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OPINION

Still Waiting for Equal Pay Act's Promise

50 years later gender gap still exists

BY LISA MAATZ

June 10 marked the 50th anniversary of the federal legislation that required employers to give women and men equal pay for equal work. Newsflash: It's not working. This golden anniversary is more call for action than cause for celebration because women are still waiting for the Equal Pay Act's promise to come true.

But don't think we're waiting patiently—or silently. And don't think you are immune from this pernicious problem. The gender pay gap exists for women in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

It exists regardless of whether states have pay equity laws in place that supplement the Equal Pay Act, although several states do not have any specific pay equity

law whatsoever. Unbelievably, Wisconsin actually just repealed its equal pay law.

And the pay gap exists in states where governors are doing excellent work on equal pay: Gov. Peter Shumlin in Vermont recently signed stronger equal pay legislation into law, and Gov. Neil Abercrombie of Hawaii and Gov. Mark Dayton of Minnesota issued Equal Pay Day proclamations this year.

But until the pay gap goes the way of the dodo bird, every state has more to do. That means your governor owes women and families an Equal Pay Act anniversary "present." And the American Association of University Women has the perfect idea for a gift.

President Barack Obama recently ordered federal agencies to develop plans to address pay discrepancies among employees in the federal workforce, including evaluating policies for setting starting salaries and looking

at how to promote greater transparency in starting salaries. Your governor could—and should—order state agencies to evaluate and take action on their pay practices as well.

Your governor should do this because equal pay is everyone's business. Families and communities are economically stronger when there is fair pay. Every day women nationwide work just as hard only to receive less. On average, women make 77 cents to a man's dollar, and that number is much worse for moms and women of color. The gender pay gap starts right after college and compounds over a woman's career. Even after accounting for all the factors that affect earnings, AAUW found that women just one year out of college are still paid almost 7 percent less than their male counterparts are paid. That's nearly a year's worth of groceries and 1,400 tall Starbucks coffees. Plus, women vote—and we deserve serious action on the issues we care about.

Statistics tell us that every action available needs to be taken, and the Obama administration has provided a step that governors can take immediately. I'll leave it up to you as to how you ask your governor for your "present"—Twitter, Facebook, e-mail, letter. But no matter how you decide to do it, I'll guarantee you one thing. Unlike the Equal Pay Act, the technology you'll use—even if it's just a pen and paper—was updated in the last 50 years.

Technology has changed. The workforce has changed. But the federal legislation designed to ensure women are paid equally to men hasn't changed—and it isn't working.

Someday, women will celebrate the Equal Pay Act anniversary. But we'll do so when we get what we were promised: equal pay for equal work.

Lisa Maatz is the vice president of government relations at the American Association of University Women.

Anatomy of the Modern Day Drum Major

We must refresh our hearts and minds

BY REV. JOSEPH LOWERY

On April 9, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached a message that was strikingly applicable to the lives of modern day civil rights leaders and leaders of America's future.

In the pulpit of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta only five days before he was assassinated, Dr. King meticulously outlined the anatomy of what he called, the "drum major instinct".

In that message, he drew from the book of Mark, Chapter 10, starting with Verse 13 where Jesus' disciples, James and John, asked to be placed on the Lord's right side and on his left side in glory. Jesus gave them an answer that resonates today as I contemplate the current state of equality and justice in America and the necessary anatomy of today's drum major.

The Lord told them that their placement in glory was not his to give. Rather their placement in glory - and anyone else's - would be contingent upon how they served here on earth. Specifically, Dr. King quoted the passage as saying, "But whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."

Dr. King then described how some in leadership positions mistakenly think that they should be sat on high, receive expen-

sive houses, cars, and receive exclusive access simply because of their positions. But, now, just as Dr. King pointed out then, the anatomy of the drum major - the leader that sets the tempo for justice and equality in America - must be the soul that is willing to humbly serve.

As then, the drum major instinct has been perverted and must now be corrected in order for us to reach our righteous goals. In other words, as we look at the current state of equality and justice in America, we must refresh our hearts and minds, as Dr. King said, with "a new definition of greatness".

What he was saying is that it is not wrong to desire to be important, to want quality things and access. But those things are not equivalent to greatness. Greatness must be earned, he said. And that new definition is simple - service.

As much work as has been done and as much progress as has been made, there is much work needed as racial disparities in this nation are still horrendous.

In a nutshell: African-Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites, according to the NAACP. Yet, the NAACP also reports that five times as many white Americans are using drugs as black Americans, but blacks are sent to prison for drug offenses at 10 times the rate of whites.

Economically, according to the U. S. Census Bureau, approximately 30 percent of

blacks are living in poverty. And the racial breakdown of that statistic is riveting. The National Urban League reports that the equality index of black America stands at 71.7 percent. This means that on average, African-Americans enjoy less than three-fourths of the benefits and privileges offered to white Americans.

Educationally, the Urban League reports that African-Americans have closed the college enrollment gap at five times the rate of closing the unemployment rate gap. Still the racial disparities are deep. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that though college attendance is steadily rising for people of color, it is only around 14 percent for blacks, 13 percent for Latinos and 61 percent for whites.

The state of equality and justice in America tells us that an astronomically higher level of service is needed, one that must replace any mindset of being recognized and awarded for every move.

People from the grassroots to Congress to the White House; people from the churches to the streets to the prisons; people from the educational institutions to the businesses to the civil rights organizations; people in every corner of our society must rise up and take leadership by placing their hands to the plows where they are. Without looking around to see who is looking, without seeking name recognition and reward, at every age and in every season, we must not shrink from the courage to say and to do that which is right.

This year is not only the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom; but it is the 50th anniversary of those four little girls killed on Sept. 15, 1963 in the bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. In Dr. King's sermon at their funeral, he spoke of how they had not died in vain for even in their inno-

cence their deaths sent multiple messages.

Among those messages that they preached from the grave was the fact that they died nobly and they did not die in vain because "unmerited suffering is redemptive." Yes, the deaths of those children, and even too many of our children today who have died by senseless violence and even at the hands of terrorists, have taught us that we must indeed temper courage with caution.

But, in modern day America, we too often find ourselves - not cautious, but afraid. Instead of challenging the systems that oppress; instead of crying out in non-violent protest where it is warranted; instead of acting upon the courage of our convictions, we far too often live in fear of what we might lose or what we personally might not attain. But, the drum major instinct is one that is impeded by fear because it requires both vision and mobility.

In order to attain an acceptable status of equality and justice in America, the drum majors of our communities must keep moving. That means, those of us who have been given much are required to give much. We must mentor the young, we must teach truth, we must take action where it is warranted, and by all means one of those actions must be to venture to the polls at every opportunity and vote.

As we move this great nation forward, let us take a moment to recognize the drum major instinct within each of us. Let us take personal leadership of ourselves and yield to our individual responsibilities to make a difference. Then and only then, will we perfect the noble art of leadership. Only then will we - through our service - become "the chiefest among us."

The Rev. Joseph Lowery was a co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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