



Wider Opportunities for Women

A Women's Agenda for Job Creation

December 2009

Congress and the Administration must act promptly to counter the dire state of joblessness in America. Public concern is mounting over the 10.2 percent unemployment rate recorded in October.¹ Important attention has been focused on the disproportionately higher rates among African Americans, Latinos, youth and recent college graduates. Many of those unemployed workers are women whose different needs in finding work are being ignored. A strategic national plan to create jobs must target the wide range of Americans who are unemployed and underemployed, and focus on those jobs that will help

communities and the country thrive.

Quick Facts:

- ❖ 10.2% unemployment rate in October
- ❖ 3.3 million unmarried women unemployed in October
- ❖ 12.6% of women head of household unemployed in October

A total of 3.3 million unmarried women were unemployed in October. According to the Center for American Progress (CAP), the October unemployment rate was 12.6 percent for female single heads of households.² Most of these 1.1 million women heads of households were mothers, caring for an estimated 1.9 million children. Unmarried women (and men) tend to be younger, have less education, and be more racially and ethnically diverse than married women (and men). In

November, the unemployment rate for female heads of household was 14.7 percent for African American women and 11.1 percent for Hispanic women.

The CAP analysis also noted an 85 percent increase in the number of unmarried women who describe themselves as discouraged workers who have given up looking for work. In 2008, 16.9 million children lived in mother-only households.³ The rate of *married discouraged* female workers rose at an even greater rate -- 174 percent. This is worrisome as increasingly married couple families across all income

¹ While the rate for November announced Dec. 4 inched down to 10.0 percent, Economist Allen L. Sinai, founder of Decision Economics, told the *New York Times*, "It's going to be bleak for years." The rate for women heads of household also declined, to 11.4 percent. November data are not seasonally adjusted, so do not reflect holiday hiring.

² Liz Weiss, Heather Boushey, "[The Recession Brings Higher Unemployment to Unmarried Women](#)," Center for American Progress, Nov. 6, 2009.

³ 2008 Current Population Survey, Table C9.

levels depend on wives' income for support. In the bottom one-fifth of the income distribution of all families, 57.7 percent of working wives in 2007 brought home as much or more than their husbands.⁴

Unemployment, underemployment and low wages take a tremendous toll on children, their health and education. Food insecurity data released recently by the Department of Agriculture showed that one in three women raising children alone struggled to provide sufficient food for their families in 2008, even before the recession deepened to its current level.⁵ The agency also noted that most families in which food is scarce contain at least one adult with a full-time job, suggesting that low wages as well as job scarcity is a problem.

This diverse population of women – older women, disabled women, women veterans, women of color, women who speak English as a second language, survivors of domestic violence, and displaced homemakers – must all benefit from jobs that are created. Wider Opportunities for Women urges that Congress and the Administration consider the following proposals as they search for remedies to the nation's unemployment:

Proposals for Solving the Nation's High Unemployment

Among Women

- ❖ Refundable tax credits for new nonprofit jobs
- ❖ Save jobs in state and local government
- ❖ Inclusive hiring in infrastructure projects
- ❖ Provide stipends and subsidized wages to adults and youth in job training programs
- ❖ Increase investment in adult education and skill development
- ❖ Create opportunities for self-employment
- ❖ Raise the minimum wage
- ❖ Stimulate consumer demand for basic necessities

Provide refundable tax credits for new nonprofit jobs. Nonprofits, which the law already recognizes as serving charitable and educational purposes, have been badly hurt by the recession as contributions and grants have fallen off.⁶ The federal government should subsidize the hiring of new workers in nonprofits serving a wide array of civic and community priorities such as child and dependent care, school modernization and repair, tutoring and mentoring, services for victims of domestic violence, outreach to the homeless, unemployed and individuals needing medical services.⁷ Such jobs should pay prevailing

⁴ Heather Boushey and Ann O'Leary, [The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Changes Everything](#), Center for American Progress, 2009, p. 37

⁵ ["Record Number of Americans Struggle to Get Enough to Eat,"](#) *The Washington Post*, Nov. 17, 2009.

⁶ "Down but Not Defeated: Results of GuideStar's Eight Annual Nonprofit Economic Survey," *GuidesStar Newsletter*, December 2009.

⁷ Other possible jobs include community financial literacy programs, after-school enrichment programs, home visitation services for new parents and isolated adults, reintegration services for ex-offenders, community center programs for seniors, physical fitness activities, improvement of public spaces and facilities, preservation of historic landmarks, arts programs, and management services connected with foreclosed and affordable housing.

wages leading to family self-sufficiency and be targeted to disadvantaged communities and workers with a prohibition against displacing public employees.⁸ Costly and time consuming grant administration could be avoided by using a refundable tax credit tied to nonprofits' payroll systems for new hires only. Women are a majority of the nonprofit workforce and would stand to gain jobs from a nonprofit tax credit.

Save jobs in state and local government and especially community colleges. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that states and local governments may have to enact budgets laying off as many as 900,000 employees beginning next February if the governments do not receive new fiscal relief.⁹ According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, women comprise 45.5 percent of full-time and 55.5 percent of part-time state and local employees. Layoffs on this scale will reduce the ability to provide human services at the very time they are needed most, including to process applications for unemployment benefits, SNAP (food stamps) and other assistance. Particularly ironic has been the phenomenon of community colleges laying off teachers at a time when unemployed adults and young people are turning to community colleges in record numbers to build new academic and vocational skills. Fiscal assistance to preserve public employee jobs should be provided, as was done in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, through the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (the federal share of Medicaid) and the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund for education and other key services. Another possible vehicle is the Community Development Block Grant, which goes directly to the local level to fund a variety of public services and community development projects.

Invest in the country's infrastructure, the green economy and women. Historically, women, minorities and other low-income populations have been underrepresented in the construction workforce where earnings can be 20 to 30 percent higher than in occupations traditionally held by women. A large portion of the 2009 ARRA funds for infrastructure programs has yet to be spent, however to the extent that any new funds are allocated for infrastructure development, whether in transportation, green jobs, weatherization, or school repair, fund recipients should be required to maintain inclusive hiring through qualified apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs serving underrepresented populations. Climate change legislation that passed the House and is pending in the Senate contains a Green Construction Careers Demonstration that can serve as a model.

Provide stipends and subsidized wages for youth and adults while they develop job skills in high-growth sectors. Wage subsidies should be enhanced through the Department of Labor's Workforce Investment Act programs for youth employment, on-the-job and customized training with private

⁸ Self-sufficiency is the level income needed to meet the basic costs needs of food, shelter, transportation, child care, health care and taxes in the local marketplace depending on family size and age of children.

⁹ [Iris J. Lav, Nicholas Johnson and Elizabeth McNichol, "Additional Federal Fiscal Relief Needed to Help States Address Recession's Impact,"](#) Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Nov. 19, 2009.

employers, transitional jobs, internships and try-out employment. Subsidized on-the-job training in the private sector should be tied to a commitment to make the job permanent at family-sustaining wages. The ARRA Emergency Fund for the TANF block grant, which includes subsidized employment programs, should be extended through 2012. Stipends for needy single parents attending community college would help them support their families while upgrading their skills.

Increase investment in adult education and skill development. To equip women and all workers for the jobs in the high-growth sectors of the 21st century, it is vital that Congress increase resources for basic skills education and job training. Highest priority should be given to reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act and enacting the American Graduation Initiative, the Women & Workforce Investment for Nontraditional Jobs Act (Women WIN Jobs Act) and the Pathways Advancing Career Training (PACT) and the SECTORS Acts. Women, who are a majority of those served by the workforce system, will be more likely to obtain career pathways leading to economic security if all levels of education and job training are aligned and fully resourced, and if the necessary support services and career counseling are in place to help them obtain the credentials necessary for career advancement. In this way, the system will serve the needs of women at all skill levels while supplying business with the workforce it needs to innovate.

Promote self-employment and small business development. Among local business start-ups, microenterprises in the U.S. represent 18 percent of all private U.S. employment. Last year, ARRA provided \$50 million for the Small Business Administration's (SBA) microloan program, which provides funding for qualified nonprofit community-based lenders who, in turn, provide microloans of up to \$35,000 to local entrepreneurs and small business owners along with technical assistance and training. As a pathway for unemployed and underemployed women, microenterprise development generates income, builds assets and supports local economies. Moreover, research suggests that women tend to hire women and to consider potential as much as skills, increasing the likelihood that these female employees will find pathways into the middle class and develop assets that will pass across generations. The SBA program should be extended, along with the Commerce Department's Women's Business Centers and Minority Business Development Program.

Raise the minimum wage. Increasing wages at the bottom of the income scale will stimulate the creation or preservation of jobs as low-income workers spend their increased earnings in local stores and businesses. Last summer marked the final installment of the minimum wage hike that took place over three consecutive years. No further increases are authorized without specific action. Women would be the largest group of beneficiaries from a minimum wage increase since they hold 63 percent of all minimum wage jobs.¹⁰

¹⁰ Kai Filion, [Fact sheet for 2009 minimum wage increase—Minimum Wage Issue Guide](#), Economic Policy Institute, July 20, 2009.

Create jobs by stimulating consumer demand for basic necessities. According to economists, putting cash in the pockets of those with the lowest income has the largest multiplier effect of all job creation strategies. One of the highest rates is the \$1.74 in economic growth for every \$1.00 spent in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps. Elements of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act should be expanded and continued through 2012 to help unemployed workers and their families cover basic needs as long as unemployment remains at record levels. These include unemployment benefits and COBRA subsidies, currently due to expire at the end of this month; the \$250 payment for seniors, disabled individuals and others not in the labor force; increased Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits; and the refundable Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit.

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Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) works nationally and in its home community of Washington, DC to build pathways to economic security for America's families, women, and girls. WOW has a distinctive history in changing the landscape of women and work through successful efforts to strengthen federal policies that fund career and technical education training, prepare welfare recipients for the workforce, and strengthen workforce development to equip workers for high wage/high demand jobs. Today, WOW convenes the National Coalition on Women, Jobs and Job Training and is recognized nationally for its skills training models, technical assistance, and advocacy for women workers.