

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

CONFIDENTIAL

September 22, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: CLARK MacGREGOR
FROM: WILLIAM E. TIMMONS *WT*
SUBJECT: Equal Rights for Women

I understand the President has approved an exchange of letters with Jerry Ford whereby he will repeat his support for a Constitutional Amendment. I have not seen the option paper or draft letter and assume you have.

I question the advisability of this approach since the real issue before the House will be the Wiggins Amendment. I believe our private position (or hope) should be defeat of the Amendment but because of pressures we can't take that public position. A letter in support of the Constitutional Amendment implies non-support for Wiggins and can be used to pass the Equal Rights provision which I assume we don't really want. On the other hand, as it now stands we have a low profile. When pressed, we can cite Justice Department and previous Presidential statements in support of Equal Rights Amendment.

As an aside, I would favor outright support of Wiggins because I personally feel 95% of American womanhood prefer to keep their protection built into state laws and exemption from the military draft. Can you imagine what this will do to divorce and custody laws and precedents, separate penal institutions, etc.? A strong Presidential statement supporting protection of women would be better received I feel.

cc: Dick Cook

CONFIDENTIAL