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Letter: Vicki Wengrow to Dr. C. Earl Cooper

Vicki L. Wengrow

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October 27, 1972

Dr. C. Earl Cooper
Pastor, Riverside Baptist Church
2650 Park Street
Jacksonville, Fla. 32204

Dear Dr. Cooper:

Persuant to our conversation this morning, I am requesting your help as liaison person with the Jacksonville Ministerial Alliance. The newly formed Alliance for Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment has asked me to invite the Jacksonville Ministerial Alliance to participate in our efforts to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment.

The Equal Rights Amendment(ERA) was introduced into 50 consecutive sessions of Congress. It was passed in the 1972 session. It takes 38 states to ratify an Amendment to the Constitution; to my knowledge, 21 states have ratified it so far. The ERA is on the agenda for the Special Session of the Florida Legislature, Nov. 28, 29 and 30.

The proposed 27th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution reads as follows:

SECTION 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

SECTION 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

SECTION 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

What the Jacksonville Alliance for Ratification of the ERA is asking of its participants is:

- 1) That the organization pass a resolution in support of ratification of the ERA.
- 2) That the organization send a copy of their resolution to members of the Duval Degislative Delegation and, preferably, to all other Florida legislators as well.
- 3) That the organization send copies of the resolution in press release form to the local press.
- 4) That the organization find several members who will participate with representatives from other groups in the Alliance for ERA in making personal visits to members of the newly election Duval Delegation in the weeks between the election (Nov. 7) and the Special Session of the Legislature (Nov. 28).
- 5) That the org. ask its members to phone and visit Duval legislators in support of ERA

When I spoke before the Ministerial Alliance last winter, I was given to believe by many persons there that philosophically women have the support of

most clergy people in our efforts to attain equal opportunity. This is the first opportunity that I've taken to invite, to ask, the members of the Alliance of ministers to take some small action to bring that equal opportunity about.

You mentioned on the phone that you weren't certain members of the clergy had as much information on the ERA as they might like to have. There is a great deal of factual material around on the subject of ERA, but out of all of it, we've chosen to get a number of copies of a two page paper put out by Common Cause. When I receive some copies, I'll send you one. We had planned to leave a copy of the publication with each legislator. But, certainly, each organization representative speaking with a legislator will have received his/her own copy of the publication in advance for his/her own education. I mention this especially as an incentive for ministers who want to help, but who don't know if they are prepared with information. We are prepared to help any such persons with information.

Regarding the two objections you had heard: The ERA is not likely to affect public restrooms in respect to being separate for male and female. The right of privacy is already vouchsafed each citizen; the ERA would have no effect here. As for the draft, the U.S. government already has the right to draft any citizen it likes, given a national emergency. Right now, men are only drafted into jobs which they are capable of doing; it is to be assumed that the same will be true of women drafted. More relevant to what is happening today, not giving military service has been the ultimate excuse for not granting women rights and opportunities under the law. Many women don't want to be clubbed with that anymore. And now that there are more opportunities for women in the military and they are being allowed to enlist and have shown their capabilities and especially now that we are so close to having a volunteer military, the whole debate about the draft might very well be moot.

In the two years the ERA will have to take effect, its supporters will be working to bring the laws into accord with the Amendment. A great many people are committed to working to resolve the fears of the uninformed during that period of time. Existing laws that restrict women specifically (There are over a thousand of such state laws) we will work to change; if the restriction is a protection that all people should have, we will work to see the law extended to men under the Amendment.

The ERA is not a radical tool that will change the world, but it will finally put a statement in the Constitution granting women full citizenship, and it will be an important step in humanizing American institutions and the American way of life. I hope the Ministerial Alliance sees fit to participate in working for its passage.

Please feel free to share any helpful contents of this letter with Mr. Mud and with other members of the Ministerial Alliance.

Sincerely,

Vicki Wengrow, Representative
Alliance for Ratification of the ERA