



Feminist Union hosts first rally for women's rights

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SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR

The Feminist Union (FemU) called for abortion rights, menstrual education and more in its first Women's Rights Rally at the Craighead County Courthouse.

Acting as an end-of-month event for Women's History Month, the rally also focused on exemptions for feminine products in sales and use tax and had numerous petitions circulating.

FemU president Chris Smith, a junior history and communication studies double major from Cabot, Arkansas, said the main focus of the rally was the abortion amendment, which would allow abortion to occur within the first 18 weeks and allows exceptions for rape, incest and to save the life of the mother.

"The reason we are pushing for that to be back on the ballot is because we believe that Arkansas should be able to decide as to whether or not we allow abortion," Smith said. "It should not be a select few down in Little Rock that gets to make the decision for tens and thousands of Arkansans who aren't in Little Rock."

The petitions at the rally were the Arkansas Government Disclosure Amendment of 2024 and The Arkansas Government Disclosure Act of 2024, the Arkansas Medical Marijuana Amendment of 2024, an act to exempt feminine products and diapers from sales and use tax, an initiative petition to approve or reject the Arkansas abortion amendment and the Arkansas educational rights amendment of 2024.

The abortion amendment garnered 67 signatures and AR Period Poverty gathered 103 names for their petition on menstrual education and exemption for feminine products for sales and use tax. Arkansas Educational Rights Amendment petition received 90 signatures and medical marijuana received at least 50 names on its petition.

An estimated 50 to 100 people attended, including protesters, guest speakers and political candidates. Throughout the rally, many organizations and their leaders attended for tabling, including Arkansas For Limited Government (ArLiberty), AR Kids, Arkansas Abortion Support Network and Arkansas Period Poverty Project.

Shannie Jackson, a sophomore social work major from Conway, Arkansas, leads the Arkansas Period Poverty Project.

The group aims to end stigma and period poverty through donations, education, and legislation. It collects period products and donates them to schools, churches, libraries, and boys and girls clubs.

"We are doing our petition which is to remove the sales and use taxes on period products and diapers for adults and children, as well as working on menstrual education," Jackson said.

During the rally, Emily Freeman, a FemU member, attended the rally to show her support for women's rights and to promote her message alongside Jackson's initiatives.

Freeman, a first-year psychology major from Bryant, Arkansas, joined the FemU earlier this year and heard about the rally through Smith at



Photo by Jack Douglas | Staff Photographer
(From left) Lynley Polsgrove, Emily Freeman, ClaudiaMarie Sharp and Chris Smith pose with their signs for a photo in front of the war memorial.

their previous FemU meeting, where they prepared signs.

"There's power in words. You have to talk. You have to be the voice," Freeman said. "That's the biggest thing to me, is getting out there and having people look at us and to just bring awareness."

ClaudiaMarie Sharp, a sophomore history education major from El Dorado, Arkansas, is a member of FemU and attended Saturday's rally because "numbers always help a turnout" when it comes to advocating for women's rights.

"Knowledge is power. Getting the word out there is important, and right now, we are signing petitions today and getting other people to sign the petitions, too," Sharp said.

The FemU's Women's Rights Rally ended with special guest speakers Alison Sweetman (a running candidate for Arkansas State Senate for District 20), Allison Guthrie (a Little Rock signature collector for the abortion amendment), Erika Askeland, Dean McDonald and Rebekah Pruitt (a transwoman activist).

Dean McDonald, a graduate student studying public administration from Paragould, Arkansas, spoke out on the importance of abortion access in Arkansas and endorsed/promoted Askeland.

"My rights are not on the line, I am here because Arkansas is not a safe place for my sisters, for my mother and for

whenever I have daughters. It's not safe for my non-binary and trans friends," McDonald said.

Askeland, a running candidate for Arkansas State Senate for District 20, spoke about Arkansans' right to vote for abortion in November, as well as looking at Arkansans' history with women voting.

"At this point, we are in a position where women outnumber men to who are registered and to who are actually voting. We outnumber men and it is time for us to show up to the polls," Askeland said. "We do have a near total abortion ban in Arkansas and we need to do everything we can in our power to stand up."

Eclipse glasses available in Reng Student Union

Members of the A-State community may pick up viewing glasses for the solar eclipse at the campus information desk on the second floor of the Reng Student Union this week. Pickup will be available Monday-Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., through the eclipse on the afternoon of April 8. Students are also invited to view the eclipse on Heritage Plaza Lawn with music from DJ King Vick and snow cones provided by the Student Government Association.

MAPS to host gross anatomy lab

A-State MAPS will host a gross anatomy lab demonstration, in conjunction with the Student National Medical Association at NYITCOM at A-State, from 5 - 7 p.m., Thursday. Participants will have the opportunity to observe cadavers and be taught by medical school students and professors.

Pickleball doubles league registration underway

Registration is underway for an open doubles league. Teams are allowed up to four players and matches will be on Tuesday and Thursday nights at the Red WOLF Center, beginning April 9. Registration closes on Friday.

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NEWS, 3A

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- Hermana Y Hermano supports local women-owned businesses

NEWS, 4A

- This week's puzzle
- Herald Connections: Scan to play

SPORTS, 1B

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- A-State run-ruled at Arkansas
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ARTS & E, 2B

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LIFE, 3B

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Access and Accommodations teaches American Sign Language

RACHEL RUDD
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Access and Accommodations taught American Sign Language (ASL) to students to highlight the deaf experience for Disability Awareness Week.

"People who are deaf are part of the community just like anyone else," said Dominique White, Access and Accommodation Services director. "We talk a lot about belonging and inclusion. If we're going to talk about those things, we have to live those things out and one of the ways we do that is to immerse ourselves in their culture, instead of all the time expecting them to immerse themselves in our culture."

Macie Copeland, a licensed interpreter for the state of Arkansas, led the presentation, teaching students numbers, colors, letters and more in ASL. She also gave some tips for people just starting to learn sign language.

Copeland taught students the basics of sign language, including which way a speaker's hand should be facing, as well as types of signs such as one-handed,

symmetrical and asymmetrical.

A one-handed sign uses one hand to communicate. Symmetrical signs use both hands in a symmetrical handshape and movement, while asymmetrical signs do not.

In addition, Copeland explained the difference between what is referred to as "big D Deaf" and "little d deaf."

"Everyone's looking at 'little d deaf' the person thinks there's an impairment, but there's not an issue there. They typically may go out in the regular world with the rest of us and don't use sign language," Copeland said. "Whenever we are looking at Deaf, the 'big D Deaf,' they're part of the culture. They went to Deaf school, they learned the language, they use the language, it is everything about their lives."

Copeland added that for students just starting to learn sign language, to have a conversation a new speaker can use gestures, spell out any words they don't know, or look up images on their phone.

Gabrielle Brown, a sophomore nursing student from Marion, Arkansas, said what she learned in the event would help



Photo by Rachel Rudd | Editor-in-Chief
Macie Copeland (right) teaches letters of the alphabet to students in attendance.

her with a career in nursing. "Just being able to do the bare minimum can make somebody's day so just saying, 'How are you?' to somebody who is deaf, that could be so awesome. If I can do that for somebody, that'd be cool," Brown said. "People actually live lives and they can't communicate the same way I can. Even though we're different, it shouldn't be a barrier."

Access and Accommodations

hosts Disability Awareness Week twice a year, once in the fall semester and once in the spring. White said the office had been trying to host an ASL learning event previously, but was unable to get an interpreter to attend. However, this semester the schedules finally worked out to allow Copeland to attend.

"We try to survey our student population at least once every two years. On that

survey, we ask them questions about what they'd like to see," White said. "We had a couple of people that just emailed us about being interested in sign language. It's something that I know a bit about, but not as much as I would like to know about in the position that I'm in. I was just interested in learning."