

First Presidency Reaffirms Opposition to ERA

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The First Presidency reaffirmed its opposition to the U.S. Equal Rights Amendment in a statement dated August 24. The statement reads:

“A number of questions continue to be asked concerning the Church’s attitude toward the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. Following are the most commonly asked questions and our responses to them:

“1. Some people suggest the Equal Rights Amendment is a purely political issue and the Church should not take a stand either for or against it. Do you agree?”

“No. We believe ERA is a moral issue with many disturbing ramifications for women and for the family as individual members and as a whole.

“2. Specifically, why are you opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment?”

“Preliminary to answering that question, it should be pointed out that we recognize men and women as equally important before the Lord and the law. We are opposed to the so-called “Equal Rights” Amendment, but we are not opposed to such things as equal pay for equal work.

“From its beginning, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has championed the rights of women in our society. We recognize that there have been injustices to women before the law and in society in general. There are additional rights to which women are entitled. We would prefer to see specific injustices resolved individually under appropriate specific laws. We firmly believe that the Equal Rights Amendment is not the proper means for achieving those rights because:

“a. Its deceptively simple language deals with practically every aspect of American life, without considering the possible train of unnatural consequences which could result because of its very vagueness—encouragement of those who seek a unisex society, an increase in the practice of homosexual and lesbian activities, and other concepts which could alter the natural, God-given relationship of men and women.

“b. It would strike at the family, the basic institution of society. ERA would bring ambiguity to the family structure which could encourage legal conflict in the relationship of husbands and wives.

“c. ERA would invite legal action on every conceivable point of conflict between men and women. Its sweeping generalizations could challenge almost every legally

accepted social custom, as well as every morally accepted behavior pattern in America.

“d. Men and women have differences biologically, emotionally and in other ways. The proposed Equal Rights Amendment does not recognize these differences. For example, present laws protecting the rights of pregnant women in the working force could be challenged if ERA becomes law.

“e. Passage of ERA, with its simplistic approach to complex and vitally important problems, could nullify many accumulated benefits to women in present statutes, such as those protecting mothers and children from fathers who do not accept their legal responsibilities to their families.

“3. Does your Church encourage women to develop other abilities in addition to being good wives and mothers?”

“Yes. In 1842, when women’s organizations were little known, the Prophet Joseph Smith established the women’s organization of the Church, the Relief Society, as a companion body of the Priesthood. At the third meeting of the Society he said, ‘... I now turn the key in your behalf in the name of the Lord, and this Society shall rejoice, and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time henceforth. ...’

“Latter-day Saint women, from the beginning of the Church and continuing today, know how deeply the Church encourages them to exercise their free agency. They also know that in the Church, or in any organization or activity for that matter, free agency must be coupled with responsibility. Individual freedom without such responsibility leads to chaos. Latter-day Saint women are strongly encouraged to develop their individual talents, to broaden their learning and to expand their contributions to activities such as religious, governmental, cultural, educational, and community pursuits.

“4. Why are you opposed to an extension of time for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment?”

“Our concern over the Equal Rights Amendment now has been deepened by what appears to be a tampering with and an abuse of the process of amending the Constitution. An extension of time would be most unwise for at least these reasons:

“a. We question whether careful constitutional reasoning led the House of Representatives to vote to give the states another three years and three months to ratify ERA. The seven years originally established for ratification is almost twice as long as the time needed for any previous amendment which has been passed and three and one-half times longer than the average.

“b. There is something basically wrong when a movement, which states it wants equality for everyone, actively seeks to gain unequal favor to get its position approved (an extension of time for additional states to ratify ERA but *not* for states to rescind ratification).

“c. The continuation of the ERA ratification effort will increasingly divide and polarize this nation.

“d. It seems clear that support for the ERA lacks the powerful contemporary consensus of that very large majority of people in the United States *which is so wisely required by its framers to change the Constitution* (two-thirds for action in the national Congress; three-fourths in the state legislatures).

“We express confidence that this nation is sufficiently strong and fair to be able to resolve problems of inequality and unfairness to women, or any other group in our society, without abusing the amending process of our most basic document, the Constitution, as outlined above, and without undermining our most basic institution, the family.

The First Presidency

The Church of Jesus Christ

of Latter-day Saints”