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ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS-- A Statement from Mrs. Barbara B. Smith, General President, Relief Society, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints -- a worldwide organization of about 900,000 women.

I believe in the essential worth of every human soul. As the gospel teaches, all men and all women are equally valuable and should be equally protected by the laws of the land.

I will always support -- as I believe the Relief Society and the Church have always done -- those pieces of legislation which in my judgement improve and protect a woman's right to development of her full potential as a contributing member of society.

I want women to have social, financial, and legal rights; I want each woman to be a valued individual, creative and with many options as to how she will develop. I would like to eradicate laws and practices unfair to women and men, while still keeping laws that provide for their special needs. I want to see a woman learn much. I want her to become the best woman, the best citizen, responsible and participating, in both her own country and in the Kingdom of God; the best homemaker; the greatest individual she is capable of becoming. I want her to be self-confident, trained, a great participator and partner in life; but, I want to be sure that the laws enacted will provide for these things to happen. The Equal Rights Amendment is not the way. It is quite possible that it will bring in its wake a sea of troubles in which the needed special care and consideration for women will be lost.

In my considered judgement the Equal Rights Amendment is so broad that it is inadequate, inflexible, and vague; so all-encompassing

that it is non-definitive. The blanket approach of the Equal Rights Amendment is, in my opinion, a confused step backward in time, instead of a clear stride forward into the future. It will nullify the hard-won protections of women. It will create endless litigation in the courts in which legal decisions are made which might create circumstances harmful to the solidarity of the family and the optimum protection of children.

Is there a law which is unfair to men? If so, change it. Is there a law which is unfair to women? If so, change it. We should seek redress in the legislatures, in the courts, through presidential decree, or by group action. But we must make sure that each law is carefully considered individually.

No one is more interested in the optimum development of women than I am. Women's rights are part of my heritage. My grandmother sought her right to be an individual in a day when it was far more difficult than now, and she became a professional woman, a practicing physician, in a time when it was almost impossible for a woman to be so educated. My mother, a school teacher, took part in many community and Church activities.

Nevertheless, it is my best judgement that ERA is not a panacea for all that remains to be accomplished. It is too broad. It would lock the Supreme Court into making decisions which might be harmful to women. It would produce endless litigation. And because it does not define some differences between men and women, I think it might be very destructive to families.