

Raleigh Round-Up

By MILDRED HUSKINS
 The "inhering sense of high responsibility" which Dr. Albert Edwards, chaplain of the House of Representatives, prayed for the members Monday evening to start the new legislative week, left the threatened 130-member body limp and exhausted but a little relieved.

Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment became the most emotional issue to come before the 1973 General Assembly and the worried look of House members as they gathered on Monday spoke of pressure which they had faced from the folks back home over the weekend. Many wished they could have avoided the return to the district. Some did. Others were in evidence at the Azalea Festival in Wilmington but faced the ERA music when they entered their Raleigh residence.

But, face it they did! The threats from each side were unbelievable, coming primarily from women, which distressed those of us observing from the sidelines. We were sympathetic but could not vote so we escaped.

Monday evening was a short session and members realized there was no escape from Tuesday when the ERA measure was set "for special order second reading roll call."

The galleries were packed long before the Tuesday session began and the corridors, courts and meeting rooms were filled with people, buttonholing legislators to try to nail down a vote...either way, for or against. They were about as equally divided as it was known already the House members were. Each side had taken nose counts and had agreed the vote would be close. There was only one member absent when the House convened. Speaker Jimmy Green called the calendar: "Public Bills, Special Order Second Reading Roll Call, Committee Substitute for House Bill 15". That was it. It was introduced by Rep. Herbert Hyde of Buncombe on one of the first days of the session and sent off to the Committee on Constitutional Amendments chaired by Rep. Hartwell

Campbell of Wilson. There it had remained. Restless but still under study. There were public hearings; committee debates and subcommittee studies. Finally it was reported out and hopes of the matter being taken care of in committee were shattered. The members knew it was about time for them to stand up and be counted.

The Gentleman from Wilson proposed a change of the rules to require a two-thirds vote for ratification, indicating he, being opposed to the measure passing, was not sure he had the votes to defeat ratification in the House. His motion was voted down but did not give a clear indication of how the members would vote although the roll call count was followed with great anxiety by both sides.

Then the debate began. The bill's sponsor, the Gentleman from Buncombe, led off and was going strong while the Speaker held the watch. He was allowed 30 minutes when he stumbled a time or two, the Speaker sent him a glass of water. "Take the Gentleman a glass of water and it won't be counted against his time." Finally Rep. Hyde concluded: "I will now offer myself up to be burned... for questions...but I ask you to search your hearts and souls, the political climate back home and vote for the bill."

The Speaker recognized members wishing to be heard from one side of the issue and the other was kind with the water, sending a sip along to Rep. Campbell who led the opposition. The Speaker, from the outside looking in, was inclined to treat the lengthy debate with a bit of humor from time to time. When Rep. Bob Jones of Rutherford, speaking against the bill, said he and his wife were both in the service and she outranked him, the Speaker quipped: "She still does." Rep. Fred Hutchins of Forsyth got so carried away in his opposition speech his grammar got a little mixed up and he apologized: "I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, my English is getting bad." The Speaker said, "There is nothing in the rule book which addresses itself to poor English. The Chair knows you better."

The most dramatic moment of the entire session was the, now famous, move at the end of the voting by Rep. Ronald Mason of Carteret. The Gentleman had determined there was a tie vote and, being a friend of the Speaker, wished to spare Rep. Green from having to break a tie, changed his vote from no to aye causing the measure to carry by one vote. There was jubilation from those who were in favor of ratification but each side knew its work was cut out for it when the vote came up for final action Wednesday.

Both sides worked through the night and pressure on members to change their vote was great, not only from men and women on the scene, but from back home. Telephone polls were taken and threats were made. Political lives were on the line and that is serious business!

During the debate on Wednesday when the Bill was up for third and final reading, Continued On Page 7


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