

# Reader gets some answers on the ERA

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By Abigail Van Buren

DEAR ABBY: I read that you were all for the Equal Rights Amendment. Can you tell me why women need it? Use plain language, please. I only went through the 9th grade.

— Confused in Elgin, Ill.

No one explained it better than Shana Alexander, when she debated columnist James J. Kilpatrick two months ago on CBS's "60 Minutes" TV program.

She said: "Under the law today, women are not being treated as equals with men. Examples:

**Social Security Laws:** Divorced women don't get a fair share of their husband's earnings — even if they were married 30 years.

**Divorce Law:** A man can divorce a wife on the grounds of drunkenness and adultery, but in some states, a woman cannot divorce her husband on those grounds.

**Property Tax Law:** In all 50 states the husband owns the farm. When he dies, his widow must pay inheritance tax — even if she has to sell the farm. But when the wife dies, he pays no inheritance tax!

**Physical Abuse:** In most states, a wife can't sue her husband for beating her up.

**Negligent Injury:** If the wife is injured, her husband can sue for loss of her 'services,' which

## Dear Abby

includes sex, because under the law, he has a legal right to companionship, sex and domestic services. (It's called 'consortium.') A woman has no such right.

**Alimony:** Most states don't allow it, which isn't so bad in wealthy families. But with poor couples, whose only assets are in the man's earning capacity, the woman comes out of a divorce dead broke!

As things stand now, the law is unfair to both sexes. (The Supreme Court says widows get an automatic property tax exemption; widowers don't.)

The court says pregnancy discrimination is not necessarily sex discrimination. It isn't? When's the last time you saw a pregnant man?

The Equal Rights Amendment would take these inequities out of the law and extend the law's protection to both sexes."

## Correction

Architect Lenair Williams, who designed and executed a sculpture memorial to the father of television's Max Robinson, was incorrectly identified in last Wednesday's Portfolio section as William Lenair.

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