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Report Reveals Wide Wage Gap for Oregon's Women

Dr. Erasmo Gamboa

Every time an Oregon woman opens her paycheck, she sees two penalties - she's penalized 28 percent for being a woman and gets an extra three percent penalty for living in Oregon.

That's the conclusion of a new report issued today (Oct. 22) by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) in Washington, D.C. Entitled "The Status of Women in Oregon," the report was co-published by the University of Oregon Center for the Study of Women in Society (CSWS).

According to the IWPR report, women in the United States are paid slightly more than 72 cents for every dollar men are paid. The wage gap is three cents worse in Oregon, which ranks in the bottom third of states for wage equity.

The situation is especially bad for the least educated Oregon women. The report finds that the real earnings of Oregon women without high school diplomas dropped 26 percent in the last two decades, and they are paid only 62 cents for every dollar paid to men who didn't graduate from high school.

In addition, the study found significant wage gaps

between racial and ethnic groups. Median incomes for African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans are between 67 percent and 75 percent of those of white families.

These findings are among the most striking in the new report, which used national data sources to compare women in the 50 states and the District of Columbia on a range of indicators of political participation, employment and earnings, economic autonomy, reproductive rights and health.

"Even in areas where Oregon enjoys relatively high rankings, there is plenty of evidence that some groups of women do not share in the good news because poverty, racism and discrimination against lesbians and women with disabilities keeps them from reaping the benefits shared by other women," notes Sandra Morgen, CSWS director and chair of the Oregon Advisory Committee, which consulted with IWPR on the report.

As an example, the report shows that poverty rates for women of color in the state are between seven and 16 percentage points higher than for white women.

One place where Oregon women's progress has been most visible is the voting booth. The report finds that Oregon women rank sixth in the nation for voter registration, the highest in the West.

Despite this, women remain a distinct minority in elected office, both in Oregon and in the nation, according to the report. In Oregon, only one statewide elected official is female, and men outnumber women three to one in the state legislature. The high point for Oregon women is the congressional delegation, in which women constitute 40 percent of the five-person delegation to the House of Representatives. But, neither of Oregon's U.S. senators are women.

Rep. Jo Ann Bowman of Portland's District 19, a member of the Oregon Advisory Committee, is concerned that the numbers of women elected to state offices fell in the last legislative session.

"We cannot go backwards," she says. "We have far too many important issues facing Oregon, and we need elected officials who represent all Oregonians, men and women, and members of all racial and ethnic groups."

Rep. Kitty Piercy of Eugene, Oregon House Democratic leader and another member of the Oregon Advisory Committee, says that the report is timely as lawmakers return to Salem for the legislative session in January.

"The Status of Women in Oregon report is an important tool for state policy makers," she says. "It not only compares us to other states, but helps us to understand both Oregon's successes and remaining challenges when it comes to full equality and opportunity for Oregon women."

In addition to "The Status of Women in Oregon," IWPR on Oct. 22 released a national 50-state report and nine other state reports, covering Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Vermont.

Copies of the Oregon report are available for \$10 each from the Center for the Study of Women in Society, 340 Hendricks Hall, 1200 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403; or by calling 541.346.5015. To receive a copy of the national report, contact Jill Braunstein, 202.785.5100.



Dr. Erasmo Gamboa, co-editor of the book, *Nosotros, the Hispanic People of Oregon: Essays and Recollections*.

On November 7, 1998, at 9:45 AM, The Oliver Memorial Lectures of the First Congregational United Church of Christ will present a day long program on the HISPANIC PEOPLE OF OREGON. The purpose of the program is to raise awareness of the influence of the Hispanic culture in Oregon, and to celebrate the many contributions which have been made by the Hispanic people of Oregon since the sixteenth century to the present time.

The featured speaker will be Dr. Erasmo Gamboa, co-editor of the

book, *Nosotros, the Hispanic People of Oregon: Essays and Recollections*. Gamboa, whose family has a long history in Oregon, is a professor of history in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington. Dr. Gamboa's expert knowledge, insights and writing make him an exciting speaker.

Following the main presentation by Dr. Gamboa, participants are invited to a catered lunch in the fellowship hall. Following lunch, participants will select two of five group sessions which will begin at 1 and 2:15 PM.

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