

STATEMENT TO THE DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM COMMITTEE
by MAYA MILLER, in behalf of
NATIONAL WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS and WOMEN'S LOBBY, INC.
Atlanta, Georgia, April 17, 1976

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I am Maya Miller, Director of the Women & Welfare Project of Women's Lobby, Inc. I am speaking today at the request of our organization and that of our sister organization, the National Women's Political Caucus. Ms. Ruby Duncan, chairwoman of Clark County Welfare Rights Organization and Operation Life of Las Vegas, Nevada, with whom I have worked for years on this issue, joins me. We thank you for the opportunity.

Poverty in an affluent society is a mark of failure. In our American case it is the failure of the free enterprise system as modified by current government plans and programs.

Since women suffer disproportionately from this failure, we bring the Democratic Platform Committee some suggestions for reform should our party continue its majority in the Congress and hopefully win also the White House. We hope to hear our candidates speaking out in defense of women. We count on the Platform to help them do so.

Included in the few pages we have given you are some facts and figures to help you understand how women are poorer than other people, and why, therefore, they often need government assistance for their basic human needs.

Women join you in wanting "Work, not Welfare". We are ready to scratch that "welfare" word. Like "detente" and "law-&-order" it's seen its day and been beaten useless by the demagogues. We don't want poor women to be further beaten down by identification with the word.

Women join you in believing that this is the Year of the Economy in presidential politics, - and we want to be full partners in the Democratic Party's work towards full employment, strong economic growth consonant with preserved natural resources, and a dedication to human life. At such points as the system does not provide full employment for everyone, we look for an assurance of adequate income for basic human needs and shared opportunities for work.

Women agree with most of you that the family is one of America's structural strengths. Whether it is single-headed, nuclear, or multi-headed, the family is the center where people come together for shelter and food and companionship. It is where children first learn. As women are the ones to bear America's children, and at present take the chief care of those children, women have a pivotal place in America's future.

Poor women have particular needs for which our Society presently offers stop-gap measures, such as food programs, medicaid, AFDC. The Democratic Party should support full funding of these for the time being, but should move to wipe out the concept of "welfare" in favor of insuring a flat working wage, not below the minimum wage, to adults who care for children.

Women, whether single or married, with or without children, should have the right along with men to work in the marketplace and earn fair pay and fair insurance for their future.

WOMEN ARE POORER THAN OTHER PEOPLE

Of the 24.3 million "poor" people in the U. S,

- 10.2 million are children
- 9.4 million are women
- 4.7 million are men

Clearly, women are poorer....

Re: Families, there are:

- 25.9 million "husband-wife" families w/children
- 4.5 million single female-headed families w/children
- .5 million single male-headed families w/children

Clearly, more women care for children than men.

Re: Families + Poverty,

- 1.5 million husband-wife families w/children are poor (5% of the 25 m.)
- 1.9 million single female-headed families w/children are poor (42% of 4.5 m)
- .07 million single male-headed families w/children are poor (13% of ½ m.)

*Clearly, to be a single-parent household w/kids inclines you to poverty;
to be a single mother w/kids inclines you severely to poverty.*

Re: Work & Wages,

- \$12,082 is median income of white male heads of households who work.
- \$6,413 is median income of white female heads of household who work.
- \$10,365 is median income of black male heads of household who work.
- \$4,465 is median income of black female heads of household who work.

Clearly, working does not bring women, especially if black, out of poverty, but does bring men out.

Re: Old Age,

- \$3,476 is median income of old men 65+
- \$1,899 is median income of old women 65+ (14% have no income at all)

Clearly, the American economic system, including Social Security and the transfers through the marriage mechanism, have not insured women an even deal at the end of their lives after raising children, providing a home for a husband, working as a community volunteer, and/or working in the labor market.

Figures from: Current Population Report, Population Characteristics, Series P-20;
1975 Handbook on Women Workers, U.S. Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau.

Welfare

"Welfare" is the general word for our political solutions to poverty. Welfare is a mess.

As a term, welfare is a mess, perhaps referring to medical assistance, perhaps to food stamps, perhaps to public housing, perhaps to vocational training, doubtless to cash grants; perhaps referring to the elderly, the blind & disabled (although help to those categories is now called "security supplemental income" (SSI) & "social security"), perhaps referring to the poor only, perhaps referring to the middling (as in the case of food stamps or medically needy), probably not referring to farm subsidies, middle-income mortgages, airline supports, and oil or shippers' tax breaks, - but surely referring to AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), ie. poor mothers left raising children.

As a system, welfare is a hopeless bureau^{cratic} tangle among cities, counties, states and the nation.

As a support system for mothers, it is totally unfair, inequitable, inadequate, and demeaning. Support for mothers with children differs wildly from \$60 a month for a family of 4 in Mississippi through \$140 in Texas to \$400 in Michigan and Massachusetts.

Women caring for children have the greatest need for help and the most governmental harrassment in the delivery of that help. Very few politicians, including Democrats, have been positive in their rhetoric on this subject of women and welfare.

While we are not prepared to support or reject at this time any of the specific welfare reform proposals floating around in and out of Congress, we want the Platform to reflect the urgency for some serious reform of the welfare system in the upcoming Congress, and that the urgency of this need stems not from women's fraud but from their need and their important value and service to the country.

Food

Food Stamps are an imperative supplement now to the inadequate AFDC cash grants, but as often as not poor women cannot now use this program because of the severity of their cash flow problem and the cash outlay demanded by the program in the name of "pride", but in actuality serving banks and credit unions. We support the Food Stamp program with the elimination of the purchase requirement, and with a separate child care deduction in the calculation of net income.

We also support the other food programs, most of which are aimed at feeding children (school lunch, breakfast, summer feeding, day care center food, etc). We support radical increase, too, in WIC (supplemental food for Women, Infants & Children). And we support those programs like Meals on Wheels which provide food prepared for the elderly, 67% of whom are women, who have more than likely served their long terms at cooking for others.

Shelter

Shelter is the other absolutely basic survival need which is in dismally short supply for the poor. 4 million families live in dangerous housing; 4 million more in seriously overcrowded housing. Public housing has failed poor mothers and their children; it is available to only 5% of those on welfare. Meantime, federal housing subsidies, directly or through tax breaks, flow to the suburbs. We support a drastic reordering of our federal housing subsidy programs to bring them in line with need, and to insure mothers bringing up children a decent roof and neighborhood.

Health Care

Almost by definition women need health care more than others. In addition to the high incidence of outright poverty, they are likely to be "medically needy" even if they work outside the home, since their jobs are chronically poverty-level. Pregnancy itself is dangerous for women. There are 17 pregnancy-related deaths for every 1,000 births (in contrast, there is only 1 death in 10,000 military-serving men).

The children women care for also have special health needs, especially in their early years. In spite of progress, American infant mortality rates remain higher than those of 16 other countries; and the death rate for non-white children remains twice that of white children in our country. 200,000 infants yearly suffer birth defects.

We support, therefore, and hope the Democratic Platform will likewise support, increasing the money and outreach for EARLY PERIODIC SCREENING & DIAGNOSTIC TREATMENT, MEDICAID and MEDICARE for poor mothers and their children and for the elderly. We also support NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE along the lines of the Health Security Act, provided it covers even-handedly the special needs of women, many of which are for preventive care. We cannot support any national health plan which does not provide for pre-and-post-natal care for those women who wish children, and safe contraceptives and abortion for those who do not.

We would expect any Democratic Platform to affirm a woman's right to reproductive choice. Children need to be wanted.

Child Care

The round-the-clock care for children is a primary service to the nation.

As such, it should be paid properly (a wage no less than the minimum), whether it is done in the child's own home, in a neighbor's, in a day care center, in an institution, or in any combination of these.

We would urge the Democratic Party through its Platform to set aside the pejorative concept of "welfare" as applied to poor mothers caring for children, and instead apply an "employment" concept: ~~Pay Mothers, or Fathers, a wage to care for children inside the home; then, generate jobs which will allow Mothers as well as Fathers to enjoy work outside the home, with pay sufficient to provide for child care during work hours.~~

In addition, we support the Child Care & Family Services Act, with its sliding scale of payments and its guarantees of quality. 14 million women married and single with children are now in the labor force. Their 27.6 million children need some kind of child care. Available centers are grossly inadequate: only licensed places for 600,000 children, whereas 6,000,000 women have children under 6 who especially need care while they work.

We support - and hope you will - major expansion of HEADSTART and Titles IV and XX Child Care funds, and the provision for Child Care credit in the Income Tax structure.

Jobs

Women want work. Women do work, inside the home and out. But they work usually at the low-paid service jobs, on and off, part-time, without fringe benefits, and without organizational support. Women want to be independent parts of the American Economy. We agree with most Democrats that 1976 is a year for major emphasis on the Economy, and we want to be an active part of our Party's push for a vigorous Economy. We do not wish to be recipients of a trickle-down theory which presumes that women receive economic benefits as a result of men's expanded opportunities. We want our own. *1976 is the Year of Women's Economic Independence. We trust the Democratic Platform will reflect this.*

57% of all married women work outside the home in the "labor market"; but 43% do not. Nonetheless they work: advancing their husband's careers, caring for their children, cleaning their house, cooking their food, doing volunteer social service work in the community. Their work needs Society's Stamp of Approval, - and not just in love, but in the coin of the realm, money (loving is one thing; surviving is another). Although \$313 billion goes through the marriage mechanism to women and children, women are not now protected by our American system in that process against death, desertion, divorce.

We therefore support the legislative moves for training and employment of DISPLACED HOMEMAKERS. We also support revision of the Social Security Act to give to both men and women their own social security record with credits accrued during marriage, credits which will follow them separately whatever the circumstances.

We support the FULL EMPLOYMENT & BALANCED GROWTH ACT OF 1976 if it includes women in its estimates and plans. We support raising the Minimum Wage to \$4 (or \$5 depending on the rate of inflation) over the next two years.

We support federal moves also to a PART-TIME FLEXIBLE-HOUR employment pattern for men and women, with full fringe benefits and protections, so that all may share in the benefits of automation.

National
Budget
Priorities

Human needs have a paramount call on government. We think our national budget currently overprotects our home with formidable rings of excessive military hardware, while it underprotects the human beings within.

Military research and development is up 15% this year from \$9.5 billion to \$10.9 billion; arms procurement up 37% from \$21.4 billion to \$29.3 billion. We do not buy the argument that the American Economy must be a war economy in order to provide jobs. For each \$1 billion in government spending, jobs are produced in the following numbers: Health - 80,041; Education - 104,019; Defense - 75,812.

We urge the Democratic Platform to underscore our Party's commitment to a life-preserving rather than a death-dealing budget. Put basic human needs first on our national agenda.

Democratic
Women's
Agenda

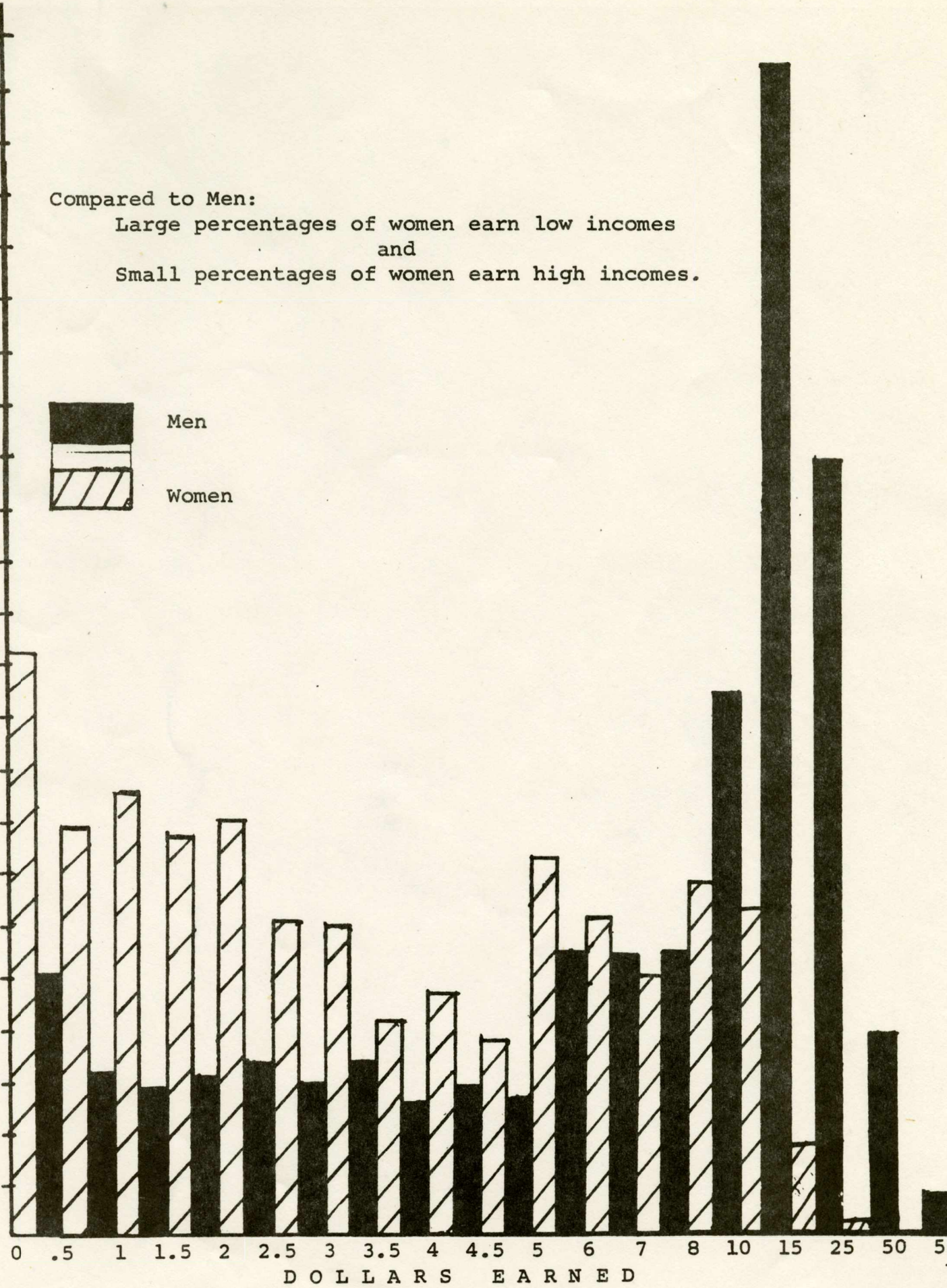
Finally, we refer you to the Democratic National Women's Agenda, and enlist your enthusiastic support for the inclusion of all of its provisions into the Democratic Platform.

P
E
R
C
E
N
T

23
22
21
20
19
18
17
16
15
14
13
12
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1

Compared to Men:
Large percentages of women earn low incomes
and
Small percentages of women earn high incomes.

Men
Women



DOLLARS EARNED

(Figures in thousands)

Figures from Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce