

Senators fight women's financial inequality

By CHARLENE BELL
Of the Emerald

Oregon's two U.S. senators are backing legislation intended to correct existing laws that perpetuate economic inequities for women.

On April 7, Sen. Bob Packwood and Mark Hatfield, both R-Ore., joined Sen. Dave Durenberger, R-Minn., in introducing the Economic Equity Act of 1981, a wide-ranging "economic package" proposing economic reforms that include:

- Under private pension plans, marriage would be recognized as an economic partnership, and pensions would be established as a legitimate property right.

- Women who were married to civil service or military employees for at least 10 years would receive the right to a pro-rata share of the benefits earned during marriage.

- The national policy stating that "discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin is unlawful,"

would be applied to the insurance industry by expanding the availability and scope of insurance available to women.

- The Internal Revenue Code would be modified to allow daycare services as a tax-free fringe benefit for employees.

- Homemakers would become eligible for Individual Retirement Accounts. Currently, individuals without incomes cannot establish IRAs.

- Tax credits would be given to employers who hire displaced homemakers.

Each of the bill's three principal sponsors has agreed to focus attention on certain areas of economic reform.

"Senator Packwood will focus his attention on the displaced homemakers' provision, by making homemakers eligible for Individual Retirement Accounts," says Janet Mullins, Packwood's legislative director.

"The senator recognizes the plight of these divorced or widowed women who have devoted many years to maintaining a home and family and

encounter difficulties when they find themselves alone, trying to receive benefits or in getting a job," Mullins says.

Recent statistics indicate that although 89 percent of single-parent families are headed by mothers, three-quarters of these women receive no child support. And only four percent of divorced women receive alimony, Mullins says.

Packwood also plans to lend his support to the daycare provision, she adds.

Jennifer Doren, a staff member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, anticipates that some of the provisions in the act will be passed during the first session of Congress. Hatfield chairs that committee.

However, Doren expects opposition from the insurance industry. The proposed insurance provision would abolish existing discrimination that has given women an inequitable percentage of insurance benefits in comparison with the amount of premiums they pay, she says.

"Senator Hatfield recognizes the fact that for many years it has been tough for women to get disability or health insurance because the waiting periods were always longer than for a man," Doren says.

Hatfield also plans to focus his attention on the military wives provision, which addresses the problem of disparity existing in military pension benefits for women and men.

"Many military wives are left penniless after a divorce, while a husband can walk away with a pension or an annuity," Doren says. "During a military marriage, if the wife is not in the armed forces, she is frequently unable to work outside the home due to constant moving and caring for the kids."

Eliminating disparity in military pensions and other economic inequities for women is long overdue, says University Women's Studies director Gail Dubrow.

"It is only in the last five years that the Supreme Court has argued in favor of an enlisted woman receiving the same benefits as her male counterpart," Dubrow says.

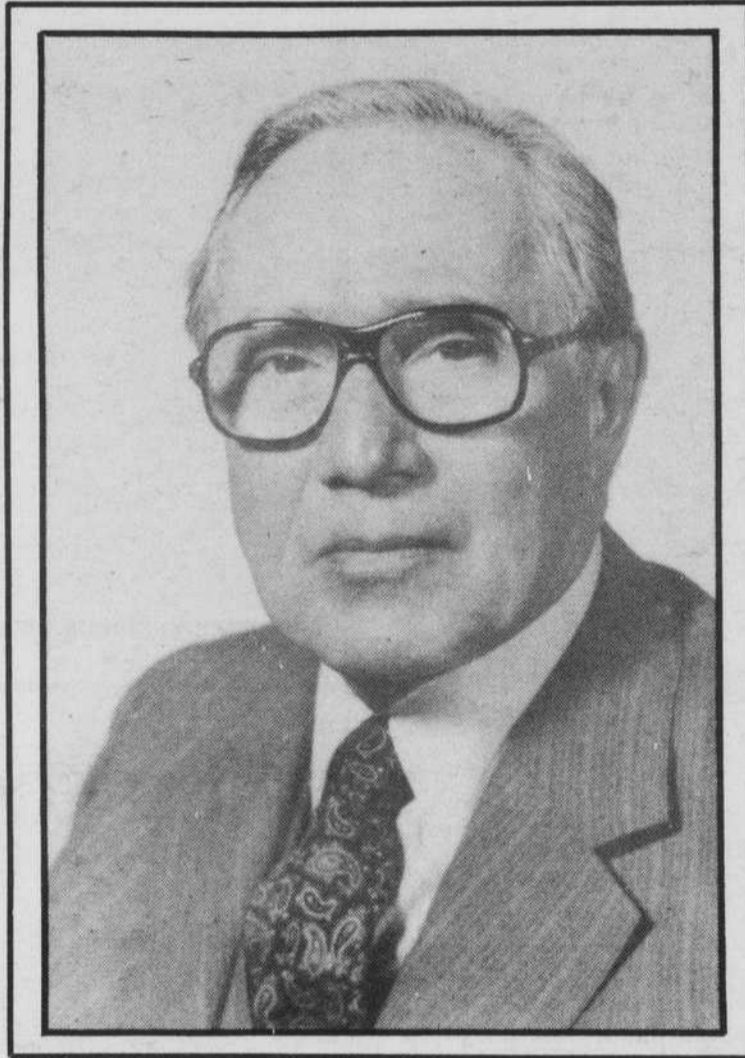
And the proposed daycare provision is badly needed, she says.

"Presently this benefit isn't widely available since men occupy the majority of the big-business positions that can afford to offer such a service."

Women work primarily in the small business sector, which has no incentive to provide daycare, Dubrow explains.

However, the daycare program may benefit women workers disproportionately if the provision is offered as a tax reform, Dubrow says. Lower income families or those with a woman as single parent won't be provided with much of a break, she says.

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Philip M. Klutznick

1981 Occupant, Wayne Morse Chair of Law and Politics

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A prominent Chicago attorney and businessman, Philip M. Klutznick has devoted much of his life to public service. He has served in various important federal posts under seven presidents, including most recently that of Secretary of Commerce under President Carter. On an international plane, Mr. Klutznick has served as a member of several United States delegations to the United Nations, first in 1957 during President Eisenhower's administration, and second as Deputy Ambassador during the tenure of Governor Adlai Stevenson as Ambassador to the United Nations in 1961.

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