FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

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

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## COMPARABLE WORTH: UNFAIR TO WOMEN

Somebody finally came up with the clinching argument against the concept of Comparable Worth. It is unfair to women.

That's the argument presented by 15 women who are seeking to intervene in the Comparable Worth lawsuit pending in Chicago where the nurses employed by the State of Illinois are suing their employer because they claim their jobs are "comparable" in "worth" to other state jobs with higher salaries.

It all started in 1982 when the Illinois Commission on the Status of Women employed Hay Associates to make a job evaluation of 24 selected state job classifications to ascertain what they are worth in comparison to each other. The evaluation was done on a point system which resulted in a chart which ranks jobs according to both their present pay and their alleged worth.

The ink was scarcely dry on this evaluation when the nurses claimed that they are underpaid in comparison to other state employees who are allegedly of the same "worth." The nurses sued to get "comparable" pay.

The crux of the Comparable Worth complaint is that female-dominated jobs are underpaid in comparison to male-dominated jobs of equal worth (as indicated in job "evaluations"). In the Illinois case, this concept translates into the complaint that the Illinois nurses (mostly female) are underpaid in comparison to electricians and stationary engineers (mostly male).

Now come 15 other female Illinois state employees (represented by Mountain States Legal Foundation) who want to be heard in the lawsuit as intervenors. These 15 women all work in job classifications which the evaluation says are "male-dominated" (80% or more male) and not "worth" as much as they are now paid.

Eleven of the intervening women are currently employed as Correctional Officers, a job classification which the Comparable Worth study identified as male-dominated. Although the Correctional Officer classification ranks 13th in present salary among the 24 classifications, the evaluation concluded that it should be rated 14th.

While Correctional Officers earned $145 more than entry-level secretaries at the time of the evaluation, the evaluation gave secretaries 12 more comparable-worth points than Correctional Officers. This is the type of "evidence" which allegedly "proves" that women are discriminated against.

One of the intervening women is currently employed as a Security Officer I, another job classification identified in the Comparable Worth study as male-dominated. This job ranks 19th in its present salary among the 24 classifications, but the Comparable Worth evaluation concluded it should be rated 24th (last).

One of the intervening women is currently employed as an Accountant V, another job classification which the Comparable Worth study identified as male-dominated. Although this job ranks 2nd in present salary, the evaluation concluded that it should be 3rd.

One of the intervening women is currently employed as a Local Office Manager I, another job classification identified in the Comparable Worth study as male-dominated. This job ranks 5th in the present salary, but the Comparable Worth study concluded that it should be rated 8th.

The 15 women intervenors deny that they are beneficiaries of sex discrimination or are overpaid. On the contrary, they say that any favorable salary positions they enjoy are the result of special skills, hard work and the nondiscriminatory market forces of supply and demand.

The 15 women in the traditionally-male jobs claim that the present system of compensation (based on market factors) properly rewards them for their special skills; their performance of particularly difficult, dangerous, or unpleasant work; and their willingness to challenge stereotypes and perform nontraditional jobs.

The 15 women assert their right to bargain freely for their higher wages through the collective bargaining process and their right to maximize their wages to the fullest extent that the market will bear.

What would happen if Comparable Worth is adopted but the court or legislature decides that no wages can be reduced to conform to the new evaluation? It's self-evident that the State of Illinois would then have to equalize the pay of the different job classifications by wage freezes, layoffs, or decreased future pay increases of the male-dominated jobs (which include all the women who work in those jobs).