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Norma Merrick Sklarek Archive, Series 7: "Savvy A Special Report The Savvy 60 The Top U.S. Businesses Run by Women"...

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power to vote in 1919, after years of rejection by Democratic Congresses. Of the thirty-five states that ratified the amendment, twenty-nine were Republican-controlled; eight of the nine that rejected it were controlled by Democrats.

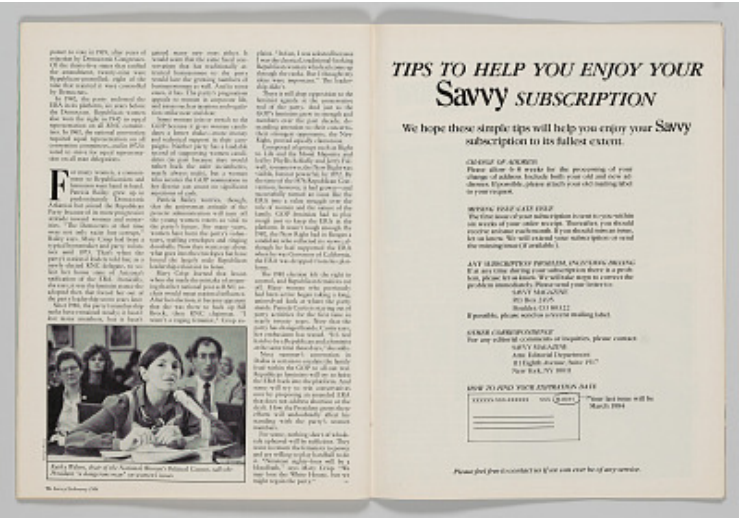
In 1940, the party endorsed the ERA in its platform, six years before the Democrats. Republican women also won the right in 1940 to equal representation on all RNC committees. In 1960, the national convention required equal representation on all convention committees, and in 1972 it voted to strive for equal representation on all state delegations.

For many women, a commitment to Republicanism and feminism went hand in hand. Patricia Bailey grew up in predominantly Democratic Arkansas but joined the Republican Party because of its more progressive attitude toward women and minorities. "The Democrats at that time were not only racist but corrupt," Bailey says. Mary Crisp had been a typical homemaker and party volunteer until 1973. That's when the party's national leaders told her, as a newly elected RNC delegate, to solicit her home state of Arizona's ratification of the ERA. Ironically, she says, it was the feminist stance she adopted then that forced her out of the party leadership seven years later. Since 1980, the party's membership ranks have remained steady; it hasn't lost many members, but it hasn't gained many new ones either. It would seem that the same fiscal conservatism that has traditionally attracted businessmen to the party would lure the growing numbers of businesswomen as well. And in some cases, it has. The party's pragmatism appeals to women in corporate life, and issues such as taxation and regulation strike near and dear.

Some women join or switch to the GOP because it gives women candidates a better shake—more money and technical support in their campaigns. Neither party has a laudable record of supporting women candidates (in part because they would rather back the safer incumbents, nearly always male), but a woman who secures the GOP nomination in her district can count on significant injections of cash.

Patricia Bailey worries, though, that the antiwoman attitude of the present administration will turn off the young women voters so vital to the party's future. For many years, women have been the party's volunteers, stuffing envelopes and ringing doorbells. Now they want a say about what goes into the envelopes but have found the largely male Republican leadership reluctant to listen.

Mary Crisp learned that lesson when she made the mistake of assuming that her national post as RNC co-chair would mean national influence. After her election, it became apparent that she was there to back up Bill Brock, then RNC chairman. "I wasn't a raging feminist," Crisp explains. "In fact, I was selected because I was the classical, traditional-looking Republican woman who has come up through the ranks. but I thought my ideas were important." The leadership didn't. There is still deep opposition to the feminist agenda at the conservative end of the party. And just as the GOP's feminists grew in strength and numbers over the past decade, demanding attention to their concerns, their strongest opponents, the New Right, proved equally clamorous. Composed of groups such as Right to Life and the Moral Majority and led by Phyllis Schlafly and Jerry Falwell, to name two, the New Right was visible, but not powerful, by 1972. By the time of the 1976 Republican Convention, however, it had grown- and successfully turned an issue like the ERA into a value struggle over the role of women and



the nature of the family. GOP feminists had to play rough just to keep the ERA in the platform. It wasn't rough enough. By 1980, the New Right had in Reagan a candidate who reflected its views; although he had supported the ERA when he was Governor of California, the ERA was dropped from his platform.

The 1980 election left the right in control, and Republican feminists cut off. Many women who previously had been active began taking a long, uninvolved look at where the party stands. Pamela Curtis is staying out of party activities for the first time in nearly twenty years. Now that the party has changed hands, Curtis says, her enthusiasm has waned. "It's real hard to be Republican and a feminist at the same time these days," she adds.

Next summer's convention in Dallas is certain to escalate the family feud within the GOP to all-out-war. Republican feminists will try to host the ERA back into the platform. And some will try to win conservatives over by proposing an amended ERA that does not address abortion or the draft. How the President greets these efforts will undoubtedly affect his standing with the party's women members. For some, nothing short of wholesale upheaval will be sufficient. They want to return the feminists to power and are willing to play hardball to do it. "Nineteen eighty-four will be a bloodbath," says Mary Crisp. "We may lose the White House, but we might regain the party."

[[image]]

Kathy Wilson, chair of the National Women's Political Caucus, calls the President "a dangerous man" on women's issues.
George Brown

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