

New strategy adopted to revive ERA

By Kim I. Mills
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hoping to take advantage of the more supportive Clinton administration, a coalition of women's groups is trying again to pass the 70-year-old Equal Rights Amendment.

This time, feminists are adopting a tactic that at least one constitutional scholar says might work. They plan to ask Congress to nullify the 1982 deadline for ratification that had been imposed on the measure back in the 1970s.

"We are aware that it is within the prerogative of Congress to lift that expired deadline so that ratification of three additional states may be secured," said Allie Corbin Hixson, spokeswoman for the coalition, ERA Summit. "With an administration that favors constitutional equality for women, we also believe the time is now favorable to push our suit for justice for all."

Since the measure passed 35 of the 38 state legislatures required by the deadline, only three more states must pass it to make the amendment law, she said at a news conference in the Capitol.

"We think a concurrent resolution could be passed that says putting a deadline on the amendment was in error," she said.

The coalition does not yet have sponsors for the proposed resolution, Hixson said.

Mary Cheh, a professor of constitutional law at George Washington University, called the strategy plausible.

Congress "put a limitation on it, they can take a limitation off it," she said in an interview.

Equal rights proposal

Here is the text of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment:

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

"It would work in their favor if they could get a simple majority of Congress to do this," she added. "They would be aided by the courts' reluctance to get involved. . . . If they seize the initiative, they may prevail."

Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women, said the 12-year Reagan-Bush era was, for women, "like being a hamster in an exercise

wheel, running as hard as we could just to stay even."

"We are going to mobilize the movement once again around what has been the Holy Grail of the feminist movement once we won the right to vote," she said at the news conference, in front of a statue of suffragists Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott.

The Equal Rights Amendment was first introduced in Congress in 1923. It states simply: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

The measure failed, but it was reintroduced in 1972, and passed

both houses with a seven-year limit for ratification by at least 38 states. The deadline was extended for three years, but elapsed before enough states could pass it.

The ERA has been reintroduced in Congress every two years since but has never again won the two-thirds support needed to submit it to the states.

Hixson said the coalition will focus its efforts on the 15 states that failed to ratify the ERA by 1982. She said Virginia, which defeated the ERA by one vote, would be the next state in which there would be an attempt to pass it.

The other prime target states are Illinois, Florida, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Missouri.