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## Insider's View

# Fair Pay Act a good start for Obama administration

[Pittsburgh Business Times](#) - by [Heather Arnet](#)

Last week, President Barack Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act into law. This is positive progress towards fulfilling his campaign pledge to eliminate our nation's wage gap.

Congress can make even more progress towards this goal by passing the Paycheck Fairness Act later this month. This companion legislation to Ledbetter would close the loopholes allowing employers to pay discriminatorily and provides consequences for that discrimination.

These national legislative actions are relevant to the people and businesses of southwest Pennsylvania because our region has one of the most significant wage gaps in the country. While women earn more than 81 cents nationally compared with male counterparts, women in the Pittsburgh region earn less than 70 cents on the dollar.

Just this week, coinciding with the passage of Ledbetter, the Bayer Center for Nonprofit Management and the United Way of Allegheny County released the 2008 Wage and Benefit Survey. In its seventh year, the survey once again quantified and exposed the nonprofit sector's gender gap, concluding that female nonprofit executives in Allegheny County earn 73 percent of their male colleagues' compensation.

These findings reinforce the need for employees, employers, public officials, corporate leadership and boards of directors to work together to take aggressive action in order to eliminate the region's gender wage gap. Finding ways to eliminate the gap is crucial to the economic health of our region. For Pittsburgh to retain strong talent, for our businesses to compete for the best workers, and for our corporations to avoid costly lawsuits, we must evaluate our compensation practices to ensure that Pittsburgh is a leader in Paycheck Fairness.

Nationally, women accounted for 68.4 percent of minimum-wage and below-minimum wage workers in 2007. The poverty rate for single female-headed households is higher than any other demographic group in America. Women's rights to equal compensation, and access to crucial services for themselves and their families, need to be priorities—for this new presidential administration, and our elected officials in the state and region.

As Obama, Congress, Gov. Ed Rendell, and county and city officials craft national, state and local recovery packages, their respective administrations must consider how 51 percent of the population will be impacted by the recommended cuts in social services and recommended investments via stimulus plans.

While the passage of the Ledbetter Act last week was cause for celebration, the removal of investment to expand health care services for lower income women was not. Hours before the House voted on the stimulus plan, the president agreed to remove a provision increasing Medicaid coverage for low-income women covering Ob/Gyn and family planning care.

Their investment would have retained and created jobs in our health care and nursing sectors, and assured that women who have lost their jobs (or health insurance) due to the recession could retain the right to affordable health care for themselves and their families.

As more businesses decrease their offerings of health insurance, more employees will look to these public services to provide basic wellness and family health support. The ability to have equal access to affordable medical care, Ob/Gyn, prenatal and contraception services for working women and lower-income women directly impacts their earning capacities.

Legislation which protects workers' rights to earn fair wages, and stimulus investment in building the human infrastructure of our nation—the education, childcare and health sectors—is as crucial and necessary as repairing turnpikes and bridges and will result in equal benefit for our region and national economic recoveries.