

**TESTIMONY OF LEANNE LITTRELL DILORENZO  
BEFORE THE HOUSE RULES COMMITTEE  
IN SUPPORT OF H.J.R. 35  
ON BEHALF OF VOTEERA.ORG**

June 12, 2013

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee, for the record my name is Leanne Littrell DiLorenzo. I am the Founder and President of VoteERA.org and live in Portland Oregon.

I want to thank the Chair and House Rules Committee for holding a hearing and possible work session for HJR 35. I would also like to thank those who from the beginning, and that is many of you on this committee, understood myth from reality and were generous with your time in listening to us while considering our evidence about the ERA. It is an honor to be here today and we are grateful we have the opportunity to present our case and testify for the Equal Rights Amendment in the Oregon Constitution.

While HJR 35 has some additional language to ensure enforcement of the ERA, the ERA is simply: Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the State of Oregon or by any political subdivision in this state on account of sex.” These words were written in 1923 by Alice Paul.

Alice Paul was a suffragist and after women got the vote, she reminded women that the vote was only a step to full equality, which was to be found when

women were expressly equal in the U.S. Constitution with an Equal Rights Amendment.

“The Equal Rights Amendment essentially provides that sex is not a permissible factor in determining the legal rights of women or men.”

To this day, neither the U.S. Constitution nor the Oregon Constitution have an ERA.

#### How will the ERA change anything?

Sex discrimination cases are consistently brought to Oregon’s Bureau of Labor and Industries and include cases about equal pay, sexual harassment and more. BOLI reported on September 27, 2012 that “the wage gap is hurting women throughout Oregon, and that gender and race both drive pay disparity.” SB 744, which passed this session unanimously requires the state Council on Civil Rights appointed by the Commissioner of BOLI to study wage inequality in Oregon. Sen. Edwards, the bill’s sponsor, said “paying women less simply because of their gender isn’t just a moral issue, it’s an economic problem.”

As Carol Hewitt from the ACLU argued in 1973 for Oregon’s ratification of the federal ERA, “the argument that piecemeal legislation would be preferable to a constitutional amendment is premised on the assumption that sex discrimination is an isolated problem which can be solved with a Band-Aid approach.” 1

Women should not be reliant upon individual laws and or Supreme Court rulings for their equality. Why should women be at the mercy of future judges' interpretations of past case law to ensure their equality?

As Hewitt argued, the ERA protects women from "Band-Aid approaches," and finally provides them secure equality in the Oregon Constitution today.

Oregon is a leader with respect to the Equal Rights Amendment.

Oregon's first Congresswoman Edith Green was the second ranking Democrat on the House Education and Labor Committee and was holding hearings on the Discrimination Against Women. "In the summer of 1970, Congresswoman Edith Green and Martha Griffiths together outflanked the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and freed an ERA resolution from twenty-two years of committee captivity without a hearing." 2 The ERA proposal at that time had been offered for forty-seven consecutive years and was stuck in a committee for decades. Griffiths used a discharge petition which required 218 signatures from congressman to "yank" the ERA out of committee and because Congresswoman Green was holding hearings that were germane, they were able to get the ERA to the floor for a vote. This was and remains the only time in almost a century that the ERA has been voted on by Congress. Brookings Institute, Gilbert Steiner refers to Green as a "maverick." 3

Women as a class are not expressly entitled to equal protection of the laws in the U.S. Constitution or in the Oregon Constitution.

I have reviewed stacks of books and papers from the federal ERA hearings from the last 90 years. They are filled with literally hundreds and hundreds of excuses as to why women should not have their equality expressed in the U.S. Constitution. They are also filled with statements by many U.S. Presidents who believed that this time, the ERA will pass. In the ERA hearings in Committee on the Judiciary, January 5, 1937 H.J. Res. 1 of the Equal Rights Amendment, Dr. Wold said “we can have no permanence without a Federal amendment.” In the hearings in the Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary on Friday, September 28, 1945 stated by Miss Wells from the National Women’s Party said “As World War II engulfed us, women were called to replace men...we do not want piece meal legislation...we want to be proud of the protection our Constitution and to have a feeling of security thought it.” In the hearings in Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments of the Committee on the Judiciary, Wednesday, April 11, 1956 President Harry Truman wrote in a letter, “say to them that I am in sympathy with their fight for the equal rights amendment because I think it will improve the standard of living by setting a level on wages equal for both sexes.”

While we hope the federal ERA gains new momentum, for ninety-years citizens have shared the same hope. We believe women's express equality should be in the Oregon Constitution, every state constitution and the federal constitution.

Today, the Oregon Legislature can pass the Equal Rights Amendment so that all Oregonians can exercise their voice next May.

You will hear from many today about how important this amendment is to them. Members, it is time to complete the process to establish equality between the sexes begun long ago. I urge you favorably consider HJR 35 and move it to the floor of the House with a due pass recommendation.

Thank you for your time. I am available to answer any questions you may have.