

January 1981

ERA REPORT

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1730 M STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, DC 20036

ERAmerica and NOW called a joint press conference on November 6, 1980 to lay to rest the rumor that ERA died November 4 as a result of the general election. RUTH J. HINERFELD, president LWVUS, was one of 12 leaders who assembled to reaffirm their organizations' commitment to ERA ratification.

MARY FUTRELL, president of ERAmerica's Board of Directors, confirmed what most people involved with ERA had already determined: "The issue (in this election) was not equality between the sexes. It was jobs, inflation, the economy. The people -- the men and women -- of this country were seeking redress for their economic adversity... The women's movement is far too vast, far too (closely woven) into the fabric of American life to be defeated by an outcry on the state of the economy."

ELEANOR SMEAL, president of NOW, echoed Ms. Futrell's comments, pointing out that "women's issues simply never came into focus." She went on to say, "The ideologues of the right wing will try to interpret the elections as a mandate for their reactionary social views. That is not the case."

Hinerfeld reaffirmed the League's determination "to stand firm in its commitment to achieve equal rights for all citizens." She emphasized that "we must not only reaffirm our personal commitments to seeing ERA ratified, we must also stand together in solidarity and cooperation to achieve our goal."



Introducing the new LWVUS ERA committee, left to right, Lois Harrison, Nancy Neuman, seated, and Marilyn Reeves, Helen Patella and Mary Ellen Ludlum, standing.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE ELECTION AND HOW WILL IT AFFECT ERA?

These two questions were put to people who are directly involved in managing the national ERA campaign. We spoke first to SUONE COTNER, executive director of ERAmerica who sketched the role of the organization. "Founded in 1976, ERAmerica is an umbrella organization with a single purpose --- to get the Equal Rights Amendment ratified. The coalition now includes more than 200 organizations. ERAmerica sets strategies and plans actions in Washington, DC and is guided by a steering committee composed of representatives from national organizations working actively on ERA."



JANE CAMPBELL, field coordinator of ERAmerica, has been working with ERA coalitions in unratified states for the past year. We asked Jane for her reactions, as an on-the-scene observer, to the election and the job ahead in 1981.

ERA REPORT: HAVE INDIVIDUALS IN UNRATIFIED STATES BECOME DISCOURAGED SINCE THE ELECTION?

CAMPBELL: No. People are angry and even more committed to ERA. People working for ERA in unratified states lost elections through no fault of their own. They did everything right, and in any other year we would have made gains. As it was, they held their ground, and that is remarkable considering the conservative Republican sweep.

ERA REPORT: DID ANYTHING POSITIVE COME OUT OF THE ELECTIONS?

CAMPBELL: Yes, I think so, even though it's hard at first to see the long view after a disappointing setback. In the unratified states, women organized as a political force, making women's participation in politics real. Many legislators may eventually be sorry they made us work so hard because large numbers of women have now become involved in politics. Many individuals in organizations have become involved politically by working on specific issues. I think they have gained a broader understanding of the problem. We must be involved in the campaigns of people who support our issues; we can't just lobby them after they are elected.

ERA REPORT: HOW DO YOU ANSWER PEOPLE WHO SAY A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT IS UNNECESSARY?

CAMPBELL: The Equal Rights Amendment is the only way to guarantee equality for women. The 14th Amendment isn't adequate. If it were, the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote wouldn't have been necessary. Statute-by-statute revision would clog the calendars of every legislature in this country and of Congress for years. Besides, statutes can be undone. The rights we have gained, such as the Equal Employment Law and the Equal Pay Act, were passed by very small margins in Congress. With a change in political climate, those acts can be repealed. With a change in the Supreme Court, women's rights may not be upheld unless we have a constitutional amendment with the same stature as the 14th Amendment, which guaranteed equal participation in society to minorities. We will settle for no less than a constitutional amendment, no matter how long it takes.

ERA REPORT: DO ETHNIC AND MINORITY GROUPS SUPPORT ERA? ARE THOSE GROUPS PART OF ERAMERICA COALITIONS?

CAMPBELL: Yes, minority organizations and civil rights organizations have supported ERA since its introduction in 1972, because it is a part of the overall civil rights struggle. However, the visibility of the participants in these groups has not been as high as it must be. ERAmerica formed a multi-cultural task force in January 1980 to identify members of ethnic groups who support the amendment, so that they in turn can identify other members of their communities who would be willing to work with coalition groups in the unratified states. ERAmerica has hired a multi-cultural outreach coordinator to enlist the active support of people within minority communities and to build the connections within these communities.

ERA REPORT: HAVE NATIONAL POLLS INDICATED A DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF AMERICANS WHO SUPPORT ERA?

CAMPBELL: No. In a Harris poll conducted in January 1980, between 56% and 60% of Americans continue to support ERA, the same percentage of Americans who have consistently supported ERA.

ERA REPORT: WHY HAS THE STRUGGLE FOR ERA BEEN SO LONG AND DIFFICULT IF IT WILL BENEFIT SO MANY AMERICANS?

CAMPBELL: There's no question that the struggle for equality is long and hard. It took a revolution for Americans to gain their liberty from England. It took a civil war to free blacks from slavery. The people in this country who have power are never going to give it up without a struggle.

ERA REPORT: WHAT CAN INDIVIDUALS DO TO SHOW THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE ERA?

CAMPBELL: People in every state can write to their state legislators, members of Congress and governors indicating the depth of their commitment to the Equal Rights Amendment. They can give money to organizations such as the League. They can talk to friends and co-workers explaining why ERA is needed.



The National Organization for Women (NOW) grew out of the movement inspired by Betty Friedan's book The Feminine Mystique. The first conference was held in 1968 with Ms. Friedan elected president of the organization. MOLLY YARD, a spokeswoman for NOW, discusses the impact of the election and some strategies now in the planning stages.

ERA REPORT: WHAT DO STUDIES REVEAL ABOUT THE WAY PEOPLE VOTED IN THE 1980 ELECTION? DID WOMEN AND MEN VOTE DIFFERENTLY IN THIS ELECTION?

YARD: Yes, for the first time there was a significant difference in the way men and women voted. Ronald Reagan received 7 out of 10 votes from men but only 5 out of 10 votes from women, according to CBS exit polls. This difference in actual votes amounts to a net loss of 3.3 million feminine votes for Reagan. For the first time in a decade fewer women than men voted. We theorize that the low female turnout was due to a lack of enthusiasm about voting for Carter, while many women simply could not bring themselves to vote for Reagan. A pro-women's rights bloc emerged in this election. If Republicans continue to act on their platform concerning women's issues, this bloc is large enough to cost them future elections.

ERA REPORT: CRITICISM HAS BEEN AIMED AT THE DEMOCRATS WHO HAVE, UNTIL THIS ELECTION, CONTROLLED THE CONGRESS AND MANY STATE LEGISLATURES, FOR FAILING TO RATIFY ERA. CAN THE DEMOCRATS BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

YARD: Looking at the states which have the strongest support for ratification, we have learned that 77% of Republican state legislators oppose ERA, whereas 55% of the Democratic legislators support ERA. If as many Republican legislators supported ERA as Democratic legislators, there would be no problem in ratifying the ERA. Because the Republican legislators are so predominantly opposed to the passage of ERA, we are going to hold the Republican Party accountable for the failure, if there is indeed a failure, to ratify the ERA.

ERA Report: WHAT STRATEGIES IS NOW CONSIDERING FOR 1981?

YARD: Many of our activities are still in the planning stages. We are currently working with ERAmerica on a petition campaign which will involve all proponent organizations. We also plan to be visible during inauguration activities to remind the nation that support for ERA has not

dissipated since the election; it has increased.

ERA REPORT: *SINCE NOW HAS WON ITS BOYCOTT CASE, IS THE ORGANIZATION PLANNING TO EXTEND THE BOYCOTT?*

YARD: Yes, 300 organizations now support the boycott, and we plan to increase that number. We are also investigating the possibility of extending the boycott to include products manufactured by the Mormon Church. As you know, the Mormon Church has successfully prevented ratification in three states, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. Civil rights groups were successful in their attempt to change the Church's position on allowing Blacks to become priests, and we feel that if enough pressure is applied, they may change their position on ERA to a more favorable one.

ERA REPORT: *SINCE FEWER WOMEN VOTED IN THIS ELECTION, DO YOU FEEL WOMEN ARE BECOMING APATHETIC ABOUT POLITICS IN GENERAL, AND WOMEN'S ISSUES IN PARTICULAR?*

YARD: Just the opposite. Following the election, we were deluged with calls from people asking "what can we do?" There is a very heightened sense on the part of concerned women that in the 18 months remaining, everyone has to do far more than they were willing to do previously. Women cannot take their gains for granted.



LINDA TARR-WHELAN has viewed the ERA campaign from two perspectives, first as deputy assistant to President Carter under Sarah Weddington, and currently as the ERA coordinator at the National Education Association. (Photo by Carolyn Salisbury, NEA)

ERA REPORT: *WHAT ROLE HAS NEA PLAYED IN THE RATIFICATION EFFORT?*

TARR-WHELAN: NEA was one of the first national organizations to support the Equal Rights Amendment by a resolution at its convention in 1969. It was also one of the first organizations to support the boycott of unratified states; no major meetings are held in unratified states. In 1978 the national convention made passage of the amendment one of its major priorities by providing technical assistance and staff to unratified states. NEA raised \$93,000 to support legislative activities in unratified states for the 1980 elections.

ERA REPORT: *HAS NEA BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGNS WHERE THEIR RESOURCES HAVE BEEN CONCENTRATED?*

TARR-WHELAN: We feel that our campaigns were successful in two aspects. We succeeded in involving members of our organization at both the state and national levels, an NEA priority. Secondly, NEA was able to provide new funds to candidates who were targeted because of their pro-ERA stands. NEA worked with coalitions in

unratified states to determine which candidates would receive funds for their campaigns. Without these funds, we would have lost many pro-ERA legislators.

ERA REPORT: *HOW DOES NEA VIEW ITS FUTURE ROLE IN THE RATIFICATION PROCESS?*

TARR-WHELAN: We expect our efforts to be long-term. We have hired a field coordinator in Oklahoma. We are still evaluating in other states to determine where we can best commit staff and other resources. We hope to participate in a full-scale media campaign.

ERA REPORT: *HASN'T A MEDIA CAMPAIGN BEEN USED BEFORE?*

TARR-WHELAN: Yes. In Iowa, TV ads were run that had a very "soft" message: boys and girls walking through fields picking daisies, with a discussion of equal rights for boys and girls. I think that's very important, but I also think the message has to be more direct in terms of where women are today---their economic plight. A lot of advertising needs to be directed to making people understand that we *don't* already have equality for women today. The biggest problem is that a media campaign will be costly. We need to convince groups and individuals that this is worth the financial commitment. If we can raise enough money to start a media campaign, it would revitalize the issue and give it a national focus.

ERA REPORT: *DOES NEA WORK CLOSELY WITH OTHER LABOR ORGANIZATIONS WHO SUPPORT ERA?*

TARR-WHELAN: NEA works closely with other labor groups, all of whom have favorable positions on ERA. Some groups have not applied as much pressure at the national level as they could. I personally feel the effort could be better coordinated, which is what we are working on now. I think the same thing can be said for the churches, civil rights organizations and other proponent groups. After all, civil rights battles were not won by civil rights groups alone, and I think they would be the first to admit this. It took a broad coalition of groups of every sort, and that's what we have to do. I might add that the League's involvement with the business community is critical to our success because the business community has enormous sway in state legislatures. What business lobbyists say and do is very important.

ERA REPORT: *FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE ERA WAS INTRODUCED WE WILL HAVE A PRESIDENT WHO DOES NOT SUPPORT THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT. HOW DO YOU THINK THAT WILL AFFECT CAMPAIGN EFFORTS?*

TARR-WHELAN: Because we have lost Democratic support in both the White House and Congress, a new coalition of liberals, moderates and progressives will have to join together to push

for passage of the amendment. Many constituencies will be left out of a very narrow Republican administration. Reagan may be boxed into a right-wing attitude because of the leadership in the Senate, which is in the hands of some of the most conservative Republicans, and because right-wing groups supported his campaign. In the long term, the Democratic Party may benefit from this situation, but it will have to be built from the ground up. We should embrace the platform of the Republican Party where it offers to pass legislation for women. President-elect Reagan can hardly get away with ignoring women in his administration, and it's our job to see that he doesn't.



The Business and Professional Women's Clubs, with 165,000 members, named ERA ratification as its number one legislative priority in 1937 and their efforts have not diminished in 43 years. In 1975 BPW incorporated into its dues structure \$225,000 a year, earmarked for ERA sup-

port. No meetings are held in unratified states. Support for ERA in unratified states has been aimed at coordinating BPW efforts with statewide campaigns and conducting educational programs. In addition, BPW has supported such national projects as media research, polling and political campaign consultants.

We talked with MARIWYN HEATH, ERA Coordinator for BPW and long-time Republican, for her impressions of what lies ahead for the Republican Party and BPW's future strategy for ERA.

ERA REPORT: HOW DID THE MANY BPW MEMBERS WHO ARE REPUBLICANS FEEL WHEN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY WITHDREW ERA FROM THE PLATFORM AT THE GOP CONVENTION?

HEATH: They felt deserted, "put in their place." Republicans Martha Griffiths and Gerald Ford spearheaded the movement for passage of the amendment in Congress. ERA has always had wide support from the Republican Party. I think the Republican Party is making a big mistake if it continues to narrow its base of support, relying only on conservative elements.

ERA REPORT: WHAT CHOICES DO REPUBLICAN WOMEN WHO SUPPORT PASSAGE OF THE AMENDMENT HAVE?

HEATH: First, they can swallow their principles and support their party's President. Second, they can leave the Republican Party and become Democrats, something many GOP women have already done. Third, they can work within the party, keeping Ronald Reagan on the defensive.

ERA REPORT: WHAT WILL THE ROLE OF BPW BE BETWEEN NOW AND JUNE 1982?

HEATH: We have at least one local club in every congressional district, and our members must

simply redouble their efforts in the unratified states. As for the Reagan Administration, we must keep the pressure on Mr. Reagan to include capable women as decision-making participants, not just figurehead appointees.



Many religious groups are actively working for the passage of ERA as part of a coalition, the Religious Committee for ERA. Catholics Act for ERA, founded and led by Sister MAUREEN FIEDLER, is one of the more vocal religious groups working within the coalition. Ms. Fiedler founded Catholics

Act in 1978 because we felt an informed Catholic group could best answer the questions raised by other Catholics. Ms. Fiedler made a campaign speaking tour through Iowa before the election. Anti-ERA forces, including the Moral Majority, conducted a particularly virulent and visible campaign in Iowa against the addition of an equal rights amendment to the state constitution. We asked Ms. Fiedler to comment on her experiences in Iowa.

ERA REPORT: THE MORAL MAJORITY HAS BEEN CRITICIZED FOR ITS INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS. DO YOU FEEL THAT RELIGIOUS GROUPS SHOULD BECOME INVOLVED IN POLITICAL ISSUES?

FIEDLER: I believe that people of faith have a right and an obligation to speak out on political issues. What worries me is the particular agenda of issues and the set of positions that the Moral Majority defines as "Christian." Their list is deficient. You never see them working on programs that further racial equality; you never see them working on world hunger; you never see them working for peace or disarmament. In fact, when it comes to peace and disarmament, they're on the opposite side. They are either opposed to, or have no position on, many issues that religious people have valued for many centuries.

ERA REPORT: WHY IS THE MORAL MAJORITY OPPOSED TO ERA?

FIEDLER: They're scared to death of changes in sex roles between men and women. They don't recognize that there is a cultural process we're struggling through, gradually changing traditional roles for the better--towards equality. Their image of the family is a one-image reality: husband-breadwinner; wife-homemaker--a concept that actually represents only about 20 percent of American families today. They refuse to recognize families in which women are the head of the household or in which both adults work outside the home. They don't recognize any kind of family other than their preconceived idea of family, and they'd like to put every family into this kind of mold.

ERA REPORT: WHAT INFLUENCE HAS THE MORAL MAJORITY HAD ON CATHOLIC GROUPS?

FIEDLER: As you know, the Moral Majority is opposed to abortion, and they use this stand to appeal to "right to life" Catholics. By coalescing with right-wing groups such as the Moral Majority, Catholics who oppose abortion are being manipulated into opposing a lot of other issues that have nothing to do with abortion.

ERA REPORT: WHAT METHODS HAS YOUR GROUP, CATHOLICS ACT FOR ERA, USED TO CONVINCE CATHOLICS THAT ERA AND ABORTION ARE UNRELATED?

FIEDLER: By encouraging prominent members of the Catholic Church to endorse ERA, we hope that Catholics will realize that ERA and abortion are separate issues. In Iowa I was in constant dialogue with Bishop Dingman, one of four bishops in the state, encouraging him to endorse the state ERA. His endorsement was released in the Catholic Mirror in the form of a pastoral letter the Thursday before the election. In the letter Bishop Dingman pointed out that "as a member of the Church and as a citizen, I believe I can help to further the movement toward fuller recognition of women by my support of the Equal Rights Amendment. It's an interesting historical note that the Bishops of the United States opposed women's suffrage when it was debated. Could it be, that we will be in a similar position when the history of our time is written and the subject is ERA?" He went on to reiterate the fact that there is no connection between the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion.

ERA REPORT: DO YOU THINK THAT BISHOP DINGMAN'S ENDORSEMENT HAD AN IMPACT ON CATHOLIC VOTERS?

FIEDLER: His reasons for supporting the amendment were widely reported in the press. I personally talked with many Catholics who changed their minds about ERA because of his endorsement. However, only 17 percent of the population of Iowa is Catholic.

ERA REPORT: AS THE REPRESENTATIVE FOR "CATHOLICS ACT" TO THE RELIGIOUS COMMITTEE FOR ERA, CAN YOU TELL US WHAT THAT COALITION IS PLANNING?

FIEDLER: We are now setting up meetings to strengthen our contacts within the religious community. Many religious groups which have not been very active in the struggle for ERA, are concerned about right-wing religious groups. Members of traditional religions are beginning to realize that if they don't voice their concerns, groups such as the Moral Majority will step in to fill the vacuum.



LOIS HARRISON, LWVUS ERA Chair, concludes our series of interviews with comments on the focus of League activities in the coming months.

ERA REPORT: THE LWV HAS TAPPED A NEW SOURCE OF SUPPORT FOR ERA BY ORGANIZING THE NATIONAL BUSINESS COUNCIL FOR ERA (NBC). WHAT INSPIRED THE LEAGUE TO GO TO THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

HARRISON: Strategists identified business as the missing link in the existing lobbying campaign. The League developed the plan for the National Business Council for ERA because we had a long-standing, good relationship with business. We based the plan partly on the example of Charles Curry, a Missouri businessman who had gone on the line for ERA. We put our energies and money into bringing the NBC together, and we now sponsor, coordinate, and monitor it and its activities. Thanks to the active partnership of Polly Bergen and Coy Eklund, we put the council together in only six months. While the League has been the prime mover, the council has flourished because other organizations and influential individuals have used their personal contacts on behalf of the council and have, in turn, used the help of NBC members. The initial press conference announced 50 members---today the Council membership numbers 155 and is growing!

ERA REPORT: WHAT ROLE HAS THE COUNCIL PLAYED FOR ERA?

HARRISON: Council members are asked to lend their names, reach out to their peers to join the National Business Council for ERA, and bring the pressure of their personal influence to bear in support of ERA when it's being voted on in state legislatures. They have also contributed dollars to the LWVUS ERA fund, which pays for council expenses. During the Illinois campaign, LWVUS/ERA asked NBC members to make targeted calls to specific legislators, then relay their reports to Gretta Tameling, the Illinois League's ERA lobbyist. She followed up by contacting each legislator who had received an NBC call--a tightly coordinated effort for maximum effect! This kind of coordination of council member's lobbying activities ensures that the NBC operates within both the League's national and state strategy.

ERA REPORT: WHAT ROLE DO YOU SEE FOR THE LEAGUE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BUSINESS IN FUTURE CAMPAIGNS?

HARRISON: Leagues in all the states are reaching out for additional National Business Council members 'to build a strong public image--and the reality of support for ERA from top levels of business. We are also building the national support networks for these contacts. In most of the states where ERA votes will occur, business is a major source of influence. We expect a strong business lobbying effort to be a critical part of the state strategy.

ERA REPORT: IS THIS ALL THE LEAGUE IS DOING?

HARRISON: No. You can't let down on any front! Leagues are part of coalition efforts at the national level through ERAmerica, and in each un-

ratified state, working to build the climate and carrying out their part of the lobbying efforts. The NBC is one essential element in the lobbying force--one we're pleased to have brought into the coalition. At the 1980 convention only last May 2,000 League delegates reaffirmed their commitment to ERA as a primary issue. We're here to stay---in force---on ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

What do these post-election evaluations add up to? Certain notes do come through strongly. The job ahead will be tough. Proponent groups remain strongly committed to seeing ERA ratified by June 1982. National organizations must rebuild support among their constituencies. They must renew their educational efforts, to make clear that all the rights that women have gained in the last eight years can be lost if the Equal Rights Amendment is not ratified. We must help people separate ERA from other issues. Proponent organizations must work together, on a unified education and lobbying strategy, at every level. Proponents must reach out to uninvolved sectors of the community and encourage "lukewarm" ERA backers to step up their efforts and visibility.

Perhaps Mary Crisp summed up what is at stake, when she wrote in the October 1980 issue of the Women's Political Times, "Ratification of the ERA is the most important issue for women today. It is the foundation on which all of our issues rest. It would end discrimination against women in employment, health, education---and other aspects of life. It should and must be established, as a national priority in order to guarantee full equality under the law for all Americans."



"Corporate America Stands Up to Be Counted for ERA", was the theme which brought Polly Bergen, co-chair of the National Business Council for ERA, and Earle Angstadt, Jr., president of the McCall Pattern Company, together as speakers for a luncheon held by Advertizing Women of New York, Inc. (AWNY). (top) A \$1,000 contribution was presented to the LWVUS ERA fund by AWNY president Carol Finn Meyer. (bottom)

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