

April 14, 2015

Dear Friends,

Thank you to the Vermont Commission on Women, and all the groups that organized today's Equal Pay Day. I regret my schedule does not allow me to be here with you.

It has been more than 50 years since President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act, and few would deny our country has come a very long way towards a more equal workplace since then.

But we still have a long way to go. There are many people around this country and on Capitol Hill who are trying to pull our nation backwards on women's rights. They are doing everything possible to end a woman's choice with regard to abortion, and to restrict access to certain health care, such as birth control. They consistently vote against legislation that would advance the cause of pay equity, and that would make it easier for women to participate in the workforce.

Meanwhile, consider these facts: Today, on average, a woman makes just 78 cents for every dollar a man makes. African American women make just 64 cents for every dollar paid to their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts. And Hispanic women? Just 54 cents.

Women with a college or graduate degree face a greater wage gap than women without a degree: A college-educated woman will make a staggering \$1.2 million less than a college-educated male over her lifetime.

At a time when the middle class is collapsing, it is nearly impossible for a one-income family to survive. Only 18 percent of families headed by single moms have economic security. More than half of poor children live in female-headed households. The average single mother earns \$23,000 per year.

Moreover, it is time to dispel the myth that the average minimum-wage worker is a teenager. It's actually a woman in her 30s.

So how do we fix this?

- We need affordable childcare and paid maternity leave, so women do not have to choose between having a career and having a family.
- We need paid sick leave so a parent can take her child to the doctor without risking her job.
- We need to raise the minimum wage, to lift low-wage working women out of poverty.

In my view, the United States should be setting the bar for equality, and yet we lag far behind other industrialized nations. We cannot wait another fifty years to achieve pay equity. We have a shared responsibility to create a more equitable economy now, and I thank you all for your efforts on this incredibly important issue.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
UNITED STATES SENATOR