FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

RELEASE: DECEMBER 25, 1984

AN INCOMPARABLY BAD IDEA

The radical notion of Comparable Worth is still percolating in a Washington State case on appeal in the Ninth Circuit, but it hasn't scored any points with the U.S. Supreme Court. The high Court last month refused to hear another appeal on the same subject from the same state.

The faculty at the University of Washington School of Nursing had claimed that "teaching is teaching," and that therefore all faculty members have "comparable worth" and should be paid the same salary. The courts seemed to agree in substance with the hyperbole expressed by Civil Rights Commission Chairman Clarence M. Pendleton, Jr., who called Comparable Worth "the looniest idea since Looney Tunes came on the screen."

The essence of Comparable Worth is that your job "worth" should be determined by an evaluator instead of by the marketplace. To make this essentially radical notion appear plausible, its advocates claim that formal job evaluation is more than 100 years old, became widespread during World War II under the National War Labor Board, and is used today by both government and private employers.

The truth is that only a small minority of businesses use job evaluations, and those that do use "benchmark" jobs to key the system to prevailing market rates. That is fundamentally different from Comparable Worth.

Comparable Worth advocates seek a system which completely rejects the marketplace in determining job "worth." That's impossible to do with justice or objectivity because jobs, like commodities, have monetary "worth" only in relation to what someone is willing to pay.

Why do diamonds cost more than water? Water is infinitely more essential than diamonds. Price is obviously determined by many things other than intrinsic "worth" -- such as supply and demand.

Any evaluation of jobs depends on an almost endless series of arbitrary and subjective judgments, including what factors to use as the basis for evaluating the jobs,

how to rate the jobs under these criteria, and who should rate the jobs.

The National Academy of Sciences, whose reports are often cited by advocates of Comparable Worth, admitted that, "It must be recognized that there are no definite tests of the 'fairness' of the choice of compensable factors and the relative weight given to them. The process is inherently judgmental...." Even Professor Ruth Blumrosen, the leading proponent of the Comparable Worth theory, concluded that job evaluation is inevitably a subjective and nontrustworthy process.

Even if the factors to be evaluated in a job could be agreed upon by all, the persons designing the job evaluation system can still determine the results by the weight assigned to each factor. Even if the evaluators could shed their personal biases, they can still skew the results by choosing the numbers within the allowable spread.

In the famous AFSCME v. State of Washington case now on appeal, the job evaluation of Washington State employees was made by Norman Willis and Associates. Under the Willis system, the "knowledge and skills" factor counts for between 46 and 244 points, whereas the "working conditions" factor counts for only between 0 and 30 points.

That means that a secretary's knowledge and skills automatically count for more than a truck driver's working conditions, including the risk of getting killed on the highway. Whether that is a just allocation of points is a matter of opinion, not a matter of fact.

Another evaluator who testified in the same case, Richard Jeanneret, stated that his evaluation system, called "PAQ," produced results substantially different from Willis'. Jeanneret stated that, "in every instance where the Willis method rated a job higher than PAQ, the job was predominantly female. In every case where the Willis method rated the job lower than PAQ, the job was exclusively male." Was the Willis system biased for women and the PAQ system biased against women? Your opinion is as valid as theirs.

Congress rejected the Comparable Worth notion in passing the Equal Pay Act of 1963 precisely because job evaluation is totally dependent on subjective judgments, consequently disputes end up in court, and the courts have no standard for reviewing the evaluation.

Comparable Worth means relying on some functionary's comparison of WORTH -- not WORK. It has nothing to do with actual WORK at all. It prioritizes paper credentials over production, degrees over demand, and social theory over hard work. It is an incomparably bad idea because it is inherently unjust.