

Highlights

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President's Desk: Adding Women to the Equation



Sonia Ossorio

The state of the economy. In recent months it's been all over the news and on every front page, but for many of us it's also taken a personal toll. Although the current situation is particularly harsh, the economy has always been a central focus for women's rights advocates, especially since 40% of women are the sole support for themselves or their families. At the same time, women are paid far less than men: the pay is lower in fields that are historically dominated by women, and women make up nearly two-thirds of the minimum wage workforce. We've talked about the wage gap in these pages before, but in today's climate, in particular, closing it can mean survival for many families.

The good news is that President Obama sent a strong signal for pay equity by making the **Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act** the first piece of legislation he signed into law as president. The act essentially overrides the Supreme Court decision in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear* that requires workers to file charges on a pay discrimination claim within the first six months of receiving their first "discriminatory paycheck." The new law is a victory for women and economic justice because it re-institutes workers' rights to sue in cases of pay discrimination, regardless of when they

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Volunteering: The New Black

By Katharine Davis

Have some extra time on your hands? Looking for a pathway into a different type of job (or any job at all)? Or do you simply want to give back? Volunteering is a great way to do some good while also learning marketable skills, making connections, and exploring new interests and career options. Plus, it's very much in vogue these days, having surged in popularity in the wake of President Obama's pre-inaugural call to Americans to serve their communities.

Of course, if you're looking for a volunteer opportunity that can give you a leg up professionally, you're hardly alone. Victims of recent layoffs are knocking on nonprofit organizations' doors looking for productive uses of their newfound free time. Meanwhile, the economy's nosedive and resulting budget cuts have had a mixed effect on nonprofits. In some cases, volunteer opportunities abound as more work must be delegated to unpaid recruits. In others, overburdened staffs don't have the administrative bandwidth to train and manage incoming volunteers. In light of these challenges, it's more important than ever that volunteers and organizations find a mutually beneficial arrangement.

"Whether it's stuffing envelopes or pulling weeds, having a good volunteer experience is a lot about expectations," says Evelyn Chen, senior donor

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No Woman Immune to Violence Against Women

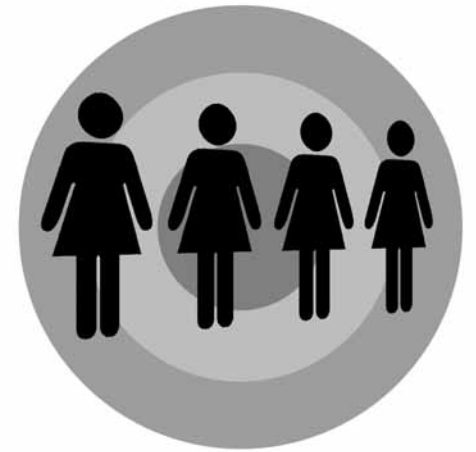
By Kim Gandy
National NOW President

Rihanna. Does it take a celebrity assault to get violence against women into the news? Indeed the story of one woman's life or death can open up a discussion with people who may not think about the issue at all, or that they can do anything about it.

Let's face it, high-profile cases do tend to stop people in their tracks, reminding them that domestic violence can happen anywhere, between people of all ages and income levels—even between much admired celebrities.

Earlier this month, R&B star Chris Brown was booked by the Los Angeles Police Department on suspicion of making criminal threats against singer Rihanna. As reported by the *Los Angeles Times*: "An early morning altercation with Brown after a pre-Grammy Awards party left Rihanna with bruises and a scratch on her face, according to police sources." Rihanna had been scheduled to perform at the Grammy ceremony but was unable to attend. The *L.A. Times* also revealed that "Rihanna is cooperating with investigators building a domestic violence case against her boyfriend," and additional charges involving the alleged assault may follow.

Now, the fame of the two people involved means this isn't your average domestic violence case, so the media have been all over it. This might not be a bad thing if reporters and on-air guests actually



took the time to discuss the larger issue at hand. If they invited law enforcement experts, advocates, social workers and survivors to share their side of the story. If they emphasized that every year in the United States women experience 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes—and every day three women are killed by an intimate partner.

Instead, early stories focused on how the charges were impacting Brown's endorsement deals. *The Washington Post* consulted a crisis management expert who said: "Strictly from a career standpoint, [Rihanna] needs to cut him loose." And what about from a personal safety and dignity standpoint? Does anyone care about that?

Indeed, there was an enormous amount of victim-blaming—just take a look at the outrageous comments about Rihanna, and what she must have done to "deserve" a beating. As

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Elizabeth Thompson, Elizabeth Thompson Art

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SAVE THE DATE

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In November of 2008, NOW-NYC Deputy Director Jean Bucaria called for the restitution of months of unpaid wages at a rally of garment workers organized by the Chinese Staff & Workers Association and the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops. In February of this year, the 25 workers won a huge victory in federal court against Liberty Apparel. The case will impact workers nationwide by setting a legal precedent that holds manufacturers and employers responsible for fair labor standards and working conditions for their subcontracted workers.

NOW-NYC volunteers Natasha Chisty and Caroline Kritzalis (l to r) join in the fight

November 18, 2008



Deputy Director Jean Bucaria speaks in support of workers - November 18, 2008

NOW-NYC organizes an educational forum, "Raising Our Voices for Choice," to discuss advancing reproductive rights in New York and across the country.



Advocates for reproductive rights lead the discussion (l to r) Galen Sherwin, NYCLU; Eleanor Bader, writer; Latifa Lyles, National NOW; and Jean Bucaria, NOW-NYC - January 22

Photo credit: David Liao



NOW-NYC Deputy Director Jean Bucaria celebrates a Title IX victory for New York City female soccer athletes (see In Press) - January 17

Photo credit: Jennifer Carnig, NYCLU



NOW-NYC co-sponsors Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr.'s celebration of Women's History Month. President Sonia Ossorio and newest NOW-NYC member, her daughter, pictured with the Comptroller - March 12

Photo credit: Marla S. Maritzer

NOW leaders talk about advancing a fresh agenda for women's rights under the new Obama administration.



NOW-NYC President Sonia Ossorio introduces National NOW Vice President Olga Vives - November 20, 2008



National NOW Vice President Olga Vives addresses local NOW-NYC members and friends. - November 20, 2008

NOW-NYC's Susan B. Anthony Awards honor grassroots activists who have advanced the cause of women's rights and improved the lives of women in our city. On February 19th, NOW-NYC honored five exemplary women at the National Arts Club.

Photo credit: Rebecca Rafelson



Human rights advocates gathered on the steps of City Hall to support an anti-discrimination law to protect caregivers (see In Press). Front row, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum speaks out alongside advocates and City Council Members (front row, l to r) Helen Sears, John Liu, and Gale Brewer - February 11

Photo credit: Gia Storms, Office of the Public Advocate



Pauline DeMairo, Director, Teen Outreach Reproductive Challenge, NARAL-NY



Olivia Greer, Director, EMANCIPATE



Irshad Manji, Director, NYU Moral Courage Project, receives award from City Council Member Helen Sears



Chanel J. Clark Rose, Director & Producer, Miss NYC Plus



City Council Member Helen Sears presents award to Joy Rose, President & Founder, MAMAPALOOZA

NOW-NYC President Sonia Ossorio presents a Special Recognition Award to long-time volunteer David Liao for his many hours of service to the organization.

Legislative Watch

By Sierra Shaffer

New York City

Clinic Access Bill Victory!

On April 2nd, the New York City Council took a major step to protect women's access to reproductive health care by passing the Clinic Access Bill (Int. 0826-2008). The bill strengthens the previous clinic access law, which criminalizes the blocking of clinic entrances and exits, by clarifying what activities are prohibited, making it easier to prosecute violators and protecting doctors and patients from violence while still allowing for peaceful gatherings and protests. NOW-NYC testified in support of the bill last November.

NOW-NYC Board Chair Judith J.K. Polson reports from the floor of the vote for the Clinic Access bill:

The new law lets police officers and clinics file complaints when they observe women being harassed or intimidated as they seek medical services. Under the 1994 law, only the patient herself could file a complaint. This required the woman to make her decision—which she might have reason not to share—part of the public record. Under the new law, the police are now allowed to do their jobs and protect patients from harassment.

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn observed that the law was made more specific as a result of 15 years' experience by police and advocates. The right to peaceful, legal protest remains; City Council staff worked even with those who opposed the bill to clarify what is legal and what is not. "Harassment and coercion are vestiges of the last century and are not acceptable," said Speaker Quinn. "This bill closes loopholes and lets cops do their jobs," Quinn said. "It's the least women deserve."

Protecting Caregivers in New York City

NOW-NYC stood with New York City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum in calling for the passage of bill Int. 565-A, which would amend the New York City Human Rights Law to protect caregivers against workplace discrimination. In these difficult economic times, it is critical to protect working families. The bill is co-sponsored by Council Members Bill de Blasio, David Weprin, and Gail Brewer.

Family and Medical Leave Act Revisions: Supporting Working Women and Families

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 guaranteed unpaid, job-protected leave in the case of a serious illness, or to

allow the employee to care for a new child or for an ill family member. However, in its last months in office, the Bush administration introduced new regulations which—while providing much needed expansions of FMLA access for military families—restrict access for the rest of the workforce. New York City Council Member Jessica Lappin has introduced a resolution (Res. No. 1814) calling on President Obama to revise the new FMLA regulations to be more employee-friendly.

Take Action in NYC. Thank your City Council Member for supporting the issues that matter to you, or urge him or her to vote for a bill you care about. Find your City Council Member online at www.council.nyc.gov and click on "Find My Council Member" at the top right or call 311.

New York State

Reproductive Health Act: Securing the Right to Choice in New York

The Reproductive Health Act will codify the protections made legal by the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision into New York State law. Currently, the laws that govern abortion in New York do not include an affirmative right to abortion, and they do not explicitly guarantee that the health of the woman is paramount. The law needs updating to protect women's health and secure choice. New York State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins sponsored an earlier version of the bill in the state senate last year, but the bill was not brought to the floor for a vote. Advocates are working to pass this proactive legislation this session.

New York State Fair Pay Act

The Fair Pay Act (A03911; S00955) will put real reforms into place to close the wage gap for women here in New York State. NOW-NYC and fair pay advocates have long supported this legislation, which has passed in the Assembly every year since 2002, but has never made it to a vote in the Senate. The bill would help put a stop to undervaluing sectors dominated by women: it would ensure equal pay for equal and comparable work and protect workers from retaliation when seeking salary information. The bill has been introduced in the Assembly by Assembly Member Susan John and in the Senate by Senator Craig Johnson.

Divorce Reform: Post-Marital Compensation

Divorce in New York costs too much, takes too long, and too often results in unfair financial outcomes for women. New York's law on "maintenance"—formerly known as alimony—is a big part of the problem (when a woman remarries, her former spouse no longer has to pay to "maintain" her). Changing the way we think about post-marital compensation (which reflects a woman's contribution to the partnership) is the cornerstone to fair financial settlements. A bill introduced by Assembly Member Amy Paulin (A07269) will make much-needed changes to establish consistency in

continued next page

In Press

NOW-NYC in the news on the local and national issues that impact women.



NOW-NYC Deputy Director Jean Bucaria and U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand - March 16

reporters from NY1, WNYC, *The Epoch Times*, WROC-TV and others, fair pay advocates from across the city spoke about the critical need to take a proactive approach to closing the wage gap for women by passing the Paycheck Fairness Act. On February 11, Deputy Director Jean Bucaria joined Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and City Council members in calling for the addition of caregiver protections to the city's Human Rights Law. Addressing wage discrimination, Bucaria stated, "This is maternal profiling. Although discrimination on the job due to one's caregiving status can happen to anyone, it is working mothers and women who overwhelmingly pay the price. They pay for it every time they are passed over for a salary increase, a promotion or a new job opportunity."

Ending Violence Against Women

On February 23, NOW-NYC issued a press release to join City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and the NYC Alliance Against

Women at Work

N O W - N Y C underscored the significance of President Obama's signing of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act on WFUV Public Radio 90.7 FM and *Telemundo* on January 29th. The organization pushed for additional steps toward pay equity at a press conference hosted by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand on March 16. Joined by

Sexual Assault in calling for a halt to the distribution of a Japanese video "rape simulation" game. NOW-NYC President Sonia Ossorio said, "Violence against women remains a national epidemic. We won't stand by and watch teens and adults become numb to the reality of such violence by allowing a serious and violent crime to be depicted as play." President Sonia Ossorio continued to speak out and educate the public about violence against women; on February 26 she participated in an on-air discussion about human trafficking on WFUV Public Radio 90.7FM's *Cityscape*, and on March 9 she was interviewed by Allison McGevna of Fox.com about domestic violence and the high-profile case of Chris Brown and Rihanna. On January 2, the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition commended the work of Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney in getting the Trafficking Victims Protection Act reauthorized.



Achieving Equality

As a long-standing advocate of Title IX, NOW-NYC applauded the decision of the NYC Department of Education to move the girls' soccer season to align with the boys' season, and the organization commended the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Office of the Public Advocate for helping the young women soccer players fight for the change. At a January 17 press conference attended by Channel 7 News, the *Daily News*, and NY1, NOW-NYC Deputy Director Jean Bucaria stated, "NOW-NYC is proud to celebrate in this victory for young women athletes, which not only ensures compliance with Title IX's equity in education law but delivers on the spirit in which that law was made: we are not letting discrimination stand in the way of these girls' dreams and goals."

whatNOW

Newsletter Team

Our newsletter team is made up of a dedicated group of staff and volunteer writers, editors, researchers, and designers.

NOW-NYC thanks our volunteers for making our newsletter possible.

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awarding post-marital payments by establishing settlement guidelines judges must follow, rather than indiscriminately deciding on their own. Currently, it's the wild card in divorce with women's financial future determined by whether she gets the draw of a fair judge. The bill will also help families by raising the cap for child support.

Helping Women and Protecting Infants

Women who decide to give up their newborn in the days after giving birth are currently protected from criminal prosecution under "Safe Haven" laws, which allow them to bring the newborn to a hospital or safe facility without facing criminal prosecution. All 50 states have such laws on the books to prevent the needless endangerment of unwanted infants. However, there is an inconsistency in New York State law that leaves women vulnerable to prosecution under civil law. Assembly Member Amy Paulin has introduced a legislative fix (A6092) that will make sure the intended protections for women—and their infants—are restored.

Take Action in NYS. Find your state and federal elected officials at the

NYS Board of Elections website—<http://nymap.elections.state.ny.us/nysboe/>—or call Vote NY at 212.868.3692.

United States

The Paycheck Fairness Act: Breaking New Ground on Equal Pay

NOW-NYC proudly supports the Paycheck Fairness Act (S. 182), a critical step towards closing the wage gap. A much-needed update of the 45-year-old Equal Pay Act, the Fair Pay Act would treat sex

discrimination as seriously as other forms of discrimination, strengthen incentives and penalties to prevent pay discrimination, prohibit employer retaliation, increase trainings for Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Staff, expand the Department of Labor's outreach and enforcement efforts, develop salary negotiation training for women and girls, improve collection of pay information, and close loopholes in defenses for employers. Thank your New York State Senators, Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, for supporting the Act.

Coming Out: Same Sex Marriage

On April 7th, Vermont made history, becoming the first state to establish equal marriage through legislative action. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and most recently, Iowa, have all legalized same-sex marriage, but through court rulings. The New York State Assembly passed a same-sex marriage bill for the first time in 2007. It's unclear if the slim democratic majority in the New York State Senate will be sufficient to pass a same-sex marriage bill in New York State. Governor Paterson has already pledged to sign the bill.

Our U.S. Senators Support Gay Marriage

New York's newly minted Senator, Kirsten Gillibrand, made it clear before she accepted her new job that she supports equal marriage rights. In March, U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer announced his change of heart on the issue, now promising to support gay marriage and the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act.

Take Action. Visit your Senators online at www.schumer.senate.gov and www.gillibrand.senate.gov or call the Congressional Switchboard at 202.224.3121.

On the Local Front: Improving the Response to Domestic Violence

By Dana Heitz

Aasiya Z. Hassan had emigrated from Pakistan and was successfully building a life and career here in the U.S. when that life was violently cut short at the hands of her abusive husband this past February. A mother of two young children and an entrepreneur working to establish a local Muslim-lifestyle TV channel, Aasiya had filed for divorce and obtained her third order of protection against her husband after nine long years of abuse. Six days later, her decapitated body was found in their shared workplace. Her husband, Muzzammil, has been charged with her murder. Though perhaps singular in the gruesome nature of the killing, this type of case is far too common: almost one-third of all women murdered in the U.S. are killed by an intimate partner.

A Problematic System of Protection

Since the U.S. Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) took effect in 1994, numerous states, including New York, have strengthened penalties for convicted offenders and increased funding for victim services. However, a lot of work remains to be done. National research suggests that because police officers still have discretionary power of arrest, despite "mandatory arrest" laws, police fail to arrest alleged violators of orders of protection (OPs) in 60-80% of cases. Apart from eliminating any deterrent effect the orders may have, flashing a virtual "green light" to abusers in these cases, the failure of police to make an arrest can increase the danger for victims of domestic violence in less obvious ways. For example, a victim in such a case may rely on the illusion of legal protection, at the expense of other safety measures she could take. After the violence continues and the victim learns that she cannot rely on assistance from the law, she may decide her only options are to suffer the abuse, or to engage in self-help—to take the law into her own hands—incurring the risk of prosecution by a system that did not aid her as required in the first place. The remedy for this catch-22 has been found in the dedicated court system for domestic violence in New York State, originally created due to the efforts of Chief Justice Judith Kaye to ease the burdens of stress, expense, and time that resulted from seeking redress in domestic violence cases.

Specialized Courts Making a Difference in New York

New York has made strides in recent years to streamline the prosecution of abusers for violations of

OPs. The former process for victims seeking protection often involved multiple court hearings in front of up to three different judges—all based on the same underlying incidents—thus creating an unnecessarily high case load for the courts and draining the time and resources of victims. Since 1996, however, New York State has devoted specialized teams of judges, legal professionals, and advocates to a victim-centered focus on domestic violence cases. This, according to the Center for Court Innovation, leads to fewer dismissals and violations of probation, more services being offered to victims, and prosecution of cases involving less severe charges. Further, the establishment of integrated domestic violence (IDV) courts in 2001 has consolidated proceedings for each family to occur before one judge who is familiar with domestic violence issues. The New York courts believe this provides "more informed judicial decision-making and greater consistency," as well as speedier proceedings (including expedited issuance of OPs), communicating a message to both the abuser and the victim that the court is taking the violent behavior seriously. As of January 2009, 37 IDV courts were in operation across the state, with three more in the works. This is good news, since the demand for these specialized courts still exceeds their availability. In some counties, not all eligible cases will make it into an IDV court.

For those who do make it, these courts have conferred some clear benefits on victims of domestic violence. The Center for Court Innovation has found that judicial monitoring in the courts has led to more consistent enforcement of OPs. Moreover, abusers in the integrated system are aware that if they violate OPs, they will not have the benefit of appearing in front of a judge who lacks familiarity with the case and the orders issued in it.

Are DV Courts Enough?

While New York State's judicial system for domestic violence protection is headed in the right direction, as Aasiya's story and thousands of others illustrate, there is still much work to be done. It is simply not enough for those who suffer violence at the hands of their partners to receive adequate protection after the fact. Advocates must continue to bring domestic violence front and center. This includes scrutinizing the media and cultural images that condone violence against women, changing the norms these images can help perpetuate, and shining a light on those tragedies that continue to occur. Advocates must also work to place the comprehensive view of domestic violence taken by the DV and IDV courts more solidly in the public eye to help bring about a change in the way society interacts with both perpetrators and survivors of domestic violence.

Join the NOW-NYC Book Club!

We meet on the first Wednesday of every month to discuss a book related to women's issues.

If you are interested in signing-up, contact Agatha Cole, cole.agatha@gmail.com, or call 212.627.9895.

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No Woman Immune to Violence Against Women

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frustrating as these comments were, there is much to be learned from them.

First of all, even men who seem nice in the public sphere can be bullies at home. Men who treat their friends just fine can become violent with their intimate partners. Men (and yes, women, too) who haven't learned how to deal with personal conflict may resort to violence as a means to resolve their problems or to exert control over their partners. That doesn't make it right, but it's important to understand where this violence comes from.

"...every day three women are killed by an intimate partner."

According to experts, young children who have witnessed violence, or been victims of violent acts, are at even greater risk of committing violence in their own relationships—girls can grow up believing the abuse is their fault because of something they did (did I burn the toast?), and boys can grow up feeling it is their prerogative to control the women in their lives. And perhaps excusing that kind of violence in other relationships as well, judging from some of the blog comments.

For once, the media's penchant for rooting around in celebrities' personal lives might actually be adding context to the story. But the media should take the next logical step and discuss how these childhood experiences and this most recent (and still alleged) event demonstrate a long-observed cycle of violence (namely that children who witness violence at home are more likely to be victims of partner violence or perpetrate it as adults) and then ask domestic violence experts: how do we stop the cycle once and for all?

That Rihanna is working with the police is an encouraging sign. It can be difficult for women to leave violent men, to report their abuse to the police and follow through in seeking justice. But women must do it—for themselves, for those who come after them, and in this case, for all the young women and girls who look up to them. And we must provide the societal resources to ensure their safety.

At the same time, it's up to groups like NOW to help identify the influences that combine to create this epidemic of violence against women: one, a society that often relies on violence to solve its problems; two, a popular culture and media that are obsessed with violent crime and its victims; and three, persistent sexist attitudes toward women and outdated gender roles that still set up a male-dominant, female-submissive equation.

As we work to educate people about the cycle of violence, and urge women and men to help break the cycle, we must also make sure that the necessary resources and services are there. This is why we have been advocating for decades to enact and fund groundbreaking legislation like the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and to reauthorize its funding. More recently, we worked to keep VAWA funding in the economic recovery package, because we know violence increases during the stress of economic hard times.

It's time for a national debate on how to stop this epidemic of violence against women. Patching up and sheltering the survivors and their children isn't enough—we must put real resources and the power of every major institution behind stopping the cycle.

This article is excerpted from the February 20th edition of National NOW President Kim Gandy's regular column, Below the Belt, published at www.now.org.



THIS IS WHAT A FEMINIST LOOKS LIKE!

Finally, a pro-choice and pro-woman president is in the White House. NOW-NYC takes a look at some of the critical women's issues that President Obama has tackled during his first months in office, along with the many tough challenges that still remain.

Undoing the Damage: Reproductive Health

By Darsana Srinivasan

The Obama administration kicked off its first 100 days by swiftly moving on some of the big-ticket reproductive rights issues for which advocates of women's health have long been fighting.

The Global Gag Rule

In January, President Obama repealed the notorious "Mexico City" policy that had been in operation during both terms of former President Bush. The policy, also known as the "Global Gag Rule," denied federal funding to international family planning organizations that provided abortion services, or even counseling or referrals, about abortion—even though the U.S. government already refused to fund abortion services, specifically. Essentially, physicians and other health care workers were censored into withholding treatment options—even those that were legal within their own country—if they wanted to continue receiving critical U.S. funding. The block on funding limited desperately needed health care services (including prenatal care, infant care, and cancer screening), reduced access to or availability of contraceptives, and weakened HIV/AIDS prevention programs.

According to the United Nations Population Fund, more than 200 million women lack crucial access to modern contraceptives, and nearly 70,000 women die annually from unsafe abortions. Reversing the policy restores the flow of funding to clinics around the world, where physicians can now offer a full range of health care services, including abortion, to desperately poor women.

HHS "Conscience Rule"

In February, the Obama administration announced that it would rescind the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regulation known as the "Conscience Rule," which broadly expanded protections for health care workers who did not want to participate in abortion services.

The poorly crafted regulation went into effect on Inauguration Day, instituted as a last-minute regulatory change by the Bush administration, despite federal laws that have been on the books for more than three decades to protect a physician's personal beliefs. An early version of the regulation even went so far as to redefine pregnancy as beginning with an un-implanted fertilized egg, effectively equating contraception with abortion—a medically inaccurate assertion. Though this extreme change did not make it into the final version, the regulation that went into effect did expand the list of those health care workers who could have a right of refusal to even include individuals who

provide support services—so hypothetically, even the clinic receptionist could refuse to deliver basic services for personal reasons.

Additionally, the regulation could have opened the doors for all sorts of refusals and conflicts with state laws. For example, advocates for sexual assault survivors feared that it would conflict with New York State's "EC in the ER" laws that require emergency rooms to provide or refer emergency contraception for survivors of sexual assault.

Reinstating Affordable Birth Control

Nestled in among the much-loathed earmarks of the \$410 billion omnibus spending bill that President Obama signed into law in March was a tiny provision that will reduce the financial burden of oral contraceptives for millions of young and low-income women and not cost taxpayers a single cent.

A technical snafu had omitted the clause from the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act, and continued Republican opposition to reinstating the provision caused an astronomical increase in the price of birth control, in some cases from \$5 to \$50 a month. Some college health centers, such as the one at New York University, had to resort to selling the pills at cost for no profit, just to provide them within a price range students could afford. Despite such efforts, thousands of women in New York City who previously relied on their college health centers or other safety-net providers for less expensive contraceptives were forced to stop taking the pill or turn to other (and possibly less effective) methods.

The law reinstates the incentive for pharmaceutical companies to discount their drugs; however, it does not guarantee that these companies will do so.

Building Lasting Change?

Many of these changes were "quick fixes" for the administration, but this means these changes can also be easily "un-fixed" by an anti-choice president. Some of these issues had a long history of such partisan back-and-forth.

For example, the Global Gag Rule was initially implemented by President Reagan in the 1980s, reversed in the 1990s by President Clinton, and then reinstated by President Bush shortly after he took office. However, unlike former Presidents Clinton and Bush, President Obama chose not to issue the order on the anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, in order to avoid politicizing the issue of international family planning.

Hopefully, by working to separate politics from science and health care, President Obama will pave the way to a time when the world's poorest women will not have to suffer based on which party occupies the White House. And, women's rights advocates must ensure that these changes are implemented effectively and act to find ways to make them permanent.

Focus on Women

President Obama Creates White House Council on Women and Girls

By Sierra Shaffer

On March 11th, President Obama signed an executive order establishing a White House Council on Women and Girls. Chaired by Valerie Jarrett and directed by Tina Tchen, the Council aims to ensure that women and girls are treated fairly in public policy and that Cabinet agencies consider how their programs will affect women and families. Areas of priority for the Council include improving women's

economic security, promoting policies that establish a healthy work-family balance, preventing violence against women, and improving women's health care. According to National NOW President Kim Gandy, "It was a pleasure for me to be at the White House to hear the president make this commitment to supporting women and girls in such strong and unequivocal terms. It was a heartening moment for those of us who have worked so hard for this day...NOW looks forward to supporting the work of the White House Council on Women and Girls in the months ahead. There is much work to be done."

NYS Reproductive Health Act: Get the Facts

The Reproductive Health Act:

- Affirms that women in New York have the right to control their own reproductive health and ensures that abortion will remain legal in New York, even if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned.
- Updates and modernizes New York's abortion laws to adequately protect women's rights and health.
- Protects the right to abortion in cases where a woman's life or health is at risk.
- Treats abortion as a public health issue rather than as a criminal matter—as is done in current law.
- Guarantees the right of an individual to use or refuse contraception.
- Protects the safety of women, and requires that abortions be performed by qualified, licensed medical professionals.

Take Action! Your legislators need to hear from you. Contact your state representatives and let them know you support choice and the Reproductive Health Act. Get online and send a quick e-mail, make a simple phone call to your State Senator or State Assembly Member, or draft your own letter. Be sure to include your full name and address.

Key points you can use:

As a New Yorker and your constituent, I am proud that our state has historically been a beacon and leader in reproductive health and would like to uphold this hard-earned reputation. I urge you to protect women's health and reproductive choice by supporting the Reproductive Health Act.

The Supreme Court's 2007 decision in *Gonzales v. Carhart*, permitting a ban on an abortion procedure without any exception to protect a woman's health, is a strong blow to women's reproductive rights.

New York needs to make sure that our own laws are updated to protect the fundamental right of women to make their own private health care decisions.

Find your state and federal elected officials at the [NYS Board of Elections website](http://nysmap.elections.state.ny.us/nysboe/)—
<http://nysmap.elections.state.ny.us/nysboe/>—or call Vote NY at 212.868.3692.

President's Desk

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discover they are being short-changed by their employer.

This is a good start, but we'll need to do more than reverse the damage of the Bush era to achieve real pay equity. Pay discrimination based on gender still doesn't receive the same legal remedies as discrimination based on race or national origin. And

Pay discrimination based on gender still doesn't receive the same legal remedies as discrimination based on race or national origin.

if women are to find out just how much they are being underpaid, first they'll need to make sure they are protected from retaliation by their employer for sharing salary information. Lastly, anti-discrimination laws mean very little without the enforcement to go with them. This is why NOW-NYC proudly stood with our new U.S. Senator, Kirsten Gillibrand, in supporting the **Paycheck Fairness Act** (see page 2). The act would address all of the above and more: it would treat sex discrimination as seriously as other forms of discrimination in the courts, strengthen the Department of Labor's outreach and enforcement efforts, and create training

programs to help empower women in the workforce.

This last part is crucial because one of the reasons that women stand to lose \$700,000 to \$2 million in earnings over the course of their lifetime is because they, themselves, undervalue their own worth. Women often don't counter a job offer for a salary at the top end of the pay scale, and they are subsequently less likely than men to negotiate and



ask for raises as frequently. This is why the NOW-NYC Service Fund initiated our **Women & Money** public education series to empower women financially and help them gain critical skills for advancing their careers. We've held programs with experts on personal financial skills, networking, and career management, and we provide a low-cost **Employment Discrimination Legal Clinic** every month. We launched a special **Divorce Financial Clinic** for women going through divorce (for tips see article on page 5), because studies show that women's standard of living can plummet upon divorce while men generally enjoy an increase in standard of living. (Check out our **Resource Guide** on page 8 for more info).

Here in New York State, NOW-NYC is trying to take equal pay one step further by enacting a **New York State Fair Pay Act** that would ensure equal pay for similar or equal work (see more on page 2).

And NOW-NYC also supports the strengthening of New York City's Human Rights Law to explicitly protect caregivers from workplace discrimination. We know that employer assumptions about caregiving responsibilities (for children or the elderly) often negatively and unfairly impact salaries, pay increases, and promotion decisions, and that it's women who bear the brunt of this stereotyping. Seventy-five percent of caregivers are women, and 64% of mothers with children under the age of six are in the workforce. (See page 2, for more on this bill).

Finally, we couldn't talk about women and the economy without taking a look at the stimulus package, formally known as the **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act** and signed by President Obama on February 17th. As feminists, one of our major concerns leading up to its passage was that the focus on funding for "shovel ready" projects would leave the creation of new jobs for women in the dirt. After all, women only make up about 15% of the construction workforce, and many of those jobs are lower paid, administrative jobs. National NOW took the lead in ensuring that the final version of the package did not leave women behind, by asking that we not only rebuild our physical infrastructure, but our "human infrastructure" as well. NOW specifically built a case for making a greater investment in community health centers. This would not only provide more

jobs for women, but it also supports women's health and increases access for everyone to preventative care, ultimately reducing health care costs. (Learn more about NOW's role at <http://www.now.org/news/note/030609.html>.)

Because of the hard work of women's advocates, the final version of the bill included many measures that benefit women and families: increased funding for programs in women-dominated sectors, an increase in funds for enforcing anti-discrimination measures, expanded funding for child care and early education programs such as Head Start, and the strengthening of our unemployment insurance system, putting well overdue measures in place that will make benefits more accessible to women for the first time since the system was created in 1935. As National NOW president Kim Gandy said (and we heartily agree) "...when women's advocates are not at the table, the outcome is not the same for women."

Sonia Egoie

Divorce Planning: 5 Financial Tips

By Cynthia Thompson

If you are preparing for divorce, here are five financial tips that can make the process easier.

1 Copy all of your documents and gather all of the financial information you have. One reason this is so critical is that this information can often disappear once the divorce begins. And once the tax returns, bonus calculations, and W-9s start to disappear—you can no longer use them, often until formal legal steps take place. How can you know or plan for what to divide, if you don't know what you currently have?

2 Start seeking out competent, proactive, expert advice to help you flesh out the "what next" or "what if" scenarios. This may not sound like a financial step on the face of it—but when you sit down and write the things that you'd like to have from your marriage, or try to envision what you might like or need in order to carry on into the future—these things can and will actually be translated into numbers. For example, your house and pension will have a range of dollar signs eventually attached to them.

3 Safeguard your credit. Order a copy of your credit report early and now—from all three reporting agencies. This is crucial, since you can have this as a baseline to know where you currently stand. This way you'll be able to see whether any new unauthorized debt is being added in your name. And if you have no credit in your own name now, you may want to apply for a credit card to begin building your own credit.

4 Do an insurance check-up. The goal is to get your hands around what coverage your family has and needs. What are your policy numbers, deductibles, limits, premiums? Some types of insurance are life, car, medical, dental, homeowners, renters, and flood insurance. It is important to keep your insurance-related financial issues in order. For example, it's critical that you know who the owners of the insurance are, and find out who is named on your beneficiary designations.

5 Make sure your tax returns are prepared in a way that you will be comfortable with for years to come. If you are preparing to divorce but have not yet started on your taxes and it's anytime around tax season, this is an area in which you should proceed with caution. Consult your accountant and have him or her advise you on not only the possible tax savings that married, jointly filing couples currently enjoy, but also on the potential future liability you could face should the returns be found deficient. Know that on returns where you sign jointly, you will both be held responsible.

As always, the best offense is a good defense—arming yourself with knowledge is often the best first step in trying to achieve an equitable, fair outcome.

Cynthia Anderson Thompson, Certified Divorce Financial Analyst (CDFA™) is the founder of Divorce Planning Solutions LLC, a fee-only financial planning firm in New York. She is a volunteer expert for The Service Fund of NOW-NYC's Divorce Financial Clinic. She can be reached at cindy@divorceplanningsolutions.com. This excerpt was reprinted with permission of the author and Divorce 360. The entire article can be viewed on www.divorce360.com.

Volunteering: The New Black

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relations manager at the Nature Conservancy. Chen notes that volunteers need to "recognize that staff are busy and that it takes work for them to manage you," while staff need to "recognize what it means to actually have a volunteer and provide a good experience."

Many nonprofits are deeply committed to providing meaningful opportunities for volunteers, in part because volunteer help is essential to their success. When describing the role of volunteers in the development department at Audubon New York, Assistant Director Jessica Wells states simply: "None of our events would happen without them. They're involved with everything we do." The same goes for NOW-NYC. "NOW relies heavily on volunteers," explains Deputy Director Jean Bucaria. "We were founded on the strength of volunteers."

To benefit from volunteer energy while encouraging personal development, both Audubon New York and NOW-NYC offer long-term volunteer intern positions, in which volunteers support office staff while learning about fundraising, event planning, and other disciplines vital to an organization's work. Traditionally, internships have been held by students, but in the current economic climate they're an attractive option for midcareer professionals looking to change gears or recent graduates who can't yet find a toehold in the workforce. One such job-seeking postgrad, Louise Enten, is optimistic that her Audubon internship will help to make her more marketable. "The skills I'm learning can't hurt," she says. Graduate student and former NOW-NYC volunteer intern Gwen Rocco believes her internship ultimately helped her define her career goals. "It was definitely a great first foray into nonprofits," she says, "and I learned a lot about

feminist issues and women's rights issues."

Of course, you don't have to seek a volunteer opportunity with your career in mind—helping a cause you care about is certainly enriching in itself. Whatever your motivation, set yourself up for the best possible experience by following these tips:

Decide what you want to get out of your time as a volunteer, and be up-front about it.

If you want to learn particular skills or work on a specific project, say so. As long as the opportunity exists, the organization should be happy to accommodate your preferences. Also be forthcoming about any knowledge gaps or factors that could curtail your commitment.

Treat your volunteer position like a job.

Show up on time and complete the tasks you commit to. Being dependable "makes you someone the organization can rely on and will call in again," explains Chen. This is especially important if you're hoping to use your volunteer coordinator as a job reference someday.

Be willing to jump in where you're needed most.

Rare is the person who enjoys making photocopies, but pitching in shows you're a team player and could lead to more interesting projects. Of course, a volunteer partnership is a two-way street, and ultimately the experience should be a good one for you. Open communication with your volunteer coordinator will ensure that both your needs and the organization's are being met.

Fun Volunteer Opportunities at NOW-NYC!

By Katharine Davis

In various roles at NOW-NYC, volunteers work to get legislation passed, act as our voice at rallies, and serve as our eyes and ears on the media and in the community. No matter how much time you have to commit, there are many ways you can take action. Here are some of our most exciting opportunities:

- **Get on our Action Alert list.** You'll receive e-mail updates about upcoming rallies, events, e-mail and phone campaigns, and other ways that you can get involved. Some actions, such as sending e-mail messages to legislators, take just a few minutes! Send an e-mail to contact@nownyc.org with your name and e-mail address in the body of the message and "Action Alert" in the subject line.
- **Join our Outreach NOW Team.** Our outreach volunteers go directly into the community to recruit members and get people working for women's rights. Team members attend an in-depth training session to learn about NOW-NYC and our issues and then volunteer by setting up an information table in local parks, or at street-fairs and festivals. Call or e-mail us to sign up!

- **Consume your media with feminist glasses on.** If you see a sexist ad on the subway or in a magazine, or if you hear biased commentary on the news or while indulging in reality TV, let us know! Submit items to our Bias Busters campaign by e-mailing contact@nownyc.org or calling 212.627.9895.
- **Sign-up to phone bank for equality.** NOW-NYC holds regular phone banks the first Tuesday of every month. You'll help us to educate members, fund-raise, and get people involved, and you'll get snacks too! Call or email to sign up!
- **Volunteer to lobby with us.** We need members from all over New York City to volunteer their time to meet with legislators alongside us on important issues. This year, we'll be focused on choice. We'll provide the training and you'll gain the experience.
- **Consider applying for a NOW-NYC women's rights internship.** Perfect for students or others who really want to get involved and can commit a few days a week. Our volunteer internships are a great way to gain experience in event planning, advocacy, and outreach.

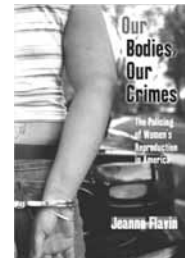
Learn more about any of these opportunities by visiting nownyc.org, e-mailing contact@nownyc.org or calling 212.627.9895.

We look forward to working with you!

Book Review

Our Bodies, Our Crimes: The Policing of Women's Reproduction in America

Jeanne Flavin
New York University Press
307 pages
\$35.00



Reviewed By K.C. Washington

Gendered Citizenship

"The yardstick by which all mothers are measured is that of a white, heterosexual, married, middle-class female," says Jeanne Flavin in her new book, *Our Bodies, Our Crimes: The Policing of Women's Reproduction in America*.

Flavin, an associate professor of sociology and anthropology at Fordham University in the Bronx, argues in her chilling yet inspiring new book that by using these criteria as a yardstick, the criminal justice system criminalizes poor women generally and women of color specifically, ultimately crippling the rights of all women.

Flavin posits that this standard evolved around the 1800s, when doctors began making decisions on whether a woman was allowed to have an abortion based on their medical opinion and not the woman's personal desire. They did this for several

reasons, including to cement their legitimacy over quack doctors who often injured or killed their patients and as a sort of population control or eugenics. The fear of being overrun by immigrants and blacks caused many in the dominant society to try and actively shape who should and could reproduce. The idea of the right kind of woman or the "fit" mother has followed women all the way to the present day in the form of court-coerced sterilizations and "no procreation" orders linked to shorter prison terms, and a lack of social services for incarcerated women and their children.

Exploring the principle of less eligibility and income and education disparity, Flavin claims that poor women and poor women of color are held hostage to a criminal justice system that disciplines women's reproductive behavior in order to "maintain the patriarchal notion that women's value derives mainly from their sexuality and reproductive capacity."

Abortion then, as now, became one of social control of women's bodies, their sexual lives and the "health" of the country. Through time, in order to ensure the strength of the country, women have been treated more and more harshly by law enforcement, judges, and the wider society if they are pregnant or mothers already. If this trend continues unchecked, the skewing of women's lives according to their potential as mothers, or "pre-mothers," to use another of Flavin's disturbing phrases, will reduce women to "fetal containers," a concept in which a woman's true worth lies in society's valuation of her unborn children.

A brief yet jam-packed primer on the history of abortion in America, *Our Bodies, Our Crimes* also argues against the defining of reproductive rights as just the right to an abortion or what she calls the "one issue campaign." Flavin makes the case that women, constantly battling society for the right for "body integrity" are forced into a caste system of "gendered citizenship."

"As I use the term here, 'reproductive rights' include the basic rights of all women to have sex according to their own thoughts and feelings, free of discrimination, coercion, violence, fear or shame," she writes.

Despite the news that all women have a long fight ahead, one of the most compelling aspects of *Our Bodies, Our Crimes* is the prevailing sense of hope that Flavin evinces. For every poorly written Safe Haven law she uncovers, she offers a better one. For every abortion she discusses, she suggests better access to family planning and contraception. Never is she angry or didactic, though she is often bemused and exasperated.

Flavin's point is clear: "As long as reproduction is the standard for all women's social citizenship, no woman will be respected as a true citizen or recognized fully as a human being."



Fight for Your Rights.

Join the NOW-NYC Reproductive Rights Action Committee.

Meets the second Tuesday of the month 6:30 p.m., at the NOW-NYC office.

Confront Sexism.

Join the NOW-NYC Bias Busters Campaign.

Learn more at www.nownyc.org, or call us at 212.627.9895 to report sexism in the media.

Advance Equality.

Join the NOW-NYC Queer Advocacy Project.

Meets the second Tuesday of the month 6:30 p.m., at the NOW-NYC office.

WAM!'09 Inspires Individuals to Action

By Jen Deerinwater

Women often voice opinions regarding women's rights issues within the safety of our communities, but rarely do we do so in mainstream society. This silence is particularly felt in the Op-Ed pages of newspapers.

During the 2009 Women, Action, and Media! (WAM!) conference hosted by the Center for New Words in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the "Inside/Outside" theme emerged that speaks directly to this silence. It is meant to motivate and inspire us to push beyond our insider status in our respective communities and venture into circles in which we are outsiders. As the nation's crippling economic crisis and multitude of problems further undermine the well-being of women, this theme is more important to feminist activists now than it has ever been.

Editors from several major publications made it clear that women don't submit op-eds at the same rate as men. (It's important to note here that the underrepresentation of women's voices in the media is more complex than a mere numbers game and requires systemic change—change that WAM! and other organizations and individuals are trying to make.)

According to Denise Zeck, Executive Director of American Forum, more people are reading news now than ever before, yet only 20% of op-eds published are authored by women. Even fewer pieces are written by women under the age of 65. Our op-ed submission rates for Spanish papers are even lower, yet there is a 90% pickup rate for these pieces. The panel expressed the urgency and desire to hear the voices of women and youth and encouraged attendees to brainstorm topics for their own op-eds in a multimedia format that could be distributed via multiple communication channels.

Organizations like NOW-NYC, which conducts a Bias Busters campaign and media outreach, are addressing the lack of women-positive voices in the media. However, we cannot rely solely on organizations to speak for us and confront the litany of issues that negatively affect the lives of women and girls. Current news stories are rarely reported through a gendered lens. It's time that we push ourselves to voice our concerns and opinions beyond our comfort zones and into areas that are in desperate need of the feminist perspective.

Jaclyn Friedman, Program Director at the Center for New Words, encouraged us "to not forget the 'A' in 'WAM!'," to leave the conference as part of something larger than when we arrived, and to put our newfound energy to work for real change. You can take action on your own through your local Op-Ed pages to help get women's voices heard.

Ten Tips for Getting *Your* Op-Ed Published

- 1 You MUST hook the reader in the first few sentences.
- 2 Speak to your personal reality. Use your experience, knowledge, and expertise.
- 3 Always remember to write an answer to the readers' question "Why do I care?"
- 4 Present facts and figures to back up your opinion. It's up to you to make a compelling case.
- 5 Tie the piece to current events, and stay current on the news in your area. Time your submission to match up with a news "hook" that links your opinion to current events and news coverage.
- 6 Don't get lost in academic jargon. Use straight talk and keep it heartfelt.
- 7 When submitting, include one or two sentences about yourself and how you're connected to the piece. If under 30, include age in submission.
- 8 Don't be afraid to e-mail and call editors or attend editorial board meetings if there's no news coverage of the issue. Many newspapers have cut their reporting staff, particularly foreign correspondents, due to high costs. Submit Op-Eds to American Forum (www.mediaforum.org). They'll submit your pieces to various news outlets for free.
- 9 Write your pieces with a publication's style and readership in mind, and be sure to respect your reader. She or he may not be an expert in the topic area, but don't underestimate her or his intelligence.
- 10 And lastly, never doubt that your opinion is valid or wanted.

Learn more: www.centerfornewwords/wam.org

www.theopedproject.org

Bias Busting, Or Where the Streets Have No Name and No Clothes

By K.C. Washington

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the nudest of them all? Well, judging from billboards, subway posters, print media and network and cable television, that would be any woman society has deemed desirable. Continuing our efforts to expose bias in the media universe against girls and women, we once again invite you to sample the advertising wall of shame. View, debate, and if so moved, take action.



Despite our national obsession with exercise and body image, somehow Michelle Obama, not only our "mom-in-chief" but also our "fitness-woman-in-chief," has come under fire for having the audacity not only to be fit but proud of it. The

First Lady's arms have been dubbed by a panic-stricken *New York Times* columnist David Brooks as "Thunder and Lightning." He should just hope she doesn't choose to strike.

A blatant, repeat offender with ubiquitous billboards and print ads all over the city, American Apparel's depictions of women and girls prompted Philip Quach, a young Baruch College student who participated in NOW-NYC's Bias Busters campaign to complain, "far too much exposure, especially when considering the product advertised is a

sweatshirt. Although her pose is not particularly sexually suggestive, the picture borders on soft-core pornography."

Jasmine Charbonier, another NOW-NYC Bias Buster, asks of the whiskey distiller Evan Williams (picture not shown), "Why is the aging of whiskey being compared to the time a woman takes to get ready? Why is it that for the woman to be considered sexy or the "better half of the ad," she



needs to have a tiny dress with half of her breasts out and almost showing her behind?" Good question.

In the wake of recent, highly publicized attacks against women, some of which are covered in these pages, this next ad is particularly disturbing. It is a near perfect illustration of the glamorization of violence against women. Ahmed Sékou Touré Kébé, who found this ad, sums it up: "This ad very much leaves a bad taste in my mouth. It shows a picture of a nicely dressed man strangling a barely

clothed woman. This just demoralizes women by putting them completely down and also giving the wrong message to men. It shows violence. This should not be shown in an ad that promotes being dressed well."



In the spirit of hope and fair play, and lest we be accused of bias ourselves, we will leave you with a positive image. In March, the sports magazine ESPN boldly and beautifully featured a pregnant Candace Parker on its cover. Ms. Parker is a WNBA MVP.

Our voices have power. Help us get the word out about sexist media and advertising. Join NOW-NYC's campaign to stop advertising the objectification of and violence against women and hold businesses and media outlets accountable for their actions. Please send advertisements that harm women and create a culture of disrespect and tolerance for violence to contact@nownyc.org. It's a fantastic way to make a difference! Call 212.627.9895 for more information or visit www.nownyc.org.

Take action right now by getting your voice heard. To register your comments:

David Brooks
www.nytimes.com/gst/emailus

American Apparel, Inc.
747 Warehouse Street
Los Angeles, CA 90021
USA
213.488.0226
<http://americanapparel.net>

Evan Williams
Heaven Hill Distilleries, Inc.
P.O. Box 729
Bardstown, KY 40004
502.348.3921
Info@evanwilliams.com

Duncan Quinn Retail Store
8 Spring St.
New York, NY 10012
212.226.7030
Info@duncanquinn.com

ESPN
<http://sports.espn.go.com>

NOW-NYC thanks our Bias Busting students at Baruch College for their contributions to finding these and many other perpetrators of sexism (and for finding strong positive images of women, too!). They are also fostering accountability, by sending their own letters of comment.



Does your company give matching gifts?

Are you under your limit for this year?

Please give us a call today at

212.627.9895

to find out how your matching gift can benefit the important programs of

The NOW-NYC Service Fund!

New York State of Denial

By Shelby Knox

New York City is home to more than 30,000 women and girls infected with HIV/AIDS, 10% of all women infected and more than any other city in the United States. A disproportionate number of these women—90%—are black and Hispanic and more than a third, or 41%, were infected through heterosexual activity. So it's fitting that on March 10th, National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, the Women's HIV Collaborative of New York released *Women Living with HIV and AIDS in NYC*, a geographical analysis and comprehensive examination of the epidemic as it affects women in the five boroughs.

Using statistical data compiled by government agencies, the report visually depicts by ZIP code a clear reality: women of color living in low-income areas are most at risk for HIV/AIDS infection. Socio-economic factors depressing their communities, like high rates of incarceration and low rates of high school graduation, as well as lack of access to reproductive health care and information about risk reduction, put them in a uniquely vulnerable position for infection and at a possible disadvantage for treatment.

Young women of color are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS; black and Latina women ages 13-24 account for 75% of all new infections nationwide. Not surprisingly, the "hot spots" with the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in the city also have the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies.

The report recommends mandatory comprehensive sexuality education in New York's public classrooms to slow the epidemic's devastating effects on the next generation. It calls on local and state leaders to take the lead in providing young people the information to make informed, responsible decisions about sex. Unfortunately, that's an area in which New York politicians have proved, in all senses, quite deficient.

New Yorkers might be surprised to learn their state, generally a leader in reproductive health policy, doesn't actually mandate comprehensive sex education in the schools. On the contrary, New York has ranked at the top of the list, with Texas and Florida, of states that receive the most money for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, accepting more than 13 million federal dollars in 2007 earmarked solely for lessons in "just say no" that often contain factual inaccuracies about condoms and contraception, generalizations about sexuality that are based on biases about gender and sexual orientation, and religious overtones.

Since New York has no statewide standards for sex education beyond minimal instruction in HIV/AIDS prevention, a victory won by responsible sex education advocates in the past decade, other information young people receive about sex often varies by classroom and teacher. In one upstate high school, one health teacher brings in an educator from Planned Parenthood to cover STIs and condoms while the other health teacher invites a speaker from a religiously affiliated abstinence-only organization to talk about the risks of sexual activity. Even New York City public schools have taken up sexless sex ed, banning condom demonstrations in the classroom at every grade level, for any reason.

Since 2001, advocates and young people have been sounding the alarm about the dismal state of sex education in New York schools. "Part of the battle is getting New Yorkers to believe this could really happen here," says Galen Sherwin, director of NYCLU's Reproductive Rights Project. "Parents are shocked to find out their children may not be learning what they think they should be about sex." When polled, 88% of New Yorkers believe students should receive information about contraception and the prevention of STIs.

Lawmakers have been slow to respond. The Healthy Teens Act, a bill that creates a competitive grant program, administered by the Department of Health, for schools and communities to choose to teach comprehensive sexuality education over abstinence-only, was first introduced in 2002 and has passed the Assembly every year since, but died in the hostile

political environment of the state Senate. However, the November elections gave New York a pro-choice majority in the upper chamber for the first time in forty years, clearing the way for the bill to pass before another generation is lost to ignorance and misinformation.

Well, almost.

Facing a \$15.4 billion budget shortfall, Governor David Paterson has vowed to veto legislation that includes new funding components and he's been keeping his promise. If the Healthy Teens Act does pass this session, it will likely die on Paterson's desk, although a strong argument could be made that every dollar spent on comprehensive sex education is one of the few good investments these days, as reducing the \$421 million the state spends per year on costs associated with teen pregnancy could only be described as a financial win.

The health of New York's young people, then, likely rests with President Obama, who could for the first time in history direct federal funds toward comprehensive sex education programs like those specified in the Healthy Teens Act. New York's congressional delegation must underscore their constituents' support for such a move, and the potential benefits that young people, not just in New York but nationwide, could reap from receiving unbiased, comprehensive sexuality education for the first time.

During the campaign, then-candidate Obama told his young supporters, "it's the right thing to do, to provide age-appropriate sex education, science-based sex education in the schools." Obama's 2010 budget overview includes a commitment to "fund [sexuality education] models that stress the importance of abstinence while providing medically accurate and age-appropriate information to youth who have become sexually active." When the budget comes out, with numbers attached, later this month, we'll see if as President he's good for his word.

This article was originally published on the reproductive health and rights website, RH Reality Check, on March 10, 2009. You can find more at www.rhrealitycheck.org.

Rewriting Science Fiction: Politics Out of Plan B

By Nancy Northup

Science was glaringly absent the past eight years in policies created by the Bush administration's federal agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Health and Human Services. Increased emissions of the most significant forms of air pollution were touted as "clear skies." The birth control pill was defined as abortion, and receptionists in health-care facilities were empowered to turn women away for reproductive medical treatment simply because they disapproved.

With President Obama in office, we are seeing welcome change. He proposed to repeal Bush's eleventh-hour HHS regulation which gives health care workers personal views over medical care. In a recent directive, President Obama declared that politics would no longer play a role in U.S. science policy, stating "we make scientific decisions based on facts, not ideology." And he nominated former New York health commissioner Margaret Hamburg as the head of the Food and Drug Administration. Dr. Hamburg has rejected the idea of having abstinence be the main focus of HIV education, saying that "only the best medical and scientific information" should dictate the curriculum, not "moral judgment."

A fitting next step for the new administration in reversing Bush policies based in fictional science would be for the FDA, under Dr. Hamburg's leadership, to take a fresh look at the agency's restrictive over-the-counter policy on the emergency contraceptive Plan B to ensure that the policy is based on medical evidence, not ideology.

The journey of Plan B's 2003 application for over-the-counter status—mired in years of inexplicable delay, unprecedented White House involvement, and decisions that run contrary to the agency's own scientific experts—reads like a story of intrigue and conspiracy. The plotline would make for compelling entertainment if the stakes weren't the health and lives of women throughout the U.S. The Bush administration's complete disregard of objective scientific evidence played a starring role, with FDA leadership stacking a reproductive health advisory committee with "operatives" and radically

departing from typical agency practice. The story ends with unfounded age restrictions for Plan B—the first time age has ever been used to restrict a

...within 72 hours after sex it reduces the risk of pregnancy by 89%...

non-prescription drug.

Access to Plan B is critically important for women who want to avoid pregnancy. But it's most effective the sooner it's taken—within 72 hours after sex it reduces the risk of pregnancy by 89%, and the odds are even greater when it's used in the first 24. The FDA has deemed the contraceptive safe and effective, but it's not always readily available despite its recognized value and the importance of timely access.

Since 2003, Plan B's manufacturers have tried to make the drug available without a prescription for women of every age, only to be repeatedly rebuffed by the FDA for no scientific reason. In 2005, the Center for Reproductive Rights, on behalf of women's health organizations and individuals, filed a federal lawsuit arguing that the FDA was not only ignoring the science in its foot-dragging on Plan B, but also violating the law. The government tried to get the case dismissed a number of times, but the judge overseeing the case refused, even remarking that the inertia on Plan B smacked of "an administrative filibuster."

Finally in 2006, the FDA announced that it would approve the distribution of Plan B without a prescription, but only for women 18 or older and only behind pharmacy counters. It didn't matter that the medical evidence overwhelmingly supported over-the-counter use for every age, or for that matter, that overwhelming scientific opinion within the FDA recommended as much. As one agency scientist puzzled, the FDA never "distinguished the safety and efficacy of Plan B and other forms of hormonal contraception among different ages of women of childbearing potential, and I am not aware of any compelling scientific reason for such a distinction in this case."

In the meantime, months of testimony in the federal case uncovered a web of deceit behind-the-scenes—replete with high-level FDA officials kowtowing to outside political influence, circumventing agency regulations, and ultimately, conspiring to grant only limited access to Plan B. Court testimony revealed that one official confessed to his coworker that he had to reject the Plan B application for fear of losing his job. Another

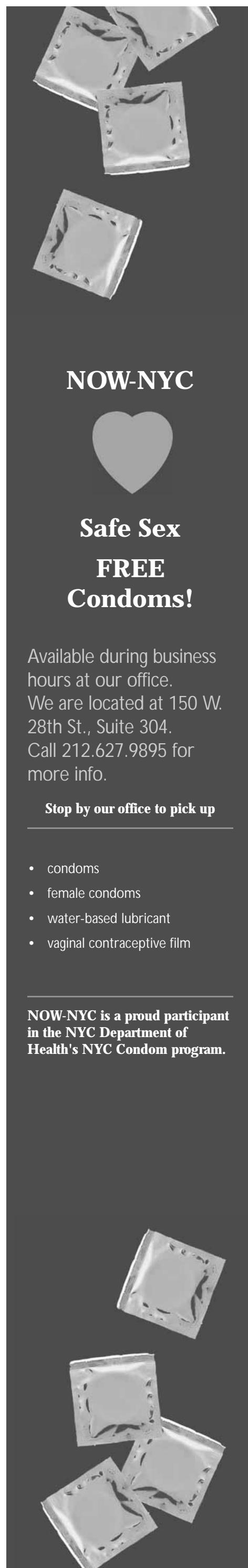
told a colleague that the plan was for the agency to postpone making any decision on the drug for as long as possible, and when push came to shove, approve it with an age restriction—all in order to "appease the [Bush] administration's constituents." During the case, the judge has said more than once that there was a "strong showing of bad faith" on the part of the FDA, but at this time, we are awaiting a decision.

At the beginning of the year, the CDC released data showing significant increases in teen birth rates in most of the country. Was that supposed to be part of the Bush administration's storyline? While Plan B's road to over-the-counter status has had many twists, turns and set-backs, the story can have a happy ending. The new administration can save the day by re-instating science as the underlying narrative at the FDA.


This article was originally published on Huffington Post on March 19th at www.huffingtonpost.com. Nancy Northup is president of the Center for Reproductive Rights.

Plan B Victory!

On March 23rd the U.S. District Court ruled that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) acted improperly in its handling of the process of approval for making Plan B available over-the-counter and ordered the FDA to make Plan B available to 17 year olds within 30 days. Furthermore, the court ordered the FDA to complete a review of its decision to limit access to minors younger than 17-years of age. NOW-NYC fought for increasing the availability of Plan B in pharmacies across the city. Plan B, also known as emergency contraception, can prevent pregnancy if taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex. In 2007, NOW-NYC joined Speaker Christine Quinn and the City Council in announcing the results of a council investigation that found Plan B was available in 94% of NYC pharmacies.



NOW-NYC



**Safe Sex
FREE
Condoms!**

Available during business hours at our office. We are located at 150 W. 28th St., Suite 304. Call 212.627.9895 for more info.

Stop by our office to pick up

- condoms
- female condoms
- water-based lubricant
- vaginal contraceptive film

NOW-NYC is a proud participant in the NYC Department of Health's NYC Condom program.

**The Service Fund of NOW-NYC
Resource Guide:
Get Help When You
Need It!**

HELPLINE 212.627.9895

What: Our HELPLINE provides callers with referrals to direct services for a variety of issues that impact women, including custody and divorce, domestic violence, employment discrimination, finding a lawyer, and health services.

When: Monday-Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., by phone. Trained staff is available to take your calls. If calling after business hours, please leave a message and someone will get back to you.

Employment Discrimination

What: Our Employment Discrimination Legal Clinic provides a roadmap for women facing a diverse set of employment discrimination issues. An experienced attorney will answer your questions and provide an overview of employment law in New York.

When: The third Wednesday of every month at 6:00 pm. \$25 suggested donation. Please call to register.

Divorce and Separation Legal Clinic

What: Our Divorce and Separation Legal Clinic participants learn from an experienced matrimonial attorney, who provides an overview of divorce and separation law in New York and sets aside time for individual questions. This is a great place to get started, if you're not sure what to do. Women come away from the clinic with a general knowledge of divorce law, information on finding a lawyer, and a list of next steps to be taken.

When: The second Friday of every month at 1:15 p.m., and the third Monday of every month at 6:30 p.m. \$15 suggested donation. Please call 212.627.9895 to register.

Divorce & Finances

What: Our Divorce Financial Clinic helps women going through divorce to obtain sound financial guidance. A volunteer financial expert presents strategies for taking control of your finances when considering or going through a divorce.

When: Held three times a year, usually on the third Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. \$15 suggested donation. Please call to register. Next financial clinic is scheduled for July 20th.

For more information or to register for a clinic, please call 212.627.9895 or e-mail contact@nownyc.org.

**Wanted: A Few Good Women
Secure a Doorwoman Job**

Have you ever thought about securing a job in a NYC residential building? The Service Fund of NOW-NYC has launched a new campaign to get more women into jobs traditionally done by men. We are looking for candidates who are interested in doorwomen positions in New York City.

Secure a union-protected job with full medical and other benefits.

Call us at 212.627.9895 to find out how you or your friend can get started!

The doorperson profession in New York City is overwhelmingly male-dominated. However, the flexible hours, union affiliation, and job security make this a strong employment option for women who need jobs with less stringent educational and training requirements. The Service Fund of NOW-NYC seeks to open the door for women to break into this job market through research, education, outreach, and advocacy.

NOW-NYC & The Service Fund Programs and Events

All meetings are held at NOW-NYC unless otherwise noted. Please remember to RSVP.

Phone Banking for NOW-NYC

Tuesday, May 5th and June 2nd, 5:00-7:00 p.m.

Join us for a fun evening of activism!

Outreach NOW Team Training

Thursday, May 7th, 6:30 p.m.

Become an Outreach NOW volunteer. Learn about NOW-NYC and women's rights issues, and then help us to build our membership and educate our communities. You must register for the training.

Reproductive Rights Action Committee

Tuesday, May 12th, 6:30 p.m.

Join us! Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month. We're working to protect choice in New York State and expand women's reproductive autonomy. Please RSVP to contact@nownyc.org.

Queer Advocacy Project

Tuesday, May 12th, 6:30 p.m.

Join us! Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month. We're championing equality in schools, communities, and workplaces through advocacy and education. Please RSVP to Rebecca Rafelson at rebeccarafelson@gmail.com.

Divorce & Separation Legal Clinics

Friday, May 8th, 1:15 p.m. - Daytime Clinic

Monday, May 18th, 6:30 p.m. - Evening Clinic

You don't have to go through divorce alone; a family law attorney will answer your questions and provide information about divorce in New York. Clinics are held the second Friday (1:15 p.m.) and

the third Monday (6:30 p.m.) of every month unless otherwise noted. \$15 suggested donation. Please call to register.

Employment Discrimination Legal Clinic

Wednesday, May 20th, 6:00 p.m.

Are you being discriminated against at work? An employment lawyer will help you to determine what to do next. \$25 suggested donation. Clinic is held the third Wednesday of every month unless otherwise noted. Please call to register.

Membership Meeting and Monthly Program

Thursday, May 21st, 6:30 p.m.

Details to be announced. Check nownyc.org for updates.

Book Club

Wednesday, June 3rd, 6:30 p.m.

Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity by Judith Butler

Mark Your Calendars NOW for These Special Events:

Divorce Financial Clinic

Monday, July 20th, 7:00 p.m.

Get the guidance you need to help you take control of your finances during a divorce or separation and start planning for your new future. Held only three times per year. Sign-up now. \$15 suggested donation. Please call to register.

150 W. 28th St. @ 7th Ave. Suite 30A

Phone: 212.627.9895 or email contact@nownyc.org

www.nownyc.org

Trains: 1; R, W, or 6 to 28th St. | B, D, F, V; Q, N; A, C; 2, 3 to 34th St.

Save the Date!

NOW-NYC's Annual Women of Power and Influence Awards

Tuesday, June 16th, 6:00 p.m.

Join us in honoring outstanding women who are both leaders in their fields and passionate about advancing women. This year's distinguished awardees represent the fields of business, medicine, law, and art. Held at the Grand Hyatt at Grand Central. For more information visit www.nownyc.org. (See ad, page 1)



PRIDE: March With Us!

Sunday, June 28th, 12:00 p.m.

Get off the sidelines and into the action! Join NOW-NYC, our Queer Advocacy Project, women's rights activists, and a rocking marching band to celebrate PRIDE by marching in the famous annual NYC parade. The march is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Sign up to march with us today.

Your membership matters!

Become a member of NOW-NYC today and ensure that our numbers are strong and our voices powerful. By joining, you are helping to advance equality and improve women's lives.

www.nownyc.org - click "Join"! or call 212.627.9895.



Take Action

Ask the Candidates!

What is your biggest question for the next mayor?

Tell us what you want the next mayor to do for you and for New York City. E-mail askthecandidates@nownyc.org.

Watch NOW-NYC's calendar for our upcoming mayoral and district attorney forums, where you can decide which candidates really speak for women. Get the knowledge and info you need to cast your vote this fall!

Join our e-action alert list for info on upcoming events. Send your e-mail to contact@nownyc.org to sign up!

Attention NOW-NYC Members: Interim Elections for Open Board Positions

Meaghan Carey and Maureen Shaw, both long-time volunteers and current NOW-NYC board members at-large, are running to fill two open board seats. Meaghan Carey is running for VP of Development. Maureen Shaw is running for Director of Membership. The vote will take place at the May membership meeting to be held on Thursday, May 21st at 6:30 p.m. For more information please visit www.nownyc.org or call 212.627.9895.