

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## Michelle Quist: The conservative case for the Equal Rights Amendment



(Steve Griffin | Tribune file photo) ERA supporters stand behind then-state Sen. Jim Dabakis, D-Salt Lake City, as he reintroduces resolution to ratify the Equal Rights Amendments during a press conference at the State Capitol in Salt Lake City Monday February 6, 2017.



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*“Both male and female citizens of this State shall enjoy equally all civil, political and religious rights and privileges.”*

No, that's not the language of the Equal Rights Amendment. That's the language that has been in the Utah Constitution since 1895, Article IV, Section 1. In other words, Utah passed its own statewide ERA a long time ago.

Utah has the chance to be the 38th state – the deciding state – to ratify the federal Equal Rights Amendment.

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

In 1972 Congress passed the ERA and sent it to the states to ratify. Only 35 states had ratified the amendment; we needed 38.

In March 2017 Nevada became the 36th state; Illinois became the 37th in 2018 (championed by a Republican legislator named Steven Andersson).

There is one spot left.

Eighty percent of Americans are surprised to learn that the Constitution does not already guarantee equal rights for women, and 94% support ratifying the amendment now.

The U.S. Constitution does not currently guarantee equal rights for women.

Let me say that again.

The U.S. Constitution does not currently guarantee equal rights for women. Even Justice Antonin Scalia has admitted the Constitution does not protect women from discrimination, saying, “Certainly the Constitution does not require discrimination on the basis of sex. The only issue is whether it prohibits it. It doesn’t.”

Utah’s state Constitution does, though.

The nation is celebrating 100 years of women’s suffrage. Utah is celebrating 150 years since the first woman’s vote, which was cast here in Utah by Seraph Young. Utah has always been at the forefront of the fight for women’s rights.

But why is it even a fight?

The ERA is good for families. It recognizes women as equal in home and civic economies. It could aid in ensuring women receive equal pay, including single mothers supporting children.

The ERA is good for business. Most women work and deserve protections in the workplace. Even more, many companies now require that businesses who work for them use a diverse workforce. The ERA supports that effort. It also encourages millennials to come and work in Utah. By passing the ERA, Utah would be communicating that we value equality. That matters to the younger generations.

Finally, conservative support for the ERA is an opportunity to rehabilitate and revive a party known to be led by old, white, men. We're losing the popular vote. We lack a strong moral compass. This effort could help bring back women and younger voters.

The parade of horrors that were trotted out in the 1970s as arguments against the ERA have mostly come to pass – same-gender bathrooms, gay marriage, women in the military. The doomsday prophecies are now moot. And contrary to arguments otherwise, this simple language will not open the floodgates to federally-funded abortion.

If the ERA will result in federally-funded abortion, then why haven't we seen state-funded abortion in Utah resulting from the language already included in Utah's Constitution? The answer is that the ERA won't affect abortion laws.

If the greatest argument against passing the ERA is that women are already equal and we don't really need it, well, that's just not good enough. The scriptures are filled with symbols used to communicate meaning and value. This could be a symbol worth the story behind it.

Just this week The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced a huge policy change to allow women to act as witnesses in baptism and sealing ordinances. Last week, many would have said we didn't need such a change to prove women are valued and equal in the church. And maybe we didn't. Maybe it's just symbolic. But it sure feels meaningful.

Today, those same people that would have balked last week at a request for women to act as witnesses embrace the notion this week that of course women should act as witnesses. Why not?

Well, of course Utah should pass the ERA. Why not? Why shouldn't we stand for equality for women? Why shouldn't we send a message to the nation that, just like 150 years ago, we value, honor, and respect women enough to stand up and put it in writing.

Speaking of the elephant in the room (see what I did there?) – The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' position on the ERA is currently unknown. They have remained neutral during efforts in other states to pass the ERA. We can't afford the negative publicity a stance against the amendment would create. The church should stay neutral and focus on spreading Christ's message of love and forgiveness.

This isn't just the conservative case for the ERA. This is the case. If you're offended that liberals may also agree that passing the ERA is a good thing, then you're blinded by a partisanship that doesn't belong in a conversation about equality for women.

Legislators: Don't let this issue wait until March. And don't let it die in a committee. Decide to do the right thing now.

Conservatives: Let's vote for women. Join them. Speak up. Contact your legislator and tell them you support the ERA.

Women: Stand up and use your voice. And don't be gaslighted into thinking we don't need it because we're already equal. If we're already equal then this amendment will just confirm the obvious.

They say we're equal. Let's see it in writing.

Michelle Quist

**Michelle Quist** *is a columnist for The Salt Lake Tribune.*



[mquist@sltrib.com](mailto:mquist@sltrib.com)

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