



Highlights

1966 – 1976 | 1976 – 1986 | 1986 – 1996 | 1996 – 2006

1966 – 1976

1966 (June) National Organization for Women (NOW) is established by a group of women, including Betty Friedan and Pauli Murray, who meet to discuss alternative action strategies during the Third Annual Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women in Washington, D.C. Friedan famously writes the acronym NOW on a paper napkin.

1966 (October) NOW holds its founding conference. Betty Friedan is elected president and Kay Clarenbach, chair of the board. Aileen Hernandez is elected executive vice president *in absentia*; Richard Graham, vice president; and Caroline Davis, secretary-treasurer. NOW sets up seven Task Forces: Equal Opportunity of Employment; Legal and Political Rights; Education; Women in Poverty; The Family; Image of Women; and Women and Religion .

1966 NOW officers and members begin petitioning EEOC for public hearings on its advertising guidelines and pressuring the Commission to enforce its prohibition against sex discrimination. NOW officers and 35 members file a formal petition with the EEOC for hearings to amend regulations on sex-segregated “Help Wanted” ads.

1967 At its second national conference, NOW adopts passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the repeal of all abortion laws, and publicly-funded child care among its goals in a “Bill of Rights for Women.” NOW is the first national organization to endorse the legalization of abortion.

1967 NOW’s National Board adopts by-laws providing for the establishment of chapters, and establishing the national conference as the supreme governing body of the organization.

1967 In May, the EEOC holds hearings on sex discrimination in employment ads as a result of NOW’s 1966 petition. NOW members demonstrate at EEOC field offices across the country in protest of EEOC’s failure to end sex-segregated “Help Wanted” advertising. In December, four NYC newspapers, including the New York Times, de-sexigrate their Help Wanted ads.

1968 NOW chapters around the country demonstrate at facilities that deny admittance or service to women, demanding equal treatment of women in all public accommodations.

1968 NOW boycotts Colgate-Palmolive products, and demonstrates for five days in front of the company’s NYC headquarters, protesting company rules that kept women out of top-paying jobs with a prohibition against lifting more than 35 pounds.

1968 In November, NOW member Shirley Chisholm becomes the first Black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

1969 On February 9, NOW proclaims “Public Accommodations Week,” and holds national actions at “men only” restaurants, bars, and public transportation. A month before, the U.S. Court of Appeals rules in favor of EEOC guidelines prohibiting sex-segregated job advertising.

1969 In March, NOW attorney Sylvia Roberts (later NOW’s Southern Regional Director, from Baton Rouge, LA) argues the first sex discrimination case appealed under Title VII. Roberts argues in the Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals that it was sex discrimination for Lorena Weeks, a secretary, to be restricted from higher-paying employment as a “switchman” because of a 30-pound lifting limit. Weeks entered the courtroom with her typewriter, which she was regularly required to lift and move — yes, it weighed more than 30 pounds. The court later rules in *Weeks v. Southern Bell* that the weight limitation rule for women violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

1969 NOW holds a week-long action called “Freedom for Women Week” at the White House, beginning on Mother’s Day. Demonstrators call for “Rights, Not Roses.”

1969 NOW chapters work to establish women’s studies courses, beginning at universities in California and Michigan, and at Princeton.

1970 In February, about 20 NOW members, led by Wilma Scott Heide and Jean Witter, disrupt the Senate hearings on the 18-year-old vote to demand hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment. At a signal from Heide, the women rise and unfold posters they had concealed in their purses.

1970 NOW establishes a Federal Compliance Committee to press for enforcement of federal equal opportunity laws requiring that federal contractors not discriminate against women. NOW files a sex discrimination complaint with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance against 1,300 corporations for failing to file affirmative action plans for hiring women.

1970 NOW organizes “Women’s Strike for Equality” on the 50th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment, with actions in more than 90 cities and towns in 40 states. 50,000 women march on Fifth Avenue in New York.

1970 In August, after an intense campaign by NOW, the House passes the ERA by a vote of 350-15.

1970-71 NOW campaigns for the Comprehensive Child Care Act, sponsored in the Senate by Walter Mondale and Jacob Javits, and in the House by Shirley Chisholm and Bella Abzug; NOW lobbies the comprehensive legislation through both houses of Congress, but it is vetoed by President Richard Nixon, who calls it the “Sovietization of American children.”

1971 NOW protests the Department of Health, Education and Welfare’s failure to deal with discrimination complaints against universities, and work begins on what will eventually become Title IX.

1971 NOW petitions the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to have women included in affirmative action programs for radio and television ownership and employment

1971 NOW stages nationwide demonstrations protesting AT&T's discriminatory practices towards women, thus beginning a campaign that will last several years and end in massive back pay for women who had been excluded.

1971 NOW adopts a resolution recognizing that lesbian rights are "a legitimate concern of feminism."

1972 NOW endorses Shirley Chisholm, a NOW member, in the democratic primary. Chisholm is the first African American woman to run for President, and NOW's first presidential endorsement.

1972 NOW organizes a national campaign to pass a law guaranteeing women and girls equal educational opportunities, including higher education admissions and athletic participation. In June, Congress passes the Education Amendments of 1972, which includes Title IX, a guarantee of equal educational opportunities, including sports.

1972 – 1982 After the Senate passes the ERA 84-8, NOW leads ERA ratification campaigns in all 50 states. By 1977, 35 of the necessary 38 states have ratified the amendment.

1973 *Roe v. Wade* invalidates all state laws that restrict abortion in the first three months of pregnancy, grounding the decision on the right to privacy, and permits second trimester regulations only to protect the woman's health. NOW chapters begin escorting patients into the newly established clinics, which are already being picketed.

1973 The NOW Task Force on Rape is created to set up Rape Crisis Centers and hotlines across the country; NOW begins campaigns to redefine rape as a crime of violence.

1973 NOW establishes the Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism.

1973 Conceived by NOW, August 26, the anniversary of the passage of the suffrage amendment, is declared Women's Equality Day by Congress and the President.

1973 In June, after a five year campaign by NOW and more than three years of litigation of the NOW complaint, the U.S. Supreme Court rules to prohibit sex-segregated employment advertisements.

1973 NOW organizes an International Feminist Planning Conference in Massachusetts.

1974 NOW passes resolutions calling for the impeachment of Richard Nixon. In September, President Gerald Ford meets with NOW President Karen DeCrow and other women leaders.

1974 NOW helps defeat a proposal by the NCAA to narrow the scope of Title IX; the Educational Equity Act passes Congress after pressure from NOW and other feminist organizations.

1975 NOW calls all members to the streets to protest violence against women and to “claim the night and the streets as ours” – the first “Take Back the Night” actions.

1975 Congress opens U.S. military academies to women, and NOW pushes for an immediate effective date.

1975 In October, NOW sponsors “Alice Doesn’t Day,” a women’s strike, to draw attention to the many unnoticed services women provide.

1975 NOW Media Task Force testifies against funding of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting due to its poor record on women.

1976 – 1986

1976 NOW opens its Action Center in Washington, D.C. and projects its first \$1 million budget. NOW continues its campaign for ERA ratification.

1976 The NOW Task Force on Battered Women is established.

1977 At the historic Houston Women’s Conference, led by NOW President Eleanor Smeal, activists pass controversial lesbian rights plank despite opposition by conference organizers. Betty Friedan speaks in favor of the plank. The conference’s final Plan of Action echoes NOW’s “Bill of Rights” proposed a decade earlier.

1977 NOW adopts bylaws establishing regional election of board members and delegated National Conferences which elect full-time salaried national officers.

1977 In August, NOW organizes the first ERA march, demanding that President Jimmy Carter take action to ratify the ERA. Four thousand people attend. Days later, ERA walkathons on Women’s Equality Day across the country raise \$150,000 for the NOW ERA Strike Force.

1977 After considerable debate, NOW conference delegates resolve to form a Political Action Committee to influence the election of feminists to office.

1978 In June, NOW members demonstrate across the country on Gay Freedom Day.

1978 In July, NOW organizes over 100,000 people to march down Constitution Avenue to the Capitol, demanding an extension of the ERA ratification deadline. The House and Senate vote to extend the ratification deadline from 1979 until 1982—only half of the seven years extension that was requested, contributing to the defeat of the amendment.

1978 NOW continues to boycott states that have not ratified the ERA, gaining the support of 321 organizations and 35 cities and counties. NOW is sued by John Ashcroft, Missouri’s attorney general, claiming the ERA boycott is unlawful; NOW prevails, establishing the right to use a boycott for the purpose of petitioning the government.

1978 NOW helps pass a Rape Shield Law, protecting the privacy of rape survivors by preventing cross examination into the woman’s prior sexual history.

1978 The Pregnancy Discrimination Act, drafted by NOW founder Phineas Indritz, ends employment discrimination based on pregnancy, requiring that it be treated as any temporary disability by employers who are covered by Title VII.

1979 NOW testifies in Congress against restrictions on abortion funding for military personnel and dependents.

1979 NOW unites with other organizations to counter a lobbying effort to limit Title IX.

1979 NOW launches a new National ERA Campaign; action teams are set up in ratified states to prevent rescission. NOW activists defeat ERA rescission efforts in 13 states.

1979 NOW Minority Women's Committee organizes the conference "Racism and Sexism-A Shared Struggle for Equal Rights," in Washington, D.C.

1980 NOW conference adopts an affirmative action bylaw, reserving a minimum number of board seats for women of color.

1980 Over 90,000 ERA supporters gather in Chicago for a march coordinated by NOW.

1980 NOW delegation fights to pass the strongest ERA and reproductive rights planks in history at the 1980 Democratic Convention, over the objections of eventual party nominee, incumbent president Jimmy Carter.

1980 NOW announces opposition to the draft, but states that if there is a draft, NOW supports the inclusion of women on the same basis as men.

1981 Sandra Day O'Connor is appointed to the US Supreme Court by President Ronald Reagan. NOW President Eleanor Smeal testifies in favor of her appointment.

1981 NOW launches a nationwide campaign to stop the so-called Human Life Amendment, which would prohibit all abortions and ban the use of some contraceptive pills and IUDs. State and local chapters across the country organize to counter anti-choice legislation.

1981 ERA Countdown Campaign Offices are opened nationwide, and rallies around the country occur to kick off the campaign. The "Last Walk for ERA" raises close to a million dollars.

1982 The ERA falls three states short of ratification. Supporters continue to reintroduce it in every session of Congress thereafter

1982 On Women's Equality Day, NOW's PACs launch a \$3 million fundraising drive for fall state and congressional elections as part of our ERA vow to "Remember in November"

1983 NOW activists defeat almost all anti-abortion bills introduced in state legislatures this year. The U.S. Supreme Court rules 6-3 that government can not interfere with women's abortion rights unless it is clearly justified by "accepted medical practice."

1983 With other leading civil rights groups, NOW is a lead organizer of the 20th anniversary march commemorating the 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have a Dream" march. At NOW's urging, Equality is added to the march theme, making it a march for Peace, Justice and Equality.

1983 NOW leads a successful campaign to reinstate the cancelled TV series Cagney and Lacey, with Tyne Daly and Sharon Gless, which was the first to portray female police officers and strong role models for women.

1983 NOW endorses the Economic Equity Act. NOW chapters nationwide participate in a "National Day of Protest" against Allstate Insurance for employment discrimination.

1984 NOW makes its second presidential endorsement, supporting women's rights champion Walter Mondale, former Vice President, in the democratic primary. With NOW's urging a "Woman VP NOW," Mondale selects Geraldine Ferraro for Vice President. NOW campaigns nationwide for Mondale/Ferraro.

1984 NOW's first Lesbian Rights Conference is held in Milwaukee, WI.

1984 NOW chapters around the country picket Republican Party offices in protest of President Reagan's anti-abortion leadership; carry out publicity campaigns with Women's Truth Squads. NOW pickets the White House, and demands an end to anti-abortion violence and harassment.

1984 – 1988 NOW works to pass the Civil Rights Restoration Act, reversing Supreme Court cases that limited federal laws combating discrimination based on gender, race, age and disability.

1985 NOW chapters conduct around-the-clock vigils in 30 abortion clinics in 18 states to guard against potential violence; NOW activists continue to provide clinic escort services for patients.

1985 In June, NOW organizes a national march in D.C. and "Witness for Women's Lives" rallies in 13 cities protesting the Catholic leadership's opposition to abortion and contraception.

1986 NOW organizes first East/West Coast March for Women's Lives, drawing 125,000 demonstrators to Washington, DC and 30,000 to Los Angeles despite torrential rains.

1986 NOW Foundation is formed as the tax-deductible litigation, education and advocacy arm of NOW.

1986 After numerous assaults on abortion clinics, NOW announces that it has filed a federal civil suit in Delaware against Joseph Scheidler, the Pro Life Action League, and other groups attacking the clinics, for violation of anti-trust and other federal laws.

1986 – 1996

1987 NOW convenes first conference on Women of Color and Reproductive Freedom, followed by regional conferences.

1987 NOW launches “The Great American Mother’s Day Write-In” to counter the right-wing assault to prevent passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act.

1987 NOW “Campaign to Free Sharon Kowalski,” successfully brings attention to the rights of lifetime partners in making medical decisions for each other.

1987 NOW participates in organizing the National Gay and Lesbian Rights March that drew hundreds of thousands to D.C.

1987 NOW unites with NAACP and others to coordinate “Jobs with Justice” march in Texas.

1988 NOW holds its second Lesbian Rights Conference in San Diego, CA.

1988 Congress overrides President Reagan’s veto to pass the Civil Rights Restoration Act, for which NOW fought. The act restored Title IX equal education laws, which had been effectively suspended since the 1984 *Grove City v. Bell* decision in the Supreme Court.

1988 NOW begins long battle with Operation Rescue, defending clinics across the country from blockades and suing (and eventually bankrupting) leader Randall Terry for breaking the law.

1989 NOW’s 2nd March for Women’s Lives brings a record-setting 500,000 to the National Mall to influence the Supreme Court considering a reversal of *Roe v Wade*.

1989 After Supreme Court decisions gut employment discrimination laws, NOW helps draft a new Civil Rights Act, which passes in 1991, giving women the right to money damages and jury trials for sex discrimination and sexual harassment.

1989 In November, NOW organizes another 350,000 people for a mass rally at the Lincoln Memorial, “Mobilization for Women’s Lives” is an unprecedented second mass action in a single year.

1990 – 1994 NOW lobbies for four years to pass the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which is signed in 1994 with an unprecedented \$1.6 billion dollar budget for violence prevention and services.

1990 NOW’s Freedom Caravan for Women’s Lives begins state tours to recruit feminist candidates.

1991 After employees are fired based on sexual orientation, NOW demands fair hiring practices at Cracker Barrel Country Stores.

1991 NOW’s National Conference in New York includes a march and rally of more than 7,500 people to protest the “gag rule.” Congress votes to overturn the George H. W. Bush Administrations “gag rule” that barred federally financed family planning clinics from giving women information about abortion, but Bush vetoes the legislation and the House does not have enough votes to override. NOW chapters nationwide protest at Bush administration speaking events.

1991 NOW's WomenElect 2000 campaign helps recruit dozens of women candidates for the Louisiana legislature, which had just passed the country's worst abortion bill. The 9-month campaign takes the legislature from two women to ten women!

1991 NOW participates in a march for peace in the Middle East.

1991 After two years of intense lobbying, the Civil Rights Act of 1991 finally passes Congress with jury trials and money damages for sex discrimination – but recovery of punitive damages is capped at \$250,000 in order to prevent a Bush veto.

1992 NOW's 25th Anniversary celebration includes a Global Feminist Conference that attracts women leaders from around the world.

1992 NOW's 3rd March for Women's Lives sets a record for the largest civil rights demonstration in the US to date, with 750,000 marching. NOW chapters and National NOW participate in efforts throughout the year to defend clinics. As a commencement to a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience, NOW and Feminist Majority organize illegal speak-out in front of the White House protesting the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*.

1992 NOW runs "Elect Women for a Change" campaigns in several states, helping feminist candidates to win congressional, state, and local primaries. Founding convention of the 21st Century Party takes place in D.C.

1993 Dr. David Gunn, an abortion provider, is murdered in Pensacola. NOW demands that Clinton administration assign a multi-agency task force to identify and prosecute the perpetrators of this and other ongoing clinic violence.

1993 NOW demands that newly-elected President Bill Clinton and Congress support a ban on discrimination against lesbians and gay men in the military.

1993 A Texas school reverses a decision to ban pregnant girls from the cheerleading squad after NOW threatens to file a lawsuit.

1994 U.S. Supreme Court in *NOW v. Scheidler* unanimously upholds our right to use the anti-racketeering law against those coordinating violence against clinics.

1995 NOW delegates at ERA Summit adopt outline of an expanded amendment calling for full Constitutional Equality.

1995 NOW brings over 250,000 people to D.C. to rally against Violence Against Women, pressuring the Newt Gingrich Congress to release VAWA funding.

1996 – 2006

1996 NOW's Women Friendly Workplace campaign names Mitsubishi Motors, where race and sex discrimination and harassment were rampant, its first NOW Merchant of Shame.

1996 NOW launches “Hungry for Justice,” a 17-day hunger strike in front of the White House to pressure President Clinton to veto the punitive welfare “reform” bill that had just passed Congress and would increase U.S. poverty among women and children.

1996 NOW “comes out” in favor of same-sex marriage rights.

1997 NOW pressures Congress to pass the Domestic Violence Option, allowing states to grant women escaping violence exemptions from punitive new welfare reform provisions.

1997 NOW National Conference resolution supports recognition of transgender oppression and calls for education on the rights of transgender people.

1998 After 12 years of litigation, NOW wins a unanimous jury verdict against Joseph Scheidler, Operation Rescue and others under RICO (anti-racketeering law); a nationwide injunction against violence at abortion clinics follows.

1998 NOW campaigns for legislation to put teeth into the Equal Pay Act, allowing compensatory and punitive damages and making it easier to bring class action lawsuits.

1998 After years of lobbying, NOW allies in Congress add sex, sexual orientation and disability to federal hate crimes legislation.

1998 NOW holds its first Women of Color and Allies Summit, during which activists support equal wages for women janitors in the U.S. Capitol.

1999 NOW and NOW Foundation host the 3rd Lesbian Rights Summit.

1999 NOW forms Family Law committee, recognizing the impact of family courts on women’s lives; NOW challenges anti-woman agenda of spreading “father’s rights” movement.

1999 Fortune 500 Project launched as part of NOW’s Women-Friendly Workplace Campaign

2000 NOW conference endorses multiple strategies aimed at achieving ratification of a constitutional equal rights amendment.

2000 In October, NOW organizes the U.S. event of the World March of Women; the same weekend NOW Foundation hosts the Women’s International Symposium on Health (WISH)

2000 NOW activists across the country campaign against the election of George W. Bush as president. NOW PAC supports the election of feminists across the country, increasing our representation in the Congress.

2001 NOW declares a state of emergency and organizes the “Emergency Action for Women’s Lives” in D.C. to call attention to the Bush Administration’s anti-woman agenda, including one of his first acts as president — reinstating the Global Gag Rule which cut off funding to international family planning organizations.

2001 Following the 9-11 tragedy, NOW joins labor and civil rights advocacy organizations and speaks out for low-wage workers and calls for a real “economic stimulus” package, including extending unemployment and health insurance for laid off workers. NOW calls for lifting the time limit on benefits for welfare recipients in light of the massive layoffs in the service sector.

2001 NOW immediately begins fighting Bush’s judicial nominees, as he nominates even more extremists in the wake of 9-11.

2002 NOW releases report “Our Courts at Risk” and is one of the first groups to press for a filibuster strategy to save *Roe v. Wade* from extremist judges.

2002 Bush administration “marriage initiatives” targeting women on welfare raise ire, and NOW campaigns for their defeat with op-eds, letters to the editor, and grassroots lobbying.

2002 NOW Launches “The Truth About George” campaign and website, a public information campaign designed to keep the public eye trained on the Bush administration’s track record on women’s rights, civil liberties, judicial nominees, the environment, the economy and protections for the elderly and the poor.

2002 – 2006 NOW’s Women Friendly Workplace Campaign names Wal-Mart a Merchant of Shame because of their sex discrimination policies in hiring, pay and promotions. NOW chapters picket local stores for four years.

2002 Federal Marriage Amendment is introduced in Congress; NOW lobbies against the FMA and continues campaigning for equal marriage rights.

2003 NOW endorses Carol Moseley Braun, the second African-American woman to run for U.S. President

2003 NOW launches campaign to pressure the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to sell emergency contraception over the counter, and to restrict the availability of dangerous silicone gel breast implants.

2003 NOW is a lead organizer and speaker for the 40th anniversary of the 1963 MLK March on Washington

2003 NOW Foundation hosts Women with Disabilities and Allies Summit to draw attention and educate activists on disability rights and accessibility issues.

2004 NOW organizes campaign to expose threats posed to women by the Bush administration’s proposed privatization of Social Security.

2004 NOW is a lead organizer of the massive March for Women’s Lives in Washington, DC. With 1.15 million marchers, it was the largest civil rights march in US history.

2004 NOW launches its formal Equal Marriage Campaign and committee, and hosts the Equal Marriage coalition meetings at the NOW Action Center. Information Kits are delivered to every member of Congress and chapters receive brochures and organizing materials.

2004 NOW Foundation undertakes campaigns to register voters, particularly women voters, achieving over 7 million voter contacts.

2005 NOW protests Justice Department's "medical guidelines" for treating rape survivors – it fails to mention emergency contraception, a standard precaution against pregnancy after rape.

2005 Second NOW Women of Color and Allies Summit draws hundreds of women to draft an action plan to empower and energize women of color.

2005 NOW declares a State of Emergency upon the resignation of Sandra Day O'Connor, holding a rally and demonstration the following day to demand that O'Connor's replacement be supportive of women's rights and civil rights.

2005 NOW establishes an advisory committee on Mothers and Caregivers Economic Rights.

2006 "Enraged and Engaged" NOW campaign brings activists from across the country to fight the nomination of Samuel Alito to replace O'Connor on the Supreme Court.

2006 NOW is a lead organizer of the huge anti-war march in NYC, the March for Peace, Justice and Democracy in April, as part of our ongoing "Peace is a Feminist Issue" opposition to war in the Middle East.

2006 NOW opposes punitive immigration "reform" measures and participates in national immigrants' rights marches in New York and Washington, DC

2006 In February, the Supreme Court rejects NOW's racketeering lawsuit against Joe Scheidler, Operation Rescue and others, and directs the lower court to invalidate the nationwide injunction that has protected clinics across the country for 7 years. Within two months after the injunction is revoked, Operation Rescue (now called Operation Save America) attempts to mount a July siege of the last remaining clinic in Mississippi, and of course, NOW is there.

2006 NOW celebrates "Forty Fearless Years" at the national conference in Albany, NY, which includes a Young Feminist Summit and a tribute to our founders and past presidents