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# Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: Discussion with Working Women

Albuquerque, NM | June 23, 2008

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It's great to be back in New Mexico, and to have this opportunity to discuss some of the challenges that working women are facing. Because I would not be standing before you today as a candidate for President of the United States if it weren't for working women.

I am here because of my mother, a single mom who put herself through school, followed her passion for helping others, and raised my sister and me to believe that in America, there are no barriers to success if you're willing to work for it.

I am here because of my grandmother, who helped raised me. She worked during World War II on a bomber assembly line – she was Rosie the Riveter. Then, even though she never got more than a high school diploma, she worked her way up from her start as a secretary at a bank, and ended up being the financial rock for our entire family when I was growing up.

And I am here because of my wife Michelle, the rock of the Obama family, who worked her way up from modest roots on the South Side of Chicago, and who has juggled jobs and parenting with more skill and grace than anyone I know. Now Michelle and I want our two daughters to grow up in an America where they have the freedom and opportunity to live their dreams and raise their own families.

But even as these stories speak to the progress that we've made, we know that too many of America's daughters grow up facing barriers to their dreams, and that has consequences for all American families. For decades we've had politicians in Washington who talk about family values, but we haven't had policies that value families. Instead, it's harder for working parents to make a living while raising their kids. And we know that the system is especially stacked against women, and that's why Washington has to change.

Now Senator McCain is an honorable man, and we respect his service. But when you look at our records and our plans on issues that matter to working women, the choice could not be clearer.

It starts with equal pay. 62 percent of working women in America earn half – or more than half – of their family's income. But women still earn only 77 cents for every dollar earned by men. In 2008, you'd think that Washington would be united in its determination to fight for equal pay. That's why I was proud to co-sponsor the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act, which would have reversed last year's Supreme Court decision, which made it more difficult for women to challenge pay discrimination on the job.

But Senator McCain thinks the Supreme Court got it right. He opposed the Fair Pay Restoration Act. He suggested that the reason women don't have equal pay isn't discrimination on the job – it's because they need more education and training. That's just totally wrong. Lilly Ledbetter's problem was not that she was somehow unqualified or unprepared for higher-paying positions. She most certainly was, and by all reports she was an excellent employee. Her problem was that her employer paid her less than men who were doing the exact same work.

John McCain just has it wrong. He said the Fair Pay Restoration Act "opens us up to lawsuits for all kinds of problems." But I can't think of any problem more important than making sure that women get equal pay for equal work. It's a matter of equality. It's a matter of fairness. That's why I stood up for equal pay in the Illinois State Senate, and helped pass a law to give 330,000 more women protection from paycheck discrimination. That's why I've been fighting to pass legislation in the Senate, so that employers don't get

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away with discriminating against hardworking women like Lilly Ledbetter. And that's why I'll continue to stand up for equal pay as President. Senator McCain won't, and that's a real difference in this election.

As the son of a single mother, I also don't accept an America that makes women choose between their kids and their careers. It's not acceptable that women are denied jobs or promotions because they've got kids at home. It's not acceptable that forty percent of working women don't have a single paid sick day. That's wrong for working parents, it's wrong for America's children, and it's not who we are as a country.

I'll be a President who stands up for the American family by giving all working parents a hand. To help with childcare, I'll expand the Child and Dependent Care tax credit, so that working families can receive up to a 50 percent credit for their child care expenses. I'll double funding for afterschool programs that help children learn and give parents relief. And I'll invest \$10 billion to guarantee access to quality, affordable, early childhood education for every child in America.

And with more and more households headed by two working parents – or a single working parent – it's also time to dramatically expand the Family and Medical Leave Act. Since more Americans are working for small businesses, I'll expand FMLA to cover businesses with as few as 25 employees – this will reach millions of American workers who aren't covered today. We'll also allow workers to take leave to care for elderly parents. We'll allow parents to take 24 hours of annual leave to join school activities with their kids. And we'll cover employees who are victims of domestic violence or sexual assault.

I'll also stand up for paid leave. Today, 78 percent of workers covered by FMLA don't take leave because it isn't paid. That's just not fair. You shouldn't be punished for getting sick or dealing with a family crisis. That's why I'll require employers to provide all of their workers with seven paid sick days a year. And I'll support a 50-state strategy to adopt paid-leave systems, and set aside \$1.5 billion to fund it. I have a clear plan to expand paid leave and sick leave, Senator McCain doesn't, and that's a real difference in this election.

And at a time when folks are struggling with the rising price of everything from gas to groceries, I'll provide working women with immediate relief. While Senator McCain wants to continue the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans who don't need them and didn't ask for them, I'll pass a middle class tax cut of \$1,000 for each working family. This will deliver tax relief for over 70 million working women. And we need to help folks at the bottom of the ladder. Almost 60 percent of Americans who benefited from raising the minimum wage were women. I won't leave any working people behind. That's why, unlike Senator McCain, I'll index the minimum wage to inflation so that it goes up each year to keep pace with rising costs.

We can't afford an economy where folks keep working harder for less. We can't let the women in our workforce get paid even less for doing the same work. And we can't keep pushing more and more of the burden on to the backs of working parents who are struggling to balance their jobs and their family. Because what binds us together, what makes us one American family, is that we stand up and fight for each other's dreams, and for the dreams of all of our children.

I want my daughters to grow up in an America where they have opportunities that are even greater than their mother had, or their grandmothers, or their great grandmothers – an America where our daughters truly have the same opportunities as our sons.

Standing here today, I know that we have drawn closer to making this America a reality because of the extraordinary woman who I shared a stage with so many times throughout this campaign – Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. And in the months and years ahead, I look forward to working with her to make progress on the issues that matter to American women and to all American families – health care and education; support for working parents and an insistence on equality. Because I want Sasha and Malia to grow up in an America where both work and family are a part of the American Dream, and where that Dream is available to all. That's why I'm running for President of the United States.



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