



Wider Opportunities for Women

December 15, 2008

Dear Mr. President Elect:

We write to extend our congratulations on your election and to offer our sincere support for both your long-term and short-term economic efforts. We share the goal so frequently articulated during the Obama-Biden campaign for building a bridge for all Americans to achieve the middle class dream of economic security. The economic vulnerabilities facing Americans today are varied, whether it is inadequate health care, risk of homelessness, hunger, lack of job skills or ultimately poverty in old age. The common thread among these problems is the lack of a measure with concrete benchmarks for assessing the progress for any American, regardless of personal circumstances, toward the goal of economic security. Toward that end, we recommend the following:

- Charge the **National Economic Council** with promoting the economic security of all Americans in childhood and through one's lifespan. Such a mandate would link the question of the economic security of individual Americans to that of the overall strength of the U.S. and global macro-economies which is the primary focus of the current Council. By charging the NEC to emphasize, monitor and measure the administration's progress toward achieving economic security for all Americans, the NEC can ensure that programs and policy decisions made throughout the executive branch are strategic and consistent with your previously stated goals. Because accountability resides in the White House under this proposal, you will not only be able to guide and evaluate progress for this economic policy agenda, your NEC Director and you can continue to draw awareness to all issues which affect life-long economic security for individual Americans by providing regular updates on benchmarks achieved.
- Convene an **Interagency Task Force on Economic Security** composed of representatives of all relevant departments and agencies, including but not limited to Labor, Treasury, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Commerce, Agriculture, and the Social Security Administration. This task force would be charged with supporting the work as defined by the NEC under the first proposal. Its scope would be clear and would reflect an internal commitment to seeking the leadership of knowledgeable and capable appointees within the administration in much the same as you have selected external leaders to serve on the Economic Advisory Board.

The Task Force would be charged with recommending and implementing coordinated federal policies and programs that have economic security as its unifying goal. To meet this goal, the Task Force would be charged with establishing an economic security benchmark for the income



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required to be economically self-sufficient throughout one's lifetime taking into consideration one's age and the community where one lives.

The Interagency Task Force will address the Obama-Biden Campaign's stated objective of economic security for all through a variety of strategies with a common goal and measure whether the strategy be career pathway programs, jobs that pay family sustaining wages, tax credits, supports for working families, housing, health care, education or retirement security policies. Establishing a benchmark of economic security can be a first step to calibrating these other initiatives to match your vision.

The notion of "self-sufficiency" is stated as a goal in many federal programs, including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, the Workforce Investment Act, the Perkins Career and Technical Assistance Act, and the Green Jobs Training Act of 2007. Self-Sufficiency Standards¹ and other family budget tools are being used in almost every state in the country and have been adopted by a variety of states and local agencies across the country. Nowhere, however, does *federal policy* offer a common definition of what it actually takes to meet the daily needs of living without public supports and offers a lifetime of economic security.

Currently Congress is engaged in the important work of considering an alternative definition of our current measure of deprivation, the federal poverty level, a tool that has been used for many decades to track abject poverty. We applaud that effort and see it as important step in better assessing efforts to bring relief to the poorest of Americans. With your leadership, we believe the nation can work toward eliminating poverty and pursue a complementary goal focused on a 21st century standard of true economic security to measure and implement a range of public policies from tax policy to those addressing economic development, education and the workforce.

Sincerely,

¹ To view the Self-Sufficiency and Elder Economic Security Standard Indexes in place throughout the country, see www.wowonline.org