



October 21, 2010

White House Promotes Economic Efforts for Women

By **SEWELL CHAN**

WASHINGTON — As one of its closing arguments before the midterm elections, the Obama administration is highlighting the impact its economic policies have had on women.

A 32-page [report](#) released Thursday by the National Economic Council, a policy coordination arm of the White House, described scores of policies that it said had promoted women's economic security.

For example, it cited the expansion of the earned-income tax credit, which disproportionately benefits working mothers; work-study money for [community college](#) students, 56 percent of whom are female; state aid supporting the jobs of teachers and nurses, who are mostly women; and Democratic opposition to privatizing [Social Security](#), of which women make up 57 percent of beneficiaries.

The policy paper was timed to the Nov. 2 election, as Democrats try to respond to voter discontent over the slow pace of the recovery and the stubbornly high rate of unemployment.

"If the Republicans in Congress have their way, many of the economic policies that have been helping millions of American women not only survive during this [recession](#), but begin to make progress while the economy continues to recover, would no longer be in place," said [Valerie Jarrett](#), a senior adviser to [President Obama](#).

The report, whose tone was less partisan, noted that women were now 47 percent of all workers, 60 percent of part-time workers, 51 percent of managers and 57 percent of undergraduate students. But nearly a half-century after the [Equal Pay Act](#) was signed in 1963, women earn 77 cents for every dollar paid to men — a gap that has changed little over the past decade.

The gap cannot be explained by differences in education, hours worked or labor-market experience, said Cecilia E. Rouse, an economist who is on leave from Princeton while serving on the [Council of Economic Advisers](#).

Women's median annual earnings fell by 2.8 percent during the 2007-9 recession, compared with 4.1 percent for men. That recession was the first since the late 1960s in which women's pay had declined.

Single mothers, black and Hispanic women and older women have been particularly hard hit. During the recession, the unemployment rate for women who are single heads of households rose to 13.6 percent — the highest level in 25 years — from 6.2 percent before the recession.

Some economists who reviewed the report said the administration needed to go further.

The president has improved access to health insurance, but has not done enough to create jobs for workers without a college education or to help with child-care expenses, said Barbara R. Bergmann, an economist at American University.

“Most of the advances women have made have been in the professions and business management,” she said, calling for “a revival of affirmative action to get women into the better-paying blue-collar jobs.”

Heidi Hartmann, president of the [Institute for Women’s Policy Research](#), said: “Nobody’s opposed to getting the deficit down in the long run, but we don’t want it to happen too soon because we’re still recovering from a very deep recession. We need to raise government revenues, we don’t need to cut entitlements.”