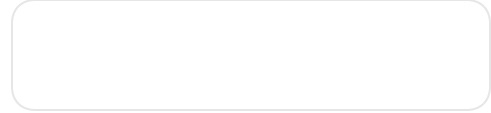


[Chat](#)[Search](#)[Images](#)[Videos](#)[News](#)

**As a part of the Driving the Vote for Equality Tour, a local high school held an essay contest. McKenzie Speller, a student at Henderson Collegiate Public Charter School, wrote the winning essay reprinted with permission in full:**



## **Equality Delayed is Equality Denied**

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

The Pledge of Allegiance — the same pledge we all grew up saying at the start of every school day. But if we pledge liberty and justice for all, does that promise not include women?

Good Evening everyone,

My name is McKenzie Speller, and I stand before you today as North Carolina continues to decide where it stands on the Equal Rights Amendment.

When we talk about equality, we are really talking about protection — protection that should be guaranteed, not questioned. Without explicit constitutional protection, rights can be subject to legal challenges and scrutiny. In legal terms, that often means laws affecting equality must face closer examination to make sure they are truly fair and justified.

The Equal Rights Amendment has been ratified by 38 out of 50 states. Yet as of early 2026, North Carolina has still not officially ratified it. And to me, that means everything.

I think back to being a young student in school, standing and reciting the pledge, learning that liberty and justice should belong to everyone. As I grew older, I started to wonder what that promise looks like in real life.

Because when a state chooses not to affirm equality directly, it sends a message, regardless intended or not. And as a young woman that has grown up in this state, I notice that message.

I notice it when I think about the future — my future that I want to build. I visualize myself pursuing a career in law, working to help protect fairness and justice for other people. I hope to make a positive impact on my community, anywhere I go.

The knowledge that equality is not explicitly guaranteed makes me question why something so fundamental is still considered optional?

I was raised to believe I can achieve anything I put my mind to. I've been encouraged to lead, and to compete, and to pursue my ambitious goals. I, as a young woman, have been taught that equality is one of the core principals of this country.

But principles mean more when they are protected, and written in stone.

The United States Constitution outlines our most fundamental rights. It defines who we are as a united nation, and what we stand for. Yet, nowhere does it guarantee that equality under the law cannot be denied on the basis of sex.

To some this may feel like common sense, or a technicality. To my generation this feels like a gaped burden. Because equality should not depend on interpretation. It should not shift with political tides. It also should not vary depending on what state you live in.

The Equal Rights Amendment is not about special treatment. It's about consistency, and holding our nation's foundational morals accountable. If we truly believe in equal protection under the law, then that should be written in our Constitution, not just assumed.

Additionally, this issue is about the strength of our democracy itself. The promise of the United States Constitution is that rights are meant to be clearly defined and equally applied. When fundamental rights are left to interpretation rather than explicitly stated, it creates uncertainty about who is fully protected under the law.

The Equal Rights Amendment is not about creating new rights, it is about clearly stating protections that should already exist. And in a country built on the idea of liberty and justice for all, clarity isn't something that should be controversial.

As I prepare to step into adulthood, I want to do so knowing that my equality is not just implied but it is guaranteed. I want the young girls coming after me to not have to

question whether their equality is written into law.

When North Carolina considers whether to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment it isn't just making a decision. It is deciding what message it sends to young women like me.

So I ask this:

## **Are we equal in opportunity, or are we equal on paper?**

I believe we should be both.

Equality should not depend on court interpretations. It should not depend on politics, and it should not depend on the decade we are living in.

Equality should be permanent.

For centuries, women have not asked for an upperhand, but for the promise this nation was built upon.

And the principle is simple:

## **Equality delayed is Equality denied.**

Thank you for your time.

       Sources