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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
TREASURY, POSTAL SERVICE,
GENERAL GOVERNMENT
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HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
EDUCATION

STATEMENT ON PAY EQUITY FOR WOMEN

BY CONGRESSMAN STENY H. HOYER

In the past 30 years, 60 percent of the people newly entering the labor force in this country have been women; and it is anticipated that in each year of the next decade one million additional women will join them. More than half are women with children under 18.

These official statistics reflect the notion that this so-called "flood" of women into the marketplace is a relatively recent phenomenon. The truth of the matter is that women have always worked; they just have not always been fairly compensated for their labor.

As far back as 1870, close to 30 percent of the households in Baltimore, Maryland, relied in some way on female-generated income. By 1900 that number had risen to 40 percent. While the number of women in the compensable labor force has almost doubled in the past 44 years, the reason for this entry has remained relatively the same - economic necessity.

Despite the rapid growth of women in the labor force, they still remain concentrated in certain industries and occupations, earning substantially less than their male counterparts. The majority of working women fill only 20 percent of the 441 occupations listed in the census occupational classification system; 80 percent in four job fields -- clerical work, service industries, retail sales and factories and plants.

Of the ten lowest paid occupations, six are 90 percent filled by women -- 84 percent of our health aides are women; 85 percent are nurses aides; 63 percent are cooks; and 13 percent are farm laborers.

Today the median wage for full-time women workers is \$12,172. For full-time men it is \$20,682. Using these statistics, it takes women nine days to gross what men gross in five -- and the federal government is no exception, where the average salary for men is \$30,553 and for women it is \$15,579 -- little more than half.

I know that I need not go any further with these statistics, but they are staggering. Women are not marginal workers and can no longer be regarded as a limitless pool of cheap labor.

Occupational segregation is extreme and it is persistent. Within the federal government, there is a statistically significant inverse correlation between sex and salary in the general schedule and equivalent grade. But it is not only the federal government that shows this segregation

We need go no further than to make a cursory examination of the crisis in this country's educational system. The teachers of this country have been predominantly women, and, as such, our educators have historically been underpaid. Despite the fact that we entrust the intellectual instruction of our children to them; despite the requisite skills, demanding responsibilities and extensive training we demand of our educators; and because it is an occupation historically filled by women, teaching has become a second class job and one vastly undervalued.

We are now being forced to see the long-range effects of this occupational segregation as our most qualified and educated women look to other, more highly paid fields of endeavor.

This phenomenon is not unique to education. More and more women are rapidly entering areas previously dominated by men -- law, medicine, politics, space exploration, engineering -- where they can be more fairly and equitably compensated.

Sex discrimination is clearly costly in the long run. For what we see happening is that jobs traditionally filled by women -- jobs undervalued precisely for that reason will become harder and harder to fill with quality people as our top-notch women seek careers that are more financially rewarding.

In the landmark school desegregation case, Brown v Board of Education, a unanimous court stated that segregation and equality cannot co-exist. This applies equally to occupational segregation which has invariably led to wage discrimination.

Which brings me to the real issue we are confronting today -- sex discrimination. It is invidious and devastating, and is pervasive throughout our society.

We at the federal level have an opportunity to do something about this discrimination, and not only by adopting needed legislation. We must begin with the federal system. We must look at the federal classification system and make position-to-position comparisons across classification group lines. The federal government should be a model for others to follow. This is true as well for our state and county governments.

Putting an end to exploitation is not without costs. Pay equity is a difficult issue. We are confronted with an administration intent on diluting the scope and strength of existing civil rights laws, and one that has steadily retreated from enforcement of those laws.

But obstacles cannot and must not be a consideration in promoting and enforcing civil rights.

Madame Chair, by assuming the leadership role in promoting pay equity and by vigorously pursuing the inequities resulting from discrimination in our society, you are proving that the barriers will be overtaken, the course made smooth and less difficult. I am certain that with your leadership and commitment, and the leadership and commitment of all of us here today, we will succeed.

The bottom line on the issue of equal pay for comparable work is nothing more, and nothing less, than the issue of equal rights for women.