



AN AGENDA FOR AMERICAN WOMEN

"Building One America means ensuring that women can make choices in their lives with dignity and can participate in our society fully, as equals. The reality of women's lives today is still something far less. They are expected to do more, and they receive less. That's not right."-- John Edwards

American women still face greater challenges in the workplace and greater responsibilities at home. They make only 77 cents for every dollar earned by men, and mothers -- particularly single mothers -- do even worse. Women are 48 percent more likely to live in poverty. More than 17 million adult women lack health insurance. Millions of working women struggle to balance their jobs with the needs of their families. John Edwards believes that -- to build a larger, more secure middle class -- we must do more to strengthen families, help women succeed at work and protect women's rights. [Census Bureau, 2007]

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Helping Women Balance Work and Family: Two-thirds of mothers are working, most of them full time. More and more families are caring for their aging parents. But our workplace and public policies have not kept up with this new reality. Edwards will:

- Give women time off when they need it by requiring businesses to offer seven paid sick days a year. Edwards will expand the Family and Medical Leave Act to cover more workers and help states offer paid leave so parents will not have to choose between their families and their paychecks.
- Create a Great Promise early childhood education program for every four-year-old. For younger children, he will expand the child care tax credit and create a Smart Start initiative to improve child care quality and affordability.
- Help families caring for their parents by expanding access to home health care, creating more choices for long-term care and offering respite care to provide caregivers a break. [Gerson and Jacobs, 2004; New America Foundation, 2005; KFF, 2006]

Securing Women's Retirement: Women are more likely to depend on Social Security for most of their retirement income, even though their annual benefits average only 70 percent of men's. Edwards will help women and other Americans increase their retirement savings by offering a new Get Ahead credit that will match families' retirement savings up to dollar for dollar. He will also examine ways to modernize Social Security to compensate women who pay less into Social Security because they are caring for children or other family members instead of working. [IWPR, 2003]

Ending Poverty within a Generation: Fifty-six percent of the nearly 37 million Americans living in poverty are female. John Edwards has called for an end to poverty within 30 years, through policies rooted in the core American values of work, opportunity and responsibility. He has proposed an ambitious set of goals, including lower taxes for low-income working families, 1 million stepping stone jobs, new housing policies to promote economic integration and other initiatives to promote education, savings and strong families. To help the 100 million out-of-school children -- the majority of whom are girls -- around the world, he will lead a worldwide effort to educate every child. [Census Bureau, 2007; UNESCO, 2005]

Raising the Minimum Wage: Women are nearly two-thirds of all minimum-wage workers. A woman with two children working full-time at the \$5.85 federal minimum-wage lives nearly 30 percent below the poverty line. Because the recent increase to \$7.25 by 2009 is too little, too late, Edwards will give 8 million women a raise by increasing the minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour by 2012 and indexing it to increase automatically. [BLS 2007, Lovell 2007]

WOMEN'S EQUALITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Protecting Women's Right to Choose: The decision about whether to become a parent is one of the most important decisions that a woman can face. Edwards believes that she should make it with her family, her doctor and in the context of her religious and ethical values. He will protect and defend the right to choose and reverse the damage that has been done by President Bush's anti-choice agenda.

Fighting Workplace Discrimination: Edwards supports the Paycheck Fairness Act to strengthen the remedies for sex discrimination and deter wrongdoing. He will expand resources for female entrepreneurs through his new REACH Fund and by prioritizing the needs of women-owned businesses in existing programs. Edwards will also strengthen enforcement at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and will restore and expand women's right to fight workplace discrimination by overturning the *Ledbetter* decision that limited women's ability to challenge unfair pay

Ending Violence Against Women: Achieving full equal rights for women includes the right to be free of violence everywhere. Edwards supports efforts to fully fund the Violence Against Women Act, which provides resources for crisis centers, domestic violence shelters and continuing education to law enforcement and the courts. Edwards will also aggressively support political and economic rights for women where they do not exist and supports efforts to reduce violence against women and children around the world.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Guaranteeing Health Care for Every Woman in America: Two-thirds of uninsured women fail to get the care they need because of its cost. For example, while more than 40,000 women die from breast cancer every year, more than half of uninsured women have not had a mammogram for two years. Edwards will take on the big insurance and drug companies and guarantee true universal health care for every man, woman and child in America. His plan requires employers to cover their workers or help pay the cost; makes insurance affordable for middle-class families through new subsidies and purchasing pools; creates a choice of competing plans, including a public plan and -- once insurance is affordable -- requires individuals to get insurance. [Census Bureau, 2007; KFF, 2005; ACS, 2007]

Strengthening America's Research Agenda: More research is needed into the diseases that affect women disproportionately, such as breast cancer, other types of cancer and HIV/AIDS. Edwards supports doubling funding for key priorities at the National Institutes of Health and supports the innovative Department of Defense breast cancer research initiative. Edwards will lift also restrictions and increase funding for embryonic stem cell research, while maintaining strict ethical guidelines to prevent human cloning.