

Remarks for 2009 Report Card Release
April 26, 2010

Good morning and welcome to North Carolina Women United's Legislative Report Card Release. My name is Alison Kiser and I am the President of NC Women United.

Women United is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to advancing public policies that support the full economic, legal and social equality of women.

Following each legislative long session, NC Women United releases a Report Card on the status of our priority issues that are key to promoting women's equality. These priorities are set by our Women's Legislative Agenda and NC Women United's 30 member organizations.

This morning we mark the official release of our 2009 Report Card that tracks the progress and set-backs from the 2009 session and also looks ahead to the work to be done in the upcoming 2010 short session.

We are very honored to have with us today the legislators who have championed Women United's key issue areas.

As we look over this Report Card, there can be no mistake that women have come a long way in the past 40 years. We have broken through numerous glass ceilings and put substantial cracks in others.

As a country, we have seen a huge demographic shift in our workforce over the past several decades. Today, for the first time in history, women are participating in the workforce in equal numbers to men and 4 out of 10 women are either the sole breadwinner or bringing home income equal to or greater than that of their spouse.

This demographic shift has implications in today's economy

It has been said by some that the recent recession is a "mancession" because the tough economy has resulted in large-scale lay offs in the male-dominated industries of construction and manufacturing.

But this idea of a "mancession" overlooks and over-simplifies the range of challenges that North Carolina's women are facing. Women, just like men, have experienced layoffs and pay cuts but many others are also dealing with difficulties associated with being the sole breadwinner in their households after a husband or partner loses their job.

We also know that the stress of an economic downturn is associated with increase in the number of women who experience domestic violence and sexual assault. In spite of an incredibly tough budget year, this spike in violence means that it is more important than ever that we protect the investments made in programs that help women in these terrible situations.

NC Women United urges policy makers not to buy into the idea that this recession has impacted only men by making the 2010 legislative session a man's session. Instead action must also be taken that addresses the needs of women who face a unique set of challenges in the current economy.

Addressing the challenges of women in North Carolina's ever changing workforce is an ideal place to start because the economic downturn has meant that now more than ever, anyone who has a job can certainly not afford to lose it.

The problem of balancing work and family is certainly not one that is new but *is* one that has gone far too long without being addressed.

The Healthy Families and Healthy Workplaces Act would finally address the fact that few things are more critical to securing the economic self-sufficiency of women than ensuring that we have the ability to care for ourselves or a sick family member without risking the loss of our jobs.

In the area of women's civic participation and equality, it is clear that women are making gains in beating down the barriers to political office with our state having recently elected our first female Governor. But it is equally apparent that we've got a long way to go.

For women, playing the money game of running for office is even harder. Studies have repeatedly shown that women don't have access to the same economic resources and networks as men do.

NC Women United has long-fought for policies that would ensure political participation for women. And we strongly believe that Voter-Owned elections is the most critical response to ending the money chase.

NC Women United calls on elected officials to make 2010 the year to acknowledge that, while Ethics Reform is a step in the right direction, the only way to truly stem the flow of money in politics is to take it out of the picture.

In spite of the challenges ahead that loom large for 2010, it is evident from this Report Card that there were some tremendous victories for women in 2009. Of the 16 items on the Report Card, legislative action on 8 bills received a positive score by passing the General Assembly and being signed into law.

Despite profound challenges in 2009 the NC Women United Legislative Report Card is proof that legislators like the ones before you now recognized that opportunities did exist to make progressive change.

On behalf of NC Women United, it is our goal that, at the conclusion of the 2010 short session, we will look back and say that 2010 was also a year of great challenges but one that ultimately advanced women's equality in North Carolina.

At this time I would like to turn the floor over to our legislators who will review the issues on the Legislative Report Card.

Agenda

We'll begin with the Access to Health Care portion of the Report Card.

Our speakers on Access to Health Care will be Representative Susan Fisher followed by Representative Farmer-Butterfield.

I would also like to introduce Rep. Verla Insko. She has been a champion on both of these bills as well as many others represented on this Report Card. She has been a tremendous leader in the area of access to health care in particular so I would like to welcome her to the podium for comments on the impact of Health Care Reform in North Carolina at this time.

The next issue area is Civic Participation and Equality.

We will hear from Representative Jennifer Weiss on Campaign Finance Reform followed by Representative Grier Martin on the School Violence Prevention Act.

The next issue area of concern on the Report Card is Economic Self-Sufficiency. Rep. Fisher is a member of the Joint Select Committee on Work and Family Balance so I'd like to welcome her to the podium again to speak on the Healthy Families and Healthy Workplaces Act.

Rep. Ross will be up immediately following to address the Housing Trust Fund.

Last but certainly not least, NC Women United prioritizes legislation to protect women and their families in the issue area of Violence Against Women.

Many of these legislators have been champions on multiple bills. So, once again, Rep. Ross to address domestic violence followed by one of our champions from the Senate, Ellie Kinnaird to speak on Human Trafficking.