



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

## **From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins**

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### **Let's Level the Playing Field**

The darn thing wouldn't work. "Can you believe it?" I asked. "A brand new television and I have to return it," I declared in frustration. I had spent the better part of Saturday morning wiring up various electronic doodads to a new TV and although I had been promised television nirvana by the salesman, there I was staring at a blank screen. My daughter watched my clumsy two-step with the knot of wires and maintained that I had somehow mismatched two components. Of course, I vigorously denied it so she quietly walked over, confidently reversed a few wires (as if she had done this a thousand times), grunted something about "stubborn" and voila! On came the TV. She smiled at me with what was clearly a mixture of pity and love for her dear old dad and then unassumingly went on her way.

I tell you this story because it makes me happy. Later I reflected on just how clever my daughter is sometimes. I know that probably just sounds like the musings of a proud papa, and I wholeheartedly admit that I am, but she really is smart. And she's really hard-working, and confident, and persistent, and I might add, kind. And I

can't help but think that she's going to do well when she sets sail into the great wide world. My wife and I like to believe that all four of our daughters will succeed and I might add that we've worked mightily to prepare them for it. Any parent reading this knows that you don't win any popularity contests with your kids when you're doing the right things but that the pay-off is down the line in their having happy and satisfying lives. Success at work is a part of that, at least that's what we hope and pray.

But now let me share a sad reality. Here in New York, in 2014, my daughter can expect to go into the commercial hub of the world that is New York City, interview with some of the most prestigious companies in the country, wow them, land a great job – and then expect a paycheck that's a whole 15 to 25 percent less than the guys working alongside her. The sad truth is that no matter how hard my wife and I work, no matter how many opportunities we afford her, no matter how hard she studies or diligently she works, my daughter will be at a disadvantage because she's a woman.

Lest you think those numbers are somehow skewed by part-time or low-paying jobs, allow me to share some disturbing facts. Every study conducted, including the 2012 census, tells us that the wage gap is actually much wider between educated women and men working full time in professional sectors. In fact, the more education a woman obtains and the higher level a professional she becomes, the greater the pay gap is between her and her male counterparts. In New York State that pay gap is currently at an incredible average \$8,590. Number crunchers estimate that it translates into 64 weeks of food shopping, 9 months of rent, or about 2,000 gallons of gas. We actually penalize women and their families for being successful.

Why does this happen? There's a combination of cultural and workplace reasons, too many to list here, but discriminatory stereotypes are a major factor. There are bosses, both male and female, who assume it's okay to pay a woman less, so men typically start out at a higher wage. Women are still predominantly seen as keepers of the household, so they are often passed over for promotions and raises. And let's face it: if a woman negotiates her salary as hard as a man, she's often labeled as "too assertive." Many men and women expect female employees to simply be more submissive. To make matters worse, in many private offices, employees are actually forbidden from discussing or disclosing their salaries to co-workers. This shroud of secrecy keeps women in the dark so they're never fully aware of how great a pay disparity exists.

So here I am, a New York State senator who has to look at my industrious daughter and all her friends in the eye and tell them that New York, the place whose opportunity attracts people from all over the world, isn't going to give them a fair shake. I won't accept that. That's why this past legislative session I fought for legislation that guarantees equal pay for equal work in New York. It would close a loophole that allows employers to justify paying female employees less, outlaw workplace wage secrecy, and increase damages to litigants to 300% of unpaid wages. It's the first step in change that's long overdue.

While the proposed legislation passed in our Senate, we're still waiting on the Assembly to take action. I invite you to please [CLICK HERE](#) where you can sign a petition and help me right what's wrong. Admittedly, this effort is personal to me but if you are a woman, or if you love a woman, or if you're friends with a woman, or you just plain care about doing what's right, we need your voice.