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E.R.A. and Women's Colleges

Among the many choices available to American women today is the opportunity to attend either a coed or an all-women's college. That right to choose will become a thing of the past if the Equal Rights Amendment is ever ratified.

Why is this so? Because an all-women's single-sex college, by definition, **discriminates** in its admissions policy **on account of sex**, and that would not be permitted under ERA. The proposed Equal Rights Amendment, Section 1, states its mandate in clear, absolute, no-exceptions-allowed language:

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

The words **"by the United States or by any state"** apply to every educational institution which receives **any federal or state funding**. This specifically includes:

- 1) all state and federal colleges and universities, and
- 2) all private colleges and universities that receive any federal or state funds (which is about 98 percent of them, and includes practically all the well-known institutions).

If ERA is ever ratified, we are sure to have aggressive federal enforcement by Congress, HEW, and the U.S. Supreme Court because Section 2 states:

"The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article."

Conform or Forfeit

If ERA is ever ratified, therefore, the few remaining state and federal single-sex colleges and universities will be required to go 50/50 coed, and all private colleges and universities will be required to go 50/50 coed or forfeit all their state and federal funding.

This ERA-enforced coed rule would apply to such well-known women's colleges as Smith, Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, and Bryn Mawr. It is unlikely that they would be willing to give up their federal funding which now accounts for a large portion of their annual income. To abandon federal aid would be a tremendous price to pay to retain the simple right they now enjoy, namely, integrity as an all-women's college.

This effect on single-sex colleges is a sure result of ERA -- not a matter of speculation. We know this from our experience with the Education Amendments Act of 1972 and its HEW implementation. The Act provides:

"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." This has been construed to mean that federal control extends to every education program or activity operated by a school or college which receives or benefits from federal funds, whether or not the program or activity itself receives federal assistance.

This 1972 Act specifically exempts **admissions** to colleges that have been traditionally single-sex (although everything else connected with those colleges is subject to the non-discrimination mandate).

When you refer back to the text of ERA, you will quickly see that it contains **no** exceptions; **it is absolute**. There is no way to put an exception in ERA now. The only way to do this would be to start fresh with a new constitutional amendment.

Further evidence of the coed mandate of ERA is shown in the HEW Regulation implementing the Education Amendments Act of 1972, and in the Pennsylvania court decision under the state ERA requiring girls to compete and practice with boys in all sports including football and wrestling.

It is highly probable that **all** private secondary schools, colleges and universities -- even if they do not receive federal funds -- will be required to become coed because: (1) it is current Internal Revenue policy to remove the tax exemption of all schools that discriminate in admissions on the basis of race, and (2) the women's lib radicals repeatedly confirm that they will litigate to force all private institutions to adopt a sex-neutral admissions policy. Their rationale is this: "Tax deductibility, the gift of the American people, should not be given to institutions that discriminate."

The majority of American students prefer coed colleges and universities. But what does it profit us to deprive those who prefer single-sex schools and colleges of their right to make that choice?

I am no particular advocate of women's colleges. I personally attended and prefer coed colleges, and so do most members of my family. However, I do believe in the freedom to choose. Different colleges serve different students with different personal needs.

All those who value free choice should oppose ERA because it will force all colleges into coed conformity to build the unisex society demanded by the women's liberation movement.

Selected Statements from Presidents

"Women's colleges . . . serve a highly important need and have a strong future. What is more, the response to women's colleges within the last two or three years demonstrates pretty clearly that the college-bound young woman looks with even stronger favor on the women's college than was the case a few years ago. Coeducation is neither an inevitable nor better status. It would be a disaster for this country if every institution were coeducational, because it would be one more step toward destroying the diversity which is essential to educational strength and therefore toward reducing the entire enterprise to a dead mediocrity. . . .

"I would regard as a very real danger that a foolish and uncritical conformity with fashion may have very real social losses. . . .

"Women on their own campus . . . are first class citizens, thoroughly able to gain the experience and the confidence that comes from successful leadership."

David B. Truman, President
Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, Massachusetts

"Bryn Mawr's record in the sciences supports what educators generally have proclaimed: that women are more likely to develop their scientific interests in an environment in which they are not handicapped by societal pressures or lack of faculty encouragement. . . .

"Studying in such a community with a majority of women students, with many women as teachers and academic leaders, is a stimulus to ambition and self-confidence. A significantly higher proportion of women undergraduates at Bryn Mawr choose to major in the physical sciences, to cite one example, than at the nation's leading coeducational colleges. The College considers it important to preserve this climate of encouragement."

Bryn Mawr College
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania

"One of the products of the last decade was the awareness of women of their own needs and concerns as individuals. An institution which specializes in the education of women draws the support of these women. . . . Women coeds receive conflicting signals on the 'femininity' of intellectual vigor and do not take full advantage of college."

Barbara Newell, President
Wellesley College
Wellesley, Massachusetts

"Women's colleges . . . tend to take women's intellectual abilities and aspirations more seriously than other institutions."

Jill Kerr Conway, President
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts

"We offer young women the chance to develop their own potential in an environment that is especially geared to them."

Sister Doris Benoit, President
Rivier College
Nashua, New Hampshire

"If there is a way for women to transcend the stereotypes, to realize their full potential, I believe it is in women's colleges. . . . They are the most likely places for women to begin to believe in themselves, to speak out for themselves without fear of being labeled pushy or aggressive. They are the most likely places for women to learn how to excel. In women's colleges, students can see women being successful. . . .

"Two recent studies bear out these claims, indicating that women achievers -- that is, those who do more than the traditional female role prescribes -- tend to have been graduated from women's colleges. Last year Kenneth Hardy published research in *SCIENCE Magazine* which indicated that during the first decades of this century, a group of women's colleges were clustered at the top of a list of colleges rated according to their productivity of scientists and scholars."

"Two years ago, in her study of 'career-successful' women, Elizabeth Tidball discovered that not only high achievers tend to have been graduates of women's colleges, but also that the number of

women's college faculties -- as role models -- has a positive effect on the number of achievers produced by the institution."

"The Tidball and Hardy studies are very important to us, because they reveal what these illustrious graduates have shown us all along that, given a chance, women can excel in all areas of human endeavor. Knowing as we do the encouraging results produced by women's colleges, and given statistics which show that the drop-out rate for women in coeducational institutions is higher than that for women's colleges, it would be a tragic mistake to close or make coed these institutions which are dedicated to women."

Rhoda M. Dorsey, President
Goucher College
Baltimore, Maryland

"As a faculty member stated recently, 'In a women's college a woman can develop confidence, competence and commitment.'"

Arland F. Christ-Janer, President
Stephens College
Columbia, Missouri

"Each student has the right to choose a college which is coed, single-sexed, or a college such as Barnard or Columbia. . . . We, the students of both Barnard and Columbia, hold unique places in higher education, being able to attend a small, single-sexed, liberal arts college, and at the same time live, take courses and interact on a daily basis with members of the opposite sex, taking advantage of what both schools have to offer."

"We do not have true coeducation. No student is forced to live in coed housing, to take a class at the sister or brother school, or to participate in an activity with members of the opposite sex. Each of us has a right to choose the degree to which we wish to make our college career a coeducational one. . . .

"During her four years at Barnard, a woman can never say she was treated a certain way or denied anything because of the sex. She is forced to develop to her full potential and cannot use her womanhood as an excuse for failure. This results in self-confidence in herself as a person, an awareness of who she is, and an honest self-appraisal of her limitations and capabilities."

"Barnard's Health Service is oriented toward women's medical problems and psychological experiences."

Gwyneth Murphy, President of Barnard Undergraduates
Barnard College
New York, New York

"The future of a unisex college under either a Federal or State Equal Rights Amendment may render the entire question purely academic. Already, Molloy College has had to admit men to its Nursing Program in order to save the State and Federal funds which made the program possible. I foresee similar situations arising as more legislation demands non-discrimination because of sex. In our case, the legislation has a reversed effect. We must hire more men; provide athletics for our male nursing students, etc. . . . The future unisex status of such colleges as ours seems quite dismal."

Sister Janet Fitzgerald, President
Molloy College
Rockville Centre, New York

"You must bear in mind that most colleges and universities were founded primarily to educate men. . . . The contrary is true at a women's college. Judson's whole atmosphere, its complete orientation, is built around the particular needs of modern women. It is our aspiration that teaching methods and presentations are such as to stimulate and motivate women. . . . After Milo P. Jewett founded Judson in 1838 and continued as its first president for seventeen years, he went to New York and founded Vassar College for women. For 110 years Vassar was strictly a women's college. Then a few years ago it began to open its doors to men, permitting only one male student to enroll for every three freshmen women who enrolled. This past spring the first four-year Vassar men graduated. What did they leave in their wake? Vassar women were surprised to find themselves after just four years in a secondary role. Already the president

and Bulletins of Women's Colleges

of the student body was a man. Male dominance spilled over into the classrooms. In the past there were women who would raise questions and lead in class discussions -- they would show themselves as leaders. But with the males present the women just sat back and listened while the men took the positions of leadership, asked the questions, and led in class discussions. . . .

"The tragedy of coeducational institutions is that one half of the women who enroll as freshmen never finish -- they drop out. On the other hand a five-year study of the 1,500 women defined as 'career-successful' by virtue of their inclusion in one of the three editions of WHO'S WHO OF AMERICAN WOMEN reveals that twice as many women's college graduates are listed in this group as compared with their counterparts who graduated from coeducational institutions."

N.H. McCrummen, President
Judson College
Marion, Alabama

"Colleges for women were established with women's needs in mind. On such campuses, women are first-class citizens with no undue concern about their rights as women and with no barriers against their growth and achievement."

Sister Alberta Huber, President
College of Saint Catherine
St. Paul, Minnesota

"A women's institution gives women a better education than a coeducational school. They learn more because they have more opportunity to exert themselves and express themselves. Women have a greater opportunity to participate in leadership positions in organizations on campus. This prepares them for the same sort of thing in the community. . . . The single-sex institution attracts a student who is more interested in an education than her contemporaries. . . .

"Our students can choose the type of activities in which they have the greatest amount of interest. They can hold all of the offices instead of the token inconsequential ones. They can learn how to get along with women, which for them is far more difficult than getting along with men. . . .

"Women's colleges are in a unique position to experiment and innovate and offer programs relevant to the needs of women. . . . Deferring to the male in order to allow for the exercising of his ego is not necessary. . . . There is more naturalness and less artificiality on the campus of colleges for women."

Charles P. Hogarth, President
Mississippi University for Women
Columbus, Mississippi

"Today's woman needs a special education. At Mississippi University for Women we have designed our academic and non-academic programs with the knowledge that every woman is an individual. . . .

"Ironically, this defense of a strongly supported belief that women obtain a better education in a women's college has caused our college to be ruled ineligible for some major federal funds because of discrimination against men."

Mississippi University for Women
Columbus, Mississippi

"Women's colleges have a unique role to play, for no other institution within or beyond the framework of higher education has defined the future role of women as its major concern. . . . Women have always been taken seriously at Wheaton by the college, by the faculty, and by each other. In a society where women's activities are often considered frivolous or tangential, women's colleges provide a crucial opportunity for women to learn how to work hard and effectively in areas of intellectual consequence."

Alice Frey Emerson, President
Wheaton College
Norton, Massachusetts

"In 1973, after intensive study and deliberations, the college reaffirmed its role of over 100 years as that of educating women. Subsequent events have strengthened this decision even more."

Peggy N. Phillips
Director, Public Information
Cedar Crest College
Allentown, Pennsylvania

"Our concept is that a women's college must be truly unique in the sense that it provides women who attend it opportunities to pursue activities in the classroom and elsewhere which counterbalance the trends in society that impede the development of women. Our intention is to provide a different kind of experience in a setting and framework in which women can develop and flourish in ways they cannot readily do elsewhere."

Hood College
Frederick, Maryland

"Over the years, there have been a number of clues in the educational literature indicating that reliance of American public schools upon coeducation may have detrimental effects. . . .

"I believe, however, that there is a great future ahead for private institutions and particularly for colleges for women. We have come through a wave toward coeducation unscathed and the remaining women's colleges will be more unique and more prized."

Robert J. Wert, President
Mills College
Oakland, California

"It makes sense for women to be in an atmosphere where they dominate. On many of the campuses that were formerly women's colleges, boys, not girls, are running the student government."

Josiah Bunting, President
Briarcliff College
Briarcliff Manor, New York

"I clearly and firmly believe that women's colleges serve a real need. . . . The underlying rationale for my belief is that I deny any one form of higher education as categorically better for everyone. Good higher education is individualized higher education, and of course that is increasingly hard to find. Still, there is to my way of thinking a persuasive amount of evidence upholding the idea that some students will do better in coeducational institutions, whereas others will do better in single-sex institutions. . . . I am saying that I believe an optional system is best for all, both the individuals and the system itself."

Harold B. Whiteman, Jr.
President
Sweet Briar College
Sweet Briar, Virginia

"Given the past inherent cultural differences assigned to women's roles, there is a need for women's colleges. Women must have a chance to 'catch-up' and 'make-up' some of the experiences they have missed. Opportunities for leadership development and positive self-image building (professionally, psychologically and socially) are two functions that a women's college can perform best."

Sandra C. Broadrick-Allen
Acting President
Garland Junior College
Boston, Massachusetts

Chatham College took a poll on coeducation. The students voted 75.5 percent against coeducation, with 18.9 percent favoring it, and 5.6 percent neutral.

Chatham College
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

"In a meeting of the board, it was vigorously stated that 'At a women's college, a woman learns to be a first-class citizen by acting like one and being treated like one.' In such institutions, women hold positions of leadership and have more women teachers and administrators to emulate."

Keuka College
Keuka Park, New York

"Cazenovia College is distinctive. We are an independent, two-year women's college, devoted to providing quality education whose purpose is to serve democracy at a time in our history when the role of women is of increasing importance to the survival of our democracy."

Stephen M. Schneeweiss
President
Cazenovia College
Cazenovia, New York

"I believe firmly in the future of women's colleges in the United States. We have consciously chosen to remain a women's college because we feel we have a special educational job to do and that the alternative of a women's college is extremely important for a substantial portion of the population. I certainly do not feel that coeducational status is either inevitable or, in the abstract, necessarily better. Young people are different from one another, different alternatives need to be provided for them, and I think the record clearly shows that women's colleges have done extremely well in educating a disproportionate share of the women who now hold leadership positions in the society. . . .

"From all I read, the new generation of young women coming out of high school at present share this same conviction in increasing numbers."

John H. Chandler, President
Salem College
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

"I believe that colleges for women have a unique role to play, that they are equipped -- in a way coeducational institutions are not -- to make a special contribution to the advancement of women toward full and satisfying participation on all aspects of American life. And, most important of all, we should continue our approach of a plurality of choices so that those who prefer to attend colleges that are distinctively for women or men shall have the opportunity to do so."

Founders Day Address
Meredith College
Raleigh, North Carolina

"Our Federal Government has been stating that there should be equal opportunity for higher education for all, and my contention is that part of equal opportunity should be equal choice -- especially for women who want a single-sex education."

Rodney Felder, President
Finch College
New York, New York

"I believe there is a very specific place for the women's college because it does give a woman a place where she can identify herself as a woman, where she is surrounded by role models of women, where she is forced into positions of leadership, and where she develops the image of herself which will enable her to function successfully in our society."

Sister Jeanne Knoerle, S.P.
President
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana

"I think one of the great advantages in a women's college is the experience in leadership that such a campus can offer. It has been my experience that in a coeducational atmosphere the men are elected to the presidencies whether they are worthy or not and the women are relegated to the job of secretary. On our campus every position is, of course, held by a woman."

R.B. Cutlip, President
William Woods College
Fulton, Missouri

"I say there is a very definite future for Mundelein and other women's colleges. . . . Mundelein had a 28 percent increase in enrollment this year. Because we are offering the programs that today's women need, our enrollment is rising rapidly."

Daniel G. Cahill
Mundelein College
Chicago, Illinois

"American higher education has always been characterized by a pluralism which has permitted a variety of institutional forms and approaches. I trust this pluralism will never change, particularly as it relates to the opportunity for women's colleges to continue to exist as an important alternative for those young women who can be nurtured so positively in our kind of environment."

William W. Kelly, President
Mary Baldwin College
Staunton, Virginia

"I, for one, seriously question whether the way for a young woman to identify and overcome and eliminate problems associated with discrimination on the basis of sex is for her to continue experiencing these problems. . . . I think that there is still a need for liberal arts colleges for women."

Margaret Waggoner, President
Wilson College
Chambersburg, Pennsylvania

"Applications and enrollment in women's colleges showed significant increases this fall. . . . It seems clear that women's colleges do have a future; they serve a need for some individuals. . . . Coeducation is neither better nor inevitable. To meet the needs of a diverse student population, diversity in educational institutions is essential."

Sister Mary Consolata
President
St. Joseph College
West Hartford, Connecticut

"We welcome our special mission to educate women, particularly when so few strong colleges for women remain for what is a critical period in their history."

John M. Duggan, President
Saint Mary's College
Notre Dame, Indiana

"Graduates of the women's colleges set the styles in foods, clothing, books, entertainment, houses, furniture, and all the hundreds of material and spiritual things which make up what we call American civilization. They control a wide range of influential organizations which give purpose to the social structure of America -- including P.T.A., orphanages, A.A.U.W., the League of Women Voters, and many others. Through these they help determine what types of schools are built for our children, what kinds of cities they want to live in, and often what political voice the average citizen is to have in our representative form of government."

Randle Elliott, President
Bay Path Junior College
Longmeadow, Massachusetts

NOTE: We are indebted to the Committee on the Status of Women for making available its recent survey on women's colleges from which we have selected the above quotations from presidents and bulletins of women's colleges. Nothing herein is to be construed as implying that they have taken a position on ERA.

Phyllis Schlafly has a B.A. with Honors from Washington University in St. Louis, an M.A. from Harvard University, and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Pi Sigma Alpha. She is the author of seven books and the publisher since 1967 of the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*.

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