FEMINIST ECONOMIC AGENDAS AND THE CLINTON PLAN

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During the long decade of the 1980s (from the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 to the defeat of George Bush in 1992), a period openly hostile to feminist public policy claims, an active network of national women's policy organizations continued to make these claims and to raise feminist issues inside the Beltway. This network of organizations grew more sophisticated in its use of insider tactics such as lobbying, testifying, writing legislation, providing public education, mobilizing constituencies, and supporting women candidates. In contrast to the heyday of feminist activism in Washington in the 1970's, however, policy successes were limited in the 1980s. Despite the constraints placed on their language, style, and activities by their need to legitimate themselves to policy makers, funders, the public, and their own members during a politically conservative era, these organizations continued to represent feminist issues and maintained an institutionalized network for the staging of future feminist claims and activities.

With the election of Bill Clinton, feminist organizations in Washington, D.C. celebrated the end of the long decade of the 1980s. After some initial skirmishes in which they were labelled "bean-counters" by the President-elect for their persistence in demanding that more women be appointed to the Cabinet, Mr. Clinton, as the new president, did immediately implement some of the women's communities long-standing goals. He overturned the "gag rule" in Title X-funded abortion clinics, reversed the Mexico City policy, and signed the Family and Medical Leave Act into law. Even though women's groups do appear to have more access to the new Administration, the extent to which a feminist agenda will benefit from this contact and how much of a role these organizations will play are still unclear.
Although Clinton won the election on the issue of "it's just the economy stupid," women's economic issues such as pay equity, job discrimination, an increase in the minimum wage, and training for non-traditional jobs do not appear to be emphasized in the President's recently presented economic plan.

With the election of Clinton, numbers of women's groups who had been working on economic issues (rather than abortion rights, for example) began to develop economic agendas. Despite endless faxes, briefing papers, coalition reports, and legislative proposals, an "economics as if women mattered," which usually links economic and family issues, does not appear to have materialized as yet in the President's plan. However, it is difficult to be certain from initial deconstructive readings of the Administration's Economic Plan.

What I want to do today is talk about some of these women's economic agendas, the likelihood that they will be enacted into legislation or Executive Orders (based on a reading of the Plan and gossip from coalitional meetings around town), and the tactics used by women's groups to get them on the agenda.

First, I'll report on the family/economy policy agenda that resulted from a recent poll of 1200 women that was commissioned by the Center for Policy Alternatives and the Ms. Foundation. Second, I'll look at three agendas that were created by groups of women leaders who are more or less representative of constituencies of women. I will also take this opportunity to report on IWPR's suggestions for the Clinton Administration which are based on our research findings. Third, I'll comment on the Clinton Administration Economic Plan, currently being debated by Congress, for its congruence (or lack of it) with these women's agendas. Fourth, I'll give some wisdom from hanging out at coalition meetings around town
about feminist issues and feminist stances vis a vis this agenda.

(1) Polling Results

In 1992, the Ms. Foundation commissioned a study on the issues of family and economy which consisted of a telephone survey of a sample of 1200 conducted by Greenberg-Lake/Duvall and a series of focus groups organized by the Center for Policy Alternatives. The results of this polling effort reflect women’s roles (especially those of working mothers) as mediators between family and economy. These polls show that economic issues are central to women’s family concerns rather than being separable issues, and that gender justice issues are at the center of these concerns.

Time and money are the two central family and economic issues for women. These concerns translate into concerns with unequal pay at work and overwork (or unequal work) at home. For example, unequal pay and discrimination are seen as issues both of fairness in the workplace and of making ends meet at home. As a result, 78 percent of the women interviewed want to pass additional equal pay and pay equity laws and 74 percent want to pass additional laws to end discrimination in employment and promotion. Low pay is slightly more likely to be reported as a major problem than are work/family issues such as flex-time, family leave or child care, with a few exceptions. For women with young children, affordable child care is a top priority, while for women of color, family leave is considered an especially important issue. (IWPR research shows that women of color suffer the greatest consequences in terms of pay losses and unemployment when they do not have the right to return to a job after child birth or the illness of a family member.) It is interesting to note that the inequality in the work done at home is still seen as a private issue,
that needs to be fought household by household, garbage can by garbage can, rather than as a subject of public policy making.

This emphasis on low pay is likely due to the fact that women have been affected by the deterioration of working conditions during the 1980s more than have men. Women are two-thirds of all part-time workers, the majority of involuntary part-time workers, two-thirds of temporary workers, and the majority of low-wage workers. Thirty-eight percent of women earn low-wages as compared to 19 percent of men. In fact, women make up about two-thirds of all minimum wage workers. Furthermore, moonlighting among women increased five times between 1970 and 1991, while moonlighting among men increased less than 20 percent. When they leave or lose low-wage jobs, women are less likely than men to move on to a higher-wage job (21 percent as compared to 47 percent) and are more likely to experience unemployment, continued low-wage work, or to rely on means-tested welfare benefits.

The second major issue raised by the women in the Women's Voices study was health care. This is seen by women as both a family and an economic issue in that it combines worries about affordability and access. Women are more likely to be employed in low-wage, non-unionized service sector jobs, and as a result of these conditions, are less likely to have employer-provided health insurance. According to IWPR research, only 55 percent of women, as compared to 70 percent of men, have this benefit. Health care is also perceived as a family issue in that it concerns the life and death of family members.

A third major issue that intertwines economy and family, from these women's perspective, is the issue of flexible schedules. The majority of women interviewed prefer
full-time to part-time jobs (or to no jobs) but require flex-time as a necessary work condition. This is both a time and money solution to family and economic concerns. Women probably prefer this solution because they are aware that full-time work is better paid per hour, and, of course, it brings in more money on an annual basis as well. IWPR research indicates that working mothers gain an average of $1.17 per hour if they are white, $1.26 per hour if they are black, and 99 cents per hour if Latina, when other factors are held constant, if they are employed in full-time rather than part-time jobs.

Women do have special gender concerns, but these issues are also seen in economic terms. Among these issues are sexual harassment at the workplace (which eighty-one percent of women see as a problem) and safety on the streets. Among Latina women, getting to work safely is one of the most important issues they mention.

How is this "ordinary women's" agenda reflected in the agendas being put forth by "women leaders"?

(2) Women Leaders' Agendas

Arlington Hill. Following the elections, Betty Friedan and Linda Tarr-Whelan of the Center for Policy Alternatives organized a retreat of fifty women leaders, referred to in the N.Y. Times as "A" list women. These women met in Arlington Hill, Vermont, at the estate of Diane Meehan and Gary David Goldberg, from December 4-6, 1992. There they crafted an economic agenda that specified initiatives for women compatible with the Administration's economic priorities for the "first 100 days." The following "pro-active" agenda resulted:

* Flexible work structures, including flextime, part-time, compressed workweeks, flexplace, and job sharing to make the dual responsibilities of working and parenting manageable.
• Equal pay for work of equal value for all employees to reward productivity and skill, raise the standard of living of the families women support, and make progress towards economic justice.

• Expansion of women’s entrepreneurship to promote economic vitality, create more good jobs, and improve the economic security of families.

• A broader definition of infrastructure which includes investing in people and communities in addition to bridges, highways and communication systems to ensure that women and families benefit from these government investments.

• A re-structuring of our nation’s income support system, including welfare, to provide real economic security, ensure that all families can participate in the economic life of their communities, and prevent poverty.

The authors of this document suggest that many of the agenda planks are “low-ticket items” that could be accomplished cheaply and quickly through Executive Orders.

**Economists’ Policy Group on Women’s Issues.** The Economists’ Policy Group is a coalition of women economists headed by two Washington scholar/activists, Heidi Hartmann and Barbara Bergmann. In contrast to the Arlington Hill Working Group’s recommendations of low-budget items, the Economists’ Policy Group agenda (which was signed by over 80 economists including three Nobel Prize winners) proposed a six-point, $100 billion-a-year national women’s policy agenda calling for guaranteed health care, anti-discrimination measures, abortion rights, improved child care, welfare reform and new taxes to pay for it. Specifically, they suggest:

• Single mothers will not be able to escape poverty unless they earn higher wages, obtain government help with child care expenses and health insurance, and receive tax-supported cash supplements such as the Earned Income Tax Credit. Therefore, the Group proposed higher government wage supplements, education and job training for low-income working parents, public service employment, government-provided child care, guaranteed health insurance with a government guaranteed minimum benefits package, and stronger child support enforcement against absent parents.
• Stronger enforcement of class-action lawsuits by the EEOC. Stronger enforcement of the Federal Contract Compliance program barring discrimination by firms doing business with the government, and stricter government guidelines using skill-evaluation criteria to boost pay in traditionally low-paid jobs held by women.

• Affordable child care via government subsidies and guaranteed family-care leaves for working parents and others.

• The right to birth control and to terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

• Guaranteed health care to everybody in the country.

• Increased taxes to pay for all this.

Women’s Job Training Agenda. This agenda was spearheaded by the Displaced Homemaker’s Network and signed by a broad range of "inside the beltway" women’s groups, including the Center for Women Policy Studies, Black Women’s Agenda, National Council of Negro Women, Older Women’s League, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, Women’s Legal Defense Fund, Wider Opportunities for Women, and YWCA.

The propose a seven point agenda including:

• Proposals for Program Content of Job Training. Women need to be provided with basic and advanced academic skills, and competencies in all aspects of the industry they are preparing to enter, along with access to specialized services that address their unique barriers. Women in job training programs should receive exposure to non-traditional occupations.

• Support Services. Dependent care and transportation are vital for women to succeed in job training. They must be fully subsidized.

• Performance and Evaluation. Job training programs should be evaluated on the quality of job placement and on long-term economic self-sufficiency as a program goal for every participant.

• Job Creation. There is a need to create high-wage jobs for U.S. workers, but clear and specific policies must be put in place that will ensure that women and other disadvantaged groups receive their share.
• Equity. Ensure gender and race equity in any mandated employer contributions for worker training.

• Increased Participation for Women. There is a need for strategies to increase women's participation in apprenticeable trades, which should be institutionalized by the Department of Labor in the form of yearly goals, monitoring, and if necessary, de-certification. There should also be systematic policies to address sexual harassment.

• Welfare to Work. The primary goal should be assisting recipients to achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency rather than removal from AFDC. In addition, there should not be further cuts in AFDC benefits, arbitrary time limitations, or laboratory treatment of recipients.

• Equal Employment Opportunity. Enforce legal requirements prohibiting discrimination and promoting affirmative action.

Institute for Women's Policy Research. As a think tank on women's policy issues, we have been involved in the coalition meetings and the faxing of documents as women's groups attempt to influence the economic policy agenda. We too have put out policy suggestions for the Clinton Administration. They include:

1. Reforming the Low-wage Labor Market. IWPR's research shows that almost half of women workers earn less than a minimum sufficiency wage of $6.67 per hour, the poverty threshold for a family of three. Of these women, one-fourth are responsible for their families' economic well-being. Given this economic reality, IWPR suggests raising the minimum wage, regulating temporary and part-time work by requiring wage and fringe benefit parity with full-time work, and improving the ability of women to organize and bargain collectively. In regards to this last point, IWPR research shows that union membership more than doubled women's odds of earning above a sufficiency wage.

2. Remedying Discrimination against Women and Minority Men. IWPR research documents the pervasiveness of race and sex discrimination in the labor market. When comparisons that hold education, work experience, occupation, and industry constant are made, women of color are four times more likely than white males to work in low-wage jobs, white women are three times more likely, and men of color are 1.5 times more likely. Available studies show that stronger enforcement of equal employment opportunity brings greater gains. Government policy should increase the costs of discriminating to employers; the use of enforcement strategies such as class
action lawsuits and disbarment from future government contracts should be increased.

3. **Transforming Welfare; Bringing Families out of Poverty.** In the face of enthusiasm to get single mothers "off the welfare rolls" and "into the workplace," IWPR research shows that a substantial portion (40 percent) of single mothers who receive AFDC are working about half-time. Their average earnings are less than $5.00 per hour. Although the low-wage work that these mothers do increases their family income and reduces their burden on the taxpayer, most changes in welfare regulations since 1981 have the effect of discouraging women from combining work and welfare. Rather than assuming that these women can become fully dependent on the job market for their livelihoods, policies should encourage the packaging of income from paid employment with welfare receipt and other income assistance. As an alternative to expanding AFDC's role as a cash supplement to low earners, the Earned Income Tax Credit could be expanded and paid out monthly. Child support assurance, a government guaranteed child support payment from the absent parent to the custodial parent, is a new policy proposal that has merit. In addition, heavily subsidized child care and national health care are necessary for low-earning women to survive in decency.

4. **Creating good jobs for women.** A recent IWPR study shows that the best jobs for women in terms of earnings and benefits are full-time, year-round jobs with a single employer in high wage industries and in male dominated occupations. Only 4 in 10 women have jobs that are full-time, year-round for one employer. The solution is to stop thinking of women as marginal workers and to create full-time, high productivity jobs in the private service sector (the growing sector of the economy) by increasing capital investment and training as well as unionization. Public sector job creation is an additional alternative, especially where private development is insufficient. These public sector jobs should include building and maintaining an infrastructure of child care, after school care, eldercare, and health care in community-based centers.

5. **Improving the Income Security of Workers.** IWPR research demonstrates that American workers (especially women) lose 100 billion dollars in earnings annually as a result of childbirth, illness, or illness of a family member. A beginning solution is the Family and Medical Leave Act signed in February. But in addition to unpaid leave, states should be encouraged to set up state Temporary Disability Insurance systems that provide paid leave for non-work-related illnesses. Furthermore, these systems should be expanded to provide income replacement for family care needs as well as for disability and illness. In addition, a complete reform of the unemployment insurance system is needed to extend eligibility to part-time and low-wage workers who, as marginal workers, are generally not eligible to receive unemployment benefits because of low earnings (e.g. a mother working half time at a minimum-wage job).
Clearly there is considerable overlap among all these family/economy agendas. All focus on raising women’s income, decreasing discrimination (including pay discrimination), providing universal health benefits, and improving the quality and flexibility of jobs. All of these are the issues raised by the 1200 women polled by Greenberg-Lake/Duvall. These "wonk-like" groups of women leaders talk more about social infrastructure, child care, and job creation. The Economists’ Policy Group suggests more taxes to bring this about. These agendas have been carried to the Little Rock Economic Summit, presented on op-ed pages of newspapers, faxed to Donna Shalala, discussed with Bob Reich and with any transition or Administration team members whose sleeve could be grabbed, and are being turned into legislative language for enactment by Congress. Despite all this activity, the gender justice-oriented agendas of the women’s policy groups appears largely absent from the proposed Clinton-administration Economic Plan.

(3) A look at Clinton’s Economic Plan.

The plan has three components. A stimulus package, an investment package, and a deficit reduction package. I’m going to focus on the first two, although Congress has focused on the third.

The stimulus package. Much of the proposal focuses on traditional sources of investment such as construction and modernization of highways, mass transit, and airports—in other words, male job programs. There is also a focus on investment in people, especially children, through such programs as Head Start (the big winner), Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and immunizations. Additionally, the package contains a billion dollar summer youth job and training program, the extension of unemployment compensation
(which goes largely to men who previously held full-time, higher paying jobs) and community service for older Americans (which might affect more women than men). The program that best meets the demands of the women’s economic agendas is the additional $9 million dollars annually for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to hire staff to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and the Americans with Disabilities Acts.

**Investment Package.** These are longer-term programs. In general, those programs that fare well under the stimulus package also fare well under the investment package: smart cars and smart highways; airport improvement; networking and computer applications; alternative fuel vehicles; energy efficiency in federal buildings; Community Development Block Grants for street and bridge repairs; summer youth programs; community service for older Americans; and extending unemployment compensation. In addition, more money is allocated for Head Start, WIC, Foodstamps, and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), but significantly, no additional funds are budgeted for AFDC. Another major part of the budget is targeted at Dislocated Worker Assistance to aid workers affected by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), defense reinvestment, or energy conversion. Further research is needed in order to determine the extent to which women and minority men will benefit from this assistance. Youth Apprenticeships are also slated to receive greater financial support, but nothing has been said about increasing the proportion of women in these programs--currently at about 7 percent).

**Deficit Reduction.** Clinton proposes to accomplish this primarily though raising taxes and imposing a national energy tax. Among the savings assumed by the Clinton Administration are those from increased child support enforcement. The plan estimates
saving of $328 million in 4 years by streamlining paternity establishment, using the IRS to collect seriously delinquent child support, and establishing a national registry to track "deadbeat dads." Interestingly, although child support is often labelled as a feminist or a women’s issues, it did not appear on any of the group’s agendas.

(4) Reflections on Feminist Issues and Feminist Stances.

Despite the fact that women’s organizations framed many of the gender justice components of their agendas in gender neutral language, few of their policy suggestions (including raising women’s income through increasing the minimum wage and pay equity, improving the quality and flexibility of jobs, increasing social infrastructure such as child care, and job creation in non-traditional jobs for women) appear to be directly addressed by the Clinton proposal. Exceptions to this are increased funding for Head Start and the EEOC (so it can respond to the backlog in discrimination cases). The proposed Clinton Administration economic stimulus and investment package is directed at building and repairing the infrastructure of bridges and roads (which creates male-dominated jobs) rather than at building child care centers or home-health care (which creates female-dominated jobs). And while there will probably be an increase in federal support for job training, it is unclear what will be done to improve low-wage jobs (the jobs for which most women are trained). No one seems to be discussing such issues as reforming Unemployment Insurance or expanding Temporary Disability Insurance.

Similarly, while Clinton seems intent to reform the welfare system, he does not seem to be listening to the proposals set forth by women’s organizations. The NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund organized a diverse coalition of women’s groups, including the
National Welfare Rights Organization, to develop a women’s economic survival agenda which is supportive of welfare recipients. This agenda has not gotten much of a hearing from an Administration that, on paper at least, is still talking about time-limited welfare benefits. It is possible that Clinton will support welfare reform that encourages and legitimates women’s ability to package income from paid work with government-provided benefits, rather than forcing dependency on the low-wage labor market and on deadbeat dads. However, the ideology of getting women off the welfare rolls is heavy.

Finally, there is concern on the part of women’s groups that women’s economic survival issues are now being subsumed under children’s issues, a new language of legitimacy to which feminist organizations must adapt.

In sum, although the Clinton plan is in its early days (and at this point he will clearly need to compromise on many of the proposed job creation and training components) a women’s economic agenda, even one wrapped in family language, that would result in increasing women’s economic autonomy as workers, as citizens, and as family members does not appear to be a primary component. To the extent that the suggestions of women’s organizations have been accommodated, it seems unintentional.

Interestingly, as women’s organizations struggle to get their issues onto the Clinton Administration agenda, many of the leaders of these feminist organizations are in contention for appointments in Executive-branch agencies. Again, the implications for a feminist agenda are not clear. In recent coalition meetings, some women spoke in the voice of the Administration, drumming up support for the Clinton economic agenda. The co-optation of these women into the Administration (getting a "seat at the table") may decrease the
marginalization of women’s organizations and issues, but such co-optation may also result in their decreased ability to raise outsider issues. If groups with ties to the administration lose their ability to raise outsider issues such as women’s economic autonomy, it may result in the growth of more confrontational tactics by those groups not inside. The result may be that a feminist agenda can be pursued through both insider and outsider tactics. As Pat Reuss, currently with NOW-LDEF and a long-time women’s organization lobbyist, suggested to much applause at a recent welfare coalition meeting:

Let’s go back to the wild and crazy things we did before the guys (in Congress and the Administration) told us we had to make sense.

In their fight for gender justice, women’s policy organizations will continue to make tactical choices, as insiders and as outsiders, concerning the economic issues they will fight for, and how they will construct and solidify their claims vis a vis the new Administration. Standing over the fax machine, with the latest agenda in hand, we eagerly anticipate greater recognition by the Administration and Congress that issues of family, economy, and gender justice are intertwined.