

workforce skilled in the creative endeavor of problem solving. The education of our engineering workforce must also be a focus of our work for the future of our Nation. We must more fervently welcome into the science and engineering workforce underrepresented groups, for their unique perspectives and diverse background enrich the problem solving environment. We must create an educational system that maintains high expectations and intellectually challenges each student to find their role in solving the problems that we will face as a Nation. This is about our future, our Nation's future, and we must act now.

#### INTRODUCTION OF THE ETHICS REFORM ACT OF 2006

**HON. EARL BLUMENAUER**

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, March 14, 2006*

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, hailing from the Oregon climate of a small state legislature where political openness and integrity is highly prized, I have been pained by both the recent revelations in Congress of wrongdoing and the inability of the Congressional ethics process to operate in an effective manner. The House has long been in need of a comprehensive solution to the oversight of Members' ethical conduct. Sadly, it has necessitated a series of egregious violations by Members to bring this issue to the forefront of public attention. The current proposals, however, do not address the core issue behind the ethics problem—oversight.

Today, I am proud to introduce with my colleague and fellow Oregonian, GREG WALDEN, the "Ethics Reform Act of 2006." While it is the responsibility of each and every Member of Congress to adhere to the spirit of the law, as a practical matter, history shows there needs to be additional enforcement and oversight. Unfortunately, history also shows that the expectation for Congress to oversee the conduct of its Members is unrealistic. The "Ethics Reform Act of 2006" would create an independent Ethics Commission, appointed by Congress, that would objectively oversee and bring charges against Members of Congress who violate the rules.

Congress needs an independent ethics review process, similar to that found in many states. We need an independent panel that can make independent decisions without worrying about the effect those decisions will have on its members' political futures. We need an independent panel whose members understand the reality of public service and the need to ensure the integrity of that service through adherence to the rules. We need an independent panel that can meet the test of public scrutiny and restore trust that today is missing.

This bill would replace the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct with an 11-member outside Ethics Commission and a full-time professional staff to provide oversight, investigations and recommendations for ethical enforcement. Each of the members would be former House members—five from each party—who have been out of office at least 2 years and an 11th member appointed by the consensus of the other 10. These Commission members would bring the experience of public

service and the understanding of the complexity of our duties.

Professional staff, headed by an executive director, would serve the Ethics Commission. The Speaker of the House and the Minority Leader of the House would choose the executive director in a manner similar to the appointment of the director of the Congressional Budget Office. The executive director would serve for a seven-year term and could be reappointed only once.

In addition to taking over the investigation and review functions of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, the Lobbying Disclosure Act would be brought under the Commission's jurisdiction. The new ethics panel would maintain all records and ensure compliance with reporting requirements and rules.

Any recommendations of the ethics panel beyond advisory opinions, letters of reproval and admonishment would go to the full House. Actions that fall short of official discipline would not require action of the House.

In reviewing both lobbyist disclosures and member disclosures, the Commission would review for potential joint financial interests between the two. Additionally, this bill mandates quarterly posting of lobbyist disclosures on the internet for easy public scrutiny.

Current Members of Congress will no longer be obligated with the task of policing their peers—a task which Members do not have the proper amount of time or impartiality to perform. It is time for the American people's faith in Congress to be restored. The "Ethics Reform Act of 2006" has the power to allow the Congressional oversight process to work in the fair, efficient, and transparent manner that many of us seek and our constituents demand.

#### RECOGNIZING MARCH 8, 2006— INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY— SPOTLIGHT ON THE PLIGHT OF MINORITY WOMEN—THE HIDDEN VICTIMS OF MULTIPLE-DISCRIMINATION

**HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, March 14, 2006*

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to say a few words in recognition of International Women's Day and to enter into the RECORD a very profound statement titled "Meeting the Challenges of Discrimination against Women from Minority Groups," authored by Gay McDougall, a human rights lawyer and a United Nations Independent Expert on Minority Issues. In the country and around the world, holidays and special recognition days come and go every year. We all celebrate and/or reminisce briefly to honor the occasions. Many times there are occasions that deserve more than just a cursory acknowledgement. International Women's Day is one such occasion.

March 8th—International Women's Day is a day marked by women's groups around the world. This date is commemorated at the United Nations and is designated in many countries as a national holiday. The idea of an International Women's Day first came about at the turn of the century during a period of expansion and turbulence, booming population

growth and radical ideologies. Great strides in women's rights have been made since the turn of century and everyone, especially women, can look back to a tradition that represents at least nine decades of struggle for equality, justice, peace and development. In the present day, women on all continents often divided by national boundaries and by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences continue to come together to celebrate International Women's Day.

The United Nations has played a pivotal role in ensuring that International Women's Day continues to receive their support. The growing women's movement has been strengthened by four global United Nations women's conferences which served to make the commemoration a rallying point for coordinated efforts to demand women's rights and participation in the political and economic process.

Few causes promoted by the United Nations have generated more intense and widespread support than the campaign to promote and protect the equal rights of women. The charter of the United Nations, signed in San Francisco in 1945, was the first international agreement to proclaim gender equality as a fundamental human right. Since then, the organization has helped create a historic legacy of internationally agreed strategies, standards, programs and goals to advance the status of women worldwide.

With so much awareness of the issues facing women in this day and time, one would believe that women have come close to reaching the pinnacle of achievement and recognition in today's society. Yes, great strides have been made but the reality is that new and urgent attention must be given to the rights of women facing multiple forms of discrimination, exclusion and violence. Amongst the most disadvantaged and vulnerable are women from minority communities who face problems compounded by their uniquely disadvantaged positions in society. These women face two forms of discrimination—first because they belong to certain minority communities and secondly because they are women.

This article that I enter into the RECORD today thoroughly exposes some of the challenges of discrimination against women—particularly women from minority groups—and clearly brings the unfinished business of equal rights for women to the forefront. Gay McDougall the U.N. Independent Expert on Minority Issues has written this article to remind us that much is left to do to confront the reality of the present unacceptable situation facing millions of women worldwide.

#### MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN FROM MINORITY GROUPS (By Gay McDougall)

All women share common bonds in the fight for equal rights. In every region and in every society, women are undervalued, face issues of personal insecurity because of violence in their homes and communities, and must wage a constant struggle for self-determination over their bodies and personal destinies. While some gains have been made in those battles, gender based discrimination remains a persistent and universal problem.

However, some women's problems are compounded by their uniquely disadvantaged position in society as members of national, racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities that are targets of discrimination. The damage done to individuals, families, communities and societies by discrimination, exclusion and racism on these grounds is immense. Women from these groups must often

fight the patriarchy within their communities along with the patriarchy and racism of the larger community.

On this, International Women's Day, it is incumbent on the international community, to speak out in support for those women whose voices have been silenced and whose lives have been blighted by discrimination, intolerance, exploitation, violence and patriarchal ideologies. Addressing the situation of the most disadvantaged women is a challenge requiring the urgent attention of all of us.

Minorities are often restricted from participating fully or effectively in economic, social and political life. Yet it is women who belong to minority population groups whose choices, opportunities and life chances, are the most restricted, in both public and private spheres. Where minorities suffer poor access to education, health services and employment, it is often the women from those minority groups, whose needs are least recognized, and whose potential remains the least fulfilled. While minorities are the most frequent victims of conflict and genocide, it is the women of those communities who often suffer the most, supporting families under unimaginable conditions, or targeted for rape or killing, due to their status as the most vulnerable of minorities, and the bearers of a new generation. Overwhelmingly, the poorest of the world are disproportionately minority communities that have been subjected to on-going discrimination, yet it is minority women who often bear the greatest burden.

A Roma woman in Europe, for example, may experience complex multiple forms of discrimination, touching every aspect of her life, including her social interactions, her health and work. An Afro-descendent woman in Latin America is also more likely to be poorly educated, to live in the poorest quality housing, lack access to health care and other services, and to work in the lowest income employment. Women in communities affected by caste in some Asian or African nations are often severely disadvantaged and forced to perform the most degrading tasks in society. If such women happen to be unmarried, to have a disability, to be lesbian or a single mother, they may also face additional forms of discrimination.

Action must be taken at the community, national and international levels to address

the discrimination and rights violations faced by women from disadvantaged minority groups. In the first instance, this requires recognition that such complex problems, exist. It is often the case that we do not see the most disadvantaged, precisely because of the violations perpetrated against them. They are, in a very real sense, hidden victims.

Socio-economic data that is aggregated hides the problems that minorities face. The increasing practice of disaggregating data along gender lines is revealing the general inequalities between men and women. But only when that data is further disaggregated based on both gender and race, ethnicity or religion, will the problems of marginalized and disadvantaged women come into focus. In order for policies and programs to be effective, the gender lens must be adjusted to reveal the dynamics of colour, ethnicity and religion, so that the plight of these women can become visible through research and statistics.

While reinforcing a clear message of the value of cultural and religious diversity, we must not shy away from addressing those cultural, religious or traditional practices which impair or restrict the full range of choices that women, as humans, are entitled to as rights. Yet calls for the rights and empowerment of minority women should not be seen as a challenge to the cultural or religious identity or heritage of minority communities. The protection and promotion of the rights of women in disadvantaged communities provides a means to realize the full potential that exists within those communities as a whole, in the abilities and efforts of both their men and their women equal in rights and in dignity.

These are not solely problems of the developing world. Minorities and women belonging to those minorities also face unique disabilities in the context of discrimination in the developed world. Trafficking of vulnerable women and girls, for example, many of whom are from disadvantaged minorities, is a manifestation of how the global economy can prey on those burdened with multiple forms of discrimination. These are problems in all countries and issues for all nations to confront together.

I believe that the problems faced by women from disadvantaged minority communities

must be tackled both from within their communities and as it is manifested in the larger society. These are problems that must be confronted both by women themselves, and by men, whose attitudes and ideologies are often a root cause of discrimination and inequality. A new challenge exists for those organizations working on women's rights, to fully and effectively address minority rights as they relate to women. Equally, those organizations working on minority rights must pay greater attention to the plight of women within minority communities and the broader society.

National legislation, sensitively conceived, actively promoted, and vigorously applied, can pave the way for social progress, and for real change to the lives of disadvantaged women. Access to effective legal remedies for women is an essential step on this path. Community based awareness raising and practical initiatives must go hand in hand with legal and judicial progress, and have a role to play in the empowerment of women to achieve their potential and to enable them to claim their rights with confidence. Crucially, girls and women from minority communities must have full and equal access to quality education. Education must extend beyond the classroom, to reach deeply into the fabric of society with a strong and pervasive message of human rights, equality and understanding, which enriches all lives.

As Independent Expert on minority issues, I believe that the issues of the rights of women from targeted minorities deserve particular attention under my mandate, and by the international community. Across the full spectrum of rights, civil and political, economic, social and cultural, minority women are often the most disadvantaged from birth until death. I will support campaigns to highlight the issues and to find effective and sustainable solutions, confronting the reality of the present unacceptable situation facing millions of women worldwide. True gender equality will only be achieved when it is achieved for all women, not simply the women in advantaged majority communities. And, the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities will be realized only when the women of those communities enjoy fully their human rights.