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WALNUT CREEK, CALIFORNIA

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Republican Perspective

By John Littig

The Pay Gap and the War on Women

President Obama has strongly signaled that the Democrats' campaign theme for this go-around will be income inequality. An important component of that theme is his assertion that women doing the same jobs as men earn only 77 cents for every dollar a man earns - a supposed pay gap of 23 percent.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) does not report on exactly that measure (probably because it can't be tracked), but does report on "median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers" by various characteristics, including gender. In October 2013, using data for 2012, BLS reported women's earnings as a percentage of men's was 80.9 percent.

This pay gap may be influenced by many variables. Among these, the BLS report cites education level, occupation, marital status, parental status and number of hours worked per week. On the latter variable, BLS reported that the men who worked full time (defined as 35 or more hours per week) worked more hours than women who worked full time. In fact, the percentage of men who worked more than 40 hours per week was double the percentage of women who did so.

Assuming much of the pay gap is due to variables (such as BLS has cited) rather than a diabolical "war on women" being waged by employers across the country, let's take a look at this revealing comparison. BLS reports that the earnings of women who have never married were 95.8 percent of the earnings of never-married men. Now, this measure does not eliminate the variable of never-married women (or men, for that matter) who may be raising children. If that variable could be removed, the 4.2 percent gap might be even less, or disappear or even be flipped.

In addition, there is actually good news on the pay gap front: The gap is closing! BLS reports: "At each level of education, women have fared better than men with respect to earnings growth. Although both women and men without a high school diploma have experienced declines in inflation-adjusted earnings since 1979, the drop in earnings for women (14 percent) was significantly less than for men (32 percent) ... On an inflation-adjusted basis, earnings for women with a college degree have increased 28 percent since 1979, while those of male college graduates have risen by 17 percent."

So the gender component of income inequality is, according to the BLS data and analysis, not all that it's cracked up to be by President Obama and the war-on-women enthusiasts.

But just for perspective, let's look at two other gaps (again for 2012) reported in government data. First is the rate of fatal work injuries, second the incarceration rate.

According to BLS, men worked 57 percent of the total hours worked in 2012, but accounted for a whopping 92 percent of the fatal on-the-job injuries. Women accounted for 43 percent of the total hours worked, but only 8 percent of the fatal on-the-job injuries. A "death gap," if you please, of 84 percent. Now that's a gap.

The U.S. Department of Justice reported in December 2013 on the federal and state prison populations by gender. For the combined jurisdictions, males outnumbered females 1,410,191 to 101,289. The prison population was 93.3 percent male, 6.7 percent female. An “incarceration gap” of 87 percent.

Now obviously, these discrepancies are brought about by the fact that men have the more dangerous jobs and men commit the most crime. It would be silly to suggest that there’s a war on men, which is at the heart of these data. And it would be equally silly to suggest that the rates for males and females should be the same - as the war-on-women enthusiasts claim with respect to the pay gap.

A cynic might think that the income inequality issue, and perhaps the entire war on women, is a contrivance to ensure that women continue to vote disproportionately for Democrat candidates.

John Littig can be emailed at jslittig@aol.com.