

# Tells Why She Opposes ERA

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Barbara B. Smith is president of The Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — an organization of 900,000 women Mormons around the world which offers spiritual, educational and social services. Mrs. Smith, who has been outspoken in her support for the church's stands against the ERA and abortion, was interviewed by Washington Star Staff Writer Randy Sue Coburn.

*Question: The Mormon church says it is interested in furthering the role of women as it is presented in the Gospel plan. What is that role?*

**Mrs. Smith:** The role of women in our church has always been one where women have been given top appreciation and they have been given the opportunity to do everything. It's been that way since the very beginning. The church was organized in 1830, and in 1832 we were given our own organization, and I am the head of that organization. Women have always been given this position of respect, honor and equal opportunity. We speak, we preach and we pray — we are on all the decision-making boards.

*Q: The church has stated its opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. Are you active in that opposition?*

**A:** Yes, I really am. We feel very strongly against this. As I tell you, we've always been given equal rights. But we are against the Equal Rights Amendment because we feel that it is just a blanket approach in the hopes of solving all problems.

*Q: What do you see as the harmful aspects?*

**A:** Well, we see that it's so vague and so broad and so all-encompassing that instead of defining any rights we have, it's just a hope that the things that we want to take place will take place.



*Q: But isn't the basic question whether or not it is valid for legal distinctions to be made on the basis of sex?*

*A: Well, we're not against equal rights for women at all — the principle, that is. In fact, we think that they should have them. But we feel like the better thing to do is have individual legislation that will give women the rights they really need. I've been looking, for example, at Title IX of the Health Education and Welfare program. Of course, this is the one that is supposed to take discrimination from the schools. And in our schools, they have now said we cannot have a separate boys' and girls' organization. And of course we've always had this and it's been something that's been traditional. We no longer can have separate boys' and girls' choruses, or separate gym classes. When I think of these things, I wonder if this same kind of interpretation would be part of the Equal Rights Amendment, meaning not only sameness but oneness. That's one reason I feel we need to be sure that whatever legislation we have will give women the rights they want, not take from them the rights they have.*

*Q: By that, do you mean rights in the working market, or rights in their roles as wives and mothers?*



A: No, I don't think so. The military issue was a big one, I think. You know, Sen. Ervin in the very beginning wanted an amendment to the amendment — one to protect women with their individual rights so that they would not be drafted in the military. But the proponents of the ERA would not have it.

Q: *Is much of your group's and church's opposition to the ERA based on biblical principles?*

A: I think so. The Bible does give women a specific role of nurturing children and raising them. I think it also gives the man the responsibility of leading out in many areas of life. The Lord has assigned men and women to work together and each are equally important, but in different ways.

Q: *Is your league's opposition to abortion organized in the same way as the ERA opposition?*

A: Yes. However, abortion to us is more of a moral issue, so you'll hear more being said from the pulpits of our church. Because we feel abortion is an evil practice and most often it's a selfish practice. Most of the motivation is because a person feels it's an inconvenience, probably, to have a child. We think that is not a good reason for taking life.

Q: *So the church's encouragement of women to fulfill their talents is directed toward home and community activities, and not in the labor force at large?*

A: We don't really try to regulate the lives of our people. In our organization we try to give women a broader vision of what their potential is and what their responsibilities are. For example, we have what we call a mother education class, and that class is to help mothers raise their children more effectively and to develop the potential of their children. We talk about such things as money management, for example. It sounds easy, and it sounds simple, but it isn't a simple problem. Because when we have the great media we have, having crime constantly before our children, they have to be

taught. And the only way they can be taught is by a mother who knows and understands the problem. You come with so many problems and you find out that so many others have them to and you can discuss them, it gives you that encouragement and it makes you realize that even though you do have to go through these mundane tasks day after day, they're an important part of life. A child cannot just go through life feeling very selfishly concerned and then all of a sudden become a selfless person willing to give to the world.

Q: *Most Mormon women are full-time mothers?*

A: I think we have an awful lot of working mothers. We surely encourage our mothers, if they don't have to work, to be at home with their children and to put them in that priority position during those years. We think a woman should gain all the knowledge and intelligence she can and then use that in her home. We want her to have a world of her own in her own home.

Q: *The Mormon church has recently been before the public, of course, as a result of the alleged will of Howard Hughes, which leaves the church \$125 million. What would be done with that money?*

A: I think the mysterious appearance of that will would give all of us reason to question its validity. I think none of us are counting on that as being authentic at this time. But I know that if the church were given any money, they would be very careful with it as it always has been. The church has a great educational program all over the world, and a great program to alleviate poverty and disease with health missionaries. It would probably go to things like this.

Q: *Does it seem ironic that a man as worldly as Howard Hughes would leave money to the Mormon church?*

A: If he has, I'm sure the reason is because he has always surrounded himself with Mormons. His top men have always been Mormons. And he selected them because he has felt they had an integrity, a health code and that he could put his faith and trust in him. I know this because my own brother worked for him.

## A-Panel Funds Voted

United Press International

The House gave final congressional approval yesterday to a \$274.3 million authorization for operating the Nuclear Regulatory