

## The President's Weekly Address

*March 12, 2011*

March is Women's History Month, a time not only to celebrate the progress that women have made, but also the women throughout our history who have made that progress possible.

One inspiring American who comes to mind is Eleanor Roosevelt. In 1961, the former First Lady was unhappy about the lack of women in Government, so she marched up to President Kennedy and handed him a three-page list of women who were qualified for top posts in his administration. This led the President to select Mrs. Roosevelt as the head of a new commission to look at the status of women in America and the unfairness they routinely faced in their lives.

Though she passed away before the commission could finish its work, the report they released spurred action across the country. It helped galvanize a movement led by women that would help make our society a more equal place.

It's been almost 50 years since the Roosevelt commission published its findings, and there have been few similar efforts by the Government in the decades that followed. That's why last week, here at the White House, we released a new comprehensive report on the status of women in the spirit of the one that was released half a century ago.

There was a lot of positive news about the strides we've made, even in recent years. For example, women have caught up with men in seeking higher education. In fact, women today are more likely than men to attend and graduate from college.

Yet there are also reminders of how much more work remains to be done. Women are still more likely to live in poverty in this country. In education, there are areas like math and engineering where women are vastly outnumbered by their male counterparts. This is especially troubling, for we know that to compete with nations around the world, these are fields in which we need to harness the talents of all our people. That's how we'll win the future.

And today, women still earn, on average, only about 75 cents for every dollar a man earns.

That's a huge discrepancy. And at a time when folks across this country are struggling to make ends meet and many families are just trying to get by on one paycheck after a job loss, it's a reminder that achieving equal pay for equal work isn't just a women's issue, it's a family issue.

In one of my first acts as President, I signed a law so that women who've been discriminated against in their salaries could have their day in court to make it right. But there are steps we should take to prevent that from happening in the first place. That's why I was so disappointed when an important bill to give women more power to stop pay disparities, the "Paycheck Fairness Act," was blocked by just two votes in the Senate. And that's why I'm going to keep up the fight to pass the reforms in that bill.

Achieving equality and opportunity for women isn't just important to me as President. It's something I care about deeply as the father of two daughters who wants to see his girls grow up in a world where there are no limits to what they can achieve.

As I've traveled across the country visiting schools and meeting young people, I've seen so many girls passionate about science and other subjects that were traditionally not open to them. We even held a science fair here at the White House, where I met a young woman named Amy Chyao. She was only 16 years old, but she was actually working on a treatment for cancer. She never thought, "Science isn't for me." She never thought, "Girls can't do that." She was just interested in solving a problem. And because someone was interested in giving her a chance, she has the potential to improve lives.

That tells me how far we've come. But it also tells me we have to work even harder to close the gaps that still exist and to uphold that simple American ideal: We are all equal and deserving of the chance to pursue our own version of happiness. That's what Eleanor Roosevelt was striving toward half a century ago. That's why this report matters today. And that's why, on behalf of all our daughters and all our sons, we've got to keep making progress in the years ahead.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 3:10 p.m. on March 11 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on

March 12. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 11, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on March 12.

Remarks to an Overflow Crowd at Kenmore Middle School in Arlington,  
Virginia  
March 14, 2011

*The President.* Hey! Hey, Kenmore! How are you? Good to see you guys. Hello, everybody. Hello, everybody. How are you? All right, everybody, have a seat. Everybody, have a seat.

Well, I was just wandering out and I—suddenly all of you were here. Well, it is wonderful to see you guys. First of all, I want to introduce—this is Arne Duncan, who’s the Secretary of Education and a good friend of mine. Give him a big round of applause.

How’s everybody doing today?

*Audience members.* Good!

*The President.* Good. Well, I wanted to come by partly because we’ve designated this Education Month at the White House. And what we are doing is traveling all across the country, finding schools that are doing a great job, and highlighting how we can make sure that every school is doing a great job.

So I want to congratulate your principal, I want to congratulate your teachers, and most of all, I want to congratulate the students for doing some outstanding work here at Kenmore. You guys have made us proud. When we look at the improvement that you’re making, day in, day out, what that tells me is, is that you’ve got a lot of hard-working young people who are really focused on learning.

And there’s never been a time where that’s more important. Part of what I’m going to do when I speak to the other group is to explain that it used to be, if you were willing to work hard, you didn’t really need an education to get a good job. You could go to a factory, and you could build things, you could make things. But you didn’t necessarily have to know math. You didn’t necessarily have to be able to communicate that effectively.

These days, if you want to get a good job, have a great career, the only way you’re going to do it is if you have a good education. And so that starts early. It can’t—you can’t wait until you get to be old like me—[laughter]—to get an education. You got to start young. And that’s what you guys are doing each and every day.

So the main message I have for you is that we’re proud of you, but we need you all to buckle down and keep working hard. This is right about the age when I—what grades are you guys? Seventh, eighth?

*Audience members.* Eighth grade.

*The President.* This is eighth grade. I’ve got a confession to make. This is probably right around the time I was at my worst. I mean, I was getting in trouble all the time. I was in the principal’s office all the time. I was—and so boys especially—[laughter]—this is the age where you start getting a little distracted. And so I just hope that everybody really stays focused. Yes, have fun, but listen to your teachers, listen to your parents, and make sure that you really are doing everything you can to succeed in school.

And I know that—I know you will, and as a consequence, I know that you guys are going to be able to do anything that you ever want to do, including maybe being the Secretary of Education or the President of the United States.

All right. Thank you, guys. See you later. See you. And teachers, good job! We’re proud of you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:04 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to John A. Word, principal, Kenmore Middle School.