I appreciate being here very much today. It is truly an opportunity for me as the prime sponsor of the Equal Rights Amendment to meet personally with so many of you and to be able to share with you why I feel the ERA is so important. Augusta is an important area with regard to the Equal Rights Amendment for several reasons. One is that the resolution to ratify the ERA, which I put in the day before the end of the session ended, was put into the House Human Relations and Aging Committee. Therefore, any action taken next year will begin in this Committee. The Chairman of this Committee is Rep. Richard Bent, who is from Augusta. Another legislator on this Committee is Rep. Don Cheeks, also from the Augusta area. Therefore, two out of the 11 members on this committee are from the Augusta area. A majority vote of the members of this committee is essential to get the ERA passed out for a vote on the House floor. Also Jack Connell, who is the Speaker Pro Tem of the House is from Augusta. He was here earlier, and his wife, Nan Connell, is here now. Please stand so everyone will know you Nan. Also, one of the main problems so many of us have unfortunately encountered is the problem of stereotype and image. A recent article I read stated that the American people like change, but not the people who make the change. We have found this to be a problem, more so out of the Atlanta area. So we appreciate the opportunity to hopefully dispel some of these stereotypes.

To my distress and amazement, I have been, at times, labeled anti-family, anti-church and anti-morality. I am a State Representative. But I am also a homemaker and a mother of two daughters. I serve on the Board of Directors of Campfire Girls. I authored and passed legislation designed to minimize the snatching and kidnapping children during custody disputes. I drive car-pool and I even make good chicken and stuffing. I also feel that those issues so often labeled as women issues are really family issues. Issues concerning rape, battered women, displaced homemakers, divorce, property laws, and of course, the ERA affect all of us — men, women, our children's futures and the elderly.
Discussions addressing changes in our property laws and inheritance laws provokes much hostility from many of my male colleagues regarding what is theirs and what they see as their inherent right to control property or income acquired during a marriage. There is often minimal concern for the non-wage earning homemaker, or even the wife who toiled for 30 years on the family farm.

These are some of the issues which I care about and which I feel in my heart that anyone who cares about the family would care about. Yet it is very difficult to get laws passed which would make positive changes in these areas. Even among those colleagues in the Ga. General Assembly who support these issues, they are often not taken seriously or made a priority. The process of change is very slow and will continue to be so unless there is a national commitment for equality under the law regardless of whether one happens to be born a male or female.

The ERA is not an end-all, but it is surely a firm national commitment and mandate toward this goal. The ERA will not affect our private lives; it will not tell you what you can do in your bedroom or which of you should pick out the new family car. The woman who enjoys baking biscuits will keep on baking biscuits; the men who feel responsible for their families, will continue bringing in the bread. No law or Constitutional Amendment can change people's caring for each other. The law is not the reason why many women have a good life; it is because they have a kind and generous husband who cares enough and earns enough to make it that way. The ERA will allow kind and generous husbands to main kind and generous, but it will give wives important rights not dependent on their husband's generosity.

The ERA will not change the person, it will change the opportunities. It is my personal feeling that upon ratification of the ERA, the battle of the sexes will lessen. I think much of the resistance to change comes from an emotional fear of change and a much misunderstood fear as to how these changes will affect one's personal life. To me, there is also somewhat of a symbolic power struggle - an unfortunate cause and effect fear that equality under the law will also be a loss of male power, rather than an enhancement of mutuality between men and women. I also feel that we will see a lessening of the stereotypes that have so long been imposed on our children - boys must be strong and athletic; girls must be dependent.
Yes, we are beginning to see some changes. I am happy to feel that my daughters will have increasing choices in their lives as they grow older. These increasing opportunities for your children did not happen by accident. The increasing opportunity for your daughter to go to medical school or law school happened because people cared. But once again I must mention that without an Equal Rights Amendment, it will continue to be a slow, tedious, and piecemeal process. These changes in the laws, without a guarantee of equality in our Constitution, are much more dependent upon the people who are making these laws, or these court decisions. Without a guarantee of equality under the law, these people change, these rights can just as easily be taken away. Any law that can be made, can just as easily be unmade.

As I have completed my third year in the Ga. General Assembly, I have become increasingly frustrated at the resistance and slowness of change. Because of a U. S. Supreme Court decision in March, all of Georgia's divorce laws were found unconstitutional. We had five days left in the legislative session to piece together marriage and divorce laws which will affect many people for the rest of their lives. Even when the U. S. Supreme Court told us that our domestic laws were unconstitutional, there was much resistance among many members of the Ga. legislature to change these discriminatory laws. Despite 42 pages of changes, one section of the Ga. Code remained. The Section states that the husband is the head of the household, and the wife is subject to him. Upon marriage her legal civil existence becomes merged unto the husbands.

Efforts to remove this outdated code section - to give married women the same rights under the law - was considered by many to be a sin against the family.

It is also my feeling that with these new domestic laws, women were given additional responsibilities, but no additional rights. As I said, one of the arguments I so frequently hear is that the ERA will cause the breakdown of the family and that the women's movement is responsible for change in morality. I find this baffling because I think we tend to confuse what laws can and cannot do, and where to place the blame on the problems our society is now having. Georgia is surely a conservative lawmaking state. And yet we do have a high divorce rate...a high rate of teenage pregnancy and violence in the schools.

Of course women are joining the work force, but the majority do not do so to neglect their families, but to supplement the family income. As we all know, inflation and economic pressures are making it more and more difficult for the single wage earner to support his or her family.
It is interesting to me that Pennsylvania which has not only ratified the federal ERA, but has had a state ERA since 1971 is currently trying to liberalize their divorce laws. Pennsylvania has one of the strictest divorce codes in the country and yet has been an ERA state for 8 years. These states which have passed state ERAs have had no negative effects. At the same time, there has been more recognition of the homemaker and other significant steps to remove discrimination in these states.

In the Ga. General Assembly I often feel helpless, powerless, frustrated, and much too dependent on my fellow legislators who sometimes don't seem to understand these concerns, and so often oppose my legislative priorities which address the issues I just discussed. I need your help. Women must become politically effective and develop a political power base, and take responsibilities for themselves. Unfortunately women often feel helpless and reluctant to exert their influence for themselves.

(Optional. In general I feel that women have been raised to be outer-oriented, rather than inner-oriented, to care about others - their children, their husbands, their parents - but not themselves.)

We often participate in charitable organizations which raise large amounts of money for certain causes, but find it difficult to ask for money for our own political campaigns. We will work for issues which advocate for children, for community projects. We will call our local public officials and ask for help with these projects, but for some reason we are reluctant to do this for our own cause. We'll stuff and seal a candidates envelopes and make calls day and night, but do we ask for his or her support on our number one priority. Often we don't.

We need to change this. We need to gain political power. These issues - be they rape, displaced homemaker, or our views on the economy, and of course, equality, are serious issues. They are important to many of us and we need to make them important to our public officials. If we don't care for ourselves and make our views important, no one else will make them for us. We all need to work together, we all need to do our own small share. None of us can do it alone. There may be women who don't want to be able to get children's equal opportunities in equal educational opportunities or equal job opportunities or pay - that's up to them. But that I don't believe they should be able to say - "My Mommy could have been a brain surgeon but she chose to work at home and stay with me." Not no, my Mommy doesn't work, she's just choosing to stay at home. She's choosing to stay at home. She's chosen to stay at home.
We are not trying to change those who don't want their rights, but I don't believe those who should benefit from the right to shape our future. People are trying to drive blanks between us - trying to say that the ERA is only for those who want outrageous 19th century, who don't care about their children or husbands. I believe the ERA is for everyone.

I know that many of you are busy with your work or your families, or both. But we must try to look beyond a narrow scope and try to make an impact. When I introduced the ERA, along with 21 co-signers, at the end of this session, I was aware that we have a lot of hard work in order to succeed. However, there is much to be gained in the process, much that we must gain. We have nothing to lose but maybe some time, energy, and a little money. But we have everything to gain. In order to be effective in any area, be it the ERA, rape, the economy, taxation, property laws or the aging, women must become politically effective.

By removing sex as a factor in determining the legal rights of men and women, the ERA recognizes the fundamental dignity and individuality of each human being. I feel that for this reason alone we have responsibility to ourselves and our future generations to make the ERA the law of the land. The ERA means evolution, not revolution. The ERA simply guarantees the other 50% of the population. It is not radical; it's just necessary.

If you feel this way, and I hope you do, please write or call your Representative and Senator and let them know how you feel, and ask for their support. Remember your vote counts. I know. This is the only way to gain equality in this state and this country. I will be glad, as I'm sure any member of ERA Georgia will be, to help you in any way we can to get these letters written. If you're not sure who your legislator is, how to address the letter, or what to say, please call me, ERA Georgia, or those people in Augusta who are working with us. We will be more than happy to help you. Don't feel concerned if you are unsure of the political process. Don't avoid writing if you care about the ERA because you are unsure of yourself.

I thank you in advance for the help I know you will give and I thank you again for letting me share my thoughts with you in Augusta.