



Wider Opportunities for Women

Wider Opportunities for Women Endorses Recovery Package

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(WASHINGTON, DC) -- Wider Opportunities for Women strongly supports the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that will be debated on the House floor this week. "With every day, economic conditions worsen and the struggle to take care of basic needs grows greater for women and their families," said Executive Director Joan Kuriansky.

For over 40 years, WOW has worked to increase the skills of women and girls and open career pathways that would lead them to economic security through good paying jobs with benefits. WOW's Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (FESS) and Elder Economic Security Initiative (EESI) demonstrate how much income families and elders need to make ends meet on a monthly basis in the local marketplace. "At no time in the last three decades, has it been more difficult for more families and seniors to meet these basic income standards," said Kuriansky, pointing to recent job loss data and the continuing high cost of food, housing and health care.

The bill before the House promises to save or create over three million jobs. Most of them will be in construction, retail trade, leisure and hospitality and manufacturing, according to a White House analysis. These are industries that employ large numbers of low- and middle-income workers who are most likely to spend all or most of what they earn on basic goods and services, thus stimulating the economy further. WOW will continue to work to ensure that women will have fair access to the estimated 678,000 high-paying jobs that the bill will create in construction through a myriad of infrastructure and "green job" investments. We are pleased that the bill provides \$80 million for the Department of Labor to bolster enforcement of worker protection laws and regulations, including policies against gender discrimination in contracting.

The \$80 billion the bill provides for a state fiscal stabilization fund will preserve many state and local office jobs held by women while also maintaining jobs in health care, education and other social services where women are disproportionately employed. The bill allocates 61 percent of this fund for education based on the state's school-age population. In addition, the workforce development system will add up to 1 million summer jobs for youth up to age 24. And jobs will be created to modernize and repair public housing, to apply green technologies in the construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing under the HOME Investment Partnership Program and to weatherize of senior, disabled and Section 8 housing. Over \$4 billion is provided for a new Neighborhood Stabilization program to enable communities to purchase and rehabilitate foreclosed, vacant properties for affordable housing.

If adopted, the bill will enable 24,000 older workers to earn income from positions added through Community Service Employment for Older Americans. The bill's aid to older workers includes a temporary extension of COBRA coverage for those who are 55 and older, or have worked for an employer for 10 or more years, who would be allowed to continue to pay their own health insurance until they become eligible for Medicare. (This is separate from the subsidized COBRA and Medicaid coverage the bill allows for workers involuntarily terminated from their jobs after Sept. 1, 2008.) The legislation provides for one extra Supplemental Security Income payment in 2009 for low income seniors and disabled individuals and increases funds to help the Social Security Administration process a large backlog of disability and retirement claims.

Of significant benefit to working women is the bill's extension of Unemployment Insurance to part-time, low-income workers, including those who have to leave their jobs due to compelling family circumstances such as a spouse's mandatory transfer or to avoid domestic violence. Incentives will be given to states to modernize current rules that exclude recent work history in determining eligibility. These provisions will benefit women who comprise 70 percent of part-time workers and who tend to have more intermittent work histories due to family responsibilities.

Workers whose earnings are less than what is needed to meet basic expenses will be aided by in the new Make Work Pay tax credit and expanded refundable Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. The bill removes the repayment requirement for the \$7,500 tax credit for first-time homebuyers enacted last year.

The bill increases support for education and training to make our workforce more competitive over the long-term. It increases funds for the Workforce Investment Act by \$4 billion and provides \$600 million more for training primary care physicians and nurses. In addition to emphasizing green job training through WIA, the bill calls for worker training in the development of the smart electricity grid.

Students pursuing technical careers in Community Colleges should benefit from state fiscal stabilization funds channeled through local education agencies that may be used to support programs under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. Under the House bill, these funds are to be used "in such a way as to mitigate the need to raise tuition and fees for in-state students." The maximum Pell grant will be raised by \$500, and a new American Opportunity education tax credit will provide taxpayers with a credit of up to \$2,500 of the cost of tuition, books and related expenses. Forty percent of the latter would be refundable, making it available to low-income taxpayers.

Further assistance to low-income workers will come in the form of work and income support, including through an estimated 400,000 new slots for children through the Child Care Development Block Grant, Head Start and Early Start; additional funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program; and nutrition programs for children and seniors, along with a 13 percent boost to food stamps.

The bill provides emergency contingency funds through 2010 to help states accommodate increased TANF caseloads and expenditures for short-term assistance or subsidized employment. It also restores funding for Child Support Enforcement, which will enable the collection of monetary support owed to families. The bill adds \$1.5 billion for Emergency Shelter Grants to provide short-term rental assistance and stabilization services for families.

The House recovery package properly recognizes that our best investments are in our people. When combined with a modern, efficient infrastructure, the skills, health and well-being of our people will restore the economy. Investments in people can occur even while waiting a few months for some infrastructure projects to get off the ground.

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