**Congress Must Pass the Paycheck Fairness Act and Stop the Theft of Women’s Wages**

**Statement by NOW President Toni Van Pelt**

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WASHINGTON — At this very moment, the U.S. House of Representatives has the opportunity to advance legislation — more than 20 years in the making — that will finally begin to close the pay gap between women and men. The National Organization for Women (NOW) strongly supports the Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 7) and urges the House of Representatives to pass the bill without amendments when it comes to the floor on Wednesday, March 27.

This bill, which Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) has introduced in every Congress since 1997 and did again this year along with Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), would close loopholes in the Equal Pay Act by:

* Increasing penalties for wage discrimination and assuring that employers determine wages through the factors of experience, training, and education rather than sex.
* Directing federal agencies to collect and distribute data on compensation discrimination.
* Barring retaliation against women who seek information on pay disparity.

The fact is that women are not gaining ground when it comes to pay equity. When the Equal Pay Act was passed in 1963, women were paid 58 cents for every dollar earned by men. While progress has been made, the ratio for weekly full-time earnings of women and men widened slightly between 2017 and 2018.

In 2018, the ratio of women’s to men’s median weekly full-time earnings was 81.1 percent, a decrease of 0.7 percent since 2017, according to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR). This continues a four-decade trend of the declining percentage change in closing the gender gap. Even worse, when adjusted for inflation, women’s median earnings stayed unchanged since 2017, but men’s earnings increased by 0.9 percent.

When breaking down the 2018 ratios for median weekly earnings by race (as compared to white male earnings), IWPR’s research shows:

* White women at 81.5 percent
* Black women at 65.3 percent
* Hispanic women at 61.6 percent
* Asian women at 93.5 percent (*While higher educational attainment leads to higher incomes for Asian American women and men, women still make less than both white men and Asian American men.*)

Women have been waiting far too long for equal wages and the Paycheck Fairness Act would bring us several important steps closer to parity.  NOW demands that Congress take action and finally stop the theft of hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages for women and their families around the U.S.