

Helen Milliken speaks

Poverty: 'Women, children first'

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

Most poor people in America are women, and they have men to thank for it.

That's the opinion of Helen Milliken, wife of Gov. William G. Milliken, and other women's rights activists.

Mrs. Milliken shared her thoughts recently with the national membership of the Society of Women Engineers in Dearborn.

She charged that male legislators have failed to pass the Equal Rights Amendment and how men in high-level federal positions — including President Reagan — are cutting the social programs they desperately need.



"THE FACE of poverty is overwhelmingly female," Mrs. Milliken said.

"Sixty-one percent of those on Medicaid are women, 69 percent of all food stamps go to women, and 80 percent of all those collecting ADC are women," she said.

"Three out of four families in need

are headed by women. When it comes to poverty, it's women and children first," she added.

Noting that only 14 percent of American families still have husbands as the sole wage earners and mothers staying home raising two children, she said there is no longer an excuse for underpayment for females.

SHE URGED that an Equal Rights Amendment be passed soon so women can get what they're entitled to.

"We're living in times of economic stress. Women are the biggest losers in federal social program cuts. The cuts go a long way toward guaranteeing poverty for women," Milliken said.

She pointed on the proposed Human Life Amendment that would make abortion under any circumstance a felony.

"It would make centers which administer birth control devices to teenagers inform their parents and in turn they wouldn't seek the methods," she feared.

"By forcing poor women to have too many children too soon, we're doing nothing to reduce poverty," she added.

"If women don't have the right to decide when or if they can bear children, then they're denied their freedom. Without the exercise of choice, a woman is merely an instrument," she said.

IT HAS BEEN 59 years since the Equal Rights Amendment was first introduced by U.S. Rep. Alice Paul, the state's first lady said.

"It's time to put our convictions into action. For decades we've had debates on whether women deserve equal rights. By the year 2000, almost 80 percent of all women will be in the marketplace. And it's a crime that women still only earn an average of 59 cents for every dollar a man earns," she added.

"On the average, women college graduates earn the same (salary) as male high-school dropouts," she said.

ERA backers launch 'New Day' with rally

"A New Day beyond ERA" will be launched with a rally at noon July 1 in Detroit's Kennedy Square, say supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Other rallies are scheduled for the same hour at Federal Plaza in Ann Arbor, Bronson Park in Kalamazoo and Calder Plaza in Grand Rapids. Similar activities are being planned for Battle Creek, Flint and Lansing.

Supporters said they will back principles of equality for women and the

announce formation of a new, nationwide network on related issues to be called A New Day Beyond ERA.

A NEW DAY Beyond ERA is an effort of the National Women's Conference Committee. It is being coordinated in Michigan by Jean King, an Ann Arbor attorney, and Dorothy Haener, a UAW international representative.

The events in Michigan will coincide with activities in more than 150 towns and cities across the nation.

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