

1-1-2017

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**REPUBLICAN FEMINISTS AND FEMINIST REPUBLICANS: THE SEARCH FOR THE
SENSIBLE CENTER IN MICHIGAN-1968 TO 1984**

by

ANN MARIE WAMBEKE

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2017

MAJOR: HISTORY

Approved By:

Dr. Liette Gidlow Date

Dr. Elizabeth Faue Date

Dr. Tracy Neumann Date

Dr. Krista Brumley Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my two amazing grandsons, John Steven Mellen and Maxwell Ryle Bouton. My wish for both of you is that you develop a lifelong love of learning and a passion for the study of history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have engaged in this long and wonderful journey without the support of others. To my friends and colleagues at Wayne State University. I would like you to know that you managed to make this entire process both intellectually rewarding and tremendously fun. Specific thanks go to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Elizabeth Faue, Dr. Tracy Neumann and Dr. Krista Brumley, without whose support this entire endeavor would not have been possible. Dr. Liette Gidlow, what can I say? You stuck with me throughout, bolstering my flagging confidence, providing encouragement when I felt discouraged, questioning or pushing me when necessary, but always with the goal of making me think more critically and write more clearly and concisely. Your commitment to my project has made me a better historian. I will never forget your mentorship and friendship.

I could not have finished this project, however, without the the love and support of my family. My children, Andrew and Jennifer Mellen, patiently put up with me when I was too busy with my own studies to help them with theirs. Both are now married to wonderful spouses, Lauren Mellen and Douglas Bouton, who have graciously inquired about my research as they have become a part of our

family. Most importantly, I want to thank my husband, John Mellen, who has always been my biggest cheerleader. You will never know how much your love and support meant to me as I spent endless hours in libraries putting this dissertation together. Thank you all for making this amazing experience possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Abbreviations	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 The Path to the Sensible Center: 1960 to 1970	39
Chapter 3 Gender and Partisanship in Political Coalitions: 1970 to 1980	80
Chapter 4 Republican Feminists Fight for the ERA: 1972 to 1979	123
Chapter 5 Republican Feminists and Reproductive Rights: 1970 to 1980	173
Chapter 6 IWY Conference and Republican Feminists: 1977	222
Chapter 7 The Sensible Center Becomes Irrelevant: 1980 to 1983	260
Chapter 8 Conclusion	302
Appendix-Timeline	316
References	320
Primary Sources	320
Manuscript Collections	320
Interviews and Statements	322
Documents	322
Books	324

Secondary Sources	326
Abstract	337
Autobiographical Statement	339

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ERA	Equal Rights Amendment
HOW	Happiness of Womanhood
IWY	International Women's Year
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MARC	Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee
MMOPP	Monitoring and Mobile Operation Partnership Program
MRWC	Michigan Republican Women's Caucus
MRWTF	Michigan Republican Women's Task Force
MWPC	Michigan Women's Political Caucus
NARAL	National Abortion Rights Action League
NCRC	National Citizens' Review Committee
NOW	National Organization of Women
NWPC	National Women's Political Caucus
RNC	Republican National Committee
RWFM	Republican Women's Federation of Michigan
RWTF	Republican Women's Task Force
STOP ERA	Stop Taking our Privileges
WEAL	Women's Equity Action League

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“I speak as a woman and a mother . . . who was told she had one chance in a million of having a child. I had a therapeutic abortion 20 years ago in a Catholic hospital.”¹ In 1969, Republican N. Lorraine Beebe, a first-term state senator from Dearborn, stood before the Michigan Senate, which was considering a bill to liberalize Michigan’s ban on abortion, and stunned her colleagues with that admission. Her medically necessary abortion, while traumatic, was safely performed in a hospital. She recognized, however, that many women who could not legally terminate their pregnancies suffered long-term medical and psychological difficulties, or even died, as a result of illegal, back-street abortions. Beebe believed that her male colleagues could not understand the gravity and the impact of the decision that they were about to make on behalf of women. By adding a female perspective to the debate, she represented all those women who were unable to obtain a legal abortion. She later emphasized that “only in dire circumstances will a woman ask for an abortion, and that only she, not her husband or doctor, only she . . . is the one who must live with this decision. Abortion is no

¹ Barbara Holliday, “The Lady Said ‘Abortion,’ If You Want to Awaken Our State Senate, Try Lorraine Beebe’s Method,” *Detroit Free Press Magazine*, August 3, 1969.

joke, especially to a woman.”² Thus, Beebe, as the only woman in the Senate, felt compelled to share her personal story with them.³ The legislature, sensing the gravity of the moment, gave her a standing ovation, but she did not convince them to decriminalize abortion in Michigan.⁴ The proposed legislation was defeated.

Beebe paid a political and personal price for publicizing her pro-choice stand on abortion. In 1970, she was not reelected to the Michigan Senate. She attributed her loss to her gender and her public support for abortion.⁵ The morning after the election, she said, “I stood up and spoke for women . . . and I see my defeat as a slap against all women.”⁶ Her story, however, was a preview of events to come. Over the next fifteen years, as the women’s movement developed and the Republican Party took a conservative turn to the right, women who were both

² Judy Jacob, “Dearborn’s Lady Senator Speaks Up on Abortion, Grapes and Problem Kids,” *Detroit News*, July 14, 1969.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jim Neubacher, “Abortion: Up from the Underground,” *Detroit News*, n.d., Lorraine Beebe Scrapbook, N. Lorraine Beebe Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Beebe Papers).

⁵ Stephen Dobyms, “Newcomer Defeats Mrs. Beebe: Dearborn Senator Blames Abortion Stand,” *Detroit News*, [November 4, 1970?], box 1, folder: Beebe-State Senate Election Campaigns 1966 and 1970, Beebe Papers; Willa Weddon, “Is Bias a Bar to Women Candidates?” *Detroit Free Press*, November 22, 1970.

⁶ Dobyms, “Newcomer Defeats Mrs. Beebe,” *Detroit News*.

Republicans and feminists found it increasingly difficult to reconcile these two parts of their lives. Ultimately they were forced to choose between two elements at the core of their identities: Am I a Republican? Or am I a feminist?

Although it is sometimes overlooked and may be difficult to comprehend, the conflict between the Republican Party and feminism was not inevitable. Historically, women's rights activists found that the Republican Party offered them more support in their fight for equality. In 1920, in response to the not-yet-ratified Nineteenth Amendment that provided women with the right to vote, the Republican National Party platform provided that "we welcome women into full participation in the affairs of government and the activities of the Republican Party. We earnestly hope that Republican legislatures in states which have not yet acted on the suffrage amendment will ratify the amendment, to the end that all of the women of the nation of voting age may participate in the election of 1920, which is so important to the welfare of the country."⁷ Pragmatically, Republicans recognized the potential power of women, who would ultimately constitute half of the expanded voting population.

⁷ "The Republican Party and Women: A Brief History," Republican Women for I.W.Y., n.d., box 2, folder: International Women's Year Houston Conference, 1977, Patricia Hill Burnett Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Burnett Papers).

Despite these gestures, however, after 1920 the Republican Party, much like the Democratic Party, did little to promote the interests of women. In fact, the political parties became largely indifferent to women once they realized that female voters would not change the outcomes of elections because they did not vote in a bloc. While some women chose to become involved in party politics, the men in charge accepted women only on their terms, and assigned them the menial tasks that men refused to perform. These early political women did not gain any real power in the parties, although, according to political scientist Jo Freeman, women fared a little better in the Republican Party than the Democratic Party.⁸

With the advent of second wave feminism in the late 1960s, many of the women who worked with or in the Republican Party became Republican feminists. Because they sought gender equality, they believed that feminism and the party, with its longstanding commitment to individual rights and opportunities, could be easily integrated. By the late 1970s, however, conservatives had coalesced within the Republican Party in opposition to both moderate Republicans, who were their intra-party rivals, and feminists, who sought government solutions to their inequality. Conservatives argued that the American way of life was threatened by

⁸ Jo Freeman, *A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Political Parties* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 228-29.

the continuous expansion and intrusion of the liberal federal government into the lives of individuals; families; private institutions, such as the church; and local public institutions, like schools. Feminist Republicans appeared to be on a collision course with the conservatives in their own party. Despite this intra-party conflict, however, historian Catherine Rymph found that “during the mid-1970s, there was an ideological space in the party for Republican feminists, and it appeared briefly that Republican feminism might be a real political force.”⁹ Michigan offered Republican feminists similar opportunities because, from 1962 to 1982, under the leadership of two consecutive moderate Republican governors, “Michigan was considered a model in the nation for the possibilities of moderate Republicanism.”¹⁰

This dissertation examines the evolution of Republican feminism from the late 1960s until the early 1980s through the experiences of seven of Michigan’s most prominent Republican feminists. These women mediated the conflicts between feminism and conservatism in order “to maintain a feminist presence in the Republican Party and to maintain a Republican presence in the feminist

⁹ Catherine Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 189.

¹⁰ Francis X. Blouin, Jr., review of *William G. Milliken: Michigan’s Passionate Moderate*, by Dave Dempsey, *Michigan Historical Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 141, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/stable/20174206>.

movement.”¹¹ Republican feminists partnered with moderate party leaders to stave off this conservative challenge by staking out “the sensible” center of the women’s movement.¹² From this middle ground, they were able to engage in feminist activism and simultaneously repudiate the radical feminism that many of their moderate Republican colleagues found offensive. In exchange, they expected the party to embrace their moderate feminist goals. As they battled with conservatives to determine who would become the true representatives of Republican women, they became a part of the struggle for control of the Republican Party. As they feared, however, when moderate Republicanism was displaced by conservatism, they were left without a political home. At the same time, the “conservative ascendance”¹³ undermined the attempts of Republican feminists to incorporate a Republican voice into the feminist movement. They

¹¹ Ken Fireman, “Angry GOP Women Disown Task Force,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 26, 1983; Position Statement, Michigan Republican Women’s Task Force, n.d., box 7, folder: Topical files 1969-1982 Michigan Republican Women’s Task Force, Helen Milliken Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Helen Milliken Papers).

¹² Elly Peterson, *Elly!: Memoirs of a Republican Lady!*, s.l., s.n., [1990?], 121-22, Elly Peterson Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Peterson Papers).

¹³ Donald Critchlow uses a variant of this phrase in the title of his monograph, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History*, which chronicles the rise of the conservative movement in the United States. Donald Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007).

found that feminists were not interested in associating with a conservative Republican Party that repudiated their feminist agenda. As the 1970s ended, so too did their hopes of integrating their gendered interests with their Republicanism. Michigan's Republican feminists were each forced to choose between these two different core identities.

These seven women came to the Republican Party from various backgrounds and with different interests. However, because of their activism, their paths often crossed. Over time, some of them became good friends. Beebe, the oldest of these women, was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1910. She was elected to the Michigan Senate as a Republican representative from blue-collar Dearborn, Michigan, in 1966. Although she lost her reelection bid in 1970, she continued her activism with an emphasis on abortion rights for all women.¹⁴ Only slightly younger than Beebe, Elly Peterson was born in 1914 in New Berlin, Illinois and moved to Charlotte, Michigan, in 1948. She spent much of her life working for the Republican Party, but in her later years she led the nonpartisan fight to ratify the Equal Rights

¹⁴ Judy Jacob, "Dearborn's Lady Senator Speaks Up;" N. Lorraine Beebe, Inductee, Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, <http://www.michiganwomenshalloffame.org/home.aspx>.

Amendment (ERA).¹⁵ Patricia Hill Burnett, born in Ohio in 1920, was a wealthy wife, mother and famous portrait artist. She never held a political office but was a co-founder of the Michigan chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW). She remained active in Republican politics and in the feminist movement for her entire life.¹⁶

Ruth McNamee, born in 1921, was married and had two college-aged children when she became mayor of Birmingham, Michigan, a wealthy suburb of Detroit, in 1970. As a ten-year representative from Birmingham in the state legislature, she fought for both the ERA and abortion rights.¹⁷ Born in 1922, Helen Milliken was married to Michigan's Governor William Milliken and the mother of two children. She never held elective office, but used her position as Michigan's first lady to promote feminist causes, especially the ERA.¹⁸ Helen Milliken and

¹⁵ Sara Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson, "Mother of the Moderates"* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011). Fitzgerald wrote this biography of Peterson with the cooperation of Peterson. Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*, 20-22.

¹⁶ Patricia Hill Burnett, *True Colors: An Artist's Journey from Beauty Queen to Feminist* (Troy, MI: Momentum Books, 1995).

¹⁷ Ruth McNamee, Vita, n.d., box 1, folder: Ruth Braden McNamee Biographical Vita and Overview Articles, Ruth Braden McNamee Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as McNamee Papers).

¹⁸ Dave Dempsey, *William G. Milliken: Michigan's Passionate Moderate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 130-45; Helen Milliken, Inductee, Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, <http://www.michiganwomenshalloffame.org/home.aspx>.

Peterson became life-long friends through their shared activism on behalf of women's rights. Similarly, Helen Milliken and McNamee became very close and continued to correspond long after they left public service.

Born in northern Michigan in 1924, Connie Binsfeld had five grown children when she became involved in politics. She "was the first women to hold leadership posts in Michigan's House, Senate, and executive branch."¹⁹ She served as assistant minority leader in the House, assistant majority leader in the Senate and lieutenant governor to conservative governor John Engler.²⁰ As a feminist who opposed abortion, she was uniquely positioned to try to bridge the differences between feminists and the conservatives in the Republican Party. The youngest of these women, Lee Kefauver, was born in 1934. Her cousin was Estes Kefauver, the prominent Democratic United States senator from Tennessee. Divorced and the mother of two, she never held elective public office but was a lobbyist and activist

¹⁹ "Former Michigan Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfeld Dies," *Associated Press*, January 13, 2014, http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/01/former_michigan_lt_gov_connie.html.

²⁰ John Flesher and John Kennett, "Former Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfeld Remembered by Local Officials, Others," *Midland Daily News*, January 15, 2014, <http://www.ourmidland.com/news/article/Former-Lt-Gov-Connie-Binsfeld-remembered-by-6927214.php>.

for women's rights for most of her adult life, with a special interest in abortion.²¹

While fighting for access to abortion for all women, she often worked with Beebe.

Beebe, Peterson, Burnett, McNamee, Milliken, Binsfeld, and Kefauver all believed that they were both Republicans and feminists. This study does not purport to determine or even try to examine whether they were genuine feminists or real Republicans. While some may disagree with one or more of these self-assessments, the veracity of how they identified themselves is not important for or relevant to this analysis. Rather, what is critical, and what this research is based upon, is that these women believed that they were Republicans and feminists.

This analysis is both chronologically and geographically bounded. It begins with the emergence of second wave feminism in the late 1960s and ends with the ascendance of conservatism in the Republican Party in the early 1980s. At that point, each woman had to decide how to prioritize and reconcile her potentially conflicting interests. It is a grassroots analysis predicated on observations and experiences gleaned from their correspondence, memoirs, notes, and other

²¹ David Holtz, "Lansing Lobbyists Strike from Dearborn," *Dearborn Press & Guide*, September 6, 1979, box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Organizations, WEAL, Michigan Division, 1973-1980, Lee Kefauver Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Kefauver Papers). This article incorrectly identified Estes Kefauver as a Republican. Lee Kefauver, "Personal History with Pro-Choice Activities," n.d., box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Biographical Information, Kefauver Papers.

records, as well as the documents of both the partisan and feminist organizations to which they belonged, and newspaper articles that contemporaneously described their activities. Although this story is situated within a larger national context, the focus is primarily on feminists who participated in Michigan Republican Party politics.

As a study of Republican feminists during the 1970s, this dissertation is situated at the point where the historiographies of feminism, the rise of Republican conservatism, and women in the Republican Party intersect. The women who are the subject of this study were all Republicans before they became feminists. They shared with their male counterparts a conviction that party politics effectively facilitated change and a commitment to the beliefs and goals of the Republican Party. At least some of them were what historians have called “party women” who sought to participate in party politics on the same terms as men.²² They immersed themselves in the party bureaucracy and willingly performed the mundane housekeeping duties of the party in order to convince the party’s leaders that they could be loyal and competent partisans.²³ However, the Republican Party did not

²² Rymph, *Republican Women*, 2-7.

²³ *Ibid.*

reward them for their loyalty and hard work. With the emergence of second wave feminism, these female political activists finally had a frame of reference through which to understand their dissatisfaction and redirect their activism.

Second wave feminists participated in the broader social movement activism that swept the United States in the 1960s. Historians often divide the women who participated in the second wave of feminism into two groups.²⁴ “Equal rights” feminists worked within the existing legal, economic and political framework to eliminate discrimination and produce a society that treated men and women as equals. They tended to be older, professional women who became conscious of gender inequality and the efficacy of legal remedies for discrimination.²⁵ Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess noted that these feminists were likely to promote feminism through their participation in feminist organizations such as NOW, the Women’s Equity Action League (WEAL), and the National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC).²⁶

²⁴ Jo Freeman, “The Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 4 (January 1973): 795-98; Myra Marx Ferree & Beth B. Hess, *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement Across Four Decades of Change* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 56-75; Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 21-24.

²⁵ Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 21-26; Ferree and Hess, *Controversy and Coalition*, 59-65.

²⁶ Ferree and Hess, *Controversy and Coalition*, 65-68.

Women's liberation feminists were often younger women who participated in, but felt increasingly marginalized by the masculinity and militancy of the civil rights, anti-war and New Left movements of the 1960s. They were more likely to reject the political and legalistic solutions to inequality sought by their older counterparts and, influenced by their membership in the protest and counterculture movements of the 1960s, they emphasized self awareness, nonhierarchical organizations, and collective, egalitarian strategies to achieve their goals. These more unconventional feminists tended to divide into socialist feminists, who believed that discrimination against women was due to the class oppression that resulted from capitalism, and radical feminists, who argued that the problem was patriarchy, which could only be resolved by revolutionizing the system to make gender irrelevant. Some of these feminists believed that women would be liberated, and men and women would be truly equal, only when the social constructs that created the artificial differences between men and women were eliminated by significant structural changes to society.²⁷ Cultural feminism grew

²⁷ Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 21-24, 26-38; Ferree and Hess, *Controversy and Coalition*, 68-75.

out of radical feminism. These women believed in female superiority and advocated gendered separatism.²⁸

Although they were not a monolithic group, Michigan's Republican feminists can best be characterized as equal rights feminists. As a demographic group, they were very homogenous—white, middle class, married or divorced and, for the most part, mothers. Middle-aged when they became feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s, none of them were products of or participants in any of the protest movements of the 1960s. Republicans before they became feminists, they believed that political power was the key to feminist success and that feminist success was the key to political power. They promoted their feminism not only through the Republican Party, but also by participating in feminist organizations, such as NOW, WEAL, and the NWPC.²⁹ Michigan's Republican feminists eschewed radical, or women's liberation feminism, with its ties to the anti-establishment social movements of the 1960s. They disputed (or failed to recognize) the ties between gender discrimination and class or racial oppression and, therefore, dismissed the need to revolutionize the system to eliminate the social constructs that created

²⁸ Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 1-11.

²⁹ Ferree and Hess, *Controversy and Coalition*, 65-68.

artificial differences between men and women. Instead, they believed that incremental change within the system would remedy the disadvantages of women.

As feminists, Michigan's Republican feminists sought "to maintain . . . a Republican presence in the feminist movement."³⁰ They joined with like-minded political feminists in a multipartisan network of coalitions through which they tried to politicize and empower women. Political participation was a feminist goal in and of itself. At the same time, however, coalition members understood that if women participated in political parties and were elected and appointed to influential leadership positions in the government, they would be able to enact laws and policies that advanced both their feminist and partisan interests.³¹

This network of coalitions, however, experienced the same problems that plagued most feminist coalitions. While members all shared the disadvantages they experienced as women, they had other, competing identities that they had to reconcile, integrate, or prioritize to be able to come together, at least temporarily, to pursue their feminist goals. Stephanie Gilmore called these multiple identities

³⁰ Position Statement, Michigan Republican Women's Task Force.

³¹ Catherine E. Rymph, "Political Feminism and the Problem of Sarah Palin," in *Obama, Clinton, Palin: Making History in Election 2008*, ed. Liette Gidlow (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 137.

the “intersecting hierarchies in their lives” that, for the most part, challenged the coalitions that they built.³² Sara Evans described the resultant instability of these coalitions as follows: “If human identities are both multiple and fluid, the human communities generated by grassroots organizing are similarly never fixed and always filled with competing perspectives and interests.”³³ For a short time, the political and gendered interests of these women aligned in this network of affiliated political coalitions. Their differences soon emerged, however, and they struggled to find common ground.

At the same time, Republican feminists realized that they could not accomplish all of their gendered and partisan objectives through a feminist political organization. Therefore, they needed “to maintain . . . a feminist presence in the Republican Party.”³⁴ They tried to convince party men and women that feminism and Republicanism were synergetic. The Republican Party needed female voters and participants, and feminism was the best way to politicize women.³⁵ But as the

³² Stephanie Gilmore, ed., *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 2-3, 6-7; Ferree and Hess, *Controversy and Coalition*, vii, 211.

³³ Sara M. Evans, forward to *Feminist Coalitions*, by Gilmore, x.

³⁴ Position Statement, Michigan Republican Women’s Task Force.

³⁵ For a discussion of how male-dominated liberal and conservative institutions contain pockets of feminism, see Susan M. Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal*

Republican Party turned to the right, Michigan's Republican feminists met with increased resistance, especially from conservative women.

The Republican Party had long encompassed moderate and conservative wings that had managed to coexist as their fortunes waxed and waned in relation to the Democratic Party and each other.³⁶ However, by the middle of the twentieth century, the conservative movement, while rife with internal conflicts, was beginning to unite. Members opposed communism and big government, and supported a laissez-faire, capitalist economy, low taxes, individual responsibility, the traditional family, and, perhaps most importantly, a shared desire for power. Yet conservatives did not follow a linear path as they took over the Republican Party.

The nomination of conservative Barry Goldwater as the Republican candidate for president in 1964 persuaded conservatives that they had finally

Establishment (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, *Faithful and Fearless: Moving Feminist Protest inside the Church and Military* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

³⁶ Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), xvii-xix; Geoffrey Kabaservice, "How Democrats are Complicit in the War Against Women," *New Republic*, April 8, 2012, <https://newrepublic.com/article/102441/war-women-democrat-snowe>. Kabaservice noted that he did not address the role that women played in opposition to the rise of conservatism in the Republican Party in *Rule and Ruin* because the issue had been "amply chronicled" by other scholars, including Rymph.

gained control of the party. His overwhelming defeat by Democrat Lyndon Johnson, however, quickly dashed their hopes. Instead of giving up, they regrouped. Moderate party leadership largely underestimated and overlooked the growing grassroots support they were building for conservatism. The Watergate debacle that resulted in President Richard Nixon's resignation severely damaged the Republican Party with voters, and further divided moderates and conservatives as they blamed each other for the scandal. In 1976, after a valiant effort, conservative candidate Ronald Reagan lost the Republican nomination for president to moderate Gerald Ford. While Reagan lost the nomination, Ford lost the presidential election to Democrat Jimmy Carter, which, according to Kabaservice, "removed the moderates' last defense against a conservative takeover of the GOP."³⁷ In 1980, Reagan came back to win the nomination and defeated Carter for president. Reagan's victory marked the completion of the conservative takeover of the party.³⁸

³⁷ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 348.

³⁸ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*; William C. Berman, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy*.

The Michigan Republican Party faced similar conservative challenges, but for many years the party's moderate leaders minimized their influence. From 1962 until 1969, Michigan was led by Governor George Romney, a prominent member of the moderate wing of the national Republican Party. He believed that a political party needed to encompass a wide-ranging diversity of ideas to facilitate compromise, political stability, and cohesion. As a pragmatist, he promoted an inclusive political party and tried to appeal to a broad swath of Michigan voters, including a large number of independents and traditionally Democratic union members. Romney rejected conservatism because he opposed identity or ideological politics that pitted one group against another. He feared that conservatives espoused a single-minded political extremism that threatened the future of the party.³⁹ According to Kabaservice, Romney was one of the last chances to save moderate Republicanism.⁴⁰

³⁹ "Text of Romney's Letter to Goldwater After Defeat of Presidential Nominee in '64" dated December 21, 1964, *New York Times*, December 21, 1966, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/docview/117638616?accountid=14925>; Dempsey, *William G. Milliken*, 166; David E. Rosenbaum, "George Romney Dies at 88: A Leading G.O.P. Figure," *New York Times*, July 27, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/27/obituaries/george-romney-dies-at-88-a-leading-gop-figure.html>.

⁴⁰ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 211.

In 1969, moderate Republican William Milliken succeeded Romney as Michigan's governor when Romney accepted a position in President Richard Nixon's cabinet. Milliken was elected governor in 1970, 1974, and 1978. Like Romney, he believed in an open and inclusive Republican Party. He understood that the party needed to attract independent voters in order to win elections and thus eschewed conservative extremism. While Romney's very public opposition to the ERA made it difficult to characterize him as a feminist, Milliken actively supported feminist causes. In fact, two female friends, his assistant for political appointments Joyce Braithwaite and attorney Harriet Rotter, characterized Milliken as a long-time feminist. His commitment to gender equality provided a political space within the Michigan Republican Party and the state of Michigan that allowed feminists to pursue their feminist goals.⁴¹ However, conservatives completed their efforts to take control the Michigan Republican Party in 1982 when Republican primary voters elected conservative Richard Headlee as the party's candidate for governor.

By the early 1970s, conservatives openly opposed feminism. Many conservatives were angered and frightened by the breakdown in the American

⁴¹ Dempsey, *William G. Milliken*; "Helen Milliken: Her Odyssey from Housewife to ERA Activist," *Oakland Press Magazine*, October 17, 1982, box 2, folder: Misc-Mich. ERAmerica and related, Laura Callow Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Callow Papers).

family caused, they believed, by the women’s movement. In fact, the two belief systems were understandably at odds because the rights sought by feminists contradicted the longstanding definition of the family embraced by conservatives.⁴² Pamela Johnston Conover and Virginia Gray put it very simply: “When the role of a woman is defined by her reproductive, sexual, and childrearing functions within the family, then there is a ‘natural’ division of activities into the public extrafamilial jobs done by the male and the private intrafamilial ones performed by the female. If women act outside their ‘natural’ roles, that is as individuals, that action is ipso facto anti-family.”⁴³

Conservatives clung to the traditional definition of the family and argued that feminists denied its fundamental foundation—the immutable biological differences between men and women. By declaring that men and women were identical, the ERA threatened to eliminate longstanding protections for women and force them to work outside the home. As a result, conservatives worried, children would be

⁴² Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Kristin Luker, *Abortion & the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁴³ Pamela Johnston Conover and Virginia Gray, *Feminism and the New Right: Conflict over the American Family* (New York: Praeger, 1983), 2-3.

raised by the state in day care centers and families would be destroyed.⁴⁴ Pro-life advocates believed that women were biologically destined to be mothers. They argued that abortion, which was the murder of an unborn child, undermined motherhood and disrupted the traditional roles of men and women within the nuclear family.⁴⁵ Conservatives were convinced that feminists promoted divorce, dismissed the traditional roles of women as wives and mothers, and, in general, legitimized immoral behavior.⁴⁶

Feminists, on the other hand, challenged the notion of the traditional family. They believed that society defined what it meant to be a man or woman. Without these artificial constructs, they argued, women would have the same opportunities as men to engage in the public sphere of politics, economics, and culture.⁴⁷ Feminists contended that an unwanted pregnancy was a barrier to gender equality. Women needed to control their reproductive decisions so that they could prioritize the relative importance of pregnancy and motherhood in their lives. According to

⁴⁴ Mathews and DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, 154.

⁴⁵ Luker, *Abortion & the Politics of Motherhood*, 7-8, 158, 161-62, 174, 176, 183-84 193, 200-202

⁴⁶ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 8, 128-29.

⁴⁷ Mathews and DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, 162.

feminists, the issues that had long been considered personal, including gender relations, sexual preferences, reproductive rights, and family structure, involved the distribution of power, which made them political.⁴⁸ The ERA and abortion rights would help to equalize men and women.

While feminists believed that the ERA and abortion rights would empower women, conservatives argued that feminists, who sought to impose on them their interpretations of sexual difference and gender neutrality, limited women.⁴⁹ Thus, in the context of the ERA, Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron DeHart concluded that “the appeal to individual rights that elicited from ratificationists a liberating vision evoked from their opponents different images—women *forced* to be men and thus bereft of the female relationships that had defined and sustained them.”⁵⁰ Conservative activists offered apocalyptic messages because they believed that society would be irreversibly altered to the detriment of all Americans by the

⁴⁸ Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, “Antiabortion, Antifeminism, and the Rise of the New Right,” *Feminist Studies* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 208, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/stable/3177522>.

⁴⁹ Mathews and DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of the ERA*, 60, 133-43, 213-25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

ratification of the ERA and the legalization of abortion. With such high stakes, the debates were rancorous and compromise became impossible.

Historians believe that the anti-feminist activism of conservative women was more than just a backlash to feminism and differing worldviews.⁵¹ Kim Phillips-Fein argued that the conservatism of these women was tied “to a broader political framework . . . [through which] ideas about gender shaped visions of the state, economic regulation, anticommunism, and the proper role of government.”⁵² Rosalind Pollack Petchesky cynically asserted that conservatives did not politicize their opposition to abortion because they were concerned about pregnant women and their fetuses. Instead, they used it to enhance their political power so that they could impose their larger ideological agenda, including the privatization of the traditional patriarchal family, business, religion, and education, upon the American people.⁵³

⁵¹ Kim Phillips-Fein, “Conservatism: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 2011): 729, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/docview/913319525?accountid=14925>; Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 8.

⁵² Phillips-Fein, “Conservatism,” 729.

⁵³ Pollack Petchesky, “Antiabortion, Antifeminism, and the Rise of the New Right,” 208, 224, 227.

In fact, both liberals, including feminists, and conservatives invoked the notion of the family to justify their own political agendas. Matthew Lassiter found that, during the 1970s, each group offered their own economic, political, and social programs to address the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family. Liberals attributed the breakdown to the flailing economy and proposed as solutions the very types of programs, such as equal rights for women in the workplace and government funded childcare, that conservatives disdained. Conservatives argued that American families were under siege by feminism. Equal rights and legalized abortion led to promiscuity and immorality. Moreover, the economic solutions promoted by feminists encouraged women to work outside of the home, which further undermined the family and expanded the government. The only way to save the traditional family, according to conservatives, was to stop the women's movement.⁵⁴

Robert O. Self argued that feminists battled with conservatives over the appropriate definition of the American family. Both attacked the traditional liberal construct of family—characterized by a white male breadwinner and a stay-at-home

⁵⁴ Matthew D. Lassiter, "Inventing Family Values," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 14-16, 20-26.

mother, propped up and supported by various social welfare programs—because it did not reflect reality. Feminists believed that the notion of family had to be flexible enough to incorporate alternative lifestyles, such as single parent families and families with same-gender parents. Conservatives, on the other hand, constructed their own idealized image of an economically independent family with a white male breadwinner and a stay-at-home mother, which did not rely on government social welfare programs. Instead, the conservative family needed government protection from the moral threats posed by feminism, such as legalized abortion. Ironically government interference became a moral threat to families, which required a different type of government interference to protect families. Although they argued about the appropriate definition of the family, each side was really debating the economic, political, social, and ideological direction of the country.⁵⁵

When Self's contest between liberals, feminists and conservatives over the family is superimposed on the two-party political system in Michigan, it becomes apparent that this debate was situated largely within, and became a part of the struggle over, who would dictate the future of the Republican Party. As Rymph noted, "Conflicts between feminists and antifeminists were an important part of

⁵⁵ Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 279, 310-11, 315, 336, 286, 398-99.

the process by which the Republican Party remade itself in the 1970s and 1980s.”⁵⁶ Michigan’s Republican feminists were significant participants in this controversy. They claimed the sensible center of the women’s movement as they emphasized moderate political and legalistic, rather than radical, structural, solutions to the problems that faced women. From this middle ground, they aligned with moderate Republicans to refute conservative allegations about the dangerous extremism of feminism and to stop conservatives from implementing their political agenda through the Republican Party.

Ironically, the conservative movement embraced female activists, such as Phyllis Schlafly, who used their political and organizational skills to politicize this new constituency of anti-feminist conservative voters.⁵⁷ Schlafly and her conservative Michigan cohorts, Elaine Donnelly and Patt Barbour, spent the 1970s battling Michigan’s Republican feminists. As they fought over who would represent women and define the family within the Republican Party, the stakes were high. These women identified, framed, constructed, and articulated their positions and

⁵⁶ Rymph, *Republican Women*, 2.

⁵⁷ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

arguments in response to and anticipation of each other.⁵⁸ They became a part of the ongoing struggle over the control of the future of the Michigan Republican Party.

In the context of abortion, where compromise between feminists and conservatives appeared impossible, one group of women seemed to have the potential to at least partially bridge the gap. Mary Ziegler identified a group of “pro-life feminists” within the feminist movement.⁵⁹ They promoted gender equality but did not believe that it was dependent on access to abortion. These women struggled to find an ideological home. Conservative leaders did not agree with their commitment to gender equality and liberal feminists linked opposition to abortion with anti-feminism. Ziegler noted that “ERA opponents [like Schlafly] helped to convince anti-abortion activists that it was politically impossible to oppose abortion while supporting the women’s movement.”⁶⁰ In 1976, NOW leader Karen DeGrow

⁵⁸ Erin M. Kempker, “Women at the Crossroads: Feminists, Conservatives, and Gender Politics in Indiana, 1950-1980,” (PhD diss., Purdue University, 2008), 3-4, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/docview/304518717?accountid=14925>.

⁵⁹ Mary Ziegler, “Women’s Rights on the Right: The History and Stakes of Modern Pro-Life Feminism,” *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 233, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/lnacui2api/api/version1/getDocCui?oc=00240&hnsd=f&hgn=t&lni=59D3-6R80-010M-605J&hns=t&perma=true&hv=t&hl=t&csi=248074&secondRedirectIndicator=true>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

delegitimized pro-life feminists when she stated, “I don’t think you can be a feminist and be against the right of a woman to choose abortion.”⁶¹ Ziegler suggested that activists like these women, “who sought middle-ground positions on gender issues,” created opportunities for compromise on issues about which pro-life and pro-choice women might otherwise be able to agree.⁶² Binsfeld represented these pro-life feminists in Michigan.

Despite their optimism and the opportunities available to them, Michigan’s Republican feminists, aligned with party moderates, were losing their battle “to maintain a feminist presence in the Republican Party and to maintain a Republican presence in the feminist movement.”⁶³ By 1980, the brief window of opportunity to align feminism with the Republican Party had passed and, as Rymph asserted, conservatives had marginalized and forced feminists out of the Republican Party. Rymph concluded with a suggestion that, by the end of the 1980s, a new type of woman had replaced feminists in the Republican Party. This woman focused on individualism rather than sexual difference or identity politics. Rymph’s new

⁶¹ Ibid., 251.

⁶² Mary Ziegler, *After Roe: The Lost History of the Abortion Debate* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 236.

⁶³ Position Statement, Michigan Republican Women’s Task Force; Fireman, “Angry GOP Women Disown Task Force,” June 26, 1983.

Republican woman did not expect the government to solve gender inequality and did not believe that she would be empowered by joining with other women.⁶⁴

These women were Rebecca Klatch's laissez-faire conservative women. They believed that a limited federal government should not become involved in the economy or the lives of American citizens.⁶⁵ According to Klatch, these women were genderless economic actors who, like men, benefited from a robust capitalist economy to the extent of their individual initiative and effort. While laissez-faire conservatives recognized that women were subject to discrimination, they opposed the ERA because it allowed the federal government to become involved in individual lives. Instead, they argued, problems of gender discrimination should be resolved at the state and local level. Abortion was a private issue in which the government should never be involved, even to subsidize poor women who would otherwise be denied access to the procedure. Klatch argued that unlike feminists, who advocated changing and expanding roles for women, and social conservatives, who promoted traditional familial roles for women, laissez-faire conservative

⁶⁴ Rymph, *Republican Women*, 244.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

women did not identify with other women based on gender and never supported positions that promoted the interests of women as women.⁶⁶

As a result of this increasingly contentious intra-party conflict, and the ultimate ascendance of conservatism within the Republican Party, the interests and priorities of many Republican feminists changed, their identities and commonalities diverged, and the women, who had often worked together but never self-identified as a single cohesive group, fragmented. Each Republican feminist had to choose whether to prioritize her feminist interests or her loyalty to a Republican Party that no longer supported feminism. Some left the Republican Party or supported candidates from other parties. A small number of them continued to believe that the Republican Party provided them with the best opportunities to meet their goals and, therefore, they remained loyal party members. Those feminists who stayed, however, were not Klatch's laissez-faire conservatives. They did not abandon their identification with or support for the women's movement. Instead, they adapted their feminist rhetoric to the changes in the party as they tried to make it more receptive to women's rights.

⁶⁶ Rebecca E. Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

This dissertation begins in Chapter One with an examination of the development of feminism in the Michigan Republican Party through the experiences of three Republican feminists, Peterson, Beebe, and Burnett. When the second wave of feminism emerged in the late 1960s, the moderation of the leaders of the Michigan Republican Party provided space for the development of a feminist consciousness and the active pursuit of feminist goals by many of the women within the party. These women were all Republicans before they were feminists. They adopted an interpretation of feminism that repudiated its more radical elements, thereby facilitating its convergence with moderate Republicanism. From this sensible center of the women's movement, Michigan's Republican feminists positioned themselves to both promote feminism and oppose conservatism within the Michigan Republican Party.

Chapter Two continues with an analysis of the formation and operation of the NWPC and its state affiliate, the Michigan Women's Political Caucus (MWPC). When members realized that it was difficult to pursue their partisan interests within this multipartisan organization, they created, under the auspices of the women's political caucuses, the National Republican Women's Task Force (NRWTF) and its state affiliate, the Michigan Republican Women's Task Force (MRWTF). Michigan's Republican feminists organized and participated in these coalitions

believing that their large numbers would provide them with access to political power to promote their feminist interests in the male-dominated Republican Party and the national, state, and local political systems more broadly. Through these organizations, they tried “to maintain a Republican presence in the feminist movement.”⁶⁷ As this chapter illustrates, however, this network of organizations suffered from the problems that all feminist coalitions faced. The Republican feminists who participated in these feminist caucuses were partisan political actors who struggled to reconcile their partisanship with the coalition’s feminism. As a result, they were forced to regularly reprioritize and reconcile their multiple interests in order to make the coalition work and to remain both Republicans and feminists.

Chapter Three looks at how Republican feminists simultaneously participated in single issue coalitions and the Michigan Republican Party to fight for the ratification of the ERA. It focuses on the different ways that these activists formulated and articulated their strategies and arguments depending on whether they were working with other feminists to achieve these specific goals, or seeking the support of the moderate wing of the Republican Party on this issue. When they

⁶⁷ Position Statement, Michigan Republican Women’s Task Force; Fireman, “Angry GOP Women Disown Task Force,” June 26, 1983.

worked with their Republican colleagues, they framed the issues in ways that fit into a partisan narrative, emphasizing moderation and family values in response to their conservative critics. They operated within a metaphoric middle ground, mediating between the radical component of the feminist movement and the conservative faction of the Republican Party, hoping to convince Republican leaders to support this feminist goal. As the party became more conservative and intensified its opposition to the ERA, however, Republican feminists found that the middle ground became a very small space that was increasingly difficult to negotiate.

Chapter Four continues to explore the activism of Michigan's Republican feminists in the context of abortion rights and other reproductive issues. Because of the differences between the ERA and abortion, they had to adopt different procedural and substantive strategies to promote and protect this right. Milliken's support for abortion made the work of Michigan's Republican feminists easier, especially with respect to women who could not otherwise afford to terminate their pregnancies. As a Ziegler pro-life feminist, Binsfeld had ties to both the moderate and conservative wings of the party. She challenged the alignment of abortion opponents with the anti-feminist movement, and seemed uniquely

positioned to bridge some of the differences between women on abortion rights. This effort, however, proved more challenging than anticipated.

Chapter Five explores the ways that some of Michigan's Republican women participated in the 1977 International Women's Year (IWY) Conference, which marked a high point in the women's movement. Five of Michigan's Republican feminists, and the daughter of a sixth, attended this conference. They joined with women from around the United States to reiterate their commitment and reenergize their efforts to ratify the ERA and protect abortion rights for all women. Many of the members of Michigan's growing conservative movement also attended this convention. Their recollections of the event, read together with those of Michigan's Republican feminists in attendance, provide an interesting snapshot of the status of feminism in the Republican Party at that time. However, by endorsing a more radical feminist agenda that included support for homosexuality, Michigan's Republican feminists provided conservative women with evidence that Republican feminists were no longer at the sensible center of the women's movement and, therefore, not moderate enough to represent women in the Republican Party.

Chapter Six is a study of the ways in which the conservative ascendancy within the Republican Party, culminating in the presidential election of 1980 and

the gubernatorial election of 1982, influenced Michigan's Republican feminists. They all felt excluded, to different degrees, by the party's rightward shift that caused it to change its positions on issues of concern to them. At the same time, they were losing their influence in the political caucuses, which struggled to support conservative Republican candidates who did not endorse their feminist agenda.

Realizing that feminism would not survive in a Republican Party controlled by conservatives, and that any connection to a conservative Republican Party would jeopardize their political influence within the feminist movement, they all had to recognize and try to reconcile the conflicts between these components of their core identities. Many Republican feminists prioritized their interests as women over their partisan loyalties and either left the party or publicly supported candidates from other parties who were more responsive to their concerns as feminists. These women walked away from their prior attempts to make the Republican Party a broad-based, inclusive political organization. However, this chapter complicates the assertion that conservatism left no room for a feminist political presence in the Michigan Republican Party. While many left, a few of Michigan's Republican feminists chose to continue to work within the party, believing that its stance on economic and foreign policy issues would ultimately

benefit women. They hoped to continue a feminist influence within the Republican Party in order to persuade party leaders to abandon the conservatism that quashed their feminist goals.⁶⁸ They remained committed to both their Republicanism and their feminism. Thus, this chapter will illustrate how feminists within the Michigan Republican Party both changed and were changed by the ascendance of conservatism within the party.

Republicans who became feminists came together during the 1970s to promote and reconcile their partisan and gendered interests. As this dissertation will illustrate, for a short time they were successful. They formed coalitions with feminists outside of the Republican Party, and created a coherent feminist voice within the Republican Party that enabled them to partner with moderate Republicans to try to stymie the rise of conservatism. As the Republican Party became more conservative and less receptive to their feminist goals, however, their different priorities undermined their ability to operate as a cohesive group and they fragmented. Feminists who were Republicans, those who prioritized their feminism over their partisanship, ultimately either supported non-Republican

⁶⁸ For an example of this viewpoint, see Victoria Toensing, "Pro-Choice Republicans Have a Place in the Party," *Washington Post*, November 29, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/pro-choice-republicans-have-a-place-in-the-party/2012/11/29/4ab72106-332e-11e2-bfd5-e202b6d7b501_story.html.

candidates or left the party altogether. Republicans who were feminists remained in the Michigan Republican Party, despite the fact that it became increasingly hostile to many of their feminist goals. In order to remain Republicans, their feminism had to be moderated or to change in response to the conservative ideology that was espoused by those who controlled the party. Ultimately, some of the ideals of Republican feminism survived the rise of conservatism within the Michigan Republican Party as its few remaining adherents continued to exert pressure on the party to recognize the rights of women.

CHAPTER 2 THE PATH TO THE SENSIBLE CENTER: 1960 TO 1970

Women, you must take the lead in building this party if it is to survive.

–Elly M. Peterson

It has been said that the home is the cradle of all, a grave if you stay there.

–N. Lorraine Beebe

We must turn men around to recognize that we are persons before we are women.

–Patricia Hill Burnett

In 1970, Peterson, assistant chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC), resigned in frustration after working on behalf of the Republican Party in different capacities for over twelve years. She spent much of that time trying to persuade the party to welcome women and minorities as equal participants, but she could never get past the discriminatory attitudes of the men who led the party. Faced with their intransigence, she realized that she would have to change her approach. While “she ha[d] always thought that the best way to deal with discrimination against women was not to complain, but to endure it and work around it [she was no longer] sure.”¹ She added, “I’m getting awfully weary of maintaining that attitude. I’m getting weary at the discrimination against women in all kinds of political life. . . . I say, if men keep working at it, we’ll be wiped out in

¹ Richard Dudman, “Woman GOP Leader Shows Disenchantment,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 5, 1970, box 23, folder: Scrapbook July 1970-Dec 1970, Peterson Papers.

10 years.”² Peterson’s recognition that she was going to have to become more of an activist for women’s rights led her to the sensible center of feminism.

Peterson’s story is but one example of the road traveled by many Republican women during the 1960s. Beebe and Burnett were as frustrated as Peterson—Beebe by a discriminatory political system and Burnett by a patriarchal society that limited her personal life and career. All three women believed that they could best effectuate change by working within the political system, specifically the Republican Party. But they had little success breaking through the gender barriers erected by the men in charge. Second wave feminism provided these women with the language that they needed to understand and articulate their frustration and a framework through which they could promote their common interests as women.

Although their paths to feminism were different, Republicans Peterson, Beebe, and Burnett developed similar understandings of and commitments to feminism.³ They agreed that the women’s movement was polarized. On one end of the spectrum, apathetic women dismissed feminism because they were satisfied

² Ibid.

³ Rymph emphasized the developmental diversity of Republican feminists on the national level. They traveled many roads to become Republicans and feminists, which, she argued, complicated the integration of feminism into the Republican Party. Rymph, *Republican Women*, 218-19.

with their lives as wives and mothers and saw no need to change the status quo. On the opposite end, radical feminists believed that true gender equity could only be achieved by restructuring the system through revolutionary change. As Republican feminists, Peterson, Beebe, and Burnett searched for what Peterson characterized as “the sensible” center between these two extremes⁴ because, from this position, they could best reconcile their feminism with their partisanship. In order to understand the complexities and richness of the feminist movement within Michigan Republican Party politics, it is important to examine how and why these three very different Republican women became feminists.

Peterson, one of the Michigan Republican Party’s most prominent feminists, was neither a Republican nor a feminist when she became a member of the Republican Party. She admitted that she joined a political party because that was what young girls did. She chose the Republican Party because it was “more fun” and “had by far the nicest parties.”⁵ Peterson later wrote that “we wouldn’t have known an issue if we met one face to face and we were never asked to meet the

⁴ Peterson, *Memoirs*, 121-22.

⁵ Elly Peterson, *Elly!: Confessions of a Woman Who Walked the Streets*, s.l., s.n., 1997, 69, Peterson Papers.

candidates, or hear what they had to say.”⁶ Exhibiting her wry sense of humor, Peterson quipped that “like prostitutes, women politicians are often asked, ‘What’s a nice girl like you doing in this business?’ And, like prostitutes, the answer is often, ‘MEN.’”⁷

Peterson, however, met her husband on a blind date set up by her friend (although he was not the date), not through the Republican Party. Married in 1935, she and her husband divorced eight years later after he enlisted in the Air Force during World War II. Never one to be constrained by society’s gender norms, the bored divorcee volunteered for the Red Cross and was sent overseas to Britain, France and Germany.⁸ She and her ex-husband remarried in 1948 and bought a farm in Charlotte, Michigan.⁹

While her husband traveled with the National Guard, Peterson returned to Republican Party politics.¹⁰ In retrospect, she noted, “My political activism just

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*, 6-19.

⁹ Ibid., 8-19.

¹⁰ Ibid., 22-23.

happened,”¹¹ but her success was attributable to hard work and dedication. By 1957, despite her inauspicious beginnings and purported lack of interest in anything political, Peterson became a valuable employee of the Michigan Republican Party, organizing voters throughout the state.¹² In 1961 the state party elected Peterson as its vice-chairman, which was, as a practical matter, the highest position that a woman could attain in the party at that time.¹³ Romney’s election in 1962 galvanized Peterson’s political career. She worked on his successful campaign managing his wife, Lenore Romney and, in the process, gained a mentor. After the election, she was reelected vice-chairman of the Michigan Republican Party, but quickly left that position to become the Executive Director of the Women’s Division of the RNC. Shortly thereafter, she became the assistant chairman of the RNC, the highest position available to women in the national

¹¹ Peterson, *Confessions*, 69.

¹² Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*, 24-29.

¹³ GOPeterson for United States Senator, Elly Peterson, 1964, box 20, folder: Clippings from Scrapbook, Peterson Papers; Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*, 29-31. The positions of chairman and vice-chairman had to be divided between a man and a woman, and since a man was always elected chairman, the woman’s position always defaulted to the vice-chairman. Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*, 30.

Republican Party. After the 1964 Republican national convention, Peterson came home to Michigan to run for political office.¹⁴

As the first female candidate for the United States Senate from Michigan, Peterson was something of an aberration, which meant that she had to deal with her gender on the campaign trail.¹⁵ She tried to use the fact that she was a woman to her advantage. Her campaign materials characterized her as a “woman of action,” and posed her traditionally feminine characteristics, such as her “interest in people,” as positive reasons to vote for her. Even though she had no children, political advertisements equated the fact that she lived on a farm with being a mother. Invoking this false equivalency, her interest in foreign policy was attributed to “the hopes and aspirations farm women, like mothers everywhere, have for their children.”¹⁶ Campaign brochures made a crude pitch for gender equality, noting, “Elly Peterson believes ‘it’s a man’s world—and a woman’s world,’ and there should be equal opportunities for both, equal chances for present and future generations to be educated, to pursue happiness, to exercise talent, without prejudice because

¹⁴ Peterson, *Confessions*, 88.

¹⁵ “Michigan Woman in Senate Race,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1964.

¹⁶ “Peterson for U.S. Senate,” Campaign Materials, box 20, folder: Later Correspondence and Memorabilia, Peterson Papers.

of sex, race, creed or color.”¹⁷ At the same time, it was made clear that she was “a working member of the Republican team”¹⁸ so that voters connected her to the group of Republican men running for state office. They did not want her to appear too independent. Peterson’s gender also became an issue among some of the voters. She noted that on one campaign stop, “an old, filth-covered man approached. I was dreading touching his hand but was prepared to do so. I put out my hand and introduced myself, whereupon he glowered and brushed it aside and said, ‘I ain’t votin’ for no woman—or niggers.’”¹⁹ Although she defeated her conservative and other primary opponents, Peterson lost the general election.

In 1965, Peterson became the first female chairman of the Michigan Republican Party. She held that position for two consecutive two-year terms.²⁰ Although she considered joining the Nixon administration to work for Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Romney, in April 1969 she chose instead to once

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Speech, Elly Peterson, n.d., 3, box 20, folder: Biographical-A Tribute to Elly Peterson-1984, Peterson Papers. In her autobiography, she attributed an almost identical quote to a man who made the comment to Lenore Romney in her campaign for the Senate. Peterson, *Confessions*, 145.

²⁰ Pat Hunter, “A Ten-Year History: Women in Politics Losing Ground,” *Honolulu Advertiser*, November 5, 1969, box 20, folder: Loose Items from Scrapbook, Peterson Papers.

again become assistant chairman of the RNC. In 1970, she agreed to serve as the campaign manager for Lenore Romney, who ran for the United States Senate from Michigan. Romney won the Republican primary, but lost the general election.

As a Republican Party leader, Peterson believed that women and other underrepresented groups would benefit from participating in Republican Party politics. Thus, she established party organizations through which women could volunteer to help people, such as African Americans, Jewish, and other ethnic women, who did not traditionally feel welcomed by the party.²¹ However, her recruitment program had another purpose. She never lost sight of her commitment to the party which, she believed, would remain viable only if it welcomed all people as participants and provided all volunteers, employees, and candidates with equal opportunities.

As both an elected and appointed official within the party's bureaucracy, and also a Republican candidate for public office, Peterson experienced first-hand how badly the party treated women. Despite her leadership positions, Peterson found

²¹ Edith K. Roosevelt, "GOP Urged to Use Woman Power: By Offering Meaningful Roles in Politics," *Manchester Union (N.H.) Leader*, July 28, 1970, box 23, Scrapbook, July 1970-December 1970, Peterson Papers; "Remarks by Elly M. Peterson, Assistant Chairman, Republican National Committee Before the Illinois Federation of Republican Women, Chicago, Illinois, November 19, 1970," 2-4, box 23, folder: Scrapbook July 1970-Dec. 1970, Peterson Papers.

that the men who ran the party did not treat her like they would have treated another man. The same Republican leaders who convinced her to run for office minimized and ultimately refused to recognize the legitimacy of her candidacy. They asked her to run for the United States Senate as a “gimmick candidate . . . someone who would be different, yet credible.”²² When party leaders urged her to enter the campaign, Max Fisher, one of the party’s chief financiers and fundraisers, assured her that money would not become an issue. Despite these promises, the party was reluctant to provide her with the funding she needed to run her campaign, requiring her to plead for every dollar.²³

Peterson experienced discrimination even as the leader of the Michigan Republican Party. She later recognized that her responsibilities were defined and her abilities were measured by her gender.²⁴ For example, she was paid less than her male predecessor because she was a woman.²⁵ When Peterson became party chairman, she insisted on attending financial meetings, even though her male colleagues controlled party finances and convened their meetings at a club that did

²² Peterson, *Confessions*, 95.

²³ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

²⁵ Speech, n.d., Peterson, 4.

not admit women. Fisher offered to send her “to lunch in the basement with his secretary.”²⁶ Peterson refused. “I quietly replied that I would walk out and go home if I wasn’t to be a full and equal participant.”²⁷ Although the party elected her as chairman, the men who led the party expected her to serve on their terms and conditions. To the extent she could, she refused to yield to their discrimination.

While Peterson believed that the Republican Party would not survive if it did not become more inclusive, she was also convinced that the conservative movement threatened the future of the party. As a long-time moderate Republican, she worked to stop the infiltration of conservatives into her party. In 1964, Romney was running for reelection for governor, and Goldwater led the Republican ticket for president. One of the reasons that Peterson agreed to run for the Senate was because of the threat posed by the schism between moderates and conservatives in that year’s elections. Although Michigan was not strongly conservative, there were pockets of conservatism within the state. Romney was not going to win the governorship on Goldwater’s coattails and Goldwater was not going to win the state of Michigan by virtue of Romney’s voters. Democrats hoped to take

²⁶ Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*, 92.

²⁷ Peterson, *Confessions*, 107; Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*, 92.

advantage of the split in the party to defeat Romney.²⁸ Peterson later admitted that she knew she would not win the senatorial race,²⁹ but nevertheless agreed to run so that she could mediate the disputes between the conservative and moderate wings of the party to insure that Romney was reelected as governor.³⁰

It was almost impossible to split the campaigns away from each other. If I would say I was campaigning just for Peterson, that I knew my own road was rough and rocky and I would do my thing and let Goldwater and Romney do theirs, I satisfied no one. As the national election picked up, more and more hate was generated. I grew so discouraged at times. I had been a working Republican too long to leave the party in such a hassle as that election grew to be. I was a Republican, and I wanted to remain a Republican. I believe the Romneys felt the same way. I perceived my job of the moment not being elected but keeping the party together coming out of the election with a Republican Governor and the troops to rebuild.³¹

Romney won the election, but many downstream candidates were hurt by Goldwater's loss.

²⁸ Peterson, *Confessions*, 101.

²⁹ George Weeks, "Stabenow's Victory Pleases GOP Political Pioneer," *Detroit News*, November 26, 2000.

³⁰ Peterson, *Confessions*, 101; Elly Peterson, interview by William Ballenger, Michigan Political History Society, video, May 1, 1995, http://www.jjblivinglibrary.com/Profile.php?Profile_ID=23. Fitzgerald came to the same conclusion as Peterson. Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*, 76.

³¹ Peterson, *Confessions*, 101.

In 1965, as chairman of the Michigan Republican Party, Peterson's support for Romney and her distaste for conservatives aligned when she masterminded a moderate takeover of Republican Women's Federation of Michigan (RWFM). The RWFM was a federation of Republican women's clubs throughout the state created to educate voters about politics, to encourage women to participate in politics, and to support the Republican Party, the national and state women's federations, and Republican candidates.³² In March 1965, months before the next election of RWFM leadership, Peterson indicated that she wanted a slate of Romney moderates to replace Goldwater's conservative women who operated the RWFM independently of Romney's moderate Michigan Republican Party.³³

As expected, the nominating committee of the RWFM selected a conservative slate of candidates for the federation's leadership. Under normal circumstances, these nominees would have been automatically elected. However, in order to thwart this result, Peterson inserted herself into the nominating and voting process. She selected a moderate slate of candidates and openly

³² By-Laws, Republican Women's Federation of Michigan, box 14, folder: Republican Women's Federation 1965-67, Peterson Papers.

³³ Peterson to Mrs. Neal Tourtallotte, March 17, 1965, box 6, folder: Correspondence March 1965, Peterson Papers.

campaigned for them. Through her machinations and over the strong objections of the federation's conservative leaders, federation members elected all of Peterson's candidates.³⁴ Peterson's efforts insured that the RWF and the Michigan Republican Party worked together to advance their moderate goals, and that party conservatives would not be able to use the RWF to promote their conservative agenda.³⁵ According to at least one political observer, the RWF takeover saved Romney, who intended to run for president in 1968, from the embarrassment of having a rogue conservative women's federation within his state, and reinvigorated

³⁴ Glenn Engle, "Moderate Jars Harmony of Right-Wing GOP Club," *Detroit News*, n.d., box 6, folder: Correspondence 8-1-to 8-15-65, Peterson Papers. In 1967, a similar power struggle occurred at the national level for control of the National Federation of Republican Women. Peterson backed moderate Gladys O'Donnell, who challenged Schlafly, a conservative clubwoman who was next-in-line for the leadership of the organization. O'Donnell predicted this conflict in 1965 when she wrote to Peterson about what she characterized as a fight for the future of the party. "A factional showdown . . . is coming, whether we like it or not. It is simply facing these people now, or else. The prospect of these people in control and watching many years effort going down the drain, along with the Party as well as the Federation, is appalling. It is this specter that keeps us going." O'Donnell to Peterson, August 13, 1965, box 4, folder: Correspondence September 15, 1965, Peterson Papers. O'Donnell won the chairmanship, but the election set off a firestorm between conservative and moderate Republican women in the national Republican Party.

³⁵ Elly Peterson, memorandum, September 30, 1965, box 14, folder: Republican Women's Federation 1965-1967, Peterson Papers; "Peterson Supporters Win Control of State Women's GOP Federation," *Adrian Daily Telegram*, September 23, 1965, box 14, folder: Republican Women's Federation 1965-1967, Peterson Papers.

the state Republican Party with an infusion of enthusiastic moderate women as both volunteers and candidates.³⁶

Peterson's description of the actual RWFm vote provided insight into the animosity and festering ideological divisions between moderate and conservative members of the RWFm and the Michigan Republican Party. She wrote that "the battle was vicious with the opposition slate [the conservatives] standing in the lobby of the hotel with two cries—'All liberal Republicans are Communists so all on the Hobbs [referring to Ruth Hobbs, the woman who Peterson had selected to run for chairwoman of the RWFm] slate are Communists' and 'this is your opportunity to beat George Romney.'"³⁷ She added that "the part that struck terror in my heart was the obvious hatred on the faces of about twenty women."³⁸ She later analogized the conflict between the two wings of the party to a war. Moderates engaged in short term political battles, but then returned to their everyday lives. Peterson wrote that "the moderates just don't care enough to fight constantly to win. . . . When the battle is over they want to go on to other things. It doesn't seem

³⁶ Roger Lane, "Pro-Romney Women Could Tip Balance," *Detroit Free Press*, September 26, 1965.

³⁷ Peterson, memorandum, September 30, 1965.

³⁸ Ibid.

to matter that much to them. Life goes on.”³⁹ Conservatives, on the other hand, never stopped fighting and refused to compromise their principles. They were dangerous because of the intensity of their commitment to their conservative ideals and goals. She noted that “they will make NO concessions to moderates, or liberals, but they expect to have concessions made to them.”⁴⁰ While in the 1960s moderates and conservatives disagreed about the future direction of the party, their debates also foreshadowed the fault line that erupted between conservative and moderate Republican women during the 1970s over ideologically based issues that directly impacted them, such as the ERA and abortion.

In 1970, a discouraged Peterson left the RNC. Although she believed that she had introduced some women to politics, her efforts to persuade party leadership to treat women as equals had largely failed.⁴¹ The party still assigned them secondary roles and supportive tasks, which precluded them from developing the skills necessary to assume the party’s leadership positions and to run for elective office.⁴² Despite her best efforts, the party continued to discriminate against

³⁹ Peterson, *Memoirs*, 97.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Peterson, *Confessions*, 137.

⁴² “GOP Urged to Use Woman Power,” *Manchester Union (N.H.) Leader*, July 28, 1970, box 23, Scrapbook, July 1970-Dec. 1970, Peterson Papers.

women.⁴³ She had been a party woman for almost twenty years, and had hoped that in exchange for her loyal partisanship and hard work, the party's leaders would ultimately accept her and other Republican women as equals.⁴⁴ By the end of the 1960s, however, she recognized the fallacy of the grand bargain that framed the rules under which she and other women chose to participate in the party. Women helped men get elected and then men refused to provide them with equal opportunities in the party or access to the government offices that they controlled. Moreover, officeholders did not reward women with meaningful political appointments and the number of women in elective national and state offices had dropped.⁴⁵

In 1970, Peterson noted with frustration that "women are regressing in politics."⁴⁶ In retrospect, she attributed the beginnings of the gender gap in the Republican Party to this period. She wrote, "How blind these men were. At a time

⁴³ Richard Ryan, "Elly Peterson is Retiring, but Don't Bet on It," *Grand Rapids Press*, December 28, 1970, box 23, folder: Clippings 1970 Retirement from Republican National Committee, Peterson Papers.

⁴⁴ In this way, Peterson resembled many other female Republican activists who chose to become "party women." Rymph, *Republican Women*, 6.

⁴⁵ Dudman, "Woman GOP Leader Shows Disenchantment," November 5, 1970.

⁴⁶ Eleanor Morehead, "GOP Official Wants Top Jobs for Women," *Columbus Citizens Journal*, August 27, 1970, box 23, folder: Scrapbook July 1970-Dec 1970, Peterson Papers.

when women were becoming more and more disenchanted with government, at a time when almost all of the well known women's national organizations were beginning their fight for equality, there was a blindness in the resistance in the White House. I believe they felt the women would continue to do their volunteer work regardless. They felt women would continue to take orders and perform, but it ain't necessarily so!"⁴⁷ She later noted, "Surely, it is reasonable to say that the events that took place in my life in the sixties and early seventies prepared me for my strong feelings about being IN and a PART of the women's movement."⁴⁸ It was this disillusionment that caused her to become a feminist.

While close in age, Beebe and Peterson followed different paths to feminism. Beebe was only the third woman elected to the Michigan Senate, and, during her tenure, was the only women to serve in that legislative body.⁴⁹ A graduate of Western Michigan University, she eventually moved to Dearborn, Michigan, where she met her husband, a Ford Motor Company executive. By the time she took the

⁴⁷ Peterson, *Confessions*, 136.

⁴⁸ Peterson, *Memoirs*, 121-22; Hunter, "A Ten-Year History," November 5, 1969. While Peterson did not yet consider herself a feminist in 1970, Gilmore recognized that women who did not identify as feminists could still engage in feminist behavior. Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions* 3.

⁴⁹ Barbara J. Love, ed. *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 34.

oath of office in 1967 as a Republican representative from Dearborn, she was in her fifties, divorced and her children were nearly grown.⁵⁰ Her campaign emphasized that she was “not just another ‘professional politician.’ She is first and foremost a homemaker who has raised two children.”⁵¹ Politics, she noted, fit naturally with her long-term interest in children.⁵² As an educator and parent, she brought strengths and skills to the table that differentiated her from other candidates. She cared about how the issues addressed in Lansing, including taxes, the cost of food, raising a family, education, and mental health, impacted families and influenced communities.⁵³ A self-identified “Romney Republican,” Beebe acknowledged that voters were aware of her gender, but argued that it did not make a difference in her first campaign.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Beebe’s age at the time that she was elected is subject to some discrepancy. According to the *Detroit News*, she was fifty years old when she was elected. “New Senator Lorraine Beebe All Set to Man the Job,” *Detroit News*, November 10, 1966. The Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame, however, stated that she was born in 1910, which would have made her fifty-six years old at the time of her election. Beebe, Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame.

⁵¹ JWT Editorial Department, 6 Page Folder, Lorraine Beebe Direct Mail Piece, October 5, 1966, box 1, folder: Beebe: State Senate Election Campaigns 1966 and 1970, Beebe Papers.

⁵² “Lady of the Senate: Mrs. Beebe Puts Feminine Touch in Man’s World,” n.d., n.p., Scrapbook, Beebe Papers.

⁵³ JWT Editorial Department, 6 Page Folder.

⁵⁴ “New Senator Lorraine Beebe All Set to Man the Job,” *Detroit News*, November 10, 1966.

She attributed her feminism to the experiences of her youth, although she never thought of herself as a feminist until she became a state senator. As a child, her grandmother advised her that girls should always “be passive, nonaggressive and supportive of the male.”⁵⁵ After she graduated from high school, she heard, like most girls her age, that married women did not need to be college educated. She believed that “we’ve been conditioned to be passive and submissive throughout the entire framework of society.”⁵⁶ Yet her experiences belied the messages she received. As a child, she played with the boys without regard to her gender. An engaged, successful college student who wanted to get married, but also have a career, she refused to accept subordination as a second class citizen.⁵⁷ In the Michigan Senate, her male colleagues disparaged the intelligence of women who, they argued, could not make sound decisions because they were incapable of

⁵⁵ “Lorraine Beebe Speaks Her Mind,” *Southfield Observer & Eccentric*, May 2, 1974, attachment to letter, Evelyn Billesdon to Beebe, June 5, 1974, box 2, folder: Correspondence 1973-1980, Beebe Papers.

⁵⁶ Susan R. Pollack, “Women Are Not Born Losers-Just Brainwashed Says Ex-Senator,” *Daily Tribune*, n.d., attachment to letter, Evelyn Billesdon to Beebe, June 5, 1974, box 2, folder: Correspondence 1973-1980, Beebe Papers.

⁵⁷ “Lorraine Beebe Speaks Her Mind,” *Southfield Observer & Eccentric*, May 2, 1974.

separating logic from emotion. While her life experiences paved the way, these comments finally inspired her to become a feminist.⁵⁸

Beebe recognized the special challenges that she faced as the only woman in the Michigan Senate and accepted that she needed “to work twice as hard and try to be twice as alert” to gain the respect of her male colleagues.⁵⁹ One told her “that he expected I’d take my hat and purse and go shopping the day after I took the oath of office.”⁶⁰ She quickly defied these expectations. Because of her singular status, she believed that she had assumed “a great responsibility for women and feel I am their special advocate.”⁶¹ Her male colleagues were not motivated to fight for equality for women. Moreover, they did not understand and, therefore, could not adequately address and resolve the peculiar and pressing issues that women faced. Beebe became chairman of the Health and Welfare Committee and vice-chairman of the Labor Committee of the Senate (later the Senate Health, Social Services and Retirement Committee) so that she could focus primarily on issues that involved

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Barbara Cranham, “Senatorial Voice Echoes Feminine Point of View,” *Pontiac Press*, March 3, 1969, box 1, folder: Beebe-State Senate Election Campaigns 1966 and 1970, Beebe Papers.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

women and children. She sought to create an administrative agency within the state to address the problems of children. After she left the Senate, Beebe fought to establish screening for mental retardation for young children, because she believed that the high crime rate among teenagers was partially attributable to a failure to identify these health issues earlier. Male-dominated legislatures, she noted, were not interested in and would not tackle problems related to the family.⁶²

Beebe, like many of her Republican feminist colleagues, worked in a public sphere dominated by men who were not quite sure how to judge or react to political women. Journalists seemed particularly confused and frequently emphasized her physical appearance over the substance of her work. For example, one writer observed that she “does not look like the popular conception of a woman politician.”⁶³ Another described her as “neat, soft spoken, not perceptibly aggressive. Her hair is light red and occasionally her blue eyes crinkle in sudden warm humor.”⁶⁴ In a grudging acknowledgement of her career, the author

⁶² Nancy Konesko, “Women Will Win Rights by Vote, Says Mrs. Beebe,” *Saginaw News*, October 21, 1971, box 2, folder: Beebe ERA Michigan 1972-1973, Beebe Papers; Holliday, “The Lady Said ‘Abortion,’” August 3, 1969.

⁶³ Holliday, “The Lady Said ‘Abortion,’” August 3, 1969.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

conceded, “nevertheless there is a professional façade which suggests careful discipline.”⁶⁵ Even female journalists emphasized her femininity. One *Detroit Free Press* reporter wrote the following, ridiculously irrelevant, description: “Sen Beebe folded her coral tipped fingers in her lap. Her lips matched her nail polish. And her dress matched her house, green, a soft green shade darker than the walls, a shade lighter than the upholstery.”⁶⁶ It is unclear how a “woman politician” should look or why any observations about her makeup, dress or decor were relevant to her work in the Michigan Senate. Certainly, newspapers did not provide these types of superficial descriptions for her male colleagues. Yet journalists regularly offered these highly feminized assessments of Beebe to their readers. Perhaps their characterizations, which seemed to delegitimize her credibility as a politician and legislator, fueled her commitment to the feminist cause.

Beebe’s greatest passion was the liberalization of Michigan’s abortion laws, which was why, after twenty years, she publicly revisited with her Senate colleagues the circumstances surrounding her therapeutic abortion. She recalled that her testimony brought back all the trauma of that time. Although her doctor

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Jean Sprain Wilson, “She Rose from Failure to a Power Symbol,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 22, 1970.

advised her that she probably could not have children, she sought a medical resolution for her problem. After one miscarriage, she had a baby boy, and five miscarriages later, she was pregnant again. Doctors told her the baby was stillborn and that she needed a therapeutic abortion. She went through a period of denial, hoping that the doctors were wrong about the baby. She admitted, “I realize now that the fetus was dead, but I was clinging to that one hope—one positive test. Some might say I was emotionally disturbed but I think any woman would be under the same circumstances, and having to make that decision.”⁶⁷ She tried to explain to her colleagues the anguish surrounding the decision about whether to have an abortion, but also “that it can happen under the best of circumstances.”⁶⁸ She hoped to impress on them that “you are trying to impose your will on a woman’s decision. You cannot do this.”⁶⁹ Abortion was a difficult choice, but it was the pregnant woman’s decision to make.

She received a tremendous amount of both positive and negative feedback about her testimony. Many people praised her courage and shared their own

⁶⁷ Holliday, “The Lady Said ‘Abortion,’” August 3, 1969.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

experiences. Others sent hate mail that “accused [her] of being without a God—of being a murderer.”⁷⁰ While her controversial confession jeopardized her position in the Michigan Senate, Beebe was not willing “to sell out my ideas for political office.”⁷¹ Her disclosure made a difference because it forced her colleagues to confront the notion that it was time for the legislature to address issues that heretofore had been considered off limits because they belonged within the private sphere of the home. She exemplified what would soon become a basic tenet of second wave feminism. By virtue of her public admission, she made the personal political.⁷²

Two years later, Beebe narrowly lost her bid for reelection to David Plawecki, a relatively unknown twenty-two-year-old Democrat who was supported by both the United Auto Workers and the Catholic Church. In an example of how all politics are local, Catholics turned out to vote in large numbers because they opposed a proposed constitutional amendment on the state ballot prohibiting the transfer of state money to private schools. A large Catholic turnout did not bode well for Beebe

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 196-97.

because the Catholic Church had mobilized against her due to her stand on abortion. Her opponents argued that she wanted to “legaliz[e] murder” and that she had “denounced the Catholic Church.”⁷³ Since it was unclear when a fetus became a human being, Plawecki argued, all abortion was potentially murder. He noted that “if this is true, I don’t see how hardship on parents could justify it.”⁷⁴ After her defeat, Beebe characterized her loss as “a slap against all women,” and she vowed to continue her efforts to liberalize Michigan’s abortion laws after her Senate tenure ended.⁷⁵ She later noted that she made a mistake because she “was trying to be a ‘lady’” and urged female politicians “not to ‘fight like ladies’” in their campaigns.⁷⁶ While in 1966 she said she did not believe that the fact she was a woman made a difference in her election, by 1970 she had changed her mind.

Burnett’s perspective on women’s rights differed from that of both Peterson and Beebe. Burnett spent most of the 1960s focusing on her family and career, not politics. She came from a middle class background, although her fortunes changed

⁷³ Dobyms, “Newcomer Defeats Mrs. Beebe,” *Detroit News*.

⁷⁴ “Plawecki Rips Beebe’s Abort Stand,” *Dearborn Press*, n.d., box 1, folder: Beebe-State Senate Election Campaigns 1966 and 1970, Beebe Papers; Campaign Flier for David Plawecki, box 2, folder: Correspondence 1970 After Election Loss, Beebe Papers.

⁷⁵ Dobyms, “Newcomer Defeats Mrs. Beebe,” *Detroit News*.

⁷⁶ “Lorraine Beebe Speaks Her Mind,” *Southfield Observer & Eccentric*, May 2, 1974.

in her teen years when her wealthy grandfather decided to forgive Hill's mother (his daughter) for divorcing her husband and shared his wealth with them. With his money and connections, she attended finishing school, came out as a debutante, and became what her mother wanted: an "American geisha."⁷⁷ A successful model and beauty queen, she won the Miss Michigan pageant in 1942 and served as a runner up to Miss America. She studied art at different universities, including Wayne State University, and became a famous portrait painter. From an early age, Burnett realized that money was the key to independence and throughout her life remained unapologetic about her wealth and the cars, furs, and trips that her money provided.⁷⁸

In her autobiography, entitled *True Colors: An Artist's Journey from Beauty Queen to Feminism*, Burnett explored the personal and professional experiences that led her to the women's movement. For many years, she was dissatisfied with her personal life. In retrospect, it is apparent she that suffered from Betty Friedan's "problem that has no name."⁷⁹ After a short failed marriage to a domineering

⁷⁷ Burnett, *True Colors*, 5, 18-20.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-31, 12-14, 1, 15-17.

⁷⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964).

doctor, she married a bully who also dominated and demeaned her.⁸⁰ An unfulfilled wife and mother, she recognized that those roles were not necessarily sufficient to make her happy and wanted more in life than to live through her husband and children. A therapist advised her that she would be happy if she “concentrate[d] on giving. That should be a woman’s satisfaction.”⁸¹ While she wanted the freedom to forge her own path in life, she realized that her “career was piece-mealed around [her] hard and fast duties as a housewife—cemented by custom, family expectation and guilt.”⁸² Ironically, the familial role that society had deemed appropriate and satisfying for women had become a trap from which she could not escape. She argued that “we must turn men around to recognize that we are persons before we are women.”⁸³

⁸⁰ Burnett, *True Colors*, 37-41, 44-48.

⁸¹ “Global Feminism,” *Fort Lauderdale News*, n.d., box 3, folder: Misc. Women’s Organizations, Conferences, Issues (Clippings), Burnett Papers.

⁸² Cobey Black, “Patricia Hill Burnett,” *Honolulu Advertiser*, n.d., box 3, folder: Misc. Women’s Organizations, Conferences, Issues (Clippings), Burnett Papers.

⁸³ Speech, Patricia Hill Burnett, [prior to August 26, 1970?], box 5, folder: TALKS NOW (1970), Burnett Papers.

Burnett described feminism as “true equality between the sexes”⁸⁴ “in the economic world, the social world, and the private home world.”⁸⁵ Gender discrimination, in her opinion, started at a young age. She noted that when asked hypothetical questions about careers, boys and girls reacted differently. Boys who were told to assume they were girls did not know how to answer a question about what career they would choose, although one responded that he would “be nothing.”⁸⁶ The answers of girls varied depending on whether they assumed they were girls or boys. As girls, they said they would be nurses, secretaries and mothers. As boys, these girls said they would choose to be doctors and lawyers. Such attitudes continued into adulthood when husbands routinely made decisions for their wives. Personal relationships between men and women were political because they involved power. Like Beebe, Burnett saw the personal as political when it came to the women’s movement.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Burnett, *True Colors*, 69.

⁸⁵ Patricia Hill Burnett, Interview by Sarah Arvey, Michigan Veteran Feminists Oral Histories Project Interviews, 2003-2004, Transcript, July 10, 2003, 12, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁸⁶ Patricia Hill Burnett, Handwritten Notes, n.d., box 4, folder: U.S. Women’s ERA Material, Burnett Papers.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Burnett argued that feminism could take many forms “and any so-called feminists who try to impose a particular political or cultural straitjacket on others can only hurt our cause.”⁸⁸ Thus, it was counterproductive for women to argue with each other over the ways in which they, as individuals, chose to exercise their feminism. Perhaps she was particularly conscious of this because, as a wealthy former beauty queen who loved to dress extravagantly and flaunt her femininity, other feminists often judged her for her lifestyle choices and questioned her commitment to feminism.

Burnett claimed that one particular professional experience contributed to her development as a feminist. A prominent Detroit doctor commissioned her to paint a portrait of his wife. When she finished, he asked her to sign the painting using only her last name. He told her that a female artist would reduce the value of the portrait. She signed it with her full name.⁸⁹

In 1969, however, she finally assigned a label to her dissatisfaction. While driving to a funeral, Burnett and her friend, Marjorie Levin, a Democrat, complained to each other about how badly men treated them. Their husbands expected them

⁸⁸ Burnett, *True Colors*, 71.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

to care for their homes and assume primary responsibility for raising their children even though they had full time jobs. Burnett suggested to Levin that they form a chapter of NOW. When they called Betty Friedan, she encouraged them to create a Michigan chapter.⁹⁰

Burnett gathered forty professional women, both Democrats and Republicans, for a NOW organizational luncheon. All success stories in a male-dominated world, the women she contacted shared a belief that they had been discriminated against, and achieved their goals in spite of men. At the meeting, they identified three objectives. They wanted “to recruit at least a thousand members across the state, who would then work for the repeal of Michigan’s abortion laws . . . and to establish day care centers for those mothers who wanted to put their talents to work . . . (ellipses in original) or needed to work to support their children.”⁹¹ They targeted as potential members “the untouched woman—the silent majority—the middle class woman who [was] afraid to speak out because it [wasn’t] feminine.”⁹² In retrospect, it was a very successful meeting.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid., 4, 55-56.

⁹¹ Ibid., 56-57.

⁹² Helen Fogel, “Michigan NOW Organizes, Seeks the ‘Silent Majority,’” *Detroit Free Press*, January 9, 1970.

⁹³ Black, “Patricia Hill Burnett,” *Honolulu Advertiser*.

Through NOW, Burnett hoped to destroy a number of myths about women. In particular, the Michigan chapter sought to refute the outdated and inaccurate notion that women could only be wives and mothers. Members believed that women could be productive long after their children left home. Anatomy should not dictate opportunity and was never determinative of accomplishment. The media and advertising industries, they argued, contributed to the subordination of women by treating them as “sex objects or mothers, NEVER as individuals.”⁹⁴ Burnett analogized the plight of women to that of slaves, stating that “home is our cotton field,” and characterized women’s “current home-bound status as that of ‘house servants.’”⁹⁵

Burnett quickly realized, however, that although NOW was created largely by, it was not an organization created solely for, middle class women.⁹⁶ After this initial meeting, she visited Friedan’s New York apartment, where NOW members were preparing for a meeting with the press. Burnett described these supporters as “a huge black woman named Beulah Sanders, leader of a welfare rights

⁹⁴ “Motor City Lions Hear Women’s Lib President,” n.p., n.d., box 4, folder: NOW-Printed, Burnett Papers; “All This and Liberation, Too!” *Ecorse Enterprise*, March 17, 1971, box 4, folder: NOW-Printed, Burnett Papers.

⁹⁵ “All This and Liberation, Too!” *Ecorse Enterprise*, March 17, 1971.

⁹⁶ Burnett, *True Colors*, 69.

organization, and a nineteen-year-old from a socialist group called the Red Stockings, who was there in a ragged T-shirt and jeans, nursing her baby.”⁹⁷ The woman who answered the door introduced Burnett as a “woman in a chinchilla hat down here who says she is a lifelong Republican and claims to be a chapter president of NOW.”⁹⁸ Friedan happily characterized her at the press conference as “the other end of the spectrum.”⁹⁹ Yet despite their differences, Burnett felt a kinship with these different women who all suffered because of discrimination. When it became obvious that many women could not afford the dues that NOW charged, Burnett’s chapter organized free “rap sessions” that allowed women from all backgrounds to share their experiences. She was shocked by the stories women told at these meetings about physical abuse. She believed, however that when she told of her experiences with her mentally abusive husband, these women learned that even wealthy women were subject to mistreatment by men.¹⁰⁰

As Peterson, Beebe, and Burnett each developed a feminist consciousness, they all arrived at what Peterson called “the sensible” center of the women’s

⁹⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 58-59, 63-65.

movement, the mid-point between the “polarized” extremes of compliant femininity and angry radicalism. Peterson described the continuum as follows:

On the one hand, we had the ultra-feminist, a complacent house-frau, content to be beckoned by the will of man, who, when she had free time would use it to follow the TV traumas of ‘As the World Turns.’ On the other hand, you have the militant, who seems not to be so much FOR women as AGAINST men and, with her rudeness, her absurd demands, and talk of ‘take over,’ antagonizes the very women who she seeks to help. Somewhere, between the saccharine [“1001 ways to camouflage hamburger way”] and the strident, [“bra burning, radical Liberation”] lies the sensible.¹⁰¹

Peterson, Beebe, and Burnett urged women to reject both extremes and to look for the middle ground, a place where each woman could assume her responsibility to live up to her full potential.¹⁰²

Peterson, Beebe, and Burnett believed that women chose not to participate in politics for two primary reasons. Society constructed expectations for women that kept them “passive and submissive” within their homes.¹⁰³ Only wives and mothers could be considered successful women and a working mother could never be a good mother. Thus, a successful woman had to devote herself to her husband

¹⁰¹ Peterson, *Memoirs*, 121-22; Remarks by Elly Peterson, Illinois Federation of Republican Women, 2.

¹⁰² Peterson, *Memoirs*, 121-22.

¹⁰³ Pollack, “Women Are Not Born Losers.”

and children and forgo a career.¹⁰⁴ The natural life cycle reinforced these attitudes. Women felt meaningful and productive only when they were raising children. After their children left home, when they should have had more time to engage in activities that were important to them, they withdrew even further because they felt irrelevant. Beebe described this phenomenon as follows: “Once a mother no longer acts as a mother, as such, she loses her incentive to be important in life. She renders herself helpless in a lot of cases where her personal efforts would bring a mountain of personal satisfaction.”¹⁰⁵ Society dictated that women should be wives and mothers, and thus created pressures that precluded them from trying to do anything else to reach their full potential.¹⁰⁶

Peterson and Beebe believed that women were their own worst enemies. Beebe noted that while “there is discrimination in jobs, pay and promotions . . . women sit back and take it. But I say it’s as much our fault as anyone else’s.”¹⁰⁷ Peterson argued that many women chose to remain “passive and submissive”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Peterson, *Memoirs*, 121-22.

¹⁰⁵ Feminine Focus Magazine, n.d., 4, box 2, Folder: Miscellaneous, Beebe Papers.

¹⁰⁶ Pollack, “Women Are Not Born Losers.”

¹⁰⁷ Holliday, “The Lady Said ‘Abortion,’” August 3, 1969.

¹⁰⁸ Pollack, “Women Are Not Born Losers.”

because of their “pure apathy.”¹⁰⁹ They happily assumed the roles that society assigned to them as wives and mothers, and were unwilling to leave the comfort of their own homes. To make matters worse, career women and full time wives and mothers sniped at each other, unable or unwilling to organize around a common cause.¹¹⁰ Peterson stated that “we’ll have to stop the jealousies and ill feelings that seem to turn women against women when a competitive situation arises. We have to be together in this.”¹¹¹ Equal rights were within reach and worth the fight, but men were not interested and many women were not willing to become activists.¹¹²

External pressures created guilt which, when combined with the internal pull of the comforts of home, made it difficult for women to break out of their apathy. Feminist Betty Friedan, who was familiar with this phenomenon, struggled to deal with it. Feminist politician and scholar Harriet Woods, and Friedan, described the latter’s plight as follows:

When Friedan was fired from her writing job in the 1950s because she was pregnant again she says she almost felt relief in seeking security

¹⁰⁹ Peterson, *Memoirs*, 121-22.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*; “All This and Liberation, Too!” *Ecorse Enterprise*, March 17, 1971.

¹¹¹ “Women Leaders Agree: Lack of Unity Hurting Movement,” *Detroit News*, October 23, 1972.

¹¹² “Work for Equal Rights, Republican Women Told,” *Battle Creek Enquirer*, May 16, 1967, Scrapbook, Beebe Papers.

within four walls in suburbia: [Friedan wrote] “I had begun to feel so guilty working, and I really wasn’t getting anywhere in that job. I was more than ready to embrace the feminine mystique [centering one’s life on husband, children, and home.] (brackets in original) . . . There was a comfortable small world you could really do something about, politically: the children’s homework, even the new math, compared to the atomic bomb.”¹¹³

Peterson, Beebe, and Burnett all realized that they had to discredit longstanding, deeply ingrained, and powerful cultural norms in order to convince women to become activists.

Radical feminism, on the other end of the spectrum, was just as threatening to women. Beebe asserted, “I’m not militant, nor belligerent, but let’s be determined.”¹¹⁴ Burnett believed that radical feminism would alienate women. She made it clear at NOW’s initial meeting that it was not a militant group, and that it would engage in traditional tactics, such as lobbying, to change the existing social system. In fact, Beebe promised to endorse the organization only if it was not too militant.¹¹⁵ To convey the organization’s moderation, Burnett instructed attendees to wear dresses to the meeting so that they would appear professional, yet

¹¹³ Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women’s Movement* (New York: Random House, 1976), 16, quoted in Harriett Woods, *Stepping Up to Power: The Political Journey of American Women* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 15.

¹¹⁴ Holliday, “The Lady Said ‘Abortion,’” August 3, 1969.

¹¹⁵ Fogel, “Michigan NOW Organizes,” January 9, 1970.

feminine. Burnett told the women that “if you want to picket or burn your bra, you’d better join a more radical women’s organization, like the Women’s Liberation Movement. We love men and by gaining equal rights within the existing structure, we think we’ll make men happier.”¹¹⁶ Although she later recognized the naivety of these initial assertions, she envisioned NOW as an organization that would promote equal rights feminism, and she was never totally comfortable with the more radical elements of the women’s movement.¹¹⁷

Radical feminism created artificial choices, pitting careers against families and women against men.¹¹⁸ Peterson asserted that extreme feminism “opens the doors to certain male critics who blanketly brand all feminists as lesbians, frustrated old maids, or living examples of Freudian philosophy. Too many feminists seem not so much for women as against men.”¹¹⁹ Burnett made it clear that at the sensible center of feminism, women did not reject men. In fact, she believed that feminism would be good for men and families because fulfilled women were

¹¹⁶ Barbara Hitsky, “Detroit Feminists Map Strategy–NOW,” *Detroit News*, January 9, 1970.

¹¹⁷ Burnett, *True Colors*, 57, 77; “All This and Liberation, Too!” *Ecorse Enterprise*, March 17, 1971.

¹¹⁸ Roscoe Drummond, “Rescuing Women’s Lib,” n.p., October 9, 1971, box 23, folder: Clippings ERAmerica & Other Women’s Rights Involvement (1964, 1969-79), Peterson Papers.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

happier and more satisfied with their lives.¹²⁰ Men would not be trapped in marriages with women who remained with them only for financial benefits. Moreover, working women who contributed to the family income would help alleviate the economic burdens on men.¹²¹ Finally, according to Burnett, women who pursued their own goals would have more independent children.¹²²

Radical feminism also undermined the goal of politicizing women because it scared them and convinced the men who led the Republican Party that feminists could not be loyal and effective partisans. Peterson did not believe that average women could relate to radical feminism or that it would help them. She was careful about the language she used to describe her activism, “sh[ying] away from such terms as ‘woman’s liberation’ because . . . people like Betty Friedan, president of the National Organization of Women (NOW) ‘come on too strong and do more to hurt the movement than help it.’”¹²³ Beebe noted that “our tactics should be

¹²⁰ Speech, Burnett, [Prior to August 26, 1970?]; Hitsky, “Detroit Feminists Map Strategy,” January 9, 1970.

¹²¹ “Motor City Lions Hear Women’s Lib President,” n.p., n.d., box 4, folder: NOW-Printed, Burnett Papers.

¹²² Hitsky, “Detroit Feminists Map Strategy,” January 9, 1970.

¹²³ Ryan, “Elly Peterson Is Retiring,” *Grand Rapids Press*, December 28, 1970.

politics, not protests.”¹²⁴ Extremism, they believed, was abrasive, assertive and alienating to both men and women.

Peterson, Beebe and Burnett occupied this middle ground of the women’s movement as equal rights feminists. They were committed to feminist activism and believed that women became self-aware, conscious of the women around them, and pragmatically optimistic about what they could collectively accomplish through their involvement in the women’s movement, with its emphasis on inclusiveness and equality.¹²⁵ Yet they were not radical. They merely sought the same opportunities as men.¹²⁶ As Burnett noted, “We advocate staying within the present marriage laws and the present government but we want free access to the good jobs and better pay for the bad ones. We want to get off the plantation, out of the cotton fields, and live freely and equally in the world.”¹²⁷ Burnett argued that women could achieve equality “by infiltrating the ‘system’ . . . by becoming active in a viable Party, searching out men sympathetic to the women’s movement, and

¹²⁴ Konesko, “Women Will Win Rights by Vote,” *Saginaw News*, October 21, 1971.

¹²⁵ Remarks by Elly Peterson, Illinois Federation of Republican Women.

¹²⁶ Burnett, Hand Written Notes, box 4, n.d., folder: NOW-Womansurge, Burnett Papers.

¹²⁷ Hitsky, “Detroit Feminists Map Strategy,” January 9, 1970.

passing and enforcing legislation that will equalize society.”¹²⁸ Republican feminists were committed to working within the Republican Party to achieve their feminist goals. They realized that they would be able to find a middle ground where feminists and Republicans could coexist and effectuate change only if they operated from the sensible center of the women’s movement.¹²⁹

In 1970, Peterson, Beebe, and Burnett came together when Peterson and Burnett served on the committee to reelect Beebe as state senator.¹³⁰ These women had all reached transition points in their political and personal lives. Beebe lost her bid for reelection and, at the age of sixty, it appeared that her political career had ended. She asserted, however, that despite her loss she would continue to fight for women’s rights even if she could not do so from elective office. At fifty, Burnett, who developed a feminist consciousness after she became dissatisfied with the life society expected of her as a wife and mother, appeared to be launching into a new phase of activism.

¹²⁸ Speech, Patricia Hill Burnett, 1977, 5, box 2, folder: Speeches, Articles, Interviews Spans 1973-1987 and undated, Burnett Papers.

¹²⁹ Drummond, “Rescuing Women’s Lib,” October 9, 1971.

¹³⁰ Press Release, “Senator N. Lorraine Beebe-12th Senatorial District,” October 15, 1970, box 1, folder: Beebe-State Senate Legislative Reports and Press Releases 1966-1970, Beebe Papers.

At the end of 1970, after leading the unsuccessful campaign of Lenore Romney, which the fifty-six-year-old Peterson called “one of the saddest experiences in my career in politics,”¹³¹ Peterson announced her retirement. Despite her years of hard work and loyalty, her influence within the party remained limited. Party leaders refused to recognize women as equal participants with the same opportunities as men. Moreover, they rejected her argument that the base of the Republican Party would expand, and the party would benefit, by treating women as valued colleagues rather than secondary helpmates. Her retirement, however, was temporary. Like Beebe and Burnett, during the 1970s she devoted her energies to the women’s movement and to empowering women through political participation.

Over the next decade, these three women became involved in a feminist movement that they would try to integrate with their long-standing Republicanism from the sensible center. Their activism would bring them together with each other and other Republican feminists in Michigan to promote the causes that were important to them—political participation for women, the Equal Rights Amendment, and abortion rights. At the same time, their feminism would ultimately put them at odds with an increasingly conservative Republican Party.

¹³¹ Peterson, *Confessions*, 138.

CHAPTER 3 GENDER AND PARTISANSHIP IN POLITICAL COALITIONS: 1970 TO 1980

As women, we have more that unites us on feminist grounds than divides us on partisan ones.

–Audrey Rowe Colom, Republican Women’s Task Force Newsletter

As the 1960s transitioned into the 1970s, Republican women agreed that women needed to become more involved in politics to fight for laws and policies that would establish and protect their equality. But the politicization of women was not merely a Republican concern.¹ In 1971, cognizant that female political participation was a multipartisan problem, Republican and Democratic feminists decided to form a coalition, the National Woman’s Political Caucus (NWPC), to address their concerns. Realizing that their success depended on grassroots participation, they created affiliated state and local political caucuses, including the Michigan Woman’s Political Caucus (MWPC). NOW and other feminist organizations used the NWPC, which was characterized “as the ‘political arm’ of the women’s movement,”² to introduce issues into the political arena for resolution.³

¹ “Statement of Elly Peterson, Assistant Chairman Republican National Committee and Geri Joseph, Vice Chairman Democratic National Committee,” press release, May 4, 1970, box 23, folder: Scrapbook, April 1970 to June 1970, Peterson Papers; Vera Glaser, “Lady Politicians Losing Ground,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 17, 1969.

² Maryann Barakso, *Governing NOW: Grassroots Activism in the National Organization for Women* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 45.

³ Rona F. Feit, “Organizing for Political Power: The National Women’s Political Caucus,” in *Women Organizing: An Anthology*, eds. Bernice Cummings and Victoria Schuck, (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1979), 202-3.

This network of political caucuses brought together feminists from all political parties in an arrangement that Republican feminists believed would be positive for both the women's movement and the Republican Party.

Republican feminists, however, soon recognized the difficulties inherent in promoting their interests through this multitiered organization of multipartisan coalitions. The founding members of the NWPC were motivated by their collective sense of empowerment as women. But its members were so diverse and its goals so radical that they sometimes struggled to come together in common cause. Republican and Democratic feminist women disagreed about feminist goals and strategies. These differences, along with their divergent political constituencies, underlying partisan objectives, and the NWPC's multitiered organization, oftentimes undermined their ability to act with one voice.

To better address their partisan concerns, Republican feminists followed the lead of the feminists within the Democratic Party and formed the Republican Women's Task Force (RWTF), followed by the Michigan Republican Women's Task Force (MRWTF). Through these task forces, Republican feminists attempted "to maintain . . . a feminist presence in the Republican Party and a Republican Presence in the feminist movement."⁴ Partisan task forces were a concession to the

⁴ Position Statement, Michigan Republican Women's Task Force, n.d.

difficulties faced by the multipartisan caucuses when they unsuccessfully attempted to paper over their political differences. They indicated that Republican feminists were not necessarily willing to set aside their partisanship for the women's movement. Partisan coalitions allowed Republican feminists to position themselves at the sensible center of the women's movement, from which they could, at least temporarily, reconcile their Republicanism and their feminism.

On July 10 and 11, 1971, approximately three hundred political women from twenty-seven different states met in Washington D.C. to organize a national coalition intended to increase the number of women who participated in politics. They decided to act because women were largely absent from the 1968 Democratic and Republican national conventions and elective and appointed government offices, despite the fact that they made up at least half of the nation's voting population. The women who assembled in Washington D.C. that weekend agreed that they sought "power, political power,"⁵ by building a broad based organization of women from all backgrounds, political parties, and ages. The group characterized itself as a multipartisan, rather than a bipartisan, organization. Most of the

⁵ NWPC Organizing Information, box 4, folder: NWPC 4, Virginia R. Allan Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Allan Papers); "Women Fight for Political Power in '72" *Detroit News*, November 8, 1971; Drummond, "Rescuing Women's Lib," October 9, 1971.

attendees at this organizational meeting identified themselves as Democrats or politically unaffiliated. Republicans made up only about 6 percent of the participants.⁶

At this initial meeting of the NWPC, the participants created a Statement of Purpose that delineated its mission, identified its intended audience, and listed the issues of critical importance to women. NWPC organizers adopted a broad, and what some have called radical,⁷ mission to fight “sexism, racism, institutional violence and poverty.”⁸ The organization sought to empower all women, including those who were traditionally ignored because they were on welfare, and “every minority woman who has endured the stigma of being twice-different from the white male ruling class.”⁹ Based on their shared interests, women hoped that they could become a powerful voting constituency that would hold political parties and elected and appointed government officials accountable. Specifically, they sought

⁶ “Report of the Organizing Conference,” July 10 and 11, 1971, box 4, folder: NWPC 4, Allan Papers; Eileen Foley, “Caucus Convenes Saturday,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 4, 1971.

⁷ Susan Smith Richardson (chair), “The Radical Roots of the National Women’s Political Caucus,” *WLM Conference Video*, August 12, 2014, <http://www.bu.edu/wgs/2014/08/12/the-radical-roots-of-the-national-womens-political-caucus/>.

⁸ Statement of Purpose, National Women’s Political Caucus, July 11, 1971, 2, box 3, folder: NWPC 4, Allan Papers.

⁹ Ibid.

political parity by increasing the number of women in elective and appointed national, state, and local political offices. They also wanted to place women in positions of authority in political parties and throughout the political process, and to educate them about how to lobby on behalf of important issues, laws, and regulations.¹⁰ They agreed that they would encourage female candidates, but support any candidate, regardless of gender, who advocated on behalf of “women’s issues.”¹¹

The NWPC identified a broad range of domestic and foreign policy issues that were important to women. Participants sought to ratify the ERA and to guarantee reproductive rights for all women. They believed that guaranteed income and universal health care programs would alleviate poverty. To address discrimination in the workplace and in education, they advocated free child care programs, maternity leave and changes in the tax and social security laws. The women who joined the NWPC also wanted the United States to protect the environment, end war, stop “the use of physical violence as a traditional ‘masculine’ way of resolving conflict,” and respect the rights of other sovereign countries.¹²

¹⁰ NWPC Organizing Information, box 4, folder: NWPC 4, Allan Papers.

¹¹ Statement of Purpose, NWPC, 3.

¹² Ibid., 3-6.

Conference attendees elected twenty-two women to the Policy Council, the governing body of the NWPC. Their interests reflected the broadly humanistic goals of the organization. Policy Council members included union leaders, such as United Auto Workers' officials Mildred Jeffrey and Olga Madar; civil rights and welfare activists, like Fannie Lou Hamer, Myrlie Evers (widow of civil rights activist Medgar Evers), Beulah Sanders, and Shirley Chisholm; liberation feminists, including Gloria Steinem and Bella Abzug; and at least one peace activist, Mary Clarke.¹³ The Policy Council also included political office holders and activists, including Midge Miller, a Democratic legislator from Wisconsin, and Joan Cashin, a member of the Alabama Democratic Party; and Betty Friedan, Virginia Allan, and Shana Alexander, who were all women's rights activists. Seven members identified as Democrats and three claimed to be Republicans. The remainder did not acknowledge any partisan affiliation.¹⁴ Between them, they represented all of the diverse constituencies whose interests were reflected in the Statement of Purpose.

¹³ "Elected Members of the Policy Council," Report of the Organizing Conference, July 10 and 11, 1971, box 4, folder: NWPC 4, Allan Papers.

¹⁴ "Women's Political Caucus'-What It Is, What It Wants," *U.S. News & World Report*, August 16, 1971.

The NWPC realized that it could only achieve its goals through grassroots political activism, so it immediately called for the creation of state caucuses, and local caucuses based on congressional districts. The organization defined a state caucus as “a coalition of women from various backgrounds, economic levels and political affiliations who have joined together for political action. These women from a variety of political parties—and also no political party—unite, crossing party lines, in the interest of all women.”¹⁵ In order to pursue their interests in the ways that best met their specific needs, the national organization provided these state and local caucuses with tremendous organizational and operational latitude. The only real restriction placed on them was that their objectives and strategies had to be broadly consistent with and ultimately serve the general purposes of the national organization.¹⁶ Although not binding, the NWPC recommended that its members avoid candidate endorsements and issues, such as abortion, that might prove divisive.¹⁷ National leaders also stressed the importance of compromise, and

¹⁵ “What is a Women’s Caucus?”, National Women’s Political Caucus, n.d., box 7, folder: Topical Files 1969-1982 National Women’s Political Caucus ca. 1974-1975, Helen Milliken Papers.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ State Caucus Organizing Guidelines, March 1972, box 9, folder 13: NWPC, delegate selection organizing guidelines, 1972, Mildred Jeffrey Papers, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University (hereafter cited as Jeffrey Papers); “What is a Women’s Caucus?”, National Women’s Political Caucus.

they advised state and local leaders to eschew “purists,” who were “women who seem[ed] to be unwilling to compromise on issues and methods.”¹⁸ Women had to learn how to use the political system for their benefit and purists undermined these efforts.¹⁹

Approximately two hundred and fifty people attended the organizational meeting of the MWPC on November 6, 1971 in East Lansing, Michigan. Organizers, disappointed about what they considered a low turnout, nevertheless celebrated the diversity of attendees. While the women came from different socioeconomic classes, races, age groups, and political parties, they emphasized their shared concerns as women and the theme of female solidarity predominated. Jeffrey and Peterson served as the chairperson and secretary of the new MWPC, respectively. Beebe, who chaired the meeting, announced that local organizations would be formed on the congressional district level.²⁰ Thus, leaders emphasized the importance of grassroots participation. They urged attendees to vote as women,

¹⁸ State Caucus Organizing Guidelines, March 1972, 7.

¹⁹ State Caucus Organizing Guidelines, March 1972, 7; “What is a Women’s Caucus?”, National Women’s Political Caucus.

²⁰ Lucille DeView, “Women Fight for Political Power in ‘72,” *Detroit News*, November 8, 1971; Eileen Foley, “Mrs. Milliken Tells Caucus How to Get Women Appointed,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 8, 1971.

regardless of party affiliation, because partisanship undermined the cohesiveness women needed to create a politically powerful voting bloc. Despite the enthusiasm with which they left this first meeting, however, it took almost two years of organizing for the MWPC to come together for its first state convention in May 1973.²¹

The exhilaration that the national leaders experienced when they met in Washington D.C. soon gave way to the pragmatics of trying to accomplish their objectives. One organizer, Rona Feit, noted that “the Caucus quickly became heir to the major problem of all coalitions, how to satisfy diverse interests without compromising conviction, coherence and force.”²² NWPC guidelines established loose connections between the national, state and local organizations, mandated membership diversity, and defined feminist issues and strategies in ways that were both vague and inclusive. However, it became apparent that these attributes made it difficult to exert any discipline or create any coherence among either the

²¹ Members issued a number of resolutions at this convention. For example, they demanded that the State Department of Education enforce federal law, especially Title IX, to fight discrimination in Michigan schools. They sought to eliminate discrimination in education through oversight by a state official, specific training and affirmative action in hiring. They also required that all books, curriculum, sports, and classes be gender neutral. “Women’s Caucus, May 5 Convention Resolutions,” box 11, folder 25: National Women’s Political Caucus, Michigan Women’s Political Caucus, 1972-1973, Olga Madar Papers, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University (hereafter cited as Madar Papers).

²² Feit, “Organizing for Political Power,” 191.

members or their organizations. Since members had the discretion to define their objectives, identify their priorities, and resolve the problems created by these intentional ambiguities, the different organizations within the political caucus network adopted strategies that sometimes worked at cross-purposes. Moreover, the diversity of individual members made it difficult for them to work together.

As intended, the decentralized nature of the caucus structure allowed for maximum flexibility. Local organizations were more responsive and accountable to their constituents because they were able to identify the concerns that were of particular importance to them. But the focus on local issues meant that individual organizations established different priorities and tactics, which made it difficult to coordinate their efforts, particularly on state-wide issues and candidates. A 1972 report by the Planning Committee of the MWPC proved this point. It described the different priorities and strategies of Michigan's local organizations. Ann Arbor's caucus focused on abortion reform. Caucus members in Grand Rapids emphasized grassroots organization and identified women to run for precinct delegates. Detroit's caucus dealt with diversity issues, making sure that its leadership included both white and minority members. It struggled to attract Republicans to the caucus. A downriver group could not attract politically active women because it was considered a women's "lib" organization. Members of local political caucuses

discouraged the state organization from developing a position statement on women's issues because "if they tried to come up with an issue statement on some of the current topics of the day, the organization would be split and many members would be lost."²³ The different groups disagreed on strategies as well as priorities and issues. The MWPC's leadership criticized the tactics adopted by the Lansing area organization because it focused on big issues and was not willing to address tangible grassroots problems, such as elections and candidates.²⁴ How could such different organizations identify and work towards common goals?

Disputes also developed between the national, state and local organizations as they worked at cross-purposes. For example, the NWPC became involved in a local issue that undermined a collaborative effort between the MWPC and NOW. In June 1973, the MWPC and NOW tried to change the negative characterizations of women by local television and radio stations. They wrote letters to local media leaders and the Federal Communications Commission to object to the stations'

²³ Michigan Women's Political Caucus Planning Committee Meeting, minutes, April 17, 1972, box 2, folder 12: SUBJECT FILES Memoranda 1971-1974, n.d., accession no. MS 80-72, Carol MacIntosh Papers, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan (hereafter cited as MacIntosh Papers).

²⁴ MacIntosh to Berry, December 6, 1971, box 2, folder 9: Subject Files Correspondence 1971-1974, n.d., accession no. MS 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

“programming and hiring practices concerning women.”²⁵ The campaign was timed to influence the pending federal relicensing of these television stations.²⁶

However, two months later, Lavon Bliesener, a Michigan Republican who was a member of the NWPC Board, sent a letter to the manager of Detroit’s WJBK, Channel 2, on NWPC letterhead. She responded to the questions raised about the station’s application to renew its broadcasting license by endorsing and supporting the work of the channel’s chief political reporter. In seeming contradiction to the MWPC, she wrote that “he has an appreciation for the causes women and minorities are involved in and has been responsive in bringing these vital topics to the attention of the general public via the media.”²⁷ The MWPC, embarrassed by the inconsistent message of the NWPC, contacted NOW to make it clear that the MWPC disagreed with and did not endorse Bliesener’s letter.²⁸ Thus, the MWPC prioritized its temporary alliance with NOW over its affiliation with the NWPC.

²⁵ “Resolution Regarding Role Models in the Media, 6/23/73,” box 2, folder 14: Subject Files Reports 1973-1974, n.d., accession no. MS 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Bliesener to Carino, September 13, 1973, box 3, folder 5: Subject Files N.W.P.C. 1973-1974, n.d., accession no. MS 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

²⁸ Michigan Women’s Political Caucus-Policy Council Meeting, November 15, 1973, box 2, folder 13: Subject Files Minutes and Agendas, 1972-1974, n.d., accession MS 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

Likewise, abortion emerged as a divisive issue within the political caucus network, despite instructions from the national organization to avoid it. In 1974, a disagreement occurred between the national and state political caucuses over their inconsistent positions on a proposed Michigan abortion law. The NWPC recommended that Senate Bill 345 be moved out of legislative committee for full consideration by the state Senate. The proposed legislation, which legalized abortion in the first and second trimesters, but required that the procedure be performed in a hospital by doctors in the second trimester, clarified Michigan's abortion laws.²⁹

Contrary to the NWPC, the MWPC did not support Senate Bill 345 because of changes sought by the Democrats, who were trying to amend it to "protect the 'unborn child in the womb of its mother,'"³⁰ and to criminalize violations of the statute. These modifications would have effectively recharacterized certain abortions as crimes and undermined the efforts of the MWPC to create a new legislative framework for abortion in Michigan. The MWPC supported Senate Bill

²⁹ "State Abortion Law Needed," *Michigan Daily*, October 11, 1973; Hammond to McMichael, January 16, 1974, box 1, folder 1: Subject Files Abortion 1973-1974, n.d., accession no. MS 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

³⁰ Hammond to McMichael, January 16, 1974.

888, which prioritized the health of pregnant women by characterizing “abortion [as] a medical procedure, the provision of which should be subject to the same standards that govern all such care.”³¹ The MWPC was angry about the NWPC’s interference in the state’s legislative proceedings, especially because the NWPC’s recommendation was based on inaccurate and incomplete information about the intricacies and nuances of Michigan state politics and a misunderstanding of the statutory objectives of the MWPC.³² The NWPC ultimately retreated from its endorsement of Senate Bill 345.³³

The organizers of these political caucuses wanted women to become political activists because political participation facilitated change. Women could advance feminist interests by working through their respective political parties to promote the interests that they, as women, presumably shared. It was difficult, however, for these activists to prioritize their feminism over their partisan loyalties because partisanship was such an important part of their identities. For example, the

³¹ “W74, Win with Women, A Project of the National Women’s Political Caucus,” Newsletter I, January-February, 1974, vol. III, no. I, box 1, folder: NWPC Convention in Kansas 1974, Jean King Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as King Papers).

³² Hammond to McMichael, January 16, 1974.

³³ “W74, Win with Women,” January-February, 1974.

founding members of the MWPC included Democrats Madar and Jeffrey, and Republican Peterson. Madar and Jeffrey were both leaders of and employed by the United Auto Workers, which was essentially an arm of the state Democratic Party in Michigan. Similarly, Peterson worked for many years as a paid employee of the Republican Party. It could not have been easy for any of these women to deemphasize their partisanship when it was so inextricably tied to their careers. In another context, Peterson made it clear that “I am a partisan Republican. I do not put my sex above my party.”³⁴ These were the challenges that the political caucuses faced when they asked women to prioritize their gender over their partisanship.

Founders structured the caucuses to provide women with spaces where they could move beyond their political differences and interact with their colleagues as women who faced common gender-based problems. On a very personal level, this happened. Peterson, for example, wrote to her fellow Michigan Republican feminists about national Democratic leaders Abzug and Liz Carpenter. She noted “Bella Abzug is funny as a crutch but so is Liz Carpenter so I hope sometime you two get to see them in action. I didn’t find any died in the wool—hope to die Democrats—they are pretty much disgusted with the picture of their leadership and

³⁴ Eleanor Morehead, “GOP Official Wants Top Jobs for Women,” *Columbus Citizens Journal*, August 27, 1970, box 23, Scrapbook, July 1970-Dec 1970, Peterson Papers.

I think we can help adding to that by attending—and keeping on top of everything.”³⁵ Peterson later became good friends with Carpenter when they put aside their partisan differences to jointly lead ERAmerica, an organization created to persuade hold-out states to ratify the ERA. Nevertheless, her comments indicated that she could not totally relinquish her partisanship. Instead, she hoped to exacerbate her Democratic colleagues’ problems with Democratic Party leadership by actively participating in the NWPC.

Because partisanship was so important to these activists, they constantly looked for ways to protect their partisan interests within the multipartisanship of the political caucuses. From its inception, Democrats outnumbered Republicans in the NWPC.³⁶ Thus, Peterson faced an uphill battle as she tried to make sure that caucus leadership would not favor the Democrats over the Republicans. She warned attendees at the second Policy Council meeting in September 1971 that many state activists viewed the NWPC as a Democratic organization. To avoid the taint of partisanship, she asked that Council membership be structured to include

³⁵ Peterson to Armstrong, memorandum, October 25, 1971, attached note to Ranny-LaVon on Monday, box 20, folder: Women’s Political Caucus, Peterson Papers.

³⁶ Kira Sanbonmatsu, *Democrats/Republicans and the Politics of Women’s Place* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 36.

similar numbers of Democrats and Republicans. A Council subcommittee recommended that Peterson, Beebe, and moderate Republican Bobbie Kilberg be appointed to the Council immediately, and that the Republican Party be given the opportunity to nominate four additional women at a later date. The Council made it clear that one of its functions was to select new members. Therefore, it refused to assign this responsibility to special interest groups, such as the Republican Party. It appointed the three Republican women nominated at the meeting, but left four openings (not necessarily Republican) to be filled at a later date. However, at the same time that they declined to retain specific openings on the Policy Council for Republicans, Council leaders appointed one Chicana woman and left a position open for a second.³⁷ Their unwillingness to do the same for the Republicans suggests that they intended to populate their organization with particular types of people.

In a subsequent report to Anne Armstrong, cochairperson of the RNC, and Gladys O'Donnell, president of the NFRW, Peterson indicated that the organization was "disorganized," and "not so much Democratic per se as heading towards their

³⁷ National Policy Council Meeting, minutes, September 10 and 11, 1971, 3, 6, box 4, folder: NWPC 3, Allan Papers.

own goals whether it be day care centers or helping Chicanos.”³⁸ Peterson wanted Republican women to become involved in the organization because it was gaining legitimacy through the participation of credible Democratic politicians like Martha Griffiths, who sponsored the ERA in the United States Congress in 1971. Without Republican participants, Democrats would fill the void and the Republican Party would lose an opportunity to appeal to nontraditional women voters.³⁹ Peterson wanted to prevent the NWPC from giving the Democrats a political edge over the Republicans with women.

In October 1971, when Policy Council members gathered in Detroit for their third meeting, Peterson was finally convinced that Republicans, Democrats, and independents were evenly represented. However, she saw intra-party conflicts between both the Republicans and Democrats on the Policy Council. She told Armstrong that “the most unified group you might say were the New York Jewish crusaders except even here Bella Abzug and Betty Friedan do not see eye to eye.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Elly to Anne and Gladys, memorandum, 1, September 17, 1971, box 20, folder: Women’s Political Caucus 1971, Peterson Papers.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Peterson to Armstrong, October 25, 1971, box 20, folder: Women’s Political Caucus, 1971, Peterson Papers.

Peterson's efforts insured that the Policy Council would protect the interests of the Republican Party, or at least not provide an advantage to the Democratic Party.

Peterson and Madar also struggled to make sure the MWPC was multipartisan. Madar's attempt to convene the planning meeting in Michigan on an inconvenient date caused Republican women to worry that "this direct action by Olga would end the chance of the Women's Caucus in Michigan. It would turn into a Democratic Caucus."⁴¹ Before the meeting, the Planning Committee concluded that the "prime objective [of the new organization] is to involve women in politics and help women to organize politically where their interests lies [sic]."⁴² Organizers recognized, but downplayed, partisanship. By the time of the founding meeting of the MWPC on November 6, 1971, Peterson was satisfied that both parties would be adequately represented.

The partisan loyalties of NWPC and MWPC members became relevant during every election when they had to cast votes for candidates who were affiliated with a political party. In an effort to persuade women to place their interests as women

⁴¹ Allan to Peterson, memorandum, Sept. 7, 1971, box 20, folder: Women's Political Caucus 1971, Peterson Papers.

⁴² Agenda Committee Meeting, minutes, September 14, 1971, box 20, folder: Women's Political Caucus 1971, Peterson Papers.

above their partisanship, participants at the NWPC's organizational meeting agreed to try to reform their political parties, but also to "confront our own party structures, and, when necessary, cross party lines or work outside formal political parties in support of such women candidates [who fight for women and minorities]." ⁴³ At the state organizational meeting, Madar reiterated the Statement of Purpose when she announced that "we have to compromise on some of our individual beliefs, but we won't compromise our dedication to peace, ending racism, sexism and poverty, and to greater democratization of our society." ⁴⁴

However, as Republican Carol MacIntosh, Michigan's representative on the National Steering Committee of the NWPC, recognized, not all women could relinquish their partisanship on specific issues or in the voting booth. She noted that "there are some women involved who are very partisan, and are loyal Republicans or Democrats. They are, as a rule, older, and they can not [sic] vote for anyone of the opposite party, even if the candidate is a woman that they agree with in everything except her party identity." ⁴⁵ One activist succinctly summed up

⁴³ "Statement of Purpose," NWPC, 2.

⁴⁴ "Ms. Milliken Attacks Sexism," *Michigan State News*, November 9, 1971, box 9, folder 17: MWPC, 1972, Jeffrey Papers.

⁴⁵ MacIntosh to Carol Berry, December 6, 1971, box 2, folder 9: Subject Files Correspondence 1971-1974, n.d., accession no. 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

the difficulties involved when a caucus from Michigan's upper peninsula tried to engage in local activism. She stated that "no more has been done on nonpartisan activities—most of us are too partisan!"⁴⁶ MacIntosh believed that each woman had to personally decide who and what she could support within the organization. When gender and partisanship became potentially inconsistent, each woman would have to individually identify, prioritize and reconcile her interests. MacIntosh worried that it would be difficult to retain members if the organization failed to recognize and address their personal concerns.⁴⁷ Women questioned whether they should support all women who were running for office, or only those who supported the objectives of the MWPC.⁴⁸ The MWPC ultimately decided that it would not support all female candidates indiscriminately, but only those who endorsed the goals of the MWPC.⁴⁹ However, this did little to address the concerns of women who did not want to vote across party lines.

⁴⁶ Maddow to MacIntosh, April 11, n.d., box 2, folder 9: Subject Files Correspondence 1971-1974, n.d., accession no. MS 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

⁴⁷ MacIntosh to Berry, December 6, 1971.

⁴⁸ Ann Shafer to Madar, July 5, 1972, box 11, folder: 25: National Women's Political Caucus, Michigan Women's Political Caucus, 1971-1973, Madar Papers.

⁴⁹ Michigan Women's Political Caucus Campaign Strategy for 1974 Elections, n.d., box 2, folder 12: Subject Files Memoranda 1971-1974, n.d., accession no. 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

Despite their avowed multipartisanship, the leaders of the MWPC never really forgot their political affiliations and continuously worked to populate the organization with their own constituents. From the start, Madar encouraged union members to join the MWPC and its local affiliates.⁵⁰ Within two years, however, Madar concluded that MWPC members did not adequately reflect the interests of working class women. In a letter to Jeffrey, she called the MWPC “a paper organization with little constituency in the districts. At the Convention [the state convention of the MWPC], the participation will be from middle income white professional females, most of whom have not been involved at the district level. I don’t know how we can get enough women to vote out the Republican group and the Jean King [an attorney who was a leader in the Democratic Women’s Caucus] types.”⁵¹ She specifically stated that she did not share these concerns with MacIntosh, who was a Republican.⁵²

⁵⁰ Olga to UAW participants in Washington Conference of NWPC, interoffice communication, box 11, folder 24: National Women’s Political Caucus, Michigan Women’s Political Caucus, 1971, Madar Papers.

⁵¹ Madar to Jeffrey, April 12, 1973, box 11, folder 25: National Women’s Political Caucus Michigan Women’s Political Caucus 1972-1973, Madar Papers.

⁵² Ibid.

MacIntosh, however, had similar concerns. On January 18, 1973, she gave a speech to the Livingston County Republican Women's Club in which she quoted Lee Kefauver, who lamented the lack of Republican women activists.

The Republican Party began as a civil rights group. Why is it taken for granted that because I am working for a cause that I must be a Democrat? I feel very strange at meetings when a speaker says, "I assume that everyone here is a Democrat," and I and a few other members raise our hands with a gulp to say, "No, we are Republicans!" The looks of astonishment annoy me considerably: But what has happened in the public mind to change this view of our party?⁵³

Leaders of the political caucuses never lost sight of political affiliations and tried to manipulate the membership of their organizations to protect their political interests.

At times, the caucuses worked together on projects where their multipartisanship gave them credibility and legitimacy. For example, the Michigan coalition effectively developed bipartisan legislative analyses that would have lacked credibility if authored or issued by either party separately.⁵⁴ In 1972 and 1973, the MWPC issued detailed reports on the voting records of Michigan

⁵³ Speech to Livingston County Republican Women's Club, Carol MacIntosh, January 18, 1973, box 2, folder 10: SUBJECT FILES MWPC-MacIntosh, Carol, Speeches 1972-1974, n.d., accession no. MS 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

⁵⁴ Jeffrey to Madar, September 5, 1972, box 9, folder 18: MWPC Mich. Women's Political Caucus 1971-73, Jeffrey Papers.

representatives and senators, respectively, on women's issues. Beebe emphasized that this type of information was crucial to women when they made voting decisions because it allowed them to intelligently participate in the campaign process and to hold their representatives accountable for their decisions.⁵⁵ Yet even these types of allegedly nonpartisan projects gave rise to partisan responses. Based on its study, the MWPC concluded that Republicans in both the House and Senate had a better voting record than the Democrats. Republican leaders in Michigan immediately used the results for partisan purposes, encouraging people to vote for Republican candidates because they were more responsive to the interests of women.⁵⁶

As members of an organization created to promote the political priorities of women, caucus participants should have been able to find common ground as feminists. Republican Audrey Rowe Colom, chairwoman of the NWPC from 1975 to 1977, wrote that "as women, we have more that unites us on feminist grounds than

⁵⁵ Senate's Record Released on Women's Issues, press release, April 2, 1973, box 9, folder 17: MWPC, 1972, Jeffrey Papers; "The Vote on Women's Issues," *Detroit Free Press*, July 20, 1972.

⁵⁶ Republican State Central Committee, news release, July 20, 1972, box 2, folder 1: Subject Files Legislation Concerning Women, 1971-1973, accession no. MS 80-72, n.d., MacIntosh Papers.

divides us on partisan ones.”⁵⁷ However, Colom’s optimism was misplaced. Members of the political caucuses oftentimes struggled to find common ground, even as feminists.

One reason for this was because their feminism was linked to their partisanship. While at least one scholar concluded that the NWPC brought together equal rights and liberation feminists,⁵⁸ the organizational framework of the NWPC clearly reflected the latter. With its emphasis on rectifying social ills ranging from racial inequality to poverty to war, its agenda far exceeded the legalistic rhetoric of rights-based political and social equality that was the core of the equal rights feminist agenda.⁵⁹ In fact, at its first national organizational meeting, radical feminists established and attendees endorsed a special interest caucus and adopted a resolution that “women’s liberation is at least as important as women’s election.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Republican Women’s Task Force Newsletter, NWPC [June to September, 1977?], box 7, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982, National Women’s Political Caucus: Republican Women’s Task Force, ca. 1974-1980, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁵⁸ Lisa Young, *Feminism and Party Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 32-33.

⁵⁹ Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 21-24.

⁶⁰ “Radical Caucus Report,” Report of the Organizing Conference, National Women’s Political Caucus, July 10-11, 1971, box 4, folder: NWPC 4, Allan Papers.

Rymph argued that the Democratic and Republican women sought to incorporate feminist ideology into their respective parties for different reasons. Democrats believed that feminism was integral to their party's larger, social justice and empowerment agenda. Republican women, on the other hand, engaged in feminist outreach to expand their base of support. Republicans feared that they were playing a zero-sum game in which the women that they failed to attract or welcome to their party would become Democrats.⁶¹ In fact, at its inception Peterson was motivated to participate in the NWPC for this very reason.⁶² In reality, however, women from the two parties embraced a different type of feminism, which ultimately undermined their ability to act with one voice. Because the NWPC adopted the more expansive (and some would say radical) type of feminism promoted by Democrats, Republican women, in particular, found it especially difficult to prioritize their gender over their partisanship within the coalition.

In fact, many Republican feminists found the liberation feminism espoused by their Democratic cohorts in the NWPC too radical for party leadership and off-

⁶¹ Rymph, *Republican Women*, 202.

⁶² Elly to Anne and Gladys, memorandum, 1, September 17, 1971.

putting to those women they wanted to attract to Republican Party politics.⁶³

Republican Mary Coleman, a Michigan Supreme Court justice from 1973 to 1982, was disturbed by the radicalism of many of the women at the first NWPC conference in 1973, particularly those represented by “the Radical Women’s Caucus, the Lesbian Caucus, etc. etc.”⁶⁴ The attacks on Republicans, particularly President Nixon, caused her to question the motives of the organization and its leaders.

When Helen Bentley read a very fine message of greeting from President Nixon, it was met with some boo’s and hisses and very discourteous behavior. I begin to think it was only a platform for the women’s militant demonstrators, especially after Bella Abzug very heatedly attacked the President for just about everything imaginable. Frankly, I felt that the Republicans were mere window dressing. There were only about 100 out of the 1500 women present. It is possible, however, the Republicans may be more active. . . . Only time will tell what effectiveness the Republican women can have in directing the attention of the Caucus to women rather than to partisan politics.⁶⁵

⁶³ Richard Ryan, “Elly Peterson is Retiring, but Don’t Bet on It,” *Grand Rapids Press*, December 28, 1970, box 23, folder: Clippings 1970 Retirement from Republican National Committee, Peterson Papers; “Women Will Win Rights by Vote, Says Mrs. Beebe,” *Saginaw News*, October 21, 1971, box 2, folder: Beebe ERA Michigan 1972-1973, Beebe Papers.

⁶⁴ Coleman to Peterson, February 27, 1973, box 4, folder: Mary S. Coleman Correspondence Personal 1973, Mary S. Coleman Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Even those women who embraced liberation feminism did not necessarily agree on the appropriate strategy to politicize women. Friedan wanted to bring all women, regardless of their partisanship or views on the women's movement, into the political process because she believed that together they would form a powerful and influential constituency that could achieve political equality. Abzug and Steinem believed that Friedan's strategy was not radical enough. Incorporating women into the existing political system would only perpetuate the very power structure that Abzug and Steinem hoped to eliminate. Instead, they wanted to build a larger constituency of all of the groups, including minorities and the poor, who were systemically excluded from the current system dominated by rich, white men. Collectively this new coalition would have the legitimacy and the power to destroy the current system.⁶⁶ One founder later observed that the organizers "left important concepts ambiguous but succeeded in setting a direction without creating a line item orthodoxy."⁶⁷ As a compromise between Friedan's goal to organize women for political power and Abzug and Steinem's strategy to incorporate women into a larger constituency focused on progressive social

⁶⁶ Young, *Feminism*, 33-35.

⁶⁷ Feit, "Organizing for Political Power," 192.

change,⁶⁸ this ambiguity, they hoped, would attract the largest number of women to the organization.

Another reason why it was so difficult for political caucus members to agree on what they meant by women's issues was because the organization tried to appeal to the full range of its members' interests. The MWPC defined women's issues broadly to encompass all "laws that restrict or deny opportunities for women to make decisions about their own lives."⁶⁹ This more expansive definition included legislation on issues such as abortion and maternal medical care, birth control for minors, discrimination in education and school sports, child care facilities for working women and the ERA.⁷⁰ As the NWPC guidelines suggested, however, some of these issues were divisive and made consensus unlikely. Differences among members became apparent at the MWPC convention. A Catholic woman who belonged to the John Birch Society believed that sex education was the responsibility of the family and the church, not the schools. She attended the meeting alongside a woman who argued that a parental permission requirement

⁶⁸ Young, *Feminism*, 33-36.

⁶⁹ Nancy Hammond and Mary Hellman, "Women's Issues in the Legislature," Michigan Legislative Report 1971-72, Michigan Women's Political Caucus, 1, box 1, folder: MWPC Women's Caucus of the MI Dem Party, King Papers.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-14.

for sex education in the schools undermined efforts to provide this information to students. Similarly, while one woman wanted to have the father of her children in the delivery room, another worried that a rule providing such access could be extrapolated to require a biological father's permission for an abortion.⁷¹ While caucus members agreed that they wanted to politicize women, they did not necessarily agree on how to do so or what positions they should promote once they were politicized.

In light of the competing and sometimes conflicting interests of the members of the political caucuses, it is not surprising that they initially formed women's organizations that were affiliated with their own parties, rather than the NWPC and the MWPC. The Michigan Democratic Women's Caucus was established in 1970, but Republican women did not create their own Republican Women's Caucus until 1975.⁷² Peterson attributed the delay to a longstanding, but familiar, problem. The party was not receptive to female political participation. It did not select inspiring candidates or causes that appealed to women and did not make volunteers feel like

⁷¹ "It's Anybody's Opinion at Women's Caucus," *Detroit News*, May 7, 1973.

⁷² "What is the Michigan Democratic Women's Caucus?" brochure, box 97, folder 4: M. Jeffrey Pt. 2, Michigan Democratic Women's Caucus, various dates, Jeffrey Papers; "Woman Power: Female Politicos to Map Campaign Strategy Here," n.p., October 19, 1971, box 11, folder 24: National Women's Political Caucus, Michigan Women's Political Caucus 1971, Madar Papers.

they were a part of a team. Women were apathetic and not interested in participating in party politics. In a 1973 speech that is believed to have been given by Peterson, she observed that the average woman “views the National Women’s Political Caucus with disdain. . . . She is happy in her socio-economic superiority and she is not especially interested in change.”⁷³ In a somewhat pessimistic assertion, she added that “the possibilities of a dramatic advance in the ‘70’s are just not there—unless they overcome their lack of interest, indicate a willingness to participate beyond the brief encounter—and have a fighting desire to go beyond their present role.”⁷⁴ She concluded “that the appointment of women is good personally for them—and for the general story—but doesn’t particularly attract other women. This is probably due to the feeling now it is every man for himself.”⁷⁵

Another Republican feminist shared Peterson’s concerns that the Michigan Republican Party did not welcome women. Kefauver, a transplanted east coast, liberal Republican, always seemed a little uncomfortable trying to reconcile her feminism with Michigan Republicanism. While she never held elective office, she

⁷³ Speech, [Elly Peterson?], [1973?], 14-15, box 16, folder: Women, Peterson Papers.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁵ Notes, [Elly Peterson?], n.d., box 16, folder: Women, Peterson Papers.

believed that the Michigan Republican Party was not liberal enough. She set out to convince its leaders to refashion it after the more “progressive” Massachusetts state party that focused on “human rights and issues that affect people in their daily lives.”⁷⁶ She stated, “I was raised on that old Puritan ethic that your life isn’t worth living unless you try and make the world a little better.”⁷⁷ Highly critical of the Michigan Republican Party, she said “its the pits! . . . Here I see a party that wishes (for the most part) to return to the 1890’s. There is little realization of where the American people are today, what they want, and how a political party can meet that need.”⁷⁸ She did not believe that it had the grassroots organization needed to support political candidates. Romney’s much touted strategy of encouraging voters to split their ticket to get Republicans elected to the highest state offices resulted in a lack of organization at the local levels and a total disregard for local positions. Thus, the party ignored average voters and special interest groups, such as women, and their concerns. Because the party was not receptive to women, Kefauver

⁷⁶ Delegate Questionnaire, Bob Edwards Campaign Committee, February 1, 1977, box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Organizations, Republican State Committee, State Conventions 1974-1977, Kefauver Papers.

⁷⁷ Holtz, “Lansing Lobbyists Strike from Dearborn,” September 6, 1979.

⁷⁸ Delegate Questionnaire, Bob Edwards Campaign Committee, February 1, 1977.

contended, they increasingly turned to the Democratic Party, which they believed would better serve their interests.⁷⁹

Perhaps it was difficult to convince feminists to create a women's caucus in the Michigan Republican Party because it did not endorse feminist goals. In fact, the political parties in Michigan had very different views of feminism. The Democratic Women's Caucus of Michigan embraced feminism and the broader humanistic goals of liberation feminists, such as livable wages, access to medical care, a pollution-free environment, and legislative limits on the president to declare war. At the same time, it realized that it needed to look out for women through "the enactment of legislation essential to women's needs and the election and appointment of feminists [emphasis added] to policy making positions both within the Democratic Party and at all levels of government. A feminist is here defined as any person who pursues the goal of full equality for women."⁸⁰ Thus, Democrats were not afraid to use the word "feminism," which encompassed not only equality for women, but also an end to racism, limitations on war and, in general, "a more

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Democratic Women's Caucus of Michigan, issue statement, February 21, 1974, box 5, folder: Republican Party, Michigan Women's Republican Caucus 1973-1979, Burnett Papers.

humanistic society.”⁸¹ Apparently, Democratic feminists were not concerned that feminist extremism would undermine their efforts to bring more women into the political process.

Some of the founders of the Michigan Republican Women’s Caucus (MRWC), including Burnett and Kefauver, believed that the organization should be “committed to encourage women to become active feminist Republicans.”⁸² Ultimately, the organization’s statement of purpose did not emphasize feminism because it was too controversial. Instead, the MRWC was structured to focus on legislation that supported all women and to “unite Republican women with a variety of views and talents,” including those who were not feminists.⁸³ The party worried that any connection with feminism might be deemed too radical and discourage women from becoming involved in Republican Party politics.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “This is an Announcement. . . .”, box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Organizations, Women’s Republican Caucus, Kefauver Papers; Handwritten Notes starting “1. What do we want to a [sic] Organize a “Republican Women’s Caucus,” n.d., Patricia Hill Burnett, box 5, folder: Republican Party, Michigan Women’s Republican Caucus 1973-1979, Burnett Papers.

⁸³ Michigan Women’s Republican Caucus, n.d., box 5, folder: Republican Party, Michigan Women’s Republican Caucus 1973-1979, Burnett Papers. While there was a motion at a meeting of the Women’s Republican Caucus on April 19, 1975 to amend this objective in a way that did not change the quoted language, the motion was defeated, and it does not appear that the attendees ever went back to approve the objective as written. Women’s Republican Caucus, minutes, April 19, 1975, box 5, folder: Republican Party, Michigan Women’s Republican Caucus 1973-1979, Burnett Papers.

The NWPC and MWPC tended to break down into partisan women's groups because the organizations were not sure how to best pursue their political goals. These tensions surfaced as early as 1972 when members of the Policy Council of the NWPC, faced with a presidential election, could not decide on the best way to proceed. Some of them wanted to split the organization into two partisan groups so that women from each group would return to and work within their respective parties for the election in order to accomplish their partisan goals. Others believed that the organization would be more powerful if it acted in a multipartisan fashion.⁸⁴ While they decided on the latter approach, it became apparent that every four years they would have to serve as the feminist representatives to each party's national convention. This meant that they would have to address questions about the number of female representatives at the convention and the inclusion of planks supporting women's rights in party platforms.

Women from the NWPC first participated in the Democratic and Republican national conventions in 1972. Jill Ruckelshaus spoke at the Republican Convention, where she asked that the goals of the NWPC be included in the Republican Party

⁸⁴ "Women's Unit Broke and Split on Future," *New York Times*, August 28, 1972.

platform.⁸⁵ Similarly, Burnett testified on behalf of the MWPC, the Michigan Women's Commission, and NOW at the same convention.⁸⁶ Republican representatives from the political caucuses had some success because, after an eight-year hiatus, Republicans once again agreed to endorse the ERA with a platform plank, and the number of women delegates at the convention increased to 30 percent from 17 percent in 1968.⁸⁷ Republican feminists also convinced party leaders to amend Rule 32, through which the party had agreed to broaden the diversity of convention delegates by prohibiting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and religion. Through 1972, states were not prohibited from discriminating against potential delegates based on sex.⁸⁸ Because of the work of Republican feminists in 1972, however, the Republican Party expanded Rule 32 for

⁸⁵ "Testimony of the National Women's Political Caucus Before Subcommittee II, Human Rights and Responsibilities, of the Resolutions Committee of the Republican National Convention," Jill Ruckelshaus, August 16, 1972, box 5, folder: Talks Women and Credit Testimony Talks for Michigan Women's Commission, Burnett Papers.

⁸⁶ Hearings on the Republican Platform, testimony, Patricia Hill Burnett, August 14, 1972, box 2, folder: Patricia Hill Burnett Speeches, Articles, Interviews, Spans 1973-1987 and undated, Burnett Papers.

⁸⁷ Jo Freeman, "Feminism vs. Family Values: Women at the 1992 Democratic and Republican Conventions," <http://www.jofreeman.com/conventions/1992conven.htm>; Christina Wolbrecht, *The Politics of Women's Rights; Parties, Positions, and Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 38-39.

⁸⁸ Tanya Melich, *The Republican War Against Women: An Insiders Report from Behind the Lines* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 28-29.

the 1976 convention to prohibit sex discrimination in the selection of delegates and issued a new directive providing that “each state shall endeavor to have equal representation of men and women in its delegation to the Republican National Convention.”⁸⁹ The Michigan Republican Party incorporated these changes into their delegate selection process for the 1976 national convention.⁹⁰ These rules continued to be suggestions rather than mandates, however, and included no enforcement mechanism.⁹¹

In 1975, a group of Republican women who believed that the creation of a partisan feminist organization would help them to convince the Republican Party to be more inclusive of women and cognizant of feminist issues created the RWTF. They also hoped it would enable them to politicize more women, thereby serving the purposes of the NWPC, and bring them into the Republican Party.⁹² Ironically,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁰ “Republican Party of Michigan Rules for Selection of Delegates and Alternates to the 1976 Republican National Convention,” box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver Organizations, Republican State Committee, By Laws, Financial Statements, Reports, 1973-1977, Kefauver Papers.

⁹¹ Melich, *Republican War Against Women*, 28-29; Wolbrecht, *Politics of Women’s Rights*, 38-39.

⁹² Progress Report, 1977 Projects, Republican Women’s Task Force, box 7, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 National Women’s Political Caucus: Republican Women’s Task Force ca. 1974-1980, Helen Milliken Papers; Proposal, Republican Women’s Task Force, 5/16/75, box 16, folder: Republican Women’s Task Force, Peterson Papers; Summary of the First Meeting of the Republican Women’s Task Force of the National Women’s Political Caucus, April 18, 1975, box 16, folder: Republican Women’s Task Force, Peterson Papers; “What Is a Republican

they intended to use the self-described bipartisan organization to increase female political participation, in the process making them partisan. Retrospectively, the establishment of partisan task forces has been called a “chance development” that “brilliantly answered the need for the Caucus to be effective within both major party structures without sacrificing the leverage party women gain by their unity across party lines.”⁹³ It can also be characterized, however, as a concession to the ongoing importance of partisanship within this feminist coalition and a safety valve that permitted the NWPC and its state affiliates to continue their work while taking into account the political differences among their members and the political parties to which they belonged. By 1976, “the NWPC was ‘overwhelmingly Democratic.’”⁹⁴ Partisan task forces, such as the RWTF, enabled Republican feminists to continue to be both Republicans and feminists within a largely Democratic organization. They did not have to choose between the more radical and primarily Democratic

Women’s Task Force?,” box 7, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 National Women’s Political Caucus: Republican Women’s Task Force ca. 1974-1980, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁹³ Feit, “Organizing for Political Power,” 195.

⁹⁴ Jo Freeman, “Whom You Know versus Whom You Represent: Feminist Influence in the Democratic and Republican Parties,” in *The Women’s Movements of the United States and Western Europe: Consciousness, Political Opportunity, and Public Policy*, eds. Mary Fainsod Katzenstein and Carol McClurg Mueller, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 226, quoted in Sanbonmatsu, *Politics of Women’s Place*, 36.

feminists who drove the agenda of the NWPC and the men who ran their political party.

The RWTF quickly focused on the number of female delegates selected to attend the 1976 Republican National Convention in Kansas City. Despite the changes to the delegate selection rules that became effective in 1976, the number of female delegates was projected to drop below the 1972 level of 30 percent.⁹⁵ Apparently, the nonbinding nature of the new rule rendered it ineffectual. However, it must have provided some leverage because when Republican leaders of the NWPC and the RWTF complained, convention organizers managed to increase the numbers of women selected as delegates to 31.5 percent through at large nominations by state party officials.⁹⁶

Before the fact, RWTF leaders also complained that women at the 1976 Republican convention had been relegated to token appearances, whereas the Democratic Party had assigned women prominent roles at its convention. In response, RNC Chairwomen Mary Louise Smith agreed to make women more

⁹⁵ Michigan Women's Political Caucus, Republican Task Force, box 94, folder 11: M. Jeffrey Pt. 2, NWPC, Various Documents, 1970s, Jeffrey Papers.

⁹⁶ Proposal, Republican Women's Task Force, 5/16/75; Summary of the First Meeting of the Republican Women's Task Force; 1975-1976 Progress Report, 1977 Projects, Republican Women's Task Force, n.d., box 7, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 National Women's Political Caucus: Republican Women's Task Force ca. 1974-1980, Helen Milliken Papers.

visible, but only after she castigated Pat Goldman, chairwoman of the RWTF. Goldman wrote that “the public perception of the role of women in the Republican Party will not only be important in terms of convention delegates, but it will be important as the image that sticks in the mind of the general voting public that watches the convention proceedings.”⁹⁷ In her surprising response, Smith seemed to reprimand Goldman for the failure of women to participate in Republican Party politics, indicating that such involvement would put them “in positions of influence and leadership at crucial times. Women must come to recognize that these goals and objectives are not most readily and effectively accomplished in the emotionally charged atmosphere of an election year. Perhaps we have all failed to make this point emphatically enough.”⁹⁸ The RWTF later touted that its letter to Smith resulted in greater female exposure at the convention.⁹⁹

While members of MRWC first inquired about the RWTF in 1975, it took four years for Michigan’s Republican feminists to establish the MRWTF.¹⁰⁰ This new

⁹⁷ Goldman to Cheney, June 23, 1976, box 16, folder: Republican Women’s Task Force, Peterson Papers; 1975-1976 Progress Report, 1977 Projects, Republican Women’s Task Force.

⁹⁸ Smith to Goldman, July 27, 1976, box 15, folder: Convention and Republican Women, Peterson Papers.

⁹⁹ Republican Women’s Task Force 1975-1976 Progress Report, 1977 Projects.

¹⁰⁰ Board Meeting, Women’s Republican Caucus, October 29, 1975, box 5, folder: Republican Party, Michigan Women’s Republican Caucus 1973-1979, Burnett Papers.

organization was “committed to maintaining a feminist presence in the Republican Party and a Republican presence in the feminist movement.”¹⁰¹ It focused on placing Republican women into elective and appointive political and government positions, and supporting male and female candidates and issues that benefitted women.¹⁰²

The NWPC and MWPC exemplified the role that one network of feminist organizations played in trying to connect the burgeoning feminist movement to politics. They also illustrated the difficulties associated with multiple interest coalitions. The founders of the NWPC recognized that these competing interests would eventually make it difficult for this large group of women to identify and work together towards common goals. Their intentional ambiguity in the founding documents and the establishment of partisan caucuses in 1975 served as safety valves that gave the women room to pursue their different interests as feminists and partisans without undermining the integrity of the organization.¹⁰³ Moreover, the flexibility that they built into both the substantive focus and structure of the

¹⁰¹ Position Statement, Michigan Republican Women’s Task Force, n.d.; Fireman, “Angry GOP Women Disown Task Force,” June 26, 1983.

¹⁰² Position Statement, Michigan Republican Women’s Task Force, n.d.

¹⁰³ Feit, “Organizing for Political Power,” 195-97.

organization, the space they created in terms of defining what they meant by a “woman’s issue,” and the ability of state and local organizations to pursue their own interests so long as they did not conflict with the goals of the national organization, were positive developments that allowed the members to act as a group without being in total agreement with each other.¹⁰⁴

However, the multiple layers of loosely connected organizations created difficulties as participating groups struggled to coordinate with each other. Moreover, women had a difficult time even temporarily relinquishing their partisanship in the interest of feminism. They shared the feminist goal of politicizing women, but then tried to recruit these newly politicized women to participate in their own respective political parties. Ultimately, Republican feminists found it challenging to integrate their feminism with Democratic feminists who operated within a different political structure. Even when confronted by male-dominated political parties, the purportedly shared feminism of the women who participated in these organizations did not allow them to overcome their partisanship. For some women, it was difficult to separate their feminism from their partisanship because their feminism was integrated with their partisanship.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 191-94.

The Republican task forces addressed this by provided Republican feminists with a space where they could combine their moderate Republicanism with moderate feminism while they worked on behalf of the Republican Party. Over time however, Republican feminists found that while they might have been at odds with Democratic feminists, they were being squeezed within their own political party by its conservative wing. The next three chapters illustrate how Republican feminists dealt with these divisive issues within their own party. They did not yet realize that conservatism would ultimately threaten the multipartisanship of these political caucuses as well.

CHAPTER 4 REPUBLICAN FEMINISTS FIGHT FOR THE ERA: 1972 TO 1979

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

–Equal Rights Amendment

Inequality hurts. ERA ends inequality.

–Laura Callow, WJR Point of View, July 25, 1977

The time is here for women to enter directly into the world as both architects of the society in which we wish to live and as direct beneficiaries of the rewards.

–Ruth McNamee, Speech, “The Women’s Movement: Change and Future Challenges”

On March 22, 1972, almost fifty years after it was first proposed in 1923, the United States Congress passed the ERA. Once adopted by Congress, thirty-eight states had to ratify it by March 22, 1979 in order for it to become a constitutional amendment. Twenty-two states ratified it that same year. Thereafter, the pace of ratification slowed considerably. By 1975, only twelve more states had ratified the amendment, and one final state approved it in 1977. Once proponents realized that they would not have the requisite number of approvals within the allotted time period, they asked Congress for an extension of the deadline. At the same time, they worried that they were going to lose some the ratifications that they had already obtained. Some ratification states considered rescinding their ratifications and others argued that their ratifications expired when the original ratification period ended. The deadline for ratification was extended until June 22, 1982, but

ERA advocates never obtained another state approval. The effort died in 1982, three states short of the number needed to enact the amendment.¹

Michigan's Republican feminists actively participated in the battle over the ERA. As feminists, they supported a constitutional amendment that they believed would guarantee them social, political, and economic equality. As Republicans, they were convinced that the ERA was consistent with the basic tenets of the Republican Party and could only be enacted with Republican support. In the space where their gendered and political interests overlapped, Republican feminists tried to carefully craft their arguments on behalf of the ERA in ways that were consistent with the broad principles of the Republican Party. In doing so, they were forced to distinguish themselves from radical feminists who argued that the ERA did not go far enough to secure gender equality, and to discredit the extremism of conservative Republicans who feared that the ERA would destroy the traditional family and fundamentally change American society. As the Republican Party became more conservative and its opposition to the ERA more pronounced, Republican feminists deliberately aligned with the party's moderate leaders and

¹ Mary Francis Berry, *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights and the Amending Process of the Constitution* (Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 70-71; Roberta W. Francis, "The History Behind the Equal Rights Amendment," <http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/history.htm>.

distinguished themselves from conservative women so that they could be identified as the legitimate representatives of the party's women. This enabled them, at least temporarily, to remain both Republicans and feminists.

Less than three months after it was enacted by the United States Congress, the Michigan Legislature adopted the ERA on May 22, 1972.² The Michigan Senate, which was equally divided between Republicans and Democrats, adopted the ERA by voice vote. Democrats held a six seat majority in the 110 member Michigan House. In a bipartisan vote, forty-six of the fifty-eight Democrats and forty-four of the fifty-two Republicans voted for the ERA. Similarly, ten Democrats and eight Republicans opposed it.³

Despite its quick ratification, however, the fight over the ERA in Michigan and throughout the country was just beginning. Two organizations, STOP ERA and Happiness of Womanhood (HOW), led the national opposition to the ERA. Drawing on her grassroots conservative network, Schlafly founded STOP ERA in 1972.⁴

² Senate Joint Resolution GG and House Joint Resolution LLL, May 22, 1972, Legislative History of Senate Joint Resolution GG, Michael Farley, Research Analyst, Michigan Legislative Service Bureau to N. Lorraine Beebe, box 2, folder: "Beebe ERA Michigan 1972-1973," Beebe Papers.

³ Ibid. Two Democratic House members did not participate in the vote.

⁴ For a discussion of STOP ERA, see Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 218-27.

Livonia, Michigan native, Elaine Donnelly, was only in her mid-twenties when she founded Michigan STOP ERA, the state affiliate of STOP ERA. Ironically, she was a Democrat when she was young, but became disenchanted with the party as it became more liberal and she started working with Schlafly. Like Schlafly, she initially supported the ERA but changed her mind once she realized that women would be disadvantaged by its breadth.⁵ “As a mother of two daughters,” Donnelly said, “it was my responsibility to see to it that ERA did not pass.”⁶

While STOP ERA and Michigan STOP ERA focused exclusively on defeating the ERA, HOW adopted a broader perspective. In 1971 Jacquie Davison, an Arizonian initially concerned about how the ERA would affect women, founded HOW. The organization adopted a patriotic, religious, pro-life agenda to defeat the ERA, but also worked to preserve the rights of parents and the traditional family. Davison stated that “like many good American women, I ignored the women’s liberationists while they were growing hair on their legs and burning their bras. But now America is under attack. The family is being attacked and the family is the

⁵ Diane Haithman, “Elaine Donnelly: Still a Woman with a Cause,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 17, 1984; Melanie Deeds, “Anti-ERA Leader Is Doing It ‘For Her Daughters,’” *Ann Arbor News*, October 5, 1978, folder: Donnelly, Elaine Newspaper Articles, 1973-1985, Elaine Chenevert Donnelly Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Donnelly Papers); Ron Russell, “ERA R.I.P. the Winner,” *Detroit News*, June 27, 1982.

⁶ Haithman, “Still a Woman with a Cause,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 17, 1984.

backbone of America.”⁷ Conservative Republican Patt Barbour, from Dearborn Heights, led the Michigan chapter of HOW before she became its national leader in 1975. She argued “that the ERA amendment ‘will do nothing for women but put a federal noose around their neck.’”⁸ In 1975 she gave voice to the opinion of many conservative Republican women when she wrote to Governor Milliken, “I am a Republican, but the Republican Party has left me.”⁹ While they did not specifically characterize themselves as Republican or partisan organizations, women who were connected to the conservative movement in the Republican Party led both STOP ERA and HOW.

NOW was one of the first organizations to support the ERA. It was a melting pot of women with different priorities, strategies and political loyalties. Its leaders recognized that they needed to carefully balance the conflicting interests and objectives of all of its members to maintain its focus on feminism. Therefore, NOW

⁷ “Abortion Foes Stage Protest,” *Owosso Argus-Press*, May 17, 1971.

⁸ “National Director of HOW Speaks Here,” *Kingman Daily Miner*, May 4, 1977, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=932&dat=19770504&id=2zdTAAAIBAJ&sjid=Y4MDAAAIBAJ&pg=7026,2708654&hl=en>.

⁹ Barbour to Governor Milliken, July 4, 1975, box 1, folder: Wohlfield Happiness of Womanhood Inc. 1973-1983, Shirley Wohlfield Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Wohlfield Papers). It is interesting to note that many of Michigan’s Republican feminists used this same line when they explained their problems with the Republican Party less than ten years later.

was structured as a nonpartisan organization to avoid the difficulties that might develop from partisan alliances.¹⁰ At the same time, NOW recognized the importance of convincing women to become involved in politics, and worked closely with the NWPC and its local affiliates. Many women who participated in the women's movement were members of both organizations.¹¹ In 1967, one of NOW's primary goals became the ratification of the ERA.¹²

In 1976, proponents of the ERA finally created an umbrella organization, ERAmerica, to bring together the various groups that were specifically focused on ratification of the ERA. A Michigan affiliate of ERAmerica, Michigan ERAmerica, was created on June 10, 1976 to coordinate different groups of people in the pursuit of their common goals of "preserving Michigan's ratification of the ERA 'educating the public about the need to guarantee equal protection under the law' [and] promoting the ratification of the ERA nationally."¹³ The leaders of ERAmerica and its Michigan affiliate seemed surprised that they needed to organize to promote

¹⁰ Barakso, *Governing NOW*, 27-28, 41.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 41.

¹³ Michigan ERAmerica, Re: Coalition Update, memorandum, n.d., box 18, folder: ERAmerica Coalition Update, 1976-1979, Peterson Papers.

the ERA because congressional approval was so easy that supporters did not believe they needed to do anything “to insure people understanding it.”¹⁴ But over time, as Peterson witnessed extremists from both ideological extremes hijacking the ratification process, it became clear to her that ERAmerica and its local affiliates should serve as the educational ambassadors for the ERA.¹⁵

Like NOW, ERAmerica and its Michigan affiliate understood that partisanship could undermine the fragile coalition that they had created to engage in collaborative work on behalf of the ERA. Thus, Michigan ERAmerica instructed its members to avoid connections to any other issues that might link the ERA to partisan politics. These organizations were careful to maintain the delicate balance that Republican and Democratic women had achieved in their efforts to gain ratification. Organizational materials instructed members that “both Democrats and Republicans are very sensitive. Sometimes it’s necessary to criticize representatives from one party or the other. Try to follow with articles of praise for someone else in same party.”¹⁶ In order to work effectively together to promote

¹⁴ Elly Peterson, Notes Regarding ERAmerica Organization, n.d., box 19, folder: ERAmerica, ERAmerica Organizational Material, 1976-1980, Peterson Papers.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Michigan ERAmerica, Re: Coalition Update, memorandum.

the ERA, women from both political parties needed to overcome the political differences that might have otherwise undermined their efforts to achieve their common goal.

Ironically, in order to solidify its nonpartisanship, two partisan women led ERAmerica. From its inception until 1979, Republican Peterson and Democrat Liz Carpenter chaired the organization. They were both moderate feminists who were political veterans, and brought their political experience to the fight over ERA, indicating that “their major strategy . . . is a nationwide campaign, run along the lines of a political campaign, only this time the candidate isn’t a human being but 24 words.”¹⁷ They intended to utilize their partisanship to lobby their respective party leaders, promote candidates in targeted states and influence their party’s platforms. The two women “denied . . . that this emphasis on partisan politics meant that they would, in effect, be snubbing feminist organizations that in the past had led the fragmented fight for the equal rights amendment. ‘Oh, we’ll work with women’s organizations, because that’s what gave us birth.’ . . . ‘We’ll work with anybody who gives us assistance. We both consider ourselves strong

¹⁷ Judy Klemesrud, “New Team to Unify E.R.A. Campaign,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1976.

feminists.”¹⁸ They were critical of Schlafly, who used typically female tactics, such as providing legislatures with baked goods, to influence their votes. Carpenter said “man does not live by bread alone. . . . I’ll give legislators the dignity of voting with their brains.”¹⁹ In 1976, Helen Milliken, along with Democrat Martha Griffiths, were named the honorary chairpersons of Michigan ERAmerica. In 1979, the leadership roles in the national organization were passed on to two wives of prominent governors, Helen Milliken and Sharon Percy Rockefeller, wife of Democrat Governor Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia.

Milliken was a relative latecomer to the women’s movement.²⁰ While she did not become a feminist until the mid-1970s, once converted, she became one of the state’s leading feminists from either party. Milliken was from a very conservative Republican family. Later noting, “I was raised in an era when women were supposed to be educated, literate, find a good husband, and provide a good home,”²¹ she followed that dictate. A graduate of Smith College, she married

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Political Savvy Joins the Battle over Equal Rights,” *Grand Rapids Press*, April 11, 1976, box 23, folder: Clippings, ERAmerica & Other Women’s Rights Involvement (1964, 1969-79), Peterson Papers.

²⁰ For a discussion of Helen Milliken, see Dempsey, *William G. Milliken*, 130-45.

²¹ Ibid., 130-31.

Milliken in 1945 at the end of World War II. When her husband finished college at Yale, they moved back to his hometown of Traverse City, Michigan. They had two nearly grown children by the time her husband was elected first to the Michigan Senate in 1960, and then as lieutenant governor under George Romney in 1964. During this time, she balanced her duties as the wife of the lieutenant governor with her life as a student of landscape architecture at Michigan State University.²² Milliken became governor of Michigan when Romney accepted a position in the Nixon cabinet in 1969.

In her early years as first lady, she recognized the importance of women in the political process and credited the MWPC for educating women about politics, but she only reluctantly offered any support for the burgeoning women's movement. She supported the ERA and when asked, she noted, "I'm for equal pay for equal work,' . . . 'but I'm not really sure about women's liberation, when it comes to disrupting the family.'"²³ She defended women who were not interested in the women's movement because "equality . . . should be an individual right . . .

²² Ibid., 131-32.

²³ Maida Portnoy, "Helen Milliken: Her Odyssey from Housewife to ERA Activist," *Oakland Press Sunday Magazine*, October 17, 1982, box 2, folder: Misc-Mich. ERAmerica and related, Callow Papers; Willah Weddon, "Wives May Heat Up Race," *Lansing State Journal*, October 23, 1974, box 4 folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 Campaigns (Gubernatorial): 1974(1) Helen Milliken, Helen Milliken Papers.

to have full equality or not to claim it if you really do not feel the need of it.”²⁴

Despite her somewhat traditional ideas about women, she and her husband provided each other with the space to be independent. She did not feel that she always had to agree with him and he let her be her own person. At this point in her career as Michigan’s first lady, her real interests were conservation and making art accessible to the people of Michigan.²⁵

According to the *Oakland Press*, “it wasn’t until 1975 that she assumed an active part in the struggle for equal rights for women.”²⁶ She acknowledged she was a latecomer to the women’s movement because “I’d never had to work. I’d worked for a couple of years (at J.W. Milliken, Inc.). It was an enjoyable outlet, a pin money job and I was working part time . . . a very different situation from women today.”²⁷ She attributed her feminist consciousness to her daughter, a lawyer, who chastised her for not having an opinion on the ERA. Her daughter told her, “Mother, you must become informed about women’s issues. You are in a

²⁴ “Levin Credibility Bothers Helen,” *Flint Journal*, October 23, 1974, box 4 folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 Campaigns (Gubernatorial): 1974(1) Helen Milliken, Helen Milliken Papers.

²⁵ Dempsey, *William G. Milliken*, 133, 136-37; “Levin Credibility Bothers Helen,” *Flint Journal*, October 23, 1974.

²⁶ Portnoy, “Helen Milliken: Her Odyssey,” October 17, 1982.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

wonderful position now to help women.’ And the lights went on and I embarked on learning.”²⁸ Milliken asserted that “once the window gets open, it’s never closed.”²⁹ Braithwaite later stated that Helen Milliken is “the purest feminist I know, . . . so many of us are divorced and widowed so we, out of necessity, are feminists. She’s not in that position, yet her concerns and efforts have been 100 percent.”³⁰ For the next eight years, Milliken devoted most of her energy to the the ratification of the ERA, not as a figurehead for ERAmerica, but as a passionate activist.

Republican feminist Ruth McNamee emerged in Michigan during the 1970s to work closely with Helen Milliken on the ERA.³¹ McNamee graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science and English from Bucknell University. Married with two children, she began her political career locally, as a member of the Birmingham City Commission from 1965 to 1974, and as mayor of Birmingham in

²⁸ Helen W. Milliken, Statement, Women’s History Project of Northwest Michigan, October 14, 2006, <https://whpnm.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/helenmilliken10-06speech.pdf>.

²⁹ Dempsey, *William G. Milliken*, 138.

³⁰ Portnoy, “Helen Milliken: Her Odyssey,” October 17, 1982.

³¹ *Ibid.*

1970 and 1971. In 1974, she was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives, where she remained until 1984, when she decided to retire.

McNamee started to develop her feminist consciousness when she became aware of the disadvantages she faced as a female volunteer in her Episcopal Church. Much like women in the Republican Party, she and other women did most of the work but had no power or authority. Frustrated but energized, her church activism led her to become involved in the community and local politics.³² She was initially ambivalent about the women's movement, arguing that some of its goals, such as gender neutral clubs, were not important to her. But she eventually came to credit it with effectuating important societal changes, "such as recognition at last that a woman has her own right to enter directly into the world, be both an architect of it and a direct beneficiary of its rewards."³³ Thus, she argued that "women should have equal opportunities in education and jobs, and that their work performance [should] be recognized in the same manner as a man's."³⁴ Women and men were

³² "Religion and Politics Don't Mix," *The Record*, September 1984, 12, box 1, folder: Ruth Braden McNamee Biographical Vita and Overview Articles, McNamee Papers.

³³ Speech, "Women Effecting Government," Ruth McNamee, January 14, 1976, 2, box 1, folder: Speeches and Articles, 1970-1981, McNamee Papers.

³⁴ Patricia A. Hay, "Birmingham's Mayor Speaks Out on Women's Liberation Movement," *Royal Oak Daily Tribune*, August 20, 1970, box 1, folder: Ruth Braden McNamee Biographical Newspaper Articles 1964-1984, McNamee Papers.

different from each other, but such differences were enriching, not limiting.³⁵ She laughingly complained that while she was the only woman on the Birmingham City Commission, the men frequently questioned the intellectual abilities of the “confused housewife” or “confused woman driver.” She noted “before I retire, I hope the ‘confused driver’ is the male—just once.”³⁶

Despite her commitment to gender equality, McNamee had some very traditional ideas about the family. She was a stay-at-home mother while her children were young, and did not resent or regret that time with her children. She believed that as a wife and mother, a woman was responsible for the family home and if that was in order, a woman could work outside the home.³⁷ Even after her children were grown, she said that she preferred “Saturday morning meetings. ‘I refuse to have my husband eat TV dinners. Even though I am mayor now, he is still my husband and deserves to have the best I can give him.’”³⁸ While her husband,

³⁵ Charlie Cain, “Rep. Ruth McNamee Seeks Wider Role Than ‘Queen Bee,’” *Detroit News*, [1978?], box 1, folder: Ruth Braden McNamee Biographical Newspaper Articles 1964-1984, McNamee Papers.

³⁶ Hay, “Birmingham’s Mayor Speaks Out,” August 20, 1970.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Pat Smith, “On Being a Woman: Motherhood Isn’t All,” *[Birmingham] Eccentric*, May 7, 1970, box 1, folder: Ruth Braden McNamee Biographical Vita and Overview Articles, McNamee Papers.

she believed, was not responsible for cooking or cleaning, he was still obliged to participate in raising the children. "I don't expect my husband to help at home, but it is important that he be a good father to the kids."³⁹

Like Beebe, McNamee's femininity was often stressed in the press. She was once described as "probably the prettiest of the mayors of metropolitan Detroit."⁴⁰ One author noted that "her favorite household appliance is her dishwasher. . . . The mayor is an avid antique collector and favors glass and china. Her glass collection pattern is the old 'buzz-saw' design."⁴¹ Another female journalist commented "that her dimpled smile makes her no less formidable than her six male associates when it comes to handling city affairs."⁴² Certainly journalists would never compare the looks of male officeholders or comment on their dimples. Moreover, no one cared about a male politician's "favorite household appliance." This journalistic double standard made it difficult for female politicians to be taken seriously.

Despite the challenges she faced as a politician and member of the state legislature, McNamee became a representative for women within the Michigan

³⁹ Hay, "Birmingham's Mayor Speaks Out," August 20, 1970.

⁴⁰ Ladd Neuman, "Detroit's Exchange Mayor Tells It Like She Sees It," *Detroit Free Press*, May 19, 1970.

⁴¹ Smith, "On Being a Woman," May 7, 1970.

⁴² Luise Leismer, "She's a City Father," *Detroit News*, September 20, 1968.

Republican Party. She consistently identified herself as a moderate Republican and a fiscal conservative. When asked why she did not become a Democrat instead of remaining in an increasingly conservative Republican Party, she noted that she was a Republican because she believed in the party's commitment to limited government and its tenet that people's problems were best solved by the private sector.⁴³

Once the Michigan legislature ratified the ERA, the battle over the proposed constitutional amendment entered a new phase. Michigan's ERA opponents, especially Donnelly and Michigan STOP ERA, began to try to rescind Michigan's ratification of the amendment. While Donnelly saw rescission as a potentially viable strategy, she recognized that Governor Milliken created a political environment that made rescission difficult. Thus, to undermine his influence, her organization pushed back on his involvement. Michigan STOP ERA objected to his "use [of] the funds, power, and prestige of his office to interfere in the Amendment process, or to financially subsidize one side in the national debate at the expense of the other."⁴⁴ Donnelly reminded the governor that the executive branch of the

⁴³ "Religion and Politics Don't Mix," The Record, 12.

⁴⁴ Donnelly to William G. Milliken, January 17, 1974, box 2, folder: Beebe ERA Michigan 1972-73, Beebe Papers.

Michigan state government did not have a role in amending the United States Constitution. Unlike legislation, which only becomes law when the governor signs it, state legislatures ratify federal constitutional amendments without a governor's participation. As a result, she asserted, he could not legally participate in the ratification/rescission process. Donnelly wrote, "To put it bluntly, the ratification of the ERA, or a rescission of that ratification, is none of your official business."⁴⁵ Donnelly made it clear to the governor that he should not use his office to take any position on the ERA or to try to protect the legislature's earlier ratification vote.⁴⁶

Donnelly shared with her feminist opponents a belief in the power of politicized women. But since Michigan STOP ERA members were not politicized, she had to teach them to become active voters and effective lobbyists so that they could meaningfully engage in the rescission process. She asked them to send hand written "rescindograms" and, if possible, to visit legislators to convince them that their constituents favored rescission.⁴⁷ She encouraged them to campaign for

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Michigan STOP ERA News, December 16, 1975, box 6, folder: 14th Cong. District Republican Party Chronological Files Miscellaneous Material Women's Rights, 14th Congressional District Republican Committee Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as 14th Congressional District Papers).

legislators who supported rescission. While Donnelly suggested that they participate through bumper stickers, phone calls and lawn signs, she urged them to more proactively “invite your neighbors and friends in the District over for coffee or an evening social event. Better yet, organize a whole day of coffees in the homes of friends who are willing to invite their friends into their homes to meet the Candidate.”⁴⁸ In order to raise the money to engage in these grassroots efforts, Michigan STOP ERA held bake sales, luncheons and boutiques throughout the state.⁴⁹ Donnelly’s efforts to teach other women to engage in grassroots politics were a part of the conservative playbook and replicated what was happening all around the nation as conservative leaders were bringing formerly nonpoliticized women into the political process and empowering them to take charge of their lives.

Michigan’s attorney general made Donnelly’s task a little more difficult when he ruled that rescission of the ratification by the state legislature was probably illegal.⁵⁰ Despite this setback, Donnelly and other ERA opponents did not abandon

⁴⁸ Michigan STOP ERA News, July 1976, 1, box 6, folder: 14th Cong. District Republican Party Chronological Files Miscellaneous Material Women’s Rights, 14th Congressional District Papers.

⁴⁹ “Fundraiser a Success,” Michigan Stop ERA News, July 1976, 3, box 6, folder: 14th Cong. District Republican Party Chronological Files Miscellaneous Material Women’s Rights, 14th Congressional District Papers.

⁵⁰ Michigan Attorney General Opinion 4779, May 15, 1973, 35, box 2, folder: Beebe ERA Michigan 1972-1973, Beebe Papers.

their rescission efforts. They argued that the will of the people had been ignored when the state legislature originally ratified the ERA, and that politicians continued to ignore their constituents as the ratification was being reconsidered. In an “Open Letter to all Michigan Legislators,” Donnelly and Barbour argued that “right from the start of the Equal Rights Amendment controversy, the opinions of the wives and mothers who do not choose to join a large organization have been screened out, ignored, or ridiculed.”⁵¹ Significantly, these ERA opponents publicly characterized themselves as “wives and mothers,” not women, indicating they believed that they derived their legitimacy and would be able to exert the most influence through these familial roles.

With Donnelly’s assistance, the Michigan House of Representatives proposed joint resolutions to rescind the ERA in March 1974 and March 1976, but both languished in the Committee on Constitutional Revision and Women’s Rights. In 1974 House Joint Resolution FF, which had five Democratic sponsors, sought “to rescind and nullify” the ratification of the ERA by the Michigan legislature.⁵² The

⁵¹ “Open Letter to All Michigan Legislators,” Elaine Donnelly and Patt Barbour, May 13, 1974, box 6, folder: 14th Cong. District Republican Party Chronological Files Miscellaneous Material Women’s Rights, 14th Congressional District Papers.

⁵² Michigan House Joint Resolution FF, March 21, 1974.

Committee's vote on the resolution was equally divided along party lines. Four Democrats opposed moving the resolution out of committee and four Republicans favored allowing the resolution to be voted on by the full House. As a result, the Democrat members of the Committee overruled their Republican colleagues and stopped the Democrat sponsored resolution, which died in Committee.⁵³ The number of sponsors for House Joint Resolution TT, introduced on March 2, 1976, had increased to twenty-two, indicating that support for rescission was growing. Of these sponsors, sixteen were Democrats and six were Republicans. Despite the additional support, the resolution met the same fate as the 1974 resolution and never got out of the Committee.⁵⁴

While the move to rescind Michigan's ratification of the ERA lost much of its energy after the 1976 vote for rescission, the debate over the ERA continued, especially as efforts towards ratification in other states seemed to stall. For Michigan's Republican feminists, the 1976 Republican national convention intensified the debate. In 1972, the Republican Party included a plank in its

⁵³ "Michigan Stop ERA News," June 1974, box 6, folder: 14th Cong. District Republican Party Chronological Files Miscellaneous Material Women's Rights, Republican Party MI, 14th Congressional District Papers.

⁵⁴ Michigan House Joint Resolution TT, March 2, 1976.

platform that reiterated the party's longstanding support for the ERA.⁵⁵ In 1976, Republican feminists, led by the NRWTF, retained a pro-ERA plank in the platform, which emphasized "that the Republican Party 'fully endorses the principle of equal rights, equal opportunities and equal responsibilities for women.' The Equal Rights Amendment is the embodiment of this principle and therefore we support its swift ratification."⁵⁶ However, conservative Republicans, led by Schlafly, came close to convincing the party to abandon its endorsement.

The convention served as a wakeup call to Michigan's Republican feminists. They had already defeated bipartisan attempts to rescind Michigan's ratification of the ERA and that effort seemed over. Republican feminists had persuaded the national Republican Party, at least temporarily, to continue its support for the ERA. Yet all of their hard work would be wasted if they could not convince other states to ratify the ERA. Moderate Republicans still controlled the Republican Party, as evidenced by Milliken's reelection as governor in 1974 and Gerald Ford's defeat of conservative Ronald Reagan for the presidential nomination in 1976. Realizing that they needed the party's support to ratify the ERA, Michigan's Republican feminists

⁵⁵ "A Better Future for All: Equal Rights for Women," Republican Party Platform of 1972, August 21, 1972, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25842>.

⁵⁶ "1976 Republican Party Platform Supports ERA Ratification," box 2, folder: International Women's Year Houston Conference, 1977, Burnett Papers.

aligned with party moderates. Their strategy had a dual purpose, however. They understood that feminists would support a party that supported them, which would strengthen the moderate wing of the party. While Republican feminists had a temporary advantage in the Michigan Republican Party, they knew that the fight for control of the party was far from over. The battle between Republican feminists and conservative women over the ERA became a part of the much larger war for control of the Republican Party.

The first task of Republican feminists was to counter the narrative that conservative women had constructed about the ERA. Schlafly and STOP ERAmerica, argued that the ERA endangered American society. Schlafly explained that conservative opposition to the ERA was based on two interrelated notions: the primacy of the traditional family and the biological differences between men and women.⁵⁷ Because of the importance of the family, women enjoyed a unique status, which justified their special privileges as wives and mothers. Schlafly contended that the women's movement arrogantly presumed to speak for all women with its assertion that women were treated unfairly. Instead, she argued, "Women's lib is a total assault on the role of the American woman as wife and mother, and on the

⁵⁷ Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New York: Jove Publications, 1977), 38.

family as the basic unit of society.”⁵⁸ She queried, “Why should we lower ourselves to ‘equal rights’ when we already have the status of special privilege?”⁵⁹ Donnelly agreed “that the feminists ‘reject the values that the majority of women hold . . . they have a very negative attitude toward the family and I don’t think they understand the nature of commitment to the family.’”⁶⁰

For Schlafly and her supporters, men and women were biologically different, which meant that they had different functions in life. Women were meant to be wives and mothers and could fulfill those functions only in a traditional family with a husband and children. Schlafly believed that abortion would eliminate women’s primary role in society. She tied the ERA to both abortion rights and homosexuality when she stated that “the ultimate goal of women’s liberation is independence from men and the avoidance of pregnancy and its consequences . . . [so] lesbianism is logically the highest form in the ritual of women’s liberation.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Phyllis Schlafly, “What’s Wrong with Equal Rights for Women?” *Phyllis Schlafly Report* 5, no. 7 (February 1972), in *Debating the American Conservative Movement: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Donald T. Critchlow and Nancy MacLean (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 200.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 223.

⁶¹ Schlafly, *Power of Positive Woman*, 3-4.

ERA's opponents claimed that they did not oppose equality, but worried about what women would lose in the process of attaining it. STOP ERA emphasized that the "ERA forbids any legal distinction on the basis of sex, no matter how reasonable and beneficial those distinctions may be."⁶² They believed that the ERA created the potential for dangerous overreaching by the government, which threatened the special privileges enjoyed by women, including protective legislation.⁶³ Barbour emphasized that "to treat women exactly like men is to treat women unfairly."⁶⁴ A constitutional amendment could not abrogate the differences between men and women, but would invalidate the protective laws that ameliorated some of the disadvantages that women suffered as a result of those differences. It did not add any value for women, but it did "take away rights and privileges that American women have achieved that make our life here the best in

⁶² Newsletter, "In Defense of Women's Rights—Why the Equal Rights Amendment Must NOT be Ratified," STOP ERA Committee, (stamped September 14, 1979), 1, box 5, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 Equal Rights Amendment Letters (Con) 1979, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁶³ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁴ International Women's Year Conference Report, Patt Barbour, November 19-21, 1977, 6, International Women's Year Conference, Houston, November 19-21, 1977, 1977-1978 Papers, International Women's Year Conference Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as IWYC Papers).

the world.”⁶⁵ The ERA “would sacrifice a large measure of personal and political freedom, plus justice for women, on the altar of inflexible equality.”⁶⁶ Donnelly clearly intended to scare wives and mothers when she argued that the financial impact of the ERA on families would eliminate a husband’s obligation to provide financial support for his wife. She noted that the laws requiring such support “were not written to penalize men, or to give women something they don’t deserve. They were written to protect the rights of women who make a good faith, long-term commitment to marriage and motherhood. All of society has an interest in the stability of families, because families are responsible for the care of children.”⁶⁷ Donnelly asserted that “if ERA is ratified . . . ‘motherhood would become a high risk occupation.’”⁶⁸ Thus, according to Michigan STOP ERA, the passage of the ERA would eliminate government protections that enabled women to act as wives and mothers and, in the process, destroy families.

⁶⁵ Beverly LaHaye to Friend, [1979 prior to June 19, 1979?], 3, box 5, folder: Topical Files 1969-1982 Equal Rights Amendment Letter (Con) 1979, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁶⁶ Donnelly to *Detroit News*, September 14, 1977, box 5, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 Equal Rights Amendment Letter (Con): 1979, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁶⁷ Newsletter, “In Defense of Women’s Rights, STOP ERA Committee.

⁶⁸ “‘Equal Rights’ Feelings: Rights Are Swept Away—Elaine Donnelly,” *Northville Register*, June 9, 1976, box 1, folder: Donnelly Elaine Newspaper Articles, 1973-1985, Donnelly Papers.

Building on Schlafly's opposition to the ERA, HOW and Michigan STOP ERA conservatives emphasized the radicalism of the groups that supported the ERA to make them more threatening to women. In 1975, Donnelly referenced the campaign slogan of the president of NOW, Karen DeCrow, "Out of the Mainstream, Into the Revolution," to argue that "all attempts to paper over the simmering radicalism of N.O.W. are sure to fail."⁶⁹ They warned that radical feminists would take advantage of the law's ambiguity to undermine the integrity of the traditional family in a variety of unanticipated ways. Donnelly called proponents of the ERA "militant feminists" who wanted to create a "'gender-free' society"⁷⁰ in which abortion, homosexual marriage and unisex bathrooms would be legal. If women were no different than men, young girls would have to be drafted and sent into combat alongside young men. The education system would have to be modified to eliminate sexism in teaching by downplaying concepts of masculinity and femininity for children. Donnelly objected to this because "there is no set standard to determine what is sexist. 'The definition of sexism is as wide as the feminist mind

⁶⁹ Michigan Stop ERA News, December 16, 1975.

⁷⁰ Susan Lark, "Donnelly Calls ERA 'Package Deal' with High Cost to Society," *Anderson Daily Bulletin*, February 27, 1975 box 1, folder: Elaine Donnelly Anti ERA Materials Clippings from Stop ERA Campaign 73-75, Donnelly Papers.

is narrow.”⁷¹ According to Donnelly, feminists were trying to “have the boys put on make-up and discuss how it affects their self-perception,” and to persuade boys “to suppress their aggressive tendencies and masculinity is referred to as a disease.”⁷² HOW also argued that ERA’s proponents wanted to use schools to teach children about a broad array of sexual preferences and that heterosexual sex was not the only acceptable option.⁷³

One major objection to the ERA was that it would change the traditional configuration of government power. The provision that granted the federal courts the right to enforce the constitutional amendment effectively shifted power from state and local governments to the federal government.⁷⁴ The ERA would also alter power allocations within the federal government. For example, Schlafly cited a statement made by ERA proponent, Democrat Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, in which she addressed federal funding for medical research in the context of the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ William Weddon, “Happiness of Womanhood Her Concern,” *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, March 21, 1974, box 1, folder: Wohlfield Happiness of Womanhood Inc. 1973-83, Wohlfield Papers.

⁷⁴ “The Effect of the Equal Rights Amendment on Federal-State Responsibilities,” Equality Yes! ERA No!, Concern Sheet #1, United Families of America, n.d., box 1, folder: Donnelly, Elaine AntiERA Materials-General, Donnelly Papers.

ERA. Schroeder asserted that women have “as much right to claim an equal portion for diseases that women are concerned about as men do.”⁷⁵ Schlafly interpreted that “to mean that ERA would compel the United States Congress to spend 50% of health care money on ‘women’s diseases’ (whatever that means) and 50% on ‘men’s diseases’ (whatever they are).”⁷⁶ Thus, the ERA would eliminate Congressional discretion for medical spending.

In response to the arguments of conservative women, Republican feminists focused on what the ERA would provide for women, rather than what it would take away from them. Peterson called it “a simple statement of principle—a principle of equal justice under the law—a guarantee of legal rights, free of sex bias.”⁷⁷ Helen Milliken emphasized that the ERA “will remove sex as a factor in determining the legal rights of men and women.”⁷⁸ Unlike their opponents, however, Republican feminists also seemed to spend much of their time on the defensive, responding to

⁷⁵ “ERA—How Broad its Scope?” Equality Yes! ERA No!, Concern Sheet #10, United Families of America, n.d., box 1, folder: Donnelly, Elaine AntiERA Materials-General, Donnelly Papers.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Speech to Lions Club, Elly Peterson, September 25, 1979, box 25, folder: Speeches 1979, Peterson Papers.

⁷⁸ Helen Milliken, “The Equal Rights Amendment,” article submitted to Women’s Life, April 1982, box 5, folder: 1969-1982 Equal Rights, Helen Milliken Papers.

the arguments made by HOW and STOP ERA about the ERA's dire and unanticipated consequences. As Peterson later noted, "In retrospect, I can see we spent too much time trying to defend our stand from the Schlafly Eagles and other right-wing organizations or fundamentalist churches and too little time on the attack."⁷⁹ They allowed their conservative opponents to create the narrative, which put them at a disadvantage.

Proponents tried to narrow the scope of the ERA by separating it from other controversial issues, such as homosexual marriage and abortion, in order to make it more palatable to voters and the Republican Party. Laura Callow, a Michigan feminist who Helen Milliken called "our Susan B. Anthony" because of her more than thirty years of activism on behalf of the ERA, was a regular pro-ERA contributor to the WJR Radio Show "Point of View."⁸⁰ She argued that "the Equal Rights Amendment was concerned with discrimination on account of gender, being male or female, not sexual preference."⁸¹ NOW and Michigan ERAmerica emphasized

⁷⁹ Peterson, *Memoirs*, 127.

⁸⁰ Helen Milliken to Callow, April 16, 2004, box 2, folder: Misc.-Mich. ERAmerica and related, Callow Papers.

⁸¹ "ERA and Homosexual Rights Are Separate Issues," Point of View Transcript, Laura Callow, January 26, 1978, WJR Radio, box 2, folder: ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corres.) 1977-1979, Callow Papers. Callow's partisan loyalties, if any, are not apparent from the public records. They indicate that she focused her activism on women's rights, especially the ERA.

that the ERA did not impact abortion because it applied only to rights and obligations that applied to both men and women. Since men could not give birth to children, they argued, the ERA was not relevant to abortion rights.⁸² Peterson noted that she did not understand “how you can equate abortion with equality of rights and privileges [unless those who converged the fights over the ERA and abortion] found a way for men to conceive.”⁸³ To bolster her position on the divisibility of the ERA and abortion, Callow noted that in 1976 the Republican Party supported the ERA but opposed abortion. Opponents, they argued, inaccurately conflated the two issues to radicalize the ERA and confuse the American people.⁸⁴

The efforts of ERA supporters to isolate the ERA from other controversial issues sometimes missed the mark, indicating that they did not always understand the concerns of ERA’s opponents and undecided voters. One of Donnelly’s primary arguments against the ERA was that it would require women to serve in the military under the same terms and conditions as men. ERA proponents responded that

⁸² “ERA Is Not Abortion,” Point of View Transcript, Laura Callow, May 26, 1978, WJR Radio, box 2, folder: ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corres.) 1977-1979, Callow Papers.

⁸³ Peterson to Helen Milliken, March 29 [1976?], box 10, folder: Correspondence 1976, Jan.-July, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁸⁴ “ERA Is Not Abortion,” Point of View Transcript, May 26, 1978.

“excluding women from the draft denies them their equal right to resist war.”⁸⁵

Then, instead of separating the ERA from the draft, they affirmed the concerns of the ERA’s opponents with their legalistic responses. In defense of the ERA, they first emphasized that federal law already authorized the government to draft women into combat. Perhaps realizing that this concession would neither persuade nor reassure women, they then tried to minimize the likelihood that women would be sent into combat by arguing that combat readiness was largely dependent upon physical fitness and women would be asked to do only that which they could do. Callow also tried to disassociate the ERA from combat readiness by arguing that “war is wrong not the ERA. War arguments should not be used in peacetime to deter women from seeking a constitutional guarantee against discrimination on account of sex.”⁸⁶ Moreover, she argued, “It is manhating to oppose the drafting of women but not the drafting of men. Male lives are not less valuable than female lives.”⁸⁷ These logical, but nonresponsive rejoinders and fits of pacifism did little to

⁸⁵ “Sex Discrimination and the Supreme Court,” Point of View Transcript, Laura Callow, July 26, 1981, WJR Radio, box 1, folder: ERAmerica Coalition Update 1977-1995, Callow Papers.

⁸⁶ Point of View Transcript, Laura Callow, April 26, 1979, WJR Radio, box 2, folder: ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corres.) 1977-1979, Callow Papers.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

reassure Americans who did not want their female relatives to be sent into battle, or to refute the arguments of radical feminists that men and women were identical.

For the most part, ERA supporters responded to the dire predictions of ERA's opponents by arguing that the ERA would not significantly change the American way of life or radically restructure American society. They likened it to "'insurance' to guarantee that laws applied to men and women equally without interference by state and local governments."⁸⁸ However, it is easy to see how the opponents of the ERA were able to take advantage of the amendment's ambiguity or at least emphasize its uncertainty. Even its proponents did not understand its impact on current law. Helen Milliken, for example, suggested that laws would change as a result of the ERA, but it was not necessarily clear how they would change. She noted that "if a law restricts rights, it will no longer be valid; if it protects rights, it will probably [emphasis added] be extended to men."⁸⁹ It was difficult to downplay the impact of the proposed constitutional amendment when its leading supporters could not even explain how it would relate to the laws already on the books.

⁸⁸ "Michigan ERAmerica," Point of View Transcript, January 26, 1977, box 2, folder: ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corres.) 1977-79, Callow Papers.

⁸⁹ Helen Milliken, "The Equal Rights Amendment," April, 1982.

When Republican feminists described the benefits of the ERA, they frequently shifted the focus and discussion away from more intangible notions about family and, instead, addressed the economic consequences of the ERA—a topic that was much more comfortable for moderate members of the Republican Party. They emphasized the fact that “marriage is an economic as well as social and emotional partnership”⁹⁰ in order to argue that the ERA protected women as economic actors. Peterson described the ERA as follows: “There has been a lot of rhetoric about the partnership of marriage and the importance of the role of homemaking and the rewards of mothering but there has been precious little action to make it an economically secure and dignified role. The ERA will raise the legal status of the homemaker and strengthen the family unit. In an age of instability, uncertainty and deteriorating family life, it is needed now more than ever.”⁹¹

The ERA would, proponents argued, eliminate many of the laws that made women, especially stay-at home mothers, economically dependent on men. For

⁹⁰ “Social Security and the Homemaker,” Point of View Transcript, Laura Callow, November 26, 1979, WJR Radio, box 2, folder: ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corres.) 1977-1979, Callow Papers.

⁹¹ Speech to Lions Club, Peterson, September 25, 1979.

example, insurance companies would be required to provide health, disability, and life insurance to women on the same terms that they were offered to men. A woman could then purchase insurance on the life of her husband, the proceeds of which could be used to support their children in the event of his death. Women were typically charged more for disability or health insurance because they were considered “clunkers and losers” due to potential “problems with their reproductive systems.”⁹² This practice, in effect, constituted “discrimination on account of motherhood,”⁹³ an argument that enabled Republican feminists to usurp the oftentimes conservative position that they were protecting mothers through the ERA.

The debate over working wives and mothers became particularly intense in the context of discussions about social security laws. Callow emphasized that society security benefits were based on employment, which left unemployed wives and mothers dependent on their spouses for derivative benefits. Divorce and premature death left homemakers who had not participated in the workplace and

⁹² “Discrimination in Insurance and Pensions,” Point of View Transcript, June 1977, WJR Radio, box 2, folder: ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corres) 1977-1979, Callow Papers.

⁹³ Ibid.

accrued benefits of their own particularly vulnerable. Callow argued that “there is a lack of fairness in Social Security for homemakers because under the ‘breadwinner/dependents’ assumption, women are penalized for motherhood.”⁹⁴ The ERA, she contended, would protect the family as an economic unit, a status that was not adequately accounted for under the derivative benefit scheme established by social security laws.⁹⁵ Conversely, Donnelly responded, changes in the Social Security laws to bring about gender equality would eliminate the derivative social security benefits that wives and mothers were able to claim based on their husbands’ working lives. Instead, women would be treated as workers in their homes and the family would be required to pay social security on their behalf, resulting in a tax increase that would force more women to work outside of the home.⁹⁶

Some feminists were critical of the ERA because it failed to address the double burden faced by working women. These activists contended that the ERA should have provided relief for women who had jobs and had to care for their

⁹⁴ “Social Security and the Homemaker,” Point of View Transcript, November 26, 1979.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Point of View Transcript, Elaine Donnelly, November 8, 1979, WJR Radio, box 2, folder: ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corres.) 1977-1979, Callow Papers.

homes and families. Such assistance could have included government provided childcare, paid maternity leave, or other arrangements which divided childcare and homemaking responsibilities between men and women. One woman from the northern peninsula of Michigan explained to Milliken that she hoped that the ERA would be ratified because working women in her community who were paid the legal minimum wage earned eighty dollars each week, but had to pay forty dollars for child care services.⁹⁷ Until this issue was resolved, many believed, men and women would not be truly equal.

Because these fixes for the double burden all increased government spending and required that the government interfere with the family, many Republican feminists were comfortable with this omission. The ERA was less controversial because it did not significantly alter the lives of working women. When she testified before the Michigan legislature in support of ratification of the ERA, Ranny Riecker, the Republican National Committeewoman from Michigan, argued that Republicans could support the ERA precisely because it benefitted families by leaving the double burden intact. Facing the challenges associated with

⁹⁷ "Mrs. Milliken Addresses Women's Caucus," *Marquette Mining Journal*, October 8, 1978, box 4, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 Campaigns (Gubernatorial) (1978) Helen Milliken, Helen Milliken Papers.

employment and homemaking, women would not choose to work outside of the home. She said that “it [the ERA] will not affect the social relationships between men and women. It will not mean that women will automatically desert their homes and families for the ‘fun and excitement’ of the job market, but rather will confirm that they are legally equal. The status of traditional women’s occupations will be enhanced and the role of women’s occupations will be broadened.”⁹⁸ McNamee also disagreed with the notion that families should be restructured so that men could assume some of the double burden. Women, she believed, should care for the home. Men had the responsibility to be good fathers, but not good homemakers.⁹⁹

Republican feminists emphasized that the ERA would create gender equality by incrementally changing the law. As a result, they could assert that it did not change the roles of men and women in society or undermine the sanctity of the traditional family. Peterson made it clear that the ERA had no impact on “the personal relationships between man and wife—whether he supports her or not,

⁹⁸ Statement Concerning Ratification of the 27th Amendment to the Federal Constitution, Ranny Riecker, Republican National Committeewoman for Michigan, April 27, 1972, box 1, folder 18: Equal Rights Amendment Testimonies, 1970-1972, accession no. MS 80-72, MacIntosh Papers.

⁹⁹ Hay, “Birmingham’s Mayor Speaks Out,” August 20, 1970.

whether she works or not is a personal relation—and will not be covered in the ERA.”¹⁰⁰ McNamee asserted that the “ERA will not alter family life. Women are the heart of the family and the family is the cornerstone of America. If you help American women, [you] strengthen the family and [the] total social fabric of this nation.”¹⁰¹ By emphasizing the ways in which the ERA’s economic changes benefited the family, Republican feminists mediated between radical feminists who wanted the government to address the structural inequities that resulted in the double burden faced by working class women, and Republican conservatives who argued that the ERA would destroy families. From the sensible center, Michigan’s Republican feminists could argue that the ERA did not systemically change American society. It did, however, provide economic support and protections to families and mothers in ways that did not undermine the familial structure. Moreover, stripped of any connection to abortion and homosexual rights, it became less of a moral threat to the family.

¹⁰⁰ Peterson, Notes Regarding ERAmerica Organization, n.d., box 19, folder: ERAmerica, ERAmerica Organizational Material, 1976-1980, Peterson Papers.

¹⁰¹ Speech to A.A.U.W. of Birmingham, Ruth McNamee, 3, March 1 1973, box 1, folder: Speeches and Articles 1970-1981, McNamee Papers.

Michigan's Republican feminists believed that moderate Republicans would be more likely to support the ERA if they could connect it to longstanding party ideology. Thus, they framed the ERA as the latest attempt of Republicans to seek equality for all Americans, consistent with the party's long-term commitment to "individual freedoms and human rights for the common man and woman."¹⁰² The ERA was merely an extension of or follow up to the emancipation of the slaves and the fight for women's suffrage. This historical tie legitimized the connections between the Republican Party, as the party of equal rights, and feminism, as the social movement established to promote equality for women. In fact, in 1976, Jeanne Holm, the first woman to become an Air Force general, and an advisor to President Ford on women's issues, asserted that "it is imperative, I feel, that a Republican President deal with this phenomenon [the women's movement] because the major gains women have made throughout our history have been made under Republican leadership."¹⁰³ The Republican Party, as the party that freed the slaves, was the natural party to lead the fight for the ERA.

¹⁰² Statement Before Republican Platform Committee, Elly M. Peterson, August 9, 1976, box 16, folder: Wednesday Coffee Group, Peterson Papers; Rymph, *Republican Women*, 190, 209-10.

¹⁰³ Speech to the Republican Women's Federal Forum, Jeanne M. Holm, Special Assistant to the President, June 14, 1976, 4, box 16, folder: Republican Women's Political Forum, Peterson Papers.

In order to legitimize themselves as the representatives for women in the Republican Party, Republican feminists appropriated the sensible center of the women's movement. In this middle ground they distinguished themselves from both radical feminists and anti-feminist conservative Republicans. Ideologically, it was comfortable place for them to reside. Substantively, most Republican feminists did not agree with the radicalism of liberation feminists. In an April 1974 speech in Lansing, Michigan, on behalf of a Democratic candidate for the state Senate, feminist Steinem indicated that she would support any woman for office, regardless of party affiliation, because "there is no such thing as a larger struggle than women."¹⁰⁴ During that same speech, she argued "overthrowing capitalism is too small for us. We want to overthrow the whole fucking patriarchy!"¹⁰⁵ Expressing her disapproval in a marginal notation to Steinem's quote, Milliken wrote, "what a shame."¹⁰⁶

At the same time, they realized that if they associated with feminist extremists, they would not have the legitimacy to promote the ERA within a

¹⁰⁴ Cynthia Krolik, "Ms. Gloria Steinem for Dem. Marjorie Lansing," *Michigan Free Press*, April 15, 1974, box 9, folder: Correspondence 1975 April-July, Helen Milliken Papers.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

moderate Republican Party. For example, in 1976 the Detroit Coalition to Defend ERA asked Callow for her support. She quickly realized, however, that the organization was an affiliate of the Young Socialist Workers Party, not a coalition of Wayne State University student groups who supported the ERA, as she was led to believe. She refused to affiliate with the group because she believed that it intended to connect the ERA to abortion and lesbian rights, and otherwise appropriate the ERA for its own purposes. She also worried that such associations might undermine her personal legitimacy and credibility as a spokeswoman for the ERA, and her reputation with respectable organizations like the League of Women Voters.¹⁰⁷

From this middle ground, Michigan's Republican feminists also actively disengaged from the conservative women in their party. On the positive side, they hoped to maximize the effectiveness of their own message by identifying one unimpeachable public representative to articulate their positions with both the Michigan legislature and the Republican Party. They decided that Helen Milliken was the perfect women "to serve as the spokesperson for Republican women in

¹⁰⁷ Callow to Jane Cutts and Audrey McConachie, Memorandum Re: Detroit Coalition to Defend ERA, February 19, 1976, box 2, folder: W.O.M.E.N. Correspondence 1975-1979 and undated, Callow Papers.

Michigan.”¹⁰⁸ Because she was more well known and respected than Donnelly, she was best positioned to fight efforts to rescind the ratification of the ERA in Michigan and to negate the influence of Donnelly and other conservative women within the Republican Party.¹⁰⁹ It is not apparent how these women felt when Milliken was subsequently named co-chairperson of the nonpartisan ERAmerica, where she assumed responsibility for a nationally focused effort to ratify the ERA. In retrospect, however, not even Milliken could have healed the intensifying rifts within the Michigan Republican Party over the women’s movement.

At the same time, Michigan’s Republican feminists went on the offensive to delegitimize their conservative opponents and attack their motives. They argued that “Elaine Donnelly does not speak for us, that she does not represent us, and that she is, in fact, a minority of a minority, who, while welcome to their opinions, should not influence decisions in the Michigan Legislature.”¹¹⁰ Michigan’s Republican feminists characterized Donnelly and Barbour as bad Republicans. Because they worked with both Republican and Democratic members of the

¹⁰⁸ “The E.R.A. and Republican Women: A Proposal, 2,” n.d., box 7, folder: Topical Files 1969-1982, Michigan Women’s Task Force, Helen Milliken Papers.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Michigan legislature to rescind the ERA, Republican feminists argued that they put “their own special concerns--whatever they may be,” above those of the party, “caus[ing] strife, confusion, and divisiveness.”¹¹¹ Republican feminists, on the other hand, argued that they put their partisanship above their feminism and were loyal to the Republican Party.¹¹²

ERA advocates refused to engage with their opponents, hoping to send the message that their positions were not even worthy of consideration. As a result, NOW and Michigan ERAmerica did not participate in ERA debates. The League of Women Voters noted that “all too often debates degenerate into ‘sideshows’ for proponents and opponents, with the press picking up the most sensational aspects of the debate with headlines like ‘ERA--Integrated bathrooms and homosexual marriages?’ regardless of the truth.”¹¹³ Thus, supporters argued, opponents used debates to set forth their unsubstantiated emotional objections to the amendment, which only diverted attention from the real issues and “create[d] doubt. We must

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ruth Clusen, President, and Joanne Hayes, ERA Chairperson, League of Women Voters to State and Local League Presidents, memorandum, November 18, 1976, 2, box 1, folder: ERAmerica Conferences and Speaking Engagements 1976-1980, Callow Papers; Callow to Mary Jane Clayton, March 9, 1979, box 1, folder: ERAmerica Correspondence Midland (MI) Mary Jane Clayton 1978-1979, Callow Papers.

overcome any remaining doubt--let's not help them create it."¹¹⁴ In one instance, Michigan ERAmerica refused to participate in a proposed debate over the ERA sponsored by the Women's Studies Department at the University of Michigan. Callow argued that it made no sense to argue about whether the ERA was necessary. "The very existence of a Women and the Law class indicates women are treated differently under the law."¹¹⁵ A debate legitimized alternatives to gender equality.¹¹⁶

Not only did proponents dismiss the need to debate the ERA, they also delegitimized their opponents by questioning their credentials to participate in such debates. While the Women's Studies Department suggested that Donnelly represent the opposition to the ERA, Callow argued that her prior debates with Donnelly "were 'media events' that were neither legal nor scholarly."¹¹⁷ She characterized Donnelly as an entertainer, not someone with real knowledge about

¹¹⁴ Clusen and Hayes to State and Local League Presidents, memorandum, November 18, 1976, 3.

¹¹⁵ Callow to Mona Fernandez and Elizabeth Yen, Women's Studies Department, University of Michigan, November 21, 1979, box 1, folder: ERAmerica Conferences and Speaking Engagements 1976-1980, Callow Papers.

¹¹⁶ Callow to Fernandez and Yen, November 21, 1979; Callow to Clayton, March 8, 1979.

¹¹⁷ Callow to Fernandez and Yen, November 21, 1979.

the ERA.¹¹⁸ The Director of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Michigan responded that the decision to present information about the ERA in a debate format which included arguments against the ERA was "a matter of pedagogic discretion," and that the university's professors have the ability to sift through and prepare their students for information which might be inaccurate or inappropriate.¹¹⁹ Thus, they did not agree with Callow that arguments against the ERA should be dismissed. Since Donnelly was unavailable on the suggested date, the university instead brought in a lawyer to speak about the ERA, including arguments on both sides of the ratification question.¹²⁰

When Peterson, at the request of Michigan ERAmerica, withdrew from a scheduled debate with Schlafly, Schlafly argued that ERA's proponents were scared to debate the issues surrounding the ERA.¹²¹ While this might have been a popular position for Schlafly to take to generate support from her base constituents, it was not truthful. ERA supporters in Michigan realized they had nothing to gain from

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Margot Norris, Director of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Michigan to Callow, November 26, 1979, box 1, folder: ERAmerica Conferences and Speaking Engagements 1976-1980, Callow Papers.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Eagle Forum Newsletter, August 1976, box 15, folder: Convention and Republican Women, Peterson Papers.

debates because ERA ratification was a fait accompli in the Michigan.¹²² Michigan ERAmerica's motives were not based on fear, but were strategic and consistent with the belief of ERA proponents that there were no legitimate issues that needed to be discussed relative to the amendment. This strategy, however, did not help their cause. The refusal of ERA's proponents to acknowledge or address the arguments of their opponents meant that the two sides failed to engage, which offered no reassurance to those who heard, but did not know how to process, the allegedly outlandish allegations of the opponents of the ERA.

By the second half of the 1970s, Michigan's Republican feminists added personal attacks to their substantive arguments about the ERA. Peterson never made a secret of her contempt for conservatives. She wrote that "it is a strange new life for me--I never fought the Democrats hating them--nor did I feel they hated me. Now I find myself with the right wingers filled with vicious propaganda which I can't simply say 'HOW can people believe that?'"¹²³ Republican feminists invoked gender, class and race to attack the character, motives and message of their opponents who, they argued, were the hapless, powerless pawns of rich,

¹²² Callow to Clayton, March 8, 1979.

¹²³ Peterson to Willah, April 16, 1976, box 17, folder: Republican Party. Correspondence 1972-1979, Peterson Papers.

white men with a broadly nefarious political agenda. They contended that the movement against the ERA was a part of a larger conspiracy led by anti-progressive, radical right-wing hypocrites who invoked nationalism and religion to justify their attempts to impose their ideological agenda on the country.¹²⁴ In an atypically alarmist assertion, Peterson identified them as “bigger, more terrifying, more destructive than a small band of Southern bigots or a handful of vindictive women using their powers against their own sex.” They were “wealthy white ‘super-patriots and super-Christians,” who sought “to give the New Right control of the U.S.”¹²⁵ They relied on religion to justify their opposition to the ERA but, according to Peterson, their piety was false. They merely invoked religion to raise money, and then used the money for political power, not to further their religious beliefs.¹²⁶

To accomplish their goals, Republican feminists argued, the New Right opposed anyone who did not look, think, or act like them. Peterson believed that they dismissed the concerns of “welfare mothers, . . . the poor, the blacks, foreign-

¹²⁴ Cheryl Arvidson, “Feminists See Right-Wing Coalition at Work in ERA Opposition,” *Ann Arbor News*, September 24, 1977.

¹²⁵ Remer Tyson, “Fight New Right, Women Told,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 30, 1979.

¹²⁶ “Elly Peterson Would Like Woman in White House,” *Detroit News*, September 2, 1979.

borns, Jews, women.”¹²⁷ According to Helen Milliken, “the New Right appears to wrap itself in a mantle of self-righteous infallibility . . . to pursue . . . [its] politics of intimidation” against minorities, women, and the poor.¹²⁸ Callow wrote that she “found opponents of ERA to be a curious lot; the Communist Party, Ku Klux Klan, John Birch Society, some anti-feminist groups with names like HOTDOG, HOW and Stop-ERA.”¹²⁹ Republican feminists agreed that conservative women provided the cover for a group of powerful, wealthy, white men who worked through a network of organizations and fundamentalist churches to promote an intolerant, broad-based agenda that was intended to change the country.¹³⁰

Michigan’s Republican feminists adopted the sensible center of the women’s movement with respect to the ERA. They disagreed with radical feminists who hoped that the ERA would help to eliminate patriarchy and create gender equality through a restructured society. At the same time, they opposed conservative women who believed that the ERA would destroy the traditional family, expand the

¹²⁷ Tyson, “Fight New Right, Women Told,” *Detroit Free Press*.

¹²⁸ Helen Milliken, quoted in “Remarks for the ERA Get Together,” Elly Peterson, August 19, 1979, box 25, folder: Speeches, 1979, Peterson Papers.

¹²⁹ “Michigan ERAmerica,” Point of View Transcript, February 25, 1977.

¹³⁰ Speech, Elly Peterson, n.d., box 25, folder: Speeches, 1979, Peterson Papers.

federal government, and interfere with their goal of unfettered capitalism. From this middle ground, they contended that the ERA helped women by creating economic equality, which protected and promoted families because these women were often also wives and mothers. They argued that the ERA was not as radical as the more extreme feminists wanted or conservative Republicans feared. However, anti-ERA conservative women were mostly Republicans, which made the battle over the ERA a part of the larger, ongoing struggle for control of the Republican Party. Michigan's Republican feminists offered their party's moderate leadership a compromised interpretation of the ERA. As Republicans and representatives of the "sensible center" of the women's movement, they linked their gendered and their partisan interests, which enabled them to argue on behalf of the ERA, and to reconcile, at least temporarily, these two, potentially conflicting, identities. However, as the following chapters indicate, this middle road was slowly narrowing.

CHAPTER FIVE REPUBLICAN FEMINISTS AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS: 1970 TO 1980

The right to control one's own body is a basic human and democratic right.

–Flier, “Abortion-A Woman’s Right to Choose”

Abortion was made illegal in Michigan in 1848, except to protect the life of the mother. Starting in the late 1960s, pro-choice activists, including Republican feminists, NOW, and the MWPC, unsuccessfully tried to convince the Michigan legislature to liberalize the state’s abortion laws. It was only in 1973, with the United States Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, that Michigan’s longstanding prohibition against abortion was finally invalidated.¹ *Roe* made it unconstitutional for a state to interfere with a woman’s right to privacy, including her right to have an abortion, although the court concluded that a state could place limitations on access to abortion after the first trimester.²

Despite the Supreme Court decision, abortion remained a highly contested political issue in Michigan as activists continued to fight over meaningful access to legal abortions and birth control, especially for poor women and minors. Proponents and opponents of reproductive rights in Michigan did not divide neatly along partisan lines. During much of the 1970s, the Democratic Party, with its large

¹ *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

² Sheila Taylor, *Abortion: A History of Abortion Laws in Michigan*, Michigan Legislative Service Bureau, Legislative Research Division, Research Report, 18, no. 2, February 1998, 1.

Catholic constituency, was often the most outspoken opponent of liberalized abortion rights. Although opposition to abortion steadily increased in the national Republican Party throughout the 1970s, Governor Milliken remained a staunch supporter not only of abortion, but also government funding for abortions for poor women. Thus, in Michigan he temporarily slowed the partisan realignment that was occurring elsewhere in the country. Milliken's position became an issue during the the 1978 Michigan gubernatorial election between him and William Fitzgerald, a Catholic, pro-life Democrat who opposed abortion. Although Milliken won the election, the fight over taxpayer funded abortions continued.

Republican feminists actively participated in the politicization of abortion in Michigan. Two of them led the state's pro-choice movement and fought to protect the right to legal, safe, and affordable abortions for all women. Their activism developed in two stages and on multiple fronts. Until *Roe*, they used the legislature, the judiciary, and the voters to try to legalize abortion in Michigan. Once the *Roe* Court recognized that women had the right to terminate their pregnancies, pro-choice Republican feminists shifted their attention to the legislature, and directed their efforts at blocking encroachments on abortion rights and making abortion accessible to all women, regardless of their ability to pay.

By the end of the 1970s, pro-choice Republican feminists, with the support of Governor Milliken, had managed to protect a woman's right to abortion in Michigan. Contrary to most states, Michigan even paid for abortions for women who could not otherwise afford them. However, they faced growing opposition to their pro-choice position from women within their own party when, in 1976, the Republican Party officially dropped support for abortion rights from its national party platform. Surprisingly, Michigan's Republican feminists also faced opposition from one of their own. In 1974, Binsfeld, who was a pro-life Republican feminist, was elected to the Michigan legislature. As pressures mounted on them from all sides, it became more difficult, but not yet impossible, for them to sustain their pro-choice position within the Michigan Republican Party. Moreover, while Binsfeld opposed them on abortion, she also provided the possibility for compromise on some of the less controversial reproductive issues that faced the state.

Members of the Michigan legislature unsuccessfully tried to amend the state's virtually blanket prohibition of abortion from 1967 until 1972. (The only exception was to save the life of the mother.) While Michigan voters did not consistently divide along partisan lines on the question of abortion, opposition to abortion reform in these early years was more likely to come from the Democratic

Party, due primarily to its large constituency of union members, who were mostly Catholic immigrants.³ Not surprisingly, then, in 1970 the Michigan Republican Party endorsed the notion of abortion reform.⁴ That same year, Governor Milliken, citing legislative upheaval and the fact that women who wanted abortions obtained them illegally, stated, “I believe that women, under appropriate conditions, should be permitted to make an individual judgment, [concerning abortion] and that the result of this judgment should be respected and protected by law.”⁵ He argued that because the people of Michigan could not agree on the abortion issue, and neither side was necessarily incorrect, abortion laws needed to be reformed to make the procedure available to all women, which would then permit each woman to determine whether to have an abortion based on her individual value system and religious beliefs.⁶

³ Robert N. Karrer, “The Formation of Michigan’s Anti-Abortion Movement 1967-1974,” *Michigan Historical Review* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 79.

⁴ Resolution, Michigan Republican Party, n.d., box 1, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Position Statements, 1970-1972, of various organizations on abortion reform [16], Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Records 1969-1972, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as MARC Papers).

⁵ Statement, Governor William Milliken, March 17, 1970, 1, box 1, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Position Statements, 1970-1972, of various organizations on abortion reform [18], MARC Papers.

⁶ Ibid.

At the same time, he established specific parameters for an abortion reform law that would be acceptable to him. He endorsed a three-month, first trimester limitation on abortion, along with a requirement that the procedure take place in a licensed medical facility. He believed that a pregnant woman had the sole right to decide whether to have an abortion in consultation with her doctor and, if the pregnant girl was an unmarried minor, with the consent of her parents. He also required a conscience clause in any legislation to protect medical personnel from being required to participate in an objectionable abortion medical procedure. Previewing the abortion debate that he engaged in for much of his tenure as governor, he argued that safe abortions should be made available to poor women who could not otherwise afford the procedure. Finally, Governor Milliken reiterated that he “believe[d] very deeply in the strength of the family as the basic unit of our society.”⁷ He concluded that a family was most likely to remain intact if, when faced with an unwanted pregnancy, a woman was given the option to have an abortion.⁸

Supported by the governor and the endorsement of the Michigan Republican Party, Michigan’s Republican feminists worked for abortion reform, initially

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 1-3.

through legislative changes and, when they realized the futility of their efforts, through other means. As a member of the Michigan Senate in 1969 and 1970, Beebe led the effort to decriminalize abortion. She hoped to redefine it as a legal medical procedure to be performed in a licensed facility based on a decision made between a woman and her doctor.⁹ Beebe exemplified the feminist strategy of making the personal political when she came to the Senate floor during the 1968 debates over the abortion bill and admitted to her colleagues that she had had a therapeutic abortion. She had been advised that it was virtually impossible for her to have children, but after numerous medical procedures and miscarriages, she ultimately had a son and a daughter. During the fourth month of one of her unsuccessful pregnancies, however, doctors discovered that the fetus was dead and had to be medically removed.

Her admission was heralded as heroic by many of her male colleagues, but she was disappointed by the demeaning comments made by others on the legislative floor. These men could not understand the positions of the women on whose behalf they were making vital decisions. Thus, she felt compelled to tell her

⁹ Jack M. Stack, "Abortion Law Reform Progress in Michigan," box 39, folder: Abortion, Republican Party, (Mich.), State Central Committee Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

story. In that chamber, she alone was able to convey the female perspective from someone who had agonized over the termination of a pregnancy.¹⁰ From the Senate floor she asked her fellow senators whether they could “say ‘I am pregnant: I am happy’ or ‘I am desperate?’” and then reminded them, “No, you can’t begin to imagine the feeling that a woman has.”¹¹ She found that many of these men were also judgmental, suggesting that women who sought abortions were immoral both for both engaging in the sexual act through which the fetus was conceived and killing an unborn child.¹²

Beebe’s heartfelt testimony did not convince a majority of senators to vote to liberalize Michigan’s restrictive abortion laws in 1969, 1970, or 1971, when bills to reform such laws were all defeated. While most state legislators indicated that they supported abortion reform, they could not agree among themselves in either legislative branch or between the House and the Senate on the nature and scope of that reform.¹³ According to Beebe, abortion reform was undermined by the

¹⁰ Nancy Costello, “Beebe’s Bombshell Sparked New Era,” *Lansing Star*, November 8, 1979, box 2, folder: Miscellaneous, Beebe Papers.

¹¹ Holliday, “The Lady Said ‘Abortion,’” August 3, 1969.

¹² Speech, Lorraine Beebe, April 11, 1970, box 2, folder: Speeches State Senator 1966-1970, Beebe Papers.

¹³ Jane Briggs, “House Fight Due on Abortion Bill,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 28, 1971.

organized efforts of the Catholic Church.¹⁴ In fact, Beebe lost her reelection bid in 1970 to her Catholic, Democratic opponent, David Plawecki, who made abortion a primary issue in the campaign. One of his campaign brochures, featuring three pictures of cherubic babies, emphasized the ambiguity over when life begins, and suggested that legalized abortion might constitute murder.¹⁵ Despite her electoral defeat, Beebe continued her efforts to legalize abortion after she left the Michigan legislature.

Republican feminist Kefauver joined Beebe in her 1970 reelection campaign for state senator and in her ongoing fight to legalize abortion in Michigan. A committed political activist, Kefauver was a legislative expert who lobbied on behalf of a number of organizations, including WEAL and NOW, in support of women's issues, particularly abortion rights for women.¹⁶ Like Beebe, she was angered by the fact that a mostly male legislature made laws on behalf of women. She argued "that collectively they [the male legislature] hate you as a woman

¹⁴ Robert H. Longstaff, "Abortion Law Change Is Defeated in Senate," *Flint Journal*, May 15, 1970, Scrapbook, Beebe Papers.

¹⁵ Campaign Flier for David A. Plawecki, box 2, folder: Correspondence 1970 after election loss, Beebe Papers.

¹⁶ Lee Kefauver, Personal history with pro-choice activities, box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Biographical Information, Kefauver Papers.

because they are insecure as men.' . . . 'If you are black, they can deal with you and go home to a segregated neighborhood. But most of these white, male legislators go home to a woman--a wife, daughter or whatever. And they'll be damned if they'll give up any power to a woman.'"¹⁷ Like other Republican feminists, she recognized that the largely male legislature did not understand women, and actually prevented them from trying to promote their interests. In such a restrictive environment, women had to empower themselves through the strategic use of their voting power.¹⁸

By 1971 Beebe and Kefauver recognized that although members of the Michigan legislature continued to try to liberalize abortion laws, they were not likely to succeed. Thus, they identified different strategies to accomplish their goal of repealing or reforming Michigan's prohibition on abortion—a judicial challenge and a grassroots voter referendum. In 1971 Kefauver and Beebe were a part of the Michigan Women's Abortion Suit, an organized class action lawsuit in which over one thousand plaintiffs argued that Michigan's law criminalizing abortion was unconstitutional. Beebe was the named plaintiff in the lawsuit filed in Wayne

¹⁷ Holtz, "Lansing Lobbyists Strike from Dearborn," September 6, 1979.

¹⁸ Ibid.

County Circuit Court on August 31, 1971. Plaintiffs claimed to speak on behalf of all of the women in Michigan who believed that a woman who wanted an abortion should not be forced to choose between an out-of-state legal abortion, an illegal abortion in Michigan, or a self-induced abortion. The goal of the lawsuit was to convince the judge to recognize a constitutional right to abortion, which would effectively repeal all of Michigan's laws that prohibited abortion.¹⁹

However, the lawsuit's plaintiffs were much like the women who joined together to form political caucuses. Although they all agreed that abortion should be made legal, their personal and ideological diversity led to significant disagreements. By 1972 politics divided the plaintiffs. Leaders of the lawsuit were members of the Detroit Abortion Action Coalition, a local subsidiary of the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition.²⁰ Some plaintiffs, including Beebe,

¹⁹ Flier, "Abortion-A Woman's Right to Choose," box 1, folder: Topical Files, Abortion: Michigan Women's Abortion Suit, 1971-1972, Kefauver Papers.

²⁰ The Women's National Abortion Action Coalition was founded in July 1971 as a broad-based coalition of women who shared an interest in repealing all limitations and restrictions on abortions and contraception. Some of its members were particularly concerned about the onerous impact of laws governing reproduction, including illegal abortions and forced sterilization, on poor women. They argued that abortion restrictions, forced sterilization, and limitations on contraception all dovetailed, because they all influenced a woman's right to choose whether to have a child. One member, a candidate for the City Council in Seattle, Washington, noted that "government-financed family planning centers, which are used primarily by poor and minority women, often are little more than research laboratories using us as the guinea pigs. We have the right to know whether pills and devices are fully tested before we take them." Newsletter, Women's National Abortion Action Coalition, September 16, 1971, box 3, folder: Miscellanea [75], MARC Papers.

objected to the involvement of this organization because it was created by the Socialist Workers Party. They were concerned that the organization's socialist ties might undermine the lawsuit's singular focus on repealing Michigan's abortion laws by introducing politics into the conflict.²¹

In addition to the lawsuit, another group of abortion activists, led by the Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee (MARC), (initially the Michigan Coordinating Committee for Abortion Law Reform), obtained over three hundred thousand signatures to place on the November 1972 statewide ballot a referendum proposing a statute that, if approved by the voters, would become law without being adopted by the legislature.²² The referendum provided that "all other laws to the contrary notwithstanding, a licensed medical or osteopathic physician may perform an abortion at the request of a patient if the period of gestation has not exceeded 20 weeks. The procedure shall be performed in a licensed hospital or other facility approved by the Department of Public Health."²³ Referendum

²¹ Attachment, "Controversy Within the Michigan Women's Abortion Suit, Lee Lavalli (Kefauver) to 'Sister,'" February 20, 1972, box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Topical Files, Abortion: Michigan Women's Abortion Suit 1971-1972, Kefauver Papers.

²² Lucille DeView, "Abortion Pro: The Right of a Woman to Choose?," *Detroit News*, n.d. box 2, folder: Miscellaneous, Beebe Papers.

²³ Michigan Coordinating Committee for Abortion Law Reform, press release, October 14, 1971, box 2, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Referendum Campaign, 1972 Publicity and Press Releases, [38], MARC Papers; Initiative Petition, Initiation of

supporters hoped that the citizens of Michigan would be willing to take a position that the legislature refused to adopt. While both Beebe and Kefauver supported the ballot referendum, relations between the two groups, one supporting repeal and the other backing reform, were not necessarily harmonious. For example, proponents of the ballot referendum criticized participants in the lawsuit for failing to support the referendum effort.²⁴

The public seemed to support the referendum and preelection polling indicated that it would easily pass. Noting that the Michigan legislature was unlikely to meaningfully address abortion reform, and that the Michigan Republican Party supported such reform, the Michigan Republican State Central Committee, the governing body of the state party, unanimously endorsed this referendum. Moreover, the Michigan Republican Party directed its representatives to promote a platform plank at the 1972 national convention advocating the legalization of abortion during the first twenty weeks of pregnancy. Helen Milliken publicly

Legislation, box 2, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Referendum Campaign, 1972 Publicity and Press Releases [39], MARC Papers; Newsletter, Oakland County B-Abortion Reform-November 7, box 2, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Referendum Campaign, 1972 Publicity and Press Releases [40], MARC Papers.

²⁴ Untitled Article, Attachment to Note from Jack M. Stack, n.d., box 1, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Referendum Campaign, 1972 Publicity and Press Releases [34], MARC Papers.

supported the referendum, but the governor, despite his support for liberalized abortion laws, refused to specifically endorse the ballot proposal.²⁵

On October 5, 1972, the Wayne County Circuit Court issued a ruling invalidating Michigan's laws criminalizing abortion. Judge Charles Kaufman concluded that the law "violated a woman's right to privacy and 'control over her own body.'"²⁶ He added that at whatever stage of her pregnancy, a woman's abortion decision was to be made solely by her and her doctor. The order prohibited both the Wayne County Prosecutor and the Michigan Attorney General from enforcing the state's abortion laws.²⁷ The decision was stayed, however, pending appeal, and on October 20, 1972, the Michigan Supreme Court agreed to bypass the Court of Appeals and hear the case.²⁸ Once they received this favorable ruling, Kefauver encouraged plaintiffs to support the referendum because it filled

²⁵ Resolution on the Abortion Reform Petition Drive, December, 1971, box 1, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Position Statements, 1970-1972, of Various Organizations on Abortion Reform [19], MARC Papers; Resolution of the Michigan Republican Party, n.d., box 1, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Position Statements, 1970-1972, of Various Organizations on Abortion Reform [16], MARC Papers; John Gill, "Brickley Opposes Abortion," *Detroit News*, October 20, 1972.

²⁶ Judy Diebolt, "Ban on Prosecution Lifted: State Supreme Court to Rule on Abortion," *Detroit Free Press*, October 21, 1972.

²⁷ Judy Diebolt and Paul Branzburg, "State's Abortion Laws Struck Down," *Detroit Free Press*, October 6, 1972.

²⁸ Diebolt, "Ban on Prosecution Lifted," October 21, 1972.

the void in state abortion laws with a law that governed licensing of abortion facilities, thus preventing abuse by prohibiting unsavory abortionists from practicing in Michigan.²⁹

One month after Judge Kaufman’s decision, despite polling results to the contrary, the abortion ballot initiative was overwhelmingly defeated, “because [according to one scholar] anti-abortionists were more organized, used more sophisticated advertising, and ably articulated the moral issue.”³⁰ He argued that voters’ early support for abortion reform in Michigan was based on a theoretic, sanitized notion of abortion. When the procedure was humanized through graphic pictures of twenty-week aborted fetuses, support evaporated.³¹ The characterization of access to abortion as an equal rights issue was more appealing to a judge than to Michigan’s voters who were persuaded by the anti-abortion movement that liberalized abortion rights destroyed human life.

²⁹ Letter to Friends [Michigan Women’s Abortion Suit], author unknown, [between October 5, 1972 and November 7, 1972?], box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Topical Files, Abortion: Michigan’s Women’s Abortion Suit, 1971-1972, Kefauver Papers.

³⁰ Karrer, “Formation of Michigan’s Anti-Abortion Movement,” 95.

³¹ Ibid., 94-97. Karrer examined in great detail the development of the anti-abortion movement in Michigan during this period.

Before the appeal of Judge Kaufman’s decision could be considered, the United States Supreme Court issued its decision in *Roe* and the Michigan Supreme Court shifted its consideration to a review of the circuit court ruling in light of the United States Supreme Court decision. The Michigan Supreme Court concluded that Judge Kaufman correctly invalidated Michigan’s abortion prohibition, but under *Roe*, decriminalization was limited to the first trimester of pregnancy. Thereafter, once the fetus became viable, the issue of whether abortion was a crime depended on the facts of the case.³²

Beebe, Kefauver, Burnett, and Helen Milliken all believed that “the right to control one’s own body is a basic human and democratic right,” and that true equality would be achieved only when women had the ability to control their own reproductive lives.³³ They tried to debunk the notion that most women sought

³² *Larkin v. Wayne County Prosecutor, Beebe v. Wayne County Prosecutor*, 389 Mich. 533 (1973), <https://casetext.com/case/larkin-v-wayne-prosecutor>.

³³ Flier, “Abortion-A Woman’s Right to Choose.” Milliken also believed that abortion was a valuable tool in the fight for population control. The American people, she contended, had to be shown how their lives and the lives of their children would improve if there were fewer people in the world. In that regard, she argued that “stopping the disastrous growth in population will give our children a better chance to find decent jobs in an increasingly tough employment market. It will increase the chances that they will have enough room to live, enough park space, wilderness to enjoy and a decent distance between them and their neighbors. If population growth is stopped, we can be certain that our children will not be forced to lower their standard of living. In short, we can show that the quality of life can be maintained and improved, provided the quantity of life is controlled.” Mrs. William G. Milliken, Michigan Confederation of Zero Population Growth, October 17, 1971, box 2, folder: Publicity and press releases [36], MARC Papers. This position was debunked when it became clear that

abortions because they were raped or abused by family members, or feared that they would give birth to a child with birth defects. Instead, abortion proponents concluded that “the overwhelming number of women seek abortions because they do not want to give birth to an unwelcome or unexpected child.”³⁴ As the primary caregivers of children, women, they believed, should be empowered to decide whether they wanted to take on that responsibility. “We want to determine the number of children we have on the basis of our ability to care for them.”³⁵ Abortion restrictions “have the effect of legally sanctioning compulsory pregnancy”³⁶ and made pregnant women helpless victims.³⁷

Beebe distinguished between the right to have an abortion and the decision about whether to have an abortion. The government was properly involved in granting the right to have an abortion because it was a political issue involving the

these efforts at population control had been selectively applied against poor and minority women. Ziegler, *After Roe*, 231.

³⁴ “What You Always Wanted to Know About Abortion but Couldn’t Find!” Michigan Coordinating Council for Abortion Law Reform, n.d., 2, box 2, folder: Publicity and press releases [36], MARC Papers.

³⁵ Flier, “Abortion-A Woman’s Right to Choose.”

³⁶ “Statement: For the Urban Coalition, From: The Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee,” n.d., box 1, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Position Statements, 1970-1972 of Various Organizations on Abortion Reform, MARC Papers.

³⁷ Speech, Beebe, April 11, 1970.

health and welfare of women and children. On the other hand, she argued, the questions of when life begins and whether to have an abortion were both moral or religious decisions best left to the discretion of the individuals who faced unwanted pregnancies. By prohibiting abortion, the government deprived women of the right to make this personal decision and imposed the religious or moral beliefs of some of its citizens on others.³⁸ The law, she argued, needed to grant all women access to abortion and to provide them with the information necessary to make this important decision. Proponents of abortion law reform argued that they were not pro-abortion, but rather pro-choice. The law would not force anyone to have an abortion.³⁹

Activists like Beebe who favored abortion reform found that they had to avoid the thorny issue of when life begins because, at that point, the protections afforded to a pregnant woman had to be balanced against those of the unborn child. Beebe dealt with this problem by declaring it a personal decision that was irrelevant to the public debate. Perhaps trying to head off the problems that they would face if forced to answer the question of when life began, they also argued that if

³⁸ Ibid.; Holliday, "The Lady Said 'Abortion,'" August 3, 1969.

³⁹ Ibid.

abortions were legal, pregnant women would seek abortions earlier in the pregnancy, and justified the twenty-week window because it allowed for testing that would reveal birth defects. Late-term abortions were not the norm, nor the desired outcome. Even doctors who supported abortion reform were opposed to these types of abortions, abortion proponents claimed.⁴⁰

Beebe and Kefauver stressed the dangers of illegal abortion, and argued that if Michigan did not liberalize its abortion laws, those who could afford to do so would travel to New York, where abortion was legal. Young and/or poor women would seek dangerous illegal abortions in Michigan. Legalizing abortion in Michigan would save these women from the risks associated with botched abortions performed under less than sterile conditions by unqualified abortion providers. One doctor suggested that “a girl would be safer to walk blindfolded across the Ford Freeway than to have an abortion with contaminated, unsterilized instruments.”⁴¹ This pipeline of illegal abortions could only be stopped, they argued, by legalizing abortion in the state.

⁴⁰ DeView, “Abortion Pro,” *Detroit News*.

⁴¹ Very Important Material, Report, Number 21, Dr. Thomas N. Evans, chairman, Department of Gynecology, Wayne State University Medical School, March 20, 1969, issued by William F. McLaughlin, Republican state chairman, box 2, folder: Publicity and Press Releases [36], MARC Papers.

Republican feminists also asserted that abortion protected unborn children from the neglect, abuse, and poverty that they would experience if born into a situation where they were not wanted, and saved the government from the economic and intangible costs associated with caring for them. They cited one study that concluded that children who were not wanted were “more likely than others born at the same time to suffer from insecurity and instability in childhood. The incidence of learning problems, psychiatric disorders, delinquency and crime was about twice as high; and they were six times more likely to need public assistance between the ages of 16 and 21.”⁴² These children struggled, and then they became unproductive adults who burdened society. Moreover, they replicated this pattern with their own children.⁴³ Every child should be wanted, Beebe believed.⁴⁴ She lamented, “It’s not the cries of the unborn I hear, but the cries of the unborn unwanted.”⁴⁵

⁴² DeView, “Abortion Pro,” *Detroit News*.

⁴³ “What You Always Wanted to Know About Abortion But Couldn’t Find!,” Michigan Coordinating Council for Abortion Law Reform, n.d., 2, box 2, folder: Publicity and Press Releases [36], MARC Papers.

⁴⁴ Speech, Beebe, April 11, 1970.

⁴⁵ Dobyns, “Newcomer Defeats Mrs. Beebe,” *Detroit News*.

Michigan's Republican feminists were surprised to find that they faced opposition on abortion reform from an unlikely source, a feminist from their own party. In 1974, Binsfeld began the first of four terms in the Michigan House of Representatives. She identified herself as a feminist, but "not an extreme feminist."⁴⁶ The ERA had to be ratified, Binsfeld believed, because as a constitutional amendment it would prevent a popularly elected legislature from expunging laws that provided or protected equal rights for women.⁴⁷

While Binsfeld identified as a feminist and supported the ERA, some of her ideas were more consistent with her conservative colleagues in the Republican Party. For example, she was committed to the primacy of the traditional family as the basic unit of American society, and worried that government interference

⁴⁶ Binsfeld to Maureen Reagan, September 13, 1983, box 7, folder 11: Connie Binsfeld, Republican Women, 1983-88, 1991, accession no. MS 99-19, Connie Binsfeld Papers, Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan (hereafter cited as Binsfeld Papers). A draft version of this letter provided, "I am not a feminist. I am not a member of the Eagles Forum." Handwritten edits to the letter made by someone, presumably Binsfeld, changed the original sentence, "I am not a feminist," to "I am not an extreme feminist." Binsfeld to Maureen Reagan, n.d., box 7, folder 11: Connie Binsfeld, Republican Women, 1983-89, 1991, accession no. MS 99-19, Binsfeld Papers. The letter that was actually sent to Maureen Reagan provided, "I am not an extreme feminist."

⁴⁷ Callow to Candidates, August 1982, box 3, folder 13: Connie Binsfeld, Campaign-Questionnaires, 1982, accession no. MS 99-17, Binsfeld Papers; Michigan Council of Christian Laymen, Questions for (Legislative) Candidates, box 3, folder 13: Connie Binsfeld, Campaign-Questionnaires, 1982, accession no. MS 99-17, Binsfeld Papers; Binsfeld to Mary Mousseau, March 7, 1983, box 4, folder 6: Connie Binsfeld, Equal Rights Amendment 1983-84, accession no. MS 99-19, Binsfeld Papers.

undermined the fundamental relationship between parents and their children. She believed that parents were obligated to protect and preserve their families by instilling in their children “the old fashioned principles and values of honesty, loving, caring, sharing, hard work, trust and service.”⁴⁸ In addition to the family, however, parents needed to reinvigorate “the neighborhoods, the neighborhood schools, small businesses, the P.T.A., church parishes and volunteer associations of every sort . . . [because these organizations] “nourished strong individuals and protected them from the state.”⁴⁹ According to Binsfeld, certain government policies threatened the family. For example, welfare programs, which were intended to assist families in times of economic need, made Americans dependent on the government and perpetuated this dependence across generational lines. The traditional American way of life, she insisted, had to be preserved because “society will crumble if we fail.”⁵⁰

Women played a critical role as mothers, but Binsfeld believed that they could also make important contributions to society in other ways. Calling herself “a

⁴⁸ Michigan Mothers Award Luncheon, April 4, 1979, 5-6, box 8, folder 6: Connie Binsfeld, Speeches, 1976-79, accession no. MS 99-17, Binsfeld Papers.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.

recycled human resource,” she argued that women needed to regularly reinvent themselves as their familial responsibilities and priorities changed.⁵¹ She noted, “I believe that people of talent and ability can be recycled just as effectively as pop bottles or metals, by going into something else once they have achieved a certain goal in other fields.”⁵² Once their children were grown, Binsfeld argued, women needed to become involved in new projects outside of the home where they could use their experiences to promote the family.⁵³ They had a responsibility to use their talents and skills to help others.

Binsfeld chose to recycle herself through government service. As one of the few women in the Michigan House or Senate, Binsfeld, like Beebe, “felt a special interest and obligation to promote the concerns of children and of women.”⁵⁴ As a legislator, she noted that “what more important province could a mother be involved in than those vital government decisions that shape the very destiny of

⁵¹ Vogt, “Mother of the Year: ‘I Consider Myself a Recycled Human Resource,’” *Michigan Farmer*, August 6, 1977, box 3, folder 5: Connie Binsfeld, Biographical Info., 1974-82, accession no. MS 99-17, Binsfeld Papers.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Statement by Connie Binsfeld, SB 228 of 1988 (Surrogate Parenting), 1, box 1, folder 3: Connie Binsfeld SB 228 of 1988 (Surrogate Parenting) 1987-88, accession no. 99-19, Binsfeld Papers.

our children and our children's children?"⁵⁵ She felt that a part of her charge was to empower women by convincing them that they had the responsibility, as well as the unique ability, to rectify society's problems. She called on women to assume their responsibilities by becoming political. This involved study and reflection to determine the best candidates for public office because "those you elect to political office do effect your families by their daily decision making. Elect those who have a sense of moral values in their personalities that can be applied to public life. Don't get hung up on one issue candidates. The family perspective is the most encompassing cause."⁵⁶ She emphasized that "we must believe that by improving the family, we can improve the world."⁵⁷ Her belief in the overwhelming importance of the family, her sense of mission in preserving it, and her almost apocalyptic belief that society would otherwise collapse, were very representative of one of the basic tenets of the pro-family faction of the conservative movement.

Binsfeld also differed from her fellow Republican feminists in her strident opposition to abortion. A practicing Catholic, Binsfeld never waived from her conviction that life began at conception. She was adamant that "the worth of a life

⁵⁵ Vogt, "Mother of the Year," August 6, 1977.

⁵⁶ Michigan Mothers Award Luncheon, April 4, 1979, 6-7.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 7.

cannot be measured by its mother's desire for it. The child has its right to life."⁵⁸ In her opinion, regardless of its gestational development, an unborn child's right to life took precedence over a pregnant woman's right to decide whether to give birth to that child. Binsfeld believed that abortion was wrong and should only be available to women whose lives were threatened by carrying or delivering their babies.⁵⁹ Binsfeld did not agree with her fellow Republican feminists that women would have full equality only if they had full control of their bodies under all circumstances, including pregnancy. Equating abortion to gender equality was, she asserted, a rhetorical tool used to market legalized abortion and to protect the profits of those involved in the abortion industry, under the guise of support for the freedom of and concern for others. Abortion rights never made women equal to men.⁶⁰

Binsfeld worried about the virtue of a society that condoned abortion. She asked whether "our resentment of the financial and emotional burden these children can create [had] reached the point where we would rather kill a child than

⁵⁸ Speech, "Abortion Debate-November 6, 1989," Connie Binsfeld, 1, 7, 11, 12, 14, box 1, folder 10: SB 183-Connie Binsfeld Abortion, 1983-91, accession no. 99-19, Binsfeld Papers.

⁵⁹ Binsfeld to Kelly Bonek, December 7, 1982, box 5, folder 5: Connie Binsfeld, Constituent Correspondence, A-C, 1982, accession no. MS 99-17, Binsfeld Papers.

⁶⁰ Speech, "Abortion Debate-November 6, 1989," Connie Binsfeld, 11-13.

take any responsibility for it? Who are we that we feel qualified to make such a decision?”⁶¹ Any society that endorsed abortion rights for women suffered from a fundamental and ultimately disabling defect because “Abortion is much more than a question of a woman’s right to control her own reproductive capacity. It is a question of the value our society places on human life, and it is one of the worst symptoms of this diminishing value.”⁶²

Lieutenant Governor James Brickley, who disagreed with Governor Milliken, but agreed with Binsfeld, about abortion, argued that society had a responsibility to the women considering abortion and the children that they wanted to abort. “I think this state should maintain a policy which advocates that every child is wanted and that each new life presents a challenge for us to assure that each person is properly cared for.”⁶³ He placed the onus on the government to alleviate those challenges which made it difficult to bear and raise children and, more broadly, to imbue its citizens with respect for the importance of human life.⁶⁴ Brickley’s views

⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

⁶² Ibid., 18.

⁶³ “Remarks by Lt. Governor James H. Brickley,” August 26, 1971, 7, box 1, folder: Michigan Abortion Referendum Committee Papers, 1970-1972 Concerning the Campaign for Abortion Reform Legislation, MARC Papers.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

were echoed by the Catholic Church, which argued that “the abortion issue isn’t a Catholic issue—it’s a human and social issue which the Church is involved in as part of a wider view that all life should be cared for and protected.”⁶⁵ Abortion was not an economic question or an issue of equality, but a reflection of society’s respect for humanity.

As many scholars have concluded, the fundamental differences between pro-choice and pro-life activists could never be settled through compromise. The Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe* was the first step in resolving the matter, but it also created new issues. Michigan’s pro-choice Republican feminists recognized that the *Roe* Court did not establish an absolute right to an abortion. Therefore, they tried to stop any attempts by the Michigan legislature, encouraged by conservative activists, to limit access to what they characterized as a legal medical procedure. Abortion remained an ongoing political issue in Michigan even after *Roe*.

Kefauver, for example, engaged in nonpartisan lobbying and educational efforts to persuade voters not to vote for the mostly white male legislators who opposed women’s rights. To further her goal, she was willing to publicly humiliate Michigan House and Senate members who did not support feminist causes. In 1975,

⁶⁵ Leonard Yourist, “Abortion Con: The Right of a Child to Have Life?,” *Detroit News*, n.d., box 2, folder: Miscellaneous, Beebe Papers.

she founded the “Feminist Bureau of Investigation,” an organization that categorized Michigan’s legislators based on their legislative records on abortion and other issues that impacted women. Her findings were publicized on posters that included a “feminist honor role” to identify legislators who promoted women’s rights and a “Warning–These Men Hate Women” advertisement that made it clear that women should not vote for legislators on the list.⁶⁶ One particular poster, which looked like an old fashioned wanted poster for criminals, publicized a “Keep-Em-Barefoot-&-Pregnant” Award for a Democratic legislator from Detroit, Thaddeus Stopczynski. In these posters, Stopczynski’s head was perched on a very pregnant body. He was singled out for trying to ban fetal research and to legislatively limit a woman’s access to abortion in Michigan.⁶⁷

The efforts of Michigan’s Republican feminists to protect a woman’s right to have an abortion became more difficult when they began to face opposition from within their party. At the 1976 Republican national convention, pressured by its growing conservative wing, Republican leaders changed the party platform to

⁶⁶ “Feminist Honor Role of Michigan Legislators, Fall 1975,” box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Organizations, Feminist Bureau of Investigation, 1972-1982, Kefauver Papers; “Warning-These Men Hate Women!” box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Organizations, Feminist Bureau of Investigation, 1972-1982, Kefauver Papers.

⁶⁷ “Abortion Laws in Michigan,” Lee Kefauver, May 1978, box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Organizations, WEAL, Michigan Division, 1973-1980, Kefauver Papers.

declare that “the Republican Party favors a continuance of the public dialogue on abortion and supports the efforts of those who seek enactment of a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children.”⁶⁸ The national party undercut the argument of pro-choice Republicans that the determination of when life began was a personal choice that was not relevant to the legality of abortion when it endorsed a new human life amendment to the constitution that recognized that life begins at conception. The NRWTF, which led the efforts of Republican feminists to protect feminist interests in the Republican Party platform, made a strategic decision to forego the abortion fight in order to maintain support for ratification of the ERA.⁶⁹

This platform position placed many Republican feminists in an untenable position. They wanted to remain Republicans, but felt betrayed by a party that did not support their interests as women. Unlike the more ambiguous ERA, which provided Republican feminists with the space to moderate some of the more extreme interpretations offered by their conservative opponents, pro-choice Republican feminists were not able to reconcile the feminist and party positions on

⁶⁸ “Women,” Republican Party Platform of 1976, August 18, 1976, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25843> .

⁶⁹ Ziegler, *After Roe*, 204.

abortion. They could not change what it meant to have an abortion and could not convince themselves that the human rights amendment supported by the more conservative members of their party was in any way consistent with their feminist goal of equality through control over their reproductive decisions.

After their victory in *Roe*, pro-choice Republican feminists turned their attention to the next phase in their fight for abortion rights. Their opponents tried to limit access to abortion by denying poor women government funding for the procedure. In 1977, Congress adopted the Hyde Amendment, which provided that federal funds could not be used to pay for abortions except in cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother.⁷⁰ The Michigan legislature considered a similar law to prohibit the state from using its funds to pay for abortions for indigent women, but the legislators did not have much of a political appetite for the issue. One Democrat member of the Michigan House noted, “I hate to vote on it. . . . We try to help the poor whenever we can, and to have to continue this distinction (between rich and poor) makes it tough. . . . If I have to vote, I will vote for (the cutoff). There’s only one question: When does life begin? I think it begins at the

⁷⁰ This addendum to the federal budget was declared constitutional by the United States Supreme Court in *Harris v. McRae*, 448 U.S. 297 (1980).

point of conception. So after you say that, there isn't much else to say."⁷¹ No matter how they voted, they were certain to offend some constituency.

Governor Milliken was able to take advantage of the ambivalence of the state legislature on this question to preserve equal access to abortion for all of the women in Michigan. When the federal government notified Michigan that it would no longer reimburse the state for the cost of abortions for poor women on Medicaid (except for certain enumerated exclusions), the governor picked up the shortfall with state funds. In doing so, he emphasized, "I cannot support a policy, the result of which is to discriminate against the poor by establishing a separate standard of medical care."⁷² Thus, in the aftermath of the Hyde Amendment, Michigan remained one of the few states to continue to fund abortions for indigent women.

However, the question of government funding for abortions for poor women reemerged in 1978. Not coincidentally, Democratic state Senator William Fitzgerald, who opposed abortion, was running against Milliken in the 1978 gubernatorial

⁷¹ Dolores Katz, "Legislators Duck Vote on Abortion Aid Halt," *Detroit Free Press*, October 16, 1977; The Michigan Medicaid Abortion Story: June, 1978 to November, 1978, Prepared for: The ACLU/NARAL Seminar Milwaukee, November 11 and 12, 1978, box 2, Beebe Papers.

⁷² Louis Heldman, "Milliken Facing Abortion Dilemma: Bill Forbids State Payment for the Poor," *Detroit Free Press*, July 17, 1978.

election. Thus, when the Michigan legislature, both houses of which were controlled by the Democrats, adopted a budget for the state's Department of Social Services, it allocated a total Medicaid reimbursement of only one dollar for all nontherapeutic abortions. In contrast, Michigan had paid \$2.5 million for Medicaid abortions during the prior year, and the overall budget for the Department of Social Services was \$2.4 billion. Legislators who opposed Medicaid funding for abortion believed that they had leverage because they tied the abortion limitation to Medicaid funding in general. To veto the line item on abortion, Milliken would have had to veto the entire Medicaid budget, leaving Michigan's poor without access to medical care. Support for and opposition to this legislation was bipartisan.⁷³

The arguments to continue Medicaid funding for abortion tended to focus on economics and class. Those who favored it were supported by a state analyst who concluded that approximately twelve thousand abortions for poor women cost Medicaid an estimated \$2.5 million each year, whereas the cost of welfare for mothers who gave birth to those unwanted children would reach approximately \$6.23 million.⁷⁴ They removed all humanity from the argument and instead

⁷³ Ibid; Katz, "Legislators Duck Vote," October 16, 1977; Charlie Cain, "House OK's Curb on Pay for Abortion," *Detroit News*, June 14, 1978.

⁷⁴ "State Aide Warns of Medicaid Cuts for Abortions," *Detroit News*, September 26, 1978.

reduced abortion to a simple cost-benefit analysis. They also invoked a class struggle, pitting rich against poor. One Republican senator who wanted to fund abortions for poor women argued that “there’s an old saying: ‘The rich get richer and the poor get children.’ I think that’s what it boils down to here.”⁷⁵ Poor women were effectively, but unfairly, denied the right to an abortion if they could not afford it.

Proponents of Medicaid abortions in Michigan disagreed on whether Milliken should veto the bill to get to the objectionable line item, which would have essentially eliminated all Medicaid funding for Michigan’s poor, or use the ambiguity of the term “therapeutic” to work around the prohibition. Some abortion advocates, including the American Civil Liberties Union and the Women’s Lawyer’s Association, argued that Milliken should order the Department of Social Services to adopt a very liberal view of “therapeutic” to cover all abortions necessary for a woman’s physical or emotional health.⁷⁶ This interpretation placed the doctor

⁷⁵ “Senate Axes Medicaid Abortions,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 30, 1978; “The Michigan Medicaid Abortion Story: June, 1978 to November, 1978.

⁷⁶ Howard L. Simon (Executive Director, ACLU of Michigan), Marianne O. Battani (Legislative Chairperson, Women Lawyer’s Association), Maryann Mahaffey (Vice President, Detroit City Council), Mark Magidson (President, Organized Workers of Legal Services for Wayne County), Jan Leventer (Director, Women’s Justice Center) to William Milliken, July 17, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers. Leventer later withdrew the support of the Women’s Justice Center for this position and essentially offered an argument much like that

squarely in the middle of the determination because he or she would have to agree that the abortion was necessary because of health concerns. Abortion opponents argued that this interpretation was contrary to legislative intent.⁷⁷

Feminist groups, such as NOW and WEAL, represented by Kefauver, favored a veto. The head of NOW believed that the veto provided an educational opportunity for advocates to argue “that it is less expensive for the state to pay for terminating a pregnancy than for bringing a child up on welfare.”⁷⁸ Kefauver contended that any substitute bill could hardly be more burdensome for indigent pregnant women and that a veto would not change votes. Moreover, she argued that the alternative, limiting the impact of the budgetary legislation by adopting a definition of “therapeutic” that was a mere regulatory slight of hand, would undermine the legitimacy of legally recognized abortion rights. Lawmakers, Kefauver argued, could no longer participate in “the despicable strategy of attaching anti-abortion riders to otherwise good and necessary legislation, in order to trap the pro-choice advocates into accepting this erosion of abortion rights.

made by Kefauver for vetoing the law. Leventer to William Milliken, July 24, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁷⁷ Editorial, “Abortion: The Medicaid Bill’s Anti-Abortion Rider Leaves a Way Out for Milliken,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 25, 1978.

⁷⁸ Heldman, “Milliken Facing Abortion Dilemma,” July 17, 1978.

Liberals as well as conservatives in Lansing have looked upon these riders as inconsequential, thus showing their contempt for the lives of the women directly affected.”⁷⁹ She saw this proposed regulatory fix as a concession to the religious right, who sought to incrementally eliminate the right to abortion in Michigan.

The women who favored an interpretive fix to the legislation referred to those who wanted a veto, including Kefauver, as “radical feminist groups.” While both sides shared the goal of protecting Medicaid abortions, and the interpretive group tried to argue that the two positions were compatible, not everyone agreed.⁸⁰ Ultimately, Milliken conferred with his Republican feminist wife and decided to reject the call to interpret “therapeutic” broadly because it would result in a legal challenge that would cause uncertainty during an inevitable court challenge. Instead, he decided to veto the entire Medicaid budget in order to get to the line item restricting funding for abortion for poor women. He noted that “I cannot say to a woman who is pregnant, and who has after considering all the alternatives with her physician reached the very difficult and personal decision she

⁷⁹ Gretchen Ackermann, “Feminists Fight for Abortion Rights; Demand Veto,” *Press and Guide Newspapers*, July 27, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers; News Release, Governor’s Dilemma Has Another Solution, July 20, 1978, 2, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁸⁰ Howard Simon (Executive Director of ACLU), to Harriet Pilpel, July 26, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

should seek an abortion, that she cannot have one solely because she is poor.”⁸¹

WEAL supported his decision, noting that, “By his action he has joined that select group of governors . . . who refuse to be intimidated by a group of legislators who have no idea what it is like to be a woman and poor.”⁸²

Milliken then urged the legislature to split Medicaid funding in general from Medicaid funding for abortion so that the poor could get other needed medical treatment. His position would have permitted the abortion funding question to be debated separately.⁸³ Since they could not gather enough votes to override his veto, the legislature threatened to pass the same bill and put it before him again. This second bill would come so close to the end of the fiscal year that it would put Medicaid funding for the poor at risk when the budget expired. Milliken objected to this tactic, indicating that if the legislature did not have enough votes to override

⁸¹ Paul Magnusson, “Pro-Abortion Groups Hail Veto, but Worry,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 5, 1978; Press Release, Executive Office, August 3, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁸² “Joint Statement of Approval for Governor Milliken’s Veto of Sections of HB 6049,” National Organization for Women, Michigan Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, Women’s Equity Action League, Michigan Education Association Women’s Caucus, August 4, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁸³ William Milliken to Kefauver, September 5, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

his veto, they needed to draft different legislation. He told the legislature that he would veto an identical bill for the second time.⁸⁴

In September, a newly created Michigan chapter of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) elected Lorraine Beebe as chairperson. The organization was “dedicated to the elimination of all laws and practices that would compel any woman to bear a child against her will.”⁸⁵ Beebe said that “the NARAL purpose . . . is to recognize the basic human right of a woman to limit her own reproduction.”⁸⁶ She characterized the legislature’s work as “an attempt by religious groups to impose their belief that life begins at conception. . . . But all they care about is the fertilized egg. They don’t care what happens to the women. They don’t care what happens to the child.”⁸⁷ Familiar arguments about abortion resurfaced in this debate as proponents of government funded abortions tried to avoid the assertion of many of their opponents that life begins at conception.

⁸⁴ “Milliken Vows to Veto No-Abortion Welfare,” *Detroit News*, September 13, 1978.

⁸⁵ “National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), Michigan Chapter, Formed,” Press Release, September 11, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁸⁶ “Lorraine Beebe Heads New Abortion Rights League,” *Press and Guide Newspapers*, September 14, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁸⁷ Mary Flood, “Abortion Issues Threaten Medicaid: State Pro-Abortion Push Launched,” *Lansing State Journal*, September 13, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

However, whereas advocates like Beebe had argued in the past that the state did not care about the unwanted child, they now offered a contradictory economic argument about how much more it cost the state to raise the child (that it did not care about) than to pay for the mother to abort it.

The House Appropriations Committee struggled with how to respond to Milliken's veto. The legislature still did not divide along strictly party lines on the question of abortion or government funding for abortion. However, when legislators made the Medicaid budget contingent on accepting a prohibition on Medicaid funding for abortion, votes became unpredictable, especially because the governor risked being blamed for cutting off all Medicaid funding six weeks before the gubernatorial election. Politics influenced the votes of some members of the legislature, to the consternation of others. In the House Appropriations Committee, where the second bill had to originate, Republican Mel Larson, who was running for Michigan Secretary of State on Governor Milliken's ticket, voted against reissuing the same bill with the prohibition on abortion funding despite his opposition to abortion. He stated "I am going to vote 'no' on this because the Democrats are using this to embarrass the Governor. . . . I have a commitment to the right-to-life, but when you use the right-to-life to defeat political candidates,

you are misusing the right-to-life.”⁸⁸ Republican Representative Melvin DeStiger, who opposed Medicaid abortions, argued that “when you cut away all the rhetoric, you get down to one thing: The use of the unborn child for political advantage.”⁸⁹ As a result he, like Larson, voted against reissuing the bill with an abortion prohibition. By cobbling together a strange coalition, the committee was able to get the Medicaid funding bill, without any restrictions on abortion funding, back to the full House. At that point, those who did not want the government to pay for abortions hoped to insert their language back into the bill. Thus, the dispute was moved back to the full House for debate.⁹⁰

WEAL made an appeal to Michigan’s legislators to protect medical care for the poor by refusing to hold it hostage to politics. Kefauver wrote to members of the Michigan House of Representatives to indicate her disdain about how abortion rights for the poor were being used by Democrats to garner support for their Democratic candidate in the race for governor. She invoked the traditional support of “the Democratic Party . . . [for] the disadvantaged sectors of our society. What

⁸⁸ “Michigan: Medicaid Abortions,” Meeting of the House Appropriations Committee to discuss HB 6655, September 14, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁸⁹ “Anti-Abortion Bill Gains,” *Detroit News*, September 20, 1978.

⁹⁰ “House Panel Drops Ban on Abortion Aid; But Battle Looms on Floor,” *Detroit News*, September 17, 1978.

this legislature does in the next two weeks either will prove that the sensitivity still exists, or that the Michigan Democratic Party has begun to wage war on the poor.”⁹¹ The next week she wrote to members of the state Senate rebuking them for their political manipulation of the issue. This time, she made a nonpartisan appeal to their consciences by arguing that “neither the Republican nor Democratic parties has a history of ruthless insensitivity towards the disadvantaged members of our society. What you do today and in the next two days will prove that the 79th Legislature is either ready to put aside political expediency and see that Michigan’s poor have needed services, or that this body has begun to wage war on the poor.”⁹²

The House ultimately rejected the bill that came out of committee without a restriction on abortion funding and, in a bipartisan vote, adopted a bill that was identical to that the governor had vetoed two months earlier. In the process, things got nasty as both sides jabbed at each other. Democratic Representative Dominic Jacobetti, who chaired the House Appropriations Committee and was opposed to state funding for abortion, took the position that he was “not going to sit here after

⁹¹ Lee Kefauver and Virginia O’Toole Brautigam (Legislative Director and Vice President, respectively of WEAL) to Michigan House Members, September 18, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁹² Lee Kefauver to Members of the Michigan Senate, memorandum, September 27, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

taking my oath of office and be dictated to by the governor. If he wants to veto it again, let him do so.”⁹³ Jacobetti noted, “we should not take state money to snuff out lives in this state.”⁹⁴ According to Republican Larson, “We have moved to the elective abortion as a method we are encouraging for birth control.”⁹⁵ He noted that “all these people are crying that its discrimination against the poor I think the unborn child is one of the poor too.”⁹⁶ Similarly, support for Medicaid funded abortions came from both political parties. Democrat Perry Bullard supported Republican Governor Milliken when he asserted that “it is simply a question of equal protection. We would be very selfish if we are to take the power we have to take equal rights away from persons with lower incomes.”⁹⁷

When the bill moved to the Senate, Senator Fitzgerald said he would vote for it so long as it included a prohibition against Medicaid-funded abortions, even if it

⁹³ “Anti-Abortion Bill Gains,” *Detroit News*, September 20, 1978; Michigan Pro-Choice Bulletin, September 26, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Rob Wilson, “Money Cut for Abortion,” *Lansing State Journal*, September 20, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁹⁶ Anne Harcus, “Pro-Life Group Chooses Allies,” *Kalamazoo Gazette*, September 24, 1978, box 2, folder: NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

⁹⁷ Wilson, “Money Cut for Abortion,” September 20, 1978.

meant the governor would veto it and cut off all Medicaid funding.⁹⁸ The editorial staffs of newspapers in the state could not help but note the strange political alignments that had developed over this issue, starting with the candidates for governor. The *Grand Rapids Press* noted, “The situation is not without irony: a Republican governor, whose party increasingly is using the abortion issue in its bid for votes, opposes state-imposed restrictions affecting only the poor, while Sen. Fitzgerald, who has represented himself as a liberal and working man’s friend, now says that insofar as Michigan is concerned, only those women who are fortunate enough not to be on welfare can get abortions without increasing their financial woes.”⁹⁹ The positions of Michigan’s politicians ultimately rested on whether they privileged the rights of the mother or the unborn child and this emphasis was not necessarily dictated by partisanship.

Recognizing that they faced a political stalemate, members of the Senate (despite Fitzgerald’s opposition) and House finally agreed to a temporary fix for the problem that extended all Medicaid funding, including that for abortions, for four months. This compromise bill delinked Medicaid funding in general from funding

⁹⁸ “Fitzgerald Says He’ll Vote for Abortion Cutoff,” *Detroit News*, September 20, 1978..

⁹⁹ “Abortion Politics,” *Grand Rapids Press*, September 25, 1978, box 2, NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

for abortion by giving Milliken the option to veto only the one dollar appropriated for Medicaid funded abortions. As expected, he vetoed the abortion line item restriction. Thus, Medicaid funding was temporarily restored, including that for poor women who sought abortions. Beebe, speaking on behalf of Michigan NARAL, noted that “it’s ironic that the legislators and gubernatorial candidates supporting this bill call themselves ‘pro-life,’ when they were willing to cut off all funding for health services to senior citizens, infant and child nutrition programs, and services to the blind and disabled in order to gain a political ‘win.’”¹⁰⁰

Fitzgerald’s stand on abortion caused an interesting political realignment among women in Michigan. By 1978, politically active feminists on both sides of the aisle questioned their party’s position on abortion. Many feminist Democrats publicly supported Milliken for governor and, in fact, created an organization called “Democratic Women for Milliken.” These women were not swayed when Fitzgerald chose a pro-choice woman, Olivia Maynard, for his running mate.¹⁰¹ Kefauver, on the other hand, who had already supported Democrat Jimmy Carter for president

¹⁰⁰ Press Release, Michigan NARAL, October 1, 1978, box 2, NARAL Report, Beebe Papers.

¹⁰¹ Susan Fleming, “Women’s Groups to Fight Fitzgerald” *Detroit News*, September 21, 1978.

in 1976, indicated that she wanted to vote for a Democrat for governor in 1978, but could not bring herself to do so in light of the fact that the Democratic candidate was opposed to abortion. She told reporters “I’ve been a lifelong Republican. I was dying to vote for the Democratic ticket. I know that even if he (Fitzgerald) had Jesus Christ as his running mate now, responsible Michigan women won’t vote for the ticket.”¹⁰² Fitzgerald lost the election.

When Medicaid funding ran out at the end of 1978, both the House and the Senate voted to provide Milliken with two separate bills, one for Medicaid funding in general and one to oppose Medicaid funding for abortion. He signed the former and vetoed the latter.¹⁰³ By the time he retired from office on December 31, 1982, he had successfully vetoed bills prohibiting Medicaid funding for abortion eleven times.¹⁰⁴

Michigan’s legislators were also grappling with other reproductive issues and Binsfeld, as a pro-life feminist, found herself in a difficult, but potentially important,

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ “The Roll Call . . . Michigan Senate,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 5, 1978; Ken Fireman, “Milliken is Free to Veto One Bill, Sign Medicaid,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 8, 1978.

¹⁰⁴ David Kushima, “Welfare Benefits Saved by Compromise,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 23, 1982.

position. While she oftentimes sounded like a conservative, her feminism caused her to moderate and even reject some of the conservative beliefs that typically emanated from her commitment to the traditional family. Because of her stance as a pro-life feminist, she was able to offer compromise positions on issues of importance to Republican women on both ends of the ideological spectrum. Thus, she tried to bring together in this middle ground moderate feminists and conservative women on issues where their positions seemed irreconcilable.

For example, she tried to bridge this gap on the controversial issue of sex education. Despite her opposition to abortion and all government funding for abortion, Binsfeld was a proponent of legislation, HB 4425, that provided for sex education in Michigan's public schools.¹⁰⁵ She noted that from 1962 to 1977, the number of teenagers in the United States who had babies rose about 34 percent, and almost half of all babies born to teenagers were born to single mothers.¹⁰⁶ These young parents were more likely to live in poverty, less likely to graduate from high school and, therefore, more likely to live in poverty as adults. It was a problem

¹⁰⁵ MCLA Sec. 380.1507, effective November 30, 1977.

¹⁰⁶ Speech, "Rep. Binsfeld—Home EC Conference—October 6, 1977," Connie Binsfeld, October 6, 1977, 1-2, box 6, folder 6: Connie Binsfeld, Speeches, 1976-79, 2, accession no. MS 99-17, Binsfeld Papers.

that had economic, psychological, and health implications for the teenaged father and mother, as well as the child.

She attributed these statistics, at least in part, to the fact that high schoolers were not inclined to use birth control when they had sex. In 1977 Michigan was one of only two states that did not permit birth control education in the public schools. (Louisiana was the other state.)¹⁰⁷ Therefore, teenagers often had to rely on inaccurate information, especially when parents were not willing or able to provide the information they needed. She noted that in 1968, the Michigan legislature proposed that sex education, including birth control information, be provided in Michigan's schools. Romney, however, vetoed the portion dealing with contraceptive information, believing that the people of Michigan were not ready for it. She found it ironic that Michigan law allowed teachers to provide information about sex, but not contraception. "As a result," she concluded, "we now have sex education classes in our public schools which in essence tell students the mechanics of how people become pregnant, but which are not allowed to provide the answers to the logical next question: How do you not become pregnant?"¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 3.

All of Binsfeld’s positions on reproductive issues emanated from her belief that life began at conception, and her position on sex education was no exception. She believed that information about contraception would help prevent unwanted pregnancies and, therefore, abortions, among teenage girls.¹⁰⁹ Thus, she supported legislation that permitted schools to teach about “family planning” and “reproductive health,” both of which included methods of contraception that would prevent pregnancy. The words “birth control” were not used because she did not want students to be taught about abortion, which she distinguished from contraception because it involved terminating a pregnancy, rather than preventing it.¹¹⁰ Schools were prohibited from providing information on abortion, required to offer opt out provisions at the request of the parents or the student, and prohibited from distributing contraceptive devices, as parents needed to be involved in that decision.

Binsfeld’s position on sex education was contrary to that of conservatives, who agreed that schools should not provide any information to their students

¹⁰⁹ Speech, “Abortion Debate–November 6, 1989,” Binsfeld, 6; Handwritten Notations, Dr. James Parshall to Binsfeld, n.d. 1981, box 4, folder 8: Connie Binsfeld Constituent Correspondence, O-P, 1981, accession no. MS 99-17, Binsfeld Papers.

¹¹⁰ Speech, “Rep. Binsfeld–Home EC Conference–October 6, 1977,” Binsfeld, 3.

about sex. Schlafly wrote that “the major goal of nearly all sex education curricula being taught in the schools is to teach teenagers (and sometimes children) how to enjoy fornication without having a baby and without feeling guilty. This goal explains why the courses promote an acceptance of sexual behavior that does not produce a baby, such as homosexuality and masturbation. This goal explains why they encourage abortions and all varieties of contraception.”¹¹¹ Binsfeld did not even engage with conservatives on that objection, but she dismissed two other arguments against the legislation, both favorites of conservatives. Once teenagers learned about contraception, they argued, they were more likely to engage in sexual activity. Also, it was best that parents teach their children about sex. Binsfeld admitted that the former was not true and the latter was not happening. Teenagers were sexually active whether or not they knew anything about contraception and parents were not providing their children with the information they needed to make good decisions.¹¹² The best alternative was to teach minors about contraception in the schools.

¹¹¹ Phyllis Schlafly, “What’s Wrong with Sex Education?” *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, 14, no. 7, (February 1981), in *Extremism in America: A Reader*, ed. Lyman Tower Sargent (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 244.

¹¹² Speech, “Rep. Binsfeld–Home EC Conference–October 6, 1977,” Binsfeld, 3.

On the question of sex education, Binsfeld operated within Ziegler's middle ground, from which she helped to facilitate a compromise between feminists and conservatives. The sex education legislation she supported was limited to accommodate some conservative opposition to abortion. At the same time, it was pragmatically designed to appeal to feminists who wanted to help minors make sound reproductive decisions. Moreover, she personally compromised her belief in the sanctity of the family by allowing the government into the privacy of the home through the schools.

As the 1970s drew to a close, Michigan's Republican feminists, with the assistance of a sympathetic governor, had managed to stop pro-life activists from imposing restrictions which, while constitutionally acceptable, would have effectively limited a woman's right to an abortion. Binsfeld made minimal progress in her efforts to bridge the gap between moderate and conservative Republican women on issues related to reproductive rights. However, her struggles were not surprising. As Luker and others have concluded, the abortion debate centered on opposing world views that did not facilitate compromise. All that Binsfeld could do was tinker around the edges to try to find common ground on issues that were tangentially connected to abortion and women's rights more generally.

Conservative opposition to abortion within the Republican Party made reproductive rights a fundamental point of contention for Michigan's Republican feminists as they tried to reconcile their partisanship with their feminism. In fact, abortion advocate Kefauver was slowly separating from the Republican Party over this and other issues. As early as 1976, she chose to vote for Democratic candidates who supported her position on abortion. Her partisan struggle was compounded by the fact that she did not like Governor Milliken, despite his support for the ERA and his continuation of government funding for abortions for indigent women in Michigan. Kefauver argued that "I am an advocate for women's rights. The Governor has no one in his office who knows anything about women's rights, so they mess up any issue that has any 'delicate connotations' to it. This makes the many organizations espousing women's rights very angry with the Governor. Where do they turn? To the Democratic Party for advocacy."¹¹³ In fact, she eventually did just that, first through her vote and eventually with her party affiliation. The sensible center no longer worked for her. Her struggles were a preview of the challenges to come for Michigan's other Republican feminists.

¹¹³ Lee Kefauver Delegate Questionnaire, box 1, folder: Lee Kefauver, Organizations, Republican State Committee, State Conventions 1974-1977, Kefauver Papers.

CHAPTER 6 IWY CONFERENCE AND REPUBLICAN FEMINISTS: 1977

In numbers and most of all, in unity, is strength!

–Elly M. Peterson, “Report on Houston”

By the middle of the 1970s, Michigan’s Republican feminists actively participated in both feminist organizations and the Michigan Republican Party. They focused on increasing female political power, ratifying the ERA and protecting abortion rights for all women. At the IWY Conference in Houston, Texas, in November 1977, they consolidated, validated, and celebrated their work as feminists. Many of Michigan’s Republican feminists represented the state at this nonpartisan meeting. They were challenged, however, by a large contingent of women, including some conservative Republicans from Michigan, who argued that the conference did not represent the interests of all women. Conservatives characterized it as a well planned and executed subterfuge intended to promote feminist causes.

At the end of the conference, feminists and conservatives each claimed that the conference was a success.¹ Peterson wrote that “it was in Houston the women’s movement came of age-201 years after the founding of the country. 51%

¹ Marjorie J. Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” in Schulman and Zelizer, *Rightward Bound*, 71-72.

of the population will no longer accept the back of the bus.”² Schlafly, on the other hand, asserted that feminists finally lost the fight for the ERA at the convention.³ Regardless of their similarly upbeat assessments, the fundamental disagreements between feminists and their conservative opponents were not resolved. In fact, historian Marjorie Spruill argued that “the IWY conflict ushered in a new era in American politics, the beginning rather than the end of a protracted struggle over women’s rights.”⁴ In one way, however, the IWY Conference gave conservative Republican women a new advantage over Republican feminists in their battle to take control of the Republican Party. The conference provided them with the evidence to argue that Republican feminists had abandoned the sensible center.

After the United Nations declared 1975 “International Women’s Year,” President Ford issued a presidential order creating a National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year. The Commission, led by Ruckleshaus, “was to adopt recommendations aimed at eliminating barriers to equality for

² Elly Peterson, “Report on Houston,” November 25, 1977, 8, box 20, folder: International Women’s Year Miscellaneous, 1977-1978, Peterson Papers.

³ Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” 71-72.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

women.”⁵ When the UN extended the year to a decade, Congress passed P.L. 94-167, which mandated that all states and territories of the United States hold meetings to adopt resolutions and elect delegates to a national conference. The fifty-six state and territorial meetings and the follow-up national meeting were intended “to assess the status of women in our country, to measure the progress we have made, to identify the barriers that prevent us from participating fully and equally in all aspects of national life, and to make recommendations to the President and to the Congress for means by which such barriers can be removed.”⁶ The Commission was designated as the sponsor of these meetings and given five million dollars to offset conference costs. The report of the Commission, “. . . To Form a More Perfect Union . . . Justice for American Women,” served as the instruction manual for conference leaders.⁷ Newly-elected President Jimmy Carter replaced Chairperson Ruckleshaus with Abzug and, as one member of the Commission noted, it became decidedly more Democratic in both its outlook and

⁵ “Background on the National Women’s Conference and the IWY Commission,” National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year, <http://digitalcollections.library.cmu.edu/awweb/awarchive?type=file&item=594788>.

⁶ “Declaration of American Women,” National Plan of Action adopted at National Women’s Conference, November 18-21, 1977, Houston, Texas, 2.

⁷ “Background on the National Women’s Conference and the IWY Commission,” National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year.

its membership.⁸ The law required that these conferences be broadly inclusive and diverse to adequately represent all American women, including those who opposed the women's movement. After the national conference, leaders were expected to produce a report for the president that contained recommendations for changes by the federal government.⁹

Michigan's conference, called Focus: Michigan Women, was held in Lansing from June 10 to 11, 1977. The meeting, organized by an advisory committee that included Helen Milliken and Burnett, was designed to accomplish two goals, as required by Congress.¹⁰ The almost fourteen hundred attendees were asked to nominate a slate of delegates to represent them at the national convention and to adopt a series of resolutions, including fifteen resolutions suggested by the national conference committee, and additional resolutions approved at the state meeting, for the delegates to take with them to Houston. Attendees endorsed all of the national resolutions, formalizing their support for ratification of the ERA and

⁸ Alice S. Rossi, *Feminists in Politics: A Panel Analysis of the First National Women's Conference* (New York: Academic Press, 1982).

⁹ An Act to Direct the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, 1975, to Organize and Convene a National Women's Conference, and for Other Purposes, P.L. 94-167, (December 23, 1975).

¹⁰ State Coordinating Committee for International Women's Year Meeting, minutes, February 18, 1977, box 2, folder: International Women's Year (IWY)-Michigan, Burnett Papers.

abortion rights for all women, including funding for those who could not afford them. They also adopted fourteen additional state resolutions. Delegates selected many of Michigan's Republican feminists, including Peterson, Milliken, Burnett, McNamee, Beebe, and Kefauver's seventeen-year-old daughter, Kari Lee Lavalli (who, unlike her mother at that time, was a member of the Democratic Women's Caucus), to attend the national convention. Neither Kefauver nor Binsfeld represented the state at the national meeting and there is no indication that either one of them attended this state meeting.¹¹

As in most states, the Michigan meeting generated controversy. Organizers estimated that about three hundred attendees objected to the meeting,¹² including conservatives Donnelly, Barbour, and Bernice Zilly. Donnelly called it a "phony festival for frustrated feminists, who have made no secret of their intention to use these tax-funded Conferences to promote their own pet political ends, especially the Equal Rights Amendment."¹³ Zilly had a long history as a conservative

¹¹ "Focus: Michigan Women" Final Report, n.d., box 5, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982: International Women's Year: Mich. State Conf. Coord. Committee: Focus: Mich. Women, June 10-11, 1977: Final Report, Helen Milliken Papers.

¹² Betty J. Blair, "Klan's 'Spies' Plan to Disrupt Feminist Parley," *Detroit News*, September 1, 1977.

¹³ Point of View Transcript, Elaine Donnelly, June 7, 1977, WJR Radio, box 2, folder: ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corres.) 1977-1979, Callow Papers.

participant in the Michigan Republican Party. As a member of the Women's Republican Club of Grosse Pointe, Zilly was an activist in one of Michigan's conservative strongholds. She led the 1965 slate of conservative women nominated to run the RWFM that was defeated when Peterson decided that she wanted a moderate RWFM board.¹⁴ As the only conservative member of the state advisory committee, Zilly claimed that committee leaders did not allow her to meaningfully participate in planning the conference.¹⁵

The Final Report of the Focus: Michigan Women conference included minority reports authored by women, including Zilly, who sought to formalize their conclusions that the meeting was fundamentally unfair. They made a case that the organizing committee had adopted processes and procedures intended to preclude them from fully participating in the state meeting, contrary to the federal enabling legislation. Moreover, they objected to the fixed, preselected, proposed slate of delegates to the national convention. While delegates chose Barbour and Zilly

¹⁴ Mrs. G. Sam Zilly to Delegate to the Convention of the Republican Women's Federation of Michigan, September 8, 1965, box 14, folder: Republican Women's Federation 1965-1967, Peterson Papers; "Romney-Oriented Faction in Women's Federation Control," *Port Huron Times Herald*, September 23, 1965, box 14, folder: Republican Women's Federation 1965-1967, Peterson Papers.

¹⁵ Patt Barbour, International Women's Year Conference, Houston, Texas, November 19-21, 1977, 2, single folder, International Women's Year Conference Collection, 1977-78, IWYC Papers.

along with two other conservatives, as alternate delegates, the roster of regular delegates contained no conservative women. An alternate delegate was essentially an observer who was allowed to participate only if needed to replace an original delegate. Thus, conservatives believed, the slate of alternate delegates was designed to satisfy the diversity requirements of the conference's enabling legislation, but to isolate those representatives from participating in the conference.¹⁶

Finally, conservative women asserted that the resolutions the Michigan delegates carried to Houston did not reflect their substantive positions, including opposition to the ERA and abortion, and support for traditional families.¹⁷ According to Zilly, "many women were opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment and to the Resolution on Abortion. They wished to have their views known. They also opposed the Lesbian Resolution and the Child Care and many other of the National Committee's Resolutions. So when the Majority Report reports that these Resolutions were approved, please keep in mind that they were vehemently

¹⁶ Bernice Zilly, Minority Report of Houston's I.W.Y. Conference, Michigan Alternate Delegate, 1, single folder, International Women's Year Conference Collection, 1977-78, IWYC Papers.

¹⁷ "Patt Barbour Speaks Out for Happiness of Womanhood, Inc. August, 77," box 1, folder: Wohlfield Happiness of Womanhood Inc. 1973-1983, Wohlfield Papers.

opposed by a great number of Delegates.”¹⁸ One attendee commented that “their (women’s) progress is all in the wrong direction. They refuse to have children—take the pill—feel no special commitment to marriage and family. Without home, marriage and family, nothing else counts.”¹⁹ They feared the interests of the Michigan women who thought like them would not be adequately represented at the national conference.²⁰

Despite the issues raised about the state conference, most of the attendees were pleased with the conduct and outcomes of the meeting. The newly elected delegates believed that they would become a part of history at the national conference. Milliken noted that “this will be only the second national women’s conference in our nation’s history. The first, of course, was held in Seneca Falls, N.Y. in 1848 and marked the beginning of the struggle for the right to vote.”²¹ The

¹⁸ Minority Report #1, A Minority Report, Michigan’s International Women’s Year Meeting, Focus: Michigan Women, June 10-11, 1977, n.d., box 5, folder: Topical Files 1969-1982: International Women’s Year: Mich. State Conf. Coord. Committee: Focus: Mich. Women, June 10-11, 1977: Final Report, Helen Milliken Papers.

¹⁹ “Focus: Michigan Women,” Final Report, 13.

²⁰ Minority Report #2, Views Solicited, Rosemary Hamilton, June 22, 1977, Michigan’s International Women’s Year Meeting, Focus: Michigan Women, June 10-11, 1977, n.d., box 5, folder: Topical Files 1969-1982: International Women’s Year: Mich. State Conf. Coord. Committee: Focus: Mich. Women, June 10-11, 1977: Final Report, Helen Milliken Papers.

²¹ Press Release, Executive Office, November 16, 1977, box 6, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982: International Women’s Year Nat’l Women’s Conf., Nov. 18-21, 1977: Miscellaneous, Helen Milliken Papers.

delegates to the national conference, including Michigan's Republican feminists, looked forward to their trip to Houston, but Michigan's conservative Republicans, angry and frustrated, did not share their anticipation.

Michigan's conservative women were not the only women who felt that they had been marginalized by the IWY Commission. Women from around the country believed that the IWY Commission advocated a feminist agenda that it intended to promote through the state meetings and the national conference. Critchlow noted that Schlafly called it "a federally funded effort to rally support for ERA, publicly proclaiming it 'a front for radicals and lesbians.'" ²² Thus, conservative women decided to fight back through the the National Citizens' Review Committee (NCRC). Established as "an educational coalition," it sought to encourage and assist women who opposed the feminist agenda to participate in the state and national conferences. ²³ The NCRC reached out in particular to those who might have been discouraged from participating because they were intimidated by the size and scope of the series of events. It also tried to monitor the state meetings to make

²² Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 244-45.

²³ Citizens/Review Committee for I.W.Y., News Memo #1, Information Backgrounder, Houston International Women's Year Conference, memorandum, October 28, 1977, box 1, folder: Donnelly Elaine IWY Convention-1977-1978, Donnelly Papers.

sure that they complied with the law.²⁴ In fact, the concerns of these women were justified. The Commission originally identified the passage of the ERA as one of its goals. Moreover, it only included minimal, token representation from the conservative movement.²⁵

Before the national conference, the NCRC accelerated its efforts to protect the interests of conservative women. Donnelly, who was responsible for the organization's relationships with the media, issued a memorandum that updated the press on the state conferences and previewed their concerns about the national conference. She asserted that "in spite of promises made to Congress that women of all viewpoints on the issues could be involved in the planning of Conference activities, including workshops and the election of delegates to the Houston Conference, women opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment and other I.W.Y. goals have been treated with outrageous unfairness and discrimination at every step of the way."²⁶ The pro-feminist bias of the delegates selected, which was reflected in the resolutions adopted by the state conferences, meant that the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "The 'Abzugate' Scandal—Important Facts," n.d., box 1, folder: Donnelly, Elaine IWY Convention-1977-1978, Donnelly Papers.

²⁶ News, Citizens' Review Committee for I.W.Y., October 28, 1977, box 1, folder: Donnelly, Elaine IWY Convention-1977-1978, Donnelly Papers.

findings and recommendations of the delegates at the national conference would reflect a similar lack of ideological diversity. The NCRC attacked the Commission's argument that their membership was diversified. "In typically disingenuous fashion, I.W.Y. Officials have pointed to 'homemakers' among their ranks, such as Ellie Smeal, President of the National Organization for Women, who is hardly a woman that most homemakers would identify with, or choose as a representative. It is an insult to women to imply that one's views on the issues can be assumed by one's religion, income, occupation, race, or similar characteristics."²⁷

Donnelly and other leaders of the NCRC alleged that some of the state conferences adopted a plan, called the "Monitoring and Mobile Operation Partnership Program," (MMOPP), with the assistance of the NWPC. They believed that there was a connection between the IWY Commission and the NWPC because twelve leaders of the NWPC were at one time on the IWY Commission. This program, "a systematic campaign of artifice and trickery," was developed, according to conservative women, "to rig the voting in workshops at the state and national I.W.Y. Conferences."²⁸ The plan was relatively straightforward. A monitor

²⁷ "The 'Abzugate' Scandal—Important Facts."

²⁸ Operation M.M.O.P.P.-A Blueprint for Fraud," International Women's Year Citizens' Review Committee, September 14, 1977, box 1, folder: Donnelly, Elaine IWY Convention-1977-1978, Donnelly Papers.

attended every break-out workshop or meeting to read the room and identify the positions of attendees. If the majority of attendees were opposed to the feminist position on that topic, the monitor brought in additional women, called “floaters,” to outvote those who opposed the feminists.²⁹ The Michigan Citizens’ Review Committee, the Michigan affiliate of the NCRC, must have anticipated problems like this when it recommended that Michigan’s conservative women tape record their sessions and avoid congregating in large groups at their state meeting.³⁰ Conservative women believed that the feminists did not speak for most women, were engaged in a coordinated effort to silence them, and had a similar plan for the national conference.

Feminists who supported the MMOPP believed that they were the true representatives of American women. They, like conservative women, saw these meetings as individual battlegrounds for the future of the feminist movement, which, in their opinion, justified the tactics they adopted. Peterson worried that Schlafly would disrupt the IWY meetings. She lamented that “somehow it has got

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “Instructions for IWY Conference in Michigan,” International Women’s Year Citizens’ Review Committee, box 20, folder: National Women’s Conference, Memoranda & Correspondence 1977-78, Peterson Papers.

to be put across that Phyllis has trained her members in sabotage of a meeting, disruption, etc.–and, instead of coming to these meetings and taking part, they are coming for this purpose along [sic].”³¹ The MMOPP was intended to stop Schlafly by “prevent[ing] a minority faction from taking over a committee or workshop and passing out a resolution which did not represent the majority opinion of conference women.”³² Feminists used the MMOPP successfully in Arizona against Schlafly who tried to influence the outcome of the abortion and ERA workshops. As one leader from Arizona wrote to the NWPC, “if the conservatives packed any workshop that woman [the monitor] quietly left, went to a central location—word was quickly passed and quietly people moved into the packed workshop—thus when a resolution came to a vote, we had the majority.”³³ While some feminists objected to the MMOPP because “our tactics were too blunt and maybe even unfair,” others argued “I’m tired of being a ‘good sport’ and losing. NEVER GIVE YOUR ENEMY AN

³¹ Peterson to Colom, May 23, 1977, box 15, folder: Chronological Apr-Dec 1977, Peterson Papers.

³² Elly Anderson, “Monitoring and Mobile Operation Partnership Program (MMOPP),” June 10, 1977, box 1, folder: Donnelly, Elaine IWY Convention-1977-1978, Donnelly Papers.

³³ Mary Peace Douglas to Colom, June 10, 1977, box 1, folder: Donnelly, Elaine IWY Convention-1977-1978, Donnelly Papers.

EVEN BREAK. This philosophy still has difficulties for many good-hearted women.³⁴

Feminists rationalized their tactics because the ends justified the means. The future of feminism depended on it.

The NCRC also used the courts and legislative hearings to argue that the IWY Commission improperly allocated its appropriated budget to lobbying, contrary to legislative intent. Conservative women filed a number of unsuccessful lawsuits challenging the use of this federal money. The NCRC noted that “these complex legal actions were filed for the plaintiffs by Attorney J. Fred Schlafly [Phyllis Schlafly’s husband] on a volunteer basis. However, the I.W.Y. Commission has had the benefit of extensive legal services from the U.S. Department of Justice. This is just another example of how private citizens have been forced to compete with huge amounts of government money being used to promote the interests of pro-ERA forces.”³⁵ Senator Jesse Helms presided over legislative hearings convened in response to complaints from many women who argued that their state meetings

³⁴ Elly Anderson, “Monitoring and Mobile Operation Partnership Program (MMOPP),” June 10, 1977.

³⁵ “The ‘Abzugate’ Scandal—Important Facts.”

did not comply with federal legislative requirements, but IWY Commission members did not attend or respond to these allegations.³⁶

To protect women, the imperial wizard of the KKK claimed that his organization sent representatives from its female auxiliary, covertly if necessary, to participate in state IWY meetings, and planned to do the same at the national meeting. He attacked “the women’s movement as a haven for ‘all the misfits of society, including self-admitted lesbians,’” and made it clear that the KKK would send male members to the national IWY Conference to protect “decent” women from these sexual predators.³⁷ Anti-feminists who objected to the IWY conference, including STOP ERA, HOW and the NCRC, denied that they had any ties to the KKK. But their hatred of the lesbians who they claimed appropriated the IWY program mirrored that of the KKK. Schlafly explained that the anti-feminist activists were not very successful in putting more of their representatives on the Illinois delegation to the conference in Houston because “our women didn’t want to leave their families for an entire weekend and spend it with a groups [sic] of lesbians. They’re very

³⁶ “Congress and the The Abzugate Scandal—Who Is to be Held Responsible?” n.d., box 1, folder: Donnelly, Elaine IWY Convention-1977-1978, Donnelly Papers.

³⁷ Betty J. Blair, “Klan’s ‘Spies’ Plan to Disrupt Feminist Parley,” *Detroit News*, September 1, 1977.

offensive to us.”³⁸ The efforts by the various groups opposed to the IWY Conference did nothing to bridge the gaping divide between the feminists and anti-feminists and did not stop the national convention.

Almost fifteen hundred delegates and nineteen thousand nonparticipant observers attended the IWY Conference in Houston from November 18 to 21, 1977.³⁹ On Friday night, a party atmosphere prevailed as four thousand people, including Roslyn Carter and Betty Ford, the wives of President Jimmy Carter and former President Gerald Ford, and Coretta Scott King, the widow of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., attended a cocktail party at which they raised \$100,000 to support efforts to ratify the ERA. The historic significance of the meeting was apparent the next morning when three young girls delivered a torch that had been carried from Seneca Falls, New York, to the conference in Houston. Accompanied by an all girl drum and bugle corps, they passed the torch to Carter and Ford, as well as Ladybird Johnson, wife of former president Lyndon Johnson, and the head of the commission that organized the conference, Democrat Barbara Jordon. Jean Stapleton was also present. An actress who played Edith Bunker, the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “After Houston, Update 9-Dedicated to NWC Volunteers” National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year, February, 1978, 8.

wife and oftentimes target of the sexist and racist rants of her television husband, Archie Bunker, on the hit sitcom *All in the Family*, Stapleton was an active and visible proponent of equal rights for women.⁴⁰ As an icon of American pop culture at the time, she represented the diversity of the feminist movement and symbolized its cultural immersion into the lives of average Americans.

On Saturday afternoon and Sunday, the real substance of the meeting began as delegates debated and approved the twenty-five resolutions that were ultimately combined into a National Plan of Action for America's women. The conference endorsed ratification of the ERA, affirmed support for reproductive rights for all women, and recommended sex education for all students, even those in elementary school. Conference attendees also approved government assistance for battered women and abused children, asserting that "elimination of violence in the home [should] be a national goal."⁴¹ Peterson noted that with one exception, some delegates opposed every resolution,⁴² which seemed to indicate to her that

⁴⁰ Peterson, "Report on Houston," 2.

⁴¹ National Plan of Action adopted at National Women's Conference, November 18-21, 1977, Houston, Texas, 5-7, 14, 25-26. Only one resolution, which would have supported the creation of a Women's Department in the federal government, did not pass.

⁴² Elly M. Peterson, "The Houston Story," n.d., box 20, folder: National Women's Conference, Memoranda and Correspondence 1977-78, Peterson Papers.

attendees considered the positions of all women and adopted a fair and balanced decision-making process.

Perhaps the most controversial resolution called on women to support gay rights. The conferees, moved by the activism of the lesbians in attendance, endorsed the elimination of all discrimination based on sexual preference.⁴³ At the conference, it became apparent that some feminists had shifted their positions on this issue. Betty Friedan, for example, had always argued that the ERA had to be passed before feminists could focus on other, more potentially controversial issues, such as sexual preference, that might be used to generate opposition to the ERA. During the conference, however, she announced her support for lesbian rights.⁴⁴ Burnett was pleased with the resolution and indicated that “those divisions [between feminists based on sexual preference] ended forever in Houston, where the entire body made it clear that lesbians are our sisters and should join us—something that was a buoyant, uplifting, truly beautiful experience.”⁴⁵ Alternate delegate Zilly noted that while all of the representatives from Michigan voted for

⁴³ National Plan of Action, November 18-21, 1977, 27.

⁴⁴ Cheryl Knott, “Gavel-to-Gavel,” *Houston Breakthrough*, December 1977 to January 1978, 2, no. 10, 6, <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/feminist/item/3446/show/3427>.

⁴⁵ Burnett, *True Colors*, 112.

the other resolutions, “six or eight Michigan delegates did not approve this one resolution [on sexual preference].”⁴⁶ Barbour was surprised that both Milliken and Burnett voted for the resolution supporting gay rights.⁴⁷

The feminist delegates believed that, as required by law, the attendees and the plan that they adopted reflected and represented the interests of all American women. Most accounts of the meeting indicated that about 20 percent of the attendees were conservatives who opposed feminist control of the meeting.⁴⁸ The majority of the delegates, including Peterson, viewed these women as obstructionists, “led by State Sen. (Indiana) Joan Gubbins, who changed her outfits so often she must have brought a dozen suitcases—and she was identified by her hat: huge, with a bright orange long plume. She held at her seat two flags—one yellow, one black, which she used to signal the delegates across the hall such as Mississippi, how to vote, when to sit, etc.”⁴⁹ Later Peterson joked that “in a suit of

⁴⁶ Zilly, Minority Report of Houston’s I.W.Y. Conference.

⁴⁷ Patt Barbour, International Women’s Year Conference, Houston, Texas, November 19-21, 1977, 5, single folder, International Women’s Year Conference Collection, 1977-78, IWY Papers.

⁴⁸ Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” 76.

⁴⁹ Peterson, “Report on Houston,” 2.

armor with that hat she could have ridden to war behind King Richard!”⁵⁰ By focusing on her appearance, Peterson used the ploy of many of Michigan’s journalists to delegitimize Gubbins and her message. How could she be taken seriously if she was so flamboyant? Moreover, the suggestion that she directed conservative women with two flags impugned their intelligence and independence by implying that they were not able to think on their own.

A second, simultaneous conference, organized by conservative women and endorsed by the Eagle Forum, was held at the Houston Astrodome on Saturday, November 19. According to some attendees, there were approximately twenty thousand women at this meeting.⁵¹ Many of them were also delegates or alternate delegates to the IWY Conference who disagreed with most of the assessments of their feminist counterparts about the national conference. Peterson indicated that these conservative women met “to pray and to castigate those at the Conference. Most had arrived by church busses from Texas and surrounding states. In direct contrast to the Coliseum where there was no name calling or outward signs of

⁵⁰ Speech, Interchange, Elly Peterson, November 3, 1979, box 25, folder: Speeches, 1979, Peterson Papers.

⁵¹ Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” 76.

disrespect, this group concentrated on calling the delegates and observers, 'sick' 'lesbians' 'unpatriotic' 'antiChrist.'"⁵²

Michigan's alternate delegates, with Schlafly at least in spirit at her alternative meeting, remained convinced that conservative women had been marginalized by those who were in charge of the conference. As alternate delegates they witnessed, but could not speak against, the feminist agenda adopted at the conference.⁵³ As a result, both Zilly and Barbour wrote scathing minority reports about the national conference. Zilly called the meeting "an agonizing experience for me . . . the most highly 'orchestrated' gathering which I had ever attended."⁵⁴ It was an event, she believed, constructed as a propaganda tool for the feminists because "the primary effort of the whole Conference seemed to be to impress upon the press, all media and the State Legislatures who have not already approved the E.R.A. that ALL WOMEN OF THE UNITED STATES INSIST THAT E.R.A. MUST BE PASSED. Anyone who disagreed with that thought was considered 'The Enemy' and was treated as such."⁵⁵ She disputed Peterson's assertion that

⁵² Peterson, "Report on Houston," 3.

⁵³ Zilly, Minority Report, 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

delegates were diverse and from all segments of society.⁵⁶ According to Zilly, “only about 5% of all delegates on the floor were the ‘Enemy’” who opposed the conference’s feminist agenda.⁵⁷ She believed that the national conference was operated much like the Michigan meeting. Those who opposed the Commission’s agenda were effectively precluded from participating by the processes and procedures adopted to control the sessions. Her conclusion to her Minority Report reflected her frustration and anger. She wrote, “it was an orchestrated Conference very effectively. I OBJECTED but I had no way to express my feelings except to tell it to you.”⁵⁸

Barbour believed that the national conference was as pro-feminist, which meant pro-ERA, pro-abortion and anti-family, as the state meeting. She, in particular, cast aspersions on the feminist participants as she stressed the radicalism of the attendees, detailed their aggressive behavior, and generally mocked the proceedings. The radical publications available at the conference that not only endorsed radical feminism and abortion rights, but also lesbianism and the

⁵⁶ Peterson, “The Houston Story,” 1.

⁵⁷ Zilly, Minority Report, 1,

⁵⁸ Ibid, 4.

legalization of prostitution, offended Barbour. Pamphlets also promoted socialism, communism, and union activism. In a particularly negative attack, Barbour noted that the conservative delegates from Michigan chose a separate hotel from the feminists because “the strong sexual preference (Gay Rights) resolution which the feminists support caused us to feel hesitant about leaving to chance the picking out of our roommates by the IWY Planning Commission.”⁵⁹

According to Barbour, the pro-feminist majority began their efforts to obstruct conservative women at the airport. She related that “under the bright television lights the feminists began chanting, ‘ERA Now’ in loud raucous voices and held clenched fists high. Members of HOW, Inc. then brought out a huge pink cloth banner that read, ‘Stop ERA’. When the cameras seemed to focus on this banner, the feminists tried to stand in front of it to hide it, but because of its size this was impossible. Their disapproving faces showed their dismay.”⁶⁰ Their obstructionism became violent “when the torch was carried the last few yards to the Conference Center [and] a lone man there [who] protested the IWY with a sign which read, ‘IWY Means Immoral Women’s Year’ was roughed up, his clothes torn by the

⁵⁹ Barbour, International Women’s Year Conference, 2, 3-7.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.

feminists, and when we saw him he had an ugly red scratch on his cheek.”⁶¹

According to Barbour, the feminists intended to block the message of their opponents, using violence if necessary.

Barbour had a strongly negative reaction to the overall meeting, noting that “when the 80% feminist delegation and the feminist guests began chanting ‘ERA Now’ and as they began to get louder and louder, I could not help but be reminded of film clips of vast crowds gathered in Nazi Germany when Hitler spoke and their shout, ‘Seig Heil, Seig Heil’ with arms raised in the Nazi salute. I wonder how many other spectators got the same flashback.”⁶² Ironically, while the feminists at the conference connected the protesters to the Nazis, the protesters accused the feminists of using Nazi techniques during the conference. Barbour also disagreed with Peterson that the meeting was orderly. She wrote that “after the ERA resolution passed, I was overwhelmed by the loud stamping, applauding and shouting that was heard. A snake dance wound in a disorderly fashion around the floor of the coliseum. Since 80% of the delegates were of like mind, I wondered why they acted as if they had just won a tremendous victory. After all, they were

⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

⁶² Ibid., 4.

holding all the aces, so who could stop them?"⁶³ She was disturbed that "thunderous applause and shouting and cheering broke out" after conference attendees endorsed expansive abortion rights for all women.⁶⁴ She wrote that "it was unreal to see this carnival atmosphere after the abortion rights issue passed. I felt kind of sick about then."⁶⁵ After the vote on sexual preference, she noted that "the Lesbians took over the IWY Conference."⁶⁶

The feminist attendees left Houston feeling unified and optimistic about the future of the women's movement, and they deemed it a success.⁶⁷ Journalist Lucy Komisar, who reported on the IWY Conference, wrote that "the significance of the Houston Conference is that, under the neutral sponsorship of the government, and through the elected delegates and delegates at large, it gathered the major women's organizations and made it possible for them to approve a comprehensive national political program that belongs equally to all of them, because it was not

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁷ Burnett, *True Colors*, 112.

proposed by any one of them.”⁶⁸ Milliken called it a life-changing event. She wrote that personally she felt “a unity among women has been forged and that it will be an indestructible one. What an experience to be in the midst of women coming together from all races and stations in life to ‘consider the barriers’ and set goals to remove them. And the remarkable spirit in which this was done, the sharing and the caring. It was one of the great experiences of my life.”⁶⁹ The attendees felt empowered by the fact that they were not alone, but had grievances and concerns in common with women from around the country. Anything was possible when all of these women chose to work together.

The meeting not only unified, but also politicized the feminists who participated in the multiday event. They believed that they were a part of the process and returned home excited to implement the National Plan of Action. Peterson commented on the order and propriety with which the attendees conducted themselves as “hundreds of the women for the first time were involved in political decisions—and they took to the action in such a way that observers

⁶⁸ Lucy Komisar, “With the Women at Houston: Feminism as National Politics,” *Nation*, December 10, 1977, 625, <http://www.thekomisarscoop.com/1977/12/with-the-women-at-houston-feminism-as-national-politics/>.

⁶⁹ Helen Milliken to Kathie Washburn Breighner, November 28, 1977, box 6, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 Int’l Women’s Year: Correspondence, 1976-1978, Helen Milliken Papers.

realized no more would they be content to make the coffee, stamp the envelopes and clean the office” and, according to Peterson, it was all witnessed by over a thousand journalists.⁷⁰ Milliken believed that it would change the women’s movement because “women’s issues have not only been solidified and defined, but . . . the political process at every level will begin to feel their impact, from Congress down to the state and local level.”⁷¹ The meeting introduced women to the political process in the ways that Michigan’s Republican feminists had long advocated.⁷²

The feminists who participated in the IWY conference eagerly embraced the National Plan of Action. Ironically, however, the meeting also energized conservative women. As Spruill observed, “the success of the feminist leaders in

⁷⁰ Peterson, “The Houston Story,” 1-2.

⁷¹ Milliken to Breighner, November 28, 1977.

⁷² While women might have been politicized by participating in the conference, it did not result in significant long term changes for women. One year later, Carmen Delgado Votaw wrote that “we felt such tremendous momentum in Houston. . . . There has been progress . . . but much less than we all thought was possible then.” Susan Fleming, “Houston: A Year Later: Women Mark Historic Meeting,” *Detroit News*, n.d., box 6, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982: International Women’s Year Nat’l Women’s Conference. Nov. 18-21, 1977: Correspondence, 1978, Helen Milliken Papers. Writing about the conference in 2014, two scholars noted “the limited influence of the conference; the Carter administration failed to create an enduring government body to oversee the implementation of the Plan of Action, and the Reagan administration was even less amenable to feminist goals.” Doreen J. Mattingly and Jessica L. Nare, “A RAINBOW OF WOMEN’: Diversity and Unity at the 1977 U.S. International Women’s Year Conference,” *Journal of Women’s History* 26.2 (Summer 2014): 89.

gaining this mandate from two presidents and from Congress to hold these IWY conferences served to galvanize the opposition, to politicize social conservatives, and to aid Phyllis Schlafly and her associates in expanding the single-issue movement against the ERA into a more enduring, profoundly antifeminist, and—in her words—‘Pro-Family movement.’”⁷³ These women left the conference more committed and united than ever in their opposition to feminism, and they were able to use the National Plan of Action to persuade others to join their cause.⁷⁴

While the IWY conference helped conservative women organize against feminism, it also provided them with support in their battle for control of the Republican Party. Conference proceedings gave them the evidence that they needed to characterize Republican feminists as radical. Attendees at the meeting, including Michigan’s Republican feminists, adopted a feminist agenda that included more than their traditional support for the ERA and abortion. They had expanded their understanding of feminism to include a woman’s right to freely choose her sexual partners. By endorsing homosexuality, Michigan’s Republican feminists provided their conservative opposition with ammunition to argue that they were no longer at the sensible center of the women’s movement. Once they abandoned

⁷³ Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” 77.

⁷⁴ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 247-48; Evans, *Tidal Wave*,

this middle ground, it became more difficult for them to argue to their moderate partisan colleagues that they were the reasonable representatives of women in the party and the logical mediators between moderate Republicans and radical feminists. They lost some of their legitimacy in the battle between conservative and moderate Republicans.

One of those who used the IWY Conference against the feminists, including Republican feminists, was long-time moderate Republican George Romney. Feminists had always feared that ERA's opponents would connect the ERA to other, more controversial issues to bolster their arguments against the ERA. In December 1979 Romney, a leader in the Mormon church, validated their concerns by invoking the proceedings at the IWY Conference to connect homosexuality to the ERA.⁷⁵ He objected to homosexuality because he believed that homosexuals were "morally perverted."⁷⁶ He reiterated, "I said that and I meant it. The Bible makes perfectly clear that adultery, fornication, homosexuality and lesbianism are immoral."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Harry Cook, "George Romney, Mormons and the ERA," *Detroit Free Press*, December 18, 1979. Callow believed that Romney opposed the ERA to curry the favor of the leadership of the Mormon Church. Callow to Peterson, February 1, 1980, box 19; folder: ERAmerica Romney, George (position on ERA), undated, 1980, Peterson Papers.

⁷⁶ Cook, "George Romney, Mormons and the ERA," December 18, 1979.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

These relationships destroyed the traditional family.⁷⁸ Romney believed that lesbians supported the ERA because “they hope[d] its adoption would legitimate their immoral relationships and behavior.”⁷⁹ As a result, the ERA had to be defeated. He told Laura Callow that “Gloria Stienem [sic], Betty Friedan have made it abundantly clear that their objective is to destroy marriage, family, parent raising of children, conjugal love etc. O, now they are moderating these objectives to secure the home-maker’s support.”⁸⁰ Thus, he argued, radical feminists were engaged in a deliberate effort to ratify the ERA in order to use it to as cover to accomplish their more radical causes.

Lenore Romney sided with her husband on the ERA. Adamant that the Mormon Church believed in equality for women, she argued, nevertheless, that it could not support the ERA. While she shared George Romney’s opposition to homosexuality, she also tied the ERA to legalized abortion. In a letter to Peterson, she wrote that “most feminists ERA supports approve abortion on demand, and while I do not quarrel with the idea that a woman should be able to determine what

⁷⁸ Editorial, “Romney: Speaking Out on Justifiable Conviction,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 21, 1979.

⁷⁹ Cook, “George Romney, Mormons and the ERA,” December 18, 1979.

⁸⁰ George Romney to Callow, December 22, 1979, box 1, folder: Personal Correspondence-Helen Milliken 1978-1987, 1998, and 2000, 2007, Callow Papers.

she should do under certain conditions, still I abhor the attitude I find on the college campuses I visit where abortion is used as a birth control method. I do know that life is present in pregnancy and that destroying that life—which is against the very ultimate function of nature [sic].”⁸¹ Anticipating that Peterson would try to delegitimize the Romneys by arguing that they were relying on the assertions and positions of radical feminists to support their position, Lenore cited statements recently made by Helen Milliken “that the Mormon church, the communist and the Klu [sic] Klux Klan were obstructing ERA. Classifying our church with communists and KKK had many inflamed.”⁸² The Romneys believed that the ERA was so broadly drafted that it could ultimately be used to justify what they considered immoral behavior and to outlaw legitimate distinctions in treatment between men and women.⁸³

The arguments made by the Romneys were consistent with all of the longstanding arguments made by conservative Republicans, especially Schlafly and Donnelly, against the ERA. They were particularly impactful, however, because of

⁸¹ Lenore Romney to Peterson, December 14, n.y., box 19, folder: ERAmerica. Romney, George (position on ERA) undated, 1980), Peterson Papers.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ George Bullard, “Romney Flays ERA, Backs Mormon Ouster of Feminist,” *Detroit News*, December 16, 1979.

George Romney's legitimacy as an elder statesman of moderate Republicanism. Now, after the IWY Conference, he had what he believed was a tangible basis for linking homosexuality to the ERA.

Despite the fact that this position aligned them with the conservatives in the Republican Party and put them at odds with many of their longtime friends, the Romneys refused to change their views. George Romney made it clear that he did not mean to imply that all supporters of the ERA were "moral perverts."⁸⁴ They were particularly bothered that their opposition to the ERA hurt Peterson. Lenore Romney wrote to her that "I do not apologize for what I am—for that it is my identity as a child of God—but I do apologize for offending you—The scriptures tell us that offences will come, but woe to them by who they come. Woe is me."⁸⁵ George Romney also tried to justify his position to Peterson. He wrote to her that "we did not take our position lightly or just because of the church. I was burned once before (Vietnam) by taking a position I had to change because I hadn't studied the problem thoroughly first. In the case of E.R.A. I carefully researched the issue first, and

⁸⁴ George Romney to Sheila [Sheila Greenwald?], December 27, 1979, box 17, folder: Correspondence, 1979, Peterson Papers.

⁸⁵ Lenore Romney to Peterson, September 14, n.y., box 20, folder: Undated Letters from Public Figures, Peterson Papers.

weighted all the points you make. I could respond to them but there is no point in doing so because I'm sure your position is one you believe is right."⁸⁶ He also made it clear that while some of the advocates of the ERA had good intentions, "I have learned from sad experience the truth of the following statement 'honorable intentions often deteriorate into shameful circumstances; the singular good often evolves into plural abominations.'"⁸⁷

Because of her longstanding friendship with the Romneys, Peterson felt particularly betrayed, although she should not have been surprised. Earlier, Lenore Romney wrote to Peterson that "the homos and lesbians are the main reason for opposition [by the Mormon Church to ERA] for they believe the next step after ERA will be acceptance of family unions of homos—with further deterioration of the sacred relationship of marriage as an institution."⁸⁸ Peterson's feminist friends tried to help her deal with the Romneys' statements. Callow offered Peterson both sympathy and humor. "I'm glad I was able to make you laugh by sending you a copy

⁸⁶ George Romney to Peterson, January 18, 1980, box 19, folder: ERAmerica Romney, George (position on ERA), undated 1980, Peterson Papers.

⁸⁷ Romney to Sheila, December 27, 1979.

⁸⁸ Lenore Romney to Peterson, December 5, 1975, box 17, folder: Correspondence, 1979), Peterson Papers. Fitzgerald noted that "the letter was subsequently labeled '1975,' but the context indicates it was written in December 1977, after the IWY meeting in Houston." Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*, 305.

of Gloria Steinem’s remarks about ‘Ayotolla Romney.’ My heart has ached for you. I had always admired the Romneys from a distance. I still felt a personal sense of betrayal. For you, a close friend for years, it must be devastating.”⁸⁹ Helen Milliken tried to provide some advice on how to deal with her anger without completely destroying the long-standing relationship she had with the Romneys. “I do have a fairly good idea how traumatic this experience has been for you, because the element of past friendship enters in. My relationship with them has been far less personal. However, it does occur to me that even your silence would be a strong message. But perhaps one good blast (BLAST) would be more cleansing, and even less destructive of a friendship.”⁹⁰

Peterson was bothered not only by what she saw as a personal rejection; she was also concerned that the Romneys’ position reflected a growing movement in opposition to the ERA.⁹¹ She wrote to Helen Milliken, “but oh Lord, am I

⁸⁹ Callow to Peterson, February 1, 1980, box 19; folder: ERAmerica Romney, George (position on ERA), undated, 1980, Peterson Papers.

⁹⁰ Helen Milliken to Peterson, January 8, 1980, box 19, folder: ERAmerica Romney, George (position on ERA), n.d., 1980, Peterson Papers.

⁹¹ Peterson to Helen Milliken, December 20, 1979, box 10, folder: Correspondence 1980 July-Oct [letter misfiled because it is incorrectly assumed to be from 1980], Helen Milliken Papers.

scared?!!”⁹² By 1979, she was convinced that the opposition to the women’s movement was organized, well funded, and a politically connected, growing component of the Republican Party.⁹³ Moreover, she was disgusted that ERA supporters seemed unwilling to take any action to promote their positions. She wrote, “I tell you frankly Helen I get a little tired of everyone being FOR ERA but unable to sit down and do something about it--such as in this instance, write a letter. So be it.”⁹⁴ Helen Milliken, however, was an eternal optimist. She disagreed with Peterson, writing to her, “Elly, I do believe you are wrong when you say that people no longer have any passion for this issue. I see new fires being kindled all along the way, and the sparks set off by this Romney ruckus will help the cause—if we can avoid being overcome by some of the smoke along the way. The cause is right, the principle is just, and I do trust in God—She will provide.”⁹⁵ Michigan’s Republican feminists found it difficult to respond to the Romneys’ arguments because they saw

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Speech, Interchange, November 3, 1979, Peterson.

⁹⁴ Peterson to Helen Milliken, December 26, 1979.

⁹⁵ Helen Milliken to Peterson, January 4, 1980, box 10, folder: Correspondence 1980 Jan-March, Helen Milliken Papers.

them as personal attacks, but also because they believed that their attempts to radicalize the ERA were both irrelevant and inaccurate.⁹⁶

Despite the elation with which feminists left the IWY Conference, the National Plan of Action adopted at the meeting, especially its support for lesbians, had unintended consequences for Michigan's Republican feminists. At the time, Peterson was convinced that feminists had sent a powerful message to conservative women. The unity of the women who attended the Houston conference, she wrote, "could not be lost on the frightened right wing who had spent vast sums of money—first, to take over the state meetings and then, in an attempt to destroy the value of the Houston Conference."⁹⁷ But McNamee seemed to sense this shift and the danger it posed to the politics of the Republican feminists. She wrote that "for me, this one [sexual preference] represented an idea whose time has not come, but I'm in the political arena and I'm not looking for any more issues than we already have in 1978."⁹⁸ While there is no record of how she voted on this resolution, presumably she was one of the few who opposed it. It appeared

⁹⁶ Helen Milliken to Callow, January 4, 1980, box 10, folder: Correspondence 1980 Jan-March, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁹⁷ Peterson, "Report on Houston," 7.

⁹⁸ Ruth McNamee, "Summary of IWY Conference," A.A.U.W. of Birmingham, March 1, 1978, box 1, folder: Speeches and Articles, 1970-1981, McNamee Papers.

to push her beyond what she had traditionally been willing to endorse, but she blamed her reluctance on the pragmatics of politics.

Eventually, even Peterson came to believe that the IWY Conference contributed to the defeat of the ERA.

I believe, in retrospect, our problems began to mount in Houston. Most of us thought that it would be a plus for the women's movement and, of course, in many ways it was. But in terms of the ERA, it gave new impetus to the anti group. On the plus side we came out of the convention with many new groups pro-ERA and many new faces. . . . But out of it came trouble, too. The convention had been ordained and funded by Congress; and was an official act. The agenda had been worked over in 50 state meetings and many seminars . . . and what happened? The press gave equal coverage to a jack leg religious rally which wouldn't have been covered with one inch of press any other time. . . . We must remember, too, that up to this point Phyllis Schlafly had been a born loser. . . . But Houston and the Opposition to ERA gave her her heart's desire—publicity.⁹⁹

These newly energized conservative women, who Peterson described as the “frightened right wing,” used the IWY Conference proceedings to recruit others to their cause by characterizing feminists as “radicals and lesbians.”¹⁰⁰ Barbour, with her emphasis on the radicalism, violence, and “raised clenched fists” at the meeting, and her analogy to Nazi rallies, captured the characterization that the conservative women sought. Romney, who relied on the IWY Conference to conflate radical

⁹⁹ “Remarks for the ERA Get Together,” Peterson, August 18, 1979.

¹⁰⁰ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 244-45.

feminism and the ERA, further undermined the cause of Republican feminists within the Republican Party. The IWY Conference pushed Michigan's Republican feminists off of the sensible center of the women's movement, and once they shifted leftward, conservative women were able to characterize them as radical crazies who were unfit to represent women, especially within the Republican Party. The IWY Conference had placed Republican feminists in a precarious position. The pressures that were building on them as they tried to reconcile their feminism with their Republicanism were ready to explode.

CHAPTER 7 THE SENSIBLE CENTER BECOMES IRRELEVANT: 1980 TO 1983

Our party, the party of Lincoln, the party of human rights, has been the party that has turned its back on women.

–Helen Milliken

We must each march to his own tune . . . and mine is certainly that I must be a loyal citizen AND woman before I become partisan.

–Elly Peterson

In July 1980, Detroit served as the site for the Republican national convention.

Commentators predicted that this quadrennial meeting would be significant because “Republican leaders meeting in Detroit believe they are on the verge of forming a new majority party with a New Deal-type coalition built on a conservative base.”¹ This conservative challenge did not bode well for Michigan’s Republican feminists, whose survival depended on the ability of the party’s moderate faction to stop the conservative tsunami. What otherwise might have been a chance for these activists to show off their state and celebrate their partisanship became instead a fight for survival between the moderate and conservative wings of the party. While Michigan’s ratification of the ERA had not been rescinded, the proposed constitutional amendment was still three states short of ratification and faced a deadline of September 30, 1982. In Michigan, abortion was legal and available to poor women through Medicaid, but that was only due to Governor

¹ Saul Friedman and Remer Tyson, “A Newer Deal,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 8, 1980.

Milliken's successive vetoes of repeated legislative attempts to end such funding. Conservatives, who opposed both the ERA and abortion rights for women, were about to take over the national and state Republican parties.

As predicted, conservative Republicans nominated Ronald Reagan as their presidential candidate, which they celebrated as the culmination of many years of hard work designed to take control of the Republican Party. Moderate Republicans, on the other hand, including Republican feminists, were fearful about their future in a party run by conservatives. Not surprisingly, moderates also lost control of the Michigan Republican Party when conservative Richard Headlee replaced Milliken at the top of the ticket in 1982.

With the conservative takeover of the Republican Party complete, Republican feminists faced new partisan challenges. They expected opposition to the ERA, abortion and the rest of their feminist agenda from the party and its leaders. Thus, they anticipated a struggle "to maintain a feminist presence in the Republican Party." At the same time, conservative control over the Republican Party undermined the multipartisanship of the NWPC, making it increasingly difficult "to maintain a Republican presence in the feminist movement." Despite the pressures placed on them by the changing Republican Party, Michigan's Republican feminists tried to hold themselves and their causes together. Each was

forced, however, to individually reassess her attempts to reconcile her feminism and partisanship in light of the presidential election of 1980 and the Michigan gubernatorial election of 1982. Not surprisingly, the outcome was different for each of them.

The disagreements between Republican women that were apparent at the IWY Conference came to the forefront in Detroit at the 1980 Republican National Convention. While Republican feminists had managed to maintain some modicum of support for the ERA in the 1976 Republican Party platform, all partisan support for abortion rights had been abandoned. Going into the 1980 convention, presumptive candidate Reagan had already stated that he supported gender equality, especially with respect to wages, and indicated that he was willing to sign legislation on a piecemeal basis that promoted income equality for women. But he believed that the ERA was unnecessary and, in fact, jeopardized many of the legislative protections offered specifically to women.² He claimed that he supported equal rights, but opposed the constitutional amendment that would guarantee those equal rights.

² "Citizens for Reagan" Flier, April 27, 1976, box 19, folder: ERAmerica Reagan (Ronald) Position on ERA (1976), Peterson Papers.

ERA activists objected to his position. While they conceded that the cause of gender equality had progressed, they knew they had more to do and would never stop until the constitution protected their rights. Callow ironically noted “Ronald Reagan’s promise to urge all states and Congress to amend their discriminatory laws is also a sign of progress. It is, in effect, an admission there are hundreds of laws that need change. State legislatures and Congress have had the power to change these laws all along, but have not. ERA supporters do not expect either Reagan or themselves to live that long.”³

While Reagan set the stage for the convention debate that would inevitably occur over the ERA, the leaders of the debate on the convention floor were familiar adversaries. Schlafly was an advisor to Reagan and a convention delegate. A majority of convention delegates supported her STOP ERA movement. Moderate Republicans within the party, including the NRWTF and convention hosts William and Helen Milliken, the latter representing ERAmerica, fought to continue the party’s endorsement of the ERA. In a familiar argument, Governor Milliken contended that a broad-based party was essential to win the presidential election

³ “Republican National Platform,” Point of View Transcript, Laura Callow, July 26, 1980, WJR Radio, box 2, ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corr.) 1980-1986, Callow Papers.

and that if the party repudiated its support for the ERA, it would lose women voters.⁴

The NRWTF arrived at the pre-convention meetings, however, handicapped by the bridges that it had burned at the 1976 Republican presidential convention. Freeman concluded that Republicans became powerful within their party through their connections to the party's power brokers. Thus, the NRWTF, which derived its earlier influence from its connections to the then ascendant moderate wing of the party, was relatively powerless by 1980 as its fortunes sank with those of its moderate mentors. To make matters worse, the NRWTF had been able to retain a pro-ERA plank in the 1976 platform only through its ties to Reagan's opponent, Gerald Ford. Even in 1976, Republican feminists operated from a position of weakness, dropping efforts to retain a pro-choice plank because they believed that any linkage of abortion with the ERA would jeopardize their chances of retaining support for the ERA in the platform. By 1980 they had no real power or influence within the party, having lost it all to Schlafly and her supporters.⁵

⁴ Paul Magnusson, "GOP Deal Shapes Up to Head Off ERA Fight," *Detroit Free Press*, July 6, 1980.

⁵ Jo Freeman, "Republicans: Feminists Avoid a Direct Show Down (at the 1980 Republican Convention)," *In These Times*, 4, no. 32, (July 30, 1980), <http://www.jofreeman.com/conventions/RepubPol1980.htm>.

The party's platform writing subcommittee, which arrived in Detroit a week early, drafted a compromise between moderate and conservative Republicans concerning the ERA. It provided that that the party "reaffirm[s] our party's historic commitment to equal rights and equal opportunity for women, a commitment which made us the first national party to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment."⁶ At the same time, the compromise did not include a specific endorsement of any version of the ERA. Instead, it included the more ambiguous statement that "we are proud of our pioneering role and do not renounce our stand."⁷

The compromise language, however, pleased no one. ERA supporters, led by the NRWTF, wanted more than a passive statement in which the party failed to denounce the ERA. Helen Milliken joined with other members of the NRWTF to lobby the platform committee to change the language promising not to renounce the ERA to a statement of support for it. Conservatives wanted it made clear that the party did not support the ERA at all.⁸ Schlafly warned that if the moderates pushed too hard for a plank endorsing the ERA, she had the votes to adopt a plank

⁶ Magnusson, "GOP Deal Shapes Up to Head Off ERA Fight," July 6, 1980.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

renouncing it outright.⁹ She told the feminists that “we think leaving the ERA out altogether is a generous compromise. . . . We’re willing to go along with it in the interests of party unity. But we’ve got a majority of votes on this subcommittee and a big majority on the whole committee. If they push us, we’ll give them a plan which repudiates the ERA entirely.”¹⁰ Conservative Senator Jesse Helms was more blunt. He asserted that “conservatives have the votes to pass ‘a tough, mean anti-ERA plank’ if proponents of the measure persist in their efforts to push the issue to a test.”¹¹

With respect to women’s issues, the final Republican platform included conservative priorities, including support for exempting women from the military draft, and an assertion that the government should not interfere with the integrity of the family.¹² It reflected Reagan’s preference to fight discrimination with specific

⁹ David S. Broder, “Republicans’ Plank on ERA Pleases Neither Side,” *Washington Post*, July 7, 1980, box 5, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 International Women’s Year: National Women’s Conf., November 18-21, 1977: Leaflets and Position Papers, Helen Milliken Papers.

¹⁰ “GOP Platform Drafters Reject Pro-ERA Plank,” n.p., July 8, 1980, box 5, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 International Women’s Year: National Women’s Conf., November 18-21, 1977: Leaflets and Position Papers, Helen Milliken Papers.

¹¹ David S. Broder, “Republicans’ Plank on ERA Pleases Neither Side,” July 7, 1980.

¹² “Women’s Rights,” “Strong Family,” “Family Protection,” Republican Party Platform of 1980, July 15, 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25844>.

laws, rather than a constitutional amendment, and to permit the states to make their own decisions about the ERA. The Carter administration was reprimanded for trying to pressure states into ratifying the proposed constitutional amendment.¹³

In a concession to moderates, the plank “acknowledge[d] the legitimate efforts of those who support or oppose ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment” and “reaffirm[ed] the Party’s historical commitment to equal rights and equality for women,” but never specifically mentioned the ERA.¹⁴ Republican feminists agreed not to pursue this fight on the floor of the convention. In exchange, Reagan promised to meet with them when he came to Detroit to accept the party’s nomination.¹⁵

Donnelly was pleased with the platform. She noted that it “combine[d] a neutral position on the Equal Rights Amendment with the strongest women’s rights

¹³ “Women’s Rights,” Republican Party Platform of 1980, July 15, 1980.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Angry ERA Backers Vow Convention Fight,” n.p., July 9, 1980, box 5, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 International Women’s Year: National Women’s Conf., November 18-21, 1977: Leaflets and Position Papers, Helen Milliken Papers; “Platform Committee Doooms Pro-ERA Plank,” n.p., July 9, 1980, box 5, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 International Women’s Year: National Women’s Conf., November 18-21, 1977: Leaflets and Position Papers, Helen Milliken Papers.

platform that the Party has ever had.”¹⁶ Conservatives embraced what they called a “compromise plank” in the 1980 Republican Party platform because it repudiated the ERA and the threat it posed to the traditional family, supported measures intended to provide economic equality for women and, at the same time, recognized that women were different from men and, therefore, needed some protections.¹⁷ Donnelly noted that “the Republican Party has taken a far-sighted step which recognizes the differences between the Women’s Movement of the 70’s, and what could be identified as the Women’s Movement of the 80’s.”¹⁸ Conservative women believed that they would finally realize their goal of becoming the legitimate representatives of women’s interests in the Republican Party.

Women’s groups sponsored protest rallies to indicate their opposition to the party’s official position on the ERA. On Sunday, July 13, 1980, the day before the convention opened, a rally called “The Family of Americans for ERA” convened in downtown Detroit. Organized by Women in Communications, participants tried to refute the notion that the ERA was unnecessary and the fight was over. It was a

¹⁶ Point of View Transcript, Elaine Donnelly, August 8, 1980, WJR Radio, box 2, folder: ERAmerica Point of View Broadcasts Transcripts (& Corr.) 1980-1986, Callow Papers.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

complicated rally that focused on the “construction of a simple home—a house raising—on a flat bed truck in a park near the convention site. The house will be only partially completed to symbolize women’s limited buying power and the unfinished task of passing ERA. Planks in the house will be painted with the states which have ratified ERA and the names of individuals and organizations contributing \$1000.”¹⁹ The family the organizers referred to “include[d] representatives of all states, ages, ethnic and income levels, the ‘Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chiefs’ of society, as well as housewives and football players, well-known VIP’s, including celebrities intermingled with average citizens.”²⁰ NOW organized a protest march on the first day of the convention, which was attended, according to one report, by approximately twelve thousand marchers, including Helen Milliken, who wore her Republican elephant pin upside down “in distress.” Drawing on the history of the

¹⁹ “The Family of Americans for ERA,” memorandum, Women in Communications, Inc., box 15, folder: July 7-17, 1980 Republican National Convention/Detroit File 2, Helen Milliken Papers.

²⁰ “Far West Region, Proposed Media Events in Detroit and New York,” ERA Committee, box 15, folder: July 7-17, 1980 Republican National Convention/Detroit File 2, Helen Milliken Papers.

party as the original proponent of equal rights for African Americans, some people carried signs picturing Abraham Lincoln with a tear streaming down his face.²¹

Republican feminists fared no better on abortion, but on this issue they did not even have a favorable plank from the 1976 convention to use as a possible point of reference. While the final platform acknowledged that some Republicans favored a woman's right to choose an abortion, it then dismissed their concerns by specifically endorsing "a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children. We also support the Congressional efforts to restrict the use of taxpayers' dollars for abortion."²² This so-called "human life amendment" would render *Roe* invalid. While they did not favor a constitutional amendment to guarantee equality for women, Republicans endorsed one to outlaw abortion by recognizing that a fetus became a person, entitled to all of the legal rights conveyed by such status, at conception.

Michigan's Republican feminists quickly became aware of their place in the Reagan Republican Party. The majority of Michigan's delegates, who reflected the

²¹ "12,000 March for ERA," n.p., July 12, 1980, box 5, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 International Women's Year: National Women's Conf., November 18-21, 1977: Leaflets and Position Papers, Helen Milliken Papers.

²² "Abortion," Republican Party Platform of 1980, July 15, 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25844>.

moderation of the state party in their commitment to George H. W. Bush, found that they were decisively outnumbered. While at the 1976 convention “the Reagan forces were considered the ‘lunatic fringe,’” in Detroit they became the mainstream who ostracized moderates.²³ This marginalization was apparent in the way that the party treated Republican feminists, not only in drafting the platform, but also at the convention.

Binsfeld, a Bush delegate to the Republican National Convention, anticipated the opportunities for change presented by this national meeting of Republican Party leadership. She believed in the importance of political involvement through political parties and the influence that participants could have on the country. In a press release, she stated ““people have abandoned political parties and turned the elections and government over to the control of special interest groups. The result is government inaction because there is no unifying force to produce action—a role historically carried out by political parties.””²⁴ She believed that ““if they [the American people] join the political process, revitalize the political parties and vote

²³ Loraine Anderson, “‘Fast Gavel’ Thwarts Binsfeld ERA Hopes,” *Traverse City Record-Eagle*, July 16, 1980, box 7, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982, Michigan Women’s Task Force, Helen Milliken Papers.

²⁴ News Release, June 11, 1980, 1, box 3, folder 6: Connie Binsfeld Campaign, 1980, accession no. MS 99-17, Binsfeld Papers.

in the next election, they can reject stagnant politics and policies and chart a new course of events for our country.”²⁵ She was especially excited about the opportunities she saw in the creation of the Republican Party Platform. “This is the area where I hope to make a strong contribution. . . . I don’t want the party platform to be a platitude that’s forgotten the day after the election. Platforms should be philosophical commitments against which we can test the effectiveness of the party and the people we elect.”²⁶ Binsfeld must have been quite disillusioned by her experiences in trying to influence the platform and the process by which it was adopted. She was disturbed that they could not even agree to a roll call vote on the platform that would allow them to publicly record their opposition the party’s stance on the ERA.²⁷

Republican feminists tried to make the best of a bad situation, but they were clearly demoralized. To save face, they argued that the outcome would have been much worse if they had not actively participated in the convention. As agreed, Reagan met with the NRWTF on July 15, 1980. Attendees, including Helen Milliken

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

and other ERA supporters, cited the fact that the meeting took place, and offered vague representations and broad generalizations about what transpired when they met, as evidence that it was a success. They noted that “the Reagan meeting was a clear victory for pro-ERA forces and a tacit acknowledgement by the Reagan camp that it had underestimated the significance of the issue and the ability of pro-ERA supporters to rally support and public attention to the issue.”²⁸ Nevertheless, their influence over Reagan was minimal and they were only able to extract minor concessions from him. He did, however, agree to consider appointing a woman to a future Supreme Court vacancy, and ultimately did so with the nomination of Sandra Day O’Connor in 1981.²⁹

Reagan chose moderate George H. W. Bush as his vice-presidential running mate, a selection that the members of the NRWTF believed they had influenced.³⁰ In their opinion, Bush was their best chance to moderate Reagan’s strong anti-women positions. Immediately after the convention ended, the MRWTF wrote to

²⁸ Republican Women’s Task Force Newsletter, August-September, 1980, 5, box 7, folder: Topical Files 1969-1982, National Women’s Political Caucus: Republican Women’s Task Force ca. 1974-1980, Helen Milliken Papers.

²⁹ David Hoffman and Paul Taylor, “Reagan Seeks to Mend Fences,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 16, 1980.

³⁰ Republican Women’s Task Force Newsletter, August-September, 1980, 2.

Bush, who they had supported for president because he favored the ERA, to hold him accountable for his subsequent endorsement of the Republican platform, including its lukewarm position on women's rights. Victoria Toensing, a Republican feminist from Michigan who cochaired the Task Force, wrote that "we feel strongly that ratification of the ERA is both a human issue and an economic issue. We cannot view the present platform language as anything but a repudiation of the Republican Party's forty year support for ratification."³¹ Their efforts to hold him accountable were largely unsuccessful, however, as Republican feminists continued to be marginalized after the election.

The NRWTF also convinced Reagan to create a Women's Policy Board under the leadership of NRWTF members Mary Louise Smith and Kilberg, through which they hoped "to continue to sensitize the candidate and campaign operatives to the need to address women's issues and include women in the campaign process at all levels."³² When they tried to populate the new group, however, Republican feminist leaders saw just how damaged relations were between Republican feminists because of the party's position on ERA. Anne Armstrong, Pam Curtis and

³¹ Toensing to George Bush, August 15, 1980, box 7, folder: Topical Files 1969-1982 Michigan Republican Women's Task Force, Helen Milliken Papers.

³² Republican Women's Task Force Newsletter, August-September, 1980, 8.

Mary Louise Smith approached Peterson to try to convince her to become a member of the board. She turned them all down, indicating that she preferred to continue her work in support of the ERA, which had become more difficult because of the opposition of Reagan and the Republican Party. She also shot down any expectations that Helen Milliken should do more to support Reagan. Peterson subsequently told Milliken that she wrote to Smith, “the Governor [Milliken] has come out for the ticket—you are striving to keep the moderate Republican women in the party and happy and working. . . . I closed that little discussion by saying that you were committed to ERAmerica and if you were to drop out of that and say you were working for RR [Ronald Reagan] it would really create problems.”³³ Peterson and Milliken were never able to enthusiastically support Reagan and chose, for the most part, to continue their work on the ERA.³⁴ Donnelly, on the other hand, was a Reagan-Bush volunteer in Michigan and became a member of the Women’s Policy

³³ Peterson to Helen Milliken, undated except for indications that it was written on a Monday and received on August 13, 1980, box 10, folder: Correspondence 1980 July-Oct., Helen Milliken Papers.

³⁴ Helen Milliken to Loret Ruppe, Co-Chair, Reagan Bush Committee of Michigan, September 30, 1980, box 10, Folder: Correspondence 1980 July-Oct, Helen Milliken Papers; Helen Milliken to Ruppe, October 24, 1980, box 10, folder: Correspondence 1980 July-Oct., Helen Milliken Papers.

Advisory Board, not at all what the NRWTF intended when it advocated that the organization be created.³⁵

NRWTF member Pam Curtis indicated that Republican feminists would respond in one of three ways to the nomination of Reagan. Some would support him because they were Republicans and they prioritized partisanship over feminism. Burnett, for example, indicated that she “happily voted for Reagan and cheered when he crushed Jimmy Carter in 1980,” despite her pro-choice stance on abortion, because she was “not a one-issue voter.”³⁶ She called herself a “feminist Republican” and, by indicating that she did not vote on the basis of a single issue, tried to reconcile her partisanship and feminism by working within the Republican Party to make it more receptive to feminist issues.³⁷ Others would support him because they wanted to advance within the party bureaucracy or to participate in a Republican administration.³⁸ Peterson characterized Kilberg as a member of

³⁵ “Women’s Policy Advisory Board,” Attachment, Mary Louise Smith and Bobbie Kilberg, Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Women’s Policy Advisory Committee, to Dear Colleague, October 22, 1980, box 8, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 Women’s Issues (Republican and Democratic Platforms), 1980, Helen Milliken Papers.

³⁶ Burnett, *True Colors*, 33.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Judy Mann, “GOP Feminists Seek Way to Support Reagan” *Washington Post*, May 30, 1980, box 7, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982, Michigan Women’s Task Force, Helen Milliken Papers.

Curtis' latter group—seeking a “big appointment” in the new Reagan administration.³⁹

In order to continue to participate in the campaign and support the Republican Party, Republican feminists were encouraged to redefine women's issues. Instead of rejecting Reagan because of his opposition to the ERA and abortion, women, according to Kilberg, needed to reconfirm their loyalty to the Republican Party and redirect their efforts to those issues where they might be able to make a difference. She stated, “I think it is useless and unrealistic for a Republican feminist to expect to find a change in Reagan's position on ERA and abortion. It's obvious that's not going to happen.”⁴⁰ Reagan argued that gender equality was dependent on economic security and global stability for all Americans.⁴¹ Kilberg shifted her position accordingly. She advised women “to concentrate on a lot of other issues that impact on women—displaced homemakers, pension reform, day care, the marriage tax. . . . I'm a feminist. But I'm also a

³⁹ Peterson to Helen Milliken, undated except for indications that it was written on a Monday and received on August 13, 1980.

⁴⁰ Mann, “GOP Feminists Seek Way to Support Reagan,” May 30, 1980.

⁴¹ “Women's Rights. Who Cares?” Campaign Brochure, Attachment, Smith and Kilberg to Dear Colleague, October 22, 1980, box 8, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982 Women's Issues (Republican and Democratic Platforms), 1980, Helen Milliken Papers.

consumer and wage earner . . . and to me the decision as to whom to support for the presidency is going to be broader than equal rights and abortion.”⁴² Republican feminists who shifted or abandoned their priorities to accept this argument were able to convince themselves that a Reagan presidency would address their concerns.

Curtis identified a final alternative for disillusioned Republican feminists. These women, she believed, would choose to elevate their feminism over their partisanship and support the candidate who best met their feminist goals— independent John Anderson. Anderson was a Republican who, in April 1980, decided to run as an independent, third-party candidate when it became clear that he would not be able to defeat Reagan for the Republican presidential nomination. A supporter of the ERA and reproductive choice for women, he was widely seen as the Republican candidate who was most supportive of women’s rights.⁴³ Helen Milliken even chose to endorse him while he ran as a Republican, but did not believe that she could publicly support him after he left the party.⁴⁴ In a letter she

⁴² Mann, “GOP Feminists Seek Way to Support Reagan” *Washington Post*, May 30, 1980.

⁴³ “John Anderson for President,” Campaign Brochure, <http://www.4president.org/brochures/andersonlucy1980brochure.htm>.

⁴⁴ Helen Milliken to Dottie Lamm, June 19, 1980, box 15, folder: 1980 National Governors Conference, August 3, 4, 5-Denver Colo., Helen Milliken Papers.

wrote to Peterson early in the 1980 election year, she noted that she thought that he was best on women's issues and had widespread grassroots support, but nobody to organize for him. She further indicated that the governor was not sure how to proceed with the 1980 presidential campaign. "Bill is agonizing over what to do ____ what would be the step (and endorsement) that would deflect Ronald R. I think John A. is really his choice too, but he can't afford a miss on this one."⁴⁵

At least one of Michigan's Republican feminists became an advocate and campaign leader for Anderson. Beebe became coordinator of his presidential campaign in Michigan because she believed that a third party candidate was necessary.⁴⁶ She felt that Reagan was "ultraconservative and hyper-nationalistic," and Carter "wasn't trained to be president" and "doesn't have the skills to lead a nation."⁴⁷ Under her leadership, Anderson was able to garner enough signatures to get his name on the primary ballot and won enough votes in the primary to get his name on Michigan's final ballot in November. Beebe was even temporarily

⁴⁵ Helen Milliken to Peterson, January 8, 1980, box 19, folder: ERAmerica. Romney, George (position on ERA), undated, 1980, Peterson Papers.

⁴⁶ "Beebe to Run with Anderson," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, June 2, 1980, box 1, folder: Beebe Anderson Miscellaneous Newspaper Articles, Beebe Papers.

⁴⁷ "Dearborn's Own Lorraine Beebe: Former Senator Works for Anderson," *Dearborn Times Herald*, August 28, 1980, box 1, folder: Beebe-Anderson Newspaper Articles, Beebe Papers.

nominated as his vice presidential candidate as a placeholder on the Michigan ticket until he actually selected his running mate, Patrick Lucey. Ultimately, Anderson got about 7 percent of the vote in Michigan. Reagan won the state with 49 percent and Carter trailed him, winning 43 percent of the vote in Michigan.⁴⁸

Once Reagan became president, things went downhill for Republican feminists. The NWPC effectively purged the NRWTF from its network of feminist organizations and replaced it with a new, accountable Republican affiliate. In 1979, the NWPC sought to gain some control over the NRWTF by requiring that all task force members join the NWPC. When the NRWTF objected to this rule change, the NWPC pushed the NRWTF out of the organization. The leader of the NRWTF told members that "Iris [Mitgang, chairperson of the NWPC] indicated that the time had probably come when the Task Force and the National Women's Political Caucus should sever their relationship in a friendly manner with no hard feelings."⁴⁹ A second group was formed, called the NWPC Republicans, to serve as the partisan task force of the NWPC. As the leaders of this new organization told potential

⁴⁸ "The Anderson Campaign in Michigan," n.d., box 1, folder: Beebe-Anderson Miscellaneous, Beebe Papers; 1980 President General Election Results, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1980>.

⁴⁹ Nancy A. Thompson, Chair, RWTF, to Member, received March 9, 1981, box 7, folder: Topical Files, 1969-1982, Michigan Women's Task Force, Helen Milliken Papers.

members, “the NWPC is a multipartisan organization as set forth in its purpose and by-laws and [NWPC Republicans is] intend [sic] to be the feminist Republican voice and action arm of the mother organization, NWPC.”⁵⁰ Leaders of the now independent NRWTF were discouraged. Chairperson Nancy Thompson indicated that “it appears to me, and I think I can speak for the other officers as well, that we should still work to fulfill our original objectives: (1) to promote a feminist presence in the Republican Party and; (2) to promote a Republican presence in the feminist movement.”⁵¹ However, she was not optimistic about the organization’s chances to do so. “On the feminist front, I have just reported our exclusion. Earlier in my letter, I referred to the appointment ‘progress’ of the Reagan administration; it is equally clear that women, not just feminist women, are being excluded [from positions in the Reagan administration].”⁵²

Inherent in this reorganization was a critique of the old guard Republican feminists who made up the NRWTF. As the leader of the new NWPC Republicans told potential members, “we as Republican women cannot help but view with

⁵⁰ Sharon E. Macha, Chair, NWPC Republicans to Republican Friend, received April 3, 1981, box 16, folder: July 10-12, 1981 National Women’s Political Caucus Albuquerque, New Mexico, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁵¹ Thompson to Member, received March 9, 1981.

⁵² Ibid.

mixed emotions the tremendous gains Republicans made in November. The long standing commitment of the Republican Party to ratification of the ERA is gone. The lip service paid to equal representation of women in convention delegates and committee memberships from the local level on up is laughable. We are all aware of the dearth of women appointed by Reagan to high level government positions.”⁵³ The suggestion appears to be that the women of the NRWTF were too closely tied to Reagan and, therefore, were either not interested in or not in a position to accomplish much for Republican feminists, with the emphasis on feminists. She continued that “the RWTF has done a tremendous job in trying to look after our interests with limited resources, particularly at National Convention time, and I urge you to give them your support. However, I feel that the NWPC with its grassroots organizational structure can provide the kind of umbrella we need to build an effective network for impacting our party and our government in general. As Caucus members we are not only a voice for Republican women but for all women who share our concerns about equality in our democracy.”⁵⁴ If forced to choose, this new group was likely to prioritize its feminism over its Republicanism. As the NWPC became increasingly Democratic and the Republican Party

⁵³ Macha to Republican Friend, received April 3, 1981.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

increasingly conservative, NWPC leadership sought to separate its Republican arm from Reagan Republicans. It did so by creating a substitute for the NRWTF and then populating it with members who were more loyal to the feminists of the NWPC than to Reagan's Republican Party.

Changes in the Republican Party also threatened the multipartisanship of the NWPC. Caucus leaders believed that women gained political strength from their large numbers and thus had to prioritize their common feminist goals over their partisan differences. However, when Republican candidates who received support from the NWPC began to vote in accordance with the directives of their party and contrary to the interests of feminists, members of the NWPC suggested that perhaps its policy of supporting Republican candidates should be reviewed. Others countered that reversing this policy would undermine the multipartisan foundation on which the organization was based. Kathy Wilson was the Republican president of the NWPC from 1981 to 1983. In her obituary, a Democratic strategist noted that she was “so tough that when she burned her bra she kept it on.”⁵⁵ While she led the NWPC, she stressed that “only with the support of both parties will equality be won. I want my party back, and I’m going to work very hard to get it back, especially

⁵⁵ Joe Holley, “Kathy Wilson Dies; Led Political Caucus,” *Washington Post*, September 7, 2005.

by supporting progressive Republican women for office.”⁵⁶ Thus, she argued, the NWPC could be instrumental in bringing the Republican Party back to its moderate roots. Ironically, however, she was one of many Caucus members who ultimately prioritized their feminism over their partisanship and left the Republican Party.⁵⁷

The ERA was finally defeated with a whimper when the ratification period expired on June 30, 1982. As head of ERAmerica, Milliken spoke eloquently about the defeat, and sought to inspire the women who unsuccessfully fought for the ERA by comparing and connecting them to the suffragists who fought for the vote. She asserted that these activists “share[d] more than history with our foremothers. We share a vision.”⁵⁸ She stressed that women would continue to pass the goal of equality from generation to generation until it became a reality.⁵⁹ Their efforts, she said, while not successful, provided “us the know-how and the tools to continue

⁵⁶ “Women’s Political Times,” March/April 1984, folder: Women’s Political Times, 1984, Women’s Political Times Papers, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

⁵⁷ Holley, “Kathy Wilson Dies,” September 7, 2005.

⁵⁸ Remarks by Helen W. Milliken, ERAmerica Reception, Washington D.C., June 30, 1982, box 18, folder: Tuesday, June 30, 1982 Wednesday, July 1, 1982 ERA Rally, Washington D.C., Helen Milliken Papers.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the fight for equality. Women have become a political force. It will not go away.”⁶⁰

In fact, women in Michigan began to organize immediately to reintroduce the ERA in Congress, to establish statewide programs in support of ratification and to nominate and elect candidates in the November 1982 elections who would support the ERA and other issues of concern to women. ERAmerica reconstituted itself in Michigan and committed itself to become an integrated element of the national ERA movement to adopt the ERA and ratify it again in Michigan.⁶¹

Reactions to the defeat of the ERA varied. Burnett and Callow both believed that the ERA failed because men realized that forced equality would be too expensive. Thus, they blamed patriarchs who profited from the status quo and had no incentive to change discriminatory labor and wage structures.⁶² Donnelly, who felt vindicated and apparently magnanimous, called for a new sense of cooperation between women. She indicated, “It’s time to get over the bitterness. . . . I don’t feel bitter. It’s time to break the ice and find a way for those of us who agree on basic

⁶⁰ Helen W. Milliken to Margot Duly-Morrow, mailgram, June 25, 1982, box 18, folder: Thursday, July 1, 1982, Beyond ERA, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁶¹ ERAmerica Coalition Update, Summer-July 1982, box 18, folder: Wednesday, July 12, 1982 Michigan ERAmerica Meeting 7:15 p.m. Holiday Inn-Howell 6:30 p.m. dinner, Helen Milliken Papers; July 1st Press Statement, box 18, folder: Thursday, July 1, 1982 Beyond ERA, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁶² Burnett, *True Colors*, 105; Barbara Hoover, “ERA R.I.P.: The Loser,” *Detroit News*, June 27, 1982.

issues and positive things to stand together. The defeat of ERA doesn't mean women's rights are lost or anything taken away. It means the debate will continue in a more reasonable fashion."⁶³ Her words, however, could not eliminate the lingering animosity between those on both sides of the ERA battle and did not change the minds of Republican feminists.

Michigan's Republican feminists received another blow when Governor Milliken announced, in December 1981, that after thirteen years as governor, he would not run for reelection and, in fact, would retire from politics at the end of his term in 1982. A four-person Republican primary ensued between three conservative candidates, L. Brooks Patterson, an Oakland County prosecuting attorney, state representative Jack Welborn, and insurance executive and businessman Richard Headlee, and moderate lieutenant governor and Milliken's chosen successor, James Brickley. The Republican voters nominated Headlee, and a former Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, Thomas Brennan, to run for governor and lieutenant governor, respectively. The three conservative candidates collectively received almost 70 percent, or 450,000 of the 644,429 votes cast in the Republican primary election, which was indicative of the direction in which the

⁶³ Sherry Kahan, "Donnelly Urges End to Bitterness," *Livonia Observer*, June 24, 1982, box 1, folder: Donnelly Elaine Newspaper Articles, 1973-1985, Donnelly Papers.

party was moving.⁶⁴ A *Detroit Free Press* obituary for Headlee in 2004 noted, “Headlee was ‘a transformational figure in Michigan politics, involved in re-shaping the Republican Party from the moderate era of former Gov. William Milliken to the more conservative, tax averse generation that came to power in the 1990s.’”⁶⁵ The Democrats nominated state representative James Blanchard to run for governor, and former member of the United States House of Representatives, Martha Griffiths, who had originally introduced the ERA to the US Congress when it was adopted in 1971, to run for lieutenant governor.⁶⁶

Michigan’s Republican feminists found that Headlee was not Milliken, especially with respect to women’s issues. The contrast between Headlee and his opponent on these issues could not have been clearer. The 1982 Republican gubernatorial ticket opposed the ERA and abortion rights for women. Blanchard favored both, including the rights of poor women to have abortions at government

⁶⁴ Dempsey, *William G. Milliken*, 222.

⁶⁵ Dawson Bell, “Tax Crusader Richard Headlee Dies at 74,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 11, 2004, quoted in Dempsey, *William G. Milliken*, 209.

⁶⁶ John Holusha, “Upset in Michigan Primary Signals G.O.P. Shift to the Right,” *New York Times*, August 12, 1982, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/08/12/us/upset-in-michigan-primary-signals-gop-shift-to-right.html>.

expense, if necessary.⁶⁷ Much like Reagan, Headlee opposed the ERA and any laws that tried to eliminate distinctions between men and women, but claimed to support equal rights for women. Differences between the genders, he argued, were biologically fixed and, therefore, could not be eliminated through legislation. He believed that the argument over the ERA was mere “rhetoric,” and that the Republican Party had a much better record than Democrats in supporting the women who held high level government positions in Michigan, including Mary Coleman, the only female supreme court justice in Michigan.⁶⁸

Many of Headlee’s comments to and about women were incendiary to feminists within the Michigan Republican Party. He objectified women as he

⁶⁷ Michigan Women’s Assembly Questionnaire—Richard Headlee, n.d., 1, 4-5, box 1, folder: Mich. Women’s Assembly, Admin. 1982-1990 Organizing Committee, 1982-1983, Michigan Women’s Assembly Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Michigan Women’s Assembly Papers); Michigan Women’s Assembly Questionnaire—James Blanchard, 1, 4, September 1982, box 1, folder: Mich. Women’s Assembly, Admin. 1982-1990 Organizing Committee, 1982-1983, Michigan’s Women’s Assembly Papers. In 1976 Blanchard indicated that he opposed abortion and Medicaid funding for abortion for poor women, and while a member of the United States House of Representatives, he voted multiple times in favor of the Hyde Amendment. Blanchard to Donald M. Reid, January 28, 1976, box 3, folder 2: Campaign 1986 to Correspondence, 1981-1995, Connie Binsfeld Campaign, Correspondence 1990, Subject: Congressman Blanchard on Abortion, accession no. MS 99-19, Binsfeld Papers; Helen Milliken to Marilyn, April 7, 1982, box 11, folder: Correspondence 1982 Jan-June, Helen Milliken Papers.

⁶⁸ James N. Crutchfield, “Headlee’s Got Silver Tongue of a Debater,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 20, 1982; Questionnaire—Richard Headlee, n.d., 1, box 1, folder: Mich. Women’s Assembly, Admin. 1982-1990 Organizing Committee, 1982-1983, Michigan Women’s Assembly Papers.

dismissed their concerns. Recognizing that he had a problem with half of the voters in the state, he met with a small group of women in September to try to convince them to support his candidacy. The women, however, were not impressed with his commitment to equality when he announced that “women are superior beings. They have more money . . . because they live longer—and they inherit their husbands’ money—and they’re pretty.”⁶⁹ He tried to minimize the number and attack the legitimacy of the women who opposed him, arguing that there were only nine members of the MRWTF who opposed him because of their rabid commitment to the ERA and abortion. He called them “irrational. . . . so obsessed with this that they’ve become hardened. They don’t even smile. They’re unhappy.”⁷⁰ He compared supporters of the ERA to members of “the [John] Birch Society’ in their unwillingness to come up with a compromise ERA that would allow for sexual differences.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ James N. Crutchfield, “Headlee’s Pitch to Women Misses Some,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 15, 1982.

⁷⁰ Hugh McDiarmid, “See Elly Back Jim—See Dick Go Nuts,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 7, 1982.

⁷¹ Barbara Walters, “Headlee Lashes Out at Brown During Campaign Stop Here,” *Kalamazoo Gazette*, September 27, 1982, box 17, folder: Michigan Campaign 1982- “The Women’s Vote” general, Peterson Papers.

Headlee proved that he was tone-deaf to women's issues when he crassly equated his support for women to his reproductive prowess. He argued that in comparison to Blanchard he could not be considered anti-women since he had nine children and Blanchard only had one.⁷² He often came across as flip and condescending, like when he sarcastically attributed his belief that "women are pretty" to "a hormonal imbalance."⁷³ Instead of reassuring women that he was committed to addressing their concerns, his comments proved that he did not understand or care about women's issues. In fact, he repeatedly asserted that the ERA and abortion rights were secondary issues that were not as important as fixing Michigan's weak economy and high unemployment rate (while arguing that by rectifying these problems, he was helping women as well as men).

Problems between Michigan's Republican feminists and Headlee culminated on October 5, 1982, when Peterson and about twenty-five other Republican feminists attended a Blanchard fundraiser to publicly announce their support for him. Some felt that this luncheon was a staged event, intended to maximize the

⁷² Jean Heller, ". . . While ERA Camp is Buzzing over Peterson Switch," *Ann Arbor News*, October 10, 1982, box 17, folder: Michigan Campaign 1982- "The Women's Vote" general, Peterson Papers.

⁷³ Walters, "Headlee Lashes Out at Brown," September 27, 1982.

political mileage that Blanchard could achieve by publicizing his endorsement by “the mother” of Michigan’s moderate Republican Party.⁷⁴ In fact, the optics of the luncheon supported that interpretation. Republican women met with Blanchard, Griffiths and Mrs. Blanchard before the event and entered the meeting room as a group after all of the other attendees were seated. *Detroit Free Press* political editor Hugh McDiarmid concluded that “in fact, the luncheon was strictly a set up, orchestrated down to the last teacup by Democrats from the Blanchard for Governor Committee. . . . [T]he Republicans were paraded in like show-biz celebrities on opening night.”⁷⁵

When asked about her endorsement of Democrat Blanchard, Peterson cited, in addition to Headlee’s stand on the ERA and abortion rights, his efforts to undermine her long-term work to diversify the base of the Republican Party. She had long worked to bring women and people who lived in the cities, especially the African American residents of Detroit, into the traditionally white, male, middle class Republican Party. She said, “I gave my [sic] 15 years of my life . . . 24 hours a day to build a broad based Republican Party. When I left in 1970, I felt completely

⁷⁴ Fitzgerald, *Elly Peterson*.

⁷⁵ McDiarmid, “See Elly Back Jim–See Dick Go Nuts,” October 7, 1982.

convinced that Bill Milliken would carry on and build an even greater Republican Party. . . . And to find out now that we are reversing all that. . . . I guess you have to say I'm a Michigander and a woman before I'm a Republican."⁷⁶ After the luncheon, she indicated that "none of these women [who joined her that day] are leaving the Republican Party. . . . They just do not feel Richard Headlee represents the Party."⁷⁷ She indicated that they orchestrated this public repudiation to try and convince the men in the Republican Party to recognize and respect women, their interests, and their potential political power.⁷⁸

In 1982, Peterson's feminist activism seemed to mirror her partisan work of 1970 when she was still trying to convince a male-dominated Republican Party to empower women. However, her reaction to their leadership decisions was very different in 1982, to a large extent because she now had twelve years of experience with the women's movement. While in 1970 she indicated that she was a

⁷⁶ James N. Crutchfield, "GOP Women at Blanchard Lunch," *Detroit Free Press*, October 6, 1982.

⁷⁷ Joanna Firestone and Susan R. Pollack, "Mother of New GOP Endorses Blanchard," *Detroit News*, October 6, 1982, box 17, folder: Michigan Campaign 1982- "The Women's Vote" general, Peterson Papers.

⁷⁸ Bonnie DiSimone, "Trying to Wake Up the Republican Men," *Ann Arbor News*, October 22, 1982, box 17, folder: Michigan Campaign 1982- "The Women's Vote" general, Peterson Papers.

Republican first and a woman second, faced with Headlee's candidacy, Peterson was forced to reprioritize her interests and her partisanship became less important than her gender. She noted, "We must each march to his own tune . . . and mine is certainly that I must be a loyal citizen AND woman before I become partisan."⁷⁹ While she still wanted to believe that the Republican Party reflected her interests, she argued that Headlee was an illegitimate, albeit temporary, representative of the party and, therefore, she could not support him.

Helen Milliken, who had just undergone surgery for breast cancer, was more politically handcuffed than Peterson and did not publicly support either Headlee or Blanchard for governor.⁸⁰ Michigan political journalist Tim Skubick indicated that he repeatedly tried to get both Governor and Mrs. Milliken to reveal who they voted for in the 1982 gubernatorial election, but they would never give him an answer. However, McDiarmid, writing about Skubick's interview, indicated that

⁷⁹ Peterson to David W. McKeague, chairman, Ingham County Republican Party, October 17, 1982, box 17, folder: Michigan Campaign 1982, "The Women's Vote" correspondence, Peterson Papers.

⁸⁰ Crutchfield, "GOP Women at Blanchard Lunch," October 6, 1982; Helen Milliken to Betty Adamo, October 12, 1982, box 11, folder: Correspondence 1982 July-Dec, Helen Milliken Papers.

while they would not respond to the question, based on their disdain for Headlee, the answer was apparent.⁸¹

Some of Michigan's Republican feminists reacted to Headlee in the same way that Republican feminists responded to Reagan in 1980 when they met with him during the national convention. Instead of prioritizing their feminism over their partisanship, they tried to reconcile their interests with Headlee's priorities and policies. McNamee and Binsfeld, for example, seemed inclined to soften Peterson's criticism of Headlee. After they met with him, they were convinced that they had been able to sensitize him to the issues that women deemed important. Moreover, they believed that policies and programs that he had implemented in his successful insurance company and campaign indicated that he did understand their concerns. They contended that Headlee "has shown his commitment to women by having a woman campaign manager, a day care center for his campaign staff, two women vice-presidents (actually they are assistant vice-presidents) as well as women managers at his company and 'flex time'—a program in which employes generally set their own schedules to meet family and work obligations—for company employes."⁸² Thus, they sought to downplay the controversial and insensitive

⁸¹ Tim Skubick, *Off the Record* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 196.

⁸² Crutchfield, "Headlee's Pitch to Women Misses Some," September 15, 1982.

public comments that he made on the campaign trail by emphasizing his actual accomplishments on women's issues. At the same time, they tried to diminish the importance of his opposition to both the ERA and abortion by emphasizing his economic positions. Binsfeld noted that the meeting "was a candid exchange of ideas and positions, I learned that he already embraces a number of the concepts that we believe in, and I believe he has a feel for the economic and job problems women face today."⁸³ They recharacterized women's issues as nongendered "economic and job" issues so that they could continue to prioritize, or at least reconcile, their partisanship with their feminism.

In an interview with a student journalist at Central Michigan University towards the end of the campaign, Headlee criticized those who supported the ERA in a comment that the *Harvard Crimson* called, "the gaffe of the year."⁸⁴ He stated that "those people that sponsor the ERA—and it doesn't mention women anywhere in the ERA, it doesn't mention women's rights anywhere in it, it talks about sex—they are the proponents of lesbian marriage, homosexual marriage, things of that

⁸³ News Release, September 8, 1982, box 3, folder 9: Connie Binsfeld Campaign, 1982 (Folder 3 of 3), accession no. MS 99-17, Binsfeld Papers.

⁸⁴ Thomas H. Howtell, "Gaffe of the Year Michigan," *Harvard Crimson*, November 2, 1982, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1982/11/2/gaffee-of-the-year-pbtbimothy-crouse/>.

nature, which I categorically resist, categorically reject as part of a basis of a sound society.”⁸⁵ This comment was very similar to the public statement that Romney made about the ERA in 1979. The similarity was most likely more than coincidental, however, as Romney and Headlee were both Mormons and Romney supported Headlee’s candidacy for governor.

Like Romney, Headlee was criticized for this statement and soon tried to walk it back. He indicated that he was not referring to supporters of the ERA, but to the Michigan Women’s Assembly III, which had just come out with a candidate ranking that placed him far below his opponent, largely due to his positions on abortion and the ERA. The Michigan Women’s Assembly III was a bipartisan, collaborative meeting of almost thirty feminist women’s groups from around the state. The group met in June 1982 to find ways to use the political power of women to further their feminist interests in Michigan. It endorsed a new ERA, access to abortion and lesbian and homosexual rights. These women organized to support candidates in the November 1982 election who backed their goals and objectives.⁸⁶

Headlee issued the following statement to explain his earlier comment:

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Michigan Women’s Commission Newsletter, Fall 1982, box 17, folder: Michigan Campaign 1982- “The Women’s Vote” general, Peterson Papers.

My comments were made in reference to some of the resolutions contained in the Women's Assembly III platform such as support of lesbian and homosexual marriage, lesbian and homosexual child custody and adoption rights and permitting minors to obtain birth control pills and abortions without parental knowledge and consent. Obviously every supporter of the ERA or every member of the Women's Assembly III does not support these provisions. However, as a group of 28 self-described feminist organizations the Women's Assembly III has endorsed them knowing that this hidden agenda might well be enacted by courts interpreting the equal rights amendment. It is that very real possibility that caused me and many others to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment as proposed even though I fully support equal rights for women.⁸⁷

His running mate was equally critical of the Assembly. He called it "'a very radical organization' that wants 'power for women' and 'sets women against men.'"⁸⁸

Brennan stated that many of Headlee's other statements were just jokes that were misinterpreted because of the preconceived notions that women had about Headlee. He also suggested that critics of the Headlee-Brennan ticket were engaged in religious discrimination because the two men were Mormon and Catholic, respectively. "The Democrats are 'trying to make us look like the guys who are trying to keep the women barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen.'"⁸⁹ These men

⁸⁷ James N. Crutchfield, "Headlee: Pro-ERA Means Pro-Gay," *Detroit Free Press*, October 22, 1982.

⁸⁸ Sharon McGrayne, "Brennan Goes to Aid of Headlee," *Lansing State Journal*, October 23, 1982, box 17, folder: Michigan Campaign 1982- "The Women's Vote" general, Peterson Papers.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

seemed unable to craft a narrative that responded to the concerns of women voters.

In fact, none of the explanations offered by the Republican candidate for governor or his running mate helped him win the governorship. He lost the election by 51 to 45 percent, despite the fact that more men voted for Headlee. Headlee lost largely because six out of every ten women voted for Blanchard.⁹⁰ Thus, the gender gap proved to be significant in this election. Milliken biographer Dempsey noted that Headlee “spoke candidly and sometimes with devastating invective about his conservative political views. While that appealed to conservative voters, the trait likely cost him the governor’s job—and all because one of the targets he chose to attack was the pro-Equal Rights Amendment position of Helen Milliken, the first lady of Michigan.”⁹¹ Ironically, Republican feminists Peterson and Helen Milliken helped to turn women voters away from the Republican candidate and contributed to the electoral victory of Democrat Blanchard. Their feminism trumped their partisanship.

⁹⁰ Blanchard was also helped by the fact that 97 percent of African Americans voted for him. Jack Casey, “Women: Michigan’s New Political Powerhouse,” *Monthly Detroit*, 6 no. 1, January 1983, 48-49, box 17, folder: Michigan Campaign 1982- “The Women’s Vote” general, Peterson Papers.

⁹¹ Dempsey, *William Milliken*, 222.

Republican feminists did not fare well in the Michigan Republican Party after the 1982 election. Despite Headlee's loss, conservatives retained control of the party and Republican women disagreed over who should represent them. In 1983 conservative women prevailed. Angered by the fact that many members of the MRWTF, including its newly elected leader, publicly supported Blanchard in the 1982 election, conservatives were able to convince Republican Party leadership to declare "that the Republican Women's Task Force 'has no official connection with this party and no franchise to speak for Republican women.'"⁹² Since their liberal views were no longer consistent with those of the party, conservative women purged the MRWTF as the face of women in the Republican Party. Although Republican feminists and conservative women had battled for at least ten years over which group best represented women in the party, the latter had finally prevailed and, in doing so, made moderate feminists feel ostracized and unwelcome.⁹³

⁹² Fireman, "Angry GOP Women Disown Task Force," June 26, 1983; Maxine Swanson to Spencer Abraham, July 6, 1983, box 17, folder: Elly Peterson correspondence 1980-1985, Peterson Papers.

⁹³ Fireman, "Angry GOP Women Disown Task Force," June 26, 1983.

Some members of the party were incensed by the way it treated the women who chose Blanchard over Headlee. Lou Cramton, who had served as a Republican member of the Michigan legislature, asked Spencer Abraham, chairman of the Michigan Republican Party, “How do I transfer out of this chicken outfit? I’ve been a working, voting and contributing Republican for more years than I like to admit but reading of the purging of the party of people--such outstanding Republicans as Maxine Swanson, Elly Peterson, Helen Milliken and others in the Women’s Republican Task Force--who are branded as disloyal sinners by the more conservative element of our part--leaves me looking for the exit.”⁹⁴ Cramton accurately identified the problem that the party faced.⁹⁵ It needed to expand its membership, not exile members who did not agree with its turn to the right. He queried, “Is a purge going to bring those women--and their votes, and their efforts and their contributions back into the fold?”⁹⁶ The big tent approach advocated by Peterson, Milliken and other moderate Republicans was abandoned on ideological

⁹⁴ Lou Cramton to Spencer Abraham, June 27, 1983, box 17, folder: Elly Peterson Correspondence 1980-1985, Peterson Papers.

⁹⁵ Cramton praised these women for prioritizing their feminism over their Republicanism when they publicly endorsed Blanchard. Noting that “these women didn’t desert their party; someone has stolen it,” Cramton indicated that was also going to vote for Blanchard in 1982. Letters to the Editor, *Detroit Free Press*, October 27, 1982.

⁹⁶ Cramton to Abraham, June 27, 1983.

grounds and it left many Republican men and women worried about the future of the party.

The presidential election of 1980 and the gubernatorial election of 1982 made it clear that conservatives had taken control of both the national and state Republican parties. While Republican feminists tried their best “to maintain a feminist presence in the Republican Party,” their efforts had largely failed. Conservatives rejected that presence when they purged the feminist MRWTF from the Michigan Republican Party. At the same time, they did not fare much better in “maintain[ing] a Republican presence in the feminist movement.” The NWPC seemed unwilling or unable to work with a conservative Republican Party because the Republican candidates it supported, once elected, could not reconcile and oftentimes prioritized the party over their feminism. As a result, the NWPC seemed willing to jeopardize the strength that it derived from its multipartisan constituency by cutting ties with a conservative Republican Party. Michigan’s Republican feminists had tried to maintain the sensible center of the women’s movement in order to reconcile their core identities—feminism and Republicanism—but that strategy ultimately failed. They were each left to process these contradictions on their own.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

Not only is it our right as women to actively participate in government, but it's time for the female half of our population to accept its full share of responsibility for governing.

—Connie Binsfeld

Peterson turned seventy in 1984, and her friends and colleagues planned a large party to celebrate the occasion. Organizers designated the proceeds, naturally, to the MRWTF. Since women in the Michigan Republican Party, which was no longer affiliated with the MRWTF, were at odds, at least one political commentator wondered if the event would become a political free for all. Instead, it was a bipartisan lovefest. Many of the state's Democratic leaders, including Senator Donald Riegler and Lieutenant Governor Martha Griffiths, came to honor Peterson. George Romney and Mr. and Mrs. Milliken attended. Even conservative Republicans, such as Headlee's 1982 running mate Thomas Brennan, and future governor John Engler, who would select Binsfeld as his running mate in 1990, came to honor Peterson. Martha Griffiths offered the following tribute: "In my judgment, Elly Peterson is the brightest politician this state has had in this century, Democrat or Republican, man or woman, black or white."¹ Michigan's Republican feminists, including Peterson, had tried to work within the Republican Party to make it

¹ Hugh McDiarmid, "Bipartisan Tribute to a Ticket Splitter," *Detroit Free Press*, June 12, 1984.

inclusive and responsive to the concerns of all, including women who sought gender equality. How ironic that the proceeds of this tribute to her long and successful career, which she had dedicated to both the Republican Party and women's equality, went to a feminist women's organization tied to the Republican Party in name only.

By 1984 the terms "Republican" and "feminist" were widely considered to be antithetical, forcing each of the seven women studied in this dissertation to individually decide how to reconcile her feminism with her Republicanism. Three of them either officially or effectively left the party by retiring from Republican Party politics. Lee Kefauver moved back to Massachusetts in 1982, where she registered as a Democrat. In light of her frequent criticisms of William Milliken and the Michigan Republican Party, and her passionate commitment to abortion rights for all women, her political shift was not surprising. As a Democrat, she continued to fight for equal access to abortion and wrote frequently about the misogyny inherent in the pro-life movement. For example, in 2009 she asserted that people who argue that life begins at conception are "fetus fetishists" who cannot claim to be concerned about life because they do not care about the lives of the pregnant women. She concluded that "in my years of experience dealing with these fetus

fetishists, I would add that they are the ultimate misogynists.”² Kefauver is apparently still living in Massachusetts.

After campaigning for independent candidate Anderson in 1980, Beebe remained disillusioned about the Michigan Republican Party. She was convinced that, going back to 1966, the party had not supported her candidacies. In 1983 she announced that “there’s no way I want to be identified with the Republican Party as it is now.”³ While she continued her longstanding support for abortion rights through her participation in Planned Parenthood, there is no indication that she remained involved in politics after 1980.⁴ She died in 2005 at the age of ninety-five.

In 1984, McNamee retired from the Michigan House of Representatives at the age of sixty. She decided that it was time for her to resign because she was out of place as a moderate in an increasingly conservative Republican Party.⁵ When

² Lee Kefauver, Letter to the Editor, “Life Begins at Some Point,” *Progressive Populist*, September 1, 2009, <http://www.populist.com/09.15.letters.html>.

³ Ken Fireman, “Feminists to Fight for Voice in GOP,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 28, 1983.

⁴ Jacquelynn Boyle, “A Revelation that Stunned Colleagues,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 29, 1989.

⁵ Sandra Combs Birdiott, “McNamee’s Seen Politics Come a Long Way: But Birmingham State Legislator Thinks the Best is Yet to Come,” *Oakland Press*, September 9, 1984, box 1, folder: Ruth Braden McNamee Biographical, Newspaper Articles 1964-1984, McNamee Papers; Charlie Cain, “Her Deciding Vote Defies White House Plea,” *Detroit News*, September 14, 1984.

asked if she had ever considered becoming a Democrat, she responded, “No. . . . I’m needed in my own party as a liberal—well, a moderate Republican. And I am a Republican. I believe in private enterprise, private initiatives to solve problems. I just want some women’s voices to be heard in decision-making.”⁶ After she retired from public office, it does not appear that she ever reengaged in politics. She chose to reconcile her interests by largely withdrawing from the public sphere. She died in 2006 at the age of eighty-five.

Peterson prioritized her feminism over her partisanship in the 1982 gubernatorial election. Perhaps hoping that conservative control over the party was temporary, she clarified that her support for Blanchard did not mean that she had left the party. Instead, she argued that Headlee’s Republican Party was not the party for which she had worked for so many years. The party had changed, not her. She noted, “MY Republican Party is open to all, and it is not necessary that we think precisely alike, as we goose step along.”⁷ Years later, however, she announced that

⁶ Ruth McNamee, interview by Lois Leonard, “Religion and Politics Don’t Mix,” *The Record*, September 1984, box 1, folder: Ruth Braden McNamee Biographical Vita and Overview Articles, McNamee Papers.

⁷ James N. Crutchfield, “Peterson Won’t ‘Goose Step’ with the State GOP,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 18, 1982.

she had become an independent.⁸ In 2008 shortly before she died, she endorsed Democrat Hillary Clinton for president.

Although Helen Milliken, understandably, was always somewhat reticent about publicly opposing the Republican Party, it appears that she voted for Blanchard in 1982. Thereafter, she seemed increasingly likely to back the candidates who agreed with her on the issues that were important to her as a feminist. Thus, she repudiated conservative Republican John Engler and endorsed Democrat Blanchard for governor in 1990 and Democrat Howard Wolpe for governor in 1994, largely because they were pro-choice.⁹ Wolpe asked her to run as his lieutenant governor, but she decided not to enter the race. While she remained active fighting for ERA and abortion rights, she came to believe that abortion was of vital importance because “‘all other rights’ of a woman [were] of ‘limited value’ without the right to choose when to bear children.”¹⁰ She remained largely uninvolved with a Republican Party that did not reflect her interests as a woman. But when she died in 2012 at the age of eighty-nine, George Weeks, one

⁸ Peterson, interview by William Ballenger, Michigan Political History Society, part 6.

⁹ Dawson Bell, “Michigan’s Ex-First Lady Lashes Out at State GOP,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 7, 1994.

¹⁰ Dawson Bell and Kathleen Gray, “Former Governor’s Wife Hailed as a Leader in her Own Right,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 17, 2012.

of Governor Milliken's long-time assistants, noted that he did not believe "that Helen Milliken left the Republican Party. 'I think she was an advocate of the party returning to what she thought of as its roots. . . . She was clearly a flaming moderate.'"¹¹ She had evolved from a childhood steeped in conservatism to an adult life devoted to moderate and liberal causes.

Even after the Republican Party's rightward turn, a small feminist presence remained in the party. Burnett continued to try to integrate her politics with her gender as an active feminist and vocal Republican, but she never became a candidate for public office. She supported freedom of reproductive choice, including government funded abortions for poor women, and tried to moderate the Republican Party's opposition to abortion from within. In 1988, Burnett spoke before the Michigan Republican State Convention in favor of abortion rights, including Medicaid-funded abortions for poor women. She indicated that she "completely respect[ed] and honor[ed] other people's right to object to abortion, based on their own personal religious or moral beliefs. All I ask is that those who are pro-life will let us who are pro-choice decide for ourselves, just as they decide for themselves."¹² She cloaked her argument in familiar, fiscally conservative

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Burnett, *True Colors*, 33.

rhetoric, noting that abortions were less expensive than raising unwanted children. Most of them, she believed, became a part of the state welfare system. Even as adults, they were less likely to become successful, productive members of society. She believed that opposition to abortion “was sexism in an unholy alliance with religion. There are a lot of men who are not comfortable with the idea of women having control over their own bodies. (Next thing you know, I imagine they must be thinking, they’ll want control over their own money.) Denying them this fundamental right is a lot easier when you’ve convinced yourself that’s what God wants, too.”¹³ After her speech, the Republican audience booed.¹⁴

Burnett was also critical of the feminist movement which, she believed, had been taken over by radicals who discouraged participation by women who were not like them. She was one of those women. Based on her experiences, she was convinced that radical feminists believed that her wealth in some way compromised her commitment to feminism. Moreover, she argued that NOW was intolerant of feminists who were Republicans because of the party’s stance on the ERA and abortion. Despite the differences between feminism and Republicanism,

¹³ Ibid., 33-34.

¹⁴ Ibid., 32.

she continued to believe that they could be reconciled. She described herself as “a fiscal conservative . . . [and] a radical feminist to the core. My mission . . . is to be a thorn in the side of my party pricking its conscience.”¹⁵ Shortly before she died, she gave an interview in which she exhorted women to become Republicans and to get involved in the political process.¹⁶ Burnett remained a Republican feminist until her death in 2014 at the age of ninety-four. Throughout her long life, she was “committed to maintaining a feminist presence in the Republican Party and a Republican presence in the feminist movement.”¹⁷

Binsfeld also remained in the party, but adopted a different strategy. She worked from within to promote equality for women, but tried to do so in a way that did not alienate her conservative colleagues. Because she was a pro-life Republican feminist, she started from a position that was perhaps more acceptable to party leaders. Thus, she served in the Michigan Senate from 1982 until 1990, when she was elected lieutenant governor under conservative Republican John Engler. She held that position for the next eight years. Binsfeld referenced the

¹⁵ Ibid., 100-101.

¹⁶ Patricia Hill Burnett, Interview by Cherie Wyatt Rolfe, Oakland County NOW, video, Spring 2012, <http://oaklandcounty115.com/2015/01/04/remembering-patricia-hill-burnett-2012-interview-video/>.

¹⁷ Position Statement, Michigan Republican Women’s Task Force, n.d.

confusing fluidity of the ideological labels attached to feminists when she noted that she “came down here [to the 1980 Republican National Convention] thinking I was a moderate. . . . ‘In the Michigan House, I’m considered a conservative,’ she added. ‘But on this committee, I was probably considered a flaming liberal.’”¹⁸

In addition to her work promoting sex education in Michigan’s schools, Binsfeld put forth other compromise strategies which reflected and integrated her moderate feminism with the conservatism of her Republican colleagues. For example, in 1983 she cofounded the Michigan Republican Women’s Caucus as “a voluntary, nonprofit, unincorporated committee of Republican women who are or were elected or appointed public officials, or who are working or have worked in positions affecting public policy. It is not affiliated with any other organization.”¹⁹ This organization incorporated Reagan’s goals, noting that “the purpose of the MRWC is to promote a policy of equal opportunity for women, and to recognize the important contributions women make to the economy and the government. The MRWC will focus on issues of economic equality, and will expand upon

¹⁸ Anderson, “‘Fast Gavel’ Thwarts Binsfeld ERA Hopes,” *Traverse City Record-Eagle*, July 16, 1980.

¹⁹ Michigan Republican Women’s Caucus ,n.d., box 7, folder 11: Connie Binsfeld Republican Women 1981-88, 1991, accession no. MS 99-19, Binsfeld Papers.

President Reagan's. and the Republican Party's, efforts and achievements for the benefit of all American women."²⁰

Binsfeld remained an advocate for the ERA because she believed that it was essential for women to have constitutional protection against legislators who answered to the political whims of their constituents. After the ERA ratification period expired in 1982, she proposed that the Republican Party endorse a less controversial version of the ERA that could not be interpreted to protect abortion rights. She sought a statement in the 1984 party platform that endorsed the following proposed constitutional amendment: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on the basis of whether a person is male or female."²¹ President Reagan, she argued, "should support a modified equal rights amendment because: a. It is right; b. The majority of the people want it; c. It will help his re-election by making the Democrats focus on something else; d. The Republican Party has always been the champion of equality before the law as the cornerstone on which all that we value rests."²² She

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Senator Connie Binsfeld, "Equal Rights Under the Law," Statement to Platform Committee, State Republican Committee Meeting, Traverse City, Michigan, June 22, 1984, box 7, folder 9: Connie Binsfeld Republican Party (State), 1983-94, accession no. MS 99-19, Binsfeld Papers.

²² Ibid.

recognized that women had needs that were different from their male colleagues in the Republican Party. They shared a common identity and an interest in protecting themselves, not just as economic actors, but also as women. She continued to dedicate her political career to helping women and children while remaining true to her Republicanism and her feminism. After serving for eight years as a Michigan state senator and two terms as lieutenant governor for conservative Republican John Engler, she retired in 1998, and died in 2014 at the age of eighty-nine.

This dissertation illustrates that throughout the 1970s, Michigan's Republican feminists appropriated the sensible center of the women's movement to maintain a feminist presence in the Republican Party and a Republican presence in the feminist movement. In this way, they were able to reconcile and promote two of their core identities—Republicanism and feminism. For a while this strategy worked. However, as the Republican Party became more conservative, they found themselves unable to simultaneously promote both interests. The NWPC did not want to work with a conservative Republican Party that challenged its *raison d'être*. Even the NWPC leaders who vowed to try to change the Republican Party from within eventually gave up and joined the Democratic Party. In trying to represent feminists in the Republican Party, Michigan's Republican feminists became an

integral part of the struggle between moderates and conservatives for control of the party. They had no choice but to partner with party moderates to neutralize the conservatism that threatened their existence. In 1980 and 1982, the nominations of conservatives to the highest national and state elective offices signaled that conservatives had won control of the party. As historians have concluded, the feminist movement was one of the losers in the conservative ascendancy. Beebe, Kefauver, Peterson, Milliken and McNamee prioritized their feminism over their partisanship and reluctantly retired from politics and/or fled the party.

However, Burnett and Binsfeld remained active in Republican Party politics. Burnett continued the strategy she used in the 1970s, trying to moderate both the feminist political organizations to which she belonged and the Republican Party. She died fighting and frustrated that that NOW and the NWPC were increasingly liberal and the Republican Party remained largely conservative. Binsfeld, who was always closer to the conservative movement because of her position on abortion, tried a different strategy. She used her elective office to work with Republican Party leadership on women's rights, which sometimes required her to compromise. As a result, her strategies and goals became less robust than those that Michigan's Republican feminists had pursued in the 1970s. If not a strong feminist presence,

for almost twenty-five years Binsfeld reminded Republicans, through her words and deeds, that women needed to be involved in politics as equal participants. Her activism suggests that both feminist and political historians need to further explore the role that Ziegler's pro-life feminists played in the Republican Party.

While the conservative ascendancy largely strangled the feminist presence in the Republican Party, the activism of Republican feminists nevertheless had a long-term, political impact. In 2011, revisiting her earlier work, Rymph suggested that the Republican Party had changed. She noted that in the 1970s, there were "political feminists," including Republican feminists, who sought to make sure "that more women be elected to public office and serve as leaders in the political parties, and that feminist issues be advanced through the political system."²³ While she was not willing to identify a rebirth of Republican feminism in the twenty-first century Republican Party, she did indicate that "Americans, including Republicans, seem to have accepted—and in some cases even grown to appreciate—transformations propelled by the women's movement, while remaining wary of or hostile to liberal feminism itself."²⁴ This dissertation describes, on a grass roots level, the genesis of this change.

²³ Rymph, "Political Feminism," 137.

²⁴ Ibid., 145.

In fact, recent polls support Rymph's conclusion. They suggest that Republicans have embraced some of the basic principles of Michigan's Republican feminists. For example, in October 2015, 90 percent of Republicans surveyed agreed that they "would support an amendment to the United States Constitution that guarantees equal rights for both men and women."²⁵ According to a 2013 Huffington Post poll, 76 percent of Republicans said "that men and women should be social, political and economic equals," yet only 5 percent of the people surveyed called themselves feminists.²⁶ Thus, these polls indicate that most Republicans believe in gender equality and are willing to support a constitutional amendment that guarantees that equality. If these surveys are to be believed, many of the ideas about gender equality espoused by Michigan's Republican feminists have survived, but are no longer linked to feminism. Instead, they are now mainstream beliefs that have been adopted at the grassroots level not just by the 5 percent of Republicans who identify as feminists, but by three quarters of the party's members. This is the legacy of Michigan's Republican feminists.

²⁵ ERA Coalition/Fund for Women's Equality, June 17, 2016, eracoalition.org.

²⁶ Emily Swanson, "Poll: Few Identify as Feminists, But Most Believe in Equality of Sexes," *Huffington Post*, April 16, 2013, huffingtonpost.com. By way of contrast, 87 percent of Democrats indicated that they believed in gender equality, but only 32 percent called themselves feminists.

APPENDIX-TIMELINE

1910 – Lorraine Beebe born

1914 – Elly Peterson born

1920 – 19th Amendment ratified
Patricia Hill Burnett born

1921 – Ruth McNamee born

1922 – Helen Milliken born

1923 – ERA first introduced in Congress

1924 – Connie Binsfeld born
Phyllis Schlafly born

1934 – Lee Kefauver born

1950s – Conservative movement begins to coalesce

1962 – George Romney elected governor of Michigan (two-year term)

1964 – Romney re-elected as governor of Michigan (two-year term)
Milliken elected lieutenant governor of Michigan
Barry Goldwater loses bid for US president
Peterson unsuccessfully runs for US Senate from Michigan

1965 – Peterson becomes first female chairman of the Michigan Republican Party
Peterson orchestrates moderate takeover of RWFEM leadership
Ruth McNamee elected to Birmingham City Commission

1966 – Romney reelected as governor of Michigan (four-year term)
Beebe elected to Michigan Senate (four-year term)
NOW Founded

1967 – Legislative efforts begin in Michigan to legalize abortion

1960s – Beginnings of Second Wave Feminism

1969 – Milliken becomes governor of Michigan

Beebe reveals her abortion before Michigan Senate

Peterson becomes assistant chairman of the RNC

Burnett establishes first Michigan chapter of NOW

1970 – Peterson resigns as assistant chairman of the RNC

Beebe loses her bid for reelection to Michigan Senate

Michigan Democratic Women's Caucus established

McNamee elected Mayor of Birmingham

Michigan Republican Party endorses abortion reform

Milliken elected governor of Michigan (four-year term)

1971 – NWPC founded

MWPC founded

HOW founded

Michigan Women's Abortion Suit filed

1972 – ERA passed by US Congress

ERA ratified by Michigan legislature

STOP ERA founded by Phyllis Schlafly

Plaintiffs win Michigan's Women's Abortion Suit in trial court

Michigan Abortion Referendum placed on November ballot, but defeated

Republican Convention held in Miami Beach

Platform contains pro-ERA plank and supports abortion

1973 – *Roe v. Wade* decided by US Supreme Court

First NWPC conference held

Mary Coleman elected first female Michigan Supreme Court Justice

1974 – McNamee elected to Michigan House of Representatives

Binsfeld elected to Michigan House of Representatives

Unsuccessful effort to rescind Michigan's ratification of ERA

Milliken re-elected governor of Michigan (four-year term)

1975 – NRWTF Created

Michigan Republican Women's Caucus established

Kefauver founded "Feminist Bureau of Investigation"

United Nations declared 1975 International Women's Year

Eagle Forum founded

1976 – Republican National Convention held in Kansas City

Platform contains pro-ERA plank, but no support for abortion

ERAmerica founded – chaired by Carpenter and Peterson

Michigan ERAmerica founded – honorary chairs: Milliken and Griffiths

Unsuccessful effort to rescind Michigan's ratification of ERA

1977 – International Women's Year Conference held in Houston, Texas

Hyde Amendment prohibits use of federal funds for abortion

Governor Milliken overrides prohibition on using state funds for abortion

1978 – Milliken reelected governor of Michigan (four-year term)

Congress extends ERA ratification period until June 30, 1982

1979 – MRWTF Created

ERA America chaired by Helen Milliken and Sharon Percy Rockefeller

George Romney announces his opposition to ERA

Initial ratification period for ERA expires

1980 – Republican National Convention held in Detroit

Platform contains no planks in support of ERA or abortion

John Anderson becomes independent candidate for President

Ronald Reagan elected President (four-year term)

Hyde Amendment determined to be constitutional: *Harris v. McRae*

1981 – NRWTF purged from NWPC

1982 – Headlee loses gubernatorial election to Blanchard

Extended ERA ratification period expires

1983 – MRWTF purged from Michigan Republican Party

1984 – McNamee retires from Michigan House of Representatives
Peterson celebrates her 70th birthday

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ABSTRACT**REPUBLICAN FEMINISTS AND FEMINIST REPUBLICANS: THE SEARCH FOR THE SENSIBLE CENTER IN MICHIGAN-1968 TO 1984**

by

ANN MARIE WAMBEKE**May 2017****Advisor:** Dr. Liette Patricia Gidlow**Major:** History**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation explores feminism in the Michigan Republican Party from the late 1960s until the early 1980s through the activism of seven women. These women, Republicans before they were feminists, believed in the efficacy of party politics to bring about change. Therefore, it was only natural that once they became feminists they turned to the political system to effectuate gender equality. They sought to bring feminism into the Republican Party and Republican Party politics into the feminist movement. The best way to do this, they assumed, was to operate from the sensible center of the women's movement. From this middle ground, they rejected radical feminism and disparaged the apathy of women who were satisfied with the status quo. As the conservative movement became increasingly anti-

feminist and the Republican Party became increasingly conservative, however, Michigan's Republican feminists were forced to align with moderates to maintain their presence in the party. In doing so, they became an integral part of the struggle between moderates and conservatives for control of the party.

As conservatives gained greater control over the party in the latter part of the 1970s, Michigan's Republican feminists found that it was becoming difficult for them to reconcile their partisanship and their feminism. Conservatives were squeezing them out of the party and feminist political organizations were reluctant to embrace members of a political party that challenged their *raison d'être*. When conservative leaders won the Republican Party's nominations for the presidency in 1980 and the governorship of Michigan in 1982, Michigan's Republican feminists had to individually determine how to reconcile and prioritize two of their core identities. Many of them voted for candidates from other parties, left the party or retired from politics. Two of them, however, remained active in the Republican Party, hoping to promote moderation from within. Republican feminists lost when conservatives gained control of the party, but their activism yielded some benefit. Forty years later, some of their goals have been embraced as mainstream by members of the Republican Party.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Ann Marie Wambeke was born in Detroit, Michigan and grew up a mile from Lake St. Clair in St. Clair Shores. She graduated from the University of Detroit-Mercy in 1978, with a dual major in English and Political Science. She continued her education at the University of Detroit-Mercy School of Law and graduated in 1981 with a Juris Doctor (JD) degree. While practicing law, she attended Wayne State University Law School at night to earn a Master of Laws (LL.M.) in Taxation. After practicing tax law for twenty years, she decided to go back to school full time and, in 2010, earned a Master's Degree in History from Oakland University. She is a candidate for a Doctor of Philosophy Degree from Wayne State University in May 2017.