



*“Activist Phyllis Schlafly wearing a ‘Stop ERA’ badge, demonstrating with other women against the Equal Rights Amendment in front of the White House, Washington, D.C. [1977].” Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.*

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# The Equal Rights Amendment and the Persistence of Kansas Conservatism

*by Kristi Lowenthal*

Every Kansan knows the history of the state's founding amidst antebellum tensions. Senator Stephen Douglas's dream of popular sovereignty, the Democrats' best effort at a compromise position that would still allow slavery to expand, dissolved into chaos as proslavery Missouri Border Ruffians attacked zealously moral, even puritanical free labor settlers from New England in a series of territorial battles dubbed Bleeding Kansas. Most Kansans probably also know that the free-state puritans eventually came out on top, using their values to shape the political and cultural backdrop of Kansas well into the twentieth century. In *Hayseeds, Moralizers, and Methodists: The Twentieth-Century Image of Kansas*, Robert Smith Bader stated, "the Doctrine of First Effective Settlement, holds that the cultural priorities of a region's colonizers will influence subsequent generations quite disproportionately to the absolute numbers of the colonizers' descendants. Citizens of a commonwealth 'born of a moral idea' could be expected to remain especially responsive to moral crusades."<sup>1</sup>

The state's founders craved moral differentiation, especially from the values of older, seemingly corrupt states of the East. Kansans consistently demonstrated a fear and rejection of outside ideals and a tenacious adherence to traditional values even if, and some would argue especially if, those values were dismissed by the rest of the nation as antiquated, irrelevant, or hidebound. This tendency appeared many times throughout the state's history, including the state's lead in prohibiting alcohol, the growth of the rural reforming Populist movement, and the rafts of moralizing social legislation passed during the Progressive Era.

In the 1970s, large numbers of Kansas women mobilized against the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the United States Constitution, seemingly reversing a century and a half of support for state legislation benefitting women. Quite the opposite was true: traditionalists' stand against the ERA was simply the latest groundswell of moralistic conservatism forged at the state's founding, which was evident in every campaign for women's rights in state history.

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1. Robert Smith Bader, *Hayseeds, Moralizers, and Methodists: The Twentieth-Century Image of Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 30.

Historically, women's rights campaigns supporting traditional family structure, consisting of a breadwinning father, a homemaking mother, and their children, gained consistent support. Those that eroded this model faced strenuous opposition. Opponents of the ERA feared radical feminists' public demand that the ERA be used to end traditional family life. These anti-ERA women wrote letters painting the ERA campaign as an apocalyptic battle between right and wrong, urging lawmakers to make the moral choice. Even Kansas ERA proponents tailored their arguments toward conservatism, backing away from feminist vitriol regarding radical household restructuring in favor of a narrow set of increased political, educational, and social welfare protections. Although opponents failed to convince legislators to reverse the state's ERA ratification, they succeeded in forming a vocal minority opinion urging Kansans to embrace their traditional, moralistic roots.

Conservative opposition to the ERA becomes more understandable when examined in the context of the moderate campaigns for women's rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in Kansas. From the 1860s through the 1920s, Kansas led the nation in progressive legislation that benefitted women, the cornerstone of which was women's suffrage. Early on, Kansas suffragists rejected men's culpability in women's oppression, an idea popularized in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York. Instead, activists limited their goals to securing property and custody rights for women, as well as voting rights in school district elections, all of which shored up the role of the mother in the traditional family. In 1867 Kansas held the nation's first referendum on women's suffrage, generating nationwide interest and an influx of leading suffragists, including radicals Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony. The impassioned demands of these outsiders shocked traditionalists and contributed largely to the issue's defeat.<sup>2</sup> Less publicized, homegrown efforts fared much better. In 1880 Kansas men added the prohibition of alcohol to the state constitution, an issue

2. Sister Jeanne McKenna, "With the Help of God and Lucy Stone," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 36 (Spring 1970): 23; Faye E. Dudden, *Fighting Chance: The Struggle over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 108–132; and Michael L. Goldberg, "Non-Partisan and All-Partisan: Rethinking Woman Suffrage and Party Politics in Gilded Age Kansas," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25 (Spring 1994): 24.

largely supported by women who hoped temperance would reduce household drunkenness, abuse, poverty, and neglect. In 1887 the Kansas legislature voted to grant women municipal suffrage, allowing them to enforce local prohibition measures and to run for city offices like city commissioner or mayor. In both cases, women succeeded in exerting political influence only within the perceived feminine spheres of morality, home protection, and education.<sup>3</sup>

A second attempt at state suffrage failed in 1894 due to its association with Populism and radicalism. Bad economic times probably doomed the experiment, but other factors contributed to its defeat. Anti-suffrage propaganda gaining momentum across the nation warned fence sitters that women's suffrage "might cause the end of chivalry," explained historian Billie Barnes Jensen:

men would lose their manners and end their generosity; wives might lose the economic support that the law required their husbands to provide. Divorce might become rampant, and men might cease to support their children. The respect that women received from a society which recognized their value as mothers might end, and in its place would come contempt and disrespect. Finally, they even warned that men might resort to violence against women who overstepped the boundaries of propriety by demanding political equality.<sup>4</sup>

Again, the activities of outside, radical agitators succeeded in shifting focus from the morally uplifting nature of women's votes to unrelated arguments distasteful to male Kansas voters. Not far from voters' minds were the tactics of Susan B. Anthony who, while speaking in Kansas in 1887, alienated suffrage-minded Republicans by objecting to their platform of farm aid over social reform, stating, "I have read your platform thoroughly and can find nothing in it but irrigation. You seem to offer no redemption of Kansas except water, and I hope there will be enough of that to wash your dirty selves clean."<sup>5</sup>

3. Nancy G. Garner, "'A Prayerful Public Protest': The Significance of Gender in the Kansas Woman's Crusade of 1874," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 20 (Winter 1997–1998): 229; Goldberg, "Non-Partisan and All-Partisan," 27.

4. Billie Barnes Jensen, "'In the Weird and Woolly West': Anti-Suffrage Women, Gender Issues, and Woman Suffrage in the West," *Journal of the West* 32 (July 1993): 44. See also Walter T. K. Nugent, "How the Populists Lost in 1894," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 31 (Autumn 1965): 246.

5. *Barton County Beacon*, June 28, 1894, quoted in Goldberg, "Non-Partisan and All-Partisan," 38–39.



*Susan B. Anthony came to Kansas to campaign for women's suffrage in 1867 when the state held the nation's first referendum on the issue. The impassioned demands of outside activists such as Anthony upset Kansas traditionalists and probably contributed to the referendum's defeat. Anthony shocked Kansas voters again in 1887 by objecting to the Republican Party's platform, which emphasized farm aid rather than social reform. In 1923 Susan B. Anthony's nephew, Kansas Representative Daniel R. Anthony, Jr., introduced the original Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Congress.*

She attempted to urge Republican convention delegates to support a state suffrage amendment over municipal suffrage "in a short speech uncomplicated by political tact," according to historian Michael Goldberg, warning delegates "if you leave [suffrage] out, you are dead."<sup>6</sup> By the time of the 1894 election, only the increasingly marginalized Populists supported women's suffrage. The Republicans ran on a platform of anti-Populism and

6. Republican Party Clippings, vol. 1: 45, Kansas State Historical Society, quoted in Goldberg, "Non-Partisan and All-Partisan," 35.

the Democrats supported their historical constituents—beer-drinking German immigrants naturally opposed to temperance and temperance-voting women.<sup>7</sup> The campaign backfired badly.

**B**y 1912 suffragists knew how to win votes for women in Kansas. Taking advantage of increasingly favorable economic times and growing independence, women had more time and money to conduct the campaign. The automobile allowed suffragists to stump in far-flung places and in a greater number of locales. At the time of the election, Kansas had been a prohibition state for over thirty years and had mostly made peace with the law, weakening the connection between temperance and woman suffrage. Even the Democrats reassessed their earlier opposition and "in some instances went to great lengths to explain why they had formerly been against equal suffrage." Some interpreted this reversal as a way to curry favor with constituents after the issue's inevitable passage. Most importantly, Kansas activists vowed to take a softer stance than in previous campaigns, taking the advice of fellow suffragist Mrs. M. A. Hutton, who was involved in the successful Washington State campaign: "Do not allow any woman speaker to abuse any man, even if he is the veriest blackguard in existence. You are asking something of them, and while I know it is gall and wormwood to be compelled to ask some of the specimens whose only claim to manhood is that they wear trousers, yet remember always, they have the vote."<sup>8</sup> Kansas suffragists withdrew from the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), home of the most radical suffragists, and asked them to refrain from sending any workers unless they were specifically requested. Anna Howard Shaw, president of NAWSA, agreed to stay out of Kansas and offered her services if requested, but she could not resist making a number of statements that undermined the effort. Shaw was on record criticizing the tactics and internal divisions of the Kansas suffragists, and she attached inordinate and pessimistic importance to the Kansas campaign as establishing the direction that the rest of the nation would inevitably follow. Shaw was quoted as saying, "It looks very much as if Kansas is going to act

7. Nugent, "How the Populists Lost in 1894," 248.

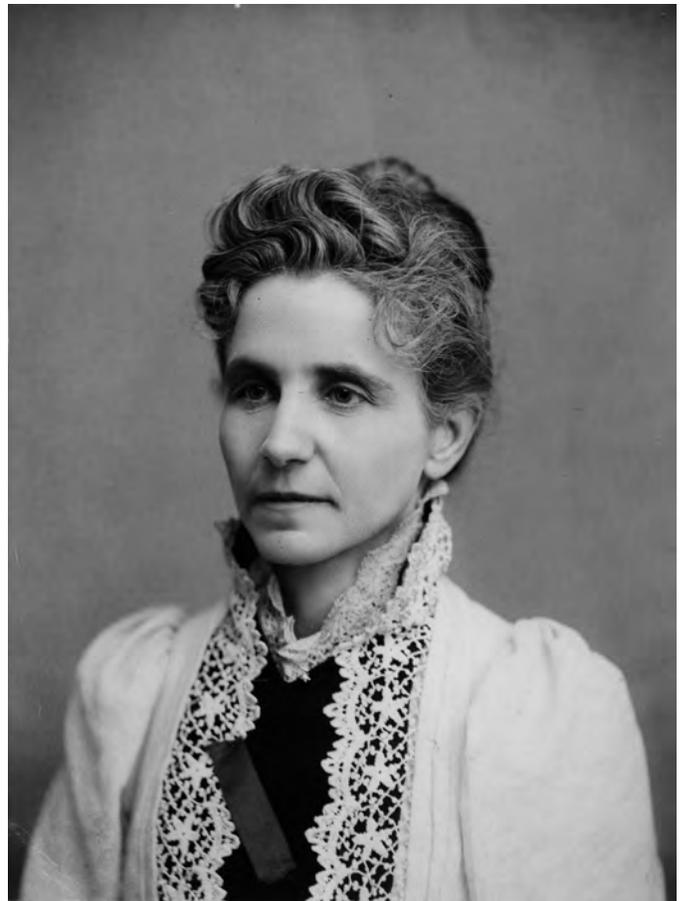
8. Wilda M. Smith, "A Half Century of Struggle: Gaining Woman Suffrage in Kansas," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 4 (Summer 1981): 94, 95; the latter quotation is from Mrs. M. A. Hutton to Lucy B. Johnston, president of the Equal Suffrage Association, February 12, 1912.

as South Dakota did, spend the first year in quarrelling for the glory and the last year in finding there was no glory to quarrel over.”<sup>9</sup> The Kansas campaign seemed to benefit from removing outside suffrage influences; Shaw made enemies of a number of prominent men in Nebraska while campaigning there in 1914, contributing to the defeat of the state amendment. Kansas, free from outside agitators, passed the amendment handily in 1912, with 175,246 votes for the amendment and 159,197 against it.<sup>10</sup>

By 1920, scores of liberal, moderate, and even some conservative groups set aside their agendas to focus on the narrow goal of national women’s suffrage. Some women wished to vote as part of the duty of citizenship. Others, after the carnage of World War I, hoped voting women would form a political bloc to outlaw war. Still others saw votes as a way to mother the nation. Regardless of their motivations, women were able to build enough pressure to ensure passage, ratification, and adoption of the national suffrage amendment.

Hoping to capitalize on the success of the suffrage amendment, radical suffragist Alice Paul immediately pressed for an amendment to constitutionally mandate equality between the sexes. Fittingly, Kansans were again at the forefront as two Republicans from the state, Senator Charles Curtis and Representative Daniel R. Anthony, Jr. (nephew of Susan B. Anthony), introduced the original Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Congress in 1923.<sup>11</sup> The moment had passed though; the bill died in committee and every year thereafter for decades. Women’s votes could be explained as an outgrowth of maternal instinct to protect the nation and its sons, but gender equality was an outrageous idea for all but the most radical.

During the next fifty years, America underwent enormous social and cultural change. Women, once confined to the home, found new outlets of employment, independence, and mobility during the Depression and World War II, even though these roles were often temporary. As women’s suffrage grew from the nineteenth-century abolition movement, the late twentieth-century women’s rights movement sprang from the civil rights movement. By the late 1960s, emancipation from the traditional patriarchal family



*Laura M. Johns, a former school teacher and temperance advocate from Salina, Kansas, served as the president of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association for seven terms during the 1880s and 1890s. She worked with Susan B. Anthony, Populist leader Mary Elizabeth Lease, and other prominent activists during the failed 1893–1894 campaign for a women’s suffrage amendment in Kansas. Harsh economic conditions, its association with Populism, and the spread of anti-suffrage propaganda destroyed the amendment’s chance of passage.*

became a rallying cry for forward-thinking feminists. Along with their demands for increased opportunities and better pay, women’s liberationists demanded the revival of a constitutional equal rights amendment.

Under pressure from the newly formed National Organization for Women (NOW), Congress passed a revamped ERA out of committee and began hearings in 1970. The amendment included only three short clauses:

1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.
2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the

9. Quoted in Smith, “A Half Century of Struggle,” 84.

10. Laura McKee Hickman, “Thou Shalt Not Vote: Anti-Suffrage in Nebraska, 1914–1920,” *Nebraska History* 80 (Summer 1999): 59; Martha B. Caldwell, “The Woman Suffrage Campaign of 1912,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 12 (August 1943): 317.

11. National Organization for Women, “Chronology of the Equal Rights Amendment, 1923–1996,” <http://www.now.org/issues/economic/cea/history.html>.

- provisions of this article.
3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.<sup>12</sup>

The U.S. House of Representatives adopted Michigan Representative Martha Griffiths's House Joint Resolution No. 208 on October 12, 1971, with a vote of 354 yeas, 24 nays, and 51 not voting. The Senate followed suit, adopting Indiana Senator Birch Bayh's resolution on March 22, 1972, with a vote of 84 yeas, 8 nays, and 7 not voting.<sup>13</sup> With this overwhelming mandate, the amendment moved to the states for ratification.

The Hawaii State Legislature ratified within the first hour, with Delaware, Nebraska, and New Hampshire the next day and Iowa and Idaho on March 24, while Kansas House Speaker Calvin Strowig (R-Abilene) went on record urging measured action and careful consideration of the amendment's possible implications.<sup>14</sup> His voice, however, was drowned out by progressive Kansas legislators joining the clamor to press through ratification as quickly as possible to honor their state's historic support of woman-friendly legislation. Senate President Pro Tem Glee Smith, Jr. (R-Larned) saw no opposition to the amendment's speedy ratification. Governor Robert Docking urged the legislature to ratify the amendment quickly "to demonstrate the commitment Kansans have to equality of rights under the law regardless of sex."<sup>15</sup> As the measure came up for debate in the Kansas State Senate on March 28, the few senators willing to object on the record would voice the same fears opponents would cite for the rest of the decade. Representative Ervin Grant (R-El Dorado) said, "I have an 18-year-old daughter and I don't want her drafted into the Marines." Representative James P. Davis (D-Kansas City) stated, "Women already have all the rights; they've got most of the money. They're wearing the pants indirectly already. You all want to make a little history, but I don't think you know what you're doing."<sup>16</sup> The objections were not enough to doom the effort. The final vote on House Continuing Resolution 1155 was 86 yeas, 37 nays, and 2 absent, with

no debate entered in the record. The Senate responded to the amendment in a similar fashion, registering 34 yeas, 5 nays, and 1 not voting. The only hint of discord noted in the official record was from Senator Steadman Ball (R-Atchison), who wanted his comments supporting ratification noted in the official record: "It astonishes me that so many women want to put something in the United State[s] Constitution pulling themselves down to the level of men. Apparently that is what they want, so I vote 'aye.'"<sup>17</sup> By and large, the ratification flew through both houses of the Kansas legislature, putting Kansas on record as the seventh state to ratify the bill, along with twenty-one other states in 1972. In 1973, eight more states ratified with three more in 1974, one in 1975, and one in 1977. Only three state ratifications remained to make gender equality the law of the land. By 1977, however, not only had momentum slowed, but five of the thirty-five passed resolutions rescinding their previous ratification. The ERA was in trouble.

ERA activists knew some conservative states would never ratify the ERA. They did not expect conservatives to wage a concerted campaign to make sure enough states would reject the ERA to prevent adoption. This opposition campaign was organized by Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative Catholic, right-wing Republican, and virulent anticommunist, who was never interested in women's issues. She made a name for herself as an advocate of strong national defense during Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential bid, for which she wrote *A Choice Not an Echo* to support his campaign. Frustrated by her male-dominated party (she was ousted as president of the National Federation of Republican Women and ran for Congress twice unsuccessfully), she nevertheless devoted herself to national defense and anticommunist topics promulgated to a large conservative readership through her publication, the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*. In December 1971, she was invited to debate a topic chosen by a conservative group in Connecticut. She asked to speak about national defense, but the group wished to hear about the ERA. Not knowing much about it, Schlafly asked for material from which to build her debate and quickly decided she was against the amendment. Two months later, she published an edition of the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* entirely devoted to the issue, entitled, "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women?" This newsletter, sent to Schlafly's mailing list of like-minded

12. Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1.

13. 92nd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 117 (October 12, 1971), pt. 27, 35815; 92nd Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 118 (March 22, 1972), pt. 8, 9598.

14. *Wichita Eagle*, March 24, 1972; Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA*, 12.

15. *Kansas City Star*, March 25, 1972, and *Wichita Eagle*, March 25, 1972.

16. *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 29, 1972.

17. *Kansas House Journal*, March 28, 1972, 876; *Kansas Senate Journal*, March 28, 1972, 550.



In 1912 Laura Clay, president of the Kentucky Equal Rights Association (far left), rode with four members of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association in Governor Walter Roscoe Stubb's car during a suffrage parade in Topeka. Many Kansas suffragists believed that activists from outside of the state hurt their cause by emphasizing radical arguments for women's equality rather than focusing on women's roles as wives and mothers. Free from the influence of prominent outside agitators, Kansas finally ratified an equal suffrage amendment to its state constitution in 1912.

conservatives, became the manifesto for those opposed to the ERA, spurring conservative women to form grassroots opposition. Recalling the arguments of anti-suffragists, her examination of the issue convinced her that feminists sought to use the ERA to destroy the family, which Schlafly considered the basic unit of America's Judeo-Christian civilization, through the promotion of abortion and homosexuality. Traditional homemaking and motherhood could no longer survive as men were freed from the obligation of supporting their families, which Schlafly called the "Christian tradition of chivalry." Women would be forced to take paid employment away from the home, and divorced wives would be unable to sue for spousal or child support. Finally, and most damningly, Schlafly saw no way to exempt women from a military draft. In all, she blasted the amendment as "anti-family, anti-children, and pro-abortion."<sup>18</sup>

Objecting to the tactics of "women's libbers," Schlafly

formed STOP-ERA (STOP meaning "Stop Taking Our Privileges") in September 1972, which grew into her conservative political action group, Eagle Forum, in 1975. Although she was clearly the leader of ERA opposition, Schlafly's overt Catholicism turned off many natural allies, especially evangelical Protestants. Many of these women found a champion in Christian evangelical author Lottie Beth Hobbs, a former church secretary from Fort Worth who wrote various biblical advice manuals for women, including *Daughters of Eve: Strength for Today from Women of Yesterday* and *Your Best Friend, Our Precious Privilege: A Personal Friendship with Jesus Christ*. Hobbs published her own objection to the ERA, called the "Pink Sheet," including information similar to that published by Schlafly, asking, "Ladies, have you heard?"<sup>19</sup> Hobbs distributed the newsletters through her group Women Who Want to be Women (or the 4 Ws), later called the Pro-Family Forum. What most did not know was that the two

18. Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 217, 218.

19. William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 165.

women were close collaborators: Hobbs maintained a seat on Eagle Forum's board, ensuring Schlafly could distribute information and factoids across their two publications, directed at different constituencies.<sup>20</sup> It was Schlafly who commanded the arguments against the ERA, and she worked tirelessly, often behind the scenes, to ensure anti-ERA women formed a cohesive, politically powerful bloc.

**K**ansans opposed to the ERA found their own champion in Barbara Hanna of Eudora, an evangelical Christian, housewife, and mother of two who founded Kansas Citizens against the ERA based on Hobbs's "Pink Sheet." Hanna, whose husband Joe taught math at Eudora High School, was horrified to learn about the proposed changes the ERA heralded and became one of the leading agitators against its passage in Kansas.<sup>21</sup> In an email exchange with the author, Hanna rejected the tone of Schlafly's publication as too shrill to be useful, echoing the sentiments of savvy Kansas suffragists in 1912. She also felt uncomfortable with Schlafly's Catholicism in an age before evangelicals and Catholics found common cause over abortion: "I don't even know of any state leader for [Schlafly's] STOP-ERA group, although there may have been one. I always liked Lottie Beth Hobbs' methods better and felt she was more diplomatic in her writing, speaking and any type of presentation. . . . Pro-Family Forum always made it clear that while we did have strong religious reasons to oppose ERA, we were not a religious organization."<sup>22</sup> To her, Schlafly was too foreign and too much of an outsider to appeal to ordinary Kansans.

On the national stage, Schlafly focused on keeping states that had not yet ratified from doing so. Congressional opponents had succeeded in inserting a preamble to the ERA mandating expiration seven years from the date of its submission by Congress. Schlafly would succeed in her goal if she could keep just thirteen states from ratifying the ERA until the amendment's expiration on March 22, 1979, thereby denying the needed three-fourths majority required for adoption.<sup>23</sup> As a secondary goal, Schlafly urged her readers living in states which had

already ratified the amendment to send letters to their elected official requesting that they rescind ratification, a move of dubious legality which had never been upheld.<sup>24</sup> Grassroots opposition in Kansas formed too late to prevent ratification, but still managed to mobilize thousands of concerned women to lobby for rescission despite the long odds of success.

As ratifications slowed to a trickle, NOW activists in 1978 hurriedly convinced Congress to pass a three-year extension, pushing the new deadline for ratification to June 30, 1982. ERA opponents howled in protest, declaring the extension to be illegal. In 1981 they got their revenge with a lawsuit challenging the extension in Idaho. The case was tried by U.S. District Court Judge Marion Callister, a prominent member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormon Church), which had flatly condemned the ERA. In his *Idaho v. Freeman* decision, Judge Callister rejected the legality of the extension and upheld state rescissions, indicating that local consensus was the only standard required for ratification. He reasoned if a pending amendment lost favor in a state which had already ratified it, and that state's legislature voted to rescind its decision before the amendment was adopted, there was no longer a valid consensus and the rescission was legal. The expiration of the ERA's extension in 1982 without further ratifications made the constitutionality of Callister's decision moot.<sup>25</sup>

As legal wrangling continued at the federal level, conservative legislators in Kansas heard the cries of their constituents, such as Barbara Hanna, and began organized political moves to rescind the state's ratification. Demonstrating the bipartisan nature of the conservative backlash, Kansas Representative Harley D. Huggins (D-Kansas City) submitted a bill to rescind ratification in January 1973, but failed to move it forward. Representatives Arden Dierdorff (R-Smith Center) and Lee Hamm (D-Pratt) led moves in the House to rescind ratification in 1975, 1976, and 1977 and two attempts to submit rescission to a referendum (1975 and 1977). Senator John F. Vermillion (R-Independence) led two attempts in the Senate to nullify Kansas's ratification due to the

20. Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002), 64, 111.

21. Bunny Smith, "Eudora woman's not laughing now: Fight against ERA serious business," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 20, 1978.

22. Barbara Hanna, founder of Kansas Citizens against the ERA, email messages to author, September 12, 2007.

23. *Kansas House Journal*, March 28, 1972, 875.

24. Phyllis Schlafly, interview by Mark DePue, January 5, 2011, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Oral History Program, [http://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/oralhistory/illinoisstatecraft/era/Documents/SchlaflyPhyllis/Schlafly\\_Phy\\_4FNL.pdf](http://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/oralhistory/illinoisstatecraft/era/Documents/SchlaflyPhyllis/Schlafly_Phy_4FNL.pdf), 177.

25. *Idaho v. Freeman*, 529 Idaho 1107 (1981); Mary Frances Berry, *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 73.



*Delegates representing the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association assembled in Topeka in 1916 to push for a national constitutional amendment granting women the right to vote. The Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in August 1920, over forty years after Susan B. Anthony first convinced California Senator Aaron A. Sargent to introduce the amendment before Congress.*

expiration of the seven-year deadline (1978 and 1979).<sup>26</sup> None succeeded. Senator Vermillion's nullification bill stayed in committee until the end of session in May 1980, but the bill finally died when it became evident that the ERA would not pass even with the extended deadline. Vermillion began a new crusade in March 1980 to ban the draft of women as a "call to death," saying America should reject the "use of our 18- to 26-year-old ladies as cannon fodder."<sup>27</sup>

The Kansas rescission and referenda attempts generated furious letter-writing campaigns from both pro- and anti-ERA activists, as did other political events publicizing the ERA. Preserved in Kansas's archives are thousands of letters and telegrams Kansans sent to their elected officials, including U.S. Senators Robert J. ("Bob")

Dole and James B. Pearson (both Republicans), Kansas Senator Edward F. Reilly, Jr. (R-Leavenworth), and Kansas Governors Robert Docking (D, 1967–1975) and Robert F. Bennett (R, 1975–1979). Of these mail recipients, Kansas Senator Reilly was perhaps the only one in a position to address the ERA issue due to his position as Chairman of the Federal and State Affairs Committee, which was entrusted with all actions relating to federal amendments, including the ERA rescission and referenda bills. The U.S. senators and Kansas governors, not being members of the state legislature, could either advise or attempt to influence voting members, but they were not involved in the state's action regarding the ERA. Unfortunately for conservatives, all five men openly supported the ERA and were not particularly open to public appeals.<sup>28</sup>

26. *Topeka Daily Capital*, Jan 24, 1973; *Kansas House Journal*, Rescission actions: 1975, 86; 1976, 1377; and HCR 5016: 1977, 212. Referendum actions: 1975, 307 and 1977, 340; *Kansas Senate Journal*, 1978, 757 and 1979, 10.

27. *Kansas City Times*, March 5, 1980.

28. The author recovered approximately 2,630 letters regarding the ERA from Kansas archives, including the Governor Robert Bennett Papers (RH MS 267, box 39.18–23), the Governor Robert B. Docking Papers (RH MS 167, boxes 34.18, 166.9, 20.9, 83.11, 104.18, 161.12), the Senator James B. Pearson Papers (RH MS 266, boxes 84.15, 102.3,

The pro-ERA letters tended to follow a similar format: usually brief, they often contained only one line stating support for the ERA or urging the politician to continue to support the ERA in the face of rescission efforts. Form letters from the Federation of Business and Professional Women, nurses' associations, woman lawyers' associations, and other professional or business groups were nearly always supportive of the ERA, along with the expected letters from NOW, citizens' rights group Common Cause, and other liberal lobbying groups from out-of-state. Some of these letters ran several pages long, but most focused briefly on the ERA as necessary to guarantee rights to women that were not already explicitly stated in the Constitution. Most did not explicitly state a purpose for supporting the ERA, perhaps indicating generalized acceptance of equality as a positive good. Some felt that the ERA was necessary to guarantee equal pay for equal work; others stated the need for equal treatment under the law or the equalization of family law. A handful felt that the ERA was critical for women to achieve their full potential. A unique refrain was the need to pass the ERA so that Kansas could maintain its position as a leader in women's rights. Very few letters strayed from these topics, and most of the outliers came from other states.<sup>29</sup>

116.12–13, 218.8–14), the Senator Edward F. Reilly Papers (RH MS 716 boxes 1.19, 3.30, 4.9–12), and the Republican Party Records, 1960–1979 (RH MS 923, boxes 8 A/B, 9, 12, 14, 24, 62, 64, 67, and 78), all located in the Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence; the Representative John D. Bower Papers (Col. 135, box 2), Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; and the Senator Robert J. Dole Papers (BDI 329-73-56 box 28.1–2 [1970]; 329-74-160 box 18 [1971, Jan–Mar 1972, Mar–Sep 1972]; 329-75-167 box 3 [1973–4]), Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics Archive, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

29. The author sorted all available letters to these five elected officials based on the letter-writers' intent (pro- or anti-ERA), reasons for support or lack of support, return address city or town, date, and any other unique identifiers. The results revealed 1,435 pro-ERA letters, most of which were form letters and simply urged support, and 993 anti-ERA letters which were much more diverse in their arguments. Of the 2,428 total letters sampled, about 70 (2.8 percent) were from out of state and tended to be pro-ERA. The pro-ERA letter writers who did state reasons why they urged support focused on equal treatment under the law (65 mentions in the 1,435 pro-ERA letters), equal pay for equal work (37), and the Kansas heritage of woman-friendly legislation (25). A handful mentioned the need to assure ready availability of abortion (8), women's self-actualization as citizens (7), and fear of discrimination in family law (5). The anti-ERA letter writers who stated reasons why they urged rescission focused on the draft (122 mentions in the 993 anti-ERA letters), the ERA's lack of compatibility with God's law (100), the negative effect on families (84), anger at the perceived requirement to share public bathrooms, etc. (75), disgust with the women's liberation movement (60), opposition to gay marriage (59) and abortion (54), states' rights (42), fear of a lessening of rape laws (36) and protective legislation for women (35), removal of the spouse benefit in Social Security (33), a perceived requirement for women to provide 50 percent

Pro-ERA Kansans rarely mentioned topics considered controversial: only eight letters urged passage to keep abortion legal and no letters mentioned homosexuality. None suggested destroying the patriarchal family so that women could achieve independence or indicated support for women leaving their families for paid employment. Exactly none supported the draft for women. In all, the overwhelming majority of pro-ERA Kansans supported a conservative interpretation of the ERA's possible effects, rejecting the more strident rhetoric of outside feminists.

**A**nti-ERA letters pressed traditionalism much further. Almost all came from in-state sources and individual households. Most were handwritten on personal stationery. While pro-ERA writers tended to cite the same five reasons why the ERA should be approved, anti-ERA writers cited at least twenty, often listing them one after another in a virtual litany of evils. Many contained personal reflections about how American society has suffered due to the women's movement and would decay further under the ERA. Evident in these letters are conservatism, traditionalism, fear of modernity, rural values and a desire for simple living, evangelical or fundamentalist Christian beliefs, and the need to maintain traditional gender roles as essential to social stability and national strength. Several writers included copies of the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, Hobbs's "Pink Sheet," direct quotations from one or both of these publications, or derivative materials as proof that dire consequences would follow the ERA. Some featured poor spelling or grammar, perhaps reflecting the writers' need to eschew education in favor of farm or family.

Quotations from these letters clearly demonstrate the depth of feeling Kansas writers held in opposing the ERA. Approximately 90 percent of the letters came from women, and their numbers indicate that opposition to equality was not a radical view held by a lunatic fringe. The ERA stirred up fears of the federal government interfering in family relationships, removing the woman's "right" to be supported by her husband, and allowing men to sink their families into poverty without legal recourse. Feminists responded to this particular

of the household income (32), opposition to gay teachers (32), opposition to the removal of the family support requirement for wives (31), removal of tax-exempt status from churches (30), the negative effect on children (25), the view that the ERA is a Communist plot (21), the legislation's vagueness (16), opposition to government daycare (14), and opposition to integrated teams of boys and girls in athletics (4).

argument with counterexamples like Nebraska's 1953 *McGuire v. McGuire*, which rejected a wife's lawsuit against her penurious husband as unenforceable as long as she chose to live with him. Schlafly and other opponents ignored these cases and stuck to their core arguments, successfully convincing huge numbers of socially conservative women that their lives would change for the worse under the ERA. Schlafly's most successful argument, that innocent eighteen-year-old girls or nursing mothers would be packed off to foxholes while sneering feminists and indolent men sat by and let them go, infuriated traditionalists with the idea's very incomprehensibility.<sup>30</sup> Mrs. Calvin Jones, a Junction City, Kansas, homemaker and leader of a group called Women for Women, went on record soon after Kansas's ratification to say, "we want to say very clearly that we believe the woman's place is in the home, as a wife and mother."<sup>31</sup>

**F**or anti-ERA women in Kansas, the tactics of women's liberationists proved the most galling, representing immoral, unnatural, and corrupt influences uncommon within the state's borders. Traditionalists objected to women's movement participants whom they viewed as too strident, too loud, obsessed with sexuality, and disrespectful of conventional gender roles. Adding to the problem was a sensational feminist media blitz that tended to feature activists who would generate the highest ratings, from the beautiful Gloria Steinem to the outrageous feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson, who predictably provided reporters with such provocative sound bites as "Marriage means rape" and "Love has to be destroyed."<sup>32</sup> Anti-ERA activists countered their vision of the mannish feminist with a version of conservative hyper-femininity, begging "dear" congressmen "to protect us" and baking bread for legislators in a publicity stunt labeled "To the Breadwinners from the Breadbakers."<sup>33</sup> The exaggerated

female roles each side manufactured were designed both to irk opponents and to contrast favorably with the other side's exaggerations.

Conservative Kansas ERA opponents used these stereotypes and exaggerations of feminism in their letters as they railed against the excesses of the women's movement while playing up their own vulnerability. Citing the fast pace of ERA ratification, attempts to invalidate rescissions, and the ERA deadline extension as illegal and unfair tactics, many letters demonstrated anger, desperation, and panic at the unrelenting pace of feminism.

I fear the National Organization for women are getting completely out of hand.<sup>34</sup>

The radicals in Womens' Liberation groups don't represent the majority of women in this country who want and need to be in the home and provided for by a husband who is the king of her (pardon me) *his* castle.<sup>35</sup>

I am proud to be a woman and it is obvious that the ERA advocates are not as they are trying to become as much like men as they can. I do not wish to fight in wars—nor do I wish to share the same restroom with a man. I do not want to be subject to the degradation that will run rampant across America if this ammendment is passed.<sup>36</sup>

Another set of authors insisted that the women's liberation movement was attempting to advance its radical agenda through trickery and underhanded tactics. One woman expressed her disgust at the ERA's deadline extension, complaining that a vocal minority of non-family oriented women were seeking to pressure legislators into passing an amendment that most Americans did not want:

Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 70.

34. L. B., to Senator Robert J. Dole, March 5, 1975, Robert J. Dole Senate Papers-Constituent Relations, 1969–1996, folder 2, box 256, Robert J. Dole Archive and Special Collections, Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas, Lawrence (hereafter, Dole Archive). Original grammar and spelling is preserved in all quotations.

35. Mrs. P. J., to Senator Robert J. Dole, August 11, 1970, Robert J. Dole Senate Papers-Constituent Relations, 1969–1996, folder 10, box 200, Dole Archive.

36. Christine Hennessey to Senator James B. Pearson, September 28, 1978, General, 1978, folder 9, box 218, James B. Pearson Collection, Senatorial Papers, 1962–1978, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence (hereafter, Pearson Papers).

30. Phyllis Schlafly, "What's Wrong with Equal Rights for Women?" *Phyllis Schlafly Report* 5, no. 7 (February 1972), in *America in the Sixties—Right, Left, and Center: A Documentary History*, ed. Peter B. Levy (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998); and Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 224.

31. *Wichita Eagle*, March 28, 1972.

32. CBS Evening News, March 9, 1970; Ti-Grace Atkinson interviewed by David Culhane, script p. 14, Marlene Sanders Collection, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University; quoted in Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 298.

33. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 224; and



*When Congress began hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment in 1970, progressive Kansas politicians joined the clamor to press through ratification as quickly as possible to honor their state's historic support of women's rights legislation. Democratic Governor Robert Docking, who held office from 1967 to 1975, openly supported the amendment. He and other Kansas politicians received thousands of letters from ERA supporters and opponents as Kansans debated whether or not the state should rescind its passage of the ERA.*

Every amendment for the last 60 years has had a 7 yr. deadline. But now Bella [Abzug] and her bunch want to change the rules and give their amendment 10 yrs., 3 mo. and 8 days, a very peculiar time period maliciously designed to include an extra session of the Illinois Legislature (which always adjourns on June 30). They are planning to railroad the Extension through Congress with a simple majority rather than the 2/3 majority that Article V requires for amendments to the U.S. Constitution. I demand that you never vote for such an unfair bill. We should not change the rules in the middle of the ballgame. The ERA amendment the way the pros want it is rotten. It is filled with all the NOW's

which have mostly the lesbians. Let's let the winners win.<sup>37</sup>

Other Kansans grumbled that the loudest feminists were not representative of all women and their policies were both corrupt and dangerous to the traditional American way of life.

According to the Associated Press, 3% of the women in the country are in the women's liberation movement—a very noisy, vocal 3%—and 97% are not.<sup>38</sup>

I know you are badgered in Washington with the very vocal representatives of the movement, who insist they represent all women. I have the right to insist that indeed they do not. The thing that bothers me most about them is that they do not grant others the right to differ with them, resorting to hate letters and unprintable names for anyone who dares to say most American women still believe by the millions in preserving the home and the family way of life. If they do not wish to be married, I do not mind, but I am weary of their saying other women should not marry, if they so wish. Their tired cliché that women should have control over their own bodies reduces women (except in rape cases) to the animal state because they do indeed have control over their own bodies right now—before conception.<sup>39</sup>

The ERA never plays fair. The only word they seem to know is "force". They use the most unfair, unAmerican, unChristian tactics. . . . Only the devil can think up the things they do to force a vote in their behalf.<sup>40</sup>

The last letter writer's complaint that the ERA "never plays fair" tapped into state conservatives' discontent about perceived federal encroachment on the primacy

37. Mrs. Harvey J. Coulter to Senator James B. Pearson September 5, 1978, folder 8, box 218, Pearson Papers.

38. Mildred Johnson to Governor Robert B. Docking, February 21, 1973, folder 9, box 166, Robert B. Docking Papers, 1966–1975, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence (hereafter, Docking Papers).

39. Mildred Johnson to Senator James B. Pearson, February 9, 1972, folder 12, box 116, Pearson Papers.

40. Mrs. W. W. Thom to Senator James B. Pearson, August 30, 1978, folder 11, box 218, Pearson Papers.

of the family. The idea that feminists were manipulating laws to force the ERA's passage contributed to the conservatives' feelings of embattlement regarding their preferred way of life. Anti-ERA traditionalists seethed with no apparent results as women's movement leaders gained press coverage for their cause. Tensions began to boil over as the 1970s progressed.

When the United Nations declared 1975 to be International Women's Year (IWY), women's movement leaders pressured Congress to appropriate money for a conference commemorating the event with delegations elected from each state. Money and plans were finally in place by 1977, with the convention retitled the National Women's Conference (NWC), to be held November 18–21, 1977 at the Houston Convention Center. The American IWY team was controlled by pro-ERA women forceful about using the convention to push for three more state ratifications (hoping rescissions would be invalidated). To further their aim, they appointed one of their own, former New York Representative and prominent feminist Bella Abzug, as chair of the convention. ERA opponents led by Schlafly and Hobbs, furious that Congress would appropriate monies for such a partisan event, planned a concurrent "Pro-Family" rally in the Houston Astrodome. Many states' anti-ERA factions planned to avoid the National Women's Conference altogether in favor of Schlafly's rally, but Kansas conservatives vowed to fight to be represented at the NWC, reasoning if Houston were truly a *national* women's conference, the views of all women of the nation ought to be heard.<sup>41</sup>

The nominating convention, called the Kansas Women's Weekend, was held July 15–17, 1977, in Wichita. From the outset, anti-ERA women felt marginalized, and they probably were. Pat Storey of Topeka, once an administrative assistant for pro-ERA Governor Bennett, chaired the weekend. Barbara Hanna of Kansas Citizens against the ERA led the pro-family faction. The weekend featured a number of workshops on abortion, the ERA, homosexuality, and other controversial issues, all of which were to be discussed at the end of the session followed by a vote on a resolution for each issue. In a five-page report, a copy of which went to Senator Reilly after the weekend, Hanna listed numerous ways the convention was skewed to marginalize the pro-family contingent's views. Her major complaint was a procedural trick that prevented

the majority of the pro-family women from participating in the all-important ERA resolution vote. According to the "Pro-Family Report," Storey directed "that all workshops must be covered in consecutive order, skipping none, and therefore a vote could not be taken on this [ERA] resolution to go on to the main areas of concern." Storey apparently stated repeatedly that the hall must be emptied by midnight. Furthermore, "She intimated that all resolutions not covered by then would be voted on Sunday morning at the general session, which never materialized. Many pro-family persons left feeling they could return and vote on the important issues Sunday morning." The report continued:

At 12:10 a.m. Sunday morning, after the conclusion of what was thought would be the final vote prior to the midnight closing deadline, Ms. Storey immediately called for a vote on the ERA, overlooking several workshops which should have preceded the ERA vote if a consecutive order would have been followed as was previously stated would be the case. All calls for "point of order" by Pro-Family persons were declared "out of order." A motion to adjourn (so that a more representative vote could be taken Sunday morning) was declared "out of order" by Ms. Storey. The "right" to take a vote on the motion to adjourn was denied.<sup>42</sup>

The ERA resolution passed, 1,149 to 944. The pro-family faction, largely dispersed before the vote, was furious when they learned what had happened. Storey's tactics were corroborated by four other letters from anti-ERA women sent to different legislators, objecting to the tactics used during the weekend. One woman noted that anti-ERA women had their microphones turned off and were threatened with being thrown out of workshops.<sup>43</sup> Another woman corroborated Hanna's report, mentioning the small number of men who showed up to protest the ERA: "Through the IWY coordinating committee, pro-ERA people were notified of the conference months in advance, pro-Family people learned of the conference 1-2

41. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 245.

42. [Barbara Hanna and/or Janet Hoover, Kansas Chairman for the Citizen Review of IWY], "Pro-Family Report," [July 1977], folder 12, box 4, Edward F. Reilly Papers, 1965–1992, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence (hereafter, Reilly Papers).

43. Mrs. Pearl Chindamo (letter and petition) to Governor Robert Bennett, February 21, 1978, folder 22, box 39, Robert F. Bennett Gubernatorial Papers, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence (hereafter, Bennett Papers).

weeks before it occurred. Pro-ERA people controlled the conference, recognizing their own people on the floor, intimidating men, allowing pro-ERA people into the Exhibition Hall, and excluding others. These are just a few of the injustices committed.”<sup>44</sup>

Hanna continued her complaint to Senator Reilly by objecting to non-Kansan speakers, especially the special appearance of Gloria Steinem. Recalling the ban on national feminists campaigning for Kansas state suffrage in 1912, Hanna’s objection is typically Kansan:

Considering the fact that the KWW was supposedly a “grass roots” participation, and considering the fact that Gloria Steinem, the Editor of *Ms. Magazine*, cannot in any way be regarded as representative of the views of the majority of Kansas women, it must then be assumed that Ms. Steinem was brought to Kansas to once again promote the feminist ideas with the complete exclusion of the “rights” of the Kansas Citizens who align themselves with the Pro-Family values.

Hanna’s suspicions that the conference was merely a rubber-stamp of feminist positions and not designed to elicit debate were confirmed by Steinem herself, whom the report quoted as saying, “It is not the [federal] mandate to include women who think women are not equal and should not be equal.”<sup>45</sup>

The insults continued. Steinem “completely distorted the facts to make it appear that [pro-family] women were bussed in by male leaders. She intimated that the male leaders were instructing the women on how to vote, etc.” This was particularly galling because “Any Kansas legislator who has dealt with any of the Pro-Family groups in the past realizes that the women involved are completely capable of controlling the situation themselves, while recognizing the support and backing of the men who have worked in the background to uphold family values.” Outside influences at the conference confirmed Hanna’s fear that Kansas opinions were being pushed aside in favor of a much more liberal national agenda. Steinem exacerbated the situation when she attempted to belittle the conservative Christian women with statements such as “Why is God always portrayed as white and male?” and stating that “organized religion has



*Prominent national feminists such as Gloria Steinem hurt support for the ERA in Kansas in the late 1960s and 1970s by advocating views that some Kansas women deemed too liberal. Steinem attacked Christian women’s faith by claiming that Christianity promoted patriarchy, and she dismissed ERA opponents as the tools of men. Local ERA opponent Barbara Hanna argued that Steinem, co-founder of the feminist *Ms. magazine*, could not speak for Kansas women. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.*

enshrined the idea of male supremacy.” Finally, Steinem dismissed anti-ERA women by stating that they all must be members of the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan, or Eagle Forum, or that they were Mormons.<sup>46</sup>

The partisan tactics used at the Kansas Women’s Weekend raised a number of objections in the fair-minded Kansas constituents. Years later, Barbara Hanna noted:

When Pro-Family groups would come to the door of the meeting room in Wichita, we were told that the fire marshal would only allow

44. Sareta M. Dobbs to Governor Robert Bennett, August 27, 1977, folder 21, box 39, Bennett Papers.

45. “Pro-Family Report,” folder 12, box 4, Reilly Papers.

46. *Ibid.*

a certain number of people to enter, and our people were turned away. Later, those with the women libber views were allowed to enter. We finally discovered that they had an orange dot on their name tags, and the people at the door were allowing mainly those with the orange dots to enter. We got a few in by using orange dots, too, but many of our people had gone home after standing outside in the hot sun for hours. (We also later did research, and they lied about the number of people the fire marshal would allow in the building. If I remember right, it was more than all of the people at the conference.)<sup>47</sup>

Others shared Hanna's objections. One woman was so offended by the conference that it caused her to change her mind about the ERA:

As a participant in the Kansas International Women's Year Conference, I was horrified at the tactics and lack of correct parliamentary procedure used by pro-ERA forces. If ERA is right and good, then these tactics should not have been necessary. My position has changed from one of neutrality to a strongly anti-ERA stance, mostly because of these tactics used by the pro-ERA people.<sup>48</sup>

Another woman felt the same way, noting if pro-ERA women had to resort to trickery to pass the amendment, then that proved that they were downplaying the true purpose of the ERA against the legitimate objections of morally minded Kansas women:

In the beginning I was definitely for the ERA amendment—until I experienced the Womans Convention in Wichita. I was abhorred to see the tactics used to push this through—so as to say this is what the woman of Kansas want. That's ridiculous—if you were not for everything the Libbers wanted—you were cut off and not even given the freedom to speak—Is that America?? The Anti Man-attitudes that came out in their bitterness opened me to see the selfishness and all for 1 extremists. I believe in the dignity of

women—I'm a woman—I believe in the dignity and sacredness of life, of marriage, of the family. To think that our hard earned tax money was and is used to finance this affair hurts me deeply. Many of the things these women stand for is against everything I hold sacred and dear. Since the Womans Convention we've become involved in the political process. We're working actively for candidates who will express our views and listen to the voice of the people and who'll uphold the values we share in the sacredness of life, the family and the dignity of women and men in the eyes of God.<sup>49</sup>

Delegates to the National Women's Conference were to have been chosen at the Kansas Women's Weekend, but pro-family women filed an injunction to ensure a fair vote. The League of Women Voters stepped in as an arbitrator, resulting in a victory for the pro-family delegation several weeks after the end of the Kansas Women's Weekend. According to Hanna, the League of Women Voters ensured "equal representation in all areas of ballot preparation, voting, and the counting of ballots." She continued, "the final vote of 13 Pro-Family delegates and only 7 IWY delegates points out the fact that the injunction was successful and did insure 'equality' and fair treatment in this one segment of the conference."<sup>50</sup>

Once at the national conference, the Kansas pro-family delegates wore sunflower badges with ribbons stating "Majority," indicating the pro-family women believed theirs was the opinion of the true majority of Kansans. The Kansas pro-family delegates joined the roughly 20 percent of convention delegates representing conservative opinions, most from the fifteen states which had not yet ratified the ERA. In a picture from the national convention, the Kansas pro-family women stood during a motion, turned their backs to the organizers, and prayed to express their discontent with the feminist agenda.<sup>51</sup> Even though they never succeeded in convincing state legislators to rescind ratification, conservative Kansas women had finally made their voices heard.

49. Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Schoenhofer to Senator James B. Pearson, August 23, 1978, folder 10, box 218, Pearson Papers.

50. "Pro-Family Report," folder 12, box 4, Reilly Papers; see also Carolyn Kortge, "Peaceful Meeting: Anti-ERA Delegates Notch Spots," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, August 21, 1977.

51. Jo Freeman.com, "The National Women's Conference in Houston, 1977," <http://uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/jofreeman/photos/IWY1977.html>; Jo Freeman.com, "Kansas Turns its Back . . ." <http://www.jofreeman.com/photos/IWY12.html>.

47. Barbara Hanna, email messages to author, September 10, 2007.

48. Mrs. Dave Herring to Senator James B. Pearson, August 30, 1978, folder 9, box 218, Pearson Papers.

Letters Kansans wrote to their representatives about the ERA available in the state's archival collections do not constitute a random sample for the purposes of statistical regression.<sup>52</sup> They can, however, be used to draw some general conclusions. Many of the authors wrote multiple letters, and some of the letters are from out-of-state. When the duplicates and the non-Kansans are removed, 2,103 authors wrote letters: 1,193 were for the ERA (57 percent), 883 were against (42 percent), and 24 neutrally requested more information (1 percent). These numbers roughly correspond to national Roper Polls taken from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s indicating that about 50–70 percent of the national constituency favored the ERA and about 20–40 percent were opposed, depending on the question asked.<sup>53</sup> Most of the pro-ERA letters came from the cities, especially cities with colleges: Manhattan, Lawrence, Emporia, Topeka, Wichita, and the Kansas City suburbs logged significant pro-ERA majorities although each of these cities also had a sizable anti-ERA constituency. Most anti-ERA letters came from rural areas with the highest concentration south of Wichita. These conservatives, though successful in their bid to send delegates to the NWC, never commanded enough support to force rescission in Kansas. They did, however, form a vocal minority strong enough to gain publicity and to support the national movement opposed to the ERA, which was ultimately successful.

The fate of the ERA in Kansas can be seen in two ways. On one hand, the state's progressive history of woman-friendly legislation might indicate Kansans would overwhelmingly support additional rights for women as granted by the ERA. On the other hand, the state's conservative, moral, even puritanical history might indicate Kansans would repudiate a measure designed to give women freedom to live outside a traditional family. Upon closer examination, both sets of assumptions rest on the same facts. Kansas is a state proudly founded on virtue and difference from the corrupt practices of older states to the east. Laws affecting

women have, historically, urged women to insert morality and restraint into the body politic. Laws perceived as eroding family authority have fared poorly.

Comparing the fate of the ERA to the campaign for women's state suffrage yields interesting comparisons. While radical suffragists from the eastern states railed about individual rights, anti-suffragists predicted dire consequences for the family if women were allowed to vote. Kansas ultimately charted a middle course, selling suffrage to a broad coalition by appealing to women as maternal, moderate, moral voters who would usher in both strong school administration and strong temperance laws. The national suffrage movement eventually followed suit and succeeded in its aim. National ERA activists, however, nurtured no such moderate coalition and instead allowed extremists to dictate the national discourse. In Kansas, the difference between a supporter and an opponent was often decided by how much one believed radical feminist rhetoric coming from outside the state. Kansas ERA supporters ignored the radical arguments of outsiders favoring the draft and lesbianism in order to focus on the aspects of the amendment they found to be pragmatic and salutary for Kansas. Not even one pro-ERA letter from a Kansas writer attacked the family, religion, morality, tradition, or even patriarchy in an attempt to sway local politicians. Instead, they limited their missives to a simple request for support. Kansas ERA opponents paid the most attention to the out-of-state extremists, hanging on every sensational sound bite as proof that feminists would usher in dire consequences following the ERA's adoption. Their letters lashed out in a desperate attempt to save their families from perceived attack by corrupt and evil influences. Historically, Kansans supported women's rights only if they shored up traditional families, moralism, and virtue. Opponents of the ERA, unwilling to risk their way of life on the nebulous idea of gender equality, chose to stand against it, solidifying the opinion of a vocal minority who still prioritized moral traditionalism as a bedrock value of Kansas. KH

52. Almost all the letters were written between January 1971 and April 1979, coinciding with the beginning of a concerted push to pass the ERA at the federal level and the expiration of the original deadline for ratification.

53. Roper Center Polls, Public Opinion Online, ERA questions on surveys from October 21, 1974 through September 19, 1983.