

Senator Barbara Mikulski:

Mr. President, I take the floor today as the dean of the Democratic women in the Senate. I say to my colleagues and to all who are watching: We women are mad as hell, and we don't want to take it anymore. We are mad that in this institution, when all is said and done, more gets said than gets done.

We are here today, united as Democratic women, to be a voice, a voice for change. We have a checklist for change we think we can do before this Congress adjourns.

These are issues that focus on the big picture of what our country is facing, but they also focus on the impact these issues have on families. We look at macro issues that affect the world and the macaroni-and-cheese issues that affect families.

In order to get things done, women have checklists in their daily lives--whether it is to get the laundry done or pick the kids up from school. We have a checklist on what we want to do in terms of a legislative agenda. This is not about gender; it is about an agenda. We invite the good men of the Senate to join us, and we hope that people from the other side will join us. We want to work to bring about change, and we start with wanting to end the gridlock.

Look at these issues for which we stand. We want to provide equal pay for equal work, good jobs that stay in the United States, we want to make health care affordable, we want to take care of our military families and veterans. If they fought over there, they should have a safety net back here. We also want to restore America's credibility in the world, protect our environment. We are looking out for gas, and we are looking out for groceries. We want to make sure there is another FEMA. And, along the way, we protect the family checkbook. We want to make sure we get rid of the boondoggles that are eating up our Federal budget.

For me, I am the leadoff. But every woman here has an issue to which she will be speaking. What do I want to speak to? I want to speak to equal pay for equal work.

Members might recall a few weeks ago we brought legislation to the floor to correct the gap in wage discrimination law. We lost that, but I said when the vote was over: The issue is not gone. I called upon the women to put their lipstick on, square their shoulders, suit up, and fight for an American revolution. This is why we are here today. This is another salvo.

Many people think, wage discrimination, didn't we solve that? No. Wage discrimination still exists. Women are earning just 77 cents for every dollar our male counterparts make. We can see this now in the famous Ledbetter v. Goodyear case. Lilly Ledbetter, a hard-working woman, challenged the system. She didn't find out until years later that she was being paid less than her male counterparts. She took it to the EEOC. The corporation fought her every step of the way. It ended up in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court made an outrageous decision. They said she waited too long to file her complaint. The Court also said she didn't do it in time.

We think it is about time we change the law. What we want to do is bring back the Lilly Ledbetter legislation called the Fair Pay Restoration Act. We want to bring it back up for a vote because equal pay for equal work is about fairness. It is about justice. It is about respect. It is going to close the loophole on the so-called statute of limitations on when one can file a wage discrimination case. We believe the current practice has been a good one, but we disagree with the Supreme Court.

We are going to bring it back up for a vote. We ask our colleagues to join us. We don't want our agenda to die in parliamentary entanglements. What we want to do is untangle this law and make sure women get equal pay and experience it in their personal checkbook, and we have to change the Federal lawbook.

We are ready. We are suited up. We have signed up. Join with us. We know the Presiding Officer is one of the great guys in the Senate who supports us. Before we go out at the end of this session, let's bring about change. Let's make America proud of their Congress. Let's turn the page.

I yield the floor to my new but very able and experienced colleague from Missouri, who has been fighting boondoggles in that Federal checkbook.