

MARGUERITE WILLIS: Women and the wage gap

Marguerite Willis Guest Columnist
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The statistics are all too familiar. For every dollar a white South Carolina man makes, a woman makes, on average, 77 cents. For African-American women, they earn 57 cents for every dollar a white man makes, and for Latina women, it's 53 cents.

This wage gap affects women across industries, from housekeepers to neurosurgeons, and for the past century, this gap has barely budged.

Every year, South Carolina women who are employed full time lose a combined total of \$10 billion due to the wage gap. Let's do the math on that. Annually, that means the average woman is losing over \$10,000 a year, not on merit, not for reasons of performance, but because of her gender. For tens of thousands of families across our state, this adds up to rent payments, car payments, food and clothing for children and more.

I saw the results of this sobering inequity first hand when I ran for governor last year. No person of good conscience believes this differential is just or fair. So why does it persist? As a woman who has worked for years in a male-dominated profession, I have my opinions. But at the end of the day, opinions are worthless unless there are solutions.

This week, U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris announced a historic plan to close the gender pay gap. For too long, women seeking pay equity have been forced to sue and prove that they are being paid less than their male counterparts. Under a Harris administration, the burden would shift to large businesses to acquire "Equal Pay Certification" and proactively demonstrate that they are providing equal pay for equal work. And, if Congress fails to act, she'll move forward by requiring equal pay certification for any company seeking a federal contract.

Equal pay is about doing right by women, and it's also about correcting an economic failure that hurts men and families as well. When women can't earn what they're worth due to sexism in the workplace, their families don't have what they need to thrive. So, we have to address fundamental inequalities, including the wage penalty women pay when caring for a new child or a sick parent.

Kamala Harris knows that the lack of paid family and medical leave consistently holds women and families back from economic prosperity. That's why she's proposing that companies that fail to pay men and women equally for equal work will be fined. Those fines will then be invested in universal paid family and medical leave, which will greatly benefit South Carolina families.

We need leadership on the federal level to take the concerns of our citizens seriously. I endorsed Kamala Harris for president because she's not just talking about these issues, she's promising concrete action. Kamala Harris has proposed the largest tax cut for working Americans in generations, the largest federal investment to raise teacher pay in our country's history, and now she's taking on the systemic failure of our economy to be fair to some of the hardest working among us.

I'm proud to support her candidacy, because Kamala Harris is, and will always be, a champion for all of us.



Marguerite Willis

Marguerite Willis is an attorney who lives in Florence and works in Columbia. She was a 2016 South Carolina gubernatorial candidate.

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