

# History of the ERA

## 1923-1982

### The Early Years

**1923**

Three years after women are granted the right to vote, ERA is introduced in Congress by Senator Curtis and Representative Anthony, both Republicans. It is authored by Alice Paul, head of the National Women's Party, who led the suffrage campaign. Anthony is the nephew of suffragist Susan B. Anthony.

**1923-1946**

Buried in committee in both Houses of Congress, the ERA awaits a hearing on the floor. In 1946, it is narrowly defeated by the full Senate, 38-35.

**1950**

The ERA is passed by the Senate with a rider that nullifies its equal protection aspects.

**1953-1970**

Through the efforts of Alice Paul, the Amendment is introduced into each session of Congress but held in Committee.

### The Last 15 Years

**1967**

The National Organization for Women, a recently founded feminist group, pledges to fight tirelessly for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

**1970**

**February:** Twenty NOW leaders disrupt hearings of the U. S. Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, demanding that ERA be heard by the full Congress.

**May:** The Senate Subcommittee begins hearings on the ERA under Senator Birch Bayh.

**June:** The ERA finally leaves the House Judiciary Committee due to a discharge petition filed by Representative Martha Griffiths.

**1971**

The ERA is approved without amendments by the U. S. House of Representatives on a vote of 354-24.

**1972**

**March 22:** The Equal Rights Amendment is approved by the full Senate without changes—84-8. Finally, 49 years after its first introduction, the ERA is sent to the states for ratification by the needed 38. Senator Sam Ervin and Representative Emanuel Celler succeed in setting an arbitrary time limit of seven years for ratification. By the end of 1972, 22 state legislatures have ratified ERA.

**1973-1975**

The ERA wins a powerful ally when the AFL-CIO reverses its earlier stand and votes to endorse the ERA in 1973. Twelve more state legislatures ratify the ERA, bringing the total to 34.

**1975-1977**

Pressure from anti-ERA, right-wing groups begins to surface in state legislatures. Indiana ratifies in 1977. NOW chapters in unratified states are succeeding in electing pro-ERA candidates. But instances of "turncoat voting" on the ERA are also surfacing.

**February 1977:** Nevada becomes an example of turncoat voting as the state Assembly rejects the ERA following its approval in the Nevada Senate. Eleven of the 24 no votes are cast by Democrats who ran on pro-ERA slates and accepted campaign assistance from NOW and other pro-ERA groups.

**February:** NOW publicizes the ERA boycott of unratified states and gathers even more support for the Amendment. The number of pro-ERA groups grows to more than 450, representing more than 50 million Americans.

**March:** Two law students, Catherine Timlin and Alice Bennett, propose that NOW seek an extension of the deadline for ERA ratification.

Their argument is that the Constitution imposes no time limit for ratification of Amendments. Further, the seven year provision of ERA is not a part of the text of the Amendment, but rather is only in the resolving clause. Congress has the power to establish and change the time limit.

**July 9:** Alice Paul, ERA author, dies at age 92.

**October:** Representative Elizabeth Holtzman introduces a bill calling for an extension of the ERA deadline which had been March 22, 1979.

1978

**February:** The NOW National Board declares a State of Emergency on the ERA. It pledges full resources to winning the deadline extension and to ongoing ratification campaigns.

**February-March:** Missouri and Nevada file suit on antitrust grounds against NOW, claiming it violated the Sherman Antitrust Act by urging groups to boycott unratified states and hold conventions only in ratified states.

**July 9:** NOW organizes ERA Extension March of 100,000 plus supporters in Washington, D. C. This March for Equality is the largest in feminist history, and one of the most massive demonstrations ever to be held in the nation's capitol.

**August 15:** The U. S. House of Representatives approves the ERA deadline extension, 233-189.

**October 6:** The U. S. Senate joins the House and approves extension 60-36.

1979

**January-June:** ERA opponents launch all-out attack by attempting to pass rescission bills in at least a dozen states. Rescission bills are defeated in Indiana, South Dakota, North Dakota, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Texas, Iowa, Delaware, Wyoming, West Virginia, Kansas and Montana.

**February:** Federal Judge Elmo Hunter rules in the ERA boycott case that NOW's activities are protected by the First Amendment and do not violate antitrust laws. This decision is later upheld by the U. S. Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court in late 1980 denies to hear the case. The ERA Boycott is legal.

**May:** Legislators from Idaho, Arizona and Washington state file suit in federal court challenging the constitutionality of the ERA extension and seeking to validate a state's power to rescind a prior ratification. Idaho is one of the three states that claims it rescinded its previous ratification. The case is assigned to Judge Marion Callister, who at the time the litigation began (and 6 months after) held a high office (Regional Representative) in the hierarchy of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The LDS Church, commonly known as the Mormon Church, officially and actively opposes the ERA and the ERA extension and supports rescission. The U. S. Department of the Justice move to disqualify Callister on grounds that a reasonable question exists as to the judge's impartiality because of his holding a high office in the hierarchy of the Mormon Church.

**December:** The Mormon Church excommunicates Sonia Johnson, President of Mormons for ERA, for her activities in support of the Amendment.

1980

**May:** NOW organizes 85,000 people to march in Chicago in support of Illinois ratifying the ERA.

**July:** During platform hearings, the Republican Party reverses its 40 year tradition of support for ERA. NOW organizes 12,000 to march in Detroit at the Republican Convention. The final Republican Platform officially takes no position on ERA, but candidate Ronald Reagan and newly elected right-wing party officials actively oppose the Amendment.

**August:** The Democratic Party reaffirms support for ERA and the ERA boycott. The Platform pledges to withhold campaign funds and assistance from candidates who do not support ERA.

**August:** NOW wins the right to intervene in the ERA extension/rescission lawsuit to protect the interests of ERA supporters.

**November:** Exit polls on election day show that for the first time ever recorded, men and women vote quite differently in the presidential race.

AP/NBC News reports that men backed Reagan by a 56-36% edge, but women split their votes 47-45%. Pollsters later indicate that for women, the issue of women's rights and ERA had a significant impact on their votes. By March, 1981, leading pollsters are claiming "Ronald Reagan has a woman problem" . . . on ERA.

1981

**January:** Ronald Reagan becomes the first U. S. President opposed to a constitutional amendment which provides equal rights for women. NOW organizes "ERA YES Inaugural Watch" where some 40,000 ERA supporters remind the new President of the overwhelming pro-ERA sentiments in the nation.

**April:** NOW sends Feminist Missionaries to Utah, the heart of the opposition to ERA, and the headquarters of the Mormon Church, to take the message of the ERA directly to the Mormon people, door-to-door.

**May:** NOW files a \$10 million lawsuit against the Attorney General of Missouri charging that he intentionally injured NOW, the Equal Rights Amendment campaign and the women's rights movement by suing NOW for its convention boycott of states which have not ratified ERA.

**June:** Former First Lady Betty Ford and Alan Alda with NOW President Ellie Smeal, announce Betty Ford as Honorary Chair and Alan Alda as Co-Chair of NOW's ERA Countdown Campaign activities.

**June 30, 1981:** NOW sponsors ERA Countdown Rallies in over 160 cities to draw attention to the ERA deadline of June 30, 1982, and to dramatize the wide support for the ERA.