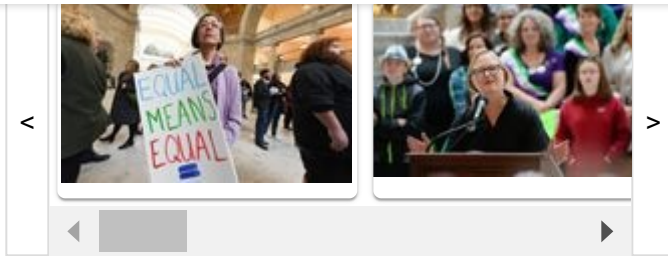


LDS Church announces it still opposes Equal Rights Amendment as supporters rally at Capitol

By Becky Jacobs | Dec. 3, 2019, 6:16 p.m. | Updated: Dec. 4, 2019, 10:38 a.m.





As roughly 200 people gathered Tuesday at the state Capitol to encourage Utah to ratify [the Equal Rights Amendment](#), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced it would continue to oppose the ERA.

When asked for comment Tuesday about the Salt Lake City rally, church spokesman Doug Andersen initially told The Salt Lake Tribune, “At this time, we do not have a statement on the proposed Equal Rights Amendment.” About an hour later, Andersen sent a statement that reads, “The church’s position on this issue has been consistent for more than 40 years.”

In the 1970s and ’80s, the church steadfastly and publicly opposed the ERA, arguing it could damage families, among other issues. Earlier this year, [some ERA advocates speculated that the church may have become neutral on the topic](#) after a church spokesman declined to comment on the church’s current position in February. But the church’s statement Tuesday quashes any question about whether the church has reconsidered its stance.

There also was [an editorial Monday in the Deseret News](#), which is owned by the church, titled, “In our opinion: Why Utah should not pass the current version of the Equal Rights Amendment.” It states, “There’s no question Utah and America should uphold and protect women’s rights, but that does not mean ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment, which has raised concerns even among avowed feminists.”

“It’s disappointing,” said Sara Vranes, one of the Utah leaders of [Mormons for ERA](#). But she added that the nonprofit will continue to work for what’s best for families and for



“The church can come out against it, but it’s going to be ratified, regardless,” said Anissa Rasheta, a national organizer for Mormons for ERA who lives in Arizona.

Rasheta said she’s “not surprised” by the announcement but wished the church wouldn’t make a statement during these renewed efforts to pass the ERA. She said she hopes that the church won’t go beyond its opinion, though, and use resources to actively work against ratification.

Some Latter-day Saints may be less inclined to engage in ratification efforts now that the church has taken a stance, but Mormons for ERA will “stay committed to see this through,” Rasheta said. “This is between us and our elected officials, not the leaders of the church,” she said.

Just a few hours before the church announced its stance Tuesday, [Rep. Karen Kwan, D-Murray](#), stood before a crowd of mostly women in the Capitol Rotunda and introduced a joint resolution for Utah to ratify the ERA. Supporters filled a stairway behind Kwan and cheered. They held signs that said “Women’s rights are equal rights,” and “Put women in the Constitution.” Some wore “ERA Yes” pins and purple, white and green sashes that read, “Equal rights for women.”

Kwan said she was “calling upon every single one of my colleagues to join me not only in supporting but to co-sponsor this important resolution.”



A couple of dozen ERA opponents stood on a stairwell on the opposite side of the Rotunda. They included members of [Abortion Free Utah](#) and [the Eagle Forum](#), among other groups. Leaflets that contained arguments against the ERA were also left on cars parked around the Capitol during the rally.

The ERA was first proposed by Alice Paul, a women's rights activist, in the 1920s. After passing the U.S. Senate and House in 1972, the ERA needs 38 states to ratify it before it can be added to the U.S. Constitution. As of 2019, 37 states had ratified. The most recent were Nevada in 2017 and Illinois in 2018.

(Christopher Cherrington | The Salt Lake Tribune)

Some advocates have predicted that Virginia will become the 38th state to ratify after Democrats won control of the state Legislature in recent elections. But those gathered at the rally in Salt Lake City said they hoped Utah could take on that role. Amy Rich, co-founder of Fair Utah, which helped organized Tuesday's event, encouraged Utah legislators "to be on the right side of history."

"It's the right thing. It's the right time. This is the right place. And we are the right people," 17-year-old Isabella Bartmess of Park City said to cheers.

"The Utah Constitution already includes an equal rights clause that is far more sweeping than the Equal Rights Amendment," said Brit Merrill, an attorney and historian for [Women Lawyers of Utah](#). [Article IV, Section 1 states](#), "The rights of citizens of the State of Utah to vote and hold office shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex. Both male and female citizens of this State shall enjoy equally all civil, political and religious rights and privileges."



Kwan's resolution follows previous ratification efforts in Utah. In 2017 and 2018, then-state Sen. Jim Dabakis introduced joint resolutions that failed. In the 2019 session, the Legislature unanimously passed a resolution, proposed by Kwan, "reaffirming the value of women." That resolution recommended "that the language and intent of the Utah Constitution provision guaranteeing equal political rights be considered for inclusion in the United States Constitution and in the formation of policy and regulations."

"Until we have our own provision in the Constitution, we will not be truly equal under the federal Constitution," said Christine Durham, former Utah Supreme Court chief justice.

Durham said, "There will be things said, and the things that have already been said, about the implications of the Equal Rights Amendment. ... And I hope that the same arguments that took down ratification all those years ago will be recognized as having no application to the world in which we live today."

ERA detractors who showed up Tuesday at the Capitol provided papers with "10 reasons to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment." The list said the ERA is "vague and poorly written," "would be used to overturn all restrictions on abortion," and "would overturn laws and practices that benefit women." Some of the points were similar to what Durham said she heard in the 1970s, such as that it would remove gender designations from restrooms and locker rooms, and that it would require women to be included in a military draft.

Rich, with Fair Utah, said her organization and other local ERA advocates understand that not everyone agrees on this topic. But they are open to having a conversation, she



Becky Jacobs is a [Report for America](#) corps member and writes about the status of women in Utah for The Salt Lake Tribune. Your donation to match our RFA grant helps keep her writing stories like this one; please consider [making a tax-deductible gift](#) of any amount today.



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