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Op-Ed for Non-Profit

**Economic Equality lies in Congress’ Hands**

Women earn almost half a thousand dollars less than men do annually, and that’s the closest it’s been since 1986. It astounds us, at RFF, that there is a sizable percentage gap between annual wages earned between men and women and that companies still have outdated family leave policies in. These issues are nothing new to society. Congress has the opportunity to improve these conditions in society yet these bills are still outstanding.

The pay gap percentage cannot close fast enough. In 2007 the percentage women earned compared to their male colleagues was 77.6%. In 2013 the percentage rose again to 77.8%, only a 0.2% change over six years. In 2014 the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics noted that the percentage gap decreased, as women earned 78.6% of what the men earned. In 29 years the pay gap percentage has moved 1.2%.

Women don’t have a chance to close the gap, even with advanced educations. A U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics report found that female workers had a Bachelor’s earned $284 less, annually, compared to their male equivalents. Also females that attained a Professional Degree earned $445 less, annually, than their male equivalents. The same time commitment, same jobs requirements, and the same education level and women earned almost half a thousand dollars less than males did. We believe that this pay gap percentage is due to the gender bias in today’s workforce. Women tend to only be offered employment in the educational and health services industry, while men get control of the professional and business services, public administration, and construction industries.

Along with sizable pay gap percentage is the issue of lack of legal and protective family leave policies adopted by companies in the U.S. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) states:

 *“Eligible employees of covered employers are permitted to take unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons, with a continuation of health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave.”*

Some of the circumstances recognized by the DO are: the birth of a child or care for a child within one year of birth, the adoption or foster placement of a child, to care for an employee’s spouse/child/parent with serious health complications, or any qualified demand where an employee is on “covered active duty.” Only a few U.S states have Family and Medical Leave policies that include males. The RFF encourages and insists that companies implement these policies. The FMLA can help employee’s take care of a family member’s and their own health, without sacrificing the individual’s opportunity to earn salaries. The strain that this act alleviates can sustain employees’ health and well-being. Studies have also shown that family leave policies can increase employee retention, labor-force involvement, lifetime and retirement earnings. Companies cannot afford to not implement policies like the FMLA.

 The RFF trusts that the U.S can do better and provide a sustainable, just, free, and participatory society for all. We support research, training, and public education campaigns, and advocacy efforts that work toward this ideal society. Gender stereotypes in the work place must come to a close and we need to pursue the just and fair treatment by employers for everyone. By supporting bills like Senate Bill 358, backed by Senator Hannah Beth Jackson, that requires the same pay for similar jobs regardless of gender. Another bill to pay attention to is Assembly Bill 908 backed by Assemblymen Jimmy Gomez that would require any company greater than 25 people to extend the amount of leave any person would have and also protect the job of that individual. It is up to us to pressure our local senators and government officials to pass along these bills so that there is economic equality for all.

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