OBAMA-BIDEN TRANSITION PROJECT

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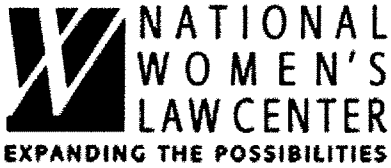

President Obama and Congress Should Take Immediate Legislative Action To Improve the Lives of Women and Families

In their first few days, President Obama and the new Congress should take two key steps—passing pay equity legislation and enacting an economic recovery package that meets the needs of women and families—to signal our country's renewed commitment to fairness, equality, and opportunity for women.

I. Pass Pay Equity Legislation

Ensuring that women receive equal pay for equal work is a critical component of any effort to stimulate the economy and to ensure self-sufficiency for them and their families. Congress should pass pay equity legislation that gives women the tools they need to challenge pay discrimination against them: the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, supplemented by the Paycheck Fairness Act.

In 2007, the Supreme Court made it virtually impossible for women and others subject to pay discrimination to go to court to vindicate their rights, holding that any challenges to pay discrimination must be filed within 180 days of an employee's first discriminatory paycheck or be forever barred. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act would overturn the Supreme Court's decision in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, and restore the long-standing interpretation of civil rights laws that employees can challenge every discriminatory paycheck they receive.

The Paycheck Fairness Act would improve procedures and remedies under, and close loopholes opened by court interpretations of, the Equal Pay Act. The Act would enable women to hold their employers accountable when those employers engage in pay discrimination.

Both the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act were passed by the House of Representatives during the 110th Congress, and the Ledbetter bill fell only three votes short on a motion to proceed in the Senate in April 2008. The new Congress should immediately pass these important bills.

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II. Pass an Economic Recovery Bill that Meets Women's Needs

The worsening recession is affecting all Americans, but women – who already were in a more precarious economic position than men – are especially vulnerable. President Obama and the new Congress should take immediate steps to pass an economic recovery package that includes measures to help women and families through these tough times and preserve and create jobs for both women and men.

1. Increase Assistance for Those in Need and Protect Vital Public Services and Jobs

Millions of families, especially those headed by women, are finding it harder and harder to keep a roof over their heads, stay warm, put food on the table, and afford health care and child care. With unemployment rising, millions of additional women and children are expected to fall into poverty this year. But, despite rising need, state and local governments facing fiscal shortfalls are forced to cut vital services. Providing assistance to low-income families not only alleviates hardship – it's one of the most effective ways to boost the economy quickly, because low-income families immediately spend the income they receive. Providing fiscal relief to states not only helps prevent cuts to health care, education, child care, child support and other essential services; it preserves jobs and promotes the economic recovery. Specifically, the economic recovery package should:

- *Increase direct nutrition, energy, and housing assistance* to low-income individuals and families, the majority of whom are women and female-headed households.

- *Expand unemployment insurance coverage* to reach more jobless workers, especially women, who are denied benefits because of outdated eligibility rules that disqualify many low-wage and part-time workers and workers who have left their jobs for compelling family reasons, in addition to extending unemployment insurance benefits for additional weeks.

- *Help low-income parents obtain the child care they need* to get and keep jobs by increasing funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Head Start.

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- *Restore funding for child support enforcement*, a program that serves over 17 million children, to protect single parents and children from losing child support income.

- *Increase the federal matching rate for the Medicaid* program to help states meet the growing need and to avoid cuts in health care and other services. This will protect access to critical health care, including for the more than 20 million adult women who depend on the Medicaid program. In addition, this will bolster state budgets and help avoid cuts to education and other vital services.

- Give states flexibility to *expand eligibility for contraceptive coverage* under the Medicaid program. This will help make birth control, a key out-of-pocket health care cost for millions of women, more accessible and affordable and will save $400 million over the next ten years.

- *Provide additional funding to states to expand Temporary Assistance to Needy Families* to help the growing number of families falling into poverty.

2. Preserve and Create Job Opportunities for Women

Unemployment among women, especially among women who head families, is rising, threatening their ability to support themselves and their families. Rebuilding infrastructure can create jobs, but many of those jobs are in fields where women are still severely underrepresented. The economic recovery package also must protect and create jobs in the areas women are currently employed, and ensure that women have access to new jobs in nontraditional fields. Specifically, the economic recovery package should:

- As described above, increase funding for programs such as Medicaid, child care, Head Start, child support, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families to preserve and create jobs for women. Women provide the majority of the health care, early education, and caseworker services in these programs that strengthen our human capital.

- Fund programs that will create additional jobs in female-dominated fields. Investing in education, libraries, and domestic violence prevention and treatment programs, to name a few examples, will not only promote important policy goals but will also increase employment opportunities in female-dominated fields such as teaching, library sciences and social work.

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- In infrastructure and clean energy job creation programs, include affirmative measures to recruit, train, and employ women, and provide additional funding for job training and support services.

- Increase assistance, including by increasing the size of Pell grants, to enable students to pursue education and job training through community colleges and other institutions of higher education, during this period when jobs are scarce.