

## [Article H] Equal Rights Amendment

**Background:** The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was first proposed as an addition to the Constitution about the time women received the right to vote (1920). It was not supported in the 1920s and was largely overlooked until the Women’s Rights Movement (aka Second Wave Feminist movement, or Women’s Liberation) of the 1960s and 1970s. The National Organization for Women, N.O.W., was founded in 1966 and lobbied to get the ERA back into Congress for debate. In 1969 Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to Congress, reintroduced the ERA in the House of Representatives. Three years later, both houses of Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment and it went to the states for ratification. By 1977, 35 of the necessary 38 states had ratified the ERA; it looked as though an equality of the sexes provision would be added to the Constitution.

Almost as quickly as the ERA gained traction, it lost steam when an anti-ERA group known as STOP-ERA began lobbying **against** the amendment. Phyllis Schlafly was the founder of STOP-ERA and worked tirelessly to oppose its adoption. Ultimately the ERA did **not** receive the necessary amount of support to be added into the Constitution.

**Text of ERA:** “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

### Opposing Viewpoints:

“Existing laws are not adequate to secure equal rights for women. Sufficient proof of this is the concentration of women in lower paying, menial, unrewarding jobs and their incredible scarcity in the upper level jobs. If women are already equal, why is it such an event whenever one happens to be elected to Congress? It is obvious that discrimination exists. Women do not have the opportunities that men do. And women that do not conform to the system, who try to break with the accepted patterns, are stigmatized as ‘odd’ and ‘unfeminine.’”

- Shirley Chisholm, “Equal Rights for Women” (1969)

“Why should we trade in our special privileges and honored status for the alleged advantage of working in an office or assembly line? Most women would rather cuddle a baby than a typewriter or factory machine.... American women do *not* want to be liberated from husbands and children. We do *not* want to trade our birthright of the special privileges of American women—for the mess of pottage called the Equal Rights Amendment.”

- Phyllis Schlafly, “What’s Wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” (1972)



Phyllis Schlafly stands surrounded by a group of fellow STOP-ERA protestors in front of the White House in 1977.



Photograph shows a rally in support of the E.R.A. with signs encouraging states to vote "YES" and a sign supporting NOW, the National Organization for Women.