

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT.  
By Congressman Everett M. Dirksen  
16th Ill. District.

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR MEN AND WOMEN.

Pending in the Senate and House is a resolution which proposes the submission to the states of a Constitutional amendment to provide complete equality of rights between men and women. The important part of the text of the amendment states that "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." You will note from this language that it is left to the states to determine what those equal rights shall be. The rights of both men and women may be more liberal in one state than in another but under this proposal they must be equal as between men and women in the same state. There must be no discrimination. Offhand, you might conclude that such a proposal contains no controversy whatsoever and yet it is one of the most disputed measures that has been considered by Congress.

ITS HISTORY.

This proposal to amend the Constitution to grant equal rights to women was first introduced in Congress in 1923. The text was somewhat different than that which is set forth above. It has been introduced in every Congress since that time. Until now, no action was taken. In the present Congress, the matter was referred to the Judiciary Committee of the Senate which made a favorable report upon it. In the House, it was also referred to the Judiciary Committee but that group decided to take no action for the duration. In consequence, a movement is now on foot, urging House members to sign a petition to discharge the Committee from further consideration of the bill so that it might be automatically brought to the floor for debate and action. Such a petition requires the signatures of 218 members.

CLEAVAGE.

A sharp difference of opinion has developed over this proposal and strangely enough, it is marked by a cleavage of opinion among women's groups themselves. An impressive array of newspapers, organizations, educators, authors and other personalities are for the amendment. An impressive array of newspapers, organizations, educators, authors and other personalities are against the amendment. Three women members of Congress, namely Mrs. Smith of Maine, Mrs. Luce of Conn., and Miss Stanley of New York are on record in favor of its adoption. Other women members of Congress, so far as the authors knows have taken no position.

THE PROS.

In favor of the adoption of this amendment, it is contended that (1) to secure equal rights for women thro the various states is too slow and cumbersome. (2) It provides equality of opportunity for women and erases inequalities respecting wages, jury service, etc. (3) It affords equal protection to women with respect to property, children and other purposes. (4) It is progressive, enlightened and in line with the trend to complete emancipation of women. (5) It puts an end to the discrimination against women which is an inheritance of the old and outmoded English Common Law. (6) It would afford full equality with respect to earnings, inheritances, occupations, contracts, divorce, etc.

THE CONS.

Now come those in opposition to the amendment to contend that (1) the amendment is not needed. (2) It would give Congress power over a vast field of social legislation which would tend toward further centralization of Federal government. (3) Its interpretation would congest the already overburdened court-dockets. (4) Equal rights can be obtained by the increased and enlightened use of the ballot. (5) It would impair high standards of equality which already obtain in many states and would jeopardize existing laws for the protection of women. (6) That the only real discriminations against women today result from custom and prejudice and not from law.

1940 - 1944.

In 1940, the Republican National platform favored the submission of this amendment to the states. The Democratic platform carried no comparable provision. It remains to be seen what provision will be made in the Party platforms in 1944.