

"We the People" - 1981

Issue

Safeguarding the principles of the United States Constitution—sovereignty of the people, supremacy of national government with respect for the states, division of power among the judicial, legislative and executive branches, rule by the majority and above all, the rights and liberties of the individual.

Background

The Constitution, which established American democracy, is the method by which Americans govern themselves as a free people. American democracy is more than a political system; it is an economic and a social system as well. As the Founding Fathers envisioned, its citizens are equal under the law with the opportunity to make full use of their abilities and to improve their economic standing. It is these freedoms which earned the confidence of millions and brought them as immigrants to these shores from around the world. For the Jewish immigrant, there was political and personal freedom, which had been denied them for centuries in the lands in which they had been living. The Jewish tradition and experience show the importance of protecting these freedoms and the need for all to be vigilant against any attempts that would deny political equality and economic opportunity for all.

Resolutions

1) Voting Rights—We believe that democracy depends upon the people deciding upon issues and candidates and therefore we are committed to the protection of the right to vote of all Americans. We support the extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which has effectively increased the numbers of registered minority voters and office holders, thus assuring minority political participation.

We call on U.S. Sisterhood members to communicate with the President and their legislators, urging their support for legislation which: extends the Voting Rights Act, without weakening amendments, to 1992 and includes bilingual provisions; strengthens the Act to make it easier to challenge discriminatory voting practices in court; and retains the administrative enforcement provision which requires covered state and local jurisdictions to pre-clear with the Justice Department proposed changes in election laws and procedures.

2) Constitutional Conventions—We believe that a constitutional convention called for the purpose of amending the United States constitution is a hitherto uncharted course fraught with uncertainty and controversy which could seriously damage the foundations of American democracy.

We recommend that Sisterhoods educate their members to the dangers of a constitutional convention and urge them to join in broad-based coalitions to oppose a constitutional convention.

3) Threats to the Balance of Power—We believe that legislation which erodes the Supreme Court's powers to review the constitutionality of laws threatens the balance of power among the three branches of government and ultimately our constitutional form of government.

We oppose any attempt by Congress or those who would attempt to influence it to limit the jurisdiction of the federal courts. We urge our United States Sisterhood members to communicate their opposition to the President and their representatives.

4) Criminal Justice—We believe that any reform of our criminal justice system requires that we undertake to

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eliminate the causes of crime by working toward social, economic and political justice for all members of our society. We believe that the resources of our federal and local governments should be concentrated on developing more effective prevention techniques and utilizing alternate methods of correction rather than depending solely on the building of more prisons as a crime control measure since statistics show that prisons neither deter nor rehabilitate.

We urge Sisterhoods to educate their members on this most serious community problem and to join with other groups in studying and recommending courses of action for governments to undertake in the reform of the criminal justice system.

5) Immigration and Refugee Policy—We support a major revision and strengthening of immigration and refugee policies of the United States in consonance with our constitutional guarantees of equal rights and individual freedoms and in accord with our traditional Jewish values of the dignity of the individual and the duty to welcome the stranger and treat all equally.

We believe it is necessary that these revisions include policies that deal fairly and humanely with the status of millions of undocumented aliens at present living in the United States. We urge: provision for reunification of families; provision for persons who must flee their homelands because of oppression based on race, religion, politics or economics; and reform of the Immigration and Naturalization Service for fairer and more efficient operation.