

This weekend marks the 160th anniversary of the 1848 Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls. This groundbreaking Convention was attended by women and men, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Frederick Douglass, who gathered to sign the Declaration of Sentiments, a revolutionary affirmation of the rights of women.

However, as we celebrate this auspicious milestone and look back on all that has been achieved since 1848, we must remember that our journey towards gender equality is not yet complete. Despite the courageous efforts of several generations of women, we are still struggling to achieve equality. Among the most distressing disparities between men and women is the significant gap in pay for the same work.

Forty-five years ago, President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act to address the unconscionable practice of paying women less than men for the same job. At that time women earned 59 cents for each dollar earned by a man. While the wage gap has narrowed, today's working women still earn only 77 cents for every dollar earned by men.

In fact, the Department of Labor maintains data on over 300 job classifications, and men are paid more in each of them. Even in female-dominated industries, those in which women comprise 70 percent of the labor force, men make 20 percent more than their female co-workers.

This wage gap is not just a problem for women, it affects families as well. Women often provide a significant share of their family's income, and in many cases are the sole wage-earner. Indeed, 72 percent of women with children work for pay. Even in dual-income households, a woman's income is not supplemental, it is essential to pay for necessities, from housing to health care.

Estimates of the total income loss a woman sustains over her lifetime as a result of the wage gap range from \$200,000 to \$2 million proving that discrimination has become an obstacle for women working to provide for their families.

Despite these staggering statistics, the Supreme Court dealt working women a blow last year

when it decided *Ledbetter v. Goodyear*. In that case, Lilly Ledbetter, a former Goodyear Tire employee, sued the company after discovering that she had been paid significantly less than male employees doing the same job during her nearly two decades of employment. The Supreme Court decided against Ms. Ledbetter. Under the ruling, in order to enforce her right to be paid fairly, Ms. Ledbetter would have had to file a wage-discrimination complaint within 180 days of when the discrimination began.

Justice Ginsberg, the only woman serving on the court, in her dissenting opinion, wisely noted that the Ledbetter decision essentially gutted legislative protections against discriminatory pay practices. Since pay practices typically take place in secret, it would be almost impossible for a woman to discover discrimination within the 180 day window she has to file a claim. In its Ledbetter holding, the Supreme Court has all but endorsed gender discrimination in employment by robbing women of a legal remedy to enforce equality.

Last Thursday, I joined Speaker Pelosi, Senator Clinton, Lilly Ledbetter, and many other Members of Congress at a rally in Washington, DC in support of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act. This critical legislation will rectify the Supreme Court's decision in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear* and build upon the Equal Pay Act to help end the persistent gap in the earnings of men and women. It is my sincere hope that these bills will soon become law.

While we are still struggling for gender equality in the workplace, women across our nation are breaking glass ceilings each day. Speaker Pelosi is the first woman to lead the House of Representatives and Senator Clinton was the first woman to run a formidable presidential campaign. I'll never forget how proud I was when Anne Mulcahy, CEO of Xerox, and Ursula Burns, President of Xerox, graced the front page of *Fortune* magazine for their huge successes at the company. However, while these remarkable women have been recognized for their talents and contributions, how many other extraordinary women have not?

Women workers are not looking for a favor, they are looking for fairness. The principles of equality and justice demand that women receive equal pay for equal work. Despite the obstacles, we must redouble our efforts to insist that Lilly Ledbetter and countless hardworking women across America are compensated fairly. Until women receive equal pay for equal work, we will never reach the gender equality that the women and men present at the 1848 Women's Rights Convention aspired to achieve.