

## **The News Journal – Delaware Online**

### **Gender wage gap still must be solved**

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DELAWARE VOICE

In 1963, J. Stacey Adams conducted a compelling study regarding how workers perceive the outcomes of their performance against other workers in his research study titled "Towards An Understanding of Inequality" in the Journal of Abnormal and Normal Social Psychology. I teach this theory every year to future managers. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 should also be perceived as a total package of fairness and equity which has not been realized.

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "the Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in the payment of wages or benefits, where men and women perform work of similar skill, effort, and responsibility for the same employer under similar working conditions. Employers may not reduce wages of either sex to equalize pay between men and women."

Forty-four years later employees are still comparing their worth against other employees. The issue evokes the question "What am I worth to my employer?"

On April 24, the observance of that question is brought to the forefront of our minds again. Are women getting paid what they are worth? Based upon many studies and the proposal of two congressional bills proposed under the 109th Congress the answer appeared to be "no."

The Paycheck Fairness Act has been reintroduced under the 110th Congress this year. The Paycheck Fairness Act (S. 766) was introduced on March 6, 2007 by Senator Hillary Clinton with 17 co-sponsors. One of the co-sponsors of the Paycheck Fairness Act is Senator Joe Biden from Delaware whose views I share in that gender wage discrimination is not fair.

The Act was referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

The Paycheck Fairness Act also was introduced in the House on March 6, 2007 by Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro with 71 co-sponsors. It has been referred to the House Committee on Education and Labor with the purpose of amending the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide more effective remedies to victims of discrimination in the payment of wages on the basis of sex, and for other purposes.

The Fair Pay Act was introduced under the 109th Congress by Senator Tom Harkin and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, but, has not been reintroduced under the 110th congress at this writing. The Act would have protected workers in equivalent jobs with similar skills and responsibilities even if the jobs were not identical against wage discrimination based upon gender and race by requiring employers to provide equal pay for work of equal value, whether or not the jobs are the same. If reintroduced and

passed under the 110th Congress, the bill would require employers to provide equal pay for jobs that are comparable but not identical and positions that require the same or comparable education.

The question some readers may ask is "why is this an issue and why am I concerned as a Commissioner?" I care about the future of America.

I would like to offer some evidence. Statistically, according to the U. S. Census Bureau, women live longer than men. With low wages, this means that women, on average, are destined to live below the poverty line in retirement.

Low wages have long term consequences not only for the individual and the family, but, for the American society as a whole.

The economy can be suppressed when discretionary income is not available to spend by the majority of the population. According to the U. S. Census Bureau, women make up the majority of the population in the United States.

But, looking beyond the shores of the United States to see what can lie ahead, Japan has become deeply concerned, according to the Economist Magazine, about the status of its economy in the future because it expects to have more retirees than younger workers in a few years. Most of these retirees will be women because of life expectancy.

Gender wage discrimination is an issue that needs to be addressed with more vim and vigor in the United States, because women who do work are overwhelmingly relegated to lower paying occupations such as child care providers, secretaries, nurses, elementary school teachers, etc.

This low pay scale does not enhance their ability to save more money for retirement years or to invest in preparation for a comfortable retirement.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau's statistics for 2006, women earned 77 cents for each dollar comparable to what a male worker earned across all occupational paths.

Until employees are paid in a fair and equitable manner, J. Stacey Adams' Equity Theory will be alive and well in the American workforce.

The gender wage gap must be closed through legislation and not just observed one day in April of each year.

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