

COMMENTARY

AT A GLANCE

THE TAR HEEL

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Countdown for equality

It was disheartening to note the sparse turnout across the state at last week's kick-off rallies for the final countdown drive for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Granted, in North Carolina, one of the three states needed to approve the amendment before the June 30, 1982, deadline, chances for passage are not good. But all is not yet lost. Supporters of the amendment must rise to the challenge offered by National Organization for Women president Eleanor Smeal and "fight to win."

Legislators must be encouraged to assess the all-important amendment for what it says, not for the ridiculous half-truths that the opposition has built up around it. The ERA would directly affect the law and no other aspect of American life.

The language of the amendment is simple, straightforward and seemingly inherent in the principals of a nation dedicated to justice for all:

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 an age of shifting political mood, the amendment is needed now more than ever. Already legislatures are seeking to turn back some of the rights women have thus far been awarded. Congress is now considering proposals that would erode some regulations designed to enforce equal-opportunity measures and the Supreme Court, through its recent ruling that upheld a single-sex draft registration and several other decisions, has demonstrated its willingness to tolerate sex distinctions in the law. Indeed, as the Constitution now reads, such distinctions are entirely legal.

The example of the draft registration has been a scare tactic cleverly employed by the opponents of the ERA. Although most of the arguments against coed registration are outdated due to the increasing emphasis on technology of our military strategy, still there is no absolute guarantee that the ERA would require the registration of women, but that issue would properly rest in the Supreme Court's interpretation of the law rather than the changing whims of politicians.

Passage of the amendment would provide the needed underpinning for the rights that women have already gained and ensure that the achievement of greater equality depends on the Constitution. Passage of ERA is long overdue.

Say it ain't so, Jimmy

If Lt. Gov. James C. Green's press conference on June 26 was supposed to, as he said, "fully and completely inform the people of North Carolina" about his involvement in receiving a cash gift from a Fayetteville contractor, Green failed miserably. In the 17-minute meeting with the press, Green made a farce of the conference by repeatedly dodging questions and refusing to elaborate on his answers.

The conference was called so the lieutenant governor could put to rest the controversy surrounding his acceptance in 1977 of \$4,774 from William W. Crowell, president of Crowell Constructors. Before giving the gift, Crowell, later convicted of bid-rigging, had paved a driveway on Green-owned property for only about half the real cost of the paving. Crowell then paid Green back in cash the amount charged for the driveway. State and federal investigators have concluded that Green broke no law in accepting the gift.

Green has said that he would not accept the gift if offered to him today. But instead of putting the issue to rest with honest, open answers, Green only served to fuel the fire by his refusal to address questions by the press, the same questions many of North Carolina's citizens would like to have answered.

Perhaps worst was Green's answer to the questioner who asked why Green wouldn't take the cash gift today.

Said Green: "To be perfectly frank with you, I don't need it right now..." Which, we presume, means that if the wealthy Green needed money now he would use his position as the second-highest ranking elected official in the state to acquire some.

Regardless of whether he broke the letter of the law, Green's actions in accepting the gift are not those expected of a public official. Green's press conference, called to clear the air, has only served to leave a nagging cloud of doubt and suspicion hanging above Green.

A historic appointment

President Ronald Reagan named Arizona Judge Sandra D. O'Connor to become the first woman justice in the 191 years of the Supreme Court Tuesday. With his appointment the president fulfilled his campaign promise to appoint a woman to one of the first vacancies on the Court.

If confirmed by the Senate, O'Connor could assume her position as early as October, when the court begins its 1981-82 term. She would replace Justice Potter Stewart, who announced his retirement in June.

"O'Connor is currently serving as a State Appeals Court Judge. She previously held the position of majority leader of the Arizona Senate. As majority leader, O'Connor backed the Equal Rights Amendment resolution, bringing opposition to her appointment from Moral Majority and conservative leaders.

More money problems

The controversy over the troubled Social Security System continued this week as trustees urged Congress to act swiftly or face bankrupted funds as early as 1982.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Richard Schweiker, Labor Secretary Ray Donovan, and Treasury Secretary Donald Regan recommended that President Reagan's proposals to aid the ailing system be approved quickly, or Congress should find other proposals which will accomplish the same objectives. The President's plans include reducing benefits to current and future users of the system and penalties for early retirement. If no action is taken, the trustees warned that the old-age and survivors trust fund, which pays most of the monthly Social Security benefits, would be unable to pay benefits by late 1982. And the hospital insurance trust fund, which finances Medicare, would not have enough money to fulfill its needs in eight to ten years.

However, Democratic opposition argued that the system was being used to help balance the president's proposed budget. Sen. Bill Bradley said he felt that the administration was using two sets of figures to enhance its proposals. In budget calculations, he believes the administration uses a 6.6 percent estimate of unemployment rates. But for assessing the future of Social Security, Bradley said that at a more pessimistic

9.7 percent unemployment rate was being assumed.

The arguments are expected to intensify before a proposal is agreed upon.

Trouble in England

Rioting and looting plagued the city of Liverpool, England, for several days this week. The riots occurred in the Toxteth slum district and accounted for more than 250 injuries to police and 120 arrested youths. Although several riots in Britain earlier this year were racially motivated, officials said the Toxteth violence was simply citizens versus the police — the community against authority.

Many of the residents of Toxteth are immigrants, poor, and jobless. Theorists hold that the police were viewed as symbols of their problems, and a natural source against which they could vent their frustration.

And a threat in Poland

Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko visited Poland to discuss the upcoming Communist Party Congress in that country with party chief Stanislaw Kania. Kania was apparently successful in allaying Soviet fears of the Polish liberalizing process, and Gromyko left with an indication of grudging acceptance of the congress.

Soon after Gromyko departed though, Polish transportation and dock workers issued new strike threats, the first in more than two months. A strike would greatly increase the Soviets' concern over the events of next week's congress. It was a similar congress in Czechoslovakia that prompted Russian intervention in that country.

Higher prices?

The Reagan administration is considering removing price controls from natural gas in 1982, three years ahead of schedule. It is estimated that such a move could raise fuel bills as much as 54 percent.

An Energy Department report cited the estimated increase along with several benefits of full decontrol. Benefits included removing the regulatory burden of price controls and cutting oil imports.

Administration officials such as budget director David A. Stockman are in favor of faster decontrol, but Republican leaders in Congress, which must approve the administration's recommendation, would prefer not to open the issue this year.

