

**The original documents are located in Box 35, “7/1/76 - Remarks Upon Receiving the Report from the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, 1975” of the President’s Speeches and Statements: Reading Copies at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN . . . .

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS TO THE  
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE OBSERVANCE OF  
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S  
YEAR

JULY 1, 1976

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THANK YOU, JILL; DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF CONGRESS:

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS ---

LET ME THANK ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION FOR THE JOB  
YOU HAVE DONE IN IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS WHICH BLOCK WOMEN'S  
FULL PARTICIPATION IN OUR NATIONAL LIFE.

I ALSO THANK THE MANY OTHERS WHO CONTRIBUTED  
TO THIS REPORT, MANY OF WHOM ARE HERE TODAY.

YOU HAVE MY ASSURANCE I WILL STUDY YOUR REPORT WITH THE  
SAME CARE YOU TOOK IN PREPARING IT.

JILL, I REGRET YOU ARE UNABLE TO CONTINUE AS  
PRESIDING OFFICER OF THE COMMISSION. BUT I AM PLEASED  
WE WILL STILL HAVE THE BENEFIT OF YOUR TALENTS AS A MEMBER  
OF THE COMMISSION.

THIS AFTERNOON IT IS MY PRIVILEGE TO ANNOUNCE THE  
APPOINTMENT OF ELIZABETH ATHANASAKOS (ATHANA-SOCKOS)  
AS THE NEW PRESIDING OFFICER. BETTY IS A PRACTICING ATTORNEY  
AND A FORMER MUNICIPAL JUDGE.

SHE HAS SERVED AS CHAIRPERSON OF THE H.E.W. ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF WOMEN,  
AND AS A MEMBER OF THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON WOMEN'S  
RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

BETTY WILL BE ABLY ASSISTED BY ERSA POSTON AS VICE  
PRESIDING OFFICER. ERSA IS THE PAST PRESIDENT OF THE  
NEW YORK STATE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION.

TODAY, THE COMMISSION ENTERS A NEW PHASE.

YOU ARE NOW CHARGED WITH PLANNING AND CONVENING 56 STATE AND  
TERRITORIAL CONFERENCES AND A NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE.

TO THOSE COMMISSION MEMBERS WHO ARE UNABLE TO  
CONTINUE SERVING, LET ME ADD A PERSONAL NOTE OF THANKS FOR A  
FINE JOB DONE. YOU CAN BE PROUD OF WHAT YOU HAVE  
ACCOMPLISHED -- AND CONFIDENT THAT YOUR WORK WILL BE CARRIED  
ON IN THE SAME SPIRIT OF DEDICATION BY THE NEW MEMBERS WHOSE  
APPOINTMENTS WE ANNOUNCED THIS MORNING.

THE WORK OF THIS COMMISSION IS NOT JUST FOR WOMEN,  
BUT FOR THE WHOLE UNITED STATES. BECAUSE THIS NATION IS  
FOUNDED ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT ALL CITIZENS SHARE THE SAME  
RIGHTS -- AND WHAT AFFECTS THE RIGHTS OF ONE AFFECTS THE  
FREEDOM OF ALL.

THE JOB BEFORE US, IN WHICH YOU WILL PLAY SUCH  
AN IMPORTANT ROLE, IS TO BRING OUR NATIONAL LIFE INTO HARMONY  
WITH OUR NATIONAL PHILOSOPHY. THAT IS AN AWESOME TASK --  
BUT WE HAVE FACED SUCH TASKS BEFORE.

AMERICA FACED SUCH A TASK ONE CENTURY AGO●

WE HAD TO ELIMINATE A SHAMEFUL CONTRADICTION BETWEEN OUR  
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY -- WHICH PROCLAIMED ALL PERSONS EQUAL --  
AND OUR NATION'S DAILY LIFE -- IN WHICH FOUR MILLION MEN AND  
WOMEN WERE SLAVES●

MANY OF AMERICA'S EARLY CRUSADERS FOR WOMEN'S  
RIGHTS WERE ACTIVE IN THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT● IT WAS  
THERE THEY LEARNED TO ORGANIZE, TO SPEAK OUT IN PUBLIC,  
AND TO DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF THEIR OWN BASIC RIGHTS●

IT IS A BITTER IRONY OF AMERICAN HISTORY THAT WHEN  
THE FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT WAS PASSED IN 1870, AT LONG LAST  
GIVING THE VOTE TO BLACK MEN, / IT DID NOT ENFRANCHISE WOMEN,  
EITHER BLACK OR WHITE. THAT WAS TO WAIT ANOTHER FIFTY  
YEARS.

MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY AFTER WOMEN'S  
SUFFRAGE BECAME LAW, MUCH STILL REMAINS TO BE DONE.  
NOT JUST COMPASSION, BUT JUSTICE AND LOGIC DICTATE THAT  
WE REMOVE THE INEQUITIES THAT STILL EXIST.



WE MUST REMOVE THE INJUSTICES SUFFERED BY THOSE  
LIKE MRS. MARY HEATH, WHO IS HERE WITH US TODAY.  
FOR 33 YEARS, SHE WORKED WITH HER HUSBAND, SIDE BY SIDE,  
BUILDING A NEBRASKA RANCH TO PASS ON TO THEIR CHILDREN.

IN 1974 HER HUSBAND PASSED AWAY.  
AND MRS. HEATH LEARNED SHE MIGHT HAVE TO SELL THAT RANCH  
TO PAY OFF THE ESTATE TAX. IF SHE HAD DIED FIRST, HER  
HUSBAND WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN FACED WITH SUCH A PAINFUL CHOICE.

BUT ACCORDING TO TAX LAW, HER YEARS OF WORK COUNTED FOR NOTHING. UNLESS SHE COULD PROVE SHE HAD CONTRIBUTED MONEY TO THE PURCHASE OR IMPROVEMENT OF THE RANCH, FOR TAX PURPOSES SHE WAS NO BETTER THAN A STRANGER ON HER OWN LAND.

THIS PROBLEM IS NOT UNIQUE TO FARM WOMEN. IT IS NOTHING MORE OR LESS THAN A WIDOW'S TAX, AND IT IS NOTHING MORE OR LESS THAN A GROSS INJUSTICE. LAST MARCH I PROPOSED LEGISLATION TO ELIMINATE THAT INJUSTICE -- LEGISLATION THAT STILL AWAITS ACTION BY THE CONGRESS.

THAT PROPOSAL WAS PART OF THIS ADMINISTRATION'S  
EFFORTS ACROSS A WIDE FRONT. SINCE BECOMING PRESIDENT  
I HAVE SUPPORTED AND SIGNED INTO LAW LEGISLATION PROHIBITING  
SEX DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING, IN CREDIT, AND IN EDUCATION.

SOME OF THE LAWS DISCRIMINATING AGAINST WOMEN  
APPEAR PETTY OR EVEN RIDICULOUS. BUT THE FACT IS, THEY  
ARE ALL EQUALLY UNJUST -- ALL EQUALLY DEMEANING TO AMERICANS --  
AND ALL EQUALLY INCONSISTENT WITH THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY  
OF EQUALITY.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS TO APPROACH THIS  
PROBLEM. ONE WOULD BE TO AWAIT THE RATIFICATION OF THE  
EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT. AS YOU KNOW, I AM IN FAVOR  
OF THE E.R.A. , AND I HOPE TO SEE IT PART OF OUR CONSTITUTION  
BEFORE LONG.

BUT INJUSTICE CANNOT WAIT UPON POLITICS, NOR  
UPON THE LENGTHY PUBLIC DISCUSSION WHICH HAS ALREADY  
DELAYED RATIFICATION OF THIS CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW. THEREFORE, I HAVE  
TODAY DIRECTED THE ATTORNEY GENERAL TO DEVELOP, / IN  
CONSULTATION WITH AFFECTED FEDERAL AGENCIES, / A PLAN TO  
REVIEW THE ENTIRE UNITED STATES CODE.

THE PURPOSE WILL BE TO DETERMINE THE NEED FOR REVISING  
SEX-BASED PROVISIONS THAT ARE NOT JUSTIFIED IN LAW NOR  
SUPPORTED BY WISE POLICY.

I ENCOURAGE THE GOVERNORS OF ALL THE STATES  
TO INITIATE A SIMILAR REVIEW OF ALL STATE LAWS -- TO BRING  
THEM INTO HARMONY WITH OUR AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY OF  
ABSOLUTE EQUALITY UNDER THE LAW.

MANY OUTDATED LAWS AND STATUTES HAVE ALREADY  
BEEN IDENTIFIED -- AND MANY OF YOU HERE TODAY HAVE TAKEN  
PART IN THAT EFFORT. I AM SURE YOU WILL AGREE THAT THE  
TIME HAS COME FOR A MASSIVE FEDERAL EFFORT.

I AM ALSO CONFIDENT THAT THE STATE CONFERENCES TO BE HELD BY YOUR COMMISSION WILL HELP IN THIS PROCESS.

ANOTHER PROBLEM I WOULD SUGGEST FOR YOUR ATTENTION AT THOSE CONFERENCES IS THE WIDENING EARNINGS GAP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN.

THIS HAS VERY SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS, NOT JUST FOR WOMEN BEING DENIED THE WAGES THEY DESERVE, BUT FOR THE ENTIRE AMERICAN ECONOMY.

IT IS A PROBLEM WE WILL ADDRESS IN THE  
IMMEDIATE FUTURE -- A MATTER OF PRIORITY FOR THIS  
ADMINISTRATION.

MY ADMINISTRATION IS FIRMLY COMMITTED TO LEGAL  
AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR WOMEN.

I SPEAK NOW / NOT ONLY AS PRESIDENT, / BUT ALSO AS A HUSBAND AND  
FATHER. I PRIZE THE INDIVIDUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE  
TWO WOMEN IN MY FAMILY. I AM PROUD THAT BETTY HAS BECOME  
A LEADER IN HER OWN RIGHT -- AND I WANT TO ENSURE THAT OUR  
DAUGHTER SUSAN WILL HAVE THE SAME FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND  
OPPORTUNITY AS OUR SONS MIKE, JACK AND STEVE.



AS THE UNITED STATES ENTERS ITS THIRD CENTURY,  
WE CAN ILL AFFORD TO DISREGARD THE RIGHTS -- OR NEGLECT  
THE STRENGTHS AND TALENTS OF ONE-HALF OUR POPULATION●

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS "WOMEN'S RIGHTS●"  
THERE ARE ONLY THE RIGHTS OF ALL AMERICANS -- TO LIFE, LIBERTY,  
AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS●

WOMEN'S RIGHTS SHOULD NOT BE GRANTED AS AN ACT  
OF CHARITY -- FOR THOSE RIGHTS ARE THEIRS ALREADY●  
BY ELIMINATING THE BARRIERS TO FREEDOM, WE ARE DOING NO MORE  
THAN FULFILLING A PROMISE MADE IN PHILADELPHIA TWO HUNDRED  
YEARS AGO●

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

I WOULD NOW LIKE TO INVITE YOU ALL TO THE SOUTH LAWN FOR  
REFRESHMENTS. ALSO, BETTY HAS OPENED THE WHITE HOUSE TO ANY  
WHO WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE GROUND FLOOR AND THE STATE FLOOR.

END OF TEXT