

Rights Plan Foes Celebrate Its Difficulties With a Gala



Phyllis Schlafly, right, with players portraying Bella Abzug and Gloria Steinem rehearsing for a skit at a Stop-E.R.A. dinner.

Eleanor Smeal at a press conference in Washington, D.C., held by supporters of the equal rights amendment.

By **KAREN DeWITT**

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WASHINGTON, March 22 — With a gala party, musical skits and a blitz of antifeminist pronouncements, opponents of the equal rights amendment marshaled forces here today to celebrate the expiration of the original seven-year ratification period, to declare the measure moribund and to lampoon its supporters in song, satire and stinging sarcasm.

Put somewhat on the defensive by the day's goings-on, supporters of the measure called a news conference to say that the E.R.A. death notices were premature and that their struggle, though uphill, was far from over, having been given a 3½-year reprieve by Congress last year.

It was a day of hyperbole and high emotion — standard ingredients in the E.R.A. battle — as the original deadline for ratification of the amendment by the states passed and both sides reaffirmed commitments to fights for

and against the measure in the coming ratification extension period, due to expire on June 30, 1982.

The amendment has been approved by 35 of the required 38 states, but its future remains uncertain. Five states have sought to rescind their approval, recent E.R.A. campaigns in four other states have failed and the measure's opponents contend they are riding a tide of discontent that will ultimately kill the amendment.

And while supporters are mapping major efforts to recover lost momentum, E.R.A. foes were riding high in the capital today, gleefully writing the amendment's obituary at a news conference and staging a mock wake at an evening cocktail party and dinner at the Shoreham-Americana Hotel attended by 1,100 people.

"The E.R.A. dies tonight, morally and constitutionally," declared Phyllis Schlafly, an Illinois housewife and mother of six children who is chairman of Stop E.R.A. and has become a na-

tional figure fighting the amendment. Mrs. Schlafly, ebullient in a red silk suit, bubbled with enthusiasm as she discussed the evening's "pro-life gala," billed as "The E.R.A. Follies of 1979."

Popping champagne corks, musical parodies, skits lampooning E.R.A. supporters and a brief bomb scare enlivened the party, attended by prominent political conservatives, including Senators Orrin Hatch and Jake Garn, Republicans of Utah, Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, and Representative George Hansen, Republican of Idaho. They were greeted at the hotel's ballroom by a large floral-wreath display of yellow and white chrysanthemums with a black sash proclaiming: "Rest in Peace — E.R.A."

After an anonymous male caller told the hotel management that two bombs would go off at the banquet, the guests were evacuated from 9 to 9:30 P.M., but the party then resumed without in-



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cident and the only injuries were the supposedly bruised egos of the targets of the satire that unfolded.

Most of the lyrics were written by Mrs. Schlafly. To the tune of "Old Fashioned Girl," the crowd was treated to a rendition of, "I want a person, just like the person that married dear old parent." Another song on the

program was a duet from "Auntie Mame" by two women portraying former Representative Bella S. Abzug and Gloria Steinem, the feminist.

"Who's goin' open the door?" sings one.

"No one," the other replies.

"Who's goin' pay our alimony?"

"No one."

Another spoof directed against Mrs. Abzug was called "I've grown tired of Bella's Face," and had an actor portraying President Carter singing: "Dealing with Sadat and Begin was not easy, yet I could no longer take her chats, no longer stand her hats, I made her take a walk."

Some of the barbs were heavy with sarcasm. Sarah Weddington, a White House assistant, was described as a "number one abortion proponent and a supporter of killing babies," while Mrs. Abzug's work at the International Year of the Woman Conference last year was said to be "pro-abortion, pro-E.R.A., pro-lesbian."

The follies got a standing ovation from the audience.

Award for Husband

Senator Garn received an award for his support of the Stop E.R.A. movement, and in his acceptance remarks, took the occasion to criticize the proposed treaty limiting strategic arms, saying he would, "do everything I can to see that the treaty is not ratified."

Mrs. Schlafly's husband was also given an award a for being "her coach, lover and cheerleader."

Earlier in the day, representatives of 150 organizations supporting the E.R.A. met to recommit themselves to their struggle. At a news conference, many declared that the amendment was still alive and would ultimately become law.

"We are winning the battle," Eleanor Smeal, the president of the National Organization for Women, asserted. "Those political leaders, those

political analysts, business leaders and odds makers who wager that a hard core minority of right-wingers can keep down forever a surging majority of women and men who know they are equal, do so at their own peril."

"The Equal Rights Amendment will not go away — we will not go away," said Helen Milliken, co-chairman of the advocacy group called ERAmerica and the wife of Michigan Governor William G. Milliken. Other supporters of the amendment said they would work to elect more pro-E.R.A. legislators in the state legislatures.

A Strong Start

The E.R.A., which would outlaw discrimination on the basis of sex, cleared Congress on March 22, 1972, together with a resolution saying it would become part of the United States Constitution if approved by 38 states within seven years. The amendment started out strong, with 22 states voting ratification in the first year and 30 had done so by the end of 1973.

But the proposal bogged down as traditionalists counter-attacked, arguing that approval could mean drafting women for combat service and suggesting that women would be obliged to give up alimony and use the same rest rooms as men. In 1974, only three states ratified, only one in 1975 and none in 1976. The last state to ratify was Indiana in 1977.

Since then, E.R.A. has been stopped, with recent defeats in Arizona, Nevada, North Carolina, Virginia and, just last week, in Arkansas.

Congress last year extended the ratification deadline to 1982, but the extension has not been viewed as a certain reprieve for the E.R.A. In South Dakota, Idaho, Nebraska, Tennessee and Kentucky, legislatures have voted to rescind earlier approval votes, though court struggles are expected over the validity of these actions.