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Unmarried Women and Pay Inequity

Unmarried Women Sounding the Alarm on Pay Inequity

To: Interested Parties

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America is changing. It is becoming more diverse, not only racially and ethnically, but also in terms of how families and households are organized. A majority of American households are now headed by an unmarried person and nearly half (47 percent) of American women live without a spouse. The population of unmarried women represents one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the country. Their agenda, therefore, is *our* agenda and issues they care about can no longer be ignored by politicians in Washington or at the local level. A case in point is the pay equity issue.

April 24, 2007 marked Pay Equity Day. This annual reminder shows just how far into the year the average woman will have to work before earning as much as a man earns by December 31 of the previous year. Several presidential candidates including Senator Hillary Clinton, Senator Barack Obama, and former senator John Edwards acknowledged this important day by pledging their ongoing support for equal pay. Many elected officials are beginning to call for passing legislation such as the Paycheck Fairness Act so that Pay Equity Day will be removed from the calendar once and for all.

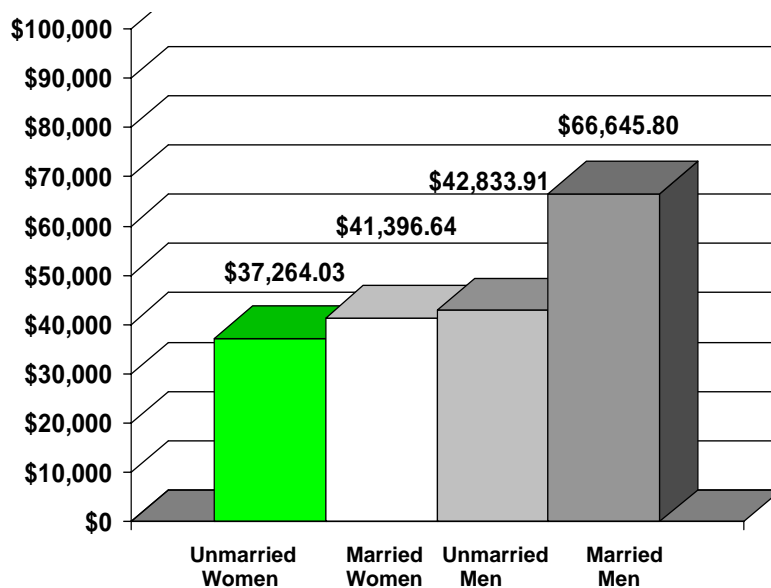
Women of all backgrounds feel the pinch of pay inequity but unmarried women are perhaps the most vulnerable group as they are wholly responsible for themselves and in many cases for their families as well. As the gender wage gap persists unmarried women are not taking the issue lightly and are heralding the call for equal pay. This activism dovetails with other calls for fundamental change in the direction of this country, including a new strategy in Iraq, equality in health care, provision of health insurance, tuition credit for low income people, and comprehensive health insurance for uninsured children. Bottom line: unmarried women are looking for changes that will allow them to protect their well-being and the well-being of their families.

Unmarried Women Impacted Most by Pay Inequity

This year the Bureau of Labor Statistics found women make on average 77 cents for every dollar a man earns. It is projected that a woman will lose approximately \$250,000 over the course of her career due to pay inequity. The wage disparity not only increases women's poverty but it also diminishes women's spending power and threatens their retirement security.

The numbers are worse among unmarried women. Compared to married women, married men, and unmarried men, unmarried women have the lowest mean personal earnings at \$37,264 and only make 56 cents for every dollar a married man earns.¹ Since women are likely to have lower earnings in general, single mothers are twice as likely to live below the federal poverty line as single fathers. Unfortunately, the pay gap only worsens for unmarried women as they enter retirement. Unmarried women entering the workforce today can anticipate receiving significantly less retirement income than their male counterparts.

Mean Personal Yearly Earnings based on Marital Status



Time for Change

With roughly half of unmarried women making less than \$30,000 a year it not surprising that pay equity is at the top of the agenda for unmarried women. These women are vulnerable to financial crisis, especially if they are single mothers, and the number of unmarried women who are financially responsible for their households is growing. According to a Pew Research

¹ Based on 2006 Current Population survey from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Labor

Center survey, nearly half of unmarried women say they are “just meeting the basic living expenses” compared to 27 percent of married women.²

Naturally then, pay equity sits near the top of these women’s issue agenda. In a January, 2007 WVWV survey of 1,000 unmarried women, pay equity ranked at the top of vote-driving issues. Clearly, the health care issue also remains a top priority and their interest in both these issues reflects an inherent economic instability in this population that broadly defines their political approach.

Pay Equity tops the Agenda for Unmarried Women

Now I am going to read you some things that the Congress may take up this year. After each one, please tell me whether it would make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely, no more likely, or less likely to support a candidate for Congress.

	Much More likely
Enact legislation to ensure that women receive equal pay for equal work by improving legal protections for women who face wage discrimination	73
Fully fund the State Children’s Health Insurance Program to ensure that virtually all children have health insurance	70
Expand health coverage so a woman who becomes pregnant and does not have health insurance can receive prenatal care, so babies can be born healthier	65
Encourage states to develop universal health care plans, where the government, employers, providers and the uninsured share the responsibility so that every person has health insurance	61
Increased federal loans and tuition tax credits to help low income people afford education beyond high school, including community college, technical training and four-year college programs	60

Conclusion

Unmarried women are sending the message that pay inequity will not be tolerated and they expect elected leaders to take legislative action on this issue. To be sure, this issue does not cloud out other concerns in this population. We have already written about unmarried women’s transcendent interest in a new policy in Iraq. As noted, the health care issue can be every bit as powerful, if not more so. For example, in 2004 when unmarried women were asked what would improve their lives the number one issue was more affordable health insurance at 56% followed by equal pay at 36%.³ However, as a basic issue of both justice and, for many of these women, economic survival, the pay equity issue is an integral part of their agenda and definition of change.

² Pew Research Center Survey of 2000 adults conducted October 18, 2006-November 9, 2006 “Most Americans Moderately Upbeat About Family Finances in 2007”. Last accessed May 19, 2007

³ Women’s Voices. Women Vote 16 State Survey of 1067 unmarried women adults conducted November 2-4, 2004