

Terre Haute and the Equal Rights Amendment

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When the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) passed through Congress and went to the states for ratification, there was great fervor to see the amendment passed quickly, with some states such as Hawaii and Nebraska taking steps to approve ratification before it had even left the US Senate. With 22 states adopting the amendment after only one year, the ERA seemed destined to pass. However, something unexpected happened and for the first and only time in the history of the United States, an amendment that had made it through Congress failed to be ratified by the states. The failure of the ERA and its goal of ending discrimination based on sex has been credited to the work of Phyllis Schlafly and her formation of STOP ERA, which spread misinformation about the amendment and garnered enough support in critical areas to kill ratification. Indiana may have ratified the amendment in 1977, becoming the last state to do so before the extended deadline of 1982, but it too was greatly influenced by the rhetoric of Schlafly and STOP ERA. Schlafly's conservative worldview acted as a conduit for the rising Religious Right and New Right movements that were taking hold in the US. The growing conservative mindset of the 1970s viewed the ERA in a similar light to Schlafly, the accumulation of which resulted in the slow decay of support for the proposed amendment. The city of Terre Haute offers a unique landscape for how this unfolded. With the city having supported Birch Bayh and a more liberal agenda for several years, the rise in New Right ideology took over by the late 1970s. The *Terre Haute Tribune* offers insight into how the ERA, and the feminist movement in general, were affected by this new political identity which eroded the support for an amendment that promised equality of the sexes.¹ This would not only cause a

¹ The *Tribune* gave extensive coverage of the Equal Rights Amendment locally and nationally, which would have provided readers with an ample understanding of the language of the amendment and its supposed ramifications to society. While highly supportive of the ERA and its passage in Indiana (which can be seen through the ample number of editorials cited at the end of the paragraph), the *Tribune* still offers a unique history of the overall struggle in Terre Haute, and to a greater extent, the entirety of Indiana to ratify the amendment. The newspaper articles cited throughout the paper would have circulated throughout Terre Haute and should be regarded as a

great struggle to pass the amendment through the Indiana General Assembly (IGA), but it would also have ramifications for liberal politicians that had championed women's rights such as Birch Bayh, a revered local politician and author of the ERA.²

Women's struggle for an Equal Rights Amendment in the United States began long before the 1970s. The "woman movement" of the mid-19th century established at the Seneca Falls convention headed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, is where the seeds of the ERA first took hold. Stanton and Anthony urged for women's suffrage along with an array of liberties that included education, jobs, marital and property rights, "voluntary motherhood", and health and dress reform.³ They were met with enormous backlash from religious leaders, Ivy League Scholars, medical experts, and press pundits. Criticisms included that the rise in college-educated and working-class women had resulted in the loss of their femininity to "hermaphroditism" due to career burnout produced by the "exhaustion of the female nervous system".⁴ These women were also accused of "race suicide" due to delaying childbearing and

source that would have been read by both pro- and anti-ERA supporters alike, giving them local, state, and national coverage of the amendment. "Time for Sexual Equality," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, October 20, 1971. "Change on Women's Rights," *Terre Haute Tribune*, December 18, 1971. "Sendoff for Equal Rights," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, April 6, 1972. "What the 27th Will Do," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, April 11, 1972. "They'll Raise a Ruckus," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, February 10, 1973. "Equal Rights: Nine to Go," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, October 15, 1973. "Next Step Toward Equality," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, September 6, 1975. "Women's Rights," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, January 19, 1976.

² For descriptions of the feminist movement and the rising desire for an equal rights amendment see Susan D. Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), Maren Carden, *The New Feminist Movement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1974), Maren Carden, *Feminism in the Mid-1970s: The Non-Establishment, the Establishment, and the Future* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1977), Raine Eisler, *The Equal Rights Handbook* (New York: Avon Books, 1978), Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), Elizabeth Anticaglia, *A Housewife's Guide to Women's Liberation* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1972), and Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). For descriptions of the New Right and Religious Right see Jonathan Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern Conservatism* (Oxford, 2001), Robert W. Whitaker, *The New Right Papers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), Robert E. Webber, *The Moral Majority: Right or Wrong?* (Westchester: Cornerstone Books, 1981), Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, *Fault Lines: A History of the United States since 1974* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), and Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (New York: Doubleday, 1980).

³ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 48-49.

⁴ *Ibid*, 49.

their lower likelihood of marriage; Theodore Roosevelt believed these women to be “criminals against the race” and women who demanded rights were charged with creating a “crisis of the family”.⁵ To hinder the effects, Congress outlawed the distribution of contraceptives and most states criminalized abortion. As a response to the media and religious groups’ complaints about the increasing divorce rates caused by feminists, state legislatures passed over a hundred restrictive divorce laws between 1889 and 1906.⁶ With this in mind, it is not surprising that when the ERA was first brought to Congress in the 1920s, it did not have the necessary momentum to warrant any hope of passage.

While the criticism towards feminists and the ERA were very similar to those that were circulated in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the momentum for it was stronger in the early 1970s. The second wave of feminism gathered support from a much wider base, with many of the women leading the charge having gained political experience from the civil rights movement. Betty Friedan, founder and first president of the National Organization for Women, would be one of the prominent figureheads of the feminist movement and acted as a catalyst to help push the ERA back into Congress. The renewed hope that the ERA would pass through Congress largely came from the success of NOW and other feminist groups in the late 1960s. After its passage in the House on August 10th, 1970, approval in the Senate seemed all but certain. Having vocal support from both the left and the right, the ERA had strong bipartisan support which gave hope that it would quickly pass through Congress and be ratified by the states. Being viewed as something positive for the nation, a strong consensus had been reached that the ERA would be beneficial for both men and women of the United States. There were examples of Republicans in Indiana having negative feelings about the amendment such as 2nd District Representative Earl F.

⁵ Ibid, 48-49.

⁶ Ibid, 49-50.

Landgrebe of Valparaiso and 10th District Representative David W. Dennis of Richmond who reverberated concerns similar to Schlafly, but overall, politicians holding this view belonged to the minority.⁷

The whispers of the reintroduction of the ERA into Congress could be heard back in 1970. The growing talk and demand for equal rights were slowly working their way into Washington. President Richard Nixon was at least a soft supporter of the amendment. He praised women for their importance and the “great debt” owed to those who dedicated their lives to women’s suffrage. All though he made no public comment on the ERA passing in the House on August 10th, 1970, his aides pointed out that he was supportive of the amendment.⁸ Although there was some initial hesitation in the Senate over whether the amendment was needed, it was not because of its perceived ill effects on society. Instead, it was believed that the legislation could be dismissed because the protection that was being vied for was already allotted in the 14th Amendment. This was met with criticism by Senators like Birch Bayh who did not view the amendment as sufficient to bring about equality of the sexes. His proposed compromise to drop the ERA and add “sex” to the 14th amendment was rejected.⁹ Bayh would double down on this when debating Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina. Ervin was one of the Senators who believed that the 14th Amendment was adequate in providing equality but, like Bayh, many women were not satisfied unless “sex” would be added to the amendment.¹⁰

Before the STOP ERA takeover headed by Phyllis Schlafly, anti-ERA groups were forming before the legislation had passed through Congress, and the state ratification process

⁷ “Conservative Backs Nominee,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Martin E. Biemer, September 16, 1970. & “Dems See Dennis as Defeatable,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Martin E. Biemer, September 25, 1970.

⁸ “Nixon Notes 50th Birthday of Fem Rights,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Frances Lewine, August 26, 1970.

⁹ “New Women’s Rights Plan,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, November 14, 1970.

¹⁰ “Change on Women’s Rights,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, December 18, 1971. & Raine Eisler, *The Equal Rights Amendment Handbook*, (New York: Avon Books, 1978), 13-15.

began. Groups such as the Happiness of Womanhood (HOW), the American Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO), and the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) were the first groups to challenge the ERA. Each of these organizations had specific reasons for disregarding the ERA. None, however, were able to mobilize as strong of an anti-ERA force as Schlafly. While STOP ERA proved to be more successful, these groups did provide building blocks that were necessary to create a meaningful blockade to stump the amendment.

HOW was founded by Jacquie Davison of Arizona. HOW's goals were to preserve femininity by "encouraging women to become the ideal woman from a man's point of view". HOW emphasized the joys of womanhood and the art of femininity; it viewed the ERA as jeopardizing this by attempting to defeminize women.¹¹ HOW also wanted to wage war against NOW to counteract the feminist movement, with the objective to "preserve masculinity and femininity". To ensure this, HOW stated that women should, "treat [their] husbands like kings and they will in return treat us like queens". Women of HOW wanted to be called "domestic goddesses" because they were the "queens of [their] domains."¹² As can be seen, HOW called for the extreme passivity of women which discouraged challenging social norms of what a woman could be. A woman was supposed to give all trust to her husband and not question his guidance or leadership; to be a woman they must "trust [their] husbands to take good care of [them] and not carry around a senseless burden of worry which will rob [them] of the presence of mind to do [their] job well".¹³ According to HOW, women should "always have the soft, gentle, tender qualities of femininity" and accept their role as wife, mother, and homemaker.¹⁴ Unlike

¹¹ Maren Lockwood Carden, *The New Feminist Movement*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1974), 164.

¹² "Women's View," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Valerie Jones, August 27, 1970.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Caden, *The New Feminist...*, 164-165.

Schlafly and STOP ERA, HOW did not have any religious defense for their desired passivity of women.

Because it believed the ERA would strip away women's rights in the workplace, the AFL-CIO viewed the amendment as dangerous. The AFL president William George Mean believed that the ERA would take the rights of women in the workforce away, undermining the progress that the organization had achieved. He thought that "militant feminists" did not want protection and were putting women who relied on the AFL's laws in jeopardy.¹⁵ The AFL-CIO would eventually switch to being in favor of the ERA three years later in 1973. Internally, however, the view towards the ERA never changed. The switch came because the AFL-CIO "was uncomfortable with its ultra-conservative allies", some of which were accused of backing white supremacist groups. The switch was viewed as a huge win for ERA supporters, gaining a prominent labor organization backing the amendment.¹⁶ Another organization that was supportive of the ERA and active in Terre Haute was the Business & Professional Women's Club (B&PW). In 1972, members of the District 10 B&PW Club held a meeting at the Dragon Inn to go over the legislative report of the ERA.¹⁷ Other meetings were held at the Dragon Inn a few months later to gather information on support within the B&PW district through a survey covering the ERA over a luncheon.¹⁸ From here, the B&PW would come out to be vocal supporters of the amendment, adding another prominent organization as a backer of the amendment.

One of the most prominent organizations that attempted to help explain the ERA to the people of Terre Haute was the League of Women Voters (LWV), a grassroots organization that

¹⁵ "George Meany Views World for America's Organized," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Neil Gilbride, August 31, 1970.

¹⁶ "Washington," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Marianne Means, November 4, 1973.

¹⁷ "Members of District 10 B&PW Clubs Hold Meeting," *Terre Haute Tribune*, June 28, 1972.

¹⁸ "District B&PW Punch, Luncheon set for Jan. 21st," *Terre Haute Tribune*, January 14, 1973.

formed shortly after the passage of the 19th Amendment to help women take a larger role in public affairs. The Local League of Women Voters in Terre Haute held a presentation on the ERA during a unit meeting on September 17th, 1972. The local discussion of the ERA and the questions being asked at the meeting mirrored those being asked nationally. The LWV were largely worried about how the ERA would affect protective laws, family relations, divorce, and criminal laws. Its main concern was whether the proposed amendment would hurt the homemaker and if women would be drafted for combat.¹⁹

The LWV would side with the channel of thought that the ERA would be beneficial for women and society as a whole. In one of its attempts to help Terre Hautians get a better understanding of what the ERA was and what it could do for them, the LWV sponsored a trip to Indianapolis so that people would have a chance to hear about the amendment firsthand.²⁰ LWV's chartered bus to Indy had roughly 40 to 50 women from Terre Haute make the trip to the IGA. At the legislative hearing, the Terre Hautians were recorded as being highly supportive of the amendment, vocalizing their belief that the ERA should become law.²¹ The LWV did other things locally to help sway the public to support the ERA. They targeted women in three prominent spheres of life the religious, the public, and the academic. For instance, the head of the Terre Haute League of Women Voters, Barbara Bailey, held a meeting with the Unitarian church to discuss the ERA in a presentation titled "The Equal Rights Amendment and Why It Must Be Passed;" some of the churches in Terre Haute were avid supporters of feminism, especially the women of certain congregations.²² The LWV also sponsored garage and bake sales to help

¹⁹ "Equal Rights Amendment Topic for Women Voters," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Barbara Brugnaux, September 17, 1972.

²⁰ "Voters League to Attend Hearing on Equal Rights," *Terre Haute Tribune*, February 4, 1973.

²¹ "ERA Hearing Attended by Local Women," *Terre Haute Tribune*, February 6, 1973.

²² "Unitarians Hear Barbara Daley," *Terre Haute Tribune*, March 24, 1973.

circulate League publications. While not solely being about the ERA, these sales had publications on the ERA for sale and review with other LWV published information.²³ Lastly, Bailey held meetings with the members of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to discuss the ERA.²⁴ With the organization's goal to advance equity for women, the AAUW backed the ERA due to its belief that the amendment could make an equitable United States a reality.

The ERA made its way into several local churches in Terre Haute. While it is difficult to garner whether all of the churches were supportive of the amendment, there are hints that at least a minority were in favor of its passage and wanted greater rights for women. At Memorial Methodist Church, the United Methodist Women held a meeting discussing the ERA.²⁵ Other local churches received speakers that were supposed to "deal with the implications of the Equal Rights Amendment," which seems to imply a negative connotation.²⁶ However, during this time women in the church were beginning to latch onto the ERA. Local papers point out a "new and more militant stance for church women involved in the feminist movement," with most of these women spending time lobbying for the ERA while in the secular world.²⁷ This would seem to fit in with the fears of the New Right religious leaders who were having trouble keeping their women congregations in line.²⁸

²³ "League Plans Activated," *Terre Haute Tribune*, June 30, 1973.

²⁴ "What Women are Doing," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Dorothy J. Clark, February 5, 1974.

²⁵ "Church Organizations," *Terre Haute Tribune*, March 28, 1974.

²⁶ "Churches Add Puppet Show to Bible School," *Terre Haute Tribune*, June 7, 1975.

²⁷ "Religion in America," *Terre Haute Tribune*, David E. Anderson, June 28, 1975.

²⁸ Anson Shupe & William A. Stacey, *Born Again Politics and the Moral Majority: What Social Surveys Really Show* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), 83

The formation of the Religious Right can be credited to the mending of different Christian denominations finding ideological similarities over the issue of abortion.²⁹ Those of the Religious Right held the issue of abortion to be tightly knitted to the feminist movement, this created the view of liberated women being a threat to a ‘moral’ American society. The Baptist pastor Jerry Falwell headed this new religious movement and helped to form the Moral Majority which painted the feminist movement in a negative light, blaming liberated women for the perceived immorality that he believed was taking place in the United States.³⁰ Falwell strongly opposed the ERA, stating that the amendment could “never do for women what needs to be done for them,”; he believed that for women to be truly provided for they must understand their subordinate role to their husbands and God.³¹ The Religious Right as a whole latched onto this message often citing scripture to defend their claims, the most common being Ephesians 5:23 which stated that the “husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church.”³²

Through the Religious Right, the New Right found a group that helped to shape the party’s social conservative platform. The New Right attempted to cut ties with the older Republican platform that held close relations to bourgeoisie ideology, instead vying for a more populist and anti-elitist mindset.³³ The culmination of the New and Religious Right resulted in a conservative push to establish a fundamentalist Christian perspective of how the U.S. government should be maintained. Both groups believed that the United States had been

²⁹ Kevin M. Kruse & Julian E. Zelizer, *Fault Lines: A History of the United States since 1974* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 89-95.

³⁰ Robert E. Webber, *The Moral Majority: Right or Wrong?* (Westchester: Cornerstone Books, 1981), 15, 43, & 48.

³¹ Jerry Falwell, *Listen America!* (Doubleday, 1981), 150-157.

³² *Ibid*, 151. The quote is quite common across most religious anti-ERA literature.

³³ Robert W. Whitaker, *The New Right Papers* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 39 & 65.

originally founded on biblical Christianity principles, rather than its civil religion foundation that allowed for the use of religion but did not contain specific Christian content.³⁴

The Indiana Women's Political Caucus (IWPC), whose goals were to help increase women's political participation to achieve a female power base to achieve equality for all women, held a presentation at St. Mary-of-the-Woods College to discuss the ERA and its implications for students and faculty on its campus in 1972. The IWPC was extremely favorable to the ERA. Caucus President Mrs. Virginia Dill McCarty stated, "our goals are passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Equal pay for equal work, equal job opportunities, and more women in policy-making positions,". Her words were presented to around 75 people who were in attendance.³⁵ One of the people in attendance at the IWPC presentation was the President of St. Mary of the Woods, Sister Jeanne Knuerle. A few months after the IWPC presentation, Sister Jeanne would come out and vocalize her support for the ERA.

The long-range implications of the Equal Rights Amendment on the whole fabric of American society have been of central concern to me for some time. I have carefully researched the meaning of the amendment and tried to project the changes it will effect on the generations to come both men and women. As a result of this study, I am convinced that the fundamental and irreversible thrust of the future is to treat the personhood of a man and woman with equality before the law.³⁶

The significance of having support from Sister Jeanne cannot be understated. As the only female president of an all-female school, Sister Jeanne was a living representation of what the ERA and its supporters were attempting to fight for. Sister Jeanne would later make another appearance

³⁴ Webber, *The Moral Majority*, 38. Robert D. Linder & Richard V. Pierard, *Twilight of the Saints: Biblical Christianity & Civil Religion in America* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 21-23.

³⁵ "Head of Indiana Women's Political Caucus Speaks," *Terre Haute Tribune*, October 24, 1972.

³⁶ "Sister Jeanne Gives Views on Equal Rights," *Terre Haute Tribune*, February 3, 1973.

with the IWPC, discussing amongst other things steps that needed to be taken to help garner support for the ratification of the ERA.³⁷

Shortly after the amendment made its way to the states for ratification, Phyllis Schlafly began her crusade against the ERA and formed STOP ERA. Initially, Schlafly was a soft supporter of the ERA, with her main concerns being the threat of communism and the state of national defense (these issues are important to note because they eventually play into her overall views of the ERA). Schlafly did not become fully against the ERA until it had already made its way through Congress and was on its way to state ratification. The lack of a cohesive group that opposed the amendment made it relatively easy for the states to quickly ratify it without any resistance; however, after the formation of STOP ERA, there was suddenly a major roadblock that brought the momentum of the ERA to a halt. Schlafly's political background made this a very dangerous threat.³⁸ More than having the political brains to pull off such a feat, Schlafly was also a figure that common people were attracted to for several reasons. Her presence and energy made it easy for people to latch onto her and feel confident that her actions were right for the US. Her movements and the way she carried herself were very articulate, while also seeming very energetic and humorous. And, while always being very confident, she never came off as vain.³⁹ Schlafly hated the ERA because of the fundamental threat that it presented to her on two different fronts: religious reasons and traditional reasons. To her, the ERA was a very dangerous piece of legislation that would be destructive to the fabric of American society. As a conservative, she felt that the amendment gave too much power to the federal government.⁴⁰

³⁷ "Women's Political Caucus to Hear Woods' President," *Terre Haute Tribune*, July 9, 1973.

³⁸ Carol Felsenthal, *The Sweetheart of The Silent Majority: The Biography of Phyllis Schlafly* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 240.

³⁹ *Ibid*, xiii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 235.

What made Schlafly so effective? Before she founded STOP ERA, Schlafly had been in politics for over 25 years, experiencing how the political sphere functioned. With STOP ERA, she held “training conferences” on how to best spread anti-ERA messages onto television to reach a larger audience. Other tactics that were perfected were the ability to create a letter-writing campaign, testifying at public hearings, holding press conferences, setting up a phone bank, and holding fundraisers. Schlafly also encouraged members to infiltrate the feminist camp, so that members could learn the ERA strategy and counter it.⁴¹ She also had designated leaders that were chosen to head each state. To be selected as a head of state, the individual had to stand up before a group and give a precise summary of STOP ERA propaganda and “pro-family” rhetoric in two minutes. The speakers would be evaluated on not only their orating but would also be judged by peers on their appearance, poise, hand movements, and other public speaking traits. The evaluations would be summed up, with the individual receiving the highest grade being given the position to oversee the designated state.⁴² Indiana’s STOP ERA chairman was Beulah A. Coughenour, who would play a crucial role in attempting to expunge Indiana’s passage of the ERA.

Schlafly was also able to use her prestige to launch the monthly release of the Phyllis Schlafly Report, which she had founded in 1967. It proved to be extremely successful and by 1972, proved to be a great conduit to circulate anti-ERA rhetoric to women across the United States. In 1975, she founded the Eagle Forum and published the *Eagle Forum Newsletter* that reached a mainly female audience. The *Eagle Forum Newsletter* acted as a primer to the anti-ERA movement, providing instructions on fundraising, influencing elected officials, holding

⁴¹ Ibid, 266-267.

⁴² Ibid, 268.

demonstrations, and writing letters. In short, it was Schlafly's "training conferences" for the masses. An example of how this was effective can be seen with the pressure that was put onto libraries to adopt more "pro-family" books to balance out pro- and anti-feminist collections; one book that Schlafly was adamant that her supporters should push for was her own, *The Power of the Positive Women*.⁴³

To full-time homemakers and feminists, the battle taking place in the home had major implications. The feminist movement had reasons to discourage full-time homemaking, viewing it as a threat to equality because more full-time homemakers would cause greater difficulty in breaking traditional expectations that a woman's place was in the home. The concept of an "egalitarian marriage" to them presented a contradiction because no matter how liberated a woman was, a woman who defined herself as "married" would inevitably slide into roles that carried an "inegalitarian heritage," therefore the home was a place where women's liberation could potentially unravel.⁴⁴ Conversely, the Homemakers' perceptions of women who worked outside of the home were very different. Full-time homemakers viewed women who worked for pay as "the enemy". To them, the female workers were degrading the social value of full-time homemaking. So, to the middle-class homemakers, the feminist movement was the main target for their discontent. It was the feminists' fault that the perception of homemaking was decaying and why full-time homemakers were shrinking in number across the nation. While some truth can be found in their assumptions, the main reason women were abandoning homemaking was that more high-status women had received an education and were no longer satisfied with being confined to the home. Because of the growing population of female graduates that wanted to

⁴³ Ibid, 269-273.

⁴⁴ Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 100.

pursue a career on their own, the desire to be a homemaker began to fall. The feminist ideology may have contributed to this, but overall, it was the expansion of women in education that allowed them to perceive a life that was not confined to the home.⁴⁵

The other issue that made the common person question the passage of the ERA was whether it would force women into combat and make them susceptible to a draft. Schlafly was extremely aggressive towards and worried about the USSR; the thought of having women forced into the military seemed dangerous to the overall well-being of the United States and its national security. She believed that the ERA allowing women into combat would severely weaken the US military, especially when facing a Soviet Army whose female troops consisted of roughly one percent of its military force.⁴⁶ ERA supporters were quick to note that the fearmongering of women being drafted into combat had been blown out of proportion. Many noted that the draft itself was not used anymore, meaning that if the ERA were to pass, it would not mean that all women would end up enlisted. If the draft were to be implemented, according to the Senate Judiciary Report, “the ERA [would] not require that all women serve in the military any more than all men are now required to serve.”⁴⁷ In a culture with highly defined gender norms, this type of logical thinking largely fell on deaf ears. The fearmongering by Phyllis Schlafly and Jerry Falwell would prove to be much more persuasive to the public and play a key role in helping to strangle the ERA’s chances of ratification. The formation of the New Right helped push the Republican Party to draft a platform that adopted the rhetoric of Schlafly and those of the Religious Right such as Falwell. What resulted was a party that opposed legal abortion and

⁴⁵ Ibid, 105-106. *There are charts on page 106 that depict the falling population of homemakers, followed by the rise of educated women.*

⁴⁶ Felsenthal, *Sweetheart*, 238.

⁴⁷ Eisler, *Handbook*, 11-13.

the ERA. Coincidentally, this led to the GOP failing to endorse the ERA for the first time since 1940. This would lead to Ronald Reagan becoming the first president to oppose the ERA amendment after it had been sent out for state ratification in 1972.⁴⁸

Unlike other states who jumped at the ability to pass the ERA as quickly as possible, in Indiana the process of passing the amendment was met with a surprising amount of hesitancy after citizens of the state voiced their disapproval. Although the ERA was able to pass through the Indiana House consistently, it struggled to pass in the Senate. Thus, a four-year struggle to get the amendment through the IGA began and was only ratified after some political favors were made with the help of Birch Bayh. In 1977, Indiana would become the last state to ratify the ERA before the deadline.⁴⁹ This was despite the majority of Indiana not being in favor of the amendment, Terre Haute specifically was polled showing that only 37.7% of the city favored ratification.⁵⁰

Shortly after Congress passed the ERA and sent it off to the states for ratification, the IGA was progressively taking steps to pass the amendment through the House and Senate. The process was being carried out smoothly and was expected to pass quickly until it suddenly came to an abrupt halt. Even with bipartisan support, the ERA session stalled after a flood of mail against the passage of the amendment fell on the legislators' desks.⁵¹ Some of the members of the Indiana legislature reported their mail running as much as "9-1 against ratification of the Amendment,".⁵² This would prove to be a pivotal moment that would continuously make the passage of the ERA in Indiana difficult.

⁴⁸ Robert W. Whitaker, *The New Right Papers* (New York: Saint Mary's Press, 1982), 236.

⁴⁹ Robert Blaemire, *Birch Bayh: Making a Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 322.

⁵⁰ "Citizens Respond to Ennis," *Terre Haute Tribune*, December 30, 1975.

⁵¹ "Propose Local Legislative Bodies Accept, Reject Tax," *Terre Haute Tribune*, February 1, 1973.

⁵² "Legislators Break After First Week's Work," *Terre Haute Tribune*, January 13, 1973.

On February 14th of 1973, the ERA passed in the Indiana House for the first time. The passage was viewed as a “Valentine’s Day present” for the women of Indiana. The House voted 53-45 in favor of the amendment. Most of those in attendance in the House Gallery were ERA supporters and responded with cheers and high hopes that the amendment would soon be ratified. However, there were mixed responses in the House itself. For example, Floyd Coleman (R-Waterloo) read a 10-stanza poem for the defeat of the ERA, which included the lines, “Now we thank you, dear God, for thy Wisdom... That exposes that Lucifer’s plot... To foist ERA upon women... Sure would be a bad national blot,”. William Crawford (D-Indianapolis) was more favorable toward the passage of the ERA. Growing up as a black youth worker, Crawford stated that being in a minority group made it easy for him to identify with the women’s struggle; “We are told rights are guaranteed by the Constitution and no remedial legislation is needed. There was the same argument against civil rights laws,”.⁵³

The battle for passage in the Senate stretched on for a considerable length of time. The ERA failed to pass in the Senate in 1973, causing frustration to some Terre Hautians. Some voters began to write the *Tribune* to elaborate a plan to help the passage of the amendment. The idea being to target the two representatives of the district that voted against the ERA, with one Hautian stating “our energies should be directed at persuading our two local dissenting senators to change their vote the next time.”⁵⁴ However, this attitude proved to be unsuccessful and in 1975, the passage of the ERA failed again in the Senate. The failure in 1975 was described in the *Tribune* Editorial; “the blow is not a knockout, however, but a knockdown. All signs indicate that after a year of setbacks the amendment’s champions will be back stronger than ever in 1976,” the Editorial also noted that renewed effort would be needed by all, not just the women’s

⁵³ “ERA Passes House,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Darrel Christian, February 15, 1973.

⁵⁴ “The Editor’s Mail,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Frank Nuessel Jr., December 11, 1973.

groups.⁵⁵ This optimism was met with hesitation as the failure in 1975 marked a cause for concern for many pro-ERA supporters. The possibility of the ERA passing in 1976 was slim because the same legislators who had voted against the amendment would remain in office. Supporters were still optimistic stating “the question [of the ERA] will be waiting in 1977,”.⁵⁶

On the other side of things, those in the anti-ERA camp were beginning to worry about the amendment eventually finding its way to ratification. To stop the amendment being sent back through the IGA, a plan was devised to mimic what had taken place in New York and New Jersey to use a referendum to settle the issue completely. The Anti-ERA believed that most Hoosiers were not in favor of the amendment and by allowing the people to cast their vote to prove this, the General Assembly would accept the results and no longer allow the ERA to be introduced.⁵⁷ Representative Donald T. Nelson (R-Indy) who opposed ratification, sponsored a bill to conduct a statewide referendum along with evidence to support it. He presented a poll that he had conducted in District 42 (Indianapolis), which showed that 64% were against ratification of the amendment, 25 % for it, and 11% undecided.⁵⁸ Many representatives disliked the idea of a referendum. Senator Marie Lauck (D-Indy) called the referendum a “cop-out”. Senator Joan Gubbins (R-Indy) boasted that it would not have any effect; legislation he said, “is not done by referendum, it is done by voting in the legislature,”. The idea would be dropped shortly after.⁵⁹

As the end of 1976 came closer, new optimism that the ERA would finally pass the IGA sprouted. The previous attempts had been thwarted by a Republican-controlled Senate, but now with the Democrats holding a majority of seats the passage of the ERA seemed all but certain.

⁵⁵ “The ‘76 Equal Rights Drive,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Editorial, May 19, 1975.

⁵⁶ “Statehouse View,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Mary Waid, May 5, 1975.

⁵⁷ “ERA Opponents May Turn to Referendum,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, November 15, 1975

⁵⁸ “ERA Bill to Face House in Indiana,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, December 28, 1975.

⁵⁹ “Police Increase Security After Threat to Brown,” *Terre Haute Tribune*. January 11, 1976.

There were hopes that Indiana would be the first state to ratify in 1977.⁶⁰ Because of the optimism that the ERA would pass, the General Assembly had an ardent desire to move the amendment through the legislature to get it out of the way. House Minority Leader Michael K. Phillips believed that the ERA would “move rather quickly.”⁶¹ The ERA would finally pass the Senate by the skin of its teeth with a 26-24 vote in favor of its passage. STOP ERA leaders immediately took action to rescind the amendment’s passage.⁶² The ERA was able to break the threshold of votes in large part because of coordination between Bayh and First Lady Rosalynn Carter.⁶³ This was met with criticism by STOP ERA and Schlafly, who complained that political favors had helped pass the amendment in Indiana.⁶⁴

Some in the anti-ERA camp began to question whether the ratification of the amendment could be rescinded. Some states had already attempted rescinding the amendment, but many legal scholars doubted the process was constitutional. Less than a week after the ERA passed through the Indiana Senate, a resolution seeking to rescind Indiana’s ratification was introduced. Even with the push from anti-ERA supporters, STOP ERA specifically, the Indiana Legislature was very hesitant to act on the resolution leaving it buried in the House Rules Committee.⁶⁵ This left many frustrated and looking for other options that were available to remove the ratification.

With the plan to rescind ratification proving to be fruitless, State Representative Donald Boys headed a new plan to sponsor a resolution to “expunge all records of the ERA passage;” Boys had met with Beulah A. Coughenour, Indiana’s STOP ERA chairman, to discuss the need for such an action. She stated that Hoosier women had proven their opposition to the ERA at the

⁶⁰ “Equal Rights Legislation Strong,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, Wayne Perry, December 1, 1976.

⁶¹ “Indiana Dem Leader Predicts Passage of Bills,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, December 7, 1976.

⁶² “ERA Issue in Indiana Gets Nod,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, January 19, 1977.

⁶³ Blaemire, *Birch Bayh: Making a Difference*, 322.

⁶⁴ Felsenthal, *Sweetheart*, 245.

⁶⁵ “Lawmakers Have 46 Days Left in Current Session,” *Terre Haute Tribune*, January 22, 1977.

International Women's Year Conference in July of '76 where 31 of 32 delegates were against the ERA. Her main argument to proceed with the expungement of ERA records was that the "ratification of the ERA did not express the will of the majority of Indiana women," and thus should not be able to stay as an accepted piece of legislation.⁶⁶ The plan was met with negative reception, even by some anti-ERA members of the IGA. House Speaker Kermit O. Burrous stated that allowing expungement would "set a precedent that I don't think we should be going with," and shortly after the idea was dropped for good.⁶⁷ The coverage of this debacle had frivolously been reported in the *Tribune*, keeping Terre Hautians updated on the condition of the ERA, arguably giving both groups of supporters scares that the amendment's passage in Indiana would remain or be wiped from the record books. Although the battle over the ERA in Indiana finally concluded in 1977, it would have ramifications for Birch Bayh in the election of 1980.

Bayh's stance on women's rights would prove to be one of the major areas of contention during the 1980 election. This is no surprise since he was the author of the ERA. Even Marvella Bayh, Bayh's wife, was a strong backer of the ERA and feminist movement. With regards to the treatment of women as different from men, she stated that people should realize "brains have no sex," so legally there should be no distinction between the sexes. She was also vocal about the stereotypes towards women and how they are socialized to be "meek and quiet," leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy where they feel as if they are subordinate to men. To her, the ERA gave women the "opportunity to choose," a life that they wanted without facing legal discrimination.⁶⁸ Where Bayh caught a lot of dissension from a state that was evolving into a more conservative conscious was with the issue of abortion. After throwing out legislation that was attempting to

⁶⁶ "ERA opponents would like to forget action," *Terre Haute Tribune*, September 23, 1977.

⁶⁷ "No tampering with ERA; State Assembly Leaders," *Terre Haute Tribune*, November 23, 1977.

⁶⁸ "Women in Politics Still Unequal: Marvella Bayh," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Colleen Blacketer, October 21, 1975.

overturn abortion, Bayh was met with a frenzy of letters receiving over 7,000, with people writing in stating they hated him and threatening political revenge. In 1980, Bayh would fall to the Republican Dan Quayle with many citing his stance on women's rights as being the nail in the coffin to his seat in the Senate.⁶⁹ Despite the heavy lifting that Bayh had done for the women's movement, he did not receive much support from women's organizations and was left vulnerable to a conservative swing.⁷⁰

The ERA's failure and its disapproval in Indiana and Terre Haute was largely due to the conservative media and its ability to play onto the fears of the people. Not surprisingly, the main reason for this was the perceived attack on the traditional home and the existential threat of having women susceptible to the draft and combat in the military. Phyllis Schlafly was the figurehead of these fears and with her previous political experiences, she garnered enough support to stop the onslaught of support for the ERA and effectively ended any chance of ratification for the amendment. While Schlafly herself did not spend a lot of time in Indiana, STOP ERA and her publications were enough to blanket the state with her rhetoric and cause many to question the viability of the ERA which is seen through the "silent" voices of those who opposed the ERA. While more coverage was given to pro-ERA groups in the *Tribune*, these groups only made up a minority of Terre Haute. The conservative shift was able to take hold of most of the city's population which resulted in a social climate that saw the ERA as a threat to the ideal society that many wanted, the cost being the equity of women in the United States.

⁶⁹ Kruse & Zelizer, *Fault Lines*, 91.

⁷⁰ "Washington," *Terre Haute Tribune*, Marianne Means, October 8, 1975.

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