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ERA Legislation Assures Equality for All If Petty Politics and Myths Are Pushed Aside

Equality in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness constitutionally is guaranteed to all American citizens. That very notion is so etched in our nation's history and indelibly seared in our hearts and minds that its absence defies logic. Nonetheless, more than half of U.S. citizens continue to be denied equal application and protection of law under the Constitution.

Left out in the polar vortex are the grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, wives, daughters, and the families and communities to which they belong. The cohort of people destructively impacted by gender inequality embodies the entire nation. Why would any man, woman or child oppose equal treatment under the law for themselves or anyone else?

The most compelling argument for equal rights sparks the "what if" of human potential. If the intellectual capital and expertise of all workers were to be fully explored, fostered, mentored, and acknowledged, we might nail the cure for cancer or the solution to water shortages. There's no telling how many scientific discoveries, medical cures, and life-altering breakthroughs are sacrificed because society has failed to provide every American equal opportunities for education and professional achievement.

An astounding 70 percent of Americans trust that equal rights under the law exist today, despite blatant contradictions occurring every day across our great country. In every facet of male, female or transgender oppression, abuses of power degrade standards of living, block lifetime potential, and curtail economic stability for millions of American families.

Sham excuses, falsehoods, myths, and scare tactics have been employed by political antagonists to drive a wedge between men and women, lobbyists and citizens, and proponents and opponents of objective and equitable treatment under the law.

Without equal constitutional protections, U.S. court cases will continue to be decided in favor of employers, while maintaining the status quo of belittling women and minorities. Despite comprising 50.8 percent of the U.S. population, earning 60 percent of both undergraduate and master's degrees, and encompassing 47 percent of the labor force, American women remain vastly underrepresented, underpaid, and undervalued.

Arizona's gender-based wage discrepancies total nearly \$6 billion a year, equating to an average loss of \$7,000 a year for each working woman. Female employees earn 81.8 cents on average for every dollar paid to men, and Arizona women are not expected to achieve wage parity for another 29 years. Chronic inequality in pay creates financial insecurity for single parent households and their families, perpetuating lifelong earnings disadvantages spanning generations.

Equal rights for all citizens in its current format originated in 1923, when free-thinking 19th Amendment strategist and advocate Alice Paul proclaimed that: "Equal rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex." Nearly a century later that inequity still has not been righted.

It was not until 1972 — with monumental effort by determined advocates amidst rapid cultural change — that the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was passed by Congress and presented to the 50 states for ratification. Subsequently stalled for decades, just three states shy of the 38 state ratifications required to become law, the amendment underwent another pivotal resurgence. Two states — Illinois in 2018 and Nevada in 2017 — became the latest to ratify. Only one more state is needed to nudge the ERA forward to becoming the law of the land.

Arizona's ratification is the nationwide conduit to guaranteed equality under the law in career opportunities, compensation, judicial decisions, health care, education, and overall economic security. When passed, the ERA will provide the assurance of legal recourse when an individual faces discrimination of any type. The judicial rules applied will be the same for one and all.

Significant hurdles must be overcome. The ERA in Arizona regrettably can't even get a legislative hearing, despite the state's historic track record of women elected to the state House and Senate, multiple female governors over the years, five top state offices simultaneously held by women, the recent swearing in of Kyrsten Sinema and Martha McSally as the first two women lawmakers from Arizona in the U.S. Senate; and the Prescott area's Karen Fann becoming the second woman in history named Arizona Senate president.

Arizona's spitfire females earned the right to vote at statehood in 1912. Many contemporaries elsewhere in the country had to wait until the 19th Amendment went into effect in 1923. Arizona must reclaim its leadership by ratifying the ERA now in the 21st Century.

Every year since about 1982, a ratification resolution has been introduced in the Arizona House or Senate or both. Each time, the measure has been obstructed through political maneuvering and grandstanding. The ERA has been blocked by opposing legislators who refuse to discuss it in committee and thereby prevent it from moving forward to full legislative hearings on the House and Senate floors.

Democracy fails when one person or group uses their position of authority to block meaningful discussion and vote on constituent-supported legislation. Yet it happens again and again at the Arizona state capitol. Voters across Arizona, regardless of political or party affiliation, should urge their legislators to push the ERA forward to ratification in the House and Senate.

The 2019 versions of the bills are just now being dropped in their respective houses and supporting lawmakers are working to get them assigned to committees where they will have the best chance of moving forward. State Sen. Michelle Ugenti-Rita, State Rep. Pamela Powers Hannley, State Sen. Victoria Steele, and their circles are the movers and shakers to follow and support.

Actively track and lobby for the ERA because it guarantees equal protection for everyone under the law and ensures that everyone is afforded the wealth of opportunities pledged by the American dream. Everyone will experience a richer and fuller lifestyle commensurate with their education, expertise, and contributions to humanity. Rise to ratify!

ABOUT ERA TASK FORCE AZ

ERA Task Force AZ is a coalition of organizations and individual volunteers pushing to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in Arizona in 2019. The coalition's participating members include the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the League of Women Voters (LWV), the National Organization for Women (NOW), Mormons for ERA, Peer Solutions, and Next Gen.

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