

April 2019: ERA, Women in Politics, Medicaid Expansion, Worker's Rights

AAUW NC's annual conference took place in Greensboro last weekend. My stay was cut short, but I managed to get in several workshops and speeches. One of my heroines, Roberta Madden, a long-time civil rights and ERA activist, gave an update on the Equal Rights Amendment. It has been a 96-year struggle to give women equality in the constitution. The late Antonin Scalia said, "Certainly the Constitution does not require discrimination on the basis of sex. The only issue is whether it prohibits it. It doesn't." Protective laws for women (Title IX, Equal Pay, for example) are being weakened or not renewed. The only right the Constitution guarantees women is the right to vote. However, there has been progress in the effort to pass the ERA amendment. Two states have recently voted to ratify the ERA: Nevada, with a predominately female legislature, in 2017, and Illinois in 2018. Just one more is needed, and it requires bi-partisan support! Will it be North Carolina? In NC, HB 271 and SB 184 have been introduced. Please call or write your legislators and urge them to vote for the bills. We can also call members of Congress and ask them to eliminate the deadline.

Women in Politics was presented by three young women who have run for office (Sunny Frothingham, Jenna Wadsworth, Adrienne Spinner), two successfully. Women face intrusive questions, attacks involving lewd websites, and comments on their wardrobes. Male counterparts rarely are questioned about their marital status, reproductive health or dress style, but women on the campaign trail can expect to encounter this behavior. In 2018, fewer women ran in NC, but nationally, we have the most diverse class of representatives to date. Women with children must struggle to find childcare when campaigning, whereas the male candidates usually rely on their wives to provide this help. And if women are assertive, combative or aggressive in debates, they face derogatory labels. It takes strength and a thick skin for women to thrive in politics.

The NC Justice Center advocates for Medicaid Expansion, and Hyun Namkoog (of the NC Justice Ctr.) anticipates that a bill will be introduced in the upcoming legislative budget negotiations. However, the bill is likely to propose costs for the recipients. The reason stated is to prevent fraud and freeloading. It is important to note that almost all of Medicaid and Medicare fraud is committed by doctors, medical providers, and hospitals! Furthermore, most of the people applying for Medicaid have jobs, usually more than one. One of the ideas being considered is to charge recipients 2% of their salary to participate. However, 2% of a meager salary results in less money to buy groceries, provide secure housing, or childcare.

Hyun's colleague, Anna Pardo, whose area of expertise is Worker's Rights, spoke of the following efforts to improve workers' lives: 1.) raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour over 5 years, 2.) a minimum wage guarantee for farm workers (there is none at present, and it would not be what is mandated for U.S workers), 3.) Caregiver Relief Act would expand the definition of family (for example, grandparents caring for grandchildren cannot get FMLA), 4.) a Paid Sick Leave bill, 5.) a Kin Care bill (a similar bill passed in Georgia), 6.) bills that protect pregnancy and breastfeeding accommodations, and 7.) paid Family Medical Insurance-- which was likely to be employee funded.

As my current term is ending, this will be my last president's message. I look forward to relaxing more and working on personal projects. I hope to see you all at our next meeting on April 13 on a subject that touches every age.