

BARACK OBAMA

October 11, 2008

The First Biennial Seneca Falls Dialogues

Dear Friends,

It's a pleasure to welcome everyone in attendance to the 160th Anniversary of the Women's Rights Convention and the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights hosted by the Seneca Falls Dialogues, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you today.

The work you're doing is crucial to working women and their families and they are extremely important to me. It's time for leadership that acknowledges the vital contributions of women to our society, enables and encourages even greater achievement and participation.

Despite the tremendous gains women have made since enactment of laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, women continue to face significant obstacles due to gender discrimination in employment, work-life balance, and health. As President, I will dedicate myself to improving the lives of women through pay equity, access to education, investment in women-owned businesses, policies to help manage work-life balance, affordable healthcare, reproductive choice, and violence-prevention. There are a number of steps we must take to achieve these goals.

Because women still earn on average 23 cents an hour less than men, and women of color earn even less, I will see that the Equal Pay Act is better enforced and work for passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act, which I co-sponsored. I also support indexing the minimum wage to inflation and improving and expanding access to the EITC to provide tax relief to low-income working women. And I will vigorously enforce Title IX to protect and advance the rights of female students. We must also try innovative solutions such as building career pathways systems in community colleges that enable low-skilled and low-income adults to progress through occupational training to good employment and to get the tuition assistance and other supports they need along the way.

I will continue pushing for increased female representation in jobs where women have been underutilized, and ensure that tax dollars are not underwriting employment discrimination—federal contracts should only go to companies that obey the law. And to help the ever-increasing number of women entrepreneurs, I will increase women's access to the federal procurement process and strengthen small business programs for women within the Small Business Administration (SBA).

As the father of two young daughters, I am intimately familiar with the challenges faced by parents who also work outside the home, and I will support them by doubling funding for after-school programs and expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act to cover more employees and make the reasons for taking leave more family-friendly. I will also require employers to provide at least seven paid sick days per year and encourage states to adopt paid



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family/medical leave programs. Other ways we can help include protecting against caregiver discrimination, providing low-income families with a refundable tax credit to help with their childcare expenses, and encouraging flexible work schedules.

Most women 65 and over get a majority of their income from Social Security. Without Social Security, more than half of all elderly women would be living in poverty. But, even with Social Security, one of every five elderly women living alone is poor. I will stop any efforts to privatize Social Security and work in a bi-partisan way to preserve it for future generations. In addition, I will provide a retirement savings “match” to low- and middle-income workers.

I am committed to addressing our health insurance crisis. Nineteen million women do not currently have health insurance, but when I am President, we will pass a plan that covers every American, and will lower a typical family’s premiums by as much as \$2,500. In addition, I will see that research is undertaken and attention given to combating diseases and illnesses that disproportionately affect women like heart disease, ovarian and breast cancer.

I have been and will continue to be a champion of reproductive choice, as well as preventive services to reduce unintended pregnancies. I helped reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act – originally authored by my running mate, Senator Joe Biden, and I will continue to strengthen efforts to reduce violence against women and ensure job security to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

At the international level, I will work to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is considered by many around the world to be an “international bill of rights for women.” The Convention affirms the reproductive rights of women, supports women’s political and economic rights, and highlights the importance of eradicating violence against women. Ratifying this treaty will make the U.S. a more active ally in the international fight to eradicate violence against women and it will serve as a model that can inspire individual states to take steps to reduce violence against women.

Thank you again for all you are doing for women in this country and for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today. I wish you all the best for an enjoyable Convention and continued success.

Sincerely,



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