

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Phyllis Schlafly

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Illinois Statecraft - ERA Oral History project

Interview # ISE-A-L-2011-001

Phyllis Schlafly, a life-long conservative activist and founder of the Stop-ERA movement which, during the 1970s, was credited with the eventual defeat of the ERA Amendment, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Illinois Statecraft* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Jan 5 & 6, 2011 Location: Eagle Forum office in Clayton, Missouri

Date: Jan 14, 2011 Location: Eagle Forum office in Clayton, Missouri

Date: Feb 21 & 22 Location: Eagle Forum office in Clayton, Missouri

Date: Mar 29 & 30, 2011 Location: Eagle Forum office in Clayton, Missouri

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, Massachusetts

Edited by: Rozanne Flatt, ALPL Volunteers

Total Pages: 273 pages

Total Time: 1:30 + 2:51 + 2:12 + 2:05 + 2:04 + 1:40 + 2:33 / 1.5 + 2.85 + 2.2 + 2.08 +
2.07 + 1.67 + 2.55 = 14.92 hrs

Session 1: Mrs. Schlafly's early life through her marriage in 1949

Session 2: Run for Congress in 1952 thru 1964 Republican Convention & election

Session 3: Defeats in runs for NFRW President in 1967 & for Congress in 1970

Session 4: The Equal Rights Amendment battles from 1972 through 1977

Session 5: The Equal Rights Amendment battles from 1976 through 1982

Session 6: Schlafly's life and career from 1980 through 1992

Session 7: Schlafly's life and career from 1992 to 2011

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The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in
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Abstract

Phyllis Schlafly, *Illinois Statecraft*, ISE-A-L-2011-001

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Phyllis McAlpin Stewart was born on August 15, 1924 in St. Louis, Missouri. Her father worked for Westinghouse in St. Louis until losing his job in 1930, in the heart of the depression. Phyllis's mother eventually found work as a librarian, and the family managed on that, including sending their daughters to a local Catholic school. During WW II, Phyllis attended Washington University during the day, while working at an ammunition plant at night. She earned a Masters Degree in Political Science in 1945 from Radcliff College (Harvard), then worked for a year in Washington, D.C. before returning to work in St. Louis. In 1949 she married Fred Schlafly, a prominent lawyer who lived in Alton, Illinois.

By this time Mrs. Schlafly was deeply interested in the communist threat and other conservative causes, and in 1952 made an unsuccessful run for the U.S. Congress in a heavily Democratic Illinois district. For the next several years she focused her energies on raising a growing family, civic events and politics. Family vacations were often centered around Republican national conventions. In 1964 Schlafly gained national recognition in Republican circles when she self-published *A Choice, Not an Echo*, a treatise on Republican national conventions since 1936. The book quickly sold more than three million copies, and is often credited with helping Barry Goldwater win the Republican nomination for President. It was during this time that she also began a long association with Admiral Chester Ward, co-authoring a series of books with Ward on nuclear strategy and national defense issues.

Mrs. Schlafly spent the next several years traveling widely and speaking extensively to Republican groups, especially to National Federation of Republican Women groups. In 1970 she made another unsuccessful run for Congress. It was in December of 1971 that Schlafly first became interested in the Equal Rights Amendment then working its way through the U.S. Congress. She soon took on the defeat of ERA as her personal cause, beginning that effort with her article "What's Wrong with Equal Rights for Women?" in 1972, the year that Congress sent the issue to the states. She organized the group 'Stop ERA' at a time when its passage seemed inevitable, with the amendment working its way through state legislatures. For the next ten years Schlafly's main focus was the defeat of ERA, but she still managed to raise her family, earn a law degree from Washington University, and continue publishing books and numerous articles. Although she traveled throughout the country rallying the anti-ERA forces, her home state of Illinois was the most contentious and important battleground state in the long ERA fight. ERA finally went down to defeat in Illinois in June of 1982.

Mrs. Schlafly has continued to write, publish, and broadcast her decidedly conservative message since that time, never leaving the public eye while coordinating her many activities through the Eagle Forum, the group she started in 1975, now based in Clayton, Missouri. Her focus remains on social issues, especially women's issues, as well as anti-abortion, school reform, the over-reach of the U.S. judicial system, illegal immigration, and many others. Because of her leading role in the defeat of ERA, she is considered one of the most important women in 20th Century politics, and certainly one of the most polarizing figures of that era.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Equal Rights Amendment fights; Barry Goldwater; *A Choice, Not an Echo*; Richard Nixon; Henry Kissinger; Bella Abzug; Illinois State Legislature and ERA fights; Washington University; STOP ERA; Eagle Forum; Fred Schlafly; National Federation of Republican Women; history of Republican National Primaries, 1952 thru 2008; Ronald Reagan and election of 1980; Jimmy Carter; George H.W. Bush; Bill Clinton; *Kissinger on the Couch*; Panama Canal Treaty; *Feminist Fantasies* by Schlafly; *The Supremacists* by Schlafly; *First Reader* by Schlafly; *Phyllis Schlafly: the Sweetheart of the Silent Majority* by Carol Felsenthal; *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* by Donald Critchlow;

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