John Oliver Calls on 13 Final States to Pass Equal Rights Amendment

Host outlines how one state can make history by ratifying ERA, which guarantees that “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex”

By RYAN REED

Equal Rights Amendment: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)

On Last Week Tonight, John Oliver lobbied for one U.S. state — but preferably not Florida, for snarky reasons — to cement gender equality in the constitution by ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment.
supreme Court justice with testing beer late—” to the election of a president who thinks of them merely as handmaids, the comedian cracked. And while June 4th marked the 100th anniversary of Congress passing the 19th amendment, securing women’s right to vote, that landmark date only highlights the absurdity of failing to achieve another crucial milestone: the ERA, which states that “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex.”

The ERA’s mission, crafted by feminist Alice Paul in 1923, is so obvious that, according to a 2015 survey by the ERA Coalition/Fund for Women’s Equality, 80 percent of us already believe it’s in the constitution. And it nearly is: The amendment passed Congress in 1972 and needed ratification from 38 states — but, as Oliver notes, “we never quite crossed that threshold, although we are tantalizingly close.” As of 2019, we’ve secured 37 states, which offers the 13 remaining — Arizona, Utah, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina or Virginia — a chance to make history.

It feels inevitable that we’ll achieve that goal, but there are risks involved in not doing so — and Oliver pointed to recent history as a model. In 1978, the ERA was passed with a March 1979 deadline to reach the required 38 states, and 30 ratified within a year. But “all that momentum came to a crashing halt,” Oliver said, citing the famous protests of anti-feminist conservative Phyllis Schlafly.
found a group called Stop ERA, and she was all over the news in the seventies, spreading fear about the ERA with unfounded claims, including the idea that parents, upon divorce, would be forced to split up their children for the sake of equality.

Oliver argued that Schlafly, a key figure in the rise of the religious right, helped create a “toxic” atmosphere around the ERA. After a three-year deadline extension, not a single additional state signed on.

“I’m not saying that there are not laws on the books outlawing gender discrimination — there are,” the host admitted. “And if you’re then wondering, ‘Well, hold on, if that’s the case, why do we still need ERA?’ , it’s because laws can be rolled back by a simple act of Congress. And policy guidelines can go away based on who’s in charge. That is happening right now: Congress recently let the Violence Against Women Act expire, and the Trump Administration has rescinded more than 20 policy guidelines on Title IX anti-discrimination laws. A constitutional amendment like the ERA is more stable because constitutional amendments are safe from Donald Trump — unlike Melania’s hopes and dreams and any American flag he gets close to.”

The 14th Amendment guarantees individuals equal protections under the law, and since the 1970s, the Supreme Court has interpreted it to cover gender discrimination. “But not everyone agrees that it should be interpreted that way,” Oliver said, singling out former Justice Antonin Scalia. During a 2016 presidential debate, Trump said he wants to see other justices “very much in the mold of [Scalia].”

Though the ERA deadline passed in 1982, bills have been introduced this year in both the House and Senate — with bipartisan co-sponsors — aiming to either change or remove the timetable. Meanwhile, Nevada and Illinois ratified in recent years. Overall, for Oliver, it’s a no-brainer.

“Equality for women should be a basic principle of our society,” he said. “And if you think it already is, great. All the more reason to write it down. And if you think it isn’t, then we badly need the ERA.”

The comedian ended the segment with a direct — and somewhat brutal — plea to the remaining 13 states to step into the history books. “Louisiana, it could be you,” he said of potential ratification. “Arkansas, it could be you.”
because I do not want to give them credit for this.