

Women's coalition reloads for ERA push

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A coalition of women's groups launched yet another drive yesterday to pass the Equal Rights Amendment, arguing that a 1982 deadline for ratification was arbitrary and political.

Members of the ERA Summit said since the measure passed 35 of the 38 state legislatures required by 1982, only three more states must pass it to make the amendment law.

"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 Hixon, spokeswoman for the 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."

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."

The Equal Rights Amendment was first introduced in Congress in 1923. The proposed amendment, written by feminist Alice Paul, stated 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 by modern-day feminists 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 be submitted to the states.

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.