

Chronology of the Equal Rights Amendment, 1923-1996

The Early Years

1923

Three years after women won the right to vote, [the Equal Rights Amendment \(ERA\)](#) is introduced in Congress by Senator Curtis and Representative Anthony, both Republicans. It is authored by Alice Paul, head of the National Women's Party, who led the suffrage campaign. Anthony is the nephew of suffragist Susan B. Anthony.

1923-1970

Through the efforts of Alice Paul, the Amendment is introduced into each session of Congress.

Buried in committee in both Houses of Congress, the ERA awaits a hearing on the floor. In 1946, it is narrowly defeated by the full Senate, 38-35. In 1950, the ERA is passed by the Senate with a rider that nullifies its equal protection aspects.

1967

The National Organization for Women (NOW), a recently founded feminist group, pledges to fight tirelessly for the ratification of the ERA.

1970

February: Twenty NOW leaders disrupt hearings of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, demanding the ERA be heard by the full Congress.

May: The Senate Subcommittee begins hearings on the ERA under Senator Birch Bayh.

June: The ERA finally leaves the House Judiciary Committee due to a discharge petition filed by Representative Martha Griffiths.

1971

The ERA is approved without amendments by the U.S. House of Representatives in a vote of 354-24. The National Education Association and the United Auto Workers vote at their annual conventions to endorse the ERA.

1972

March 22: The Equal Rights Amendment is approved by the full Senate without changes — 84-8. Senator Sam Ervin and Representative Emanuel Celler succeed in setting an arbitrary time limit of seven years for ratification.

The newly founded National Conference for Puerto Rican Women endorses the ERA, and the League of Women Voters agrees to support it after years of opposition.

Phyllis Schlafly establishes the National Committee to Stop ERA.

1973-1975

The ERA wins a powerful ally when the AFL-CIO votes to endorse it in 1973.

1975-1977

Pressure from anti-ERA, right-wing groups begins to surface in state legislatures. Indiana becomes the thirty-fifth state to ratify in 1977. NOW chapters in unratified states are succeeding in electing pro-ERA candidates. But instances of “turncoat voting” on the ERA are also surfacing.

1977

At the first congressionally funded National Women’s Conference in Houston, Texas, 2,000 delegates from every state call for ratification of the ERA.

February: NOW publicizes the ERA boycott of unratified states and gathers even more support for the Amendment. The number of pro-ERA groups grows to more than 450, representing more than 50 million Americans.

March: NOW seeks an extension of the deadline for ERA ratification with the argument that the Constitution imposes no time limit for ratification of amendments. Further, the seven year provision of ERA is not a part of the text of the amendment, but rather is only in the resolving clause. Congress has the power to establish and change the time limit.

July 9: Alice Paul, ERA author, dies at age 92.

October: Representative Elizabeth Holtzman introduces a bill calling for an extension of the ERA deadline which had been March 22, 1979.

1978

February: The NOW National Board declares a State of Emergency on the ERA. It pledges full resources to winning the deadline extension and to ongoing ratification campaigns.

February-March: Missouri files suit on antitrust grounds against NOW, claiming it violated the Sherman Antitrust Act by urging groups to boycott unratified states and hold conventions only in ratified states.

July 9: NOW organizes ERA Extension March of 100,000-plus supporters in Washington, D.C. This March for Equality is the largest in feminist history.

August 15: After intense lobbying by a united women's rights coalition, the U.S. House of Representatives approves the ERA deadline extension, 233-189.

October 6: The U.S. Senate joins the House and approves extension by a vote of 60-36. A new deadline of June 30, 1982 is set.

1979

January-June: ERA opponents launch all-out attack by attempting to pass rescission bills in at least a dozen states. Rescission bills are defeated in 12 states.

February: Federal Judge Elmo Hunter rules in the ERA boycott case that NOW's activities are protected by the First Amendment and do not violate antitrust laws. This decision is later upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court in late 1980 declines to hear the case. The ERA Boycott is legal.

May: Legislators from Idaho, Arizona and Washington state file suit in federal court challenging the constitutionality of the ERA extension and seeking to validate a state's power to rescind a prior ratification. The case is assigned to Judge Marion Callister, who at the time the litigation began (and 6 months after) held a high office (Regional Representative) in the hierarchy of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormon Church. The Church officially and actively opposes the ERA and the ERA extension and supports rescission.

1980

May: NOW organizes 85,000 people to march in Chicago in support of Illinois ratifying the ERA.

July: During platform hearings, the Republican Party reverses its 40 year tradition of support for ERA. NOW organizes 12,000 to march in Detroit at the Republican Convention. The final Republican Platform officially takes no position on ERA, but candidate Ronald Reagan and newly elected right-wing party officials actively oppose the amendment.

August: The Democratic Party reaffirms support for ERA and the ERA boycott. The Platform pledges to withhold campaign funds and assistance from presidential candidates who do not support ERA.

November: Exit polls on election day show that for the first time ever recorded, men and women vote quite differently in the race. AP/NBC News reports that men backed Reagan by a 56- 36% edge, but women split their votes 47-45%. Pollsters later indicate that for women, the issue of women's rights and ERA had a significant impact on their votes. By March 1981, leading pollsters are claiming "Ronald Reagan has a woman problem" on the ERA.

1981

January: Ronald Reagan becomes the first U.S. President opposed to a constitutional amendment which provides equal rights for women. NOW organizes the "ERA YES Inaugural Watch" where some 40,000 ERA supporters remind the new President of the overwhelming pro-ERA sentiments in the nation.

April: NOW sends Feminist Missionaries to Utah, the heart of the opposition to ERA, and the headquarters of the Mormon Church, to take the message of the ERA directly to the Mormon people, door-to-door.

May: NOW files a \$10 million lawsuit against the Attorney General of Missouri charging that he intentionally injured NOW, the Equal Rights Amendment campaign and the women's rights movement by suing NOW for its convention boycott of states which have not ratified ERA.

June: NOW announces Betty Ford as Honorary Chair and Alan Alda as Co-Chair of NOW's ERA Countdown Campaign activities.

June 30 NOW sponsors ERA Countdown Rallies in over 180 cities to draw attention to the ERA deadline of June 30, 1982, and to dramatize the wide support for the ERA.

October: NOW begins the first nationwide advertising campaign for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. The television spots focus on sex discrimination and are designed to activate the vast majority of people who support the ERA.

December: On the eve of the opening of crucial legislative sessions in key unratified states, Judge Callister rules the ERA extension illegal and rescission legal. This opinion marks the first time in this country's history that an Act of Congress relating to the amending process was declared unconstitutional by a federal court. NOW immediately appeals the ruling to the Supreme Court and asks for an expedited hearing.

1982

January: The Supreme Court, just 17 days after NOW appealed the Callister ruling, vindicates NOW's position by entering a rarely granted unanimous stay prohibiting the enforcement of Callister's decision and agreeing to hear NOW's appeal on the merits of the case at a later date. This action negates any legal effect of Callister's

decision and removes the cloud of confusion that the ruling had placed over the ratification debate in the states.

June 30: ERA is stopped three states short of ratification. ERA supporters pledge “We’ll Remember in November.” An analysis of the ERA vote in the four key targeted states, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina and Oklahoma, shows the Republicans deserted ERA and Democratic support was not strong enough to pass the amendment; the analysis makes clear that the single most obvious problem was the gender and racial imbalance in the legislatures, with more than 2/3 of the women, all of the African Americans but less than 50% of the white men in the targeted legislatures casting pro-ERA votes in 1982.

July: ERA is officially reintroduced in the United States Congress.
1983.

The U.S. House of Representatives fails to pass the ERA by a vote of 278 for the ERA and 147 against the ERA, only 6 votes short of the required 2/3 majority for passage. Fourteen cosponsors voted NO and three cosponsors did not vote. Only 30% of the Republicans voted YES and 85% of the Democrats voted YES.

1985 – 1992

The ERA is reintroduced into each session of Congress and held in Committee.

NOW’s Recent Work on ERA

1993

At its national convention NOW passes a resolution calling for the formation of two committees, one an ERA grassroots committee to survey the chapters and states as to their members’ current thinking about the direction the organization should take concerning the ERA. The second committee (the legislative history committee) is formed to study the history of the previous amendment and the impact of state ERAs.

1994

As activists begin to discuss what they want constitutional equality for women and non-discrimination on the basis of sex to mean, interest grows and at the annual conference in July 1994, an ERA Strategy Summit is called for the purpose of developing recommended language for a new ERA. The membership includes in the resolution that any proposed amendment must include the concepts of reproductive rights including abortion and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

1995

January: The ERA Summit is attended by the national officers and board, the state presidents, members of the ERA Strategy committee and interested activists to discuss the issue and draft language for a new ERA. At the ERA Summit, NOW President, Patricia Ireland explains that to achieve true equality a paradigm shift is needed. Under the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, using a male rather than human standard, the courts have been able to justify discrimination. Our goal of the summit is defined as the need to construct an amendment and develop a strategy that would end women's historic subordination to men and guarantee women full constitutional rights.

July: NOW members, voting in conference, resolve to proceed with an expanded constitutional amendment strategy that would eliminate discrimination based on sex, race, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnicity, national origin, color or indigence. Members also call for further study of age and disability as classes to be included in the struggle for constitutional equality.

1996

The national Constitutional Equality Amendment (CEA) Committee continues to evaluate the working draft of the CEA adopted at the 1995 National NOW Conference. The committee produces and distributes educational and action organizing materials on the proposed amendment. In addition, the committee plans day-long education and action organizing workshops to be held throughout the country.