



An Open Letter to John McCain from the Women of Steel

Sept. 3, 2008

Dear Senator McCain,

We write on behalf of the 1.2 million active and retired Steelworkers in our union and our extended families, at least half of whom are women. As activists and leaders in our union, we are looking in this election for leadership that champions women and working Americans. You chose a female as your running mate, and we applaud your contribution to the progress this represents.

Unfortunately, you chose the wrong woman for the wrong job. Governor Palin is a working mother whose achievements should be respected – but due respect for a budding political career doesn't mean she's ready to be vice president. Nor does it change the fact that Governor Palin isn't the best candidate to improve the lives of women and working families in this country.

You had an opportunity to add strength to your ticket by selecting from among many time-tested, respected and experienced women in our nation. Instead, you chose someone whose entire resume consists of a short stint as a village mayor and a controversy-clouded term as the governor of 18 months in a state with less than 800,000 people.

Apparently, you believe that women will vote for your ticket, simply because it now includes a woman. Nothing could be more insulting. Governor Palin has absolutely no business being vice president and she has no agenda that responds to the needs of women and working families – and frankly, Senator McCain, that is patronizing.

By proposing to place a woman of such obvious inexperience a mere heartbeat away from the most powerful job on our planet, you have shown shockingly poor judgment. Media reports accuse Palin of being a token, and sadly when reviewing her record, resume and observing how she handles herself in the public arena, the description seems appropriate..

We are Steelworker women and we will not be fooled. We see your appointment for what it is: a cynical and transparent ploy to try to lure independent women and Hillary Clinton supporters to your ticket. We agree with Sen. Barbara Boxer: the only thing

Sarah Palin has in common with Hilary Clinton is that they are both women. Mrs. Palin's references to the 18 million cracks in the glass ceiling that voted for Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primaries simply defines Palin's appointment for the pander that it is. It dismisses the aims and ideals of the 18 million voters who supported Hillary Clinton in her pursuit of our nation's highest office. You see, those women believed in Hillary not only because her leadership, experience and credentials proved her more than capable of being a presidential candidate, but because her success and her unwavering commitment to women, children and working families would improve our country for those citizens.

Despite claims that adding a female to the Republican ticket is a boon for women, a McCain-Palin ticket only continues your long history of an anti-woman, anti-working family agenda that:

- Opposes giving workers the right to join a union and bargain collectively – a right that could help raise millions of women out of poverty since Union women earn 30% more than unorganized women and have equal pay on the job because of a union contract.
- Erodes the ability of working families to secure quality health care by taxing their employer -provided coverage for both active and retired workers, a tax many women cannot afford and a move that will only increase the number of women who are uninsured (currently 1 in 4 of women between the ages of 19 and 24).
- Jeopardizes retirement by privatizing Social Security since more than 78% of women 65 years and older depend on Social Security as their only form of income; therefore it is critical for women that this benefit not be subject to the whims of the stock market.
- Threatens to cut Medicare and Medicaid benefits that most retired women and families with special-needs children rely upon.
- Further threatens job security by signing more job-stealing trade deals without the regard to human rights and environmental abuses and the potential job and earning loss. Women are often the first to be laid off when off-shoring occurs because they typically have less seniority and job security and once unemployed they are less likely to find reemployment; and, when they do it is predominately precarious work at much lower wages and benefits.
- Does nothing to protect or expand family leave or make it paid. Today millions of working mothers could actually be fired for taking maternity leave. Women shoulder care for elderly parents and often must choose between their job and honoring their parents and insuring they are a partner in their child's education and participate parent-teacher conferences and assemblies. Over 78 percent of women workers who qualify for current family leave can't afford to take it because it's not paid.
- Refuses paid sick leave while 22 million working women today don't have a single paid sick day, forcing them to choose between their jobs and their health.
- Fails our children by doing nothing to make child care more affordable for a working mother; provide more children to access quality, affordable early childhood education; and, fund additional afterschool programs so the children of

America are safe in the critical hours between the end of the school day and the end of longer and longer work days.

- Opposes increases to the minimum wage when women are the largest group of beneficiaries: 59% of workers who will benefit from an increase to \$7.25 by 2009 are women.

These positions are not just bad for women; they are also a blow for middle class working families. Women are not only the backbone of our families, but of the middle class. We won't truly have an economy that puts the needs of the middle class first until we ensure that when it comes to pay and benefits at work, women are treated like the equal partners they are. When a job doesn't offer family-leave, it also hurts men who want to help care for a new baby or an ailing parent. When there's no affordable childcare or afterschool programs that hurts children who wind up in second rate care, or spending afternoons alone in front of the TV. When women still make just 77 cents for every dollar men make, that doesn't just hurt women, it hurts families who find themselves with less income, and have to work even harder just to get by.

Your opposition to equal pay for equal work is perhaps your deepest failure for women and working families. In 2005, women in the United States were paid 77 cents for every dollar men were paid and that gap has not closed. Working families lose \$200 billion in income annually due to the wage gap between men and women. If married women were paid the same as men in comparable jobs, family incomes would rise by nearly 6 percent. If single working mothers earned as much as men in comparable jobs, their family incomes would increase by nearly 17 percent and their poverty rates would be cut in half, from 25.3 percent to 12.6 percent.

Unfortunately, you believe the Supreme Court got it right last year when they handed down a decision making it harder for women to challenge pay discrimination at work. You also opposed legislation to reverse that decision, and upon doing so, suggested that the reason women don't have equal pay isn't discrimination on the job – it's because they need more education and training. In 2008, when 62 percent of working women in America earn half – or more than half – of their family's income, you'd think a candidate would be determined to close the pay gap and ensure women are paid fairly for their work, especially when they choose a female candidate as a running mate. Under your wrong-headed thinking, if elected vice president, Sarah Palin should not earn as much as current Vice President Dick Cheney or former Vice President Al Gore. After all, according to your theory, she would need more education and training to equalize her earnings.

In closing, your vice presidential ploy has done nothing for working women who are already in a very precarious position. Although you have a woman on your ticket, if elected, McCain-Palin will only continue an America that makes women choose between their kids and their careers rather than change America for the better for women. That, Senator McCain, is cosmetic change that we can't accept and that we believe American women are smart enough to be fooled by. We will not allow this step backward for

women to go unchallenged and we commit to speaking the truth to all women – our friends, our families, our neighbors -- between now and November 4th.

From the USW National Women's Committee of the United States and Caribbean:

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USW District 11 Nan Duchene – Minnesota & all North Central States

USW District 12 Rosie Gonzalez – California and all Western and Pacific States

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