Equal Rights NOW: Eau Claire and the Equal Rights Amendment Debate

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Abstract

In 1972, after the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was reintroduced to Congress and quickly passed, a long and contentious debate between those who were pro and anti-ERA began. The most prominent of these groups was the National Organization for Women (NOW), the largest and longest running second-wave era feminist group. Not only was NOW a widespread group with chapters formed in large cities throughout the entire United States, but also in small cities and towns as well in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Historiography on this topic predominantly focuses on NOW and the ERA debate at a national level, rather than looking at the smaller grassroots movements like the NOW Eau Claire Chapter. Primary sources regarding NOW Eau Claire Chapter during the ERA debate include sources from the chapter’s founder, Margo House, various group members, a great deal of articles from local newspapers, and materials from the NOW Eau Claire Chapter itself. Originally the Eau Claire Chapter was tied to the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire during the first part of the ERA debates in the 1970s and later through the Eau Claire Women’s Community Center during the second part of the ERA debates in the early 1980s. Due to their activism as well as the opposition they faced, the Eau Claire Chapter of NOW and their fight for the ERA within Eau Claire greatly mirror that of the national debate between NOW and anti-ERA groups. This research will contribute to current historical knowledge by taking into account the importance and impact of small grassroots movements on the larger ERA debate.
Introduction

During the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s through the 1980s, grassroots organization was among the most popular way for feminists’ voices to be heard. Even some of the most well-known legislation of this era was put forth and fought for by these grassroots women’s organizations. One small town example of this was the Eau Claire, Wisconsin, chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) which was founded in 1972 following the Equal Rights Amendment’s (ERA) pass-through Congress. Smaller grassroots movements of the second-wave feminist era such as this one, though often ignored in present-day scholarship, were fundamental in many political and social movements.

In August 1920, following the decades long fight for women's suffrage in the United States, women gained the right to vote with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Suffragists’ fight for the representation and protection of women in the Constitution did not end there, however. Hoping to take advantage of the recent ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, two feminist leaders of the suffrage movement, Alice Paul and Crystal Eastman, drafted the ERA. First introduced to the House of Representatives on December 13, 1923, the ERA was the next step in women’s suffrage as it promised equal rights for women and men under the protection of the Constitution. Specifically, the 1923 version of ERA stated that “men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction. Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”¹ Despite the Nineteenth Amendment’s ratification only three years

¹Proposing an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, 68th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, December 13, 1923, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/7452156
prior, the ERA had not passed either the House of Representatives or the Senate that year. Though the amendment was reintroduced every few years in Congress following its 1923 debut, it was not until the early 1970s that the ERA was seriously considered within Congress again.

In the 1960s, second-wave feminism in the United States began gaining traction and feminists began taking on the task of lobbying in favor of the ERA. The group most well-known for their activism for the ERA is NOW. NOW was founded by a group of activists in 1966 and included well-known feminist leaders such as Betty Friedan and Gene Boyer. A total of forty-nine women and men founded the organization—its sole purpose was to fight for equal rights between men and women in the United States.2 After the organization’s conception in 1966, NOW quickly spread with chapters forming in every state.

The smaller NOW organizations that formed throughout the United States—like the NOW Eau Claire chapter—were the reason NOW was the largest and most successful feminist group on the national level during the second-wave feminism era. Due to the overwhelming activism by NOW, the ERA was reconsidered and quickly passed in both the House of Representatives by 354 to 24 votes and in the Senate by 84 to 4 votes in March 1972.3 Following the quick pass-through Congress, the ERA was then sent out to the states to be ratified. Thirty-eight states were needed to ratify the ERA for it to be added to the constitution and because of NOW activism through grassroots organizing state-by-state, the ERA was ratified by twenty-two states by 1973.

Despite these grassroots movements being what made the organization successful for many years, most secondary literature focuses on the debates between NOW and anti-ERA groups and how these led to the downfall of the ERA. Focusing research on the fight for the ERA within Eau Claire will provide insight into how these smaller grassroots movements mirrored and contributed to the overall NOW movement. Specifically, the local chapter followed similar themes to the national group only on a smaller scale, for example, in the ERA debates with local anti-ERA groups, events geared towards ERA awareness, and even demographics of members. For over a decade from its founding in 1971, the small Eau Claire NOW chapter mirrored and contributed to the national NOW movement in its fight for the ERA.

**Historiography**

Although scholarship on this topic is mostly based in research on the opposition to NOW and the defeat of the ERA, a great deal of information of the inner workings of NOW chapters and their support of the ERA is discussed. Much of the work focused on this topic was written immediately following the defeat of the ERA in the 1980s and then another resurgence of scholarship in the late 1990s and 2000s following the reintroduction of the ERA and new attempts for ratification in recent years. Though most of the works on this topic were published within a decade of each other, they each take on different perspectives.

The earliest look at the ERA debate and its failure from a historical perspective is *Why the ERA Failed* by Mary Frances Berry. Because this book was published in 1986, in many ways Berry’s book could be considered a primary source document. However, because it looks at the ERA through a historical lens, it is an important look at how historians began viewing NOW in the ERA debates as early as four years after its defeat. Berry compares NOW’s ERA campaign
to previous failed and successful attempts at amending the constitution. Through NOW’s push towards the ERA’s pass in Congress, Berry discusses how this could have led to its downfall. Based on her research, Berry states that the “ERA approval was problematic at best and defeat predictable. Supporters did too little, too late of what is required for ratification of a substantive proposal.”

Because supporters of the ERA (i.e., NOW) did too little early in the ratification process, there was not enough awareness among the general public that the ERA was a needed amendment the constitution—Berry argues this along with too little being done on the state-by-state level by NOW contributed to the ERA’s downfall. Berry’s early look at the ERA debates through a historical perspective led to later scholarship building upon her ideas about the ERA’s failure and her comparison of NOW’s fight for the ERA to previous failed amendment ratification movements.

In the resurgence of NOW and ERA scholarship, one of the earliest journal articles was written and published in 1996 by David E. Kyvig. Kyvig’s article, “Historical Misunderstandings, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment,” he takes on a similar perspective to Berry by comparing NOW’s fight for the ERA to past failed amendments to the constitution. Historical Misunderstandings provides a great deal of context to the ERA movement while also explaining how its failure could have been avoided through an understanding of US political history and the women’s movement. Though Kyvig describes Berry as a "sympathetic scholar" when it comes to NOW and the ERA movement, he agrees with the majority of her work and builds off her work in his interpretation of NOW and the defeat of

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5 Berry, Why the ERA Failed, 70-71.
Kyvig’s main argument is on NOW’s ignorance of history stating, “the Equal Rights Amendment provides a classic example of the consequences of failure to pay serious attention to a pertinent past in dealing with a contemporary public policy or political issue.” Kyvig argues this point through providing context to the women’s movement beginning in the late 19th century through the ERA movement from the beginning to the extension of the ratification deadline, to the ERA’s ultimate failure of ratification.

Historian Jane Mansbridge, in the chapter “Whatever Happened to the ERA?” from the 2003 edited volume Women and the United States Constitution: History, Interpretation, and Practice, views the ERA failure through internal issues within NOW in their misunderstanding of the legal process similarly to both Berry and Kyvig. However, Mansbridge also discusses the anti-ERA movement and their role in the ERA failure to a greater extent. Mansbridge also argues NOW could have been a stronger movement if more attention and support had been given to local, grassroots chapters of the organization. Both Kyvig and Berry mention the involvement and impact of the anti-ERA movement but paid greater attention to NOW and the historical implications of past attempts to ratify the Constitution and their ignorance towards it.

Mansbridge is a highly regarded historian of the second wave feminist movement and focuses much of her work on NOW and the ERA. In 1986, immediately following the ERA’s defeat, Mansbridge published Why We Lost the ERA, which follows a similar argument to other early

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6 Kyvig, “Historical Misunderstandings,” 46.
7 Kyvig, “Historical Misunderstandings,” 47.
works on the topic for example, that of Berry and Kyvig’s arguments.\textsuperscript{10} The main shift in Mansbridge’s own views from 1986 to 2003 reflects that of the larger historical interpretation of NOW and the loss of the ERA—both the effects of external and internal factors within NOW played a role in the ERA’s failure rather than a focus on only the internal factors.

More recently, political historians Cynthia L. Stachecki and Donald T. Critchlow in the journal article “The Equal Rights Amendment Reconsidered: Policy, Politics, and Social Mobilization in a Democracy,” argues that there were internal factors in NOW that led to the defeat of the ERA, the external factors of the grassroots organizing of the anti-ERA movement played a significant role. Stachecki and Critchlow differ from previous historians in that they greatly focus on the anti-ERA movement rather than a focus on the perspective of NOW. Especially in the success of the grassroots organizing of the conservative anti-ERA movement in its fight against the ERA’s ratification.\textsuperscript{11}

A major shift in historiography and the interpretation of the fight for the ERA in NOW is in diversity the inclusion of marginalized groups within women’s rights organizations like NOW. While it is widely agreed upon by historians that the second wave feminist movement in the United States mostly focused on upper middle-class white women, historiography on this topic begins to look more into the diversity within the movement. Beginning to emerge in “Whatever Happened to the ERA” and then a few years later in “The Equal Rights Amendment

Reconsidered,” historians began looking into how marginalized groups were affected by, both positively and negatively, by NOW and the fight for the ERA.

Overall, diversity within NOW was scarce as the organization was mostly made up of upper-middle class white women and often only included or focused on issues relating to white women. In more recent historical works, this is delved into more, looking at how race and class played a role in the success and later failure of NOW. For example, Mansbridge posits women of color were originally fought for when the organization originally formed, court cases and task forces formed to fight homophobia, racism, and help women of marginalized identities. Yet, queer women and women of color were later cast aside when the organization needed the backing of the general public, mostly targeting the support of the white-middle class, when fighting for the ERA as state-by-state ratification became few and far between in the mid-1970s. This lack of diversity, especially later in the ERA movement, is an internal issue that recent historians believe led to the downfall of the ERA through NOW’s exclusion of large groups of women.

Another one of the main shifts in the historiography of this topic is the reasoning behind the failure of the ERA. Earlier works, in Berry’s “Why the ERA Failed” as well as Kyvig’s “Historical Misunderstandings,” base their arguments on the internal factors within NOW that led to the failure of the ERA. For example, beginning ERA activism too late in the ratification process or NOW’s general misunderstanding and ignorance of United States political and women’s history. More recent scholarship on this topic has argued that both internal and external

factors like the anti-ERA movement. Earlier works did not fully discredit the anti-ERA movement in the ERA and NOW’s failure, but more so focused on NOW itself rather than how the anti-ERA movement impacted the ERA’s ratification status.

Besides the consistency of comparing the ERA movement to previous failed amendment ratification movements, each scholarly work is also consistent in its focus on NOW on the national level. While more recent works began discussing the anti-ERA movement as a grassroots movement, for example in Stachecki and Critchlow’s piece, very few discuss the grassroots organization of the state and city NOW chapters as well. Looking into the work of a smaller, local chapter, such as the Eau Claire NOW chapter, will provide insight into the inner workings of NOW and show how grassroots organizations contributed to the overall NOW pro-ERA movement—as well as how the grassroots organizations compare to the larger organization both in its successes and failures.


Though NOW was founded in 1966, the Eau Claire NOW chapter did not form until fall 1971, only a few months before the ERA passed Congress in March 1972. The chapter was started by University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire English Professor Margo House and was run out of House’s own living room and various free rooms on campus. Prior to the chapter’s formation in 1971, House had been a well-known figure in Eau Claire’s women’s movement both on and off campus. The local organization started and stayed upon the same principles as the larger NOW. These principles as well as basic organization rules were outlined in the group’s
constitution—the foundation built upon the idea of activism towards the equality of sexes. In its founding, the local chapter utilized guidelines from the national movement to help shape their new, small organization.

Representatives from the larger Wisconsin NOW also visited the aspiring chapter to inform members on how to conduct meetings and direct their activism. In October 1971, the Midwest Regional NOW Representative for Wisconsin, Mary Jane-Collins Robson visited the university to give an informational talk to the new chapter as well as any interested community members. The campus newspaper described the audience as a “60-member audience of well-groomed students, housewives, and professional women” to whom Robson described the purpose of NOW and their goal of ERA ratification. This connection between the larger movement and the grassroots Eau Claire chapter continued throughout NOW’s fight for the ERA.

The chapter’s activism for the ERA began early on following the chapter’s formation but did not fully start until after Congress sent the amendment out to the states to be ratified in March 1972. Almost immediately following, Wisconsin became one of the first states to ratify the amendment on April 26, 1972. This same year, Republican lawyer Phyllis Schlafly began the National Committee to Stop ERA which kickstarted the widespread anti-ERA movement. At

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13 National Organization for Women Eau Claire Chapter, 1972, Folder 1, Box 1, MSS DA, UW-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, United States.


this moment in time however, the anti-ERA movement had insignificant effect on the ratification process of the ERA and did not have any effect on the local Eau Claire NOW chapter—the local chapter’s focus in the early 1970s was on raising awareness of the ERA rather than combating those opposed to the ERA. Locally, there was not an anti-ERA movement, but Eau Claire County and the state were both right leaning in all recent elections—though the national amendment had bipartisan support.

Despite the state’s ratification of the ERA nationally, a state version of the constitutional amendment was defeated by popular vote in April 1973. Working up to the election, the local NOW chapter teamed up with other local women’s organizations such as the local League of Women Voters to form a coalition in attempts to raise awareness of the ERA and combat any misconceptions of the ERA. Some of these popular misconceptions included in a March 1973 *Eau Claire Leader Telegram* article included: “the ERA isn’t needed,” the “ERA will deprive women of alimony,” and even the “ERA will require men and women to use the same bathrooms.”16 Despite the NOW chapter and the coalition’s efforts, in Eau Claire, the proposed state version of the ERA was ultimately defeated by 7,077 votes to 4,657 votes.17 In the Eau Claire NOW chapter’s early days, the organization was faced with opposing public opinion and the general public’s misunderstanding of the ERA’s purpose, much like the national organization.

In response to the defeat of the state ERA, the local chapter’s monthly newsletter *NOW News* simply stated: “Feeling defeated about the ERA? Want to quit? Don’t!” Following and because of the defeat of a local ERA, the group began having a wider presence in the Eau Claire Area, with more events planned outside of campus. An important event held by the Eau Claire chapter was the NOW State Conference held at a local hotel conference center on April 26-28, 1974. The conference was entirely set up and hosted by the local chapter—about 170 people attended the three-day conference with women and men from around Wisconsin. The conference included various panels discussing issues facing women and as House stated, the event was for “women to discover themselves as leaders and to experience the support of a sisterhood.” With this event, the grassroots chapter became more established within the wider movement especially on the state level.

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20 “Teamwork Stressed at Women’s Meeting,” Margo House quote.
From 1971 to 1974 the local Eau Claire Chapter of NOW found its place within the larger organization. The group shaped itself and grew through the guidance of both the state NOW and national movement. Throughout its first three years, the group tripled in its membership as awareness of the group and the ERA spread throughout the area.

Part II: Opposition and Approaching the Deadline (1975-1979)

By the year 1975, 33 states ratified the ERA of the 38 states needed for the full ratification of the ERA into the Constitution.\textsuperscript{21} With only five states needed for ratification, NOW both in the national and local settings were seemingly very hopeful for the amendment’s

\textsuperscript{21} “Ratification Information State by State,” equalrightsamendment.org.
ratification, yet still worked to gain greater attention and favor. At this point, the 1979 deadline for ratification was quickly approaching and NOW was beginning to face even greater challenges in the coming years.

In the mid-1970s, the anti-ERA movement had grown exponentially since the National Committee to Stop the ERA officially started in 1972. Phyllis Schlafly, the founder of the committee, became the face of the anti-ERA movement. Schlafly viewed the ERA as an unnecessary amendment to the Constitution and was against traditional gender-roles and womanhood. A once bipartisan amendment that had the backing of both Democrats and Republicans became an issue of feminist vs. Anti-feminist. The anti-ERA movement garnered lots of attention and in similar fashion to NOW, quickly spread throughout the entire United States with large grassroots following of mainly upper-middle class women.

Eau Claire was not without its own anti-ERA group. In 1975, a local woman called Jenny Wales started her own anti-ERA group after learning about the amendment from her husband. In an article titled “Local Group Opposes Feminism” from the UW-Eau Claire Spectator, Wales describes how she began her anti-ERA group and what her opinions are of the ERA.22 Wales began her work in the movement after her husband brought her a flyer from another organization called Women Who Want to be Women which also were opposed to the ERA--she had not heard of the ERA prior to this.23 After learning about the ERA, she began the group People Against the Influence of the ERA which had a total of thirty members a month after its founding. She felt

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23 Huebner, “Local Group Opposes Feminism.”
like the ERA would be “very destructive to the family unit and the whole makeup of America. Once the family unit starts falling apart, America will start falling apart.”  She believed that the ERA would force women into the workplace against their will and “not to make men and women equal, but to make them the same—to make no distinction between male and female.” Wales’ views of the ERA were not dissimilar to those of Phyllis Schlafly and other anti-ERA women and groups.

Wales and her anti-ERA group brought their opinions of the ERA to the public eye and government officials mainly through local newspapers and letter writing campaigns. Their first letter writing campaign was to send letters to various state legislators both to encourage opposition of the ERA as well as “reprimand” those who agreed with the amendment’s passage. This type of activism was popular in both the national anti-ERA movement and the national and local NOW movements. Wales and the group also discussed their views on a local radio show and were very outspoken in their views in letters to the editor in local newspapers. In fall of 1975 Wales and pro-ERA activists got into a long-lasting debate over the ERA ratification weekly through the local newspaper, the Eau Claire Leader Telegram. On October 3, 1975, Wales published an article titled Voice of the People in which she expressed her concern over the ERA and wrote to convince people to join her movement saying, “to you who want to remain women and you men who love us the way we are, it is time to join hands across our state and nation to have this blatant attack on our family structure repealed.” Wales’ article caused a

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24 Huebner, “Local Group Opposes Feminism.”
25 Huebner, “Local Group Opposes Feminism.”
26 Huebner, “Local Group Opposes Feminism.”
response from local NOW members a week later which caused a back and forth which lasted through the rest of October that year.

Meanwhile, despite the great pushback from Wales and the anti-ERA group in Eau Claire, the local NOW chapter continued meeting and hosting events in favor of the ERA. However, as the group became closer to approaching the ERA deadline without the possibility to fully ratify, the local group became quieter, losing hope and meeting less frequently. When the group did meet, much of their time was spent working towards influencing other states ratifying the amendment. Meeting less frequently, while partially due to the national and local anti-ERA movement, was also due to leaders of the local NOW moving on to work for the state Wisconsin Chapter of NOW. House, for example, became the Wisconsin state coordinator for NOW.28 Because of this, House and had to work away from Eau Claire often and later moved to Madison, Wisconsin. Eventually, in the late 1970s, though activists continued to fight for the ERA, the Eau Claire chapter of NOW no longer formally met.

As the original March 22, 1978 deadline for ERA ratification drew nearer without the 38 states needed for the ratification into the Constitution, NOW lobbied for an extension of the deadline. NOW was successful in the deadline extension and on August 15, 1978, the House of Representatives voted 233 to 189 for the extension of the deadline by thirty-nine months to June

28 Margo House Papers, MSS BU, UW-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, United States.
30, 1982.\textsuperscript{29} The extension, despite pushback, was also voted on and passed in the Senate soon after and the deadline officially became June 30, 1982.


The anti-ERA movement was extremely impactful on public opinion of the ERA. Due to the negative attention these groups were bringing towards the ERA, state ratification began to slow, and some states chose to try and rescind their ratification—something that is not often done or allowed in the amendment ratification process. In 1980, a total of 35 states had ratified the amendment, only three states away from the two thirds majority for ratification. With the extended deadline of the ERA to June 1982, Eau Claire feminists once again started a chapter of NOW and began planning events to raise awareness of the ERA. Rather than through the university, the new chapter of NOW was started through the Eau Claire Women’s Center in October 1980. The Eau Claire Women’s Center had been a well-established feminist organization for many years prior to the addition of the new NOW chapter and easily shifted towards focusing on the ERA debate through NOW.

To rebuild their local NOW group, Eau Claire feminists set up an action training workshop led by the current Wisconsin State Coordinator, Chris Roerden. The Women’s Center Community Newsletter outlined the activities and topics of discussion taking place at the workshop, some examples being “the purpose of NOW and the meaning of action,” “the role of consciousness raising,” and “how to plan fundraising.” The group then delegated tasks to different women and created separate task forces to plan events and raise awareness for the ERA more efficiently. Many women from the previous chapter had joined the new Eau Claire chapter

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30 “Ratification Information State by State,” equalrightsamendment.org.
31 Eau Claire Women’s Community Center, Women’s Community Center Newsletter, October 1980.
along with many new members, and included in this same newsletter, was a list of names and addresses of fifty-eight current and potential NOW members.

One of the first actions when forming the new group was to team up with the Rice Lake Chapter of NOW to plan an ERA Walkathon to raise money for the national effort. Based on the events the Eau Claire NOW chapter began planning after they re-started in 1980, much of their focus was on fundraising for the national movement of NOW and the fight for the ERA. The group also participated in letter writing campaigns, targeting Wisconsin state representatives and politicians in states without ratification as well as leader of the anti-ERA movement, Phyllis Schlafly. A year away from the ERA ratification deadline, the local chapter also participated in another fundraising effort through the NOW National Media Campaign. The Eau Claire NOW ERA Task Force put together an advertisement showing support of the ERA—over 250 supporters from around the area contributed five dollars to the campaign and have their name appear in the advertisement. The one thousand dollars from this campaign was mailed directly to the national NOW headquarters.

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34 Women’s Community Center Newsletter, July 1981, page 1.
Letter writing campaigns were among the most popular ways for the Eau Claire NOW to try and convince politicians to join their fight for ratification. Included in each monthly newsletter were the addresses of representatives from important states up for ratification. The two states the group targeted most were Oklahoma and Illinois. Their sample messages to send to each politician were short but concise in explaining the need for the ERA. For example, to Illinois Speaker George Ryan, Senator Phillip Rock, and Representative M. J. Madigan the message simply read, “let the majority rule on the ERA. The 3/5 rule is blocking the majority will. The women of our nation need your leadership to end the logjam against the ERA. This is a national issue.” These campaigns were not exceedingly rare, rather, letter writing campaigns were constant for the local NOW chapter in the final months leading up to the ratification deadline.
The final year before the deadline, both the national NOW and the Eau Claire NOW worked non-stop to plan meetings, letter writing campaigns, fundraisers, and events in support of the ERA. The final large event the local NOW planned to raise money for the national ERA effort was a rally at Owen Park in Eau Claire in August 1981, the summer before the final deadline.\textsuperscript{35} The rally included speeches and performances by local feminists as well as a small auction. Although this was the last major event held by the group, they continued their efforts towards ERA ratification up until the June 1982 deadline through smaller campaigns. In the end, the deadline for the ERA came and went without the full two-thirds majority needed to ratify the amendment. In spite of the defeat, in their first newsletter following the defeat of the ERA, the NOW Eau Claire Chapter encouraged its members to continue on with their fight.\textsuperscript{36} The local group, however, slowly stopped meeting.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In 2022, forty years after the deadline for ratification passed, there are no direct, explicit protections for women in the United States Constitution. Despite its seeming end, the final three states needed to reach two thirds majority to ratify the amendment did so—Nevada ratified the ERA in 2017, Illinois in 2018, and finally Virginia in 2020. On February 13, 2020, a resolution to end the deadline was voted on by the House of Representatives: “that notwithstanding any time limit contained in House Joint Resolution 208, 92d Congress, as agreed to in the Senate on March 22, 1972, the article of amendment proposed to the States in that joint resolution shall be

\textsuperscript{35}Eau Claire Women’s Community Center, July 1981, page 1.
\textsuperscript{36} Eau Claire Women’s Community Center, August 1982, page 1.
valid to all intents and purposes as part of the United States Constitution whenever ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States.” 37 The Senate has since received the resolution, but no vote has taken place.

Though the Eau Claire NOW chapter no longer exists, the national NOW today is much smaller in size with only one active chapter in Wisconsin, and the anti-ERA movement is relatively nonexistent, the results of both their efforts are still present today. 38 Regardless of the outcome of the ERA in the present or in the past, local chapters of NOW played a substantial role in the national movement's success for many years. The activism of smaller grassroots chapters of NOW, like the Eau Claire Area NOW Chapter, often went unnoticed by the national NOW movement. Looking at the NOW movement for the ERA debate within small-town Wisconsin expresses the importance of grassroots movements within social and political movements and how these movements manifest on a smaller scale.

37 Eau Claire Women’s Community Center, August 1981, page 1.
38 “Chapters,” National Organization for Women, last modified 2022, https://now.org/chapter/?state=WI.
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