

## ERA Rally Remarks – Bonnie Cox LWVIL president

The principles on which our government and our identity as Americans are based, are eloquently expressed in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

But these principles are not legally binding. These words were not enshrined in our Constitution, but it was and is the Constitution that acts as a huge merger uniting a group of states with different interests, laws, and cultures. It is the Constitution that unites us as a nation under the rule of law.

Some would say that when we examine the Constitution, we are looking at our “history.” Yes, HIS Story. I would prefer to think that when we look at the Constitution, we look at “OUR story.” Every amendment to the Constitution, some 27 of them, tells another chapter in OUR Story. They clearly focus on what we consider those “inalienable rights” endowed upon us.

If I had been able to ask the founding fathers if any rights should be denied or abridged to me, based solely on my being female, apparently, they would have said, “Yes, your right to own property, your right to pursue a higher education, your right to own your own business, your right to vote, your right to use contraception...” and the list goes on.

Today I’m representing the League of Women Voters, an organization founded when the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified in 1920 to say: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

Carrie Chapman Catt, the League of Women Voters’ founder, had goals for what she deemed important for our democratic story: A rational, issue-oriented political process controlled by informed, active citizens and a league devoted to issues and placing what it deems the public good over partisan politics. The League of Women Voters of Illinois, an organization of women and men, deems the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to be for the public good.

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

These are the questions I will be asking anyone, including my elected representatives, who oppose the ERA:

- “What right do you believe should be denied or abridged to me in our country or any state solely because I am a woman?”
- “What right do you believe should be denied or abridged to my husband or my son in this country or any state solely because they are men?”

These are the questions that keep the debate focused on

equal rights under the Constitution, the real issue to be addressed in this chapter of “Our Story.”

If you are passionate about equal rights under the law of the Constitution, don’t leave your passion here at this rally today. Put it in the political process in Illinois right now. Visit your legislator. Call him or her. Get your friends, neighbors, and family to do the same. We can make the ratification of the ERA in Illinois one very important chapter in “Our Story” of equal rights. -- BC

*More images from the ERA Rally on Saturday Sept. 16 in Normal*

