

Cost of Convention Boycott to States That Have Not Ratified Equal Rights

Proposal Put at \$100 Million

WASHINGTON, April 3 (UPI)—It began with a small newspaper advertisement in Los Angeles. Now, by its sponsors' estimate, the convention boycott of states that have not ratified the proposed equal rights amendment is costing the states \$100 million.

Fourteen months ago, supporters of the proposed constitutional amendment, which would bar sex-based discrimination, began asking business, labor, professional and other organizations to avoid holding conventions and other meetings in the 15 states that have not ratified it.

Some states report no problems with the boycott, but convention bureaus in others have let out cries of anguish as they watch big conventions switch to one of the 35 states that have approved the amendment. Three more ratifications are needed before the amendment can become part of the Constitution.

The National Organization for Women, the prime mover behind the boycott, says the revenue loss for the 15 states amounts to \$100 million and is climbing.

Whether the boycott will persuade reluctant legislators to ratify the amendment remains to be seen, but the measure's supporters say that the economic squeeze, coupled with other tactics, will succeed.

The boycott's effect on convention business in Missouri and Nevada promoted those states to file suit charging NOW with violation of Federal antitrust laws. The other targets of the convention boycott are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia.

NOW says that more than 120 organizations have joined the boycott. Cooperating are such major national organizations as the United Automobile Workers,

the National Education Association, Common Cause, and the American Association of University Women, as well as lesser-known groups.

The boycott began in January 1977 when a group of women, frustrated by Nevada's refusal to ratify the amendment, placed a small advertisement in a Los Angeles paper urging people not to travel or trade in Nevada.

Sizable Revenue Losses

Though the estimates vary, the boycott is clearly causing sizable revenue losses for some major cities.

Allen Goldhamer, public relations director for the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau, estimated that at least 92,250 people and \$18.4 million would not show up in that city because of the boycott. NOW puts Chicago's loss at \$20 million.

The Missouri Attorney General esti-

mated that the boycott had cost Kansas City \$8 million and St. Louis \$10 million. And Bill Peeper, of the Greater New Orleans Tourist and Convention Bureau, said that city had lost from \$10 million to \$12 million in canceled business.

NOW estimates other losses at \$16 million for Atlanta, \$8 million for Las Vegas, and \$5 million for Miami Beach.

Mississippi's travel and tourism director, George William, expects the boycott will cost his state several million dollars. "It has had some effect," he said. "We've been notified by a couple of associations they're asking their members to boycott Mississippi—not only in convention business, but in general vacations as well."

The boycott did not pick up steam until late last year, and its full impact may extend for several more years.

Most large conventions are planned, including site selection, well in advance.

Thus, the organizations participating in the boycott are making decisions that will keep their meetings out of the 15 states next year and in 1980, and perhaps even beyond.

Even with the boycott, legislatures may not be persuaded to ratify the amendment. The amendment has come before the Louisiana Legislature six times and never gotten out of committee. Other legislatures have been equally adamant.

Boycott Draws Criticism

The boycott has been criticized by some officials of the target states. Gov. Reubin Askew of Florida says that the boycott is counterproductive. "Why penalize a whole state because of a handful of elected officials?" an aide to the Governor said.

Phyllis Schlafly, head of a group called Stop ERA, doubts that the boycott has had any political effect. She describes the

boycott as "a deliberate, malicious campaign against people like waiters and maids in hotels and restaurants and taxicab drivers who don't have anything to do with ratification."

Others maintain that it is women, more than men, who are being hurt by the boycott. Bob Thompson, convention and tourism director for the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, says the majority of the workers in the convention industry are women, "and I don't mean just maids."

Eleanor Smeal, president of NOW, defends the boycott as "a tactic that has been employed as part of freedom of speech and political expression in this country for literally centuries." Kathleen Currie, of ERAmerica, which acts as an information clearing house for the boycott, describes the action as "economic justice."