



Improving Working Conditions and Increasing Employment Opportunities for Women

In 1963, the Equal Pay Act was signed, forbidding men to be paid more than women for the same job. A year later, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination in employment on the basis of sex or race, along with other bases. Although women have made great progress over the past nine decades, women still have a long way to go when it comes to equality in the workplace. Many families are increasingly dependent on two incomes, and many other families depend solely on women's paychecks; however, women still hold a majority of low-wage jobs. And the pay gap still exists despite the fact that more women are working than ever before. For the first time in history, women now make up half of today's labor force.

Within the first ten days of his new administration, President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act to reverse a Supreme Court decision that made it even more difficult for women to bring pay discrimination cases. The Fair Pay Act re-establishes a reasonable time limit for filing pay discrimination claims. The Department of Labor is focused on promoting equal pay, workplace flexibility, paid leave and employment opportunities for all women. The following is a sample of investments and activities of Secretary Solis and the Department – actions that demonstrate this Administration's strong commitment to improving working conditions and increasing employment opportunities for women and their families.

- **Reaching Women:** Secretary Solis has met personally with women across the country. She met women working in the solar industry in Memphis, spoke at the California Working Families Policy Summit and the Women's Conference in Long Beach, participated in the White House Council on Women and Girls forum addressing Workplace Flexibility, and hosted a roundtable with women in the trades during Women's History Month. And as part of the Department of Labor's ongoing efforts to promote and improve business practices and policies that provide greater work-life balance and workplace flexibility, Secretary Solis announced the Women's Bureau's National Dialogue on Workplace Flexibility which will kick off this fall in Dallas.
- **Working Together – White House Equal Pay Enforcement Taskforce:** By establishing a collaborative effort among the Labor Department, the Department of Justice, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Obama Administration will ensure strategic enforcement of pay discrimination cases and take steps to reduce the persistent pay gap between men and women through improved data collection, improved interagency coordination and enforcement efforts, a public education campaign to educate employers on their obligations and employees on their rights, and ensuring the federal government is a model employer.
- **Enforcing Equal Opportunity and Pay:** The Department is focusing enforcement efforts on individual and systemic pay discrimination which affect the lives of every American family. This month Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs celebrates the 45th anniversary of Executive Order 11246 which first established a federal-wide requirement of equal opportunity in employment by federal contractors and subcontractors. It has hired nearly 200 new compliance officers to increase its ability





to investigate and resolve cases. Through rulemaking, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs will seek input on how to improve compensation-based data collection. Along with the Women's Bureau, it will launch new public education efforts so that working women, and their employers, understand the law. Recently, the Department filed an administrative complaint against a large federal contractor in Illinois, alleging female job applicants were systematically rejected.

- **Work-life Balance and Workplace Flexibility:** The Administration supports passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act and the Healthy Families Act. The Department's Wage and Hour Division recently made new information available on the break time requirement for nursing mothers which took effect when the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was signed into law in March, 2010 and clarified the definition of "son and daughter" under the Family and Medical Leave Act to ensure that an employee who assumes the role of caring for a child receives parental rights to family leave regardless of the legal or biological relationship.
- **Training Women for Jobs in a Clean Energy Economy:** Ensuring women are trained to succeed in a clean energy economy is critical to ensuring opportunities are available in industries that are growing and have good jobs. Training for women was funded by the Department's "Pathways Out of Poverty" grants, grants which provided \$150 million to support programs that help disadvantaged populations find ways out of poverty and into economic self-sufficiency. Among others, awardees included the Mi Casa Resource Center for Women, Inc. in Denver which will provide education, training and supportive services to 500 participants in Denver, and the Consortium for Worker Education which will provide 425 participants in the Bronx with training and education services, including 297 who will be placed in training related employment. On Earth Day 2009, Secretary Solis held a roundtable with White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley to discuss the opportunities for women in the clean energy economy. The Women's Bureau hosted a series of five teleconferences for workforce practitioners, designed to offer information and an exchange of ideas to better connect women with green jobs training. Look this fall for the publication of "A Woman's Guide to Green Jobs."
- **Advancing Women in Non Traditional Occupations:** Earlier this year the Department's Veterans' Employment and Training Service and the Women's Bureau partnered to award \$1.8 million in grants to support partnerships that ensure that women have training opportunities and career support to succeed in non-traditional occupations in growing sectors of the economy. Over 26 grants were awarded in 14 states and the District of Columbia for job training, counseling and placement services (including job readiness, and literacy and skills training) to expedite the reintegration of homeless female veterans and veterans with families into the labor force. Through the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) grant program the Department promotes the recruitment, training, employment and retention of women in apprenticeship and nontraditional occupations. On June 14, 2010, six grantees were awarded WANTO grants totally nearly \$2 million dollars. The awards sustain the partnerships needed to ensure that women have the training opportunities and career support to succeed in non-traditional occupations in growing sectors of the economy



- **Supporting Female Veterans and their Families:** More women are serving than ever before. The Women’s Bureau hosted a series of listening sessions with homeless female veterans and service providers across the country to gain further insight into reintegration challenges specific to women. As a result of these sessions, the Women’s Bureau will be developing resources to better equip service providers with a deeper understanding of the unique experiences and needs of female veterans.
- **Strengthening the Safety Net for the Unemployed:** The Recovery Act provided incentives for states to update antiquated unemployment laws to make unemployment assistance available to more American workers, including part time workers who are disproportionately women, and efforts by the administration have resulted in unemployment benefits being extended. And because of the modernization efforts in the Recovery Act, an estimated 100,000 unemployed Americans received benefits they would not otherwise have received.

