WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

SPEECH FOR

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Hello everyone!! I want to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for giving me the opportunity to share some thoughts today and may I say, “You’ve come a long way, baby!!” Most of you are probably too young to remember that catch phrase, but it was coined in 1968 for a cigarette brand that was targeted for the newly “liberated” female demographic. It’s hard to imagine that there were cigarette commercials back then and it’s even harder to imagine the birth of the women’s rights movement, but really, baby, how far **HAVE** we come? Where are we now? And how can we improve and revolutionize conditions for women and in particular working women? According to a report from the US Census Bureau entitled “Women in the Workforce,” back in the late ‘60’s there were about 15 million women in the workplace as compared to 37 million men at around the same time. The median annual income for women was around $25,000 a year while men earned almost twice as much. By 2009, women’s wages “sky rocketed” to an average of about 36,300 while men leveled off at around $47,000. (**If you want to make a joke you can say**) According to this report, it looks like the more women earned, the more men might have been inspired to ease up a little!!

Almost fifty years have gone by since women began to travel on that modern road of equality and independence. So, in the words of the late Mayor Ed Koch, “How are we doing?” What does the working woman in New Jersey face today? In 2013, the American Association of University Women published a study called “Gender Pay Gap: New Jersey.” In that study we learn, “With a record number of women in the workforce and two-thirds of women functioning as primary or co-bread winners for their families, equal pay for women is critical to families’ economic security. Yet in 2012, women working full- time, year round, were still paid 77 cents on average for every dollar paid to men.” But let’s look on the bright side… in Wyoming, the earning power of women is less than 2/3 that of men in the same state. I suppose it’s all relative!

The National Women’s Law Center in Washington DC has a poignant and fitting motto- “Stop **DISCOUNTING** WOMEN. **I AM NOT WORTHLESS**.” This organization released the following information as of 2012 based on a survey from the Census Bureau: “The poverty rate for female headed families with children averaged almost 41% while the percentage for male headed families with children was a little more than half at 22%. The poverty rate for married couples with children was 8.9% for the same reporting period.”

It’s no secret, times are getting tougher, it’s getting harder to make ends meet, and our money is not worth the same as it once was. Family budgets and tolerance are being pushed to the limits while we all work harder but to what ultimate goal? How do we work smarter? How do we encourage the initiation of programs that will support women in the workplace? Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “A woman is like a tea bag-you never know how strong she is until you put her in hot water.” I don’t know about how all of you feel, but I think this kettle has been whistling for years!! (**Wait for the laugh**) In a study by Wallet Hub called “Best and Worst States for Working Moms,” New Jersey ranked 15th-tied with Tennessee-that’s probably not great news, but on the bright side, the state ranked 8th in child care.

So what CAN be done to find the balance in all aspects of life for working women? Here are some insights and suggestions from the expert panel interviewed in the Wallet Hub study:

* Sara Sutton Fell of FlexJobs.com reminds us, “Work flexibility is no longer a fringe idea. More companies are adopting flexible options.” She also suggests that an important move on the part of state and local governments would be to embrace work flexibility and telecommuting for their own workforces, and then let the idea blossom from there.
* Jennifer Owens of Working Mother Research Institute suggests that mandated paid sick days and family leave for all employees should be a given.
* Sara Ettus of “Working Mom Lifestyle” radio show suggests more affordable healthcare options and supporting thriving and healthy communities that celebrate all aspects of accessibility for working women.
* Pacific Life Coach Amber Rosenberg simply states that protective legislation should include “equal pay for equal work, equal recruitment, hiring and training for both genders, and strict laws against any form of sexual harassment”

Of course we would also have to look at raising the minimum wage. Oddly enough, if adjusted for inflation, the minimum wage peaked in 1968, and in terms of value by 2012 standards, would have been equivalent to $8.56 per hour. In 2014, the minimum wage in New Jersey is $8.25. Of course most people do not aspire to holding minimum wage jobs, but it’s a start or an anchor for many people-a place from which to attempt to self-sustain. The battle for gender equality in the workplace is an ongoing issue. As women are forced into roles requiring self sufficiency, as families find single incomes can no longer sustain a healthy level of work/life balance, as people attempt to become less interdependent and more self-reliant, we will all have to find the way to accept the new world we inherit each day. There is an expression, “Adapt or die.” The women of New Jersey and throughout the US are continually showing their strength, ingenuity, and resourcefulness. I wish all of you the best of luck, self-sufficiency and equality! Thank you all!