

Solution to wage disparities embedded in Equal Rights Amendment

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OPINION

November presents a poignant reminder for Americans of the sacrifices made by veterans so that our country remains the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.

A grateful nation salutes the men and women of the Armed Forces past, present and future who give their all so that our nation can remain free from tyranny and oppression. We honor our heroes on Nov. 11 with patriotic ceremonies and parades.

Then, as families gather on November’s fourth Thursday to again appreciate blessings bestowed, Americans celebrate on Thanksgiving Day how fortunate we are to live in a nation of abundant resources.



Sue Marceau

Nesting between those cherished national holidays, Nov. 20 is one in a yearlong series of Equal Pay Days identified by the National Committee on Pay Equity to draw attention to gender-based pay disparities. Equal Pay Days acknowledge the point in any given year at which the earnings of working women “catch up” to those of men for the year prior.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics first tracked wages by gender around 1979, at a time when working women earned 63 cents for every dollar paid to men. Forty years later, American women receive about 80 cents to a working man’s dollar.

Far from being a cause for celebration, Equal Pay Days underscore the decades-long struggle of American women to secure equal pay for equal work. Latinas, who earn 53 cents on average for every dollar paid to men, will not attain parity for 2018 until Nov. 20. Black and

Native American women fared only slightly better, closing the gap on Aug. 22 and Sept. 23 respectively. The former accumulated 61 cents on average and the latter 58 cents. Asian American women, the female cohort with the closest pay scale to men, broke even Mar. 5 at 85 cents. That’s still a two-month earnings gap that never will be recovered.

NCPE’s Equal Pay Days remind us that more than half of the nation’s workers routinely contend with pay inequality and other workplace discrimination merely because they are female. Advocates use Equal Pay Days in a full court press toward abolishing gender-based pay discrepancies once and for all.

No matter how the statistics are reported, American women in the most generous nation in the world continue to face wage inequality through limited access to educational, life and career opportunities afforded their male counterparts.

Inequality persists, despite lawmakers’ attempts at multiple governing levels to modify employer behavior and enforce pay equity. After years of effort, the U.S. Congress voted the Equal Pay Act into law in 1963. Enforcement of this and other civil rights legislation has narrowed gender-based pay disparity, but only certain segments of the population are usually affected. The most significant risk of this piecemeal approach is the ease with which future lawmakers and administrations are able to rescind or dilute progress achieved to date.

We must pick up the pace of pay equity for the sake of American families, female breadwinners, dual-income households, and the overall economy. Over a 40-year career, the average American woman is expected to forfeit an estimated \$418,800 to the wage gap. For women of color, those losses about double.

Passage of the long-awaited Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and its subsequent implementation as the law of the land is the proper channel to guarantee equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender. Only by amending the U.S. Constitution to recognize women as full equals under the law will society move toward equity and reconciliation in this matter.

There is no better time for Arizona to become the 38th and milestone state to ratify the ERA than by honoring in 2020 the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment giving American women the right to vote.

Immediately after that major accomplishment, women’s rights advocates began working on the subsequent phase to ensure “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”

Women and men of Arizona, rise now to ratify. Don’t waste another minute. Contact your lawmakers in the Arizona House and Senate, urging them to sponsor, support and vote for legislation to ratify the ERA in the next session.

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