

Pro-ERA Rally Draws Thousands to Capitol

The Los Angeles Times

Washington—Waving banners, chanting slogans and wearing the traditional white clothing of the original suffragettes, thousands of women and men from across the country rallied yesterday in front of the U.S. Capitol in what supporters called the largest women's rights demonstration in U.S. history.

They had come by chartered bus, plane and train from all 50 states to press Congress to vote favorably to extend the March, 1979, deadline for ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment. Estimates of the size of the crowd ranged from 55,000 to 100,000.

Women of all ages marched in the over 90-degree heat down Constitution Avenue to the Capitol 14 blocks away, pushing baby strollers and wheelchairs, some of them on crutches, and waving signs saying, "Free My Sisters" and "ERA All The Way."

Paramedics treated many people for heatstroke and sunstroke, but police reported no serious problems throughout the day-long demonstration. It featured actresses Jean Stapleton and Marlo Thomas, former Rep. Bella Abzug, author Betty Friedan, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Patricia Harris, New Jersey Gov. Brendan Byrne, and Lt. Govs. Mary Anne Krupsak of New York, Thelma Stovall of Kentucky and Mervyn Dymally of California.

"This is just the beginning," said Eleanor Smeal, president of the National Organization for Women, to the mass of supporters on the Capitol lawn. "We will march into history. We will finish and complete the American dream. We will make real the promise of equality for all."

She urged the demonstrators to lobby vigorously in Congress today to win votes for the ERA extension bill, which the House Judiciary Committee will vote on tomorrow. ERA supporters have said they do not think that they can get the last three states needed to make the ERA part of the U.S. Constitution by the current 1979 deadline.

Comedian Dick Gregory, a veteran civil rights activist, called the gathering "probably more important

than any other march in the history of the country."

As the marchers streamed across the grass, Friedan summed up the scene: "A lot of women who have moved up in the world are here paying their dues," she said. "These are not the strident ones, not the hysterical ones. The women's movement is in the fabric of society. Before, the marchers were radical. Now they're mainstream."

Presidential adviser Midge Costanza read to the crowd a message from President Carter, which said in part: "There is no limit on human rights, no time limit on the full protection of the Constitution for every citizen. This administration supports the ERA and supports legislation for the extension."

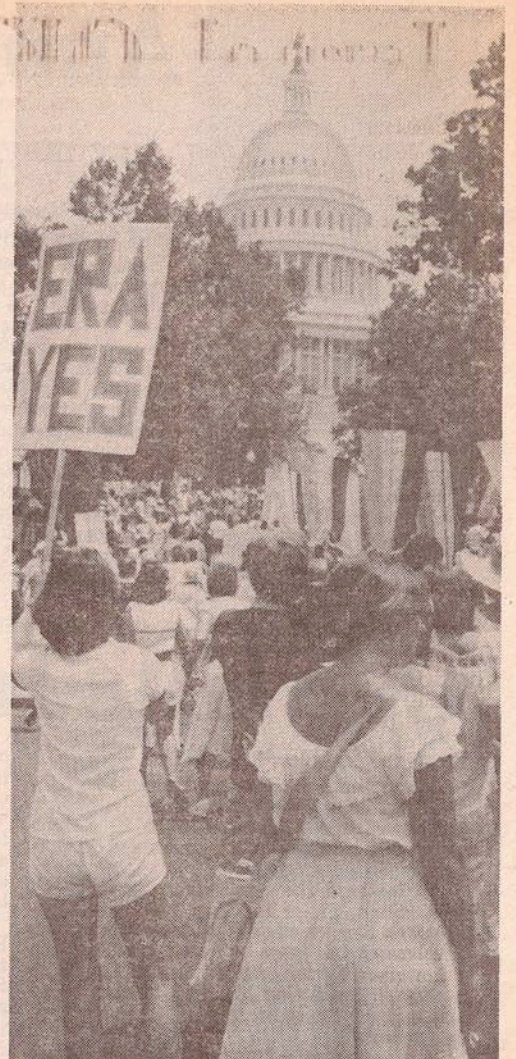
On the steps of the National Archives Building, Mary Lou Maneff, a 37-year-old legal assistant from Van Nuys, Calif., helped hold up a long banner spelling out the actual Equal Rights Amendment: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the U.S. or by any state on account of law."

"Standing here in the excitement, seeing all these people I started to cry," she said. "They shouldn't have to be walking two miles, or flying in from California, for their rights."

Washington (AP)—About 200 opponents of the ERA held a prayer meeting on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial yesterday to protest abortion laws and the campaign for extension of the ERA ratification deadline. They gathered at the opposite end of the Mall from a pro-ERA rally at the west front of the Capitol.

"This nation is in a time of great moral crisis," said Lillian Koegler of White Plains, N.Y. "The laws of this land have been set against its citizens and replaced with an ethic as bad as that of Nazi Germany."

The prayer meeting's organizers said the amendment would result in "free and unfettered abortions, preferential treatment for homosexuals and a federally mandated unisex society where women will be indistinguishable from men."



UPI Photo

ERA supporters at the Capitol yesterday