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Open Forum: Sylvia Rogers and Susan Burk

Make History By Ratifying Amendment

On Women's Equality Day, Aug. 26, we call on the Virginia General Assembly to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Equality under the law, regardless of gender, is a fundamental American value, supported by both Republicans and Democrats. In Virginia, members of both parties have sponsored resolutions to ratify the ERA. Given this bipartisan support, why has ratification of an amendment embodying the fundamental right of equality proven elusive? And what makes now the time for ratification?

Many have hesitated to embrace the ERA, often for the most seemingly virtuous of reasons. In the 1930s and '40s, some women's groups opposed the ERA because they believed it would reverse hard-won labor laws protecting women. Even Eleanor Roosevelt opposed the ERA, saying she believed government "must concern itself with the health of the women because the future of the race depends on their ability to produce healthy offspring." Some have believed that the ERA will destroy the differences between men and women, let men into women-only facilities, and require women to register for the draft.

The last several decades, however, have shown that equality under the law does not result in a unisex dystopia. Men and women serve side-by-side in the military, the government, and the private sector. The conflict between our deeply held belief in equality under the law and our appreciation of the differences between the sexes has proven ephemeral. Having moved toward equality under the law and seen its positive results, our society is finally ready to ratify the ERA.

> In 2017, Nevada became the 36th state to ratify the ERA, and Illinois became number 37 this year. If one more state ratifies the ERA, it will have been ratified by three-fourths of the states.

Despite progress toward equality under the law, ratification of the ERA remains critical. It will assure enduring protection and further reduce discrimination against women and girls. Statutes, regulations, policies, and enforcement may change from time to time, but adoption of the ERA will enshrine equality under the law as a Constitutional right.

Congress' 1979 deadline for ratification, which it extended to 1982, does not defeat the ERA. Congress can eliminate or again extend the deadline. Also, under the Constitution, once a proposed amendment has been ratified by three-fourths of the states, it "shall be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution." There is no precedent for excluding from the Constitution an amendment ratified by three-fourths of the states.

In 2017, Nevada became the 36th state to ratify the ERA, and Illinois became number 37 this year. If one more state ratifies the ERA, it will have been ratified by three-fourths of the states. Let Virginia be that one remaining state, number 38, to ratify ERA and ensure that "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

Sylvia Rogers (Harrisonburg) and
Susan Burk (Annandale)
Co-Vice Presidents for Public Policy
AAUW of Virginia

Letters To The Editor

Moved By McCain's Tributes

I HAVE BEEN DEEPLY moved hearing all of the tributes to John McCain since his passing on Aug. 25.

I cannot imagine the suffering he endured during his five and a half years of captivity and torture in Vietnam. He was truly a hero and a patriot.

In contrast, we all should have realized what a small person Donald Trump is when he said about McCain, "He's a war hero because he was captured. I like people that weren't captured."

Peter Kohn
Keezletown

Viewpoint: Rita Dunaway