

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
On Equal Pay Day
April 12, 2016**

Today, Vermonters and Americans across the country will recognize Equal Pay Day, a day that shines a spotlight on the glaring pay disparity between men and women. The United States is often looked to as a leader in the global landscape, setting the gold standard for others to follow. Unfortunately, our country fails to lead when it comes to pay parity, and American women continue to be treated unequally and unfairly in the workplace. On average, women are only paid 79 cents to every dollar paid to men. In Vermont, the disparity is 83 cents to the dollar. Over a career, this means a woman is compensated hundreds of thousands of dollars to millions of dollars less than a man with no other explanation for the disparity than gender. This practice is unacceptable and runs contrary to American values.

The fight for equal pay for equal work has spanned generations and continues to impact nearly every corner of our country. From corporate boardrooms to locally owned small businesses, women have long fought for their right to be treated with the same respect and dignity as their male counterparts. As I reflect on this fight I think of Lilly Ledbetter, a person whom I greatly admire and who changed the lives of millions of Americans with her courage to stand up for equal pay. It has been nearly nine years since five justices on the Supreme Court ruled that her pay discrimination claim was invalid because she did not file a suit against her employer within the federally mandated time period even though she did not know she was being discriminated against at the time. I was proud to work with Senator Mikulski to overturn this injustice by passing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. This important legislation clarified the statute of limitations for filing an equal pay lawsuit regarding pay discrimination. And it was the first bill President Obama signed into law. The progress achieved seven years ago was important, but the fight for equal pay for equal work continues today. That is why I am proud to cosponsor Senator Mikulski's Paycheck Fairness Act, an important bill to ensure equal pay for equal work – a principle that for too long has failed to be a reality.

Today, women from all over Vermont will assemble at the Vermont State House to highlight an initiative known as "Change the Story," which aims to improve the economic status of women in my state. They will note that while Vermont women fare slightly better than average, at the current pace the wage gap will not disappear before the year 2048. They will also point out that Vermont women are twice as likely to live in poverty in their senior years, when their savings amount to only one-third that of their male counterparts. Every year, I am proud to present the Vermont's Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, which for two decades has helped support women-owned businesses and encourage good-paying, non-traditional careers. But as we prepare to mark its 20th anniversary in June, I would much prefer it if we could eliminate the need for such a conference. I look forward to the day when there is no gender wage gap, and when career opportunities are available to *all* women.

Pay equality has recently received considerable attention at the international level, in large part due to the leadership of the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team. We can all recall last year when this team of world-class athletes won, for a third time, soccer's most coveted title: the

FIFA World Cup. This thrilling victory was the most widely viewed women's soccer game in our Nation's history. Like so many other Americans, I took pride in their historic win. Yet fans from across the world were shocked to learn that members of the U.S. women's team only received \$2 million for winning the 2015 Women's World Cup, while the 2014 Men's World Cup champions were awarded \$35 million. We were also astonished to learn that our 2015 world champion women's team received \$7 million less than the U.S. men's team that lost in an early round of the 2014 Men's World Cup.

As a result of this alarming inequity, I introduced a Senate resolution calling on FIFA to eliminate its discriminatory prize award structure and to award athletes with equal prizes. Not a single Republican was willing to cosponsor this resolution and when I tried to get it passed to support fairness for our champion women's team, there was an objection from Senate Republicans. Nonetheless, I am hopeful that as more Americans learn of this unfairness, Senators will join me in support of its passage. Senators should not be afraid to be on record in support of equal pay for equal work for all athletes, and, in fact, for all women.

Opponents of an equal prize award structure in sports have pointed to revenue as the reason behind this gross disparity. This is unacceptable. Tennis icons like Billie Jean King and Venus Williams did not accept these arguments and instead fought for equal prize awards in the face of overwhelming adversity. Their impressive efforts led to equal prize awards in the U.S. Open Tennis Championships and Wimbledon, which now provides all athletes with the respect they deserve. This is why I am proud to stand in support of the U.S. Women's National Team in their fight for equal prize awards from FIFA and for equal treatment from the U.S. Soccer Federation. The current disparities that exist in these organizations are outrageous and should be remedied immediately to ensure that men and women are treated fairly and equally.

As we reflect on the important meaning of Equal Pay Day, I encourage all Americans across the country to continue to join the growing movement to eliminate discrimination from the workplace. Hardworking women – our mothers, our sisters, our wives, our daughters and granddaughters – deserve no less. We should pass this resolution recognizing the achievement of the U.S. Women's World Cup champions. We should pass Senator Mikulski's Paycheck Fairness Act. We should take these simple and straightforward steps to guarantee pay equity and protections against workplace discrimination. The time for equality is now.

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