 3, folder 5, box 2, Utah Women's Issues Collection, UU.

Mormon women expressed disappointment with how members of their church behaved or expressed concern for what this political involvement would mean for the future.[70] One wrote, "I don't question the right of Sister Smith to get women involved in the conference, however it is disconcerting to witness the ease by which extremist groups, particularly the Birch Society, have been able to gain control of the flock."[71] Another was more blunt: "From what I know of Conservative Caucus in our area, it is a refined name of 'John Bircher.'"[72] On the whole, a majority of the women sending in letters seemed disappointed at the missed opportunity to actually discuss women's common issues and connect with one another. While one group of 100 women and men started an inter-faith study group on women's issues after the conference, most conferences attendees left more radicalized to one side or the other.

Utah's IWY leaders hoped to bring women together under common, mainstream, and largely middle-class issues, but, instead, the conference served as a demonstration for the growing Christian Right values and vast reach of the Mormon Church.[73] Encouraged by the strong showing at the Utah Women's Conference, the LDS Church replicated this plan in other Mormon-heavy states. Martha Sonntag Bradley argues, "The IWY conference in Utah offered evidence of how efficiently women could be rallied to further the church's political objectives, the key being to call on them to defend home and family, to which they responded with fierce determination."[74] Inspired by their success, the church's Public Communications branch printed packets similar to those given out before the Utah conference and distributed them in Mormon-heavy states that had yet to hold their IWY meeting. Barbara Smith herself attended the Hawaii

[70] Anonymous to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Letter to the Editor, June 30, 1977, folder 15, box 7, International Women's Year Conference Collection, UU.
[71] Anonymous to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Letter to the Editor, July 11, 1977, folder 15, box 7, International Women's Year Conference Collection, UU.
[72] Anonymous to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Letter to the Editor, June 26, 1977, folder 14, box 7, International Women's Year Conference Collection, UU.
[73] Holland, "Salt Lake...Is Our Selma," 54.
[74] Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums*, 138.

Women's Conference after the success in Utah.[75] In all, nine state conferences, including Utah and Oklahoma, experienced a conservative take over, with Mormon influence reported in Washington, Virginia, Florida, and Nevada. "Church women," bussed in at times by the thousands, were "taking direction from grass-roots pulpits."[76] Most importantly, the LDS Church and other New Right groups set their sights on the IWY National Women's Conference in November.[77]

International Women's Year Conference, November 18-21, 1977, Houston Texas

On the morning of September 29, 1977, a few hundred women gathered, as they had 129 years before, outside of the small church in Seneca Falls, New York. There, Maya Angelou read her tribute to the Declaration of Sentiments, titled "A Declaration to American Women: To Form a More Perfect Union." The text as well as a torch was presented to a group of runners in shorts and IWY t-shirts as they prepared to begin the first leg of the 2,600-mile journey to Houston, Texas, where the IWY National Women's Conference would begin in just two months. Along with the scrolled Declaration and cheers from the small crowd, the women quite literally carried the torch.[78]

The relay of torchbearers made their way south steadily towards the Sam Houston Coliseum where, on November 19, they found another, much larger crowd. The final three relay women, all from Houston, represented a diverse city and nation; they included a Latina, white, and African American woman. As the three women neared the convention center's block, influential women's rights leaders-- Billie Jean King, Betty Friedan, Liz Carpenter, Lady Bird

[75] Beverly Creamer, "Orders from the top led to Mormon push," *Honolulu Observer*, July 11, 1977.
[76] Vera Glaser, "Women's Year: Peril on the Right," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 23, 1977.
[77] John Crewdson, "Mormon Turnout Overwhelms Women's Conference in Utah," *New York Times*, July 25, 1977.
[78] "Runners are carrying torch to women's conference here," *Houston Chronicle*, September 29, 1977.

Johnson and others-- joined the procession and the torchbearers on their way to the National Women's Conference. Inside, an estimated 2,000 elected delegates from around the country and another 18,000 or more spectators awaited them, along with the national commissioners Maya Angelou, First Lady Rosalyn Carter, former First Lady Betty Ford, Representative Martha Griffiths, LaDonna Harris, Coretta Scott King, and actress and activist Jean Stapleton. Former congresswoman and Houston native Barbara Jordan gave the keynote address, and soon after IWY Commission Chair Bella Abzug called the historic conference to order.[79]

[79] United States, National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, *The Spirit of Houston: The First National Women's Conference: An Official Report to the President, the Congress And the People of the United States* (Washington: National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, 1978).

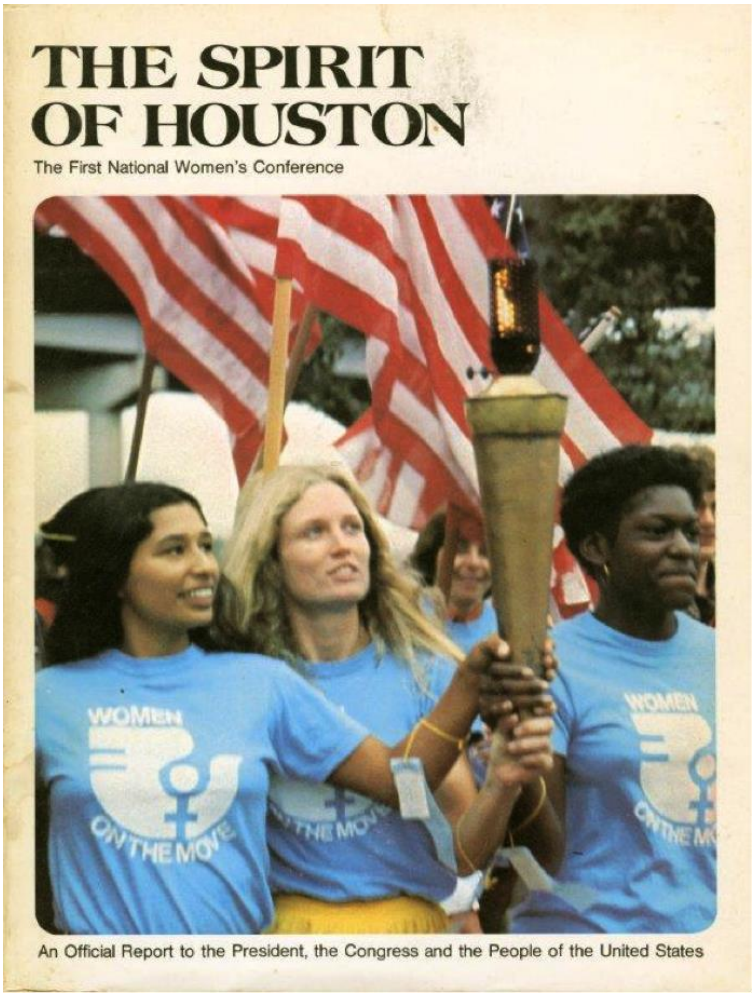

Figure 4.2. Cover photo of the *Spirit of Houston,* the official report given to President Carter and Congress from the National Women's Conference. Women carried this torch from Seneca Falls, NY, to Houston, TX, for the opening ceremony. Courtesy of the University of Houston Digital Library.

For the next three days the IWY delegates, which included women from every walk of life, debated one another on the twenty-six resolutions approved by the state conferences, and debated the opposition through the press.[80] A majority of the resolutions were not radical or even all that new, but they urged major reforms for already established federal and state programs aimed at helping women and children. Women's organizations, labor unions, social and charity groups, and political organizations found common ground. Yet, from the very beginning of the

[80] Lucy Komisar, "With the Women at Houston: Feminism as National Politics," *The Nation*, December 10, 1977.

workshops and floor debates, the delegates who opposed to the ERA and "immoral" issues drew attention inside and outside of the conference. By the end of the weekend, the Pro-Family women would claim victory over the feminists at the conference, and, in the long run, this would be true. But the massive showing of conservative women at the national conference also further solidified the bonds that western ERA activists had built through their state meetings.

Inside the conference conservative women protested any support for the ERA and any other "minority feminist" issues. Claiming themselves as the representatives of most American women, social conservatives wore yellow ribbons (some even with the title "Majority" printed on them) and tried to vote down every single measure.[81] The delegates from Oklahoma in particular opposed almost every resolution, including involvement with "battered women, child abuse, child care, education, rape, international affairs, and homemakers," stating the measures were socialist.[82] Instead, the Oklahoma delegates brought their own resolutions to the table, including opposition to gay rights, the rights of unmarried couples, and access to contraceptives and abortion for minors. One resolution called for the "recognition of homemaking as the most vital and rewarding career for women," but did not show any interest or support for the recommendations proposed to protect homemakers. During the debate over reproductive rights, those claiming to be the "Majority" held up large signs of fetuses while chanting "All we are saying is give life a chance." Their voices were quickly overwhelmed by the counter-chant "Choice, choice, choice!"[83] Despite these numerous interruptions, chair Bella Abzug worked to keep order and allow both sides of every issue heard on stage. Overall, anti-ERA delegates accounted for fifteen to twenty-five percent of the national delegates; they used the meeting to

[81] Komisar, "With the Women at Houston: Feminism as National Politics."
[82] Susan Witt, "Sooner women say proposals 'too socialistic,'" *Tulsa Tribune*, February 21, 1977.
[83] Komisar, "With the Women at Houston: Feminism as National Politics."

gain publicity for their cause and they were ultimately successful at derailing most discussions about the amendment.[84]

As disputes escalated inside the conference, conservative protestors picketed, blew horns, and shouted "Immoral Women's Year!" outside of the coliseum. Before heading to her own counter conference, Phyllis Schlafly stood with the protestors. She told one reporter that she would have had even more STOP ERA and conservative supporters in attendance to protest the conference but many of them did not "want to leave their families for an entire weekend and spend it with a group of lesbians. They're very offensive to us."[85] Her forces, which Schlafly suggested were a select few representing many, protested almost every IWY measure, arguing that the only women being represented inside were "lesbians and libbers."[86]

The tensions outside of the conference continued to amp up as more spectators arrived. Grand Dragon of the Mississippi United Klans of America, George Higgins, and Grand Wizard Robert Shelton were also outside of the National Women's Conference taking questions from reporters. Earlier that year, Higgins bragged that the Women's Auxiliary of his branch had infiltrated the women's movement and the Mississippi IWY meeting. This was probably not far off. The Mississippi Women's Conference elected seven male delegates to attend the national meeting, and not one African American man or woman. One of the only women elected was Dallas Higgins, the Grand Dragon's wife.[87] Grand Dragon Higgins told reporters, "If Congress can authorize $5 million for that [IWY state and national conferences], then it should give $5 million to the Klan to fight for segregation." He added, "While we are an independent

[84] Debbie Camp, "Delegates will 'speak out' at conference," *Tulsa World*, November 3, 1977; Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 245.
[85] Carol Kortage, "Schlafly Says Women's Movement is Dying in Anti-Feminist Surge," *Detroit News*, September 1, 1977.
[86] Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 245.
[87] Carolyn Kortage, "Schlafly Says Women's Movement is Dying in an Anti-Feminist Surge," *Detroit News*, September 1, 1977; Dick Behn, "Antifeminism: New Conservative Force," *Ripon Forum*, October 1, 1977.

organization, we work with any group with a Christian base. And yes, we are working with some Christian groups."[88] Grand Wizard Shelton suggested that his branch had also infiltrated the women's movement three or four years before. Another group protesting the conference was the Christian Defense League, whose leader, Reverend James K. Warner, insisted that his group was not the Klan, but was there to protest the infiltration of Jews into the US government and the IWY conference.[89]

Figure 4.3. National Women's Conference attendees confront the Ku Klux Klan. Carol Bartholdi and Marilyn Mock, "Far right street fight," *Daily Breakthrough*, November 21, 1977.

[88] Betty J. Blair, "Klan 'Spies' Plan to Disrupt Feminist Parley," *Detroit News*, September 1, 1977.
[89] Carol Bartholdi and Marilyn Mock, "Far Right Street Fight," *Daily Breakthrough*, November 21, 1977.

Figure 4.4. National Women's Conference attendees confront the Ku Klux Klan. Carol Bartholdi and Marilyn Mock, "Far right street fight," *Daily Breakthrough*, November 21, 1977.

Attendees entered the conference through a crowd of racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, and hateful protestors, and when they did, something changed. The racial and geographical tensions between the western delegates in particular seemed trivial when they faced thousands of STOP ERA members protesting the conference.[90] Historian Marjorie J. Spruill argues that, despite the negative attention, the National Women's Conference pushed the women's movement "beyond its white, middle-class base," smoothing out some tensions between Republican and Democrat, radical feminists and liberal women, and allowed the voices of minority women, lesbians, older women, and disabled women previously pushed to the fringes the chance to be heard.[91] Janice Kissner, vice president of the National Council of Negro Women remarked on the unity she felt that weekend: "A certain kinship, a certain closeness has evolved. I felt hostile before toward a lot of white women. After coming here and seeing that they had sympathy and empathy, I have a

[90] Interview with Frankie Sue Del Papa, by Roselyn Richardson-Weir, 2007, UNR, 9.
[91] Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn," 74-5.

feeling of sisterhood... I think we have many more things in common than I thought we had."[92] Another conference goer, Lucy Komisar, recalled that "the proposals were adopted with little dispute among the feminists, partly because of a real consensus and partly from fear of playing into the hands of the Right by delaying action and not reaching a vote on all the motions."[93] Utah pro-ERA activists showed up outside the conference with buttons and signs, a show of solidarity for their feminist sisters inside and to dispel the myth that all Utah women were against the conference. One Arizona delegate, Judy McCarthey (White Mountain Apache), was heavily pregnant and experiencing contractions. Her doctor told her to stay home, but she refused to miss the conference. She insisted on representing her state and voting on behalf of her sisters. After going into labor when she returned home from Houston, McCarthey named her baby girl ERA in honor of the movement.[94] Vice chairwoman of the Republican National Committee and Arizona native Mary Crisp, along with other leading Republican women Elly Peterson and Geridee Wheeler were just 3 of over 100 delegates who also participated in the Republican Caucus and actively supported many the conference's recommendations. Even Eagle Forum members and yellow-ribbon ladies found themselves supportive of a few proposals. Although instructed to vote each one down, some found themselves sympathetic to increased resources for battered women and children or discriminatory inheritance laws. Judy Cline, a Kentucky woman brought to Houston with a busload of protestors, told one reporter "I don't think I'd be in favor of the minimum wage being abolished...And we need some more legislation on protecting battered wives and rape victims." Another conservative "Majority" woman voiced her support for the resolution calling for attention and more resources for the disabled, stating,

[92] Komisar, "With the Women at Houston: Feminism as National Politics."
[93] Ibid.
[94] Leader and Hyatt, *American Women On the Move*, 96.

"anything we can do for them is just not enough."[95] These women did not represent the majority of conservatives who came to protest a perceived abuse of taxpayer funds, big government, and feminism, but they do show the transformative potential of the conference. The conference built relationships between many of the women and men in attendance that weekend, sometimes between women on both sides of the political aisle.

Figure 4.5. Baby ERA with Gloria Steinem at the White House in March of 1978, a few months after the conference. Photo by Diana Mara Henry, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[95] Komisar, "With the Women at Houston: Feminism as National Politics."

Across town at the Houston Astros Arena, Phyllis Schlafly told her alternative "Pro-Family Rally" audience a straightforward story of good and evil. Between 10,000 and 20,000 attendees, representing Schlafly's Eagle Forum, STOP ERA, Conservative Caucus, Daughter of the American Revolution, the John Birch Society, and the National Council of Catholic Women, among others, listened and cheered for their lineup of speakers. In the crowd, men and women held signs that read, "IWY: International Witches Year," "We're Ladies, Not Libbers," and "Up with God, Down with Gays."[96] The conservative conference called for "the defeat of the ERA and a return to God, family, and country." One reporter described the scene as militant. "They thunderously shouted 'Yes!' to resolutions calling for a constitutional amendment against abortion, the defeat of the ERA, a ban on federally-funded child care centers, and laws which would prohibit homosexuals from teaching in schools," they wrote. The "Pro-Family" attendees then compared government childcare centers to Hitler youth camps.[97]

[96] "National News Media Gives Little Attention to Massive Pro-Family Rally in Houston," *Battle Lines*, January 1978.
[97] "ERA foes will continue battle," *Tulsa Tribune*, February 21, 1977.

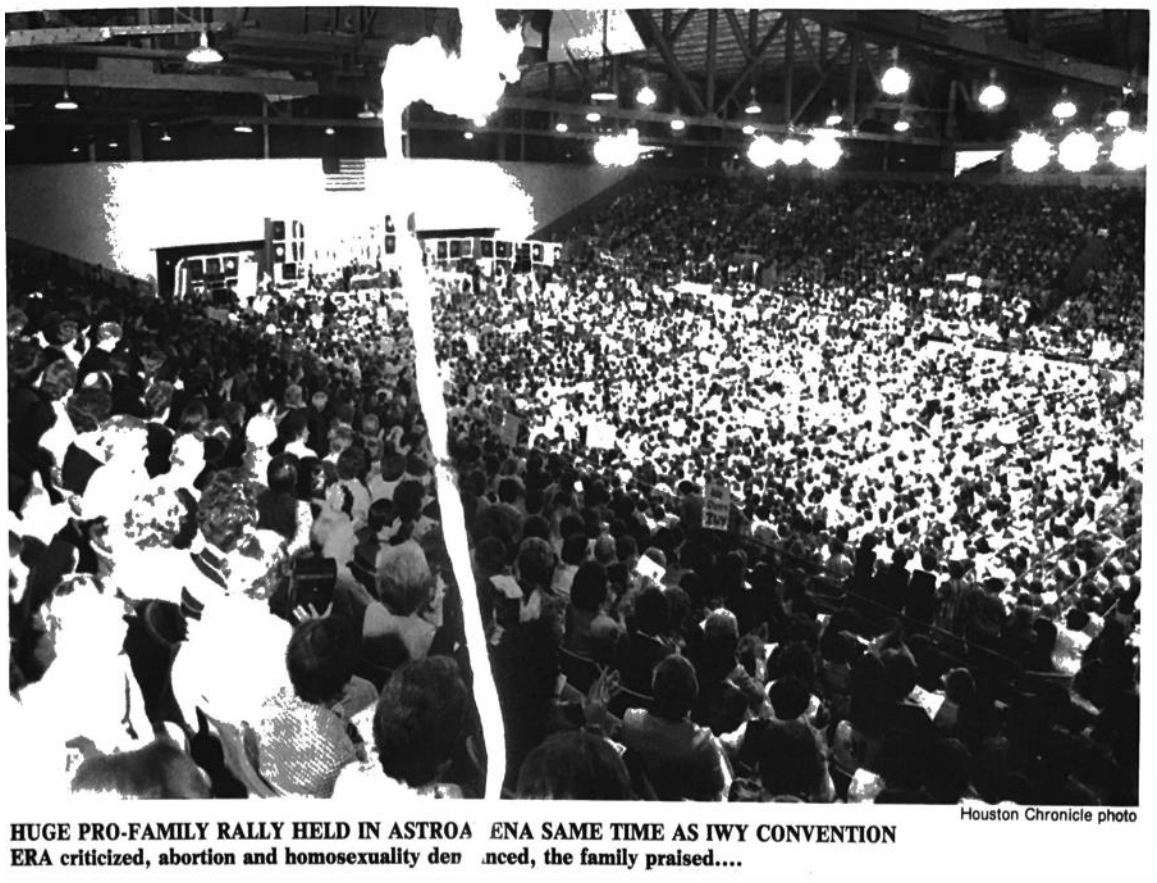

Figure 4.6. Photo of the packed Pro-Family Rally. "National News Media Gives Little Attention to Massive Pro Fam Rally in Houston, *Battle Lines*, Jan 1978.

As the keynote speaker, Schlafly focused not only on the dangers of feminism and "Big Sister Government," but made the ERA the centerpiece of these problems.[98] "It is a sex-neutered world the ERA proposers are trying to build. They want all people equal. But, if you do this, it will take the wife out of the home and away from her family." She also added that gay couples would benefit from the ERA because it would legally allow them to marry and adopt children. To undermine the National Women's Conference, Schlafly continued to question the validity and fairness of the state conferences, claiming that only "one-tenth of one percent of all American women" were allowed to participate. According to her, this meant conservative women were

[98] Citizens Review Committee for the IWY, News Memo #3, folder Minority Report, box 1, National Women's Conference Collection, VC.

drastically underrepresented at the meetings. Yet in another statement, she boasted about the great number of conservative delegates representing their interests at the National Women's Conference at that very moment. She claimed one-fourth of attendees were a part of the conservative coalition.[99] Another speaker at the Pro-Family Rally, Representative Robert Dornan of California chastised first ladies Rosalyn Carter, Lady Bird Johnson, and Betty Ford for attending the conference, claiming that it was "a great tragedy" to see the women "standing by Bella Abzug and by their presence approving sexual perversion and the murder of unborn babies." He ended his speech with a resounding message: "We've got a message. Rosalyn Carter- You went to the wrong rally!"[100]

To counter the National Women's Conference Plan of Action, the Pro-Family rally submitted their own call to action, which was based on "logical, progressive, Judeo-Christian principals which are in keeping with the principals upon which the United States of America was founded." It had three major planks. The first was tax limitation and an end to non-essential government spending. Second, it argued that women should demand that the federal government be reduced back to only its primary functions, with "defending our children" being the most important. Last, women of America should demand an end to legal abortion.[101] While only a one-day rally, Schlafly accomplished quite the press event, grabbing headlines for conservative women and the New Right while, at times, overshadowing the historic National Women's Conference.

[99] "National News Media Gives Little Attention to Massive Pro-Family Rally in Houston."
[100] Ibid.
[101] "National News Media Gives Little Attention to Massive Pro-Family Rally in Houston."

Despite the opposition, the National Women's Conference succeeded in passing all twenty-six resolutions recommended by the national commission and approved by the states, many of which contained highly progressive calls to action for President Carter and Congress. The Reproductive Freedom Resolution in particular suggested abortion coverage by private insurance and federal funds, more family planning and sex education in public schools, government funded childcare, and an end to involuntary sterilization. The conference was also truly a breakthrough for gay rights in the nation, as the delegates also put forth the Sexual Preference Resolution, which advocated for an end to discrimination based on sex and sexual orientation and the end to all state laws prohibiting sex between same-sex consenting adults. Many historians argue that these ideas and resolutions were either too far removed from the more moderate politics of the late 1970s or too far ahead of their time to gain real traction with the American public. The at least momentary success of the conference galvanized the opposition.[102] As one self-proclaimed "foe" of the conference told the *Tulsa Tribune*, "This will make us more determined to become involved in political campaigns across the state and nation now," after being encouraged by Schlafly to return home and "have their own battles."[103]

Before the national conference, each state conference in the West's unratified states experienced some sort of controversy. In Arizona, anti-ERA conservatives reacted to the state conference afterwards instead of showing up at it. In Nevada, the organizers avoided discussing the amendment in workshops in hopes of keeping the peace. Oklahoma and Utah's meetings experienced complete takeovers by the Christian Right, which now included enthusiastic LDS women. Forced to face each other on the public stage for, in many instances, the first time, liberal and conservative western women battled over a host of issues but most especially the

[102] Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn," 74-5.
[103] "ERA Foes Will Continue Battle," *Tulsa Tribune*, February 21, 1977.

Equal Rights Amendment, which had become a representation of radical feminism and federal expansion. Pro-ERA women inside states like Utah and out were shocked at the power and turnout of the highly mobilized conservative women. But through this common enemy, women from the center-right to the left came together at the state and national conferences.

These events, although highly influential for the women who participated, would ultimately provide further ammunition and a national platform for STOP ERA and its conservative and religious affiliates, especially the LDS Church. The anti-ERA movement and the broader Religious Right used the national IWY meeting's official "Plan of Action" to discredit the women's movement and the ERA in the remaining unratified states. The National Women's Conference was a success in the eyes of the organizers and a majority of those who attended, but the long-term rifts between liberals and conservatives created that weekend would have a lasting impact in each of the unratified western states, and for years to come.

Chapter Five

"Down With ERA!":

The ERA Countdown Campaign and the Conservative Ascendency in the West, 1978-1982

"The national leadership for ERA is Eastern, urban, certainly not Mormon, and probably not Baptist."

– Lee Ann Walker, Equal Rights Coalition Utah

"I come to you tonight wearing my bra and my wedding band."[1] These were the surprising words of Arizona Senator Sandra Day O'Connor when she was pressed publicly about her support for the Equal Rights Amendment. The highly respected politician was not actually interested in discussing her undergarments with the press. Instead, this statement sent a clear message in the 1970s: O'Connor was not a radical, bra-burning feminist, but a proudly married and dignified woman. Distancing one's ERA support from feminism had become a common tactic amongst Arizona leaders and others across the West by the end of the 1970s. While opponents of the ERA had long tried to discredit activists by challenging their commitment to their churches and families, the press solidified those New Right claims during and after the IWY National Women's Conference. Returning home from the conference, pro-ERA activists found even more opposition and backlash from their communities. While a majority western ERA supporters held

[1] Joan Biskupic, *Sandra Day O'Connor: How the First Woman on the Supreme Court Became Its Most Influential Justice* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 4; Carol S. Palmer, "Challenging Tradition: Arizona Women Fight For the Equal Rights Amendment" (Masters Thesis, Arizona State University, 2007), 71; Anne Dingus, "Sandra Day O'Connor," *Texas Monthly*, September 30, 1998.

on to the unity they found at the conferences, this unity was fragile. Some, like O'Connor, continued to promote the amendment as mainstream. Many others decided to change course, uniting with moderates and radicals and publicly protesting for the ERA's ratification. These divisions intensified in 1981 and 1982 when the remaining four unratified western states became the sites for some of the ERA's biggest challenges, which included boycotts, rescinding ratification votes, and lawsuits against the amendment's deadline. Each of these issues further stressed the relationships between those fighting for the ERA on the ground, the majority, and the few remaining mainstream proponents in leadership.

Western and national ERA leaders hoped that, despite the New Right's appearance at the conference, western women could return home and ratify the amendment. While shaken by the large number of STOP ERA members at the National Women's Conference, most pro-ERA conference attendees returned home rejuvenated, united, and ready to finish up the ratification campaign. They were not fully prepared for the effect that the national media coverage of conservative opposition to the IWY and the ERA had on their own communities. Activists faced divisions in their neighborhoods, churches, schools, and even their own homes, as the ERA was now, more than ever, perceived as a social threat. Activists in each state experienced unique challenges posed by the growing New Right. In Utah, Nevada, and parts of Arizona, the LDS Church worked overtime to prevent the ERA from gaining any real support in each state legislature. Events in Oklahoma and Arizona contributed to a national debate as to whether the ERA's deadline extension and some of the ratification votes were valid.

In the last years of the ERA fight, amendment supporters also underestimated the influence that outsiders, from both pro- and anti-ERA groups, would have on the campaign. National ERA leaders and even local, western leaders of the movement seriously misjudged how

to approach westerners in their final campaigns to ratify the amendment. Groups like the National Organization for Women (NOW) often floundered in these years in their attempts to relate with westerners. Western feminists across the region, fed up with the intrusion of national organizations and the refusal by some local leadership to acknowledge issues outside of the ERA, became more bold and radical in their activism. A combination of clumsy activism from outsiders and widening divisions between a few local ERA leaders and the masses of grassroots activists contributed to the failure to ratify the ERA.

Backlash

When western ERA activists returned home from the National Women's Conference, they were ill prepared for the battles to come. For most of the attendees, the conference became a defining moment in their lives. These women made life-long connections and had the opportunity to hear issues, discuss national political topics, and vote on the things that mattered to them. Activists also achieved a few important victories immediately after the conference, including an extension of the amendment's deadline for ratification. Still buzzing with excitement from the monumental event, many did not understand that it was conservative attendees who had gained the sympathy of many Americans who heard about the event in the media. The New Right quickly capitalized on this sympathy. While the National Women's Conference was supposed to be a positive, uniting event for women of all geographic and political backgrounds, the tension surrounding the ERA and its polarization of liberals and conservatives instead led to bad press for the amendment and a strong motivation for western legislatures to avoid the ERA.

Immediately after the conference, ERA supporters did have some reason for hope. Despite the show of opposition, the amendment was overwhelmingly approved for the platform produced by the National Women's Conference and remained a priority for activists. In the weeks and months immediately after the conference, as 1977 turned to 1978, ERA supporters in the West and around the country still believed that the conference would provide the final push to get three more states to ratify. Most importantly, the ERA remained a part of both the Republican and Democratic parties' national agendas. Arizonan Mary Crisp, co-chair of the Republican National Committee, continued to vocally support the amendment and encouraged Republican state legislators to do the same.[2] Groups like the "GOP Feminist Caucus" in Minneapolis campaigned with the activists from unratified states.[3] In July 1978, over one hundred thousand ERA supporters from around the country marched to the United States Capitol in a show of support.[4] The National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) and the League of Women Voters (LWV), both non-partisan organizations, continued their energetic campaigns for the ERA. One study produced by the NWPC's Republican Women's Taskforce in 1978 labeled both Arizona and Oklahoma as states with a great possibility of ratifying before the original deadline, March 22, 1979.[5] Fortunately for ERA supporters, this date would change. On October 10, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed House Judiciary Resolution 638 into law, which extended the ERA's ratification deadline to June 30, 1982.[6] Activists now had more than two years to get the required 38 states.

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[2] Mary Crisp to the Honorable John J. Rhodes, John R. Rhodes Papers, folder 9, box 19, Arizona State University Special Collections (hereafter ASU).
[3] "Republican Women's Taskforce," National Women's Political Caucus newsletter, May/June 1979, folder 1, box 3, Maureen Murphy Papers, ASU.
[4] "ERA Attracts 100k to Washington March," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 10, 1978.
[5] Arizona Women's Political Caucus newsletter, May 25, 1978, folder 1, box 2, Maureen Murphy Papers, ASU.
[6] H.J.Res.638 — 95th Congress (1977-1978). https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/house-joint-resolution/638.

Instead of catapulting the ERA over the finish line, the National Women's Conference pushed Phyllis Schlafly onto a national stage. Still reveling from her Pro-Family Rally, Schlafly utilized her publicity to promote fear of the ERA throughout the nation. "It's a sex-neutered world the ERA proponents are trying to build," she remarked to one *Battle Lines* reporter.[7] She later added that the amendment would benefit homosexuals because it would make it legal for people of the same sex to marry. In another interview, Schlafly argued that even more of her supporters would have attended her rally in Houston, but "our women didn't want to leave their families for an entire weekend and spend it with a group of lesbians. They are very offensive to us."[8] Divisive and homophobic comments from Schlafly and her allies only escalated after the women's conference. In the same interview with *Battle Lines*, Representative Robert Dornan, a Republican from California, echoed Schlafly, calling the conference attendees, including former first ladies Betty Ford and Lady Bird Johnson, "sexual perverts" and supporters of the "murder of unborn babies."[9] Ultimately, Schlafly decided on a three-point call to action for anti-ERA activists, which were based in "logical, progressive Judeo-Christian principles."[10] Her three goals were, "a limit on taxation and non-essential government spending," a return to government performing its primary duty which was "defending our children," and a law outlawing abortion.[11] These central pillars of the New Right, while having nothing directly to do with the ERA, cemented the connection between the amendment and the broader feminist movement. The ERA had become an issue that conservatives could use to critique liberalism and sexual modernity.

[7] "National News Media Gives Little Attention to Massive Pro-Family Rally in Houston," *Battle Lines*, January 1978.
[8] Carolyn Kortage, "Schlafly Says Women's Movement is Dying in Anti-Feminist Surge," *Detroit News*, September 1, 1977.
[9] "National News Media Gives Little Attention to Massive Pro-Family Rally in Houston," *Battle Lines*, January 1978.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

There was an immediate backlash against the ERA and feminism after the conference in the unratified states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah. Activists faced opposition in a variety of ways, many of which overlapped and some that were unique to each state. In Nevada, a NOW-led economic boycott would enrage citizens across the state, leading to a state referendum on the amendment. To the east, Utah women felt the full weight of this backlash from the LDS Church as it flexed its political muscle once again against the ERA. Events in Oklahoma and Arizona contributed to a national debate as to whether the ERA's deadline extension and some of the ratification votes were valid. In each of these crucial moments, western ERA supporters lost in the long run.

The Nevada delegates returned home from Houston in 1977 to a poisonous political atmosphere. Anti-ERA activist Karen Hayes, who attended the National Women's Conference as a spectator, visited LDS churches across the state giving talks and distributing leaflets on the "agenda" of the meeting. One line read, "This conference was a pre-packaged and pre-written media event staged to sell to the Congress the radical women's platform for social revolution in the United States," adding that the conference was "pro-ERA, pro-abortion, and pro-lesbian."[12] Local media coverage of the conferences was also negative, and centered on attacks on the state from feminist outsiders.

Nevada media focused especially on the NOW Economic Boycott Campaign, which targeted the three remaining unratified states with the most tourism dollars: Illinois, Florida, and Nevada.[13] NOW wanted organizations and companies to move their company meetings and conferences out of unratified states as a show of solidarity and to push state legislators towards

[12] Central Stake House handout on the National Women's Conference, January 15, 19778, folder ERA and the National Women's Conference, box 6, Renee Diamond Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada (hereafter UNLV).
[13] "Economic Boycott: ERA Momentum Pinches Nevada, Other Tourist States," *Las Vegas Sun*, n.d., folder 11, box 4, Mary Gojack Papers, University of Nevada-Reno Special Collections (hereafter UNR).

ratification. The American Psychology Association and the National Legal Defense Trial Lawyers Association were some of the first organizations to move their Las Vegas conferences out of state.[14] In just a month, over forty national organizations pledged to take their dollars elsewhere. While Las Vegas did lose money because of the boycotts, the loss was pennies compared to what Chicago and Miami claimed to suffer. Some estimates suggest that those two cities alone lost over $20 million, while others argued this estimate was much too high.[15]

Though there was little evidence that Nevada lost substantial tourism dollars, newspapers across Nevada continued to report on the boycott's supposed devastation. One reporter in particular, Dick Odessky, included emotional tirades about NOW and the Nevada conference in his weekly column in *The Valley Times*. A week after the National Women's Conference he wrote, "Supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment, intent on blackmailing our state legislators into ratifying the highly controversial measure, have robbed our economy of $15 million in documented revenue along with unknown millions more," basing these numbers solely on the general downturn of convention center hotel room reservations. He added, "Since burning their bras had no effect other than to make them sag, our friendly, neighborhood women libbers have decided to try to make all of Nevada sag along with them." Getting graphic, he accused Nevada delegates of "baring their flat, hairy chests" in support of the boycott, adding, "to classify the Nevada representatives [to the National Women's Conference] as stupid and shortsighted would be complementing them."[16] Odessky's sexist attack perfectly captured some of the problems ERA supporters hoped to address with the amendment, that perhaps equality under the law might advance how women were portrayed in the media. The unsubstantiated rumor that the NOW

[14] Ibid.
[15] Michael Hirsley, "ERA boycott costing city $15 million," *Chicago Tribune*, October 23, 1977; "Economic losses rise in states lacking ERA," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 13, 1977.
[16] Dick Odessky, "No Lift for Libbers When Tourism Sags," *The Valley Times*, December 1, 1977.

boycott hurt the Nevada economy became so prevalent that Attorney General Robert List filed suit against NOW in 1978, although it was rejected.[17] Chairwoman of Nevadans for ERA Cynthia Cunningham criticized the attorney general's actions and argued that this movement was the nation's way of calling out Nevada legislators for stopping an amendment that a majority of Americans wanted passed.[18]

Tensions were high before the Nevada and national conferences, but nothing prepared progressive Nevada women for the personal and widespread attacks that they faced after. Senator Jean Ford recalled this moment with sadness, stating, "We were right back in the middle of a big political fight in Nevada. There was a lot of conflict, and it became more and more evident that there were quite strong differences in opinion on what the answers were to the role of women."[19] Ford was afraid to call herself a feminist during this time, worried that it would hurt the image of the amendment. Senator Sue Wagner also remembers this moment of realization after the conferences. Wagner's supporters from the LDS Church were told to cut ties with the legislator or risk reprimand. One Mormon woman, an attorney and neighbor of Wagner's, testified in the state assembly on behalf of the ERA. Later in the halls of the capitol, the woman's mother began hitting Wagner with her purse and told her to leave her daughter alone.[20] The return of Nevada women from the conferences coupled with the boycott rumors also led to violence, the destruction of personal and NERA property, and wire-tappings of the organization's office.[21]

This vitriolic debate came to a head in Nevada in 1978. The national attention from the Nevada Women's Conference, the National Women's Conference, and the NOW boycott had

[17] Caryll Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics: The Equal Rights Amendment Ratification Campaign, 1973-1981" (PhD Dissertation, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, 2010), 181.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Interview with Jean Ford by Victoria Ford, 1988, UNR, 210.
[20] Interview with Sue Wagner, by Victoria Ford, 2000-2003, UNR, 146-7.
[21] Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics," 292.

entirely defined the political identities of Nevada women based on their support or dismissal of the ERA. For Sue Wagner, being a liberal or conservative depended on how one thought the government should spend tax dollars. Being fiscally conservative is what attracted her to the Republican Party in the first place. Yet, as Wagner learned, the definition of liberal and conservative changed drastically during this period. She recalled, "Because I was for the Equal Rights Amendment and I was for the choice issue-I was perceived as a liberal.... It was these two issues that defined me forever as a way liberal Republican...and they defined not just me, but other women, as well."[22] A host of identities were restructured around this single issue.

Nevada legislators had had enough of ERA, and decided to put the amendment to a public non-binding referendum vote. NERA, STOP ERA, and the LDS Church all campaigned heavily to sway Nevadans in the lead up to the vote. The weekend before the referendum in November of 1978, over 2,000 LDS members gathered in Las Vegas to organize a final canvass against the ERA.[23] The next day, Mormon temples all over the state held special "assemblies" to educate members about the amendment. The Church boasted that, with the help of nearly 9,000 LDS women, every Mormon in Las Vegas was reminded to vote; the next day, 95% of eligible Mormon voters showed up at the polls.[24] The power of the Church's contacts and organization, coupled with support from Schlafly's members, was too much to overcome for pro-ERA women in Nevada. Even though a clear majority of state voters had supported the amendment in the years before the conferences and boycott uproar, on November 7, 1978, the citizens of Nevada rejected the ERA in a landslide two to one defeat.[25]

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[22] Interview with Sue Wagner, by Victoria Ford, 2000-2003, UNR, 146-7.
[23] Neil J. Young, '"The ERA is A Moral Issue": The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment," *American Quarterly* 59 (September 2007): 623-644, 636-7.
[24] Ibid., 637.
[25] Ibid.,134, 116; Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics," 116.

The fallout from the National Women's Conference would have devastating consequences in Utah as well. Members of the women's organization Algie Ballif Forum (formerly Alice Louise Reynolds Women's Forum) wrote a letter to President Spencer W. Kimball himself, detailing instances of discrimination against pro-ERA LDS women after the conference. Confronted by her ward Relief Society president, one unnamed single woman was asked about her thoughts on the women's movement. When the woman claimed to be sympathetic with some aspects of the movement, she was promptly released from her position teaching Social Relations at her church. The woman was also told that her job as the assistant to a prominent conservative politician could be in "jeopardy."[26] Church officials asked another Mormon ERA supporter, tasked with speaking at a banquet, to discuss with her audience of young women the importance of choosing marriage rather than a career. When the woman pushed back, she was replaced.[27] Another member of the Algie Ballif Forum, Loneta Murphy, had her temple recommend rescinded for supporting the ERA and giving public speeches on the topic.[28] Her Stake President, Kevin H. Hoopes, of the Provo Edgemont South Stake, wrote to Murphy, "My counsel to you…is not to support the ERA or the organizations which promote its passage but rather to reroute your efforts through other channels which are compatible with the counsel of the prophet of the Church."[29] He ended the letter with his recession of her temple recommend, which Murphy had requested in order to attend her child's upcoming wedding. He

[26] Algie Ballif Forum to President Spencer W. Kimball, March 10, 1979, folder 21, box 1, Algie Ballif Forum Collection, University of Utah Special Collections.
[27] Ibid.
[28] For LDS members, having a recommend, or "a card attesting to the holder's adherence to church principles and practices" is necessary to enter the temple and participate in certain church activities and ceremonies, including weddings, or "eternal marriages." Receiving a recommend from the church involves a standard questionnaire to determine one's worthiness. For more information on temple recommends and the most updated list of questions, see Peggy Fletcher Stark, "What the New LDS Temple Recommend Questions Say," *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 6, 2019 and "Church Updates Temple Recommend Interview Questions" *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Newsroom*, October 6, 2019.
[29] Stake President Kevin H. Hoopes to Loneta Murphy, January 31, 1979, folder 21, box 1, Algie Ballif Forum Collection, University of Utah Special Collections.

explained, "I regard this issue as part of a person's commitment to sustain the prophet and therefore as related to a person's worthiness to participate in the temple ceremonies." According to Stake President Hoopes, Murphy's support of the amendment was proof that she did not obey President Kimball, the prophet, and therefore could not participate in this church event. In their letter, the Algie Ballif Forum urged President Kimball to issue a statement that made clear that "Mormon feminists are not to be subjected to intimidations, rejection for church assignments, loss of employment, and psychological excommunication."[30] The letter went unanswered by the Church.

Not only did President Kimball not directly respond to the LDS women's request that the Church end the demonization of ERA supporters, he reasserted the Church's condemnation of the amendment. The prophet released an official statement regarding the amendment, similar to the one issued in 1976. In this reaffirmation, announced August 24, 1978, President Kimball stated that the Church did not support the ratification of the ERA because it was a "moral issue" rather than a political one.[31] Going a step further, the First Presidency also argued that the amendment, if ratified, would be detrimental to women and the family for several reasons. First, the ERA would encourage a "unisex society" and "the practice of homosexual and lesbian activities." Secondly, the ERA did not take into account the biological and emotional differences between men and women. The statement ended with the Church's strong opposition to the extension of the amendment's deadline for ratification. Like Schlafly, the LDS Church's public statements against the ERA became more strident after the National Women's Conference. The

[30] Algie Ballif Forum to President Spencer W. Kimball, March 10, 1979, folder 21, box 1, Algie Ballif Forum Collection, University of Utah Special Collections.
[31] First Presidency, "Reaffirmation of the First Presidency's position of ERA," August 24, 1978, item M243.3 F527r 1978, Secure Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter LDS Archive).

LDS Church, like the rest of the anti-ERA coalition, escalated its tirades against gay marriage, abortion rights, and "unholy" gender roles in these last years of the ERA debate.

This 1978 statement led many pro-ERA Mormon women to fear not just the loss of their jobs, church positions, or temple recommends, but also excommunication. This fear would soon be realized for at least one. Dr. Sonia Johnson, co-founder and president of Mormons for ERA, had continued her public campaign against the Church's involvement in ratification efforts. Through numerous public speeches, Johnson highlighted the tightening patriarchal grip of the Church and criticized the dwindling personal and political agency of members. Most damning to her opponents was her testimony before the US Senate subcommittee hearing over the extension of the ERA's deadline in August of 1978. There, before the nation, Johnson faced the young senator and powerful LDS leader Orrin Hatch. She criticized the Church's role in the ERA debate and emphasized the sexism prevalent in the church. While women were "exalted" for their roles as wives and mothers, Johnson pointed out that they were not encouraged to explore their interests or career options, allowed to manage their own organization (the Relief Society), offer prayers in sacrament meetings, or even christen their own children.[32] She told the senators, "The leaders of the church, though great men and good men, are nonetheless mortal and not yet like our Father in the fullness...They have chosen instead to tamper with our agency, to attempt to compel us to do what they believe is right through the use of fear and of their considerable authority."[33] Johnson added, "Unlike the Lord, they are afraid now, having taught us correct principals, to let us govern ourselves." Senator Hatch was not pleased with Johnson's testimony or her negative representation of the LDS Church in a national forum. At the Senate hearing, he pushed back at Johnson's assertions and replied, "I'd be surprised if the Mormon women who

[32] Statement of Sonia Johnson, Mormons for Equal Rights, Hearing on the ERA Extension, Committee of Human Resources, Washington, D.C., August 4, 1978, 30-1, Relief Society Clippings, LDS Archives.
[33] Ibid., 29-30.

are for the ERA would constitute one-tenth of one-tenth" of the ladies in the Church.[34] While membership numbers for Mormons for ERA were quite small compared to the nearly million members of the Relief Society, Johnson argued that many LDS women sent her group donations and encouragement without officially joining, as they feared retribution. Outside of the debates over membership, Sonia Johnson had gone where no Mormon feminist had before her. She questioned the authority of the church hierarchy and the prophet's revelations in plain view of other members. It did not help that the eyes of the nation were also upon her. This face off between Senator Hatch and Johnson occurring in the US Capitol foreshadowed the end of Johnson's relationship with the LDS Church.

One year later, on December 5, 1979, Sonia Johnson was excommunicated from her lifelong church. After seven hours of trial testimony before an all-male panel, the LDS Church issued its verdict. Bishop Jeffry H. Willis of Johnson's ward in Sterling Park, Virginia, listed three reasons for the excommunication. The panel agreed that Johnson encouraged LDS members and non-members to "oppose church programs," disregarded the authority of church leaders, and presented false doctrine.[35] Johnson's bishop told her, "Your testimony and public speeches evidence in spirit that you are not in harmony with Church doctrine concerning the nature of God and the manner in which he directs his Church on earth."[36] Her support of the ERA was tactfully not included, at least not directly, as a reason for their decision, but this did not matter. Johnson's public support for the ERA and challenge of the LDS Church's anti-ERA political action had everything to do with her excommunication.

[34] Cheryl Arvidson, "Hatch, Mormon Feminist Clash at Hearing Over ERA," *The Washington Post*, August 5, 1978.
[35] "Bishop's Decree: Excom Feminist Leader," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 6, 1979.
[36] Memorandum, Stake and Mission Presidents and Bishops- Washington, D.C. Area, to Julian C. Lowe, December 6, 1979, folder 7, box 9, Mormons for ERA Collection, Utah State University Special Collections.

After having the "Book of Mormon thrown at her," Johnson appealed her excommunication and continued to campaign for the ERA.[37] Thousands of LDS and non-LDS women across the country wrote her letters of support. Women within the church were shocked, and many appalled. Several women wrote to their bishops and asked to be excommunicated as a form of solidarity with Johnson.[38] Former White House aid Esther Peterson, a Mormon herself, stayed with Johnson throughout the trial.[39] Another ERA activist, Marilyn Warenski, appeared with Johnson in the papers and was listed as an "ex-Mormon" in one caption.[40] Despite having supporters around the country, Johnson's appeal was denied. Her requests to meet with or correspond directly with President Kimball were also denied.[41] Interestingly, the Church created a martyr in Johnson. Across the country at ERA rallies, activists held signs that read "You Can't Excommunicate Equality."[42] Mormons for ERA members from Arizona, California, Montana, Virginia, and Utah gathered in Salt Lake City for the annual Days of '47 parade in 1980 with "ERA Yes" balloons and a plane flyover banner that read "Sonia Johnson was Right." One year later, she was featured on the cover of the *Ms.* magazine with a four-page spread titled, "The Woman Who Talked Back to God." The publicity around her only increased when she released her autobiography, *From Housewife to Heretic*, in 1981 in the hopes of aiding the ERA's ratification.[43] For ERA supporters across the West, LDS and non-LDS, Johnson's experience

[37] "Irked by Sonia Johnson's E.R.A. Crusade, Church Elders Throw the Book of Mormon at Her," *People Magazine,* December 3, 1979.
[38] "Mormon Asks for Excommunication," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 1979; "Mormons Excommunicate ERA Supporter in Oregon," *The Washington Post,* February 15, 1980.
[39] "Irked by Sonia Johnson's E.R.A. Crusade, Church Elders Throw the Book of Mormon at Her," *People Magazine,* December 3, 1979.
[40] "ERA Boosted by Excommunication," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 9, 1979. For more on Warenski's, see Marilyn Warenski, *Patriarchs and Politics*: *The Plight of the Mormon Woman* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980).
[41] "LDS Deny Appeal By Sonia Johnson," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 30, 1980.
[42] Photograph, item 1, folder 3, box 1, Mormons for the Equal Rights Amendment Collections, Utah State University Special Collections (hereafter USU).
[43] Sonia Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic*; Mary L. Bradford, "All of Fire: An Interview with Sonia Johnson," *Dialogue Journal* April 1981, 2. https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V14N02_29.pdf

with fighting for equality and her subsequent punishment was something that many women could relate to in the late 1970s.

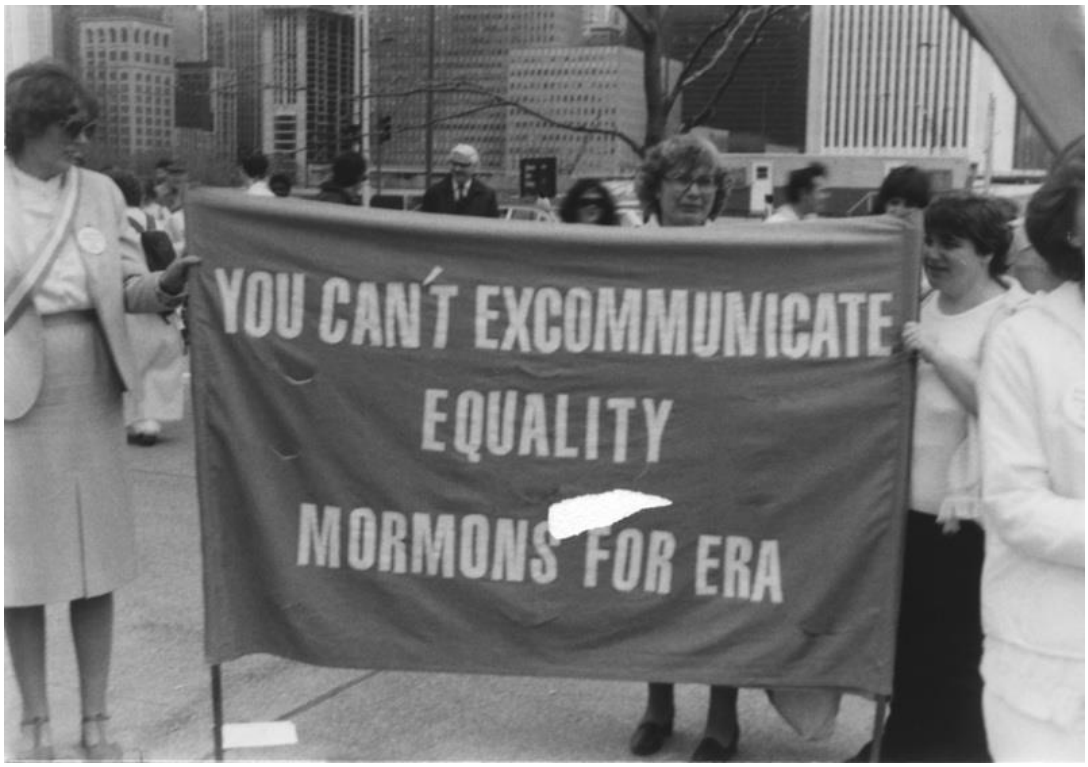

Figure 5.1. Women holding a sign, "You can't excommunicate equality, Mormons for ERA." Aileen H. Clyde 20th Century Women's Legacy Archive, J. Willard Marriot Library, University of Utah.

In Oklahoma too, anti-ERA activists returned from the conference in 1977 with a renewed commitment to discrediting the amendment and "women's libbers" in their state. An Oklahoma pro-family delegate from the conference, Grace Haigler, collected what she called "artifacts" from the conference to show Oklahomans exactly what the ERA represented and how their $5 million in tax dollars was spent. The presentation of these artifacts was simply called "the display." In one dramatic article, *Daily Oklahoman* journalist Nick Thimmesch explained what he saw in the "display":

> NOW and other militant women's "liberation" groups somehow thought that the ERA movement should also include militancy on behalf of abortion-on-demand, special rights for lesbians, and even "sexual independence" demonstrations featuring stimulated lovemaking between lesbians and exhibits of dildos and other apparatus a female can use alone.[44]

The so-called proof of the "gay agenda" and "socialism" actually came from the vendors outside of the conference and were not promotional materials or resolutions from the actual conference. All paying vendors were allowed to set up their own booths with merchandise around the arena; less than 10% of vendors were affiliated with lesbian or Marxist-inspired groups. A product of willful distortion and misrepresentation, the display was informally set up in the lobby of the Oklahoma State Capital in January of 1978 for the public to view. It was mounted just in time for the opening of the state legislative session. Those who flocked to see the "display" were outraged. Pro-ERA women from Oklahoma charged that it did not represent the conference at all, and that the items had to have been bought in some kind of sex shop.[45] No matter the provenance of the artifacts, the damage was done and the people of Oklahoma were left wondering if the ERA was a Trojan horse for abortion and lesbian rights. ERA opponents continued to sexualize women's rights activists, particularly lesbians, and this tactic continued to work. The pro-family's display was so successful in Oklahoma that Schlafly had it travel around the country. When shown to Kentucky legislators who had already voted to ratify the ERA in their state, they asked to rescind their vote three days later.[46] By 1982, the display had grown to over sixty sheets of poster board and had travelled to more than thirty states.[47]

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[44] Nick Thimmesch, "Supporters to Blame for ERA's Woes," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 6, 1978.
[45] Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002), 118.
[46] "Woman's Meet Materials to Be Displayed Here," *Tulsa World*, June 18, 1978.
[47] Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 248.

The Kentucky legislature's request to rescind its ERA ratification was not the first state to attempt to rescind their ratification vote or contest the extended ratification timeline; two western states had tested these political waters in the previous two years. In 1978, Idaho and Arizona both filed claims in federal court questioning the legitimacy of the ERA's deadline extension. They also argued that ratified states should have the ability to rescind their votes.[48] ERA activists in Arizona immediately went to work to fight these suits. League of Women Voters Arizona entered the filing as "amicus" in defense of the deadline extension and argued that the state had no right to bring the suit in the first place.[49] The organization argued that the Arizona legislature and the attorney general had no authority or business using taxpayer dollars to challenge a federal bill that had already passed allowing for the deadline extension. The Arizona Center for Law filed similar suits, citing "an unlawful expenditure of public funds."[50] The LWV Arizona, Women in Law organization at Arizona State University, and the Arizona Women's Political Caucus all signed amicus briefs with the Center.[51]

While organizing around these lawsuits, Arizona ERA activists also faced direct backlash against the amendment and the conference at the local level. For example, one returning anti-ERA delegate testified at an Arizona Eagle Forum convention that along with the ERA, the conference included workshops on the "Homosexual Revolution," humanism, and abortion. Leaders of the city of Mesa were so enraged by what they heard from Eagle Forum that they passed a city resolution against the ratification of the ERA in their state as well as the amendment's deadline extension. Conservative anger at the ERA would eventually lead to the

[48] See *State of Idaho v. Freeman* 529 F. Supp. 1107 (D. Idaho 1981).
[49] Jane Boren White for Mrs. Becky Moon, President of the League of Women Voters Arizona, to John D. Franklin and Ms. Susan Freeman, Lewis and Roca Law Firm, July 15, 1979, folder 9, box 1, Maureen Murphy Collection, ASU.
[50] Susan M. Freeman, Lewis and Roca Law Firm, to Ms. Jane Boren White, League of Women Voters of Arizona, August 8, 1979, folder 9, box 1, Maureen Murphy Collection, ASU.
[51] Ibid.

defunding of the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women in both Arizona and Utah. A real conversation on ratification now seemed hopeless.

The lawsuit challenging the ERA's deadline and the validity of ratification recensions did move forward, and into the court of LDS federal district judge Marion Callister. Judge Callister was a high-ranking official in the Church, a Regional Representative in the Apostle of Twelve.[52] Both NOW and ERAmerica filed recusal motions requesting the judge step down from the case because they charged he could not be impartial.[53] Five pro-ERA congressmen wrote an open letter urging the same.[54] As an LDS leader, Judge Callister knew well what the prophet thought about the ERA and its political and moral ramifications. In October 1979, the Justice Department asked Judge Callister to recuse himself as well, but to no avail.[55] Instead, the judge was relieved of his duties as Regional Representative in the Church. Two years later, when he handed down his decision, the fears of ERA supporters were realized. Judge Callister ruled that "Congress acted unconstitutionally" in 1978 when it extended the ratification deadline of the ERA. He also ruled that states had the authority to rescind their ratification of the amendment as it was "an action that Congress has never recognized."[56] Women across the West, including Mormon activists, balked at the decision. Shirley Wallace told reporters, "As a Mormon woman, I fear that my Church will go down ignominiously in history as the institution that thwarted efforts for justice for women in the 20th century."[57] In a show of both solidarity with other LDS women and to protest the Church, nine women chained themselves to the Mormon Temple in Kessington,

[52] Jonh P. MacKenzie, "The Judge Gave Up the Wrong Task," *New York Times*, January 29, 1980.
[53] ERAmerica Contributor Letter, May 1980, folder 5, box 11, Lucile Kaufman Papers, ASU; Ruth Marcus, "NOW Revives Attempt to Remove Mormon Judge," *National Law Journal* vol. 3, October 6, 1980, 8.
[54] Ruth Marcus, "NOW Revives Attempt to Remove Mormon Judge," *National Law Journal* vol. 3, October 6, 1980, 8.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Mary Thornton, "ERA Backers Launch Now-or-Never Drive," *Washington Post*, n.d., folder 10, box 10, Mormons for ERA Collection, USU.
[57] Press Release, "Women Protest Mormon Church Activities Against the ERA," Kensington, Maryland, folder 18, box 14, Mormons for ERA Collection, USU.

Maryland.[58] The Justice Department declared it would appeal Judge Callister's ruling if three more states ratified the ERA. If ratification failed, there was no point. For Idaho, at least on paper, the recension vote was successful. Relief Society President Barbara Smith gave an anti-ERA speech in the state just days before the legislature voted against its previous ratification.[59]

ERA Missionaries

As the ERA's deadline approached, supporters in the unratified states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah dealt with more negative national attention, first for their loss of official support from the Republican Party and then for divisions over strategy in the ERA Countdown Campaign. In the early 1980s Schlafly utilized her power and media presence to pressure Republican leadership to remove support for the ERA from the national platform. The prominence she earned in her national campaign against the amendment empowered Schlafly to challenge moderate Republicans and President Ronald Reagan. ERA supporters also suffered setbacks due to bad strategy from their own national leaders. As the ERA Countdown Campaign geared up, NOW sent paid members from all over the country to the remaining unratified states. While some locals appreciated the help, others became dismayed that they were not included in campaign plans in their own towns and cities, places they had often worked for years. Many locals were in disagreement with NOW's tactics as well, arguing that the organization lacked an accurate understanding of the region and its people. As the amendment's deadline approached, local leaders and activists on the ground also began to disagree. While some western leadership tried to portray the amendment as a mainstream, single-issue amendment, a majority of activists

[58] Michael McQueen, "ERA Supporters Protest Outside Mormon Temple," *Washington Post,* January 10, 1982.
[59] Jennifer L. Holland, "Salt Lake...is Our Selma": The Equal Rights Amendment and the Transformation of the Politics of Gender in Utah" (Masters Thesis, Utah State University, 2005), 41.

in western states embraced more radical tactics and publicly stood for other women's issues, including supporting reproductive rights and opposing violence against women.

In 1980, the ERA faced another setback when President Jimmy Carter lost his bid for reelection to Ronald Reagan. President Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, were both proponents of the amendment and had been instrumental in getting the ERA's deadline extended. President Carter had also recently appointed ERA supporter Sarah Weddington, the attorney who successfully defended the abortion rights of Jane Roe (whose real name was Norma L. McCorvey) in *Roe v. Wade* (1973), as his special assistant on women's issues. Running on a conservative platform and gaining the support of the New Right, Reagan became the first president since World War II to drop the Equal Rights Amendment from his agenda. Instead, he adopted what he called the "50 States Project" that hoped to "identify and change laws at the state level which discriminated against women."[60] To show his good faith to women, President Reagan also appointed several women to his cabinet and the first female Supreme Court Justice, Sandra Day O'Connor, who had supported the ERA in her earlier days as a state senator in Arizona.

Of course, Schlafly was not shy about disagreeing with Reagan on women's equality. "I think it's nice to have a woman on the Supreme Court. It's obvious that she got the job because she's a woman," she stated.[61] For years she had urged the Republican National Convention to remove the ERA from its platform. She advised leaders to remove it as a "harmony plank," or a way to keep the harmony among moderate and more far-right Republicans. At one point in 1980, after being ignored by the Chairman, Senator John Tower of Texas, Schlafly sent a letter to every

[60] Ronald Reagan, "Memorandum, October 1981," White House Staff and Offices, Elizabeth Dole Collection, folder ERA 3, box 26, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Archives, Simi Valley, California.
[61] Randy Ellis, "Opponent of ERA Finds Mixed Reception," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 17, 1982.

single Republican Convention delegate about the ERA's removal, around 1,000 letters.[62] Schlafly was also not completely satisfied with President Reagan's stances on women's employment and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. She boldly testified to the Senate Labor and Human Resources Commission against the EEOC's guidelines on sexual harassment in 1981, proclaiming, "men seldom make passes at virtuous women."[63] Schlafly won at least one important ally. President Reagan opposed the ERA, and this would have important ramifications for the amendment moving forward.

Despite losing support in the White House, ERA supporters across the country geared up for one final, all out push for ratification in the last year before the deadline. NOW led the charge, setting up task forces in the few remaining unratified states.[64] The organization prioritized Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah over unratified southern states. Despite an impressive LDS showing and anti-ERA backlash in the West, NOW still held out hope, largely based on mythologies of the Wild West and western progress. Jennifer L. Holland writes, "...NOW predicated their activism on a specific vision of the uncivilized West, by imagining a state full of imprisoned, gullible women, oppressed by backwards men."[65] Easterners perhaps could set them free. NOW set up Countdown Campaign offices in multiple cities in each state. Despite Utah in particular being one of the most hostile towards the amendment, the organization sent specific "ERA Missionaries" throughout the state, going door-to-door asking to speak to Mormons.[66] National president of NOW, Eleanor Smeal, thought their assistance in these states

[62] Phyllis Schlafly, "The ERA Plank in the Republican: The Facts and the Lessons," *Eagle Forum,* August 1980.
[63] Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 277.
[64] Clay F. Richards, "ERA could survive if…?," *Tulsa Tribune*, January 27, 1979.
[65] Holland, "Salt Lake...Is Our Selma," 97.
[66] Lena Zezulin, "An ERA Missionary in Utah," *Radcliff Quarterly*, March 1980, folder 18, box 14, Mormons for ERA Collection, USU.

could finally give the ERA the backing and support it needed and provide an opportunity to hit back at the strong LDS media blitz against the amendment.

Other national organizations pitched in to help in the Countdown Campaign as well. The National Women's Political Caucus fundraised for ratification through contribution mailers that encouraged supporters to donate according to "however much...equality is worth to you."[67] The League of Women Voters appointed Ellouise Schoettler ERA Campaign Director and raised million of dollars for ratification after holding a national conference on behalf of the amendment in 1980. Other groups took a more direct approach in their own campaigning.[68] ERAmerica held a national strategy session and bought radio ads in unratified states.[69] The group also worked with thirty-three major women's magazines, from *Vogue* to *Good Housekeeping*, to publish articles on the ERA from women in every state. The readership was an estimated 60 million people in total.[70]

During the final days leading up to the June 30, 1982 deadline, activists struggled to agree on how to best promote ratification. When Nevada activists brought in big names like Maureen Reagan, daughter of President Ronald Reagan, to speak on behalf of the amendment and testify before the legislature, STOP ERA leaders criticized ERA proponents for bringing in an outsider to influence local politics and "dupe" their fellow Nevadans.[71] These charges were, in many cases, ironic, as the most popular anti-ERA groups in these states were national Phyllis-Schlafly-led organizations that also relied on bringing in big-name speakers from out of state.

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[67] National Women's Political Caucus, ERA Fund Contributor Newsletter Update, February 23, 1982, folder 5, box 11, Lucile Kufman Papers, ASU.
[68] Ellouise Schoettler, oral history for Second Wave Album, uploaded June 12, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYlhNjB8Xlo
[69] ERAmerica, Contributor Letter, May 1980, folder 5, box 11, Lucile Kufman Papers, Arizona State University Special Collections; ERAmerica, Alert for Contributors, January 22, 1982, folder 5, box 11, Lucile Kufman Papers, ASU.
[70] ERAmerica, Press Release, October 4, 1979, folder 9, box 1, Maureen Murphy Papers, ASU.
[71] Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics," 130.

Yet pro-ERA activists also disagreed with national strategy. Women in the unratified West had long joined NOW and the National Women's Political Caucus chapters, but these had always been under the control of local members. Now, in some states, those locals had to vie with outside activists for control of their organizations.

One state where these tensions played out most clearly was Oklahoma, the only unratified state in the nation with a supportive governor, house speaker, and president pro tempore serving in its capitol. It was not the national figures that would influence Oklahomans, many local ERA supporters argued, but those who were for the ERA right there in the state. NOW opened ERA Countdown Campaign offices in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Norman, each with its own out-of-state leader and field coordinators. NOW put Ruth Adams in charge of the entire state of Oklahoma, even though Adams was from Indiana and had never lived in Oklahoma.[72] NOW tried to pay lip service to local leadership. The *Daily Oklahoman* reported the Norman ERA Countdown Campaign office would honor Hannah Atkins on its opening day November 24, 1981. This, at least, was something local and out-of-state ERA supporters could get behind, but this unity would not last long.[73]

[72] "ERA Office Open; Challenge Issued," *Oklahoma City Times*, November 30, 1981.
[73] "Equal Rights Amendment Plot Strategy," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 24, 1981.

Figure 5.2. ERA Countdown Campaign staff meeting at the ERA office in Oklahoma City, June 1982. Ruth Adams is located at the top right of the photo. Courtesy of Sara Werneke, granddaughter of Ruth Adams.

Because Oklahoma leadership had worked hard to portray the ERA as a mainstream initiative that was beneficial to the state, some local groups including the Oklahoma Women's Political Caucus (OKWPC) and OK-ERA had mixed feelings about the presence of NOW and the national attention it received. Religious coordinator Mattie Morgan was on the fence about the newcomers. She recalled some resentment between state and national groups, mostly over money. Wanda Jo Peltier was informed that NOW would be taking over the lobbying of legislators from the major metropolitan areas of Oklahoma, while her local group could work on the rural representatives less likely to flip on the issue. Many of the group members had been volunteering their time and effort for years, and resented outsiders with little experience in the

area getting paid to do the same work. NOW had funds to pay many of their field workers.[74] Fellow ERA activist Harriet Guthrie held similar feelings when NOW set up shop in the state: "They had money and resources and didn't understand Oklahoma at all, but at that point I don't think any of us understood Oklahoma."[75] Many pro-ERA activists were beginning to realize how conservative the state had become since the beginning of the debate in 1972.

In October of 1981, NOW began a "media blitz" throughout Oklahoma, buying radio and television advertisements to promote the ERA.[76] They also paid celebrities to fly in and endorse the amendment. Actor Alan Alda held a speaking tour across seven Oklahoma cities, and singer/actress Mary Kay Place held an ERA rally at the University of Tulsa. But as Peltier had warned, Oklahomans did not respond well to promoters. One woman wrote to the *Tulsa Tribune* angry at the spotlight NOW had put on Oklahoma. She argued that the state could make up its own mind and worried that her fellow citizens were not "thinking for themselves."[77] Many locals- both for and against the amendment- thought NOW was just trying to throw money at the amendment.

[74] Interview with Mattie Morgan, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, November 16, 2009, Red Dirt Women and Power Oral History Project, Women's and Gender Studies Department, University of Oklahoma (hereafter Red Dirt Oral History).
[75] Interview with Harriet Guthrie, by Julie Stidolph, April 17, 2009. Red Dirt Oral History.
[76] "OK Targeted for Extensive Media Blitz for ERA," *Oklahoma Times*, October 10, 1981.
[77] "Letters to the Editor," *Tulsa Tribune*, January 15, 1982.

Figure 5.3. Alan Alda speaking at a pro-ERA rally in Oklahoma. Ruth Adams, NOW ERA Countdown Campaign Coordinator for Oklahoma, is on the right. Courtesy of Sara Werneke, granddaughter of Ruth Adams.

Overall, NOW spent an estimated $200,000 on the ERA Countdown Campaign in just four states, including Oklahoma, with little to show for it.[78] The national groups also continued to exclude local leaders like Peltier from meetings and strategizing. Peltier was conveniently left off guest lists for conferences, and when she would show up and try to work with national leaders, she was ignored. With such marginalization, Peltier and the OKWPC lost its statewide influence and local credibility the organizations had worked so hard to create.[79]

[78] Associated Press, "ERA Forces Organizing," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 1, 1981.
[79] Interview with Wanda Jo Peltier Stapleton, by the author, February 29, 2016, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

In addition to pressure from outside Oklahoma, many homegrown activists were becoming dismayed at the singular focus on the ERA from the mainstream women's movement in Oklahoma. This sentiment grew as the amendment's deadline approached. Although Oklahoma activists had, for ten years now, tried to claim Christianity and motherhood for themselves, this strategy did not appeal to all ERA activists. Younger women in particular argued that this tactic was not working; many had watched since childhood feminist advocates fail to persuade the Oklahoma legislature to grant equal rights to women. Highly influenced by women's liberation groups, college-aged women in particular protested in ways that veered away from the mainstream image many Oklahoma feminists like Hannah Atkins and Cleta Deatherage had created. While the generation of ERA activists before them claimed their status as mothers and non-threatening women through ERA bake-offs and fashion shows, this new generation of activists did just the opposite.

OKWPC and OK-ERA members Jackie Kinney and Cynthia Hoyle started a new kind of protest, something they called a "guerilla theater group." Inspired by other chapters around the country, Ladies Against Women (LAW) became an outlet for University of Oklahoma students frustrated with the pace of politics in the state. LAW also served as a sarcastic, entertaining way to respond to the conservatives who still felt the need to tell women how to dress, when to speak, and the importance of a male escort.[80] Donning white gloves, dresses, pillbox hats, lace hankies, and the "Reverend Feelwell" as their leader and overseer, the fifteen or so members of LAW performed skits for different organizations around the state and also picketed at the capitol and other public events. In an interview from 2009, Hoyle elaborated on LAW, stating, "All of us were very involved and dedicated in our professional volunteerism or jobs, but we needed something else, and a part of it, I think, was a sense of celebration of the ERA, because it was

[80] Interview with Debbie Blasiar, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, April 13, 2009, Red Dirt Oral History.

getting very hard to be happy, positive, and joyous about it when people were being very negative and ugly."[81] The activists who made up LAW were looking for an outlet to express their frustrations with national and local leadership and their fears that the battle over the ERA was all but over in Oklahoma.

Making their public debut on March 30, 1982, during President Ronald Reagan's visit to the state capitol, LAW members Lee Agnew, Debbie Blasiar, Lonnie Colder-Agnew, Cynthia Hoyle, Mary Katherine Long, Linda Terrell, and Susan Wood, who all met at the University of Oklahoma, held signs that stated, "I'd Rather Be Ironing," "Truly Needy Women Should Get Married," "Protect Fathers From Child Support," and "59 Cents is Just Too Much!" The conservatively dressed ladies and the "Reverend" also sang to onlookers, "Social Security, what's that for? We'll get by scrubbing the floor!" Many spectators and even members of the press could not decide if the women were being serious or not, so the Reverend Feelwell decided to up the ante. He ended the demonstration by silencing the women and stating:

> The rally for Ladies Against Women was funded and sponsored by several local and national groups, including the National Association for the Advancement of Rich White Straight Men, the Vulture Forum, Mothers for World Domination, League to Protect Separate Bathrooms, Bedtime for Bonzo Anti-Evolution League, Voice of the Unconceived, and Future Fetuses of America.[82]

These protests upset many conservative Oklahomans, while others found the protestors humorous.

After drawing public attention at the capitol, members of Ladies Against Women ventured out to other events in Oklahoma City and Norman, showcasing their willingness to

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[81] Cynthia Hoyle in Ladies Against Women Interview, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, June 27, 2009, Red Dirt Oral History.

[82] "Ladies Show 'Love' for Reagan," *Oklahoma Free Press*, March 30, 1982; "'Ladies Against Women' Satire ERA Opposition with Hankies, Gloves," *Arkansas Gazette*, June 6, 1982; Cynthia Hoyle in Ladies Against Women Interview, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, June 27, 2009, Red Dirt Oral History.

push the boundaries of Oklahoma activism. At a Norman carnival put on by the Lion's Club, a few members of LAW noticed a game called the Titty Buster. Mary Katherine Long described the scene: "…it was pictures of women's heads over cardboard cut-outs of their chests, covered in t-shirts and balloons for breasts, and you won a prize by throwing a dart and popping the women's breasts." For Long, Debbie Blasiar, and Paul Young, the outrageousness of the game was put into stark relief by recent reports of a serial rapist in Norman. So they protested the game and, when asked to leave, the group started a sit-in at the carnival. They were eventually threatened with arrest and removal from the property. After LAW went to the papers, the Lion's Club eventually apologized for the crude game.[83]

LAW took a stand at another event, the 1982 Miss University of Oklahoma Pageant. The members were outraged at the degrading acts, including requiring the participants to parade around in a swimsuit. Inspired by the famous feminist protest at the 1968 Miss America Pageant, Mary Long applied to compete in the event as Bella Pure, Miss USDA Prime Perennial Beauty Contestant.[84] The women were threatened with violence from some fraternity members in the audience as they tried to force LAW out of the event. Worried for their safety, the group, including "Bella Pure," left.[85]

Unfortunately, this was not the only time the women faced serious opposition to their unabashed commitment for women's rights. While protesting Phyllis Schlafly's visit to the

[83] Mary Katherine Long in Ladies Against Women Interview, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, June 27, 2009, Red Dirt Oral History.
[84] The 1968 Miss American Pageant protest was one of the most prominent events in second wave feminism. Feminists from numerous groups, including NOW and New York Radical Women, gathered outside of the pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey, decrying the way the supposed scholarship contest sexualized young women, promoted racist standards of beauty by only allowing white contestants, and the dehumanization of women by grading their bodies like meat. Activists gave speeches, sang songs, and burned items in trash can that they deemed repressive to women, including panty hose, make up, and other items. The 1968 pageant protest is where the "bra burning" stereotype comes from, although no bras were reportedly burned that day, only other items.
[85] Giff Palmer, "Beauty Queen Uses Winnings for Education," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 1, 1983; Mary Katherine Long and Linda Terrell in Ladies Against Women Interview, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, June 27, 2009, Red Dirt Oral History.

University of Oklahoma, a few LAW members reported being followed to their cars by angry men and women who wrote down their license plate numbers and tried to follow them home. A few of the members also found out years later that the Oklahoma Bureau of Investigations tapped their phones. By this point, it was not just pro-family conservatives and Schlafly followers who disapproved of their behavior. State officials, representatives, and many in the public were tired of hearing about the ERA, with many just wanting it to go away.

These more outspoken Oklahoma activists faced opposition from local and national leaders pushing moderation. Because many pro-ERA leaders were trying to appeal to the increasingly conservative state and fight accusations of radicalism, they worried LAW would undermine their progress. LAW member Cynthia Hoyle described her time working for NOW during the ERA Countdown Campaign this way: "The NOW people started putting restrictions on us. They wanted to approve all of the organizations and activities that I participated in outside of work." After nine months, Hoyle quit her work with NOW when the restrictions became too excessive.[86] Clearly Hoyle and many other Oklahoma activists were not happy with the leadership in the state, including NOW and Oklahoma Representative Cleta Deatherage. Younger feminists accused ERA leaders of avoiding other women's issues that they cared about deeply, including reproductive rights, sexism, and rape culture. Their leaders, they thought, were forsaking the movement in order to keep the peace and get the amendment passed.

It was not just college-aged activists who had grown frustrated with the state of the pro-ERA movement in the Oklahoma. Older activist Wanda Jo Peltier and others were not afraid to embrace a broad, progressive feminism and poke fun at those who called them radicals. John Monks, a state representative from Muskogee, was perhaps the most notorious anti-ERA

[86] Randy Ellis, "Opponent Finds Mixed Reception at University," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 17, 1982; Hoyle interview.

legislator in the capitol.[87] He was also known to keep an American flag in his desk and a recording of the national anthem in case anyone speaking sounded like a radical. After throwing both Mattie Morgan and Wanda Jo Peltier out of his office and accusing them of being communists, some of the women decided to take a jab back at him. Forming a group of anonymous activists called Radical American Feminists or RAF (according to Peltier, you have to growl when you say RAF to fit the "intimidating" description), the group sent Monks a "stuffed toy rat with a yellow stripe down its back." They sought to play up the stereotype of pro-ERA radicals. Enraged by their actions, Monks demanded that the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation find the members of RAF as they might be dangerous to him and the public. When it came to light that the investigation would be paid for out of taxpayers' pockets, Monks dropped the idea.[88] Another legislator, Senator John Young of Sapulpa, attracted the attention of ERA supporters when he gave a passionate speech against the amendment, explaining, "I'm not against the ERA because I hate women. I'm against the ERA because I love women!" In retaliation, some ERA supporters, including Pat Rigler, sent a singing playboy bunny to Young's office since he "loved women so much." According to Rigler, the stunt made the news all the way down in Dallas, Texas.[89] Both of these actions, while most likely done out of frustration, broke from the mainstream, moral mother image that local leadership had cultivated and NOW eventually embraced as well.

Representative Hannah Atkins and Wanda Jo Peltier both seemed to break at times from the mainstream approach even more in the final year before the amendment's deadline. Although Atkins retired from her position as a representative in 1980, she was still very involved with the

[87] Lee Hockstader, "Okl. Initiative Tackles Tradition," *Washington Post*, November 2, 2012.
[88] "Monks' Quiz Request Upsets Rights Group," *Oklahoma City Times*, March 5, 1981; Peltier Stapleton interview, February 29, 2016, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
[89] Interview with Pat Rigler, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, November 6, 2009, Red Dirt Oral History.

ERA campaign through the OKWPC. On December 6, 1981, at the University of Oklahoma, the Caucus held a statewide convention for the first time since 1975. Wanda Jo Peltier organized the convention and Atkins was the keynote speaker. There, she had some striking words for her fellow activists as she, too, began to promote more radical tactics. To a crowd of young and old, men and women, Atkins stated, "I believe we must be militant. We can't just rock back and sip tea…The gentle approach is not working."[90] Peltier, too, had more hope with this new, energetic and more militant generation of activists. In a letter to Atkins she wrote, "Hannah, I really believe we are going to get it this time. There is really a lot of grassroots support. We are going door to door in twelve towns/cities. Problem, of course, is a handful of legislators who are really going to get it if they don't change their ways."[91] Not even a death threat left on her answering machine at home that year was going to stop Peltier from continuing her activism. About the threat she stated, "I was terrified when I would come home at night after that because I lived alone at the time. My sweetheart made me carry a gun just in case."[92]

In Utah as well, locals began to contest the mainstream politics of the Countdown Campaign. Beginning in May of 1981 NOW sent around two hundred ERA "missionaries," styled similarly to the LDS Church's door-to-door proselytizers, to homes across Utah in the hopes of conversion.[93] While most ERA missionaries were met with disdain, some, like Radcliffe student Lena Zezulin, claimed to have made some positive connections. For example, one Mormon woman Zezulin met was dismayed to find that the text of the amendment contained nothing about abortion. In fact, "Where's the part about abortion?" was a common response from

[90] Warren Vieth, "Starting Over," *Oklahoma Monthly*, February 1981.
[91] Wanda Jo Peltier to Hannah Atkins, November 9, 1981, folder 11, box 11, Hannah Atkins Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (hereafter OHS).
[92] Peltier Stapleton interview, February 29, 2016, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
[93] Vera Glaser, "Feminist Missionaries Target Utah," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 12, 1981.

Utah women approached by the missionaries.[94] Overall, the group was fairly unsuccessful at obtaining ERA converts.

The NOW missionary program was unpopular, not just with anti-ERA Utahans but also with activists in support of the amendment, because organizers assumed that women in Utah could not face the church on their own. Organizers for NOW claimed that the ERA Missionary Project was one way to "do battle with the ERA's most powerful and wealthy opponent, the LDS Church."[95] The Church claimed responsibility for the ERA's continued defeat in not just Utah, but Nevada, Arizona, Virginia, Missouri, and Florida. For NOW and other feminists across the country, Mormon women were some of the most oppressed in the country. Some even called Utah "their Selma."[96] Yet activists in Utah, inside and outside of the Church, continued to publicly campaign for the ERA and push back against the Church's authority. The same summer that NOW sent its missionaries, Equal Rights Coalition Utah (ERCU) publicly protested in Salt Lake City at one of the state's largest public celebrations, the Days of '47 Pioneer Parade. The organization was denied a permit for a float in the parade, and without written cause. The only other organizations denied permits for a float were the Metropolitan Community Church and the Gay Affirmation, two local groups who supported LBGTQ people.[97] This was the second time the city, which was completely under the control of the LDS Church, denied ERCU a place in the parade, but this year the stakes were higher. In response, the group first filed a federal lawsuit for "improper use of public funds."[98] They also founded a new organization called Families for

[94] Lena Zezulin, "An ERA Missionary in Utah," *Radcliffe Quarterly*, March 1982, folder 18, box 14, Mormons for ERA Collection, USU.
[95] Carole Rayburn, "NOW's ERA Missionary Project Making An Impact," *From NOW ON: NOW Montgomery, Colorado Chapter Newsletter*, vol. 4 no. 3, September 1981, folder 7, box 14, Mormons for ERA Collection, USU.
[96] Holland, "Salt Lake...Is Our Selma," 95.
[97] Bob Bernick Jr., "Wilson Ducks ERA Float Fright," *Deseret News*, July 15, 1981.
[98] Ibid.

ERA.[99] On July 24, 1981, as the state celebration began, Families for ERA held their own celebration in a Salt Lake City park nearby. Among over five thousand "Support ERA" balloons and "Fathers Support ERA" banners, children and parents played outdoor games, enjoyed refreshments, and passed out literature on the amendment.[100]

The ERCU's alternative to the Days of '47 parade was just one moment where the tensions between Mormon ERA activists and the Church were exposed. A few months earlier in November, Mormons for ERA protestors chained themselves again to the temple doors in Salt Lake City. Security officers reportedly beat many of the women, and two were arrested including Sonia Johnson.[101] The following April, right before the conflict over the Days of '47 parade, the ERCU held a meeting during the LDS 151st General Conference, an international event that brought members from all over to Salt Lake City. Mormon ERA supporters and their allies, from Utah, Nevada, Arizona, Washington, and Idaho, joined in a protest at Temple Square. Mormons for ERA and Nevadans for ERA soon joined.[102]

[99] Flyer, Families for ERA, folder 7, box 5, Beatrice Marchant Papers, UU.
[100] "Pro-ERA Group Parades Its Lack of Float," *Deseret News*, July 25, 1981.
[101] "ERAers Arrested at LDS Temple," *Salt Lake City Tribune*, November 18, 1980.
[102] Dan Bates, "ERA Conference Target's 'Enemy,' Airs Strategy," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 5, 1981.

Figure 5.4. Sonia Johnson is led away from an LDS temple by a police officer after she had chained herself to the gate during a pro-Equal Rights Amendment demonstration in Bellevue, Washington, on Nov. 17, 1980. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "40 years after her Mormon excommunication," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 18, 2019.

Strategists for NOW's Countdown Campaign underestimated the abilities of western activists and deeply misunderstood the culture of the region. While NOW envisioned that its two hundred volunteer missionary group would help "save" Mormon women, Mormon women had, since 1972 and even before, worked diligently for women's rights and the ERA in their state on their own. And many of the tactics employed by local activists and Mormon women, similar to women in Oklahoma, surprisingly turned out to be much more direct and radical than the tactics employed by the national NOW taskforce team. Frustrated with the outside takeover of the movement or panicked by the fast-approaching deadline with little progress, western activists rejected the image of western feminism that local leadership had curated and NOW encouraged.

Four years before the Countdown Campaign began, ERAmerica activist David L. Abram, after a visit to Oklahoma, wrote to fellow Arizona member Maureen Murphy, "The Oklahoma people are holding the line here that out-of-state people will not be effective in their ratification push."[103] ERCU president Lee Ann Walker tellingly stated, "As a Utahan, I know there is language, a lifestyle, a pace of doing things, a mode of persuasion, a hierarchy of values that is unique to the unratified West. The national leadership for ERA is Eastern, urban, certainly not Mormon, and probably not Baptist. The Western resistence [sic] to the Eastern city slicker is not just a thing of the cowboy shoe on TV." She added, "The national leadership, not being part of either of the regions, had failed and will fail to communicate with these regions."[104] Her prediction could not have been closer to reality. It's not that NOW did not organize a strong campaign; they certainly did this well in each unratified state. The largest issue was the lack of understanding and trust between national leaders and local activists. Instead of working the networks built by western activists over the past ten years, NOW put in new contacts and focused on ads and celebrity events rather than relating to local people and what they were interested in, which was overwhelmingly better protections for homemakers and farm wives. Frustrated with the loss of autonomy and lack of understanding, many western ERA activists revolted or withdrew from NOW work.

The Final Months of the ERA

Desperate activists in all four states continued to push for ratification until the very end. Despite the failed referendum vote, Nevada activists were successful at reintroducing the amendment in both 1979 and 1981, although it was never voted on. In Arizona, the Senate came

[103] David L. Abrams, ERAmerica, to Maureen Murphy, January 14, 1977, folder 1, box 2, Maureen Murphy Papers, ASU.
[104] Holland, "Salt Lake... Is Our Selma," 103.

close to passage several times, and within two votes in 1975, but it was never ratified.[105] Activists and supportive legislators, as in Nevada and Utah, continued to introduce the ERA in every session from 1977 to 1982, but with little movement.[106] Even as independent polls still showed a majority of citizens favoring the amendment, all but Oklahoma seems like a lost cause. Oklahoma held many supporters in the public, the governor's office, and the state legislature. In fact, as the June 30, 1982 deadline for ratification approached, Oklahoma became ERA activists' final hope.[107]

While some historians have argued that there was no "serious revival" of the ERA after 1980, the Oklahoma legislature came very close to passing the amendment in 1982 when ERA advocates captured the attention of the new president pro tempore of the Senate, Marvin York.[108] By 1982, York had served in the Oklahoma House and then the Senate for a total of thirteen years. He was a close ally of ERA supporters Representative Cleta Deatherage, Speaker of the House Dan Draper, and Representative Hannah Atkins. After focusing his first year as the leader of the state senate on housekeeping issues, York decided that 1982 was the year for what he called "political philosophical" reform. He stated, "We needed to do something that was actually really important and could benefit the state and the country as well. I had in my mind that the Equal Rights Amendment was what I was talking about." According to York, he had wanted to do something to change the sexist laws in Oklahoma since the 1970s, when he watched his widowed mother fight in probate court for the rights to her own farm. York's wife, a surgical

[105] Carol S. Palmer, "Challenging Tradition: Arizona Women Fight For the Equal Rights Amendment" (Masters Thesis, Arizona State University, 2007), 103.
[106] Ibid., 111, 123.
[107] Paul Scott Malone, "Poll Gives ERA Slight Edge," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 14, 1982; John Greiner, "ERA Voted Down By State Senators," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 14, 1982; National Organization for Woman Phoenix Chapter, ERA Countdown Campaign Newsletter, June 6, 1981, folder 6, box 3, ASU.
[108] Batt Dziedziak, "The Gendering of Nevada Politics,"182-3.

nurse, and his teenage daughter had also inspired him to throw his political weight behind the ERA.[109]

Because the Oklahoma House had not voted on the ERA since 1975, House Speaker Draper publicly announced that the ERA would not be brought up again in the House unless the Senate passed it first. Although York had been secretly lobbying for "yea" votes for the past six months, he did not announce his advocacy for the Equal Rights Amendment in the media until one month before the new legislative session was to begin in January. This, according to York, was when all hell broke loose.[110]

This new ERA champion in the Oklahoma Senate got unavoidable national attention. NOW members including President Eleanor Smeal, STOP ERA leadership, and even former vice president Walter Mondale rushed to the state. There were rumors that if Oklahoma approved the amendment, Missouri and Florida would follow suit, upping the total number of supportive states to the minimum of thirty-eight needed to add an amendment to the constitution.[111] Television and radio advertisements on both sides of the issue increased. Activists immediately reinvigorated their campaigns. At the capitol, legislators became caught in the crossfire between activists. Reporter Chuck Ervin noted, "Legislative offices and corridors in the capital have turned into battlegrounds on several occasions by pro and anti-ERA factions, who have fought bitterly over the controversial issue."[112] With the rights of every American woman on the line, activists from all over the country took over Oklahoma City.

At home, York disconnected his phone in order to stop its constant ringing by harassers, both local and out-of-state. "They called me a lot of things: baby killer, sinner. They even

[109] Interview with Marvin York, by the author, January 28, 2016, Norman, Oklahoma.
[110] John Greiner, "Senate Leader Launches Push for ERA Approval," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 2, 1981.
[111] Interview with Pat Rigler, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, November 6, 2009, Red Dirt Oral History.
[112] Chuck Ervin, "Carter Invites Nigh, Solons to Discuss ERA Ratification," *Tulsa Tribune*, January 1, 1979.

questioned my masculinity… These fundamentalists and Republicans were never for [the ERA]. They thought women had been given the vote and that was enough." York's wife also began receiving threatening calls. At work, other senators criticized him for allowing out-of-state money to influence his vote and the people of Oklahoma. The out-of-state money did not bother York because, according to him, both sides of the debate had used help from outsiders for sometime.[113] He believed that there was no longer a distinction between local and national politics when it came to the ERA; the whole nation was watching Oklahoma and waiting for the state's legislators to make a decision.

It was true that only a few senators stood in the way of the Equal Rights Amendment's approval in Oklahoma. York had gathered twenty-two "yea" votes; two additional senators reluctantly agreed to vote for the ERA only if it looked as though the amendment would have the twenty-five necessary votes for passage. By this time, the state capitol was filled with hostile forces on both sides. Screaming matches were breaking out in the rotunda between opposing activists, and national NOW president Eleanor Smeal was practically camped out in York's office to get all of the updates. With the opening legislative session beginning on January 5, York decided that neither the state nor its legislators could endure this battle any longer. "We had other things to worry about like the state budget to write!" York stated. He decided to raise the ERA, Senate Resolution 24, for a vote on that first day in hopes of calming down the situation and resolving it once and for all.[114]

Because raising the ERA resolution this early was so unexpected, many key leaders on both sides of the debate were not present in the spectator's gallery like they had been in the past. With President Pro-Tempore York commanding the floor, the state senators made their

[113] York interview, January 28, 2016, Norman, Oklahoma.
[114] Interview with Marvin York, by Dr. Martha Skeeters, April 1, 2010, Red Dirt Oral History.

decisions. The vote ended in 22 yeas and 27 nays, with one senator recanting his yay vote after the fact. On paper, the Equal Rights Amendment was three votes short. York had two swing voters willing to change their votes if he could find a third, and he immediately filed a Motion to Reconsider, which gave him until January 19th to re-present the resolution on the senate floor.

Although shaken by the defeat, those in support of the ERA were not giving up just yet. That very evening, OK-ERA, OKWPC, and NOW put aside their differences and teamed up for a rally in front of the capitol.[115] NOW continued its ERA Countdown Campaign advertisements, and the OKWPC reached out to other National Women's Political Caucus members for contacts and advice. Former vice president Walter Mondale made his way to Oklahoma where he held personal meetings with every state senator who voted against the ERA. He also held a private meeting with local OKWPC members. York did not feel too optimistic about the upcoming re-vote, stating, "Mondale or Jesus himself wasn't going to change their minds."[116]

[115] Ann Savage, OK-ERA Newsletter, January 7, 1982, folder 1, box 3, Equal Rights Amendment Collection, OHS.
[116] York interview, January 28, 2016, Norman, Oklahoma.

Figure 5.5. ERA Rally outside of the Oklahoma State Capitol, January 1982. Courtesy of Sara Werneke, granddaughter of Ruth Adams.

Figure 5.6. ERA Rally outside of the Oklahoma State Capitol, January 1982. Courtesy of Sara Werneke, granddaughter of Ruth Adams.

Local leader and the face of the ERA in the state Cleta Deatherage was also not too optimistic about the chances of the ERA passing in Oklahoma or in three others by the June 30, 1982 deadline. After the first negative vote in the Senate, many activists for the ERA were urging Deatherage and her ally Speaker Draper to bring the amendment to a vote in the House. The now seasoned legislator simply refused; she did not see the point of bringing something up for a vote in the House when the Senate had not successfully passed it. Deatherage also stressed the importance of her colleagues' political careers and their desire to avoid unnecessary hot button issues.[117] Activists from across the state were shocked and angered. So many ERA

[117] Cleta Deatherage, "Transcript Recording of the February 18, 1982 Democratic Women's Club of Cleveland County's meeting," Transcript composed by Lou Allen, February 20, 1982, Miscellaneous box, Wanda Jo Peltier Stapleton Collection, OHS.

supporters had "put their faith in Cleta" and now felt betrayed. Despite the slim chance of passage, raising the ERA for one last vote in the House would have been at least symbolic. Instead, Deatherage's refusal to introduce the amendment cut off one of ERA activists' final pathways to victory.

When the Senate's second vote came, the legislative gallery was packed with green, red, and white t-shirts. When York took the floor, his Motion to Reconsider was approved. The vote remained the same as it was just a few weeks earlier: 21-27. Cheers and cries sounded through the gallery from excitement and disbelief on both sides. In clear sight of the senators, a few women dropped a large banner from the capital spectator gallery. In the pro-ERA colors of green and white, it proclaimed, "Equality Denied, 1982" along with a picture of the Pioneer Woman Statue, a beloved Oklahoma landmark commemorating the fortitude of western women. The capitol police soon removed the women holding the banner, but hundreds of remaining women began shouting, "ERA Won't Go Away!"[118] Activist Mattie Morgan watched as a woman in tears dropped the white rose she clutched in her hand onto the floor.[119]

In the weeks before the June 30, 1982 deadline, a combined 35,000 ERA supporters marched to state capitals across the country. Mormon women held an all-night prayer vigil in Temple Square followed by a march to the Utah State Capitol.[120] Governor Bob Graham and his wife led the march in Florida, where thousands of out-of-state LDS members had donated to the campaigns of anti-ERA legislators.[121] Despite the Florida House passing the ERA 60 to 58 in June, the Senate voted the amendment down.[122] In Illinois, protesters chained themselves to the

[118] John Greiner, "ERA Rejected Again in the Senate," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 20, 1982; Interview with Eddie Collins, by Julie Stidolph, April 9, 2009, Red Dirt Oral History.
[119] Morgan interview.
[120] "ERA Backers Plan Vigil, Hold Rally," *Deseret News*, April 1, 1982.
[121] Holland, "Salt Lake...Is Our Selma," 85-6.
[122] "Florida House Passes ERA," *U.S. Scene*, June 21, 1982.

Senate doors while others, including Sonia Johnson, held a hunger strike.[123] The majority of Senators in Illinois who voted "yay" on the amendment were not enough to satisfy the special three-fifths rule in the state; the ERA failed there as well.[124] In Oklahoma, Wanda Jo Peltier marched with over 10,000 ERA supporters, asking Governor George Nigh to call special session.[125]

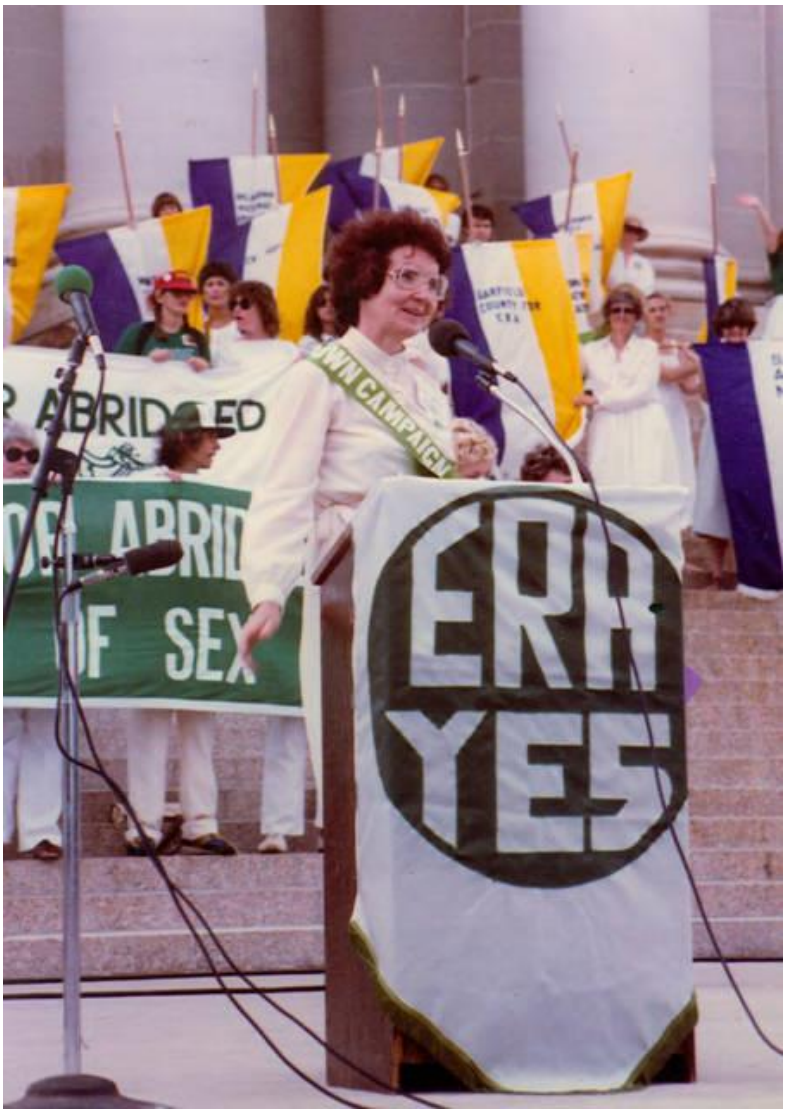

Figure 5.7. Wanda Jo Peltier speaking to a crowd of ERA supporters in front of the Oklahoma State Capitol, June 6, 1982. Photo courtesy of the Women of the Oklahoma Legislature Oral History Project, Oklahoma State University.

[123] Press Release, "Statement of Women's Fast for Justice," June 3, 1982, folder 7, box 11, Mormons for ERA Collections, USU; Gary S. Ruderman, "Controversy," *People Magazine*, June 6, 1982.
[124] "ERA Backers Jailed," *Deseret News*, June 26, 1982.
[125] "Marchers back ERA in 4 states," *Tulsa Tribune*, April 7, 1982.

Despite this impressive showing of supporters across the country, no unratified states voted again on the amendment before the deadline. The Equal Rights Amendment, falling three states short, was not added to the US Constitution. Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, where for ten years activists invoked the legacy of suffrage and the power of western women, all remained on the short list of unratified states. What remained after the long-fought campaign for the ERA in the West was a victorious and emboldened New Right and, at least temporarily, a defeated feminist movement.

The intense final years of the ERA movement challenged and united women's activists across the West. Although activists returned home more united and inspired by the women's activists they met with at the National Women's Conference, conservatives had already won over the media in the region, and ERA supporters from the unratified West found it even harder to win over the public. This uphill battle to ratify the amendment in the West only grew steeper as the 1982 deadline approached. The interest of national leaders and organizations continued to raise tensions in the West even higher as the ERA Countdown Campaign commenced. Interestingly, ideas of western exceptionalism and ruggedness did not just affect locals who hoped to connect the ERA to suffrage. Those outside of the West also viewed the region as both a promised land for women's rights and as a place where women needed to be saved from a retrograde male citizenry, and this influenced how national organizations approached campaigning for the amendment in these final years.[126]

As the four states became overwhelmed with pamphlets, radio and television advertisements, celebrity appearances, rallies, and newspaper articles about the ERA from both

[126] Holland, "Salt Lake…Is Our Selma," 97.

sides, the West became a national battleground at the most vital moment of the amendment debate. When NOW sent in ERA Missionaries and out-of-state leadership to the region, local activists became overwhelmed and frustrated. Fighting back against the minority of ERA leadership in the region and now East Coast outsiders who still promoted the mainstream, western feminist image, many on-the-ground activists in the four unratified western states defied leadership and publicly demanded ratification through public protest and independent lobbying. This would not be enough, though. Even in Oklahoma, where support for the amendment was strongest, the New Right's growing dominance in the state could not be overcome. The ERA failed in the unratified West and in the nation.

Influence from outsiders came not just through the National Women's Conference and the ERA Countdown Campaign, but also from the opposition. With the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980, it became clear that national politics were changing in the region as well. The West these feminists had once put so much faith into had drifted further to the right, especially in regards to women. By 1981 the region housed some of the highest concentrations of evangelical Christians and Latter-day Saints populations in the country, making it highly receptive to New Right ideals. The mass movement to pass the Equal Rights Amendment in West would be a reminder of the region's long progressive tradition, and an expression of its new rightward turn.

Conclusion

Beyond ERA

"We have come to the end of the beginning."

-Nevada Senator Jean Ford, 1982

On July 1, 1982, the very first day after the ERA failed to meet the ratification deadline, the National Women's Conference Committee sponsored an event called A New Day: Beyond ERA March and Concert at Constitutional Hall in Washington, D.C. Forty-five other states, including Nevada, held their own corresponding local events. The organization called for an ERA part two, which would focus on pro-women candidates in elections and the sex bias that continued to plague businesses and employment along with a renewed ERA campaign.[1] At the Nevada march, Senator Jean Ford took the podium and encouraged her fellow ERA supporters. It had been a long and hard ten-year battle, but she reminded them of what the ERA had given women despite its failure to pass. She told the crowd, "The number of women in legislative positions has tripled in the past ten years and thirty or forty laws that discriminate against women have been changed in Nevada alone."[2] Like Ford, many activists in the summer of 1982 reflected back on the ERA battle in the West not with total disappointment, but with pride at what they had accomplished. The ripple effects of the amendment were not over yet, though.

[1] National Women's Conference Committee to Local Coordinators, July 12, 1982, box 2, folder 12, series 3, Nevadans for ERA Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, NV.

[2] Lee Adler, "After the ERA's Death, Nevadans Plot New Courses," *Nevada Appeal*, July 2, 1982.

Despite its failure, the ERA had a massive impact, both short-term and long-term, on western women's rights and women in politics. The West was the amendment's battleground, the place where activists and opponents campaigned and debated one another for over a decade, and where women's rights and place within western society could not be ignored. Far from an East Coast feminist movement, western feminists and moderates championed the amendment and, in the process, expanded women's rights by addressing sexist legislation and challenging discrimination against women in politics, their homes and farms, their places of work, and on college campuses. In the process, western women expanded the notion of modern feminism. They argued that feminism was and remained focused on the full human rights and equality of women, but that feminists could also be motivated by their motherhood or religion. The ERA campaign would also have important long-term effects on the region. For women in politics, particularly in Nevada and Utah, female representatives actually decreased in the 1980s, and support for governor's commissions on the status of women were defunded. These long-term effects and pushback against feminism and women's rights would carry on through the 1980s and 1990s. And, in an ironic twist, the ERA would be back up for debate in 2017 and 2018 in two western states that held some of the most contentious debates over the amendment in the past: Nevada and Arizona.

How Far We've Come

When activists in the unratified western states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah came to the ERA movement, they had no idea what they were getting into. With most of the West ratified by 1974, activists thought ratification would be simple and straightforward. They drew on their work as civil rights activists, environmental proponents, and formal political

organizers. They also took comfort in and built upon the legacy of suffrage in their states, despite the fact that these were largely based in outdated and racist colonial ideas.

As the initial optimism of early ratification began to fade, ERA activists began running their own candidates in legislative races, many of whom had no experience in this realm, and building a grassroots network. As women, the candidates faced sexist questioning from the public about who would watch their children or care for their husbands if they were elected; in a remarkable show of adaptability, many of the of the female candidates found success by including their families in their campaigns. In fact, this strategy began to carry over into how activists campaigned for the ERA as well. In developing a "western" version of feminism, the leaders of the movement, who were mostly legislators and organization leaders, pushed this family-friendly and non-radical view of women's rights as the face of the ERA movement in the West. This included numerous grassroots tactics like bake sales, fashion shows, and "bake-offs" that promoted the idea that feminists could be housewives, mothers, and even religions members. Activists focused on the sexist language and issues of gender discrimination in their own state statutes as evidence that the ERA was necessary, with each state individually honing in on the immediate needs of local women. In the West, the rights of homemakers and farm wives as well as property rights for married and divorced women became their focus, and ERA proponents worked to expand the definition and focus of motherhood to include not just the married mothers, but the needs of working mothers, single mothers, and displaced homemakers.

As the New Right became more prominent and vocal in the anti-ERA movement in the West, supporters built upon this image of western feminism to include churchwomen. This became especially important after 1976 when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints officially declared its opposition to the amendment and joined Phyllis Schlafly and the New Right's

campaign against the amendment. As conservatives loudly declared that the ERA was harmful to the Christian family, leaders in the unratified West doubled down on their mainstream image that promoted motherhood and religiosity alongside feminism through ERA prayer vigils and multi-denominational religious ERA groups.

This mainstream, western feminism did not represent all ERA supporters in the West, but supporters from all political spectrums eventfully found ways to come together. Lesbians, pro-choice advocates, and non-religious activists often did not fit into this moderate image, and were highly frustrated with the unwillingness of ERA leadership to speak out for broader women's issues. Yet when faced with extreme pushback at the state-level and the national IWY conferences, western ERA supporters chose to unite. Although fragile and not across the board, activists carried this unity with them in the final days leading up the ERA's deadline. Faced again with massive opposition from conservatives, especially the New Right and the LDS Church, western ERA supporters diligently worked together in the hopes of achieving ratification in three more states.

Despite remaining vigilant and hopeful, ERA activists after 1982 faced continued opposition against feminism and the women's movement in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in the American West. As discussed throughout this work, Americans and westerners in particular were not opposed to expanding women's rights and revising sexist legislation in their states in the 1970s, but many *were* opposed, by 1982, to "E.R.A." By this time the conservative opposition had successfully packaged the numerous insecurities many westerners had, namely the increasing urban population, a rise in minority populations, the civil rights movement, abortion legalization in *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the women's movement, and increased federal power and subsidies, into a single political problem: liberalism. And while there was not much to

be done about many of these insecurities by the 1980s, stopping what conservatives viewed as feminism through the defeat of the ERA became an achievable and highly visible goal. The campaign against the ERA in the West was not about preventing constitutional equality, but about stopping feminism and all that it represented. This New Right campaign, which owed much of its power in the West to the LDS Church, was successful, as the ERA died in the West, taking numerous liberal women's organizations in the region with it.

The Long-Term Impact of the ERA in the West

The 1980s was a particularly difficult time for women across the country. With an increase in sexual violence, decline in child support payments, and attacks on reproductive rights, in Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, the pushback against liberal feminism was even harsher.[3] President Ronald Reagan's economic policy and the federal cuts that ensued deeply affected women, as one-third of these cuts came from "programs primarily serving women."[4] As early as 1978, the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women in the state of Utah was defunded. California's commission lost its funding as well due to its support of political measures like the ERA. In the West, moderate and even conservative women's organizations came under attack because of the successful demonization of the amendment. Utah did not reestablish its women's commission until 1990, renaming it the Governor's Commission for Women and Families.[5] In the state of Nevada, a Governor's Commission on the Status of Women was not established until 1994, and even then it was not fully "activated," or given any

[3] Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991); Jennifer L. Holland, "Salt Lake...is Our Selma": The Equal Rights Amendment and the Transformation of the Politics of Gender in Utah" (Masters Thesis, Utah State University, 2005), 92.
[4] Holland, "Salt Lake...is Our Selma," 91. Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 272-8.
[5] Holland, "Salt Lake...is Our Selma," Ibid., 65.

real authority or funding, until 2016.[6] Other moderate women's organizations lost membership as well, including local Women's Political Caucus, League of Women Voters, and Equal Rights Coalition chapters. Carol S. Palmer writes, "Forty years after they led the fight for the ERA, the Arizona chapters of organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women struggled to find women willing to assume leadership positions."[7]

Women in elected positions decreased in these states, despite rising in other regions.[8] The first Nevada woman elected to U.S. Congress occurred in 1982, a hurdle passed by almost every other state decades earlier. And it was not until 1990 that women really began to make their mark in state politics again, with the *Las Vegas Times* celebrating the highest number of state representative seats filled by women in the state to-date: 27%.[9] Female representation in Arizona slowed as well in the years after the ERA failed. Because ERA activists there began organizing much earlier than other western states, many of their leaders, like Shirley Odegaard of the Arizona Coalition for ERA, were simply worn out after years of campaigning to a relatively unwavering legislature.[10] Yet the lack of substantial female representation in Phoenix and Carson City in the years immediately following 1982 does not necessarily mean former ERA activists were no longer involved in social change. Many transitioned their activism back into other social justice movements.

After the ERA campaign failed, many activists refocused their energies into programs that would directly benefit women in their own communities, shrinking, for a time, from the

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[6] Nevada Revised Statutes 2331. https://www.leg.state.nv.us/nrs/NRS-233I.html
[7] Carol S. Palmer, "Challenging Tradition: Arizona Women Fight For the Equal Rights Amendment" (Masters Thesis, Arizona State University, 2007), 127.
[8] Anne Marie Cammisa and Beth Reingold, "Women in State Legislatures and State Legislative Research: Beyond Sameness and Difference," *State Policy Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 181-210, 181.
[9] Richard C. Paddock, "Nevada Women Strike Electoral Gold," *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1993.
[10] Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 122.

formal political scene. Historian Joanne L. Goodwin writes that women in Nevada, especially Las Vegas, were involved in "labor organizations, civil rights, women's rights, combating violence against women and children, and antipoverty."[11] Pointing to Florence Shilling McClure, a working class woman who founded Community Action Against Rape (CAAR) as an example, Goodwin states that women during this period in Las Vegas "did not set out to be agents of change, but saw a problem that needed a solution and worked to make it happen."[12] In Arizona, former ERA activist Allison Hughes took a similar path, focusing her time on grant writing in order to raise funds for domestic violence and rape crisis centers. Carol Papalas, another pro-ERA activist, founded Arizona's Center Against Sexual Assault.[13] Oklahoma ERA activist Pat Reaves used her masters degree in counseling and psychology to help found and direct one of the first battered women's shelters in her home state in the early 1980s.[14] Women's organizations in Utah evolved into similar centers aiding women in crisis.

Despite western women's continued support of social issues in the wake of the ERA's rejection, the clearest indicator of pushback against feminism is the decline of women in state and local politics. Historian Martha Sontag Bradley observed that many Utah women "who toiled for the ERA have become complacent or discouraged—even fearful, based on past experience—to reexamine why women have not fully arrived."[15] While serving in political office is certainly not the only avenue for feminists or women in general to create change, it remains one of the most important and impactful ways of doing so in a mainstream and widespread basis.

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[11] Joanne L. Goodwin, "Women at Work in Las Vegas, 1940-1980s" in *Oral History, Community, and Work in the American West,* ed. Jessie L. Embry (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 178, 190-1.

[12] Goodwin, "Women at Work in Las Vegas, 1940-1980s," 191.
[13] Palmer, "Challenging Tradition," 129.
[14] Interview with Pat Reaves, by the author, March 15, 2019, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[15] Martha Sontag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums,* 442.

Political scientists Anne Marie Cammisa and Beth Reingold write, "Female legislators statistically are more likely to vote in favor of women's 'issues' like reproductive rights or the ERA, but they are also almost always the ones to 'initiate' legislation for women."[16] While on the surface a decrease in female legislators or representation through women's commissions in western states may seem small, this lack of perspective and representation only added to these states already precarious position of lagging behind in the safety, happiness, and equality of their female citizens. This backlash against perceived liberal feminism, in part due to the ERA campaign, continued on into the 1990s and beyond. While some dubbed 1992 as the new "year of the woman" because of the notable increase of women in politics, that increase still only brought the number of female representatives across the country to 20%.[17] The states of Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah would not see a viable, state-wide feminist movement or substantial female visibility in local and state politics until the last few years.

The ERA and the West Today

In 2018, for the first time in the nation's history, a state legislature held a majority of women lawmakers. Nevada's legislature was 50.8% women. One female representative from Nevada commented, "It's been a long, hard fight," noting the decades it had been since feminists felt they held real power in the capitol.[18] That same year, Oklahoma also boasted a record-breaking year for female state representatives when the percentage increased from 14% to 21%, the highest in the state's history.[19] Candidates who won in this cycle were not only feminists, but

[16] Cammisa and Reingold, "Women in State Legislatures," 191-2.
[17] Leila Fadel, "A First: Women Take the Majority In Nevada Legislature And Colorado House," *National Public Radio*, February 4, 2019.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Caroline Halter, "Oklahoma's Legislature Will Have More Women in 2019," *High Plains Public Radio*, November 8, 2018.

queer feminists and feminists of color, groups long denied access to elected office. In 2018, many were now representing their states at the local and national levels. Kyrsten Sinema became the first female and openly bisexual US Senator from Arizona when she won her campaign in 2018. Sharice Davids became the first Native American women in Congress and the first openly queer representative from Kansas. Two other queer female representatives in the West--Annie Craig of Michigan and Katie Hill of California--became the "firsts" in their states as well, and unseated anti-LGBTQ candidates in the process. The US Congress also received its first female Muslim-American representatives: Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Ilhan Omar of Minnesota.[20] This increase in female representation in the West continued on in 2019 and 2020, as Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) not only became one of the first Native American women elected to office, but President Joe Biden's pick to head the Department of the Interior, a position no woman or American Indian has ever been appointed to.[21]

Not coincidentally, one of these queer, female, western representatives led the newly revived ERA campaign in Nevada. Pat Spearman is about as unconventional as they come as far as state representatives. She is a black woman, a lesbian, a retired Army lieutenant colonel, and an ordained minister. She was also transparent when it came to her motivation to pass the ERA in her state forty years after its failure: "I've had to fight for everything that I have. All the titles, none of that was given to me." When asked why the ERA remains important to women in her home state, Spearman explained, "It's time to do away with the patriarchy that holds people down."[22] Here Spearman articulates what activists on both sides of the ERA issue have understood and accepted for many years: the ERA represents an unfinished feminist movement.

[20] Rose Dommu, "The 116th Congress Is Now the Queerest and Most Diverse in History," *Out*, January 3, 2019.
[21] Coral Davenport, "Biden Picks Deb Haaland to Lead Interior Department," *New York Times*, December 17, 2020.
[22] Fadel, "A First: Women Take the Majority In Nevada Legislature And Colorado House," *National Public Radio*, February 4, 2019.

When asked why her CLUW chapter in Oklahoma brought the ERA back to their legislators in 2018, Treasurer Debra Donwerth was clear: "We hoped for more union participation from women. Not all women are lucky enough to be protected by a union. Sometimes equal pay for equal work cannot be achieved in male-dominated careers. The ERA is still needed."[23] For places like Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Utah, feminists are rebuilding their power in mainstream politics for the first time since the late 1970s. These women have made the ERA an important part of that resurgence.

The ERA faces real hurdles, not only because the deadline has long past, but because its opponents still hold on to their contention that the amendment would radically remake American gender roles. Supporters and opponents of the amendment continue to battle tooth and nail over the issue in their state, with many against the ERA using the same assumptions and "radical" implications the amendment could have on American public and private life. A *New York Times* article argued, "The legislative losers in Nevada tended to be Republican men complaining rather antiquely that the E.R.A. would harm family life, advance abortions and force women into military combat roles."[24] One male Nevada representative and LDS physician commented, "I cannot pretend to think by legislation I can become equal to them."[25] Forty-five years after Congress approved the ERA, it continues to represent much more than its plain words opposing gender discrimination. In the present day, conservative representatives link the amendment to larger, usually unrelated fears of liberal feminism. When Illinois ratified the ERA less than a year later in 2018, the media clips could have been from that day or forty years earlier; the arguments had not changed. Illinois Representative Peter Breen asserted that the ERA would

[23] Interview with Debra Donwerth, by the author, February 8, 2019, Norman, Oklahoma.
[24] The Editorial Board, "Pumping Life Into the Equal Rights Amendment," *New York Times*, March 25, 2017.
[25] Sandra Chereb, "Nevada Ratifies the Equal Rights Amendment on 45th anniversary of passage by Congress," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, March 22, 2017.

"expand taxpayer funding of abortions, very [sic] well might roll back our parental notice (for minors to have an abortion) law and have other negative impacts on various abortion regulations."[26] When Virginia came extremely close to passing the ERA in January 2019, *The Federalist* published an article titled, "Today Virginia Could Ratify A U.S. Constitutional Amendment Forcing Women To Get Drafted And Share Hospital Rooms With Men," and included a photo of a terrified looking women lying in a hospital bed. The article also added "The Equal Rights Amendment could do great damage to the American constitutional order by inserting progressive identity politics into the highest law of the land."[27] In 2019, when the ERA was up for debate in Utah, Mormons for ERA and the LDS Church faced off once again, ending with the Church reaffirming its stance against the amendment.[28] From privacy fears and forced gender mixing to women being drafted, the fear-based arguments utilized by opponents of the ERA continued on. The amendment still represented liberal and even "radical" ideas about gender and threatened the moral fabric of the United States by amending the nation's constitution.

This was not just a local or western phenomenon either. National advertisements and articles from the Independent Women's Forum, a conservative women's organization, bought anti-ERA ads on YouTube stating that "The ERA is a bait and switch. It promises basic equality, but leaves the door open for a radical progressive agenda to be implemented through the judiciary, without input from American voters, the majority of whom today are women." One particular article described the ERA as "nice-sounding words with potentially radical impact."

[26] Rick Pearson and Bill Lukitsch, "Illinois approves Equal Rights Amendment, 36 years after deadline," *Chicago Tribune*, May 31, 2018.
[27] Inez Feltscher Stepman, "Today Virginia Could Ratify A U.S. Constitutional Amendment Forcing Women To Get Drafted And Share Hospital Rooms With Men," *The Federalist*, January 25, 2019.

[28] Becky Jacobs, "LDS Church Announces It Still Opposes Equal Rights Amendment as Supporters Rally At Capitol," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 3, 2019.

The advertisements again utilized the term "radical" multiple times, promoting the notion that the ERA was not within the liberal tradition of the amendment process, but as something outside of legal means and unnecessary. Under a section for further reading on the amendment and how citizens can get involved, the article linked directly to Eagle Forum's website.[29]

With one state technically needed for ratification, Arizona legislators again began to seriously work to get votes for ratification. After a tide-turning election in 2018, Democrats held the majority of the House for the first time since 1966, with thirty-one Democrats and twenty-nine Republicans.[30] In the Senate, party lines stood at seventeen Republicans and thirteen Democrats. Then, two moderate Republican House members, Michelle Ugenti and Heather Carter, ran and won in the Arizona Senate. While still in the House, both women together co-sponsored the ERA. Representative Ugenti in particular was vocal about her support of the ERA, arguing that the amendment should not be a party issue. As a highly public pro-life supporter, she felt the need to defend her position on both seemingly unrelated issues, arguing that the amendment had suffered numerous "misconceptions" by many of her Republican colleagues and reminded them that the ERA was on the party's national platform until 1980.[31] As now senators, Ugenti and Carter promised to continue their support of the amendment, putting the ERA's tally in the Senate now at a likely even fifteen to fifteen if allowed to come to a vote.

Allowing Arizona legislators to even vote on the ERA was another issue. From 2016 to 2018 the amendment was not allowed out of committee and onto the floor for a vote by the same man: Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Eddie Farnsworth. Leading the newly invigorated charge to give the amendment a vote in Arizona, Representative Victoria Steele (Seneca/Mingo),

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[29] Inez Feltscher Stepman,"Policy Focus: Recipes for Rational Government: Equal Rights Amendment," *Independent Women's Forum*, February 2019.
[30] Dustin Gardiner, "Will Arizona Be Crucial 38th Ctate to Ratify the Equal Rights Amendment?," *Arizona Republic*, January 19, 2019.
[31] Ibid.

organized a media blitz and ERA rally at the capitol in March 2019 with the help of an old ally, the National Organization for Women, of which she was a board member. In an interview about the amendment she argued that the ERA "could be the most significant vote" she and her colleagues might ever have the chance to participate in.[32] The Democratic Party as well argued that the amendment was necessary in the state in order to fix Arizona's still-present wage gap as well as further reinforcing gender discrimination laws in the state. Janelle Wood, founder of the Black Mother's Forum, reminded voters that women of color in the state still make sixty-five cents on the dollar compared to men.[33] Supporters in 2019 urged the Arizona legislature to, if nothing else, allow the amendment a vote. To further encourage Senator Farnsworth to allow the amendment onto the floor, ERA supporters participated in a thirty-eight mile march to the state capitol, similar to the march by ERA supporters in 1977 from Seneca Falls, New York, to the National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas. The marchers carried with them many of the same banners they themselves and the previous generation of supporters carried during the 1970s ERA ratification rallies in Arizona. Despite the internal and external support for the amendment at the Arizona capitol, Senator Farnsworth did not allow the ERA to be voted on. He argued, as in previous years, that the amendment was unnecessary due to federal regulations already protecting Americans from discrimination based on gender. He also added that states who passed the ERA had somehow used the amendment to keep legislators from restricting reproductive rights and keeping abortions legal, a right already protected by the Supreme Court. When the news broke that the ERA would not be allowed onto the floor of the Arizona Senate, it became hard for bystanders to differentiate between the present debate and the ERA debate forty years earlier. Just like in the 1970s, ERA opponents thanked Senator Farnsworth and others for

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

blocking the amendment with homemade baked goods. And just like in the past, opponents insisted that women were different than men and needed protecting more than they needed equal rights. "Women are sacred," Senator Farnsworth told the media. "The world is a better place because of their softness and femininity." President Cathi Herrod of conservative watchdog organization Center for Arizona Policy added, "It's really about abortion."[34] Activists, as they did in 1982, returned home without the ERA.

For both sides, conservatives and progressives, the ERA continues to represent the unfinished wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. This is the legacy of the decade-long debate over its ratification in the West. For supporters of the amendment, the ERA became a public representation of liberal feminism's victory—a victory that would measurably improve women's lives. Those against the amendment also viewed the ERA as a representation of feminism and all the social disasters that movement portended for them. The defeat of the amendment was a way to publicly challenge that social change. Just as they did in the 1970s, feminists argued that the amendment was moderate and mainstream, a simple commitment to anti-discrimination, while opponents charged that it was a backdoor way to promote abortion and force children into state-run daycare centers.

Feminism in the West is just now recovering from the amendment's very public 1982 defeat and corresponding backlash. While 2018 may have been the next "year of the woman" in light of the Women's March, #MeToo movement, TIME'S UP, the upcoming 100th anniversary of (white) women's suffrage, and a revitalization of female representatives, it is no coincidence

[34] Dustin Gardiner, "Arizona Won't Make History: Representatives Bock Vote on the Equal Rights Amendment," *Arizona Republic*, March 13, 2019.

that the ERA has returned with this new wave of feminism. On January 15, 2020, the state of Virginia made history by ratifying the ERA and becoming the 38th and final state needed to reach a three-fourths majority.[35] While the amendment's ratification deadline expired on June 30, 1982, the ERA still has a chance at passage, either through an extension by Congress of the deadline, which the House has already submitted, or the passage of new ERA bill for states to vote on again. In either case, the struggle to ratify the ERA remains. This amendment is still western women's unfinished business, as the ERA largely died in the West twice now.

The long, ten-year battle to ratify the ERA in the West had long-lasting repercussions on the women's movement in the region, something other regions and states that did ratify were spared. Western women, promoting the needs of single mothers, working women, and displaced homemakers in particular, remade modern feminism from an ideology based on separating women's rights from motherhood to embracing that fact that motherhood is often a key component to women's motivation into the feminist movement. Some activists built their campaign networks through their church connections and dedication to their families, and built a mainstream, western feminism that leadership in the West encouraged. Others pushed back against this image and remained vigilant in their support of lesbians, pro-choice advocates, and more radical campaign tactics. In the face of the growing power of the New Right and the infiltration of national leadership into the region in 1982, western ERA activists, both moderate and more radical, largely came together, but in the end experienced some of the most extreme opposition against feminism that continued on from the 1980s to today.

[35] Timothy Williams, "Virginia Approves the E.R.A, Becoming 38th State to Back It," *New York Times*, January 15, 2020.

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