



# Presidents

## Betty Friedan, served as president 1966-1970

Born in Peoria, Illinois, Betty Friedan was valedictorian of her high school and attended Smith College, where she edited the college newspaper and graduated *summa cum laude* in 1942. Her 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, touched a public nerve. Friedan recognized a longing in the women of her generation, a longing for something more—opportunity, recognition, fulfillment, success, a chance to live their own dreams beyond the narrow definition of “womanhood” that had limited their lives.



In 1966, Friedan was instrumental in the founding and success of NOW, which has grown into the United States’ largest feminist organization. Later that year she was elected NOW’s first president, and her fame as an author helped attract thousands to the new organization.

Friedan was NOW’s president from 1966 to 1970. During that time, NOW lobbied the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to enforce laws against sex discrimination in employment, and to ban “Help Wanted” ads that were segregated by sex. NOW forced airlines to change their policies that permitted only female flight attendants, and required them to resign when they married or turned 32. And in a key achievement, NOW convinced President Johnson to sign an Executive Order barring sex discrimination by federal contractors.

In 1968, NOW became the first national organization to endorse the legalization of abortion. Upon her retirement from the NOW presidency, Friedan called for a “Women’s Strike for Equality.” Friedan was a co-founder of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (now called Legal Momentum), the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (now called NARAL Pro-Choice America) and a convener of the National Women’s Political Caucus.

Friedan continued to write and lecture, and in her later years took on the issue of aging. Friedan’s other books include *The Second Stage*, *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women’s Movement*, and *The Fountain of Age*. Her autobiography, *Life So Far*, was published in 2000. Betty Friedan passed away on her 85th birthday, February 4, 2006. We are indebted to her revolutionary vision of a feminist future.

## Aileen Hernandez, served as president 1970-1971

After serving for three years as Executive Vice President, Aileen Hernandez was elected the second president of NOW in March 1970. Months later, under her leadership, NOW organized the “Women’s Strike for Equality” to celebrate the



50th anniversary of the suffrage amendment and draw attention to the importance of women's labor. Over a hundred thousand women were involved nationwide.

After her election, Hernandez embarked on a campaign to secure women's rights in the paid workforce, establishing a Federal Compliance Committee to press for enforcement of federal equal opportunity laws for women. In June, NOW filed a blanket sex discrimination complaint with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance against 1,300 corporations, charging that they had failed to file affirmative action plans for hiring women. The next month, NOW demonstrated in 14 states, pressuring the Secretary of Labor to develop affirmative action guidelines for hiring women.

NOW was also working nationally and locally to raise consciousness about the ERA. Under Hernandez's leadership in 1971, NOW protested the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's handling of sex discrimination complaints against universities and kept up the pressure on newspapers to end segregation of their "Help Wanted" ads by gender. NOW joined the EEOC in efforts to deny AT&T a rate increase on the grounds that the company practiced "pervasive, system-wide, and blatantly unlawful" discrimination in the employment of women and people of color and helped pass the Comprehensive Child Care Act through Congress, but it was vetoed by Richard Nixon.

In May 1971, Hernandez told 300 corporate personnel executives that NOW planned to file suit against the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Defense, and the Director of the OFCCP for not enforcing Executive Order 11246, unless they met the deadline for issuing regulations on sex discrimination and guidelines for affirmative action goals and timetables for federal contractors. The campaign to achieve these goals met with success in December 1971. Hernandez has founded several Black women's organizations, including Black Women Stirring the Waters. She has been Chair of the California Women's Agenda since its founding in 1996 and has won national and local recognition for her work as a civil rights and women's rights leader.

#### **Wilma Scott Heide, served as president 1971-1974**

In February of 1970, Wilma Scott Heide and Jean Witter led about 20 NOW members to the Senate floor, where they disrupted proceedings on the 18-year-old vote to demand hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment. At a signal from Heide the women rose, and unfolded posters they had concealed in their purses. Committee chair Senator Birch Bayh disclosed later that this demonstration did in fact prompt the hearings on the ERA held later in the year. The next month, Heide was elected Chair of the NOW National Board, and in September of the following year, Wilma Scott Heide was elected President, succeeding Aileen Hernandez.



1972 was laden with successes for NOW and feminists nationwide. In October, the ERA was passed in its original form in the House by a vote of 354-23. In March 1972, the Senate voted to pass the ERA 84-8. In June, NOW and other feminist groups won a major victory by passing Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, prohibiting sex discrimination in education institutions receiving federal funds. And in July, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 was extended to

cover executive, administrative and professional personnel. On January 22, 1973, Justice Harry A. Blackmun wrote the decision in *Roe v. Wade* legalizing abortion.

Meanwhile, NOW worked on the front lines to keep the country moving forward on women's rights. NOW initiated action against sexism in elementary school textbooks and began a national campaign for enforcement of the new Title IX. The NOW Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism was established, as well as a Task Force on Rape, which began a campaign to redefine rape as a crime of violence against women. NOW continued to coordinate national actions against AT&T's discriminatory practices, resulting in the largest job discrimination settlement in U.S. history.

Besides playing major role in the passage of the ERA in Congress, in pressuring the EEOC to act on sex bias cases, and in pursuing the campaign against AT&T during her presidency, Heide was a key player in the case against the Pittsburgh Press newspaper, which ended sex-segregated "Help Wanted" ads. Wilma Scott Heide died at 64 after a lifetime of advocacy for women's equality.

### **Karen DeCrow, served as president 1974-1977**

Under DeCrow's leadership, NOW helped to defeat a proposal by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to omit school sports from the scope of Title IX. One month later, NOW testified before the House Armed Services Committee on a bill that would admit women to the nation's service academies. 1974 also saw the settlement of three major employment discrimination suits—against the steel industry, AT&T, and Bank of America—awarding back pay and wage adjustments to employees who were victims of sex discrimination.



Early in 1975, new Title IX regulations barring sex discrimination in intercollegiate athletics and broadened opportunities for women. Just months later, Congress opened the service academies to women and NOW promptly urged for the new policy to take effect by the fall of 1976. At the end of the summer, NOW called all of its 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. DeCrow also helped organize the "Alice Doesn't Day" strike in autumn of 1975, drawing attention to the important but often uncredited work of women. Taking aim at discrimination in the media industry, the NOW Media Task Force testified against funding the Corporation for Public Broadcasting because of its poor record on women. DeCrow, along with actor Alan Alda and Democratic Party Chair Robert Strauss, arranged a press conference to bring increased attention to the campaign to pass the ERA.

In 1976, NOW opened a new Action Center in Washington, D.C., established a National Task Force on Battered Women/Household Violence, and a Task Force on Feminism in Rural America. At Yale University, DeCrow debated the merits of the ERA with opponent Phyllis Schlafly—DeCrow won the debate 32-20. It was one of more than 80 times DeCrow debated Schlafly.

In January of 1977, as she finished her term as president, DeCrow delivered a Women's State of the Union Address in Washington. Karen DeCrow's tenure as NOW's leader was marked by significant legislative and legal gains, along with tireless advocacy on behalf of the ERA. DeCrow advocated for women's rights through her newspaper opinion column until her death on June 6, 2014.

### **Eleanor Smeal, served as president 1977-1982 and 1985-1987**

Ellie Smeal was elected three times as president of NOW, first in 1977 when conference delegates also established a Political Action Committee to elect feminist candidates and authorized a NOW ERA Strike Force to campaign for ratification. Months later, at the Houston Women's Conference attended by more than 20,000 women, Smeal spearheaded the effort to pass the gay rights plank in the National Plan of Action to be submitted to the U.S. government.



After hearing a novel theory that the ratification deadline for ERA could be extended, Smeal convinced Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman (D-NY) to bring the proposal to Congress. Smeal was a key organizer of the 1978 March for the ERA, which brought over 100,000 marchers, and Congress soon voted to extend the deadline to June 30, 1982. In 1979, Smeal was reelected, and NOW testified against restrictions on abortion funding for military personnel and their dependents. NOW organizers helped stage the 1979 National March for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Smeal focused on making Social Security fairer to women, calling the system "institutionalized sexism at its worst," and testified in Congress for the Family and Medical Leave Act. When Reagan was elected president in 1980, Smeal analyzed in the National NOW Times the difference between women's and men's votes—making her the first person to define and name the "gender gap." That January, NOW coordinated three days of ERA actions around the inauguration and launched a national campaign to stop Reagan's anti-abortion "Human Life Amendment." However, NOW supported his nomination of Sandra Day O'Connor to the Supreme Court, and Smeal testified at her confirmation. NOW worked tirelessly for the ERA, but the Amendment fell three states short of passage in June, 1982.

Smeal was again elected president in 1985. NOW Foundation was established, and NOW filed federal lawsuits against anti-abortion leaders and sought a nationwide injunction against clinic violence. Smeal led the first March for Women's Lives in 1986, which drew over 150,000 people to Washington and Los Angeles in support of women's reproductive rights, and she testified against the Supreme Court nominations of Antonin Scalia and William Rehnquist. In 1987, Smeal founded the Feminist Majority and still serves as its president.

### **Judy Goldsmith, served as president 1982-1985**

With Judy Goldsmith at the national helm, local chapters across the country were busy fighting for NOW's priority issues. In the state legislative sessions of 1983, nearly 100 anti-abortion bills were introduced but fewer than twenty passed. Under Goldsmith's leadership, NOW made its second-ever



presidential endorsement, voting to support former Vice President and women's rights champion Walter Mondale in the democratic primary. With NOW's urging to choose a woman, Mondale selected Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate.

In January of 1984, Goldsmith organized a Lesbian Rights Conference in Milwaukee, WI, which focused on the themes of power and politics as NOW headed into an election year. The same weekend, NOW marked the 11th anniversary of Roe v. Wade with nationwide picketing of Republican offices to protest President Reagan's anti-abortion leadership. Goldsmith responded to the wave of anti-abortion terrorism by increasing NOW's presence and demanding a full-scale investigation into the attacks.

Goldsmith continued to call national attention to the clinic violence in a White House picket, where she told reporters, "If Reagan persists in calling American women murderers, he must accept responsibility for the violence that is occurring." Goldsmith also helped bring attention to the segregationist apartheid policies of South Africa and was arrested demonstrating against apartheid near the South African Embassy. As the 1984 election neared, Goldsmith traveled to 21 states helping NOW register voters and encourage support for the Mondale-Ferraro ticket.

As 1985 began, NOW again turned more attention to thwarting violence against abortion clinics—conducting round-the-clock vigils at thirty clinics in eighteen states when federal officials warned that they expected violence. In January, Goldsmith joined Connecticut NOW in supporting striking Yale clerical and technical workers who were eventually victorious in their fight for equal pay.

The next month, before approximately 300 members of the Washington Press Corps, Goldsmith accused anti-abortion leaders of "moral bankruptcy" at a debate with Jerry Falwell. During her tenure at NOW, Judy Goldsmith was a strong leader in the efforts to bring attention to the inhumane and cruel terrorism against women and doctors at abortion clinics. Goldsmith has retired from her position as Dean/CEO of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Goldsmith resides in Wisconsin where she most recently served as CEO/Dean of the University of Wisconsin-Fond du Lac.

### **Molly Yard, served as president 1987-1991**

Before becoming NOW President in 1987, Molly Yard had been involved in politics since the 1940s and was an advisor to Eleanor Roosevelt. She headed up John F. Kennedy's Western Pennsylvania presidential campaign in 1960 and George McGovern's in 1972. Yard was on NOW's staff in the late '70s, when she raised over \$1 million for the campaign to ratify the ERA. From 1985 to 1987, Yard was NOW's Political Director and a key player in the 1986 campaign to defeat anti-abortion referendums in several states.



Yard led NOW's efforts to defeat the Supreme Court nomination of extremist Robert Bork, organized massive marches, opposed U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf War, and organized for lesbian rights and against violence against women. Under Yard, NOW fought for the passage

of the Civil Rights Restoration Act in 1988 and helped draft the 1991 Civil Rights Act, which for the first time gave women the right to money damages and jury trials for sex discrimination and sexual harassment.

In April 1989, Yard organized the largest march in D.C. history at that time. In response to the Webster case, in which the Bush administration had asked the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, NOW organized over 500,000 people to March for Women's Lives and let the Court know what would happen if *Roe* were overturned. Within two months Yard called for a second mobilization, held in November 1989, which brought another 350,000 activists to DC. Throughout that year, NOW's Project Stand Up For Women worked nationwide to escort women safely to clinics and to counter the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue's across the country.

In 1990, the Freedom Caravan for Women's Lives traveled from state to state rallying women and recruiting feminist candidates to run in the fall elections. In 1991, NOW joined other civil rights groups in demanding fair hiring and employment practices at Cracker Barrel after the company fired fifteen employees on the basis of sexual orientation. A year before, NOW launched a campaign to pass and fund a comprehensive Violence Against Women Act, which was signed in 1994.

Months after a debilitating stroke in 1991, Yard determinedly testified in the Senate Judiciary Committee against the confirmation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. Yard died in 2005 at age 93, after a lifetime of leadership in the women's rights and civil rights movements.

### Patricia Ireland, served as president 1991–2001

Patricia Ireland began her ten years as NOW president by celebrating NOW's 25th anniversary in January 1992 with a Global Feminist Conference that brought together women from more than 45 countries. Simultaneously, she was organizing a history-making 750,000 person March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C. Marchers massed behind a banner that declared "WE WON'T GO BACK! WE WILL FIGHT BACK!" At that time, it was the largest march and rally ever held in the nation's capital. In D.C., NOW helped thwart Operation Rescue's attempt to blockade four of the city's clinics, which were kept open by hundreds of defenders.



Throughout 1992, NOW's "Elect Women For A Change" campaign had projects running full force in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia and Tennessee, helping feminist candidates win Congressional, state, and local elections. NOW helped make the 1992 "Year of the Woman" appellation a reality with victories across the country. The percentage of women in Congress doubled from 5% to 10%, and women of color representation increased from six seats to 14. Women Senators increased from two to six, and 48 women went to the House of Representatives—all were pro-choice.

Throughout her term at NOW, Ireland forged strong links with allies, welfare rights activists, civil rights leaders, and LGBT rights groups. As part of NOW's work as a founder of the Up and Out of Poverty Now! coalition, Ireland delivered testimony, and NOW organized lobby days,

news briefings, and protests on behalf of poor women. In 1993, she was a co-convenor and keynote speaker for the 30th anniversary march on Washington commemorating the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ireland's efforts on behalf of lesbian and gay rights included organizing to fight punitive ballot initiatives around the country, being arrested at the White House over the continued ban on gays and lesbians in the military, and serving as a speaker and major organizer for the 1993 March on Washington for Gay, Lesbian and Bi-Equal Rights.

In 1996, Ireland organized a NOW hunger strike in front of the White House, dubbed "Hungry for Justice" protesting passage of a punitive welfare "reform" bill and appealing to President Bill Clinton to veto the measure. Active since 1975 in international women's rights and human rights work, Ireland was the prime architect of NOW's Global Feminist Program.

### **Kim Gandy, served 2001-2009**

Kim Gandy served as a national officer of NOW starting in 1987 and in state, local and regional leadership positions since 1973. As president, Gandy led campaigns on issues ranging from Supreme Court nominations to the rights of mothers and caregivers, from Social Security reform to ending the war in Iraq. Through grassroots political action, Gandy helped increase the women's vote and change the face of Congress in 2006 and led the organization's efforts around the pivotal 2008 elections.



During Gandy's presidency, NOW celebrated its 40 year anniversary, organized conferences on issues affecting women of color and women with disabilities, campaigned against Wal-Mart as a Merchant of Shame, and expanded efforts to win equal marriage rights and benefits for same-sex couples. During her first presidential term, Gandy was one of the lead organizers of The March for Women's Lives in 2004. Gandy was a key organizer of the 1989 and 1992 marches, and her expertise in mass actions helped ensure that 1.2 million activists made the 2004 march for women's reproductive freedom the largest and most diverse grassroots mobilization in our nation's history.

In the legislative arena, Gandy served on the drafting committees for two groundbreaking federal laws: the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act. In addition, Gandy led the fight against anti-abortion terrorists through the landmark racketeering case NOW v. Scheidler, which was in litigation for two decades and reached the Supreme Court three times.

Gandy graduated from Louisiana Tech University in 1973 with a B.S. in mathematics. Her NOW involvement inspired her to attend law school, and she received her law degree in 1978 from Loyola University School of Law, where she was a member of the Loyola Law Review and the National Moot Court Team. Gandy went on to serve as a Senior Assistant District Attorney in New Orleans, and later opened a private trial practice, litigating countless cases seeking fair treatment for women.

She currently serves as president of the National Network to End Domestic Violence.