

THE STATE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS  
IN AMERICA

**HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, December 18, 2015*

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, we face a real problem in America as it relates to the rights of women and how this will one day impact our young girls.

We live in a great country founded on principles of liberty, justice and equality.

Throughout history, we have grown and developed into a nation where women hold some of the most prestigious and powerful positions in our country and throughout the world, as scientists, astronauts, businesswomen, educators, government officials, Supreme Court justices, and hopefully one day soon, the President of our United States.

However, as a global champion and advocate of international human rights and the rule of law, the United States still has a long ways to go guaranteeing equal access to legal rights and protections for all women in America.

The United Nations Working Group on Discrimination against Women in the Law and Practice (U.N. Working Group) recently issued a sobering statement and assessment, with a full report to follow in June 2016, delineating an infringement on the rights of women in America.

Upon visiting several states throughout the country, including my home state of Texas, the U.N. Working Group concluded that women in the United States inexplicably lag behind international human rights standards.

Pointing to data and research on public and political representation, economic and social rights, and health and safety protections, experts in the U.N. Working Group boldly acknowledged that there is a myth that women in the United States already enjoy all of the expected standards of rights and protections because they live in America.

A woman's fundamental reproductive right is tied to their economic independence, empowerment and wellbeing of her family.

The reality is, women in the United States are experiencing continued discrimination and daunting disparities that curtail their ability to fully participate as equal members of society.

The primary areas and statistics noted, include the following:

Women have risen to some of the highest levels of legislative and executive representation over the years, yet with only 4 of 15 cabinet members, 19.4% of Congressional Members and an average of 24.9% of state legislatures, the U.S. ranks at only 72 in the global market of women represented in public and political positions.

While the number of women justices has significantly increased, women litigants' access to justice is severely limited.

Although women vote in higher percentages than men, women's access to voting is under attack in states like Alabama where increased voter ID requirements pose unprecedented barriers.

Women constitute nearly half of the US labor force, at a participation rate of 57%. Yet, equal economic opportunity is severely lacking given deficient or nonexistent mandatory standards for workplace accommodations for

pregnant women, post-natal mothers and persons with care responsibilities.

What also remains a shameful truth in America, is the gender wage gap which has remained at or near 21% over the past decade. Shockingly, women with higher levels of education experience the largest earning gaps, as do minority women regardless of educational attainment.

The percentage of women in poverty has increased over the past decade, from 12.1% to 14.5%, with a higher rate of poverty than men. As such, women are exposed to higher rates of homelessness and violence without adequate protections in place in shelters and housing support options.

Women in detention facilities throughout the country are also experiencing increasingly high rates of over-incarceration, sexual violence, shackling while pregnant, solitary confinement, lack of alternative custodial sentencing for women with dependent children, and inadequate access to health care and re-entry programs.

Migrant women traveling to the U.S., many victims of trafficking and violence, including sexual violence, are kept in detention centers with children for prolonged periods of time.

Notably, the criminalization of women in prostitution places them in unjust, vulnerable and stigmatized situations that are contrary to international human rights law.

The U.N. has also pointed out that women, particularly black and LGBTQ women, in the U.S. experience deplorable police brutality and increased incidents of homicide by police.

Even though women own over 1/3 of firms in the U.S., primarily in small and medium sized businesses, these businesses face greater barriers in obtaining low cost capital from sources such as the Small Business Administration—which awards less than 5% of federal contracts to women-owned business.

Lastly, one of the most alarming deficiencies for women in America is the lack of access to basic health care and the imposition of devastating barriers to reproductive health and rights.

Too many women are suffering dire and deadly consequences.

Between 1990 and 2013, the maternal mortality rate for women in the U.S. has increased by 136%.

Black women are nearly 4 times more likely to die in childbirth, and states with high poverty rates have a 77% higher maternal mortality rate.

Our global experts and allies acknowledge that even though women's reproductive rights in America are constitutionally protected, access to reproductive health services are severely abridged by states' imposition of sweeping barriers and restrictions.

For instance, in many states, women must undergo unjustified and invasive medical procedures; endure groundless waiting periods; be subjected to harassment, violence or other threatening conditions that remain constant throughout all reproductive health care clinics; and forced to forgo treatment or engage in lengthy and costly travel due to closure of clinics faced with burdensome licensing conditions.

These restrictions disproportionately discriminate against poor women.

The United States can and should do better.

It is unacceptable that women in America are facing a reproductive health care crisis so

dire that the global community is denouncing it as a human rights violation.

Sadly, the direction States are taking will only further dismantle women's access to affordable and trustworthy reproductive healthcare.

Clinics are shutting down at alarming rates throughout the country as a result of devastating restrictions and barriers imposed throughout Texas.

A Texas statute known as HB2 (House Bill 2), was enacted several years ago claiming to promote women's health, when in fact it only set in motion dangerous restrictions on women's access to reproductive health care.

In addition to constant attacks on funding for reproductive health care clinics, abortion providers in Texas were forced to undergo impossible million dollar renovations and upgrades.

Denying hundreds of thousands of women health care services in Texas, nearly half of all reproductive health care clinics were forced to shut down, and now only 10 remain in the second largest state in the country.

Another moment will occur when the Supreme Court decides *Whole Woman's Health v. Cole*, which will decide the fate of the remaining clinics in Texas and throughout the nation.

No woman in America should be denied the dignity of being able to make choices about her body and healthcare.

Access to safe, legal and unhindered healthcare must be realized by all women.

A woman's right to choose to have an abortion is a constitutionally protected fundamental right.

More than 40 years ago in the landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113, (1973), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7–2 that the right to privacy under the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment extends to a woman's decision to have an abortion.

More recently, in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992), the Supreme Court upheld *Roe v. Wade* and further explained that states could not enact medically unnecessary regulations meant to create substantial obstacles for women seeking abortion services.

Yet, fairness and access to exercise constitutionally protected fundamental rights is trampled on and denied to millions of women.

We cannot ignore the unfairness of imbalanced protection and access to fundamentally protected rights for women in America when it is easier to purchase and lawfully possess a firearm—even for a person on the terrorist watchlist—than it is for a woman to exercise her constitutional right to terminate a pregnancy.

Mr. Speaker, this is neither fair nor right and it should not be rewarded.

As our nation continues to push back against horrific acts of violence at the hands of dangerous and irresponsible gun owners and gun dealers, and our nation's number one provider of women's healthcare continues to experience violent and deadly attacks on its personnel and facilities, it is time we find common ground.

A woman's right to choose to have an abortion and an individual's right to possess a firearm are both constitutionally protected fundamental rights.

I will be working with my colleagues to find ways to address the unfair and unjust disparity by reviewing and responding to unwarranted

restrictions that result in disparate access to these constitutionally protected rights.

Certainly, if the state has a legitimate interest in requiring a woman to wait several days, undergo a physical examination, receive counseling and education about alternative options before making the decision to terminate a pregnancy, then it has an equally compelling interest in requiring a person seeking to obtain a firearm to demonstrate the mental, physical, and emotional fitness to possess an instrument that is used to kill more than 30,000 Americans annually.

I hope that one day soon in America it will not be harder for a woman to exercise her fundamental right to choose than it is for a person on the terrorist watchlist to lawfully purchase and possess firearms.

At a minimum, I urge the Congress to rededicate itself to the critically important but unfinished task of ensuring equality of opportunity and protection of law for women.

CONGRATULATING JOE RITCHEY  
AND PROSPECTIVE, INC.

HON. GERALD E. CONNOLLY

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, December 18, 2015*

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate Joe Ritchey and his company, Prospective, Inc. on being named one of the 2015 BCA 10: Best Businesses Partnering with the Arts in America honorees. Presented every year by Americans for the Arts' Business Committee for the Arts (BCA), the BCA 10 awards honor U.S. companies for their exceptional commitment to the arts.

Joe Ritchey and his firm actively support a vibrant local arts scene in Reston and throughout Fairfax County. Mr. Ritchey helped form the Initiative for Public Art—Reston (IPAR), where he still serves as President and Chair. IPAR consists of a group of civic leaders who represent Reston's key community organizations and seek to inspire and expand the community's commitment to public art. In 2008, IPAR launched a process that led to the adoption of the Public Art Master Plan for Reston which strives to incorporate art into public spaces. Anyone strolling through the many parks and public squares in Reston can readily see the impact of the Master Plan.

Mr. Ritchey's contributions and influence extend far beyond Reston and have benefited our larger Fairfax County community. A passionate lover of the arts, he has served on the boards of the Arts Council of Fairfax County (Board Chairman in 2013 and 2014), Children's Museum of Northern Virginia, Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts Associates, and the Greater Reston Arts Center.

A successful businessman, Mr. Ritchey also shares his knowledge and expertise with numerous other organizations. He serves or has served on the boards or in other leadership roles of the Reston Hospital Center of HCA Virginia Health System (Board Chairman in 2011 and 2012), the Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance, the Dulles Corridor Rail Association, the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce, and he is an active supporter of Reston Interfaith, Nature House, and the George Mason University Center for Regional Analysis.

Mr. Ritchey has received numerous awards and accolades in recognition of his service to our community. These awards include the NAOIP 1995 Award of Excellence for Economic Development, 2003 "Best of Reston" designation, the 2004 Fairfax County Federation of Citizen Associations Citizen of the Year, the 2006 Times Community Newspapers Reston Citizen of the Year, the 2009 inaugural Robert E. Simon Community Service Award, the 2011 Jinx Hazel Arts Citizen of the Year, and in 2013 he was the Grand Marshal of the Reston Holiday Parade.

Northern Virginia is a vibrant region where countless people donate their time, energy, and financial support for the betterment of our neighbors and our community as a whole.

In this region where so many do so much, Mr. Ritchey stands out and is an example of what one person can do. He has created a legacy that will live on for future generations to enjoy and has truly been a force in Reston and Northern Virginia being considered among the best places in the country in which to live, work, play, and raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in congratulating Joe Ritchey and Prospective, Inc. on being honored as a BCA 10 recipient, and in thanking him for his unwavering and tireless efforts on behalf of our community.

SUPPORT FOR OMNIBUS AND TAX  
EXTENDERS LEGISLATION

HON. EARL BLUMENAUER

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, December 18, 2015*

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I voted for both the omnibus and tax extender bills that came before the House this week. They represented hard work and compromises by many on both sides of the aisle and across the advocacy community. I commend so many of my colleagues for reminding us of what we can accomplish when we work together on behalf of the American people.

These bills don't just do the bare minimum to keep the government open and continue the policy status quo as we have done many times in recent years. Instead, they actually invest in important programs, many that I have supported for years and that are priorities for Oregonians.

I am pleased to see the extenders legislation support research and development, and provide important tools—such as an extension of the New Markets program—to invest in our communities. The tax package increases the benefit for transit riders to the same level as the parking tax benefit, providing much-needed tax fairness, strengthening options for commuters, and eliminating an incentive to drive to work. This provision will ease congestion and road wear and make our transportation system more sustainable.

The omnibus also contains robust funding for public broadcasting, animal welfare enforcement, and health and scientific research. It includes the highest-ever levels of funding for the implementation of the Water for the Poor and Water for the World Acts, for which I have fought for years. I am pleased that the bill contains many provisions that I helped champion, including language to ensure the

Department of Justice stay out of the way of state medical marijuana laws, language that supports industrial hemp research programs, and increased funding for brain research.

There are also many positive provisions for the environment in these bills. I am delighted that the Land and Water Conservation Fund has been reauthorized and funded at a significant increase of \$144 million. This program is one of the most important tools we have to protect land and habitat, construct parks and purchase other outdoor spaces that are cherished in communities.

Both bills take important steps to help us transition away from fossil fuels and allow us to meaningfully contribute in the global fight against climate change. In particular, the long-term extension of tax credits for wind and solar energy development will significantly expand the development of clean renewable energy across the country at a critical time in our struggle to reduce carbon emissions. With this support, the solar industry estimates that by 2020, it will deploy more than 20 GW of solar electricity annually.

The provisions supporting wind energy will free that industry from a repeated boom-and-bust cycle caused by inaction in Congress, and will strengthen the build out of low-cost, emission-free renewable energy from coast to coast.

The elimination of many of the damaging environmental riders that were proposed during the appropriations process was a major victory, measures that would have defunded the Clean Power Plan, or reduced protections for endangered species among many others.

There are certainly provisions in both of these bills that I do not support. It is troubling that we are drifting away from discipline in terms of dealing with the deficit. There were many missed opportunities to reduce wasteful spending and redirect those resources to where it is more needed. We will continue to spend billions of dollars every year on a nuclear arsenal we can't afford and will not use. Through tax breaks and direct subsidies, we will also continue to directly support wildly profitable industries that do not need this support—such as agribusiness and the petroleum industry.

The bills also fail to address the need for new and different revenues, such as a carbon tax and a gas tax increase to rebuild crumbling infrastructure, to protect our environment and to properly invest in social safety net programs over the long run.

Both bills include provisions that on their own, I would not support. I remain unpersuaded that we need to lift the crude oil export ban. I have voted against such legislation in the past since it will not help us transition to a cleaner energy future. The inclusion of the Cybersecurity Information and Sharing Act is troubling because it fails to strike the right balance between privacy and security, or between the responsibility of the private sector and the government. The omnibus also continues an irresponsible policy rider that interferes with the District of Columbia's ability to manage the sale of marijuana to ensure safety and appropriate regulations. Finally, the extenders legislation imposes new rules and responsibilities on the overburdened staff at the Internal Revenue Service. We currently have the most efficient tax collection system in the world among developed nations, but we have been systematically destroying its ability to serve taxpayers by doing its job.