

The Conservative Feminist: Joan Gubbins, Indiana Politics, and the ERA

Taylor Vachon

University of Indianapolis

Senior

vachont@uindy.edu

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Anyone venturing into the Indiana Statehouse rotunda on February 7, 1978, was in for a surprise. An exhibit, which earned an X rating by *The Indianapolis News*, was on display featuring brochures, news clippings, books, and pamphlets that conservative coalition leaders brought back from the International Women's Year conference that took place in Houston in 1977.ⁱ The leader of this coalition was Indiana state senator Joan Gubbins. She was also the floor leader of the pro-family, conservative coalition at the IWY conference where she petitioned against the Equal Rights Amendment, an amendment that would constitutionalize gender equality. While there, she was disgusted with some of the materials on display by some feminist booths that she claimed were paid for with "taxpayers' money."ⁱⁱ Many of these materials came from lesbian booths and included a lesbian sex manual and other pornographic material from far-left organizations. Absent from this display were the materials that the American Nazi party and Ku Klux Klan brought to the conference as noted by Indiana state representative Marilyn Schultz, a Democrat from Bloomington.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite many similar complaints and an eviction order by State Commissioner of Administration Raymond E. Sanders, the display remained in the statehouse.

While many women at the time fought against the Equal Rights Amendment because they believed it sought to end the traditional family structure, Joan Gubbins focused on the so-called dirt under the rug of the ERA. For Gubbins, the material presented by the far left at the conference outlined her main argument against the Equal Rights Amendment: that it was an "attempt to destroy the moral values and traditional institutions that most Americans respect."^{iv} A staunch conservative, Gubbins was known for petitioning against sex education in schools, abortion rights, homosexual rights, and against anything that threatened her idea of a religious and moral society. However, Gubbins did not fight against the ERA because she did not want

equality for women. She fought against it because she saw it as taking away equality for women. To her, being a feminist meant giving women the choice and the opportunity to pursue what they wanted, and the ERA threatened to take that away. Gubbins was the quintessential conservative feminist who fought against anything that did not fit her moral standards while also paving the way for women in Indiana politics. Her story is instructive because it demonstrates that not all women who fought against the Equal Rights Amendment were anti-feminists, rather they represented the feminism that a large number of women did in the 1970s; a conservative one built on the right to choose.

While it might seem ironic that women were the main leaders of the movement against the Equal Right Amendment, it was not uncommon for women to lead social movements in the mid-1900s. Following the end of World War II, the anti-communist movements in the United States started to come to the forefront. Outside of mainstream politics and party platforms, the main leaders of the anticommunist movement were white, middle-class, suburban housewives.^v Historian Erin Kempker, in her book *Big Sister Feminism*, outlines the effect that these housewives had on the anticommunist crusader movement. She argues that the threat of communism allowed housewives to extend their ‘duties’ to include “cleaning up society and the government” as well as empower themselves to be politically active.^{vi} Often following their religious morality and utilizing biblical undertones in their justifications, they saw it as their right to fight the perceived threat of communism because it meant the end of times. This rang true for Joan Gubbins who got her start in activism when she joined the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade in the early 1960s at the recommendation of her neighbor.^{vii}

Joan Gubbins was born on July 2, 1929, in White Plains, New York to a conservative family. She attended Mary Burnham School for Girls in Northampton, Massachusetts, and

eventually attended the University of Illinois for two years. It was there that she met her future husband, Dale George Gubbins. Due to his job, the Gubbins family moved to Indianapolis and started a family with two children: a daughter and a son. While there, she helped charter Heritage Christian School in Indianapolis, joined Pro America, the National Federation of Republican Women, and the Campus Crusade for Christ.^{viii} Described as a “striking blond...who spends her summers swimming and tanning” with a “trim shape which she enhances with a stylish and colorful wardrobe,” Gubbins was the picture-perfect conservative housewife.^{ix}

Joan Gubbins started her path toward politics when her kids entered school. As mentioned above, she joined her local anti-communist movement. From there, she joined the local Bible study group as well and was influenced by many evangelical Christian women who had a profound impact on her worldview.^x This impact led Gubbins to tie evangelical Christian teachings into everything in her personal and political life. While she found her religious beliefs to be calming in her personal life, they seem to have caused turmoil in her political one.^{xi} Her religious beliefs were one of the two main factors in her fight against abortions. Not only were her views in line with other pro-life supporters at the time, but she also disliked abortions because of her own trouble with childbirth. Gubbins was pregnant seven times and had three children, one of whom died as an infant, but only had two healthy children.^{xii} Therefore, abortion rights were at the top of the list of things she fought against.

Current scholarship helps to frame some of the contradictions in Joan Gubbins’s life. Historian Erin M. Kempker focuses on conservative activists like Gubbins and shows how anticommunism evolved due to the formation of conservative groups in states and on the national level. The three main groups that Kempker focuses on are the Minute Women, Pro-America, and the John Birch Society.^{xiii} In addition to discussing how each organization began and how they

utilized technology like the telephone to disrupt the actions of feminists, Kempker notes the vital role that women played in them. However, these women were never given credit by the men in those organizations. Did those women feel the effects of gender discrimination in the workplace while they were fighting against an amendment that would make that unconstitutional? Despite the discrimination that women faced in these organizations, they still managed to break into the political and activism sphere which was a first.

While the anticommunist movement was at its peak during a time of social conservatism, the women who led the charge helped usher in a change to the Republican Party and form the New Right.^{xiv} In their book, *Debating the American Conservative Movement: 1945 to the Present*, scholars Donald T. Critchlow and Nancy MacLean present a debate on the formation of the New Right as a result of the 1950s Red Scare and a transformation of the Republican Party. While most historians agree that the conservative era was a result of the Cold War, Critchlow and MacLean also argue that the fight against the Equal Rights Amendment by women like Phyllis Schlafly, national leader for the anti-ERA movement, and Joan Gubbins were the true catalysts for a new American conservatism which Critchlow coins as “The Conservative Ascendancy.”^{xv} In Indiana, this was especially true, as social conservatism ran deep in its politics. Historian James Madison argues that Indiana’s Republican party rebounded after World War II, by linking anti-communism with a commitment to limited governance.^{xvi} This echoed the national fight.^{xvii}

Following the socially conservative era of the 1950s, the 1960s and 1970s were progressive decades, especially for civil rights. After Barry Goldwater’s failed 1964 presidential campaign, the effectiveness of the crusade against communism as a party platform had considerably weakened and those still in favor of it were labeled as extremists.^{xviii} Therefore, many conservatives pivoted towards a more moderate conservatism in the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding

with a rise in global liberalism. The spark that relit the fire in social conservatism happened after the announcement by the United Nations that 1975 was International Women's Year. In turn, this announcement led to a planning committee in the United States for a conference in 1977 to celebrate women and create resolutions including the want for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.^{xix}

Despite the overwhelming support for these liberal ideas, many conservative women who achieved prominent positions during the 1950s expanded their platform to fight against the Equal Rights Amendment. Harkening back to the anticommunist crusades that were built on the principles of traditional and religiously moral family units, the Equal Rights Amendment, and the associated progressive ideas such as abortion and homosexual rights galvanized the white, middle-class, suburban housewives back into action. Their ideals of a family unit and specified gender roles which were once threatened by communism, the New Left, and world government were once again being threatened by feminism and the Equal Rights Amendment.

The national fight against the Equal Rights Amendment was led by Joan Gubbins's good friend, Phyllis Schlafly. Schlafly got her start in anti-communism and foreign affairs. A strong supporter of Goldwater, Schlafly fell out of Republican favor as well following his presidential campaign. On the national level, it was Schlafly who helped pivot the core of the Republican party towards family matters and fighting the Equal Rights Amendment. While her true passion was anti-communism and foreign affairs, Schlafly knew that she could not pass up the opportunity that the pro-family caucus presented her to fight the Equal Rights Amendment.^{xx} Even though Schlafly herself found her congressional race and other activities affected by gender discrimination, she still held strong in her moral and religious arguments against the Equal Rights Amendment.

The national anti-ERA movement can be summed up in *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, which was a monthly report founded in 1972 by Phyllis Schlafly. It was a conservative newsletter where Schlafly debated topics like foreign affairs, communism, and the ERA. The first issue where Schlafly discussed the Equal Rights Amendment was published in February of 1972 and was titled “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” In it, she discussed all of the failures of the ERA and their effect on the average woman. Schlafly started her newsletter by saying that the “American woman is the most privileged” group because of protective labor and child custody laws.^{xxi}

Schlafly and her conservative supporters drew their moral standings from the teachings of Christianity, where they believed that the husband and the wife were given different and distinct roles from each other. According to them, “the family [is] the basic unit of society,” which means that society and the laws that govern it should be built around that guidance.^{xxii} This meant that since women carry children, the husbands must bear the burden financially by providing for their wives and children. Because of this, there were many special labor protection laws in place for women and children where companies could not force women to work overtime or to lift heavy loads. Schlafly believed that these protections were important because “a woman can enjoy real achievement when she is young by having a baby” and that this was “the most precious and important right of all for a woman.”^{xxiii}

The fear was that the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment would take these special privileges away. In addition to these labor laws, other fears of the ERA included women being drafted, women being forced out of the home to work leading to the need for federally funded childcare, and federally funded abortions.^{xxiv} To many conservative women, the possibility of being drafted out onto the battlefield was the “most common horrible place” and

many of the opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment utilized that fear.^{xxv} In an effort to undermine the arguments of the “straggly haired women on talk shows and picket lines,” Schlafly and Joan Gubbins frequently described the feminists as pushing secret agendas in the Equal Rights Amendment including rights for women to have abortions and homosexuals to marry and teach in school.^{xxvi}

Many conservative women also saw the Equal Rights Amendment affecting the education system. They worried that moral standards such as respecting authority or basic religious texts might not be taught. These women looked towards presidential candidate Richard Nixon to prevent that. In her report published in March of 1974, Schlafly discussed Nixon and how he and the Republican party needed to “phase out federal control” of schools.^{xxvii} Another concern over education involved the right for homosexuals to teach in schools. Schlafly did not support homosexual teachers because she believed that they could not teach the Christian moral agenda in school.^{xxviii} The justification for this argument being relevant to the Equal Rights Amendment is that the amendment prevented schools from discriminating on the basis of sex and therefore could not turn down homosexual applicants.

These sentiments were echoed by women across the nation, many of whom subscribed to Schlafly’s newsletters. As her voice grew, she managed to organize grassroots campaigns against the Equal Rights Amendment. Eventually, as a protest to the IWY conference in Houston, Schlafly helped organize a pro-family rally across the street at the same time. While many of the leaders of the antifeminist movement attended this rally, a small number, led by Joan Gubbins, attended the IWY conference in hopes to have their voices heard as they were women too. Schlafly thought the Pro-family rally went well but did not get the media coverage it deserved, and this was because of the split in conferences and the media could not cover both at once.

However, many more people showed up to the Pro-family conference than to the IWY conference. This was largely thanks to women who read *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* and rose awareness for the Pro-family conference and managed to carpool and take buses to the conference despite it being the weekend before Thanksgiving.^{xxix}

Schlafly described this conference as a “turning point in the war” between feminists and those who were pro-family and pro-life.^{xxx} While the Equal Rights Amendment was ratified in 34 states at one point, it still failed to gain the 38 states needed by its expiration date in 1982. This is largely because of women like Schlafly and Gubbins whose grassroots organizational skills led to “the repeal of ratification in five states.”^{xxxi} The rally’s success led to the motivation of conservatives across the country and was a monumental catalyst for the rise of the New Right. By 1980, the Republican Party started to include the pro-family delegation’s gender issues and opposition to progressive social policies as a part of its platform.

Across the street from the Houston Pro-Family rally was the International Women’s Year conference which ran from November 18, 1977 to November 21, 1977. In total, around 20,000 women attended. The main goal of the conference was to pass a series of resolutions regarding the state of women. These were combined into a report titled *The Spirit of Houston* and were sent to the Carter administration and Congress. Included among those resolutions was recommendation to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. While most in attendance were feminists and liberals, there was a small conservative caucus led by Joan Gubbins. Even though they made up a minority of women at the conference, with the help of Gubbins, they made a name for themselves on a national level.

Prior to the conference, Gubbins and fellow Indiana delegates to the IWY were already facing problems. Whether it was intentional or not, they had received no agenda, rules, or information about the conference even as late as two weeks before the start date.^{xxxii} Additionally, the women had received no confirmation about housing or seating arrangements.^{xxxiii} For a woman as organized and well-versed in parliamentary procedure, this was a big letdown for Gubbins and only foreshadowed what she later faced at the conference. Despite the miscommunication, the Indiana delegation still planned to attend the conference with an agenda and goals. Their main goal was to represent the “thinking of the vast majority of women in Indiana as expressed at the state IWY conference.”^{xxxiv} They believed that their idea of conservative feminism was what women in Indiana wanted. They sought to work for the rights of women including to give women the right to choose to stay home if they wanted.^{xxxv} Specific goals included focusing attention on employment, education, professional women, women in politics, home life, education for children, anti-abortion laws, and, of course, rejecting the Equal Rights Amendment.

These women were not against the basic principles of the Equal Rights Amendment which were to give women equality, but many of them cited that the Equal Rights Amendment meant more than just equality and it could pave the way for homosexual rights, sex education in schools, and other liberal agenda items that could push women out of their homes when they did not want to leave.^{xxxvi} While Joan Gubbins led this ideology and the delegation, there were other officers in the Indiana delegation as well. Among them were Kathy Nikou, Indianapolis, secretary-treasurer; Evelyn Pitschke, Indianapolis, attorney; Jan Conner, Indianapolis, parliamentarian; Peg Bender, Bloomington; Beulah Coughenour and Michelle McRae both of

Indianapolis; Jean Harvey, Monticello; Jean Hill, Terre Haute; Jackie Pyle Connersville; and Alice Beutler, resolutions chairman.^{xxxvii}

Gubbins' fears were realized on the first day of the conference, which she spent "chasing after information about rules" because she wanted to introduce alternate resolutions during the sessions where delegates could participate.^{xxxviii} This information was important because Gubbins knew here delegation was the minority at the conference but still wanted to have an official minority report be sent to President Jimmy Carter. As the conference's sessions started, it was quickly apparent that they had set the Pro-Family women up for failure as their groups were sat between pro-ERA factions instead of in alphabetical order, as is normal for conference procedure. This additionally meant that microphones were set up in a way that was advantageous toward the pro-ERA groups and disadvantageous for the Pro-Family groups.^{xxxix} Therefore, it was hard to get their voices heard whenever they were finally granted time at the microphone.

Regardless of the fact that Gubbins believed the conference was set up to intentionally drown out the voices of her Pro-Family delegates, she still made a lot of noise with a lot of color. When she first arrived, she noticed that the armbands for the Pro-Family caucus at the conference were bright yellow. Following this realization, she sent two of her male 'bodyguards' to buy her "appropriate headgear."^{xl} They returned with an outrageously yellow hat with a huge plume for her to wear. Following the lead of other chairs at the conference, Gubbins came up with her own way to signal her delegates when they were on the floor by utilizing a series of colorful flags. Attendees said that the "red, green, and yellow flags would appear and then disappear before votes on proposals and procedural matters."^{xli} Even in small conversations, she still made her opinions clear. This was evident in a conversation she had with Ohio chair, Anne Saunler, who asked Gubbins to call her chairwoman or chairperson. Gubbins responded by

saying “Madame Chair, I am Indiana State Sen. Joan Gubbins, chairman of the Indiana delegation.”^{xlii} With her colorful flags and her bright yellow hat, Gubbins was a sight to see at the IWY conference and refused to let her voice be drowned out.

Near the end of the conference, the Pro-Family women were fed up with the treatment that they received and the blatant objection to publishing their minority report in the main IWY report. According to Gubbins, the “whole convention was nothing more than a media event to convince the American people [and Congress and the state legislatures] that these women spoke for all American women.”^{xliii} She continued to be angry at the way that rules seemed to change from day to day. This led to Gubbins charging the conference with fraud and that it was rigged because her delegation was unable to pass a resolution and was permitted at the microphone very little.^{xliv}

By the end of the conference, which had already extended well past the noon end time, Gubbins decided to lead her delegation out of the conference and sing “God Bless America” in protest. This religious undertone was a constant for the Pro-Family delegates as they were frequently seen bowing their heads and praying.^{xlv} One woman, Mary Interlied, reaffirmed this when she stated that she kept “wondering why pro-ERA people [felt] threatened by pro-God people” and that she thinks “it’s because they know that God is not with them.”^{xlvi} This feeling of the ERA threatening religious morality was a large reason that many evangelical Christian women at the time fell inline with Gubbins’ beliefs that the ERA should not be passed. Ultimately, the Pro-Family delegates had to print, at their expense, a minority report to send to Congress. Joan Gubbins had made a name for herself nationally and returned home to continue her work in Indiana politics.

While Schlafly led the charge nationally, Joan Gubbins led the charge in Indiana and as the floor leader for Indiana conservative women at the liberal-dominated IWY rally. Gubbins, who considered herself a conservative feminist, had different arguments against the ERA. Among these were that it was a threat to her form of religious morality and the family unit and found her issues with the liberal agenda that came alongside the ERA. While both women were housewives and considered themselves wives and mothers, Gubbins found a prominent role in Indiana politics.

Around the 1960s, when she began to enter the public sphere, she and a few of her friends joined the League of Women Voters, a liberal and feminist organization. She felt that it was too liberal and would not listen to her or her friends' conservative views despite both groups seeking progress for women. After she parted with the League, she worked on the campaign of Congressman Donald Bruce in 1960 and was appointed to be the state research chairman for the 1964 Barry Goldwater campaign.^{xlvii} After working on that campaign, she decided that “the Lord was trying to lead [her] into running.” She contacted Senator Leslie Duvall to talk about running for the House in 1968.^{xlviii} The state Republican party ended up slating her to run for the state senate seat and Joan Gubbins won her election. By her campaign for her third term, she utilized the fact that she was the only woman in the Indiana state senate in her campaign ads.^{xlix}

She served as an Indiana state senator from 1968-1980. It was during the primary race for her second term that Gubbins faced backlash from the county chairman for the Indiana Republican party, L. Keith Bulen, who strongly disliked Gubbins and what she stood for as a state senator. In her words, “it was because I [Gubbins] fought Uni-Gov”, but Bulen’s sentiments were echoed throughout the state Republican party.¹ During her campaign for her second term, Gubbins, along with a few other Republican candidates, were dropped from the party’s slate in

favor of more moderate candidates.^{li} She recruited the help of some close peers and started a door-to-door campaign to be reelected. Despite not having the support of the popular Republican mayor, Richard Lugar, and being denied the record of Republican voters, even though they were supposed to be public knowledge, Joan Gubbins still managed to win reelection to her state senate seat.^{liii} Gubbins was rated the most conservative state senator in Indiana with a maximum score of one hundred.^{liii} This was based on her voting records for topics such as abortion counseling, the death penalty, taxes, divorce laws, inmate laws, penalties for narcotics offenses, and federal and state-funded food stamp programs.^{liv} Because of her voting record and the bills she introduced, Gubbins was considered to be an extreme conservative for her time and still managed to represent her constituents' views 95% of the time.^{lv}

Even though she was considered a conservative for many reasons, including her distrust of the Equal Rights Amendment, Gubbins originally supported it. She went into her research about it with the idea that it meant equal pay for equal work which is something that she believed women deserved. However, after further research, she decided that it did a lot more than that and thought it was going to “knock down some laws that [she] believed were very valid” and that it was going to “take away the choices that women have and put them in mandatory situations.”^{lvi} Ultimately, she summed her beliefs up by stating that she was for equality, but still believed that the Constitution already adequately provided for the “reasonable and physiological differences” between men and women into account via the Fourteenth Amendment.^{lvii} Even after the ERA was ratified in Indiana on January 18, 1977, Gubbins still did not believe it could get the full 38 states it needed to become part of the Constitution and began efforts to get Indiana to rescind its ratification.^{lviii} This was one way in which Gubbins was considered more conservative than most of her political counterparts in Indiana.

While Gubbins was the primary opponent of the Equal Rights Amendment in Indiana, she also worked to pass many other bills that labeled her as an extreme conservative by Indiana Republican standards. In addition to SB 23, the anti-ERA measure, she also cared a great deal about education practices.^{lix} During her time as an Indiana state senator, Gubbins got a bill through the Secondary and Special Education Committee that urged the State Commission on Textbook Adoption to see that “instructional materials teach such values as honesty and respect for authority.”^{lix} Another bill regarding education was stuck in a committee deadlock and wanted the State Board of Education to be replaced with a board “that has a greater emphasis on lay people and less on professional educators.”^{lxi} A third education bill sought to allow substitute teachers to work more days in the same school corporation without approval from the state school superintendent.^{lxii} In addition to education matters, Gubbins was also a staunch supporter of anti-abortion laws. In 1973, Gubbins was the primary author of the Indiana Abortion Law which she stated, “restricted abortions as much as [they] could under the Supreme Court decision [Roe v. Wade]” and this law, while amended over time, continued to be the main source of inspiration for Indiana abortion legislation.^{lxiii}

While Gubbins sponsored and authored bills on topics that she saw as important, people had mixed opinions on her as a state senator. Everyone, however, acknowledged that she was a hard worker. In her own words, she worked every day until about 10 pm in the evening, then, from 10-11pm, she had personal time in which she read historical novels and relaxed with “a cup of coffee and a cigarette.”^{lxiv} She was also described as someone, when “when battling for her convictions [was] no laughing matter for philosophical or political opponents.”^{lxv} Additionally, many women looked up to Gubbins and had nothing but praise for the way she held herself in office. They believed that Indiana was “in desperate need of more legislators who exhibit the

character, integrity, dedication, and loyalty to those they represent [like Joan Gubbins].”^{lxvi} She was also described as a Lincoln Republican who stood for what the people wanted and did not back down. These opinions of Gubbins show that she was a competent and capable state senator that was supported by her constituents despite being called out for being too conservative and too stubborn by other Indiana politicians. Because of this, it was more difficult for her to get reelected to office. In the 1980 Republican primaries, the Republican party slated Virginia Murphy Blankenburger, a more moderate female candidate, against Gubbins. Blankenburger won her primary which prevented Gubbins from being reelected.^{lxvii} The Gubbins family moved to Noblesville shortly after, and Gubbins did not run for office again.

She did face criticism as well when she “locked horns” with both Republicans and Democrats as well as being described as a party embarrassment by Republican leaders.^{lxviii} This was because of her conservative views, which at the time, were considered extreme. Gubbins stated, that at one point, even the teachers at her children’s school spent an entire class period telling the students what a terrible person she was.^{lxix} Frequently, she faced similar backlash from people who saw her as too conservative, too stubborn, and too frequently trying to legislate morality. Despite this, some feminists still saw her as a feminist because she “represents the ultimate goal of feminism... and is political effective for what she believes in” and they coined her as a “conservative feminist.”^{lxx}

While leading the conservative, anti-ERA charge in Indiana, Joan Gubbins helped usher in a new Indiana conservative movement before, during, and after her attendance at the IWY conference in 1977. While the anti-ERA fight was a national attitude that many women had, it was echoed at the local level, specifically in Indiana. Indiana is known today as a staunchly conservative state with a supermajority of Republicans. At the time of the ERA, it was the final

state to vote in favor of ratification of the amendment. Following this vote, the anti-feminists became the predominant voice in Indiana politics thanks to Joan Gubbins, and, in the process, drowned out the “low-key” feminism tactics utilized by pro-ERA members.^{lxxi}

The defeat of the ERA and the movement that arose because of it led to the formation of the New Right and a new Indiana conservative. Most of the credit for bringing together a new Republican Party whose ideals were based on social conservatism lies in the organizational skills that Schlafly, Gubbins, and other Pro-Family leaders brought to the table when they organized and rallied conservatives from all different sects to fight the ERA. Throughout her early time as a conservative, Gubbins worked on Barry Goldwater’s campaign for president where she came into contact with Schlafly. While Schlafly represented what the poster child of antifeminism was in the 1960s, Gubbins presented a new kind of feminism that was rooted in social conservatism and giving women a choice. She was inspired by her Christian faith, her belief in traditional and moral education, and anti-communism. She and other conservatives at the time believed that American freedoms came from God’s grace, and they strived to follow a moral Christian lifestyle in order to pass on their legacy.

Overall, the Equal Rights Amendment was a lobbying war that lasted almost a decade. Both the feminists and pro-ERA individuals and the anti-ERA individuals proved to be a huge force of influence in state governments when the question of ratification came up. The Equal Rights Amendment was ratified in 34 states. During this battle for ratification, many women rose up and took a place on the national stage like Joan Gubbins. From her work on anti-communism and her role as a state senator, and her nomination from President Reagan to the National Education Committee from 1983-1988, she was an important spoke in the Indiana conservative wheel. She also was an example of feminism working as she broke into a male-dominated field in politics.

The idea that Joan Gubbins was a conservative feminist was echoed by many. Some even called her a “closet feminist” who used reverse psychology to get elected to the pro-Family delegation in Indiana.^{lxxii} While Joan Gubbins was nominated to be Vice President of the National Committee for the Status of Women during its rework to become more conservative, some women still believed she had the heart of a true feminist. One woman compares Joan Gubbins to two other women, Marabel Morgan, author of “The Total Woman” and Sally Quinn, former CBS correspondent. She states that these women, under the guise of antifeminism, managed to “infiltrate three of society’s major male-dominated institutions – government, literature, and television.”^{lxxiii} Despite the criticism she received and the issues she faced at the conference, many women thought she did the most for the feminist movements because of the work she had done for the Pro-Family movement as a politician. She managed to galvanize the Hoosier feminists after their complacent attitude led to a poor showing at the Houston IWY conference. Even though she represented the minority at the IWY conference, she still was the voice for many American women who saw the ERA as a threat to their way of life. Yet again, they saw Gubbins as working for right of women to choose their way of life including staying in the home.

In fact, Gubbins was aware that she broke through social barriers and set a new path for women in politics in Indiana. She was also aware that she faced gender discrimination while doing so. While she was known for her stubborn attitude, she was known just as much for knitting during committee meetings. Many people saw this as odd, but Gubbins stated that it helped her focus and calm down as she was “the type of nervous person who can’t sit still and do nothing.”^{lxxiv} Anyone in those committee meetings knew that the real issues came when Gubbins put her knitting down. While the knitting was a traditionally feminine activity, Gubbins did not

care about stereotypes. She knew she was the only woman in the state senate, but she also made sure she was known for being competent, a tough compromiser, and well-spoken. She stated that she knew that the Indiana legislature was “still pretty much a man’s world.”^{lxxv} Frequently, at dinner parties and such, people spoke mostly to her husband, assuming he was the state Senator, until someone spoke up and pointed out that it was actually Joan Gubbins. While attention immediately shifted toward her because people were looking for political jobs, she was not offended by it and found it amusing.^{lxxvi} It was not uncommon for Gubbins to receive this treatment. On one occasion, after speaking on one of her projects, a male politician approached Gubbins and started to say, “I didn’t know a woman could...,” and Gubbins knew that he meant that he was shocked to see a woman could do what a man could.

Even though she was cited as an antifeminist, she was different in that she knew women were faced with certain inequalities in the workplace. She knew that she would not even be able to vote or hold office if it were not for the suffragettes.^{lxxvii} Her views on the matter can be summed up in a statement she gave about the different ways that men and women are treated, “A man is accepted immediately and has to prove himself ineffective or whatever. A woman goes in and has to prove she is capable.”^{lxxviii} Gubbins knew that gender discrimination existed, she knew that she had broken into a male-dominated field, and she still fought against the Equal Rights Amendment. This was not because she did not want equality for women, as many feminists believed, but because she wanted to give women the right to choose and the Equal Rights Amendment along with its other liberal agenda items threatened her way of life.

Gender equality is not a protected right in the Constitution despite the many times an Equal Rights Amendment was proposed in Congress. The necessity of a gender equality clause in the Constitution made perfect sense to the feminists in the 1970s as they saw state after state ratify

the Equal Rights Amendment. Following the announcement of 1975 as International Women's Year and the ERA, feminists were delighted and planned a conference in Houston in 1977 to celebrate all that they had accomplished and to outline further changes they wanted to see. As support for the ERA and feminism grew, so did the opposition. This group, fueled by anti-communism sentiments and filled with white, middle-class housewives began to form nationally. In Indiana, it rallied around state senator Joan Gubbins. While history has labeled her as an antifeminist due to her conservative beliefs and work to prevent the ERA from being passed, Joan Gubbins formed a different kind of feminism that was rooted in conservative and religious ideals. She wanted to give women a choice and believed the liberal ideals and the ERA prevented that. Overall, her work paved the way for women to enter the political sphere in Indiana as well as sparked a New Right in Indiana focused on social conservatism that has continued into recent years.

Joan Gubbins led the anti-ERA, pro-family minority caucus at the IWY conference in Houston as opposed to attending Schlafly's conservative pro-family rally across the street. There, Gubbins made a name for herself, nationally, as a martyr who spread her bold ideas and waved her colorful flags. Her efforts at the IWY conference were reinforced upon her return to Indiana. At the time, she was the only woman in the Indiana state senate and became a strong political activist. While she protested against the liberal ideals that were presented with the movement for the passage of the ERA, she was forming her own form of conservative feminism, that, unlike other anti-ERA women who wanted women to stay in the home, Gubbins believed in giving women the choice to live how they wanted. Even though she spoke against the ERA, she was simultaneously breaking glass ceilings and blazing the way for other women to follow.

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- ⁱ “X-Rated Display Stirs Statehouse,” *The Indianapolis News*, February 8, 1978.
- ⁱⁱ “X-Rated Display is ‘Unfair’,” *The Indianapolis News*, February 10, 1978.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*
- ^{iv} *Ibid.*
- ^v Erin M. Kempker, *Big Sister: Feminism, Conservatism, and Conspiracy in the Heartland* (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 24.
- ^{vi} *Ibid.*
- ^{vii} Susan Lennis, “Hoosier in Profile: Senator Joan Gubbins,” *The Indianapolis Star*, April 29, 1978, 17.
- ^{viii} Kempker, *Big Sister*, 72.
- ^{ix} Lennis, “Joan Gubbins,” 17.
- ^x *Ibid.*
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*
- ^{xii} *Ibid.*, 18.
- ^{xiii} Kempker, *Big Sister*, 26.
- ^{xiv} The role that conservative women took in the fight against anticommunism was echoed in states as well as on the national level. Historian Michelle M. Nickerson, in her book *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*, studies conservative housewives in California in the 1950s and how they organized grassroots campaigns against the threat of communism. According to Nickerson, everyday housewives led the fight and created a new niche for conservative women in activism. In addition, it was the housewives who turned their everyday religious and social agendas into political ones and built the base of the new Republican party from the ground up.
- ^{xv} Donald T. Critchlow and Nancy MacLean, *Debating the American Conservative Movement: 1945 to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 197.
- ^{xvi} He also outlines the influence of divisive social issues such as abortion and homosexual rights which created new coalition groups mostly led by born-again Christian conservative women in Indiana. This conservative sentiment continued into the 1960s and 1970s when Marxism, homosexual rights, sex work, and feminism became prominent issues that many conservative women labeled as the return of the Antichrist.
- ^{xvii} James H. Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana* (Indiana University of Press, 2014), 319.
- ^{xviii} David Farber, “Phyllis Schlafly: Domestic Conservatism and Social Order,” in *the Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History*, ed. David Farber (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 138.
- ^{xix} Lorraine Boissoneault, “The 1977 Conference on Women's Rights That Split America in Two,” *Smithsonian.com* (Smithsonian Institution, February 15, 2017).
- ^{xx} *Ibid.*, 128.
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- ^{xxii} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxiv} *Ibid.*
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- xl^{iv} Donna Snodgrass, "Indiana Delegates Side with Minority," *The Indianapolis Star*, November 22, 1977, 8.
- xl^v *Ibid.*
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- xl^{viii} *Ibid.*
- xl^{ix} "Re-elect Senator Joan Gubbins," *The Indianapolis Star*, April 30, 1972.
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- lⁱⁱ *Ibid.*
- lⁱⁱⁱ "Garton, Runge Rated 'Liberals,'" *The Columbus Herald*, November 9, 1973, 29.
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- l^v Lennis, "Joan Gubbins," 20.
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- l^x *Journal and Courier*, (Lafayette, IN), January 16, 1980, 5.
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