

What Women Need to Know: Reevaluating Your Financial Health

In this tough economy, it's hard to find anyone who hasn't begun to think about his or her financial health. In fact, many women find themselves in particularly precarious positions as we enter 2009. Some are looking to enter, or re-enter, the paid workforce. Others are seeking to hold on to their jobs or better prepare for retirement.

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Alyssa Best is the local programs and policy associate at Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) where she works on direct service, organizing and policy projects that increase economic opportunities for low-income women and girls in the DC metropolitan area.

Date/Time: **Tuesday, January 27 / noon — 1:30pm**

Open to the public, no reservation necessary

Place: **American Council on Education,
One Dupont Circle, 8th floor Kellogg Room.**

Bring brown bag lunch, soft drinks available from a machine.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

A photo ID must be shown at the security desk of One Dupont Circle.

Please allow time to go through the sign-in system.

In case of bad weather and closing of government offices, the CWI meeting will be cancelled.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, February 24, 2009

Examining Prospects for Progressive Social Change

The speakers at CWT's Nov. 25 meeting were **Lisalyn R. Jacobs**, vice president for government relations at Legal Momentum, formerly known as NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, and **Nan Aron**, president of the Alliance for Justice, a national association of public interest and civil rights organizations.

Nan Aron works to reform the civil justice system and spearheads the "Judicial Selection Project," a campaign to appoint qualified judges who will work to protect the rights of all Americans, including the vulnerable and disenfranchised.

Noting that while we are all hopeful that the new administration will support progressive issues, Aron reminded us that "We are not yet at the promised land" as there is much more to be done to ensure that the new administration sees through its campaign's promises. She quoted Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who, when he became president, challenged Americans, "I hear what you say, I agree with you, now make me do it." She explained, "We (activists) are the outside social change agents, who need to push the new administration because they will be immediately consumed with Iraq, the economy and health care. Of course," she added, "we can all agree that these are priority issues."

But, Aron continued, attention to the judiciary is even more important this year than it has been in the past. "We look to the judiciary to represent and ease the pain of so many Americans — whether it is foreclosure of a house, losing unemployment or social security benefits, or an experience like Lilly Ledbetter's. These cases find their way to the courts." The courts are often the only place where many Americans can find recourse, Aron explained,

Aron reminisced of her recent experiences campaigning in three towns in conservative



Lisalyn R. Jacobs



Nan Aron

areas of Ohio, where GM plants had recently closed. "Many people there are on food stamps, and are now renting, when they had previously owned their homes. There were cars in the driveways with 'for sale' signs. They could not turn to their members of Congress, who voted against them and their needs."

"In the early 1970s," she added, "you could appear before Republican-appointed judges who had open minds, and valued a fair and independent application of the law. This does not hold as true today. Now many corporate lawyers are judges. Not that there's anything intrinsically wrong with corporate lawyers, Aron countered, but none of the recent judicial appointments have come from civil rights, public defender or consumer program backgrounds; they have done little or no *pro bono* or public service work."

Aron continued, "We now have a tremendous opportunity to come up with wonderful judges who can

quickly be put on courts of appeal and the Supreme Court. It would be nice if we could get a Supreme Court vacancy by June 2009, because a president's support is strongest early in their tenure. But we don't expect any of the Republican appointees to retire in the near future, so the most we can hope for is to tread water and stay on hold for the next four or eight years, unless one of the Republican justices steps down. On the federal district and appellate courts it is much the same: President-elect Obama's appointments will be countering the extreme choices of the Bush administration, working to bring us back to a more even divide."

Aron discussed the current scenario with President-elect Obama by maintaining that judge-ships are sometimes viewed by Democratic presidents as controversial. For example, she cited President Clinton's attitude towards judicial

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nominations, saying that, President Clinton did not often include the selection of justices among his highest priorities. She reminded the audience that the Senate confirms judges and that even with an increased number of Democratic members, there will likely still be obstacles to confirmation. Senator Jon Kyl, a powerful Republican from Arizona and a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has announced publicly that he intends to filibuster any nominees seen as “too liberal” for the federal bench. While discussing the possible setbacks to judicial confirmations, Aron did say that she was pleased that Senator Joe Lieberman is staying a Democrat, but mostly because she hopes he can influence some of the more moderate Democrats and Republicans in favor of President Obama’s likely judicial nominations. She concluded warmly that, “I must remind myself that (President) Obama’s worst nominee has to be head and shoulders above any of President Bush’s appointments.”

Aron was asked about President Carter’s judicial appointments and noted that most of them are now working limited hours on “senior status.” Of the 124 judges appointed to the bench during President Carter’s administration, only 17 are still working as active judges. Many of President Reagan’s appointees, however, are still serving — 71 remain on the bench. There are currently over 50 openings on the federal judiciary as a whole. On the courts of appeal, there are currently thirteen vacant seats, and an additional two judges who have announced their intent to depart within the year. The important District of Columbia Circuit, which decides most agency cases, has two openings on its Court of Appeals and three on its District courts.

Lisalyn R. Jacobs asserted that Legal Momentum has worked on many issues for the last eight years, and now, with a new administration, there is hope for progress.

She first discussed the Lilly Ledbetter case and Legal Momentum’s advocacy around equal work and equal pay issues. They seek restoration of the former standards. At issue is the question: when someone realizes they are a victim of pay discrimination, how does the court assess when the clock started running — that is when she can go to a federal court to seek recompense. The Supreme Court’s recent decision held that

Ledbetter had not come forward in a timely fashion; there is now a 120-day limitation on claims. (CWI held a meeting on the Ledbetter case in October 2007.)

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), first enacted in 1992 and reauthorized twice since, is now referred to as Violence III. There has not been enough money to pay for some of the programs included in the past so part of the unfinished business remains on the agenda: programs such as campus grants for education on VAWA, rural grants that focus on women with disabilities, native Americans, and communities of women of color.

Jacobs said that Legal Momentum has dual foci — issues concerning immigrant women and the intersection of VAWA and economics. On immigration issues, the organization works with the Department of Homeland Security on trafficking, including protection and new visa regulations that deal with fee-waiver guidance.

In terms of economics, she reported that one unfunded piece of Violence II was the creation of a resource center dealing with employment-related issues as they intersect with sexual and domestic violence. For instance, an employee who has been abused may be struggling to maintain her job. The resource center would be able to work with unions, service providers, etc. to help with sexual and domestic violation policies. Employers could help by providing flexible work hours, and perhaps moving a worker to a new work location, to help put off angry partners (who sometimes appear at the workplace).

Legal Momentum is also working on legislation that would provide unemployment insurance for victims of sexual and domestic violence who have to leave a job, as well as provisions for unpaid leave. Jacobs said that unpaid leave was rejected by an “inhospitable” Congress.

Jacobs cautions against over-optimism for satisfactory resolution of some of these issues. She tells her colleagues that the members of the incoming Congress are not “my father’s Democrats ... today’s Democrats are more centrist and there are many chunks of resources already committed.” She noted that “In times of economic upheaval and uncertainty, incidents of sexual and particularly domestic violence increase, so it is vital to get protections on the books.”

In closing, Jacobs said that women’s organiza-

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tions will be working to reverse recent Bush administration regulations that “make it almost impossible for women-owned businesses to compete.” She also mentioned two other programs that Legal Momentum is advocating against. One is the abstinence-only program. Jacobs says reality calls also for well-funded comprehensive sex education as well. The second is the marriage promotion program that is particularly aimed at

women on welfare. It implies that these women are poor because they lack husbands. Unfortunately, money was taken from other welfare programs to support “marriage education” issues.

Jacobs claims she uses the “momma test:” she explains any federal program to her momma and if it makes her laugh, there’s a huge problem.

The Society for Women’s Health Research has a blog, which they update twice a week. Visit them at <http://www.womenshealthresearch.blogspot.com/>

CEDAW

From the San Francisco Chronicle

“President-elect Barack Obama pledged to restore United States’ international standing, including a promise to push for ratification of the long-ignored United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the women’s equal rights treaty known as CEDAW.”

From Women’s eNews

“Although 185 countries have ratified the 1979 treaty, the United States remains one of only eight that have not, alongside Sudan, Somalia, Qatar, Iran, Nauru, Palau and Tonga. The U.S. Senate must ratify the treaty and it could be difficult to persuade because the treaty says women should have access to ‘information, counseling and services in family planning,’ which anti-choice groups have interpreted as a guaranteed right to abortion.”

From Women’s eNews

“King Mohammed VI of Morocco formally banned discrimination against women during a speech to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *Afrique en Ligne*, a North African Internet news site, reported last month.

Officially, the king lifted Morocco’s ‘reservations’ to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the 1979 treaty guaranteeing women’s equality known as CEDAW. Morocco signed the treaty in 1993, but like many other Arab nations, did so only with reservations to clauses that contradicted national or Islamic laws.

Moroccan women’s rights groups hailed the speech, *Maghreb Arab Press* reported Dec. 12. The king said the reservations were no longer necessary since Morocco passed an updated national family law in 2003 increasing women’s legal rights. The king also touted his reformist views in his speech. “Our country has become an international actor of which the progress and daring initiatives in this matter are readily recognized,” he said.”

Lilly Ledbetter will ride on Obama Inauguration Train

Lilly Ledbetter, who is the namesake of federal legislation regarding employment rights, is one of about 40 people who have been invited by President-elect Obama to join him and Vice President-elect Joe Biden as a special guest on the Obama Express carrying them from Philadelphia to Washington on Saturday, January 17th as part of the inauguration ceremonies.

From the National Women’s Law Center

On Friday, Jan. 9, the U.S. House of Representatives passed two key fair pay bills, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act — which provide women with critical tools to challenge pay discrimination “We’ve been fighting for (these). What a way to start off the new year!

“But the fight isn’t over yet. President-Elect Obama is ready to sign both bills into law during his first few days in office. But before that can happen, the Senate needs to pass pay equity legislation, too.”

From Barbara J. Ratner, president

We've finally made it to 2009! It was a long and exciting campaign that resulted in energizing women, empowering them with reasonable expectations for progress on the issues that matter to us. In addition to goals that seemed unreachable before, we can now contemplate new and higher goals. I'm sure you've noticed how the tone of our incoming emails has changed. Hope IS spelled in capital letters. Stay tuned, we have some exciting programs planned for CWI in the coming months.

Another first, the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) is hosting an inaugural ball to honor the role women played in electing Barack Obama and to honor the women leaders in the new administration and in Congress. History is being made again — a women's ball! Please see the details below. I think we need to resurrect Helen Reddy's *I am Woman, hear me roar...*

Women's Inaugural Ball

The National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO), a nonpartisan umbrella organization of over 230 groups representing more than 12 million American women, will roll out the red carpet for an inaugural ball at the historic President James Monroe Mansion in Washington, DC on Saturday, January 17, 2009 from 6:30 pm to midnight. The NCWO Inaugural Ball will celebrate the historic roles and contributions of women to the election of President-elect Barack H. Obama and Vice President-elect Joseph R. Biden, Jr. and will also serve to welcome an administration that supports the advancement of women's agendas.

NCWO will host the only 2009 inaugural ball to honor women leaders in business, politics and philanthropy as well as those who are taking leadership roles in the new administration. The honorees include future First Lady Michelle Obama, Dr. Jill Biden, Transition Team Co-Chair Valerie Jarrett, Secretary of State designate Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of Homeland Security designate Janet Napolitano, Secretary of Labor designate Hilda Solis, UN Ambassador designate Susan Rice, EPA Administrator designate Lisa Jackson, and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

Additional information is available on the event website, www.NCWOIB.com, from JJ Ghatt at jj@ghatt.com, from NCWO at www.womensorganizations.org, or Kimberly Otis at 202-293-4505. The NCWO Inaugural Ball will feature a VIP Reception from 6:30 to 8 pm and cocktails, buffet dinner, dancing and a live performance by 2009 Grammy nominee Wayna from 8pm to midnight.

Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Statistics Methodology Changed

From Women's eNews

"The U.S. Department of Justice has revised its methodology for tracking violent crimes, resulting in data that more accurately reflects the rates of gender-based crimes against American women. New data released Dec. 18 as part of the Bureau of Justice Statistics' annual Crime Victimization Survey indicate much higher rates of sexual assault and domestic violence in 2007 compared to data from 2006, due to the change of methodology, including more personal interviews, increasing interviews in rural areas and new sampling methods. According to the new data, there was a 42 percent increase in domestic violence and a 25 percent increase in rape and sexual assault. A drop in the numbers of men killed by their intimate partners was also reported."

Mississippi: Highest National Rate of Teen Pregnancies

According to the Centers for Disease Control, Mississippi now has the nation's highest teen pregnancy rate (formerly held by Texas and New Mexico). "Mississippi focuses heavily on abstinence education and teachers are prohibited from demonstrating how to use contraceptives...the state's Human Services Department says abstinence is the only birth control that is 100 percent effective. And that's the only message teens need to hear...a review by the House Oversight Committee found that 80 percent of the abstinence-only curricula...contain false, misleading, or distorted information about reproductive health."



Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

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FIRST CLASS MAIL

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 22

Roe Day for a DC Abortion Fund screening of *The Coat Hanger Project*

A discussion with Heather Booth, founder of Jane (a service that referred women to safe abortion providers when abortion was illegal), will follow the film. All proceeds from the event will go directly to assisting women living in DC, MD and VA who cannot afford an abortion. RSVPs required: dcaf_events@hotmail.com or for more information visit www.thecoathangerproject.com

Sunday, January 25

Women's Legislative Briefing

12:30-5pm. University of Maryland, Shady Grove Campus
Keynote Speaker: Congresswoman Donna Edwards
For information call 240-777-8330 or register online:
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/cfw/wlb/index.asp

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