

The Equal Rights Amendment ^[1]

Listen to the interview (running time: 8:24).

Martha McKay

At any rate, then the Senate committee met on Friday and I believe that it was voted out by an 8 to 7 favorable majority. But you see, the House knew we were worse off in the Senate than we were in the House, they knew that. The Senate all year long, last year and this year has been, as H.L. Mencken used to say, "a Sahara." I mean that it has just been devoid of leadership, character, you know, the whole smear. They have been perfectly awful. The legislature hasn't been good, but the Senate has been dreadful. Also, we had worked on the Senators, we had worked on those committee members very hard to get a favorable vote. Because a bill that doesn't get a favorable vote is hardly ever voted on favorably and they would have used that for an out on ERA. We worked very hard on the committee. But, we had not lobbied the Senators, we had spent, I don't know, five or six weeks or whatever the time period was, doing nothing but working on House members. Nothing. I mean, I could pull out my... that's what I had marked. We just went over and over them. I called people like Pat Taylor to call Hightower. I mean we used everybody, I mean, we've been doing it for years, we just haven't gotten credit for it. If I was to pull out my phone bill, you'd see... my phone bill one month was three hundred dollars. We raised money, fortunately, we raised money, so, I didn't have to pay for this one, although I've paid for plenty. I imagine that I called at least six hundred dollars worth. And see, we had she's a Republican woman, and he was assigned to her, and she reported back to here that Locke, no. See here, I marked on this, this one is signed yes. See, we sent out things and over fifty per cent of them were signed yes before they walked in the door. We know who signed and then who chickened, which is a kind word for it. At any rate, here they are, signed "yes," signed "yes"...

Belinda Riggsbee

Would you comment on Mike Mullins and Gordon Allen backing out at the last minute.

Martha McKay

O.K. Just let me finish this. So, we had done all that work, as you can see, and so we were fearful. However, we went to work on the Senate and we didn't have but about five days. And we worked like dogs and we had it. When they walked in there, we had it twenty-five, twenty-five. And they knew it.

Belinda Riggsbee

And you believe that you had it.

Martha McKay

We did have it. We had it in commitments. We can't help it if they are liars. You know, they're not honorable men. Gordon Allen wrote a constituent and said, "I intend to vote, I haven't made up my mind all those times, but now I intend to vote, when it comes up, for ERA." And he wrote that the weekend before. On Saturday night before that vote, we had it. As a matter of fact, we had it twenty-seven on Saturday night. Well, two that had been kind of wavering, flaked out before Wednesday.

Belinda Riggsbee

Who were they.

Martha McKay

One of those that we thought we had a chance with was Barker. The Democrat Barker from Wake County. And he flaked out. We found out that morning, and somebody else that we thought we had flaked out.

Belinda Riggsbee

But, that still would have been twenty-five.

Martha McKay

When they walked in the door, it was twenty-five, twenty-five. Mullins had given his commitment, and so had Gordon Allen. In writing. So, I had exactly... see, you understand that the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment had nothing to do with it. Gordon Allen did not want to make Jim Hunt a hero. Hunt had already announced that he was going to break the tie. Right.

Belinda Riggsbee

In favor of it.

Martha McKay

That's right. And by that time, Allen must have realized that every woman who had ever worked in politics, practically, was for the ERA. Every organization. The women who worked the system were for ERA. The ones who were against it, we never heard of them before or since. The woman who headed it up was a proud and avowed member of the John Birch Society. And they don't run politics in North Carolina. So, I think that it was very simple. Gordon Allen did not want to make Jimmy Hunt a hero. And again, he went over... I saw him go over to Deane, Charlie Deane and kneel down and start talking to him on the floor. And then I saw Charlie put his head down and of course, what he was doing was telling him that he was going to change his vote.... if I had been Charlie and I don't criticize Charlie, everybody has to operate in his or her own way. But I would have said, "Gordon, you gave me your word and I'm really going to ask you to keep it." That's part of the rules, too, you can do that. He hadn't released him. Of course, it's usual that people do release people, but with a twenty-five, twenty-five, I would have said, "Sorry Gordon, I've helped you on this bill and that bill and I want you to, I'm asking you, I will not release you." I figure myself, that Mullins would never have had the nerve to switch if Allen hadn't switched. He was a freshman and I may be wrong, but I figure that he wouldn't have.

Belinda Riggsbee

Well, was there any visible signs with Mullins, like you say the way that Gordon Allen went over and talked to Charlie Deane?

Martha McKay

No, because you see, Mullins is a Republican and I tell you the truth, I don't know who was keeping up with the Republicans. Taylor was with us, Charles Taylor. He was the minority leader. I guess he still is. See, I had him marked "o.k." At any rate, I don't know, I can't say. I feel myself that if Allen had not... and you see, I think that Alford is the first name and Allen is the second, he's second name called and I question whether or not Mullins would have gotten up there and been the one to cause the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. But I think that Gordon's reasons are very, very simple. He has had an interest, so it is said, in running for governor. We all know that Jimmy Hunt is running for governor and it would have made Jimmy Hunt a hero.

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