

Pelosi, House Democratic Women Announce Economic Agenda for Women & Families

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Washington, D.C. – Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and House Democratic women held a press conference at the U.S. Capitol today to announce: “[When Women Succeed, America Succeeds: An Economic Agenda for Women and Families.](#)” Below is a transcript of the event:

Thank you all for joining us on this wonderfully warm summer day. A 100-degree heat index would be intimidating for some, but American women, we have shown that we can take the heat.

Audience. Yeah!

Congresswoman DeLauro informed me this morning that at the time of the Seneca Falls Convention it was 90 degrees.

Audience. Wow!

Ninety degrees and no air conditioning inside. So, indeed, we have withstood much more to make the ideals of our democracy a reality for America’s mothers, wives, and daughters. This week marks the 165th anniversary of a historic gathering of women who were committed to that singular purpose: to ensure that every freedom, every liberty, and every right belongs to every American.

The Seneca Falls Convention was the first Women’s Rights Convention. Our very Declaration of Independence is echoed in the Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men and women are created equal. So now it’s a necessity,” they said, “[for women] to which they are entitled.”

That is why we, the Women Members of the House Democratic Caucus, are so proud to announce an economic agenda for women and families: When Women Succeed, America Succeeds.

[Applause]

This agenda is about the future of America’s families and the growth of America’s economy. When women earn equal pay, we know America’s economy will prosper. When women can have fairness and balance between work and family, we know American society will thrive. It is about unleashing the power of our nation’s women and, in doing so, strengthening the middle class – the backbone of our democracy. And when all women succeed, we know America succeeds.

Our initiative builds on 165 years of progress at Seneca Falls. We today want to address the economic challenges facing America's women and families. To do so, we will hear from Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro. You all know her to be an unsurpassed champion for the women's economic agenda. She is here with her guest, ReShonda Young, who will discuss our initiative for equal pay. You all know of [Congresswoman] Rosa [DeLauro's] credentials. I want to make sure that you are aware of the extraordinary credentials of Congresswoman Donna Edwards, a champion as Chair of the Democratic Working Women's Group. She has been such a force, such a force in the Congress on improving the economic situation for women [and] with her guest, Sonja Darai, they will discuss women and life balance. Congresswoman Doris Matsui, Co-Chair of the Democratic Working Women's Group, another champion for women, an articulate spokesperson for women's prosperity, with her guest, Stephanie Brown, and they will discuss the importance of affordable child care. Bringing us all together is a woman who has made history as one of the few women to chair a full committee of the House, Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, who is now the Ranking Democrat on the Small Business Committee. She will discuss the vital role played by women small business owners.

In the interest of time, I am just asking to bring themselves on so that we can hear directly from them – an important economy of time in light of the weather, but with full value for what their contributions means for women. And now we are going to hear from Congresswoman DeLauro's guest, ReShonda Young.”

Ms. Young. Thank you, Leader Pelosi. My name is ReShonda Young. I'm the Operations Manager for my family's businesses, Alpha Express and Alpha Services in Waterloo, Iowa. Alpha Express is a transportation company that hauls parts all throughout the United States and into Canada. And Alpha Express is a maintenance contracting company that provides services to local companies and John Deere facilities as well. My dad started the businesses in 1989.

I want to thank Leader Pelosi and other Representatives here for inviting me to join you and share perspective from our businesses. When I decided to join my dad and the family businesses seven years ago, I found that there was an issue with our paychecks. We had a woman who had been with us for many years and she was the one who was keeping everything in order. One day I found out that she was only getting paid a little more than half of what her male counterparts were making. I knew I had to do something about it. For my dad and me to be able to work together and make our business into what he and I envisioned it to be, things had to change. So, when my concerns weren't quickly addressed...

[Laughter]

...I contacted our accountant and I raised our women's pay to be equal to those of our male counterparts.

[Applause]

And that was dealt without authorization.

[Laughter]

I believe people should be paid according to the job they're doing and the value they bring to a company, nothing more nothing less. I refuse to allow myself or other women workers to be paid less than the value that we bring to our company because of our gender. I love my dad dearly. But, he was 65 [years old] when I came to work with him and he had a very old school mentality about women and work. It was something that he's had to struggle to get over, but in the end he's got it.

[Laughter]

The reason he got there was because he recognized that the women on our team were instrumental to keeping the business afloat. It really would not survive without us. I'm proud of the decisions we've made in our business, and I'm committed to continuing to offer fair wages and equal pay for equal work.

This is about the values I hold as a small business woman. It's about how we attract and keep good employees on our team. And it's about how we build strong communities, stronger families, and stronger local economies in Waterloo, Iowa and across the nation.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Ms. DeLauro. Thank you, ReShonda, you said it all – what a story. Good afternoon and thank you all for being here. Let me acknowledge Leader Pelosi and all of my colleagues for their hard work and their leadership in helping to improve the lives of women and families across our country. Thank you to all of our guests who have come to share their personal stories.

The issue here is income. Congress can make an important difference for women and families by working to raise their wages. We need to pass paycheck fairness, increase the minimum wage, and provide women with education and training opportunities to further their careers. Women comprise 40 percent of the country's breadwinners, but the vast majority are low-wage workers in single-headed households. Women are more likely to be in poverty, to file for bankruptcy, and to have less retirement savings. Unmarried women – single, widowed, divorced, or separated – are the most economically insecure. And 50 years after the Equal Pay Act, women are still being paid only 77 cents on the dollar as compared to men for the same job. That comes to an average real difference of \$11,000 per year – that is two years' worth of groceries or over a year of rent. And for women of color the disparity is even worse.

One key step forward is enacting the Paycheck Fairness Act to help ensure a simple principle: same job, same pay. We also need to raise the minimum wage: two out of three workers making the minimum wage are women. The minimum wage used to be equal to about half of average wages, and at \$7.25 an hour, it is now barely a third. At this rate, a mom with two kids could work full time and still be well below the poverty line. Women are really struggling financially. They are looking for an increase in the minimum wage and equal pay so that they can raise their income, so that they can support their families and have a chance for a better life. And third:

while women have recognized that education and training will help them to improve economically, student debt has skyrocketed, eating up more and more of that monthly paycheck.

We need to support women's efforts to receive a better education and training opportunities, to further their careers, and to obtain better-paying jobs. For women to succeed, for America to succeed, we need an economic agenda that ensures women equal and rising pay and that supports them with training and education opportunities.

Thank you.

[Applause]

Let me now hand it over to Sonja Darai of Somerville, Massachusetts. She's going to share her story with all of you, Sonja.

Ms. Darai. Thank you so much.

Good afternoon. I want to thank Leader Pelosi for allowing me to be here today. My name is Sonja Darai and I am from Somerville, Massachusetts. I'm a member of the group MomsRising and I'm a mom of two sons.

[Applause]

Yay MomsRising! And I'm a mom of two great sons – Kerian, he's 14 years, and Lucian, he's 12. I'm here today to talk to you about the benefits of the Family and Medical Leave Act or FMLA. Last year, the FMLA was instrumental in keeping my family afloat when my father broke his hip and required hip replacement surgery. The FMLA allowed me to take a month off from work to help with his daily needs. During his recovery from hip surgery, I cooked for him, I did laundry, I talked with him a lot, and I ran errands. My dad needed help with his physical therapy and I was able to be there for him. My sisters and nieces had been my father's primary caretakers, but they needed a break and I stepped in.

But that's what families are supposed to do when times get tough. None of it would have been possible if it weren't for FMLA. In reality, it didn't just help my father get back on his feet. It also helped bring my family together. My presence meant my dad could stay in his own home instead of going to a nursing home. This is better for my father's mental health, as well as saved us money in the long term. My sisters and I were there with a helping hand, organizing his medicine, helping him prepare meals, helping him just to go to the bathroom. He would not have been able to stay independent if I hadn't been there.

Today, my father's healthy again. He's still in his own home. And thanks to FMLA, my father is a dapper, older man who goes to visit his neighbors. And I'm a happy daughter, a sister, mom, with job security. But not everyone is so fortunate. In my particular case, I was able to use my accrued paid sick days from my family leave. Some people don't have that luxury, they don't have paid sick days to cover their leave. I know that it could be torture when you can't be there for someone you love when they're ill or in need of help. Unfortunately, that's the reality for

most people in this country. Making family and medical leave, and in particular paid family medical leave, a requirement for all workers would go a long way to relieve the stress that so many families need during medical crises.

Everyone should have benefits. Actually, everyone should have the right to be, to have paid family medical leave. It's good for employers and employees since happy, healthy workers make for a productive and fair workplace. Thank you everyone.

[Applause]

Ms. Edwards. Wow, Sonja, thank you so much for sharing your story. Every once in a while, when I'm blown away by Leader Pelosi and our colleagues who've joined us here on the steps. Then we get to hear from ReShonda Young and we hear from Sonja Darai and then we hear from Stephanie Brown, and we are blown away even more because they represent so many women all across this country.

I'm really pleased to join our leaders here and our colleagues. Representative DeLauro didn't say this, but her state is one among three in the nation, in Connecticut, to provide paid sick leave. And to my colleagues, Representative Matsui and Velazquez, and other colleagues, we're here to promote an agenda for women because when women succeed, America truly does succeed.

[Applause]

Sonja's story is one that we really know all too well. For twenty years now, the Family and Medical Leave Act has enabled millions of women like Sonia to care for themselves, or loved ones, with peace and the peace of mind that they wouldn't lose their job because they were taking care of their family responsibilities. FMLA provides workers with up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to take care of themselves, a new born, a newly adopted child, or as you've heard, a family member with a serious injury or condition. And it has been used over, get this, the Family and Medical Leave Act in 20 years has been used over 100 million times, in 20 years. And so while the law has been successful and it's been overwhelmingly popular among the public, FMLA only provides unpaid leave.

And so today we want to outline an economic agenda that says we can actually build on FMLA. Women make up over half of the workforce; 40 percent are primary bread winners in their household and so many women had single parent households. And so that means that millions of women across our country are responsible for making significant or singular contributions to their family income. And so these women, who are so deeply woven in the economic fabric of our country should also have the benefit of knowing that they would be able to take paid leave to provide a savings and it would provide a savings of \$160 billion a year because productivity would be increased, turnover would be decreased.

Low wage workers, a majority of whom are women and by the way, as [Representative] Rosa [DeLauro] said: "let's increase that minimum wage including tipped wages," are not able to earn paid leave and have to work while their ill or while a family member is ill. And so those paid sick days, and it's estimated that more than a third of working women are not able to take that

time off to care for themselves and their families. And so Sonia's story in some ways is slightly unusual, and so what we need to do is for women who are concerned about a work life balance, that really allows them to meet all of their responsibilities, that should include paid sick leave. And it's why we're meeting women like Sonja and they're here to address these concerns. The United States remains really one of the only developed nations that doesn't offer paid family and medical leave. And so it's time for us to stand with women like Sonja, to stand with the leaders in Congress and provide an economic agenda that really does say: "when women succeed, America succeeds." And that has to include paid leave.

[Applause]

And now I'd like to introduce another one of these fabulous women, Stephanie Brown, to share with us her story.

Mr. Brown. Hello, my name is Stephanie Brown and I recently graduated from Grand Valley State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology. However, I was not your average college student. I am a mother to a four year old daughter named Mackenzie, therefore I was considered a student parent. I'm originally from metro Detroit in Michigan and I got pregnant shortly after I graduated high school in 2008. I was not going to let this challenge stop me from furthering my education. I knew that I needed an education in order to land a decent job, so I decided to attend community college for two years. As soon as I completed my general requirements, I decided to further my education at a university.

In the fall of 2010, I transferred to Grand Valley State University and moved to Grand Rapids with my daughter. Grand Rapids is two and a half hours away from my hometown and family, so I knew I was going to need help with my daughter in order to attend school full time while working. Grand Valley was very helpful with directing me to their available resources for student parents. They gave me a list of affordable apartments around campus and also gave me information on daycare centers in the area. My daughter went to a quality and affordable daycare right on Grand Valley's campus called the Children's Enrichment Center. The daycare also provided me with countless resources and created community, community that made me feel very comfortable being a student parent. The Director even encouraged me to write an essay for a scholarship to the women's center on campus. I was blessed to receive that scholarship and it helped me purchase my school supplies and books.

[Applause]

Ms. Brown. If it was not for Grand Valley's resources, I would not have been able to work, raise my daughter, and receive my Bachelor's Degree in five years. Because of my education, I now hold a full time position at Saint John's D.A Blodgett as a Direct Care Counselor in a children's shelter. I know I would not have been able to receive my education, and the job I have now without the resources available at Grand Valley State University. I am so grateful for my education and also for the quality of care my child received in the process. Thank you.

[Applause]

Ms. Matsui. Thank you Stephanie for the truly inspiring story. My name is Doris Matsui, I am from Sacramento, California and I have been meeting with some extraordinary women in my district: small business owners, women in clean energy and clean tech, and women working two jobs, sometimes three jobs, to support their families. But no matter what their background, no matter what we're talking about, we always reach a point in our conversation, any conversation, where they say: "and then there was a time that I had to drop everything I was doing to pick up my kids."

You know when we talk about affordable, reliable child care, women get it immediately. Every mother has had to face that frightening moment of uncertainty when one responsibility is pulling them in one direction and the duties as a mother are pulling them in another. And you know, it's just not moms, every day this choice is faced by grandmothers, aunts, sisters and other women with children in their lives. For too many women, it may be the choice between a paycheck or a safe environment for their kids. This is not a choice any mom should have to make and why affordable, reliable child care is essential for the economic security of women. The Democratic Women in the House understand this and we are here to elevate the issue of child care to give it the national attention it deserves. We can do this by expanding the child care tax credit, by defending head start programs, and ensuring adequate pay and training for child care workers.

[Applause]

We also challenge our colleagues in Congress to have the vision to invest in our children's future by enacting President Obama's Preschool For All initiative. Quality preschool provides educational opportunities at a time where children's minds are rapidly expanding and it provides safe and reliable care whether mothers are at work or school. Affordable, reliable child care will boost the economy by allowing working moms to participate more fully. Because when women succeed, America succeeds.

[Applause]

I thank you, my colleagues, for being here and I want to now here from my colleague, Congresswoman Velázquez.

Ms. Velázquez. Thank you Doris and thank you Madam Leader, [Congresswoman] Rosa DeLauro, my colleagues, and all the special guests that are here. As we have heard first hand today, women workers are a cornerstone of our economy. When women have the tools to succeed, America as a whole moves forward. I challenge anyone here that visits with a small business person, and they will say to you that the biggest obstacle they have right now is lack of consumers walking through their doors.

This is an economic agenda that empowers women as consumers but that does much more. And this is especially true in entrepreneurship. Women today own 17 million businesses in the United States and ninety percent of them are small businesses. In fact, in just ten years, women-owned enterprises have grown and doubled the rate of those owned by their male counterparts. Given the tools, imagine, imagine the vast potential that we hold here for job creation. The agenda being promoted today will empower more women to go into business for themselves and create

jobs in their communities. Expanding child care access gives more women freedom to launch and maintain a new business. The truth is that no women should be put in the position of having to try to choose between starting a business and raising a child.

It is certainly challenging being a working mom, but it is even more daunting to be a single mother trying to start your own company. In fact, female business owners spend six and a half hours more per week caring for children than male entrepreneurs. Granting women greater flexibility means more of them can pursue entrepreneurship while also caring for their families. Child care isn't the only obstacle. In that regard, ensuring working women achieve pay equity can help more women pursue business ownership. Simply put, when women make more, they save more, giving them resources to invest in a business. But we shouldn't stop there. We need to move from welfare to business ownership, which is truly inspirational and a victory not just for those women, but for the entire U.S. economy.

Likewise, by investing in job training, as this agenda promotes, we can give more women skills they need to open businesses and also create a steady supply of skilled labor for women in entrepreneurship to hire. These are the investments our nation must make in female entrepreneurship. When women succeed, America succeeds.

This agenda will help women from all walks of life. It is about the twenty year old graduating from college as we saw here, a single working mom who wants more control in her life, the new immigrant who left her country for the better future for their children, and the suburban mother who doesn't want to choose between climbing the corporate ladder and raising a family.

The agenda we are laying out today sends a clear message to American working women: we are on your side. Thank you.

[Applause]

Leader Pelosi. Well I thank everyone for participating today. It's an honor to stand here with our colleagues, male and female, as well as representatives of some of the organizations who work with women in the workplace to advance the cause of women and families in our country.

We stand on the steps of the Capitol of the United States and I want to acknowledge the presence and the endurance of our colleague [Congresswoman] Tammy Duckworth, who has been standing with us the whole time, a veteran, a woman veteran, whose leadership has made us the home of the brave and the land of the free. As well as [Congresswoman] Tulsi Gabbard, another woman veteran who is in our Caucus. And she had to leave because we have action on the floor, but [Congresswoman] Louise Slaughter was here before and she represents the Seneca Falls area in Congress and she has been a champion for what she calls 'uppity women' and their 'uppityness.' But I wanted to acknowledge her leadership in advancing the principles of Seneca Falls. As they said: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal. Such is now the necessity for women to be in equal station to which they are entitled.' That's what we are here to do: when women succeed, America succeeds! Thank you all. Thank you all.

[Applause]