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The First Ladies of the Legislatures

In most of the State Legislatures where the Equal Rights Amendment has been defeated, the credit belongs to the women leaders who have led the battle. These lady legislators are able and articulate, capable and conscientious, admired by their friends and respected by their political foes. Together and separately, they are distinguished by their beauty (physical and spiritual), talent (political, educational, and business), and leadership (on issues and organization).

Some of these lady legislators are Republican, some are Democrat, some are Independent. They reveal a variety in geographic location, church membership, and career interest. The bond that binds them together is their high moral values, their family orientation, and their dedicated devotion to Home and Country.

With persevering enthusiasm and at great personal sacrifice, these lady legislators have continued the battle that was waged so gallantly in the United States Congress by the outstanding Congresswoman of our time, Leonor K. Sullivan of Missouri. At a time when no one else seemed to be listening, Congresswoman Sullivan carried the banner for American women when she voted NO on ERA in the U.S. Congress in 1971. Her great speech against ERA is a classic in the literature about ERA.

The careers of the lady legislators described in this report conclusively prove that American women already have every chance and choice for home and job fulfillment -- we don't need an ERA for that. These lady legislators also testify to the fact that the American homemaker is *not* "oppressed" or kept in "serfdom," but has every opportunity to achieve a second successful career in public life.

This Report does *not*, by any means, include *all* the women legislators who have voted NO on ERA. Space limitations prevent the inclusion of others who also deserve to be honored.

We proudly present our First Ladies of the Legislatures:

Representative

Mary Lou Kent

Illinois



Mary Lou Kent, a Representative in the Illinois General Assembly, serves on the Transportation Committee, the Appropriations Committee (first woman permanently appointed in Illinois), and as Minority Spokesman for the Executive Committee. She is the Chairman of the Tourism and Advisory Committee, a member of the Illinois Economic and Fiscal Commission, and a member of the Organization of General Assembly Commission. Before her election to the Legislature, she was Administrative Assistant for the Quincy Chamber of Commerce and a leader in industrial development, community problems, and tourism. She is a Republican and a Methodist. She is married to Laurence S. Kent and the mother of one daughter and two sons, and she has one granddaughter.

Mrs. Kent says: "No proponent has yet to give me ONE specific advantage that would be accomplished for women by passage of this amendment -- repeat -- not ONE specific point! Yet I can list many disadvantages for women, the home, and society at large. I do not and will not accept the premise that the traditional structure of the American family is wrong. I stand totally opposed to ERA's passage, and in doing so I am completely confident that I represent the great majority of people of our District -- as well as the rest of the country."

Senator
Mary L. Gant
Missouri



Mary Gant was the first woman ever elected to the Missouri Senate. She serves on the Banks, Banking and Financial Institutions Committee, the Public Health and Welfare Committee, and as Vice Chairman of Higher Education Committee and Chairman of Industrial Development. She is also serving on a Select Committee to Study Medical Malpractice Insurance. Prior to her election, she served two terms in the Missouri House of Representatives. She is a real estate broker, a commercial artist, a member of the Board of Governors for the Kansas City Museum of History and Science, and a member of the Kansas City Bicentennial Commission. She is a Democrat. She is the mother of two sons and one daughter.

*Mrs. Gant says: "The ERA will create many more problems than solutions. ERA says that sex can **never** be a factor, under any circumstances, in determining the rights of men and women. In other words, a greater or different obligation cannot be placed on either sex, even in regard to the family. The primary obligation of a man to support his family would be unenforceable. American women have always been exempt from mandatory military duty. Since no one can predict what the future will bring, it is irresponsible to bind us with a constitutional mandate to treat women exactly like men. ERA is NOT the way. We should end any remaining discrimination with specific legislation."*

Senator
Joan Gubbins
Indiana



Senator Joan Gubbins of the Indiana Legislature is best known for her outstanding work as a member of the Education Committee, on which she has served since 1969. She has also served as Chairman of the Public Safety Committee, as ranking member of the Public Policy Committee, and as a member of the Affairs of Marion County Committee, the Public Health and Welfare Committee, and the Governmental Affairs Committee. In addition, she served on the Health and Welfare and Education Interim Study Committees, the Indiana Fact Finding Committee on Sex Education, and as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Textbooks and Curriculum. She is Vice President of the National Committee on the Status of Women. She is a Republican and a member of the Hope Missionary Alliance Church. She is married to Dale Gubbins and is the mother of a son and a daughter.

Mrs. Gubbins says: "As a Indiana State Senator, sworn to uphold the Indiana and U.S. Constitutions, I must oppose further encroachment on individual citizens' rights and benefits reserved to the protection of State legislative wisdom. Passage of ERA would subvert the U.S. Constitution by transferring many areas of law to the Federal level. It would make a mockery of the Tenth Amendment under which rights concerning family and local affairs are "reserved to the states respectively." Passage of ERA would do much to complete the death of state and local government."

Senator
Helen Herr
Nevada



Senator Helen Herr has served 16 years in the Nevada Legislature, including three terms in the Senate. For most of that time, she was the only woman serving in the State Senate. She won reelection the last time openly campaigning against ERA. She serves as Chairman of the Transportation Committee and as a member of the Health and Welfare Committee and the Taxation Committee. She is a successful businesswoman, owning her own real estate business. She is a Democrat and a member of the Religious Science Church. She has one daughter and two grandchildren.

Mrs. Herr says: "ERA is presented as an amendment that will benefit women, but we have conclusively demonstrated that ERA will not give women anything they do not now have. Full rights for women in employment, education, and credit are already guaranteed by Federal and state laws. So what will ERA do? It will take away the right of a wife to be supported and provided with a home by her husband, the right of a mother to have her minor children supported by their father, the right of a young woman to be exempt from the draft, and the right of a woman who does manual labor to have the benefit of protective labor legislation."

Representative
Donna Carlson
Arizona



Representative Donna Carlson was elected to the Arizona Legislature in 1974 after leading the battle to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment as Arizona Chairman of Stop ERA. She serves as Vice Chairman of the Judiciary Committee and as a member of the Commerce Committee, the Counties and Municipalities Committee, and the Government Operations Committee. She is a past president of the Arizona Coordinating Council of Republican Women, adviser to the Young Americans for Freedom, and President of the National Committee on the Status of Women. She is a Republican and a member of the Christian Church. She is the wife of Eric J. Carlson and the mother of five sons.

Mrs. Carlson says: "The Equal Rights Amendment is without a doubt one of the most devastating attacks on state government that our country has ever witnessed. State Legislators who vote for a constitutional amendment with a clause like Section 2 of ERA are betraying the people who trusted them to uphold their right to local government. ERA is also one of the most insidious schemes ever devised to destroy the very thing that has kept our country strong for 200 years -- the home and the family. I believe the American people will demand that their states reject ratification."

Representative
Georgia Peterson
Utah



Representative Georgia B. Peterson has served as Assistant Minority Whip of the Utah House of Representatives since 1973. She has also served as Chairman of the Rules Committee, Chairman of the Transportation and Public Safety Committee, and as a member of the Public Education Committee, the Judiciary Committee, the Public Education Appropriation Committee, and the Executive Council Appropriation Committee. Prior to her election to the Utah Legislature in 1970, she was a research writer at Stanford University and at the University of Utah. She is a Republican and a Mormon. She is the wife of Dr. Ted T. Peterson and the mother of a son and a daughter.

Mrs. Peterson says: "The far-reaching effects of ERA would probably be even more important than the immediate and obvious ones. These long-term effects, if ERA is ever ratified, would have a direct adverse effect on the integrity of the family as the basic unit of our society. The language of the Constitution and of our laws is constantly being distorted by the Federal courts and the Federal bureaucrats to achieve results that were never intended. Busing, abortion, the elimination of prayers from the public schools, and the new rules on school sports, are only a few examples. Who knows to what mischievous ends ERA could be used by the anti-family forces?"

Representative
Norma Russell
South Carolina



Representative Norma Russell is in her second term in the South Carolina General Assembly, where she serves as Vice Chairman of the Medical, Military, Municipal, and Public Affairs Committee. Before her election in 1972, she was a Court Reporter. On January 29, 1976 she set the record for filibusters by women in state legislatures when, after speaking for three and a half days, eight to nine hours a day, she rallied so much public support in her campaign against the South Carolina Postcard Registration Bill that it was defeated. Holding her own in a houseful of men has always been easy for her -- she has 12 brothers. She is a Republican and a Presbyterian. She is married to Rodney J. Russell and is the mother of a daughter and a son.

Mrs. Russell says: "I am strongly in favor of eliminating discrimination in employment, salaries, education, insurance, Social Security, credit, etc., but I believe that discrimination can be eliminated by specific legislation without taking the consequences of such a vague amendment as the ERA. Many things hoped to be corrected by the ERA are caused by psychological bias, and you cannot legislate psychological bias. I am opposed to such a vague amendment as the Equal Rights Amendment."

Delegate
Eva Scott
Virginia



Delegate Eva Scott was recently reelected without opposition for her third term in the Virginia House of Delegates. She serves on the Roads and Internal Navigation Committee, on the Counties, Cities and Towns Committee, and on the Militia and Police Committee. She is Chairman of the Blue Ribbon Committee Studying the American Business System and How It Serves Virginia. The relationship of local government to the private enterprise system has always been a major interest. She is a graduate of the Medical College of Virginia and owned and operated a pharmacy. She is an Independent in politics and a Baptist. She is married to Leander Scott and is the mother of two sons and two daughters.

Mrs. Scott says: "In Virginia, we continue our efforts to expose ERA as the Extra Responsibilities Amendment for Women. If ratified, it will surely prove to be exactly that. Our Virginia Task Force Report, to the disappointment of ERA proponents, provided major arguments for those opposed to ERA. ERA is unnecessary, it will hasten the erosion of the institution of the family, it will cause endless problems in schools and colleges by banning any difference of treatment between the sexes and it will compel equal treatment for men and women in the military. Let's continue to oppose this folly."

Representative
Louise Johnson
Louisiana



Representative Louise Johnson served in the Louisiana Legislature on the Appropriations Committee and the Commerce Committee, and as Vice Chairman of the Louisiana Trails Council. She owns and manages two general insurance agencies and in 1969 was Special Oscar Winner for Insurance Advertising and Public Relations. In 1967 she was first runner-up in the Mrs. America contest of Louisiana. She is a Democrat and a Baptist. She is married and the mother of one son and two grandchildren. In 1975 she chose not to run for reelection, but to run instead for another office.

Mrs. Johnson says: "The problem is not the fault of the U.S. Constitution, and hasn't been since 1869. Legislative and judicial remedies, plus enforcement of present non-discrimination statutes and regulations, would solve any problems which may still exist. Only ignorance of the U.S. Constitution or a desire to harm our society would prompt anyone to support the 27th Amendment in its present strict and absolute form."

Senator
Mary Helm
Oklahoma

Senator Mary Helm, the first woman in the Oklahoma Senate in half a century, serves on the Environmental Quality Committee, the Revenue and Tax Committee, the Wild Life Committee, and the Engrossed and Enrolled Bills Committee. By profession, she is a botanist and electron-microscopist engaged in medical research.

We regret exceedingly that space does not permit the inclusion of many other lady legislators who are most deserving of recognition. We hope to report on others in a future newsletter.

Representative
Dorothy Conaghan
Oklahoma

Representative Dorothy Conaghan, now serving her second term in the Oklahoma Legislature, serves on the Higher Education Committee, the Common Education Committee, and the Mental Health and Retardation Committee.

Representative
Joan Hastings
Oklahoma

Representative Joan Hastings, now serving her first term in the Oklahoma Legislature, serves on the Public Safety and Penal Affairs Committee, the Common Education Committee, and the Wild Life Committee.

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