



**Wider Opportunities for Women**

## **Women's Economic Security across the Generations**

### **A Workforce Agenda for Women in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress**

Investment in women's skills and economic opportunity is a key to national growth, the reduction of poverty and the well-being of future generations. The quality of a woman's employment through her working years underpins her quality of life in retirement.

#### **Getting to Self-Sufficiency**

- **Set household "economic self-sufficiency" as a goal of federal adult education and skill development programs.** For example:
  - An increase in the self-sufficiency of training participants was stated as a goal of both the Green Jobs Act, that passed as part of the House energy bill (H.R. 3221) this year, and the Workforce Reinvestment Act (S. 1021) reauthorization bill that passed the Senate in 2006.
  - "Self-sufficiency" in these bills is specified as "the income needs of families, by family size, the number and ages of children in the family, and sub-state geographical considerations."
  - The Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-270) adopted self-sufficiency as a potential performance indicator.
- **Make gender parity in employment a goal of national investments** in energy, transportation, infrastructure and similar programs that generate employment in high-paying, high-growth and high-demand occupations.
- **Increase funding for WIA and the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations program (WANTO)** that provides grants to organizations addressing women's specific needs for training and preparation for employment in the construction trades and similar high paying fields.
- **Establish new career ladders in occupations traditionally deemed "women's work."** For example, the Workplace Balancing Act (H.R. 2392), introduced by Rep. Lynn Woolsey, would promote the retention of committed, qualified child care providers by providing them health benefits and financial assistance to improve their educational qualifications. H.R. 2392 would also finance the construction and renovation of child care facilities, creating jobs in the construction trades.
- **Pass the Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act (S. 1843) that reverses the recent Supreme Court ruling** by reinstating the paycheck accrual rule. The ruling requires complaints to be filed within 180 days of the employer's first discriminatory decision, thus negating the discrimination that continues paycheck after paycheck.

#### **Improve the Workforce Investment Act to Develop Women's Skills for Quality Jobs**

- **Amend WIA to include displaced homemakers and individuals within two years of exhausting TANF benefits as "hard-to-serve populations,"** requiring states to describe specific training and service strategies for them, such as providing access to child care, transportation and other support services.

- **Amend WIA to address the needs of older workers as a “hard to serve” population** as proposed in the Health Care and Training for Older Workers Act (S. 708) introduced by Senator Herb Kohl. Because WIA measures performance partly by change in earnings, older workers – who tend to seek part-time work and earn less when they get new jobs – are not adequately served under WIA. S. 708 would require states to report the performance and participation of older workers as special population.
- **Ensure that WIA actively provides training opportunities for women to prepare for jobs nontraditional for their gender**, which typically offer wages 20 to 30 percent higher than traditionally ‘female’ jobs. The law should specify that computer science, technology and other emerging occupations are included in the definition of nontraditional employment. Current law defines nontraditional as fields for which individuals from one gender comprise less than 25 percent of the individuals employed.
- **Ensure that One-Stop Career Center staff is prepared to counsel women and all job seekers, including older workers, with information on occupations and training opportunities that can lead to high-growth, high-demand jobs paying self-sufficient wages.**
- **Ensure that the Department of Labor publishes data disaggregated by gender, age, race and ethnicity** for those receiving various services, including training in nontraditional occupations.

#### **Reduce Older Workers’ Barriers to Employment**

- **Pass the Health Care and Training for Older Workers Act (S. 708)** that would extend COBRA coverage for up to 36 months for workers between the age 62 and 65 who typically would lose employer-based health coverage when phasing down their work to part-time status.
- **Encourage employers to establish flexible work programs for elders.** S. 708, for example, gives a tax credit equal to 25 percent of wages for employers who create formal flexible work programs and provide full, qualified pension and health insurance plans for full- and part-time workers age 62 and over.

#### **Level the Playing Field for Part-time Workers and Caregivers**

- **Pass the Workplace Balancing Act (H.R. 2392)** that requires employers to provide pro-rated health, pension and family leave benefits to part-time workers.
- **Make it easier for women and all caregivers to work full time.** The Workplace Balancing Act provides a wide range of family-friendly provisions, such as increasing the availability and quality of child care, after school care, and family leave options. The bill also creates a program to increase awareness and use of telework.
- **Pass the Unemployment Insurance Modernization Act (H.R. 2233 and S. 1871)** that gives states incentives to cover employees who are available only for part-time work and whose work histories are concentrated in the most recent quarter, and those who lost employment due to compelling family reasons.

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