

When Will We Know?

By Heidi Hartmann, president, Institute for Women's Policy Research

We will have a woman's nation when women and men have equal opportunity to develop and use their skills and talents and equal responsibility to rear the next generation and sustain all generations. In such a nation, a newborn girl would have the same chances in life as a newborn boy—the same opportunity to strive to leave their mark on our collective human society and identity—by discovering a star, building a bridge, writing a play.

Too many women today still do not have these opportunities. Women still do the lion's share of the care for children and for adults. Women have subsidized the economy and subsidized the government for far too long. How? Well, for one, women's unpaid labor keeps families humming and keeps state budgets down. If women were not providing child care and long-term care to elderly family members at home then taxes and public spending would be much higher.

In the paid economy, women's lower wages keep profits high, too. Women earn less than men and women's jobs pay less than comparable men's jobs. If women were paid what they were worth, some of those profits would be redirected to women. Let's face it: Business owners and political leaders have been getting a free ride on the backs of women, taking advantage of their unpaid and underpaid labor.

In my view this is what the women's movement is all about—stopping the free ride and getting women their due by unleashing their talents, honing their skills, and enabling them to contribute to society far beyond their families.

Women have been voting with their feet, moving away from the family and into the marketplace. It is not that women do not want to raise children and nurture families. Of course they do. The human goal is about raising and providing for future generations and building a better place for all of us. But the reality is women today spend less time married, less time rearing children, and more time getting educations and job skills—more time working than earlier generations of women did.

They do so because women want more opportunities to contribute to the human endeavor in their wider communities and because, like men, many need to support themselves and their families. Women also want men to take more responsibility in the family arena, to share in the responsibility and joy of, for example, raising the next Einstein or Curie. So we will have a woman's nation when:

- Women have an equal share of the leadership positions in society: in business, in government, in religion, in the military, in the non-profit sector
- Men take an equal amount of time away from paid work to participate in hands-on care of family members
- Our laws, public policies, and social institutions make it possible for women and men to move readily between these two realms

Only then we will have a nation built on the principle that the work women have done for millennia is every bit as important to the survival and advancement of the human race as the work men have done.

This is the path our nation is on. This is the path that will provide more joy, more health, and more accomplishment to girls and boys, women and men, mothers and fathers, and their mothers and fathers.

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