



In Iowa's Interest: Honoring Women's History Month and Fighting for a More Just Future *by Senator Tom Harkin*

Each year, during the month of March, we take time to honor Women's History Month. It is a month to reflect on the great strides that have been made by women over the years in Iowa and across the nation. And while we have taken important steps in the direction of equality, we still have a ways to go.

Women have a strong and proud history in Iowa, and without their achievements, Iowa would not be the same place it is today. For example, Iowa was the first state in the nation to let women become attorneys. Arabella (Belle) Babb Mansfield was the first woman admitted to any state bar in the United States when she was admitted to the Iowa State Bar in June 1869. Ms. Mansfield set a high standard of achievement for women across the country and her success has a very personal connection to my life. She paved the way so that my wife Ruth could be elected as the first female County Attorney in Story County in 1972.

Despite the many great achievements by women in America, there are still great inequalities in our society. It is unacceptable that a woman still makes only 77 cents for every dollar a man earns. In fact, this wage gap exists in every segment of our society - women of every race and national origin, and in almost every sector of the economy earn less than their counterparts. Make no mistake, the wage gap is not just a woman's issue. It is a family issue.

To help address this very issue, I was very pleased to have worked to pass the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the first bill President Obama signed into law. Named for a woman who simply asked to be paid the same amount as a man for performing the same labor, the bill helps curb the unfair practice of pay discrimination. This bill is an important first step, but Congress needs to do more. That is why I was proud to cosponsor the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would strengthen penalties for discrimination, and why it is critical to pass the Fair Pay Act, which I have introduced in every session of Congress since 1996. As a nation, we unjustly devalue jobs traditionally performed by women, even when they require comparable skills to jobs traditionally performed by men. To address this more subtle discrimination, the Fair Pay Act would ensure that employers provide equal pay for jobs that are equivalent in skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions.

So this month, while we look back on the great achievements of women in history, and also appreciate the many women in our lives- our mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, wives and friends - we must also keep our eyes on the future and work toward an even more just and equal society for all Americans - no matter their gender.