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## After four decades without relief, women must stand up for equal pay

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### Opportunities

OK, ladies, get your boxing gloves out. You're in for the economic battle of your lives.



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It's about time we confronted that persistent gender wage gap that hasn't budged in decades.

This time around we're not going down without a fight. It riles me that after four decades of the Equal Pay Act, which made gender pay discrimination illegal, women in the U.S. still earn an average of 80 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts.

It's even worse for sisters. An African-American woman earns 68 cents for every dollar a white man earns, while Hispanic women earn only 57 cents, according to figures from the U.S. Department of Labor.

That gap has a cumulative price. A 25-year-old woman who works full time for her entire career will earn \$523,000 less than the average 25-year-old man will by the time they both retire at 65, according to research from Simmons College.

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Let's not stop there. Women with advanced degrees will earn \$2 million less than their male counterparts, economist Evelyn Murphy reports in her new book "Getting Even: Why Women Don't Get Paid Like Men and What to Do About It," (Simon & Schuster, 2005). That's some serious cash. I don't know about you, but I could sure use \$2 million, and I'm certain that most young women in this country could use that \$500,000 that they're going to miss out on if the wage gap continues.

Hopefully, women are reading this column, and for those who are, by now you should be fuming mad. Where are my younger women readers - you 20-and-30-somethings? I know many of you came into the work force expecting equality and may not see the need to fight until it smacks you in the face.

Consider this your slap.

This type of rank injustice isn't going to go away unless women stand up and take action. Well, women throughout the nation did just that on Tuesday by taking a national day of action against unfair pay.

Three advocacy groups - The National Committee on Pay Equity, Business and Professional Women USA and the WAGE Project - held a news conference in Washington, D.C., to launch a national campaign aimed at closing the gender wage gap.

Some local women's groups are starting to make some noise about these issues, including Milwaukee Women Inc. and Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton's Wisconsin Women Equal Prosperity initiative, which seeks to improve the economic status of women in Wisconsin.

It's about time women did something about the wage gap. What if, this year, we all push back the same way? If each woman claims a small victory for herself, that will add up to a big victory for us all.

- Know what your value is and be sure it is visible to the person you want to negotiate with, says Deborah M. Kolb, professor of management at the Simmons Graduate School of Management and founder of its Center for Gender in Organizations.

- "Gather good information: The more you know, the more defensible what you are proposing will be," says Kolb, also a senior fellow and former executive director of the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School. "Ask yourself what happens if you don't get the salary you want. What will you do?"

- Know that your contribution is every bit as valuable as that of your male peers.

The pay gap between men and women is widening at every economic level and across industries, says Belle Rose Ragins, professor of management in the Sheldon B. Lubar School of Business at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

That's because women often are viewed as temporary workers who will shelve their careers for the so called "mommy track," asserts Ragins.

"They are viewed as less committed and less able - even though the data is clear: Women perform as well as men," says Ragins. "And, now, they are more likely to have the educational credentials that are predictors of pay. So what can explain this disconnect? Stereotypes, perceptions and attributions."

Women are increasingly represented in traditionally male-dominated fields, like law, construction and transportation. There's no excuse for bosses to offer women less - or for women to take less.

- Look at industrywide salary benchmarks, typically conducted by trade associations, for your starting point.

"It's true that the mechanic who fixes your car makes more than the day care worker who takes care of your children. We know that, and that accounts for some of the wage discrepancy," says Ragins. "The critical piece is that there's been essentially no change in the gender pay gap even though women are entering male-dominated fields."

- If you won't stick up for yourself, do it for your kids.





















Many women bring in half or more of their families' income. African-American women are especially likely to be heading households, according to numerous studies.

"You're talking about a woman's ability to survive," says Ragins.

Ladies, better start lacing up those boxing gloves - \$2 million is worth a good fight.

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