

## IN FOCUS Discussion: Equal Rights Amendment

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SALT LAKE CITY (ABC4) – The [Equal Rights Amendment](#) (ERA) was first penned by Alice Paul and Crystal Eastman and then introduced in Congress in 1923 to change the U.S. constitution and guarantee equal legal rights for all American citizens, regardless of sex.

The text of the ERA is 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 provision of the article. Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.”

The [Equal Rights Amendment](#) needed ratification from 38 states and failed to do so by the first deadline in 1979. Congress extended the deadline multiple times and fourth-wave feminism, along with the Me Too movement revived interest in the ERA in the 2010s. But after Virginia claimed to be the 38th state needed to ratify the ERA in 2020, there’s now debate over its legality, due to expired deadlines and five states previously revoking its ratifications.

ADVERTISING

Utah is one of 12 states that has still not ratified the [Equal Rights Amendment](#). Lawmakers such as [Rep. Karen Kwan](#), [Sen. Kirk Cullimore](#), and [Sen. Kathleen Riebe](#) have sponsored resolutions in the past to do so, but have not made progress in the Utah State Legislature. Back on [Women’s Equality Day](#) in August, Sen. Riebe announced that she re-opened an ERA bill again for this upcoming session.

### [With Virginia’s final ratification, ERA fight advances](#)

Multiple organizations including [ACLU Utah](#), [Alliance for a Better Utah](#), [Equality Utah](#), [League of Women Voters](#), and [Silicon Slopes](#) support ratifying the [Equal Rights Amendment](#) in our state. They argue that the ERA would ensure equal pay for equal work, require sex discrimination offenders to affirmatively prove that they didn’t violate the constitution, allowing women survivors of violence to take their cases to federal court, and banish the legal argument that women are sometimes responsible for their own rape.

Other organizations and agencies such as the [Utah Eagle Forum](#), the [LDS Church](#), and [Big Ocean Women](#) have openly expressed opposition to the ERA. In a statement to ABC4, Gayle Ruzicka, president of the Utah Eagle Forum wrote:

*“I am opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment for a number of reasons. The ERA is very poorly written and does not allow for the biological differences between men and women such as special accommodations in the workplace for women who are pregnant or the elimination of state labor laws that protect women who do dangerously heavy work. Another great concern are the Social Security benefits for stay-at-home mothers that they receive based on their spouse’s income. Under the ERA these women would no longer receive these benefits. The ERA will remove biological sex designations in bathrooms, locker rooms, prisons, college dorms, hospital rooms, etc. This will be extremely dangerous for women and young girls and will completely eliminate their privacy.*

*Women should not be drafted, but the ERA will require women to be drafted and sent into front-line combat in an equal ratio to men. That means our 18-year-old daughters could be sent to war in the Middle East where they could be captured by evil men who do not respect or honor women. The second line of the ERA gives Congress the power to enforce the provisions of the ERA through laws passed by Congress. That means family law would become federal law. All laws impacted by the sexes*

*would be controlled by the federal government. Why would any legislator vote to giveaway our state's rights in these very personal areas?*

*The ERA hurts women, it does not do anything to help women."*

**GAYLE RUZICKA, PRESIDENT OF THE UTAH EAGLE FORUM**

Tiffany Chan, Vice President of University Relations for [ASUU](#) (Associated Students of the University of Utah) joined ABC4's Rosie Nguyen for an IN FOCUS discussion. She talked about why she believes there is still a gender equality gap across the country, how she views the religious conversation surrounding the ERA, and youth involvement and mobilization.

[Emily Bell McCormick](#), founder of the [Policy Project](#) explained why she believes the ERA is still needed despite other laws being passed to help equalize society, the history of the Equal Rights Amendment movement, why it hasn't been ratified before, and how she would address opposing arguments that the ERA would impact the privacy and safety of women and girls by removing gender designations for bathrooms, locker rooms, jails, and hospital rooms.

Kelly Whited Jones, chairwoman of the [Utah Equal Rights Amendment Coalition](#) discussed how her upbringing in the LDS church plays a role in her work, an update on where the movement is nationally, and concerns about the ERA potentially overturning laws and practices that benefit women who may be pregnant, working in heavy manual jobs, stay-at-home moms, and divorcees. She also addressed opposing arguments about the ERA granting equal access to women's prisons, shelters, sport teams, restrooms, and locker rooms for transgender women.

[Sen. Kathleen Riebe](#), of Cottonwood Heights, shared why she is co-sponsoring a resolution again to ratify the ERA in Utah, what she observed during the COVID-19 pandemic about gender equality, why the ERA still needs to be ratified despite equal rights granted through the 14th amendment, and opposing arguments that the ERA would be used to overturn all restrictions on abortion and mandate taxpayer funding of elective Medicaid abortions.

To watch the full IN FOCUS discussion with Chan, McCormick, Jones, and Riebe, click on the video at the top of the article.