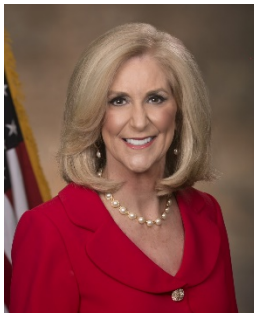


Daily Journal

Attorney General Fitch: Time to join every other state and pass equal pay



Lynn Fitch, Guest columnist

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Last spring, Alabama became the 49th state in the nation to pass a state equal pay law. It did so without a single dissenting vote at any stage in the legislative process, which was controlled by Republican supermajorities in both chambers. And, it became law under the signature of a Republican governor.

This leaves Mississippi the lone state in the country without a law protecting equal pay for equal work on the books.

Earlier this year, the Mississippi Senate passed an equal pay bill – authored by Sen. Sally Doty – by a vote of 38–11. But it is currently double referred to two House Committees. Two years ago, when the Mississippi House had the opportunity to consider equal pay language as a floor amendment, they passed it overwhelmingly, by a vote of 108 to 8. We need the House to demonstrate that kind of courage again now and bring Sen. Doty’s bill to the floor. Mississippi deserves a chance for it to be considered, voted on, and signed into law this year.

President Trump has consistently led on this issue. In fact, during the 2016 campaign, in a television interview, he said without hesitation or equivocation: “If they do the same job, they should get the same pay.” His daughter, Ivanka, reminded us of his record of action for equal pay at the Republican National Convention that year, too: “At my father’s company, there are more female than male executives, women are paid equally for the work that we do, and when a woman becomes a mother she is supported, not shut out.”

Mississippi should follow the president’s lead now. There are some who say that a Mississippi equal pay law isn’t necessary because there is already a federal Equal Pay Act. But, that argument rings hollow. First, access to state courts is less expensive and easier to attain as there are more attorneys who regularly practice there.

But, also, it misses one of the primary points of the Legislature’s power – the tremendous bully pulpit from which it speaks. There were those who said a Mississippi religious liberty law would be similarly redundant because the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act offered the very same protections. But, our Legislature and our governor rightly believed not only that the State should offer its own protections for this fundamental First Amendment right, but also that we needed to make the statement that the free expression of our religious beliefs is important to Mississippi.

Our Legislature needs to make a similar statement of support now to demonstrate that Mississippians do not believe that a woman's work is worth 27 cents less than that of her male counterparts for every dollar earned. It is time to make a crystal clear statement that the \$6 billion in combined lost wages of full-time working Mississippians are contributions to our economy that we will no longer ignore.

Abigail Adams reminded our Founding Fathers to "remember the ladies" as they drafted the Constitution. On behalf of Mississippi women, I ask all our legislators to do the same and use the 2020 legislative session to ensure this great state joins every other state in the country in supporting equal pay with a state law.