



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Diane J. Savino

## Women's History Month: A Salute and a Mandate

DIANE J. SAVINO February 28, 2009

As we celebrate Women's History Month, and all of the triumphs the years past has brought, we must not forget the pressing issues women continue to face. March is Women's History Month. Public celebration of women's history in this country began in 1978 as "Women's History Week." In 1981, Congress declared Women's History Week a national holiday. Overwhelming support and participation led to the 1987 declaration to extend the celebration to include the entire month of March. One of the nation's most beloved First Lady's, Eleanor Roosevelt stated it best: "In the long run, we shape our lives, and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility." During this session calendar, the Senate Majority has made pay equity a top priority for their agenda. Senate Democrats have been a lead sponsor on this bill. We are committed to fight for working women across the state that continue to be disproportionately compensated compared to male counterparts. Pay equity is not a new issue for women. Women have long begun to penetrate fields once deemed only suitable for men such as engineering, construction, and government. Today, they receive the same education as men within their respective fields. Roles have changed and perceptions have evolved, yet many employers have not in terms of pay equity. Women represent some of the most accomplished individuals in the history of not only our state, but the nation. They have provided a legacy of historic achievements in all fields of human endeavor. Nearly four decades ago President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act into law mandating that

women are fairly compensated for their labor. Today women on average make 73 cents for every dollar earned by men. In New York alone women earn on average eighty cents for every man's dollar, or \$118 less per week. Studies have shown that women make up at least two-thirds of the minimum wage workforce. As more and more women assume the head-of-household role, it is all the more pressing for businesses to reform their policy and recognize that fair pay is good policy and good business. Absent strong legislation, women fall victim to discrimination in the workplace without a voice. Earlier this year I was extremely pleased to see the Obama Administration push forward the Fair Pay Campaign. President Barack Obama signing of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was yet another step in the right direction. Now, thanks to this law, women will be able to challenge pay they believe may be unfair. I, along with my colleagues in the State Senate, am serious about bringing real economic gains to women. We are serious about pay equity and comparable worth. This issue is something that touches us all because our families and friends have experienced this first hand. The State Senate is prepared to propose legislation that will level the playing field. I urge my friends on the other side of the aisle to join us in passing legislation that will guarantee fair pay. The time to act is now.