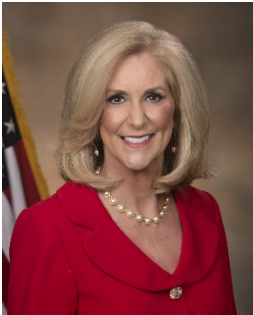


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## Following Clinton's example to close the pay gap between men, women

Lynn Fitch and Phil Fisher, Guest columnists

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According to an analysis done earlier this year by The Clarion-Ledger, in the Jackson-metro area, only the city of Clinton has leveled the playing field and eliminated pay disparities for its women employees.

The American workplace has made great strides over the decades and the overt sexism that *Mad Men* and other historical fiction depict is not really the way of today's world. That is not to say there are not cases where pay disparities are due to blatant sex-based discrimination. There are still far too many of those instances today. Overall, however, many gender pay inequities come from cultural norms that are not malicious but are just as harmful to women and their families.

For example, studies show that when men have children, their earnings tend to increase. These studies indicate that the so-called "daddy bonus" stems from the subconscious view that many employers have about fatherhood. It is seen as a sign of stability, responsibility and commitment, all qualities that employers value and reward.

According to these same studies, however, the opposite is often true of many employers' subconscious views of motherhood, which suggests an employee having divided attention and loyalty and requiring greater flexibility for family commitments. This leads to the so-called "mommy penalty." One study by the University of Massachusetts found that women suffer a 4-percent penalty per child. Another study by Cornell University researchers found that otherwise equivalent resumes earned \$11,000 less for mothers.

Again, we want to stress that this does not mean those employers are sexists or bad people. Most likely, they are not even aware of the disparities they are reinforcing amongst their employees.

That is why efforts like Clinton's are so important. City leaders made a conscious effort to review employee salaries to address any pay inequities. Their comprehensive two-and-a-half year study looked at every angle to ensure that women and men are paid fairly and equally for comparable work.

Legislation the Treasurer's office brought to the Legislature earlier this year would have promoted a similar concept for businesses. Modeled on a Massachusetts law, this legislation would have encouraged businesses to voluntarily conduct studies like Clinton's. Employers who took this step would have an affirmative defense in court should they ever find themselves defendants in a gender pay dispute.

The idea is to make employers more mindful of how they pay their employees and to give them the opportunities to address inadvertent pay disparities on their own, without the courts or government getting involved in their workplace. As Republicans, this approach appeals to us.

More importantly, as public servants, it appeals to us. There is more than ample research to show that when employers close the pay gap, they increase their skills diversity, collective intelligence and even their bottom line. And polls show that millennials of both sexes are flat-out disinterested in working for an employer that has failed to address pay-equity issues. Our constituents deserve the highest quality public workforce possible today and moving forward. Pay equity helps achieve that goal.

We recognize that an appeal to the better angels of our nature will not work in every instance, and there may very well be times when court is the only option to address workplace pay discrimination. Mississippi is one of only two states in the nation that does not protect equal pay for equal work in that circumstance.

It is time for us to join the rest of the country and pass a state pay equity law. Until then, we can all learn a lesson from and follow the leadership of the city of Clinton and do our part to put an end to the pay gap.

*Lynn Fitch is treasurer of Mississippi. Phil Fisher is mayor of Clinton.*