

In 1987, I worked along with my colleagues in Congress to pass a resolution which designates the month of March as "Women's History Month." During this month we celebrate the legacy of achievement of American women.

The theme of this year's celebration is "Women Change America," as the nation reflects upon the ways in which women have transformed culture, history and politics. We take this month to show our appreciation for, and continue to educate ourselves about, the many accomplishments of our talented female political leaders, writers, scientists, artists and educators.

Today, women are employed as professionals in fields that 30 years ago were not even an option and hold positions of authority and responsibility at almost every level of government. In this year's 109th Congress, there are a record 82 women serving.

Since women were belatedly endowed the right to vote in 1920 by the 19th Amendment, American women have increased their political involvement over the years and have actively exercised their right to vote. In the 2000 Presidential election, women were more likely to vote than men (61 percent compared with 58 percent).

Further, the 19th Amendment also empowered women to demand better jobs and better pay and to get equal pay for equal work. And over the years, women have become an increasingly powerful force in the workplace.

The Center for Women's Business Research reports that last year, there were an estimated 197,631 privately-held women-owned firms in Maryland, accounting for 47.4 percent of all privately-held firms in the state. These women-owned firms in Maryland generate more than \$35 billion in sales and employ 313,122 people.

Additionally, American women have taken on a more active role within our communities. In 1972, the Congress passed Title IX prohibiting sex discrimination in federally funded education programs and activities. Nearly three million young women were able to participate in high school athletic programs in the 2002-2003 school year in comparison to only 800,000 in the year the legislation was passed.

Women have also taken full advantage of the opportunities offered to them by increased educational equality. Thirty-one percent of 25 to 29 year-old women have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. This percentage of women exceeds the percentage of men (26 percent). Furthermore, 57 percent of bachelor's degrees and 58 percent of master's degrees are expected to be awarded to women this school year.

This success, however, has not come without great challenges. In 2002, women earned 76 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts. While working women in Maryland are farther along the road to equal pay than women in many states, earning 83.5 percent as much per hour as men, pay discrimination affects the majority of American families. With over 64 million women in the workforce, collectively, American families lose over \$100 billion annually in wages due to pay inequity.

I have been a strong sponsor of steps to ensure that women receive the same protection, pay, benefits and promotional opportunities as their male co-workers. And, I continue to work toward this end because equal pay is not a women's issue. This enormous loss of income hurts fathers, husbands, and families who depend on that income for their livelihood.

We know that time alone will not solve the problem of unequal pay for women. At the current rate of change, working women in Maryland won't have equal pay until 2024. Nationwide, women won't achieve equal pay until after 2050.

It requires action: on the part of business owners and executives to advance corporate compensation practices with regular pay reviews and equal benefits, as well as active recruitment of women.

It requires action from policymakers like myself: to strengthen equal pay laws; improve enforcement; and continue to strengthen and revitalize small business loan programs that provide assistance to women-owned business to help women access the capital they need to start a business, and increase the access of women-owned businesses to federal contracts.

We must be cognizant of these disparities preventing such an important segment of our society from success because without doing so, we will miss out on the strength and spirit with which American women contribute to our nation and our prosperity. The month of March is dedicated

## **Celebrating Talented Women Serving America**

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to honoring the great impact women have had on our country. I join the nation in celebrating our strong, successful women and remain committed to their flourishing future.