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The ERA Rises Again!

Our mothers' fight, our sisters', our aunts', and in some cases ours — the fight for the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment), waged so passionately during the 1970s. Reading "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 Equal Rights Amendment was ratified by 35 states by 1977, but, falling three short of the required 38, it seemed doomed.

Now, however, the struggle has been rejoined. In March 2017, Nevada ratified the ERA, followed by Illinois in May 2018. When one more state ratifies (possibly North Carolina or Virginia), the battle will go to Congress and the courts, since the deadline has long expired.

LWV sees the ERA as critically needed. Women are not adequately protected today; unequal pay, violence against women, pregnancy discrimination, and other forms of unequal treatment are pervasive. What laws exist are inconsistently interpreted and applied, and what progress has been made can be rolled back.

By acclamation, the recent LWVUS National Convention adopted as a program priority that when the 38th state has ratified, the LWVUS will "take the required steps to see the Amendment through whatever judicial or other challenges may occur until we see the ERA added to the U.S. Constitution..." Further, the Convention resolved that, even before a 38th state ratifies, the LWVUS will "support efforts to remove the time limits for ratification" and "support an emphasis on the ERA this year and every year until the ERA is ratified and becomes a U.S. Constitutional Amendment."

South Carolina is not likely to be the 38th state to ratify (although guess what? in March 1972, the South Carolina House of Representatives voted to ratify the ERA by 83 votes to zero; unfortunately, the Senate did not go along). But we can educate the citizenry all over the state with programs such as that now being presented by League member Barbara Fry in the Charleston area. When the fight goes to Congress, LWVUS will promote national lobbying and advocacy. In addition, Representative Gilda Cobb-Hunter has declared her intention to introduce the amendment in the S.C. House during the next session. Stay tuned...