

# Manhattan

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IN THIS SECTION

Daily News, Tuesday, February 2, 1982

## HAVE CAUSE, WILL TRAVEL

By BELLA ENGLISH

**I**F YOU THINK "New York Loves Florida" sounds as if it were yet another tired old orange juice campaign trumped up by some Madison Ave. firm, guess again.

It's a campaign, all right, but the stakes, at least for many women in this country, are much higher than those involving citrus juice sales.

The "New York Loves Florida" campaign by the Manhattan chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) is out to prove that you *can* mix apples and oranges, very nicely in fact. As in the Big Apple and the Big Orange.

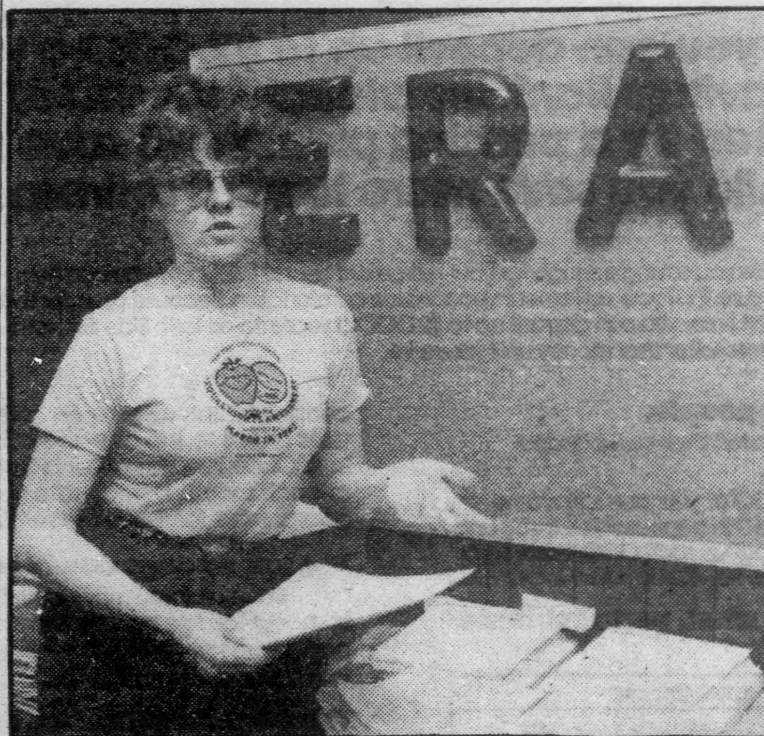
Parlaying the deep ties that exist between millions of New Yorkers and Floridians—some swear the states have virtually annexed each other—NOW has targeted Florida as one of the key states in the Equal Rights Amendment vote this legislative session—and New York State has been earmarked as a key component in the Florida campaign.

The last time it considered the amendment, in 1979, the Florida State Senate turned it down by a vote of 21 to 19. New Yorkers, who have overwhelmingly supported the ERA in every poll, make three million trips to the Sunshine State every year, according to Florida statistics.

The time limit for ERA passage runs out in June, and three more states must approve the amendment before it becomes law.

Under the new campaign, New Yorkers who have family or friends in Florida pledge to get six registered voters in the Sunshine State to write six letters each to state politicians on behalf of the ERA. The campaign

*New York's Equal Rights supporters take their battle to the Sunshine State as the ERA reaches its 11th hour*



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Maureen Healy, heads NOW's "New York Loves Florida" campaign.

began in November, and scores of New Yorkers have signed pledges to lobby Floridians so far.

"There are so many Floridians who are displaced New Yorkers," said Maureen Healy, campaign coordinator. "New Yorkers are always down there, so we thought it would be an effective, grassroots way to get support for the ERA."

Nationally, NOW has launched a boycott against the states that have rejected the amendment, urging conventions and groups to take their money to states that have approved the measure. But realizing that New Yorkers are always going to Florida, the local NOW chapter felt a Big Apple-Big Orange liaison would be a pragmatic approach to the situation.

"Letters are the most important thing to legislators," said Gail Gabler, NOW's coordinator for the ERA. "Look how much letter-writing has helped the New Right."

The target deadline in Florida is March 18, when the Legislature adjourns. NOW officials are optimistic that the power of the pen—or typewriter—will turn the tide there.

"Also, Reagan's policies have given us something to fight for," Healy said. "People are really coming out to work." Since Reagan took office, the Manhattan chapter's membership has increased from 1,300 to 2,000.

The goal for the "New York Loves Florida" campaign is 1,000 pledges from New Yorkers to sign up a total of 6,000 friends and relatives in Florida who would send out a total of 36,000 letters to the Legislature. Each pledge gets a packet which includes sample letters to write to "pro" and "con" legislators, a list of senators

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# Equal Rights activists take fight to Florida

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with addresses, phone numbers and districts, a map of legislative districts and a list of all Florida NOW chapters.

And, of course, tips. "When writing to the governor, who is pro-ERA, state that he must be more aggressive in his support, etc." In letters to politicians who oppose the ERA, NOW suggests that writers include a simple but powerful phrase: "I shall make this issue of extreme importance in my voting decisions in the upcoming 1982 and 1984 elections."

In addition to the New York-Florida connection, New York NOW is sponsoring an "Equality Riders" program, styled after the civil rights movement's freedom riders of the '60s. Volunteers spend at least two weeks in unratified states, lobbying for the bill. NOW provides the transportation and per diem expenses, but workers must find their own place to stay.

Students are using their breaks, career women are taking leaves of absence and others are forgoing vacations to become Equality Riders, NOW officials say.

One woman who went to Virginia

as an Equality Rider to help the campaign of recently elected Gov. Charles Robb (D), an ERA-supporter, told of arranging an airport rendezvous with her host family. "I asked how could I pick them out of a crowd," New Yorker Tica Simpson recalled. "They replied, 'You're not exactly coming into Kennedy Airport here. Look for someone wearing an ERA-YES button.'"

Simpson described how she felt about her mission. "We were all out there, day after day, chipping away at old stereotypes, fighting the Phyllis Schlaflys of this world. We're all nervous. It's not easy getting laughed at or getting to know a door-knocker by the imprint it leaves on your nose.

"The Equality Riders are sometimes met with hostility and often with ignorance," she said. "Many local women would say things such as, 'Oh, no, I'm not interested in this political stuff. You have to talk to my husband and he's not here,' or, 'God, would you just leave us alone.' From the look of terror you'd think you were advocating leprosy rather than equality.

"One local newspaper said the town was being invaded by NOW-



ERA rally at Democratic Party conference in Hollywood, Fla., last October.

ettes," Simpson recalled. "And the day before the election 80 people called Robb's office to say they wouldn't vote for him if he supported the ERA."

But one woman who went to Virginia on Robb's behalf wrote: "Hun-

dreds of women just like me took time out from the normal routine of our lives and worked like hell for something we believe in with all our hearts; and we made a difference. We had our questions, we had our qualms, but we came. And we won." ■