SPEECH DELIVERED DURING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH AT THE JACkSONVILLE WOMEN'S CENTER ON MARCH 11, 2008 BY DR. EDNA S Affy

FREEDOM IS NEVER SO SWEET TO THOSE WHO BENEFIT FROM IT AS TO THOSE WHO FOUGHT FOR IT.

EQUALITY OF RIGHTS UNDER THE LAW SHALL NOT BE DENIED OR ABRIDGED ON ACCOUNT OF SEX.

Do you have any idea how lucky you are today that the Equal Rights Amendment never received the votes of 38 states after the U.S. Senate sent it to the states to be voted on (or ratified) 1972. We had until 1982 for 38 of the 50 states for pass it but We came three states short of the 38, so according to the interpretation of the law at that time, the ERA died. FLORIDA WAS ONE OF THOSE 3 STATES THAT FAILED TIME AND TIME AGAIN TO PASS THE ERA.

To hide the pain of our failure, of our loss, we bravely say, “Oh we might have lost that battle of Equal Rights, but we won the war.” We quietly bandage wounds and hide our broken hearts.

You see, we were new to the battle, to the war, to the fight. We didn’t know they Those who opposed the ERA had all the weapons. We thought because we had justice and fairness and human rights on our side... Because this was the United States of America, with a constitution, with the rule of law and Equal Rights under the law that Equality would prevail all sides. Honesty would prevail. We were so wrong. Have we learned? Have we been able to move from being outsiders to insiders? Have we learned enough? Do we know how to prevail? Only the next few years will tell. Do you have the skills that we did not have? Can you in this room do it?

That is why I said how lucky you are that the ERA failed, because now YOU Have the chance to change history—the chance to change the world.

You and I voted, probably on January 29, 2008. Did we give any though to the struggles of the Iron Jawed Angels who fought and died so that we might do it? Women are not mentioned in the Constitution of the United States—not yet. How many years? How many decades? How great struggle before we finally had the right to vote in 1920?
I'm going to go back in time. No, not to the 1920's, but almost. Let me go back in time to the 1950's in Jacksonville Florida with no ERA, no equality. I will share with you what the world was like as we were losing that battle.

I was born and raised in Jacksonville. When I was 18 or 21 (I can't remember which) my mother filled out the forms at what was then Cohen Brothers (now City Hall) and I was given a credit card which had a limit of $50 and of course she was solely responsible for the debt. I was quite proud to have it and it helped me, a single woman to establish credit. Thirteen years later in 1969 I was just married and returned from UF to Jacksonville with my husband of four months. Grady Johnson (I let him keep his maiden name) had never lived in Jacksonville before. He had no credit cards except one for gasoline. Both he and I had just graduated with Masters degrees from UF. He was 24 years old and about to begin his first employment in Jacksonville at Florida Junior College.

That afternoon, my husband was looking in another part of Cohen Brothers when I went to the Credit Department to surprise him with the papers for his own credit card. When I told the woman what I wanted, she said “May I see your credit card? I handed it to her. She said, “You are now a married woman.” “You may not hold a credit card in the state of Florida.”

She took my credit card away from me and would not return it.

You see, in 1969 Florida a married woman could not have a credit card in her own name, for under state law she may neither buy nor sell property in her own name because she may neither sue nor be sued. If you wish to know what I did about that, please ask during the Q and A.

I should also mention at this time, 1969, I had to go through the courts to maintain my maiden name of Edna Saffy.

Now let me move in time to 1972 March when one of my students a Florida Community College said to me, “Ms. Saffy aren’t you excited that the U.S, Senate has just sent the Equal Rights Amendment to the States to be ratified. To be honest with you I had no idea what he was talking about.

Here in Jacksonville on August 26, 1970 after a demonstration in front of the Federal Building on Bay Street, three of us founded the National Organization for Woman. The main goal at the time to gain control birth control, amniocentisis, so recognition of women as equal in any way . Our main issues were abortion and equal pay. In 1970, women made 57 cents for each dollar men made.

When that student at FCCJ told me, I pretended I knew what ERA meant. I had no idea it meant the next decades of my life.
"The ERA was based on creating a true partnership for both women and men throughout society, in family, at work, in government, founded upon mutual respect and the recognition of the unique contribution each individual can make, will lead Americans toward the goals so gallantly set forth in the Preamble to the Constitution." (To Form a More Perfect Union, V)

Women were considered an appendage to their husbands. At that time a woman was not credited with half the benefits accruing from her husband's coverage with the right to keep the accrual at divorce or at early widowhood.

Many of these more blatant inequities have changed. But laws can be changed very easily. A constitutional amendment cannot. So of the laws we have now are not even enforced. Ask Marjories Broward about the Equal Pay Act. Ask a woman athlete about Title IX.

In Duval County when a woman who was a Public School teacher became pregnant, or told she was, or began to show the "bump", she was fired.
In Louisiana a woman could not be executor of a will or estate. Women who worked as stewardesses for airlines were fired when they reached a certain age or weight. Women were clerks, secretaries, maids, etc. Seldom if ever Supervisors, bosses, administrators. Never lawyers or doctors.

That leads me to another story.

Back into time once more...

It is now 1954. I'm probably 19. I'm in my second year at the University of Florida and in my advisor's office when he says to me, "Honey, it's about time you settle on a major field of study as the University requires."

He had never mentioned "major" before in those two years. He said, "Now what do you want to major in?"

So I told him. In the next moments he was laughing so hard I thought he would fall out of his chair. You see I told him I wished to be a physician.

"Girls can't be doctors. We don't allow girls in Medical School here." You see, I never knew.
Then he said, name something else, honey." Foolishly I said, "My uncle is an attorney, maybe I could do that."

He had to go and get a glass of water to stop laughing.

When he returned he told me I could be a teacher, a nurse, or become through the College of Business Administration an executive secretary.
One week later, I packed my bags, walked out of the sorority house and left for University of Florida.

Now back to the ERA and the 1970's and 80's. What happened? How did we fail? We failed because we trusted in honesty, truth, and justice. We were in much the same position Hillary Clinton is in at the moment.

We were betrayed by the people we had elected to represent us. We were betrayed by private enterprise (big business), we were betrayed by the church, we were betrayed by our own government, and we were betrayed by our own innocence and naivety.

You see we followed the rules and we believed what we were told. Each year after lobbying our legislators while they were still here in their counties, lobbying in Tallahassee, writing letters, sitting in on sessions, doing the research, marching with parade permits when the vote came it was always surprising short of the number needed no matter what we had been promised. Year after year, march after march.

Perhaps during Q and A you will ask questions about betrayal of some of the institutions I have just mentioned.

Perhaps it was our basic philosophy that needed to be changed. We've learned a great deal. Maybe this time we will succeed.

Something is happening with the ERA!!

“We in conjunction with federal and state lawmakers have launched a new drive to pass the ERA. It has a new name—the Women’s Equality Amendment. It is hoped to bring it to a vote in both chambers by the end of the 2008 session.

Corollary to that is the legal argument that the ERA remained viable because in 1992 the Madison Amendment—which affects congressional pay raise became the 27th Constitutional Amendment 203 years after it first won congressional approval. Under that precedent, advocates say the ERA should become part of the Constitution once three-quarters of the states ratify it, no matter how long that takes."

Remember what I said in the beginning of this talk. How lucky you in this room are? Remember also that “FREEDOM IS NEVER SO SWEET TO THOSE WHO BENEFIT FROM IT AS IT IS TO THOSE WHO FOUGHT FOR IT.

SO I SAY TO YOU. THE PAST IS NOW PROLOGUE.

IT IS YOUR TURN NOW,
THANK YOU.

Dempsey Barron. Alan Trask. Florida March for the ERA