

Eagle Forum

"the alternative to women's lib"

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THE ERA PLANK IN THE REPUBLICAN PLATFORM: THE FACTS AND THE LESSONS

So much misinformation was printed & aired about the ERA plank in the Republican Platform that the record should be set straight. It contains many important political lessons.

Weeks in advance of the Republican Convention, it was clear that the majority of Convention Delegates would be against ERA. (If the Republican National Committee and the Reagan campaign staff didn't know that, they just can't count.) After the much-publicized defeat of ERA in Illinois on June 18 (for the 9th year), it was clear that it would be politically stupid to have a pro-ERA plank in the Platform and thereby embarrass Republican candidates from the top of the ticket to the bottom in one of the country's largest, swing states, crucial in any presidential election. (If the Rep Natl Com and the Reagan campaign staff don't know that, they are in big trouble.) It was also clear that a handful of pro-ERA Republicans combined with the non-Republican women's lib agitators would have their usual big access to the media. The political question was, how to handle this?

We in Illinois had already shown the politicians how to handle ERA. At the Illinois State Republican Convention in Peoria on May 10, we clearly had enough votes to pass a very strong anti-ERA resolution. Instead we presented a "harmony" resolution calling ERA "a state legislative issue not a national issue," and urging the Republican Platform adopted in Detroit "to delete all references to ERA." This was passed with only a few scattered "no's" among the 3,000 delegates.

In the weeks before Detroit, I made repeated efforts to talk with the chairman of the Republican National Platform Committee, Sen. John Tower, in order to discuss how best to handle ERA in the Detroit Platform, but he did not return my calls. Finally, I sent a letter to all Republican Convention Delegates urging substantially what the Illinois Convention had voted, & recommending in the name of party harmony and a November Republican/Reagan victory, that ERA be omitted from the Platform. Of those who

responded to my letter and poll, 973 agreed and only 54 disagreed.

Meanwhile, in Washington, Sen. Tower and a small group of people working on the Platform met to approve the staff-written draft of the Platform which would be submitted to the elected Platform Committee when it met in Detroit. The original staff-written draft had some confused, neutral treatment of ERA. But Congresswoman Margaret Heckler had a tantrum, demanding that an ERA endorsement be included. She was vehemently supported by Cong. David Stockman, speaking for Gov. & Mrs. Milliken. Whereupon, the draft Platform was changed to include an ERA endorsement! This was a political blunder which set the stage for an ERA fight in Detroit. Unable to stand up to the Heckler demands, the "powers that be" in the Republican high command simply passed the buck to the full Committee in Detroit.

If the men running the Republican Platform Committee, the Rep Natl Com, and the Reagan campaign had been politically alert, here is what they would have done. (1) Decide firmly and finally that the ratification of constitutional amendments is a matter for each state legislature to decide, not the President, not Congress, not a party platform; and that therefore the Platform would make no mention of ERA. (2) Turn to the Hecklers and the Millikens and tell them bluntly, "You don't have the votes to do anything in the Republican Convention; we know because we have counted them. If you want Republican candidates to win, you will gracefully accept no mention of ERA in the Platform. If you fight for a pro-ERA plank, you will lose and you will probably get an anti-ERA plank. And if you continue to fight ERA in Detroit and in the media, you will be branded as disruptive of party unity and everyone will know you are trying to defeat Republican candidates." This would have disposed of ERA with a minimum of bitterness and publicity, before the 10,000 media personnel gathered in Detroit eager to write about something controversial. Nobody said that, so the ERAers thought they could use the media and bluff the Delegates.

The establishment media's own polls proved that the ERAers didn't have the votes. The CBS poll showed 62% of the Delegates anti-ERA and the Washington Post poll showed 70% of the Delegates anti-ERA. If the question had ever been asked (as I asked in my letter to Delegates), "Do you believe that, for the sake of Party harmony and a Republican victory, ERA should be omitted from the Platform?", at least 95% would have said yes.

But the handful of ERAers who wanted ERA in the Platform at all costs, no matter how much it might hurt Republican candidates, took their battle into the eager arms of the 10,000 media personnel clustered in Detroit who had little else to write about. With full press coverage, Gov. Milliken made a big demand for ERA at the opening session of the Platform Committee. His people had arranged for his claque to applaud loudly. Anti-ERAers were mostly excluded from the hall, altho 200 seats remained empty. Helen Milliken joined the NOW demonstrators in the streets. Mary Crisp cried in front of TV cameras and photographers. At that point, the Rep Natl Com, Chairman Bill Brock, Sen. Tower, some of Reagan's campaign staff, and a few nervous conservative office-holders, urged a pro-ERA plank to appease the libs.

But the Convention Delegates were smart enough to tell a media event and a bluff from the real thing, and they were not intimidated.

The Human Resources Subcommittee, which had jurisdiction over ERA, simply wrote its own plank. Subcommittee members didn't take anybody else's words; they wrote their own. The Subcommittee members were better platform writers and smarter politicians than any of the people who were trying to tell them what to do. They all were capable, dedicated, and articulate. They worked for hours and days hammering out the best, practical compromise: it takes a strong stand for women's rights, against drafting women, and takes no position on ERA, recognizing it as an issue for state legislatures to decide. Special thanks are due to Marilyn Thayer of Louisiana for presenting the language which was adopted, to Glenda Mattoon of Oklahoma for her willingness to withdraw her stronger plank for the sake of harmony, and to Guy Farley of Virginia for his skill in debate, in handling amendments, and in procedure.

The "harmony" plank referred to above passed the Subcommittee on Human Resources by 14 to 1, then passed the full Platform Committee by 90 to 9. When the principal ERA sponsor in the Convention tried to raise the issue on the floor, his motion failed for want of a second. ERA wasn't controversial anywhere except in the media.

The Lessons of the ERA Plank Battle

1. Support for ERA in the Republican Convention came only from a handful of persons plus the media. There were 50 women on the Platform Committee, each a leader elected in her own state as a Delegate, and then elected by her peers to the Platform Committee (one from each state). Only 6 voted for ERA; 44 voted for the "harmony" plank. Candidates who want to win elections should side with the majority, not the minority.

2. The men in the Republican National Committee, the Reagan campaign staff, and Congress have no idea how to handle the ERA issue. If they don't learn fast how to handle ERA and the noisy ERA proponents, political candidates will be hurt again and again.

3. The anti-ERAers are smarter politicians than all the office-holders and campaign staffs working against them. Anti-ERAers have learned from experience how to win against big odds. Candidates who want to win should consult with the anti-ERA winners, not the losers.

Anne Armstrong's Appointment

Since the Convention, there has been a campaign by the ERAers and the media to convince Ronald Reagan that he should appease ERAers by appointing pro-ERA women to office. So he started by appointing Anne Armstrong as co-chairman of his campaign. Who is she?

The Congressional Record of Sept. 24, 1974, contains a statement by Sen. Charles Percy, which quotes a statement written by Anne Armstrong promoting International Women's Year in which she says: "Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment is necessary for the achievement of legal equality for all men and women. ... I look forward to working with Congress and State Department officials to assist in the success of this government's participation in International Women's Year. I, too, add my encouragement for the full participation of not only the government sector but also the private sector as we implement the principles outlined by the goals of IWY."

It should be noted that she was referring to the UN IWY, since her remarks were made before the Bella Abzug ERA-abortion-lesbian IWY Conference in Houston in 1977. But the UN IWY plan of action was even worse!

There is one unique characteristic of pro-ERAers: they do not believe in equal rights for those against ERA, and once pro-ERAers get in government positions, they blacklist all those who are against ERA. Question: Will Armstrong screen out all anti-ERA women from Reagan's staff?

Please send your most generous contribution to help pay for our heavy current expenses for the Convention and the ERA lawsuit.