Staging the Compelling Question

Featured Source | Source A: Barack Obama, presidential proclamation, National Equal Pay Day, April 7, 2014


NATIONAL EQUAL PAY DAY, 2014

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

Throughout our Nation's history, brave women have torn down barriers so their daughters might one day enjoy the same rights, same chances, and same freedoms as their sons. Despite tremendous progress, too many women are entering the workforce to find their mothers' and grandmothers' victories undermined by the unrealized promise of equal pay for equal work. On National Equal Pay Day, we mark how far into the new year women would have to work to earn the same as men did in the previous year, and we recommit to making equal pay a reality.

Women make up nearly half of our Nation's workforce and are primary breadwinners in 4 in 10 American households with children under age 18. Yet from boardrooms to classrooms to factory floors, their talent and hard work are not reflected on the payroll. Today, women still make only 77 cents to every man's dollar, and the pay gap is even wider for women of color. Over her lifetime, the average American woman can expect to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars to the earnings gap, a significant blow to both women and their families. In an increasingly competitive global marketplace, we must use all of America's talent to its fullest potential — because when women succeed, America succeeds.

More than half a century after President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act, my Administration remains devoted to improving our equal pay laws and closing the pay gap between women and men. From signing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act to establishing the Equal Pay Task Force, I have strengthened pay discrimination protections and cracked down on violations of equal pay laws. And I will continue to push the Congress to step up and pass the Paycheck Fairness Act, because this fight will not be over until our sisters, our mothers, and our daughters can earn a living equal to their efforts.

The time has passed for us to recognize that what determines success should not be our gender, but rather our talent, our drive, and the strength of our contributions. So, today, let us breathe new life into our founding ideals. Let us march toward a day when, in the land of liberty and opportunity, there are no limits on our daughters' dreams and no glass ceilings on the value of their work.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 8, 2014, as National Equal Pay Day. I call upon all Americans to recognize the full value of women's skills and their significant contributions to the labor force, acknowledge the injustice of wage inequality, and join efforts to achieve equal pay.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this seventh day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand fourteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-eighth.

BARACK OBAMA

Staging the Compelling Question

**Featured Source**

**Source B:** Carrie Lukas, opinion piece about the gender wage gap, “It’s Time That We End the Equal Pay Myth,” Forbes.com, April 16, 2012

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**It’s Time That We End the Equal Pay Myth**

By Carrie Lukas

Holidays are sometimes moved for the convenience of the calendar. Each year, Americans celebrate George Washington’s birthday on the third Monday of February — not on his actual birthday, which is February 22 — to ensure that the public has a long weekend. Yet the logic behind declaring Tuesday, April 17, “Equal Pay Day” as the feminist movement has dubbed it, is increasingly flawed.

Equal Pay Day is supposed to represent the day that women have finally earned enough to make up for last year’s wage gap. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, full-time working women earned 81 percent of what full-time working men earned in 2010 (the most recent data available), leaving a “gap” of 19 percent between the sexes. But that means to make up for that “under-payment,” women would have to work through March 10. So we are celebrating Equal Pay Day more than a month late. Yet the mistaken logic of Equal Pay Day goes deeper than this simple calculation. Equal Pay Day presumes that the difference between men and women’s average earnings stems from discrimination, as President Obama suggested in his official proclamation last year: “I call upon all Americans to recognize the full value of women’s skills and their significant contributions to the labor force, acknowledge the injustice of wage discrimination, and join efforts to achieve equal pay.”

The wage gap statistic, however, doesn’t compare two similarly situated co-workers of different sexes, working in the same industry, performing the same work, for the same number of hours a day. It merely reflects the median earnings of all men and women classified as full-time workers.

The Department of Labor’s Time Use Survey, for example, finds that the average full-time working man spends 8.14 hours a day on the job, compared to 7.75 hours for the full-time working woman. Employees who work more likely earn more. Men working five percent longer than women alone explains about one-quarter of the wage gap.

There are numerous other factors that affect pay. Most fundamentally, men and women tend to gravitate toward different industries. Feminists may charge that women are socialized into lower-paying sectors of the economy. But women considering the decisions they’ve made likely have a different view. Women tend to seek jobs with regular hours, more comfortable conditions, little travel, and greater personal fulfillment. Often times, women are willing to trade higher pay for jobs with other characteristics that they find attractive.

Men, in contrast, often take jobs with less desirable characteristics in pursuit of higher pay. They work long hours and overnight shifts. They tar roofs in the sun, drive trucks across the country, toil in sewer systems, stand watch as prison guards, and risk injury on fishing boats, in coal mines, and in production plants. Such jobs pay more than others because otherwise no one would want to do them.

Unsurprisingly, children play an important role in men and women’s work-life decisions. Simply put, women who have children or plan to have children tend to be willing to trade higher pay for more kid-friendly positions. In contrast, men with children typically seek to earn more money in order to support children, sometimes taking on more hours and less attractive positions to do so.
Academics can debate why men and women make these different choices. The important takeaway, however, is that there are many reasons that men and women on average earn different amounts. It’s a mistake to assume that “wage gap” statistics reflect on-the-job discrimination.

Women have many reasons to celebrate today. Women are increasingly taking on leadership roles in businesses around the world. Technology is increasingly creating more flexible work arrangements, creating new options for parents to combine work and family life. Women are excelling academically (earning far more college degrees than men). Given that the economy tends to place a premium on education, we can expect women to contribute (and earn!) more in the future.

Feminists may protest, but American women aren’t the victims of a sexist economy. It’s time to declare an end to the Equal Pay Day myth.

Carrie Lukas is the managing director of the Independent Women’s Forum.

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