

**REMARKS FOR
NEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
EI STANDING COMMITTEE FOR (GENDER) EQUALITY
OCTOBER 21, 2013**

Greetings...acknowledgements...

On behalf of the National Education Association, I bring greetings from our 3 million members across the United States.

It is an absolute pleasure to be here and spend a few moments with you.

Pause...

“There is so much to do, and so little time.”

These are the words articulated by Lily Ledbetter who spoke at NEA’s 2013 Joint Conference on Concerns of Minorities and Women.

Her words were more than just powerful and fitting for the moment. They were a clarion call to us all who choose courage when defending and promoting gender equity over those who choose the comfort of the status quo.

Four years after President Obama signed into law the act that bears her name, Ledbetter continues the fights for fair pay for women, who still earn just 77 cents for every1 Euro earned by a man.

In 1998, after 19 years working as a night supervisor at a Goodyear tire factory, Ledbetter found an anonymous note in her mailbox that revealed she was earning thousands of dollars less than the men doing the same job in the same southern factory.

Over eight years, her case of pay discrimination made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled Ledbetter should have filed her claim within 180 days of receiving her first unequal paycheck — even though she had no idea 19 years earlier that she was being shortchanged!

But she didn't stop fighting then, and in 2009 the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which states that the 180-day window resets with each paycheck, became the first law signed by President Obama.

The story of Lilly Ledbetter proves that gender inequality in employment remains a great barrier to the full expression of human rights around the world.

Union landscape

In our unions, women are an increasing proportion of union membership, thanks to their higher labor force participation and strong unionization rates in the jobs they dominate, such as nursing, teaching, and clerical jobs.

In the United States 44 percent of union members are women and the majority of new workers organized in unions over the past two decades have been women. In some unions, particularly in the service industries, women already comprise 50 percent or more of membership.

Yet, women are not proportionally represented within union leadership. In the US, women are about 21 percent of lead union organizers and they hold relatively few top union positions, even in unions with strong female membership.

Just as we need a pipeline of girls and women into science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers, so, too, do we need a pipeline of girls and women into all aspects of leadership – public, political, philanthropic, corporate, educational, and NGOs.

While women have achieved unprecedented levels of success in many sectors of the workforce, gender equity in leadership remains elusive.

A recent study made some interesting findings about why women in leadership roles are not more common. I was enraged by some of these three findings:

One - Women face the “double-jeopardy” of being criticized for having a more collaborative leadership style -- and also for adopting or utilizing a more male, dominant leadership style.

Two - Women who are cheerful are less likely to be perceived as willing to take on leadership roles in the workplace than men who display similar emotions. **So, no more smiling in the workplace ladies!**

Three - Women are perceived as being more willing to lead if they show that they are proud of their personal performance; yet, “women who do not temper their agency and competence with warmth and friendliness risk being disliked and less influential” ...

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry when I read these conclusions. They are misguided and driven by a culture that is desperately holding on to ancient notions of equality.

Unions can and have the power to create a space to cultivate women's leadership by providing women-specific training programs, conferences, women's committees, and networks at the local, regional, and national levels.

Whether these programs are held in large national meetings or local strategy sessions, they can help women build skills and confidence in their union work, particularly when it is new and relatively intimidating for them. They can also help women strategize about the particular issues and circumstances facing their union work.

This is also a men's issue. We know that men play an important role in the balance of power – whether in unions or schools.

Unions can only succeed if we listen and respond to the concerns of both genders. If our unions more consistently and visibly address women's concerns, we are more likely to inspire long-term, active involvement by women.

We understand this - which is why gender equality is a priority at NEA.

We believe that we can only achieve success as a union when men and women are equal partners in leadership opportunities.

Currently, 4 of the 9 members of the NEA Officers and Executive Committee are women. In fact, we expect that we will elect a woman as NEA President, Lily Eskelsen, next July.

What we do...

Our commitment is also evidenced throughout many of our programs. The NEA **Women’s Leadership Training Program** **has impacted the nature of leadership within the union at the local, state and national levels. This program was initiated more than four decades ago – as you can imagine we’ve built in many changes but have stayed steady in our vision of full engagement of women in every aspect of union life.**

Through this program our leaders learn new leadership skills, how to mobilize and build coalitions, and become better advocates. Our Women’s Leadership Training provides support for women leaders at each level of leadership in the Association –

There are four modules:

- **“Campaigning to Win”** helps those who are interested in running for office to put their best foot forward in running for office.
- **“Skills for Emerging Leaders”** addresses the leadership development needs of women new to leadership;
- **“Developing Your Leadership Skills”** supports experienced leaders who have held union leadership roles for more than 4 years;
- And **“Strategic Leadership”** is designed for our most senior leaders who have held union office for more than 8 years;

As an added benefit of this effective leadership training, many of our members have applied the skills and understandings to new

settings, whether leadership positions in education or in the community.

We also address gender equity issues through our **Women's Issues Committee**. This body is responsible for:

- Proposing policies and programs related to issues of particular concern to women – including efforts to achieve equal rights under the law for women.
- And reviewing NEA programs affecting women, and advising the Association on their implementation.

The Women's Issues Committee also gathers information and reviews data on legislative actions that impact:

1. **Title IX** – our national gender fair law on education that governs both access to education programs and sports.
2. **Equal Rights Amendment** – sadly, the United States still does not have full equality of gender in its constitution. This is an effort that we still must move ahead on.
3. **CEDAW** – the UN treaty for the human rights of women and girls – again my own nation has not taken the important step of ratifying this treaty which is the norm in almost every other nation.

But we also understand that when we fight for better pay for educators we are standing up for women.

When we combat gender stereotypes in the classroom we are standing up for women.

And when we advocate for early childhood programs we are helping women, who are the primary caregivers of most children.

The NEA will always be a trailblazer in the fight for gender equity,

Although doors to success are opened far wider today than they have ever been before, there are confining stereotypes that govern what men and women—think our roles should be.

This binary of what is perceived ‘female’ and ‘male’ limits all people in reaching their full potential. As educators, we understand this.

Close

It has been said that the great moral challenge of the 19th Century was slavery and in the 20th Century it was totalitarianism—and the great moral challenge of the 21st Century is the challenge of addressing the needs of girls and women around the world.

There is plenty of evidence, however—and this is the good news—that the education and empowerment of women would transform this world of ours.

Though we have yet to make the mark for the Education For All and Millennium Development goals that are focused on 2015, I am heartened by the UN Secretary General’s new report, which proposes recommendations for the 2015-2030 period.

Gender equity and education is the second and third of 12 goals. Our nations – with input from Civil Society and Education International – will be further defining what is ahead. We know that without education, we cannot have progress in eradicating poverty and transforming economies.

As we move forward towards our goal of gender equity, the ultimate question becomes what do we believe?

Story of Malala Yousafzai...

As you know, Malala Yousafzai believes that all girls and women should be allowed to have ambition and to dream.

Though Malala was shot a year ago in the head by the Taliban, she has emerged as a leader.

Not only did she survive, her voice got louder...her courage tougher...her spirit stronger.

She spoke eloquently at the United Nations this past summer and this is what she had to say:

The terrorists thought that they would change our aims and stop our ambitions but nothing changed in my life except this:

Weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born. I am the same Malala. My ambitions are the same. My hopes are the same. My dreams are the same.

So here I stand... one girl among many.

I speak – not for myself, but for all girls and boys.

I raise up my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard.

Those who have fought for their rights:

Their right to live in peace.

Their right to be treated with dignity.

Their right to equality of opportunity.

Their right to be educated.

I go back to what the words of the American Lily Ledbetter who changed gender protections in the workplace:

“There is so much to do, and so little time.”

Let's not waste it!

Thank you