



National Council

Of Women's Organizations

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NCWO's Presidential Transition Policy Recommendations

The National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) presents four areas for immediate action and attention below: economic security, health, education and training, and civil/human rights. In each area we outline key facts on the status of women, goals for the new Administration and Congress to address, and recommended actions. (Sources for the facts on women are available online at http://www.hbelkins.com/NCWO/NCWO_Handbook_Final_spreads.pdf, and at www.womensorganizations.org.)

Economic Security

Facts: According to a recent report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), women's total earnings over their prime working years average only 38% of what prime-age men earn due to a combination of lower pay, more part-time work, and time out of the workforce to care for children. In a single year's time, the typical working woman in 2007 earned \$35,102, while the typical working man earned \$45,113.

Collectively, women lose over \$200 billion annually in wages due to pay inequity. A 25-year-old woman who works full-time year-round for the next 40 years will earn \$523,000 less than the average 25-year-old man, if current wage patterns continue. About 60% of the improvement in the wage gap during the last 15 years can be attributed to the decline in men's real earnings.

The U.S. has the greatest percentage of elderly women in poverty of all the major industrialized nations. Older women are twice as likely as elderly men to be living near or below the poverty line.

A majority of employed mothers (53%) cannot take days off to care for their sick children.

Three in five preschoolers have mothers in the labor force. Yet, mothers have been earning two-thirds of what fathers have been earning for the past several years, whether children were preschool or school-aged.

Goal 1: Make the U.S. economic recovery plans work for working women and their families, who are among those hardest hit by the downturn.

Actions: Enact stimulus legislation that addresses families' real-life economic insecurities, through provisions like unemployment insurance extension, food stamp assistance, heating assistance, and aid for states struggling to fund their programs. Ensure that job creation programs recruit women for nontraditional jobs and invest in areas where women do work.

Goal 2: Ensure that women receive equal pay for equal work and that equal pay laws are fully enforced.

Actions: Enact the Paycheck Fairness Act, to strengthen enforcement of the Equal Pay Act. Enact the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which clarifies that a pay discrimination claim accrues each time a discriminatory pay decision is made.

Goal 3: Provide temporary safety nets to women, who are more likely to be poor and sole caregivers for their families, during periods of unemployment and economic declines.

Actions: Expand unemployment insurance eligibility and assistance to ensure that part-time and low-wage workers, who are disproportionately women, qualify for benefit receipt.

Goal 4: Update our nation's workplace standards to ensure that workers can meet the dual demands of work and family without risking their family's financial security.

Actions: Enact legislation to guarantee a minimum number of paid sick days such as the Healthy Families Act, provide paid family and medical leave similar to the Family Leave Insurance Act, and expand access to the Family and Medical Leave Act.

Goal 5: Ensure that poor women have opportunities to improve their economic well-being and the future of their children.

Actions: Freeze time limits on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefit receipt during the current economic crisis. In preparation for TANF reauthorization in 2010, negotiate expanded time limits for benefit receipt, expanded time allotments for vocational training and education from 12 months to at least 24 months, and better systems for ensuring that community college one-stop shops are serving TANF recipients and guiding women toward jobs with good pay and potential career growth.

Goal 6: Ensure that tax and budget policy center on human needs.

Actions: Support a progressive tax structure that ensures sufficient revenues to fully fund critical public programs like Social Security, SCHIP, and Medicaid; that requires corporations and the wealthy to pay their fair share of taxes by closing tax loopholes; and that expands supports for working women and families through the EITC. Support a progressive budget that prioritizes meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged by fully funding programs like food stamps, WIC, SCHIP, Medicaid, child care assistance, job training, and others, and refusing to place caps on funding for domestic discretionary programs and entitlement programs.

Goal 7: Protect workers' right to choose to form a union without the threat of being fired.

Actions: Enact the Employee Free Choice Act giving employees a voice at work to advocate for workplace standards and higher wages.

Goal 8: Expand access to affordable, high-quality child care and early education.

Actions: Enact legislation to increase funds and access to child care assistance, Head Start, and early education programs; provide funding for quality rating systems; and improve child care health and safety requirements.

Goal 9: Promote the economic security and safety of victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

Actions: Enact legislation to provide emergency leave, unemployment insurance and insurance non-discrimination for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Health

Facts: Right now, 17 million women under the age of 65 are either uninsured or have been uninsured in the past year. Minority women are more likely to be uninsured than women as a whole; 38% of Hispanic women, and 34% of Native-American women report being uninsured at least some time in the past year, compared to 21% of white women.

About one in three women who are injured during a rape or physical assault require medical care. More than half of all rapes (54%) of women occur before age 18, and 22% of these rapes occur before age 12.

Women are often less able to afford insurance or care because of pay disparities over the lifespan, have unstable coverage when under a spouse's plan, pay higher premiums in the individual market, lack access to coverage based on a greater prevalence of preexisting conditions, and pay higher out of pocket costs than men.

Goal 1: Tailor health care to women's needs and circumstances.

Actions: Ensure women's specific medical needs and circumstances are considered when crafting new policy to make health care more affordable and accessible to all. Ensure that all federal health agencies, including the FDA, CDC and NIH, prioritize science over politics and are committed to women's health issues.

Goal 2: Protect access to safe and legal abortion.

Actions: Pass the Freedom of Choice Act, to guarantee the right to choose whether and when to become a parent for future generations. Repeal the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funds to be used for abortions, affecting many low-income and military women even in cases of rape or incest.

Goal 3: Ensure that all women have access to comprehensive reproductive health services, including birth control, counseling and information about abortion.

Actions: Issue an executive order rescinding the “global gag rule,” which currently forces foreign recipients of U.S. family planning aid to stop using their own funds for legal abortion-related services, counseling and information or to advocate for safe abortion laws and policies. Ensure that all health insurance covers women’s access to birth control and HPV vaccination.

Goal 4: Prioritize prevention strategies that promote comprehensive and medically accurate sex education.

Actions: De-fund abstinence-only sex education programs by abolishing Title V and CBAE funding, and reforming the Adolescent Family Life Act. Establish a federal funding stream for comprehensive, accurate, and age-appropriate sex education which helps young people reduce their risk of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS and HPV.

Education and Training

Facts: Women earned 57% of the B.A. degrees awarded in the U.S. in 2005, 59% of M.A. and professional degrees, and 49% of doctoral degrees. However, higher education for women has not yet translated into equal earnings with men. In 2005, women with an A.A. degree earned as much as men with a H.S. diploma and women with a B.A. degree earned just under what men with an A.A. degree earned.

Women are still severely under-represented in certain fields – women earning only 22% of bachelor degrees in computer/information science and 18% in engineering. Fewer girls than boys enroll in computer science classes, feel self-confident with computers, and use computers outside the classroom. However, prior to the fourth grade, studies show that girls are quite interested with this technology.

By the end of 2008, there will be 1.3 million new technology workers and 65% of the economy will be based on technology by the year 2010.

Goal 1: Strengthen Title IX protections for non-discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs.

Actions: Continue to ensure women’s participation in athletics by rescinding the Additional Clarification to Title IX issued by the Department of Education in March 2005; passing the High School Athletics Accountability Act to better measure athletics participation and expenditures at the high school level; and rescinding single-sex education regulations issued in 2006 that expand opportunities for public single-sex education beyond the purpose of remedying existing or past discrimination.

Goal 2: Ensure that women in nontraditional careers such as construction, emerging technology and engineering and are not unfairly left out of employment in transportation, cyber security and infrastructure projects.

Actions: Set numerical goals for hiring women to work on federally-funded transportation and infrastructure projects exceeding or at least in proportion to their representation in the appropriate fields. For the construction industry, require the Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs to enforce the current DOL employment goal of 6.9 percent women in federal contracts of \$10,000 or more.

Goal 3: Increase the accessibility and affordability of postsecondary education, including career and technical education, for all students.

Actions: Fully fund the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act and continue to increase the maximum available Pell Grant.

Goal 4: Ensure that programs that promote Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) and Green jobs target women and other underrepresented populations for careers.

Actions: Require that all legislation authorizing and funding STEM and Green job growth set ambitious goals for women's recruitment, training, and retention in these fields.

Goal 5: Make the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) more accessible to low-income women and ensure that WIA promotes employment at self-sufficiency wages and nontraditional careers for women.

Actions: In WIA reauthorization, set aside part of WIA funding for work supports, such as child care and transportation assistance, that allow low-income women to make the most of the system. Require that localities spend a certain percentage of funds to train women for nontraditional careers. Also, amend WIA performance measures to eliminate disincentives against serving less-skilled participants, such as TANF recipients.

Civil/Human Rights

Facts: While the number of women in Congress has tripled since 1985, the U.S. still ranks 66th in the world in terms of women's representation. Some countries with a higher percentage of women legislators than the U.S. include: Rwanda (6), Cuba (7), Germany (15), Afghanistan (22) and Mexico (28).

Two to four million American women are battered each year by their husbands and partners. Women are ten times more likely to be a victim of domestic violence.

Goal 1: Protect the civil rights of women and girls.

Actions: Name judicial and political nominees and appointees who will protect the fundamental freedoms and civil rights of women, including equal protection under the law and a woman's right to choose. Re-establish the White House Office on Women's Issues and elevate to Cabinet level.

Goal 2: Support legal and economic parity for and public recognition of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) relationships.

Actions: Block constitutional amendments to ban gay marriage.

Goal 3: Continue to work to eliminate discrimination against women here in the U.S. and abroad.

Actions: Enact the Women's Equality Amendment (WEA) and ratify the United Nations Convention for the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Goal 4: Improve access to immigration relief and accompanying protection for immigrant women.

Actions: DHS should publish rules on not yet implemented provisions of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Trafficking Victims Protection Act and their subsequent reauthorizations including an interim rule on the immigration provisions in the VAWA 2005.

Goal 5: Hold the Department of Defense and the branches of the military responsible for ending the widespread pattern of rape and sexual assault of military and related personnel, particularly women, by fellow service members.

Actions: Enact legislation, such as the Military Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Act, which will fully illuminate the problem, protect victims' rights, punish perpetrators, and hold the Department of Defense accountable for preventing these crimes

Goal 6: Improve the involvement of women in decision making roles to protect the rights of women in media and technology practices, strategies and legislation, including appointing a female Chief Technology Officer (CTO).

Actions: Enact and ensure legislation, such as the Wireless Internet Nationwide for Families Act, Public Safety Broadband Authorization Act, and the Connect The Nation Act which should include protection for women and girls against all forms of discrimination and abuse with the use of technology (i.e., cyberstalking/bullying and digital voyeurism).