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When Women Succeed, America Succeeds*

*Remarks by Leader Nancy Pelosi***

Last week I was in Seneca Falls, New York, and was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame. It was such a source of pride to me. I was thrilled. But very thrilled, because after votes, 19 of my colleagues, my women colleagues, came up there. You can just imagine how the crowd reacted to seeing this beautiful diverse group of women Members of Congress all there to, of course, be with me.

But that was secondary to paying our respects to what happened at Seneca Falls 165 years ago. And when they came together, these women, imagine the courage they had. Women were really not even supposed to speak in mixed company and nonetheless, these women were breaking out, riding the range, having the courage of so many of them to fight for women's rights. And they said at Seneca Falls 165 years ago, they quoted our Declaration of Independence that every man and woman is created equal. And then they further said: "Such is now the necessity which constrains [women] to demand the equal station to which they are entitled." Imagine that, 165 years ago. Standing on their shoulders, receiving that award, was just such a tremendous thrill.

In July, we announced our "When Women Succeed, America Succeeds" campaign. We had been, women and some of the men in Congress, studying this issue for a while to say: "What are the things that we can do that will unleash the power of women more fully in our society?" There are many issues that we can talk about, and have all worked on.

And I love the *Journal's* slogan: "If you're going to go out on a limb, you might as well grow your own tree." I think that's perfect because what we have been saying all along is "We've been involved in incrementalism for a while, it's not working to the extent that it should." We've got to kick open the door and think in more drastic ways about empowering women and

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**Nancy Pelosi is the Democratic Leader of the House of Representatives in the 113th Congress. From 2007 to 2011, she served as the first woman Speaker of the House and is also the first woman in American history to lead a major political party in Congress. Leader Pelosi has led House Democrats for a decade and has represented San Francisco, California's 12th District, for 26 years.

increasing the leadership of women in all fields. So we've been saying all along, this is an environment that has been conducive to our representation in all fields of life, to the extent that it should be, and so, we must make our own environment. And how perfect then to say, "Grow your own tree"—it's the same thing.

I want to congratulate you for the twenty-five years that the students and volunteers behind this publication have provided a unique and extraordinary forum for the advancement of women. Whether it is disability rights or prisoners' rights, the *Hastings Women's Law Journal* has given a strong and influential voice to women. I thank you and congratulate you on twenty-five years of leadership for the *Journal*.

So what is our proposal? It is called "When Women Succeed, America Succeeds." We are losing so much in our economy because we don't have the fullest empowerment of women in our economy. And there are so many issues—violence against women, women's rights to choose, women and health issues, among others. The three proposals that I will make to you today are strictly about workplace and home and the balance between them.

First, it is pay equity and there are two issues involved here: raising the minimum wage and paycheck fairness. Sixty-two percent of the people who make the minimum wage are women. Raise the minimum wage to a living wage and have paycheck fairness. We have that bill. One of the bills that we passed—the first bill signed by President Obama—was the Lilly Ledbetter Act. Lilly had come to Seneca Falls and I was so honored that she was there the other day. The Lilly Ledbetter Act was really important because it is about having recourse under the law. But the paycheck fairness bill then says that you must have paycheck fairness; not just recourse, but fairness to begin with. Pay equity is an essential piece of this. What is this, that women work for the first three months of the year practically for free compared to what a man makes for the same work in the same workplace?

The second point is paid sick leave and this is a really important thing for women. I'll give you one example of some stories that we have heard across the country. We had one of our first in New Haven, Connecticut. A woman got up there and told her story—poor, on the margin, single mom, the rest of that. And she finally got a job as a school bus driver. And she loved her work. But she said, "I came here to tell you my story, but I want to tell you what I see." She said, "Every day I pull up and I see moms in tears putting children on the bus that they know are sick [and] that shouldn't be going to school but they have no alternative. They cannot stay home from work, they'll be docked pay or fired if you do that too many times. And they can't afford childcare. And they have no alternative."

Can you imagine that, in the United States of America, the greatest country that ever existed in the history of the world, that we have moms putting sick kids on the bus because they cannot afford to not be at work and have no paid sick leave for family members? That's just not right. And so

we have the Healthy Families Act to address that and we have the twentieth anniversary of the Family Medical Leave Act. When we passed it, it too was one of the first bills that was signed by a new President—President Clinton. We had been working on it for a while but we just did not have a signature. And so he passed it and one hundred million families have availed themselves of family medical leave. But it's not, in many cases, paid. So, we have to have paid sick leave. So that women and men can fully participate.

And then the third point, which is something that is really going to require a crusade. The childcare issue, which is part three—pay equity, paid sick leave, affordable quality child care. This is again about making our own environment. We can't just keep inching along. We have to change the scene. When these women were riding the range, they were fighting for decades to get women to have the right to vote and to have their equal station. When women got the right to vote, the headlines said: "Women given the right to vote." Given? Fought, struggled, demanded, marched, traveled; they were relentless. It took decades. And that was a great thing, women having the right to vote. But they weren't given it. And they're not going to be given anything.

We have to really go fight for these things. But that happened during World War II—there were women in the workplace and out of the home, like Rosie the Riveter, and that was really a big deal, a big change. Then came higher education of women. Women had choices to do that or stay home; they were able to do whatever it is that was their aspiration. But, the missing link in all of that was affordable quality child care. It was on Richard Nixon's desk in the 70s. He vetoed it. And it was already long overdue. And President Obama has made an initiative of universal pre-school and that's a piece, but it's not the whole thing. And Head Start is a piece—children learning, parents earning.

So we think if you do those three things—now, of course, with the Affordable Care Act, we've declared that being a woman is no longer a preexisting medical condition and all of that. And that's very important, as well, a piece of it. We passed the Violence Against Women Act. Can you imagine that they were 600 days past the time when it should have been passed? And they said, "We'll pass a bill with you, and we don't like violence against women, but we don't want to include in that anti-discrimination, immigrant women, Native American women, or LGBT-community women."

In any event, we made it too hot to handle. And that's what we have to do: make these issues too hot to handle. But again, inviting ideas about where we go from here. The other way, changing our environment, building our own tree, is absolutely essential. Walter Ruther once said you cannot separate the ballot box from the bread box. Policies and negotiations that you make here can be eliminated depending on what happens at the ballot

box. And I believe—and I promise you this; I know it is absolutely true—if you reduce the role of money in politics and increase the level of civility in politics, you elect more women to public office. And not only that, I know that Wendy [Gruel, former Los Angeles City Controller] who is such a courageous leader knows, that they can't wait to get women in some kind of altercation so that for men it looks strong, for women it looks strident. What's the deal here?

So again, let's just talk about ideas. This is a debate about ideas in our country; let's take it to that level where it should be. And the money, it's just an obstacle that people do not want to engage in, nor should they. So, I've issued a DARE in this regard. Disclose. Where is all of this big money coming from to define us in ways that nobody who knows us would even recognize? Disclose. Where is the money coming from? And I don't just mean saying that so and so gave \$10 million. I mean on the ad, saying who paid for this. Amend the constitution to overturn Citizens United. It's absolutely essential to our democracy.

It's hard, it's hard, but it's an organizing tool. You just have to start. And reform. We have a bill that we're introducing now on public financing of fair campaigns and fair elections. It's about empowering small donors. And matching funds for small contributions. So, expand the universe of people who are supporting a candidacy. And then E: Empower. Disclose, Amend, Reform, and Empower.

And all of the things that are being done to suppress the vote in legislatures, and secretaries of state, and offices across the country, they're terrible. They're terrible and we have to fight that. But we have to recognize that one of the biggest oppressors of the vote is secret, undisclosed, special interests money, poured into a campaign with all of the misrepresentations and confusion.

So, confusion becomes their friend. The more they confuse the issue, people just throw up their hands and say: "I don't know, there doesn't seem to be anything in this for me." People who say we have to fix our deficit by cutting food stamps and cutting Pell Grants are the same people who fight an increase in the minimum wage. Because they are saying: "If these people worked, they wouldn't need food stamps." No, they are working, and two family members making the minimum wage in a family of four are below the poverty line. That's just not right.

Again, we have to change the atmosphere. In order to do it, in order to change the policy, you need to change the politics. And the Supreme Court has already had a coercive effect on our democracy. The Citizens United decision has been a terrible thing.

Regardless, there is real opportunity here. The people are ready. They understand. We want everybody to be significant—whether it's their vote, their voice, or what they do in the workplace. And if you empower women to the extent that you are gathered here, you will not only improve the lives

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of women, individual women, and their families, you will grow the GDP of the United States. You do these things I just suggested, it's two or three points added to the GDP. This is about "When Women Succeed, America Succeeds."

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