

## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO: All Interested Parties**  
**FROM: The National Women's Law Center and  
Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.**  
**DATE: August 5, 2008**  
**RE: Poll Findings: Understanding What Women Want In 2008**

*From July 17 to 24, 2008, Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., conducted 1,308 interviews, including 1,001 women and 307 men. The gender-based samples were then weighted to their proper proportions in the overall population. The margin of error for this survey is  $\pm 2.8$  percentage points overall,  $\pm 3.2$  percentage points among women,  $\pm 5.7$  percentage points among men, and is larger among other subgroups.*

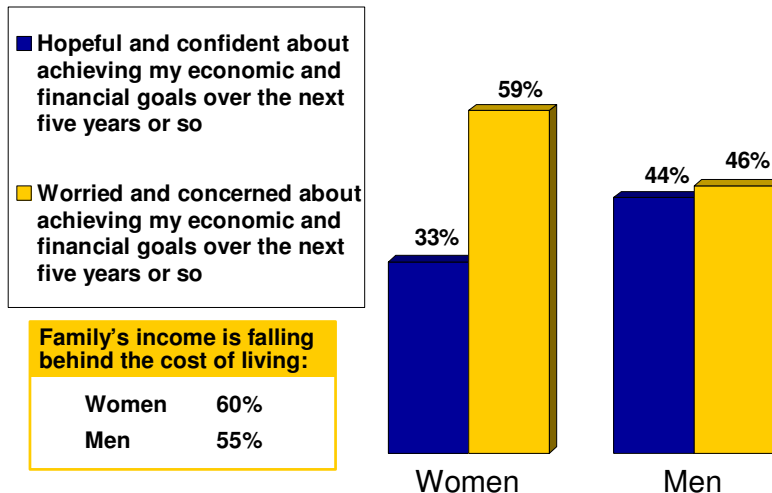
*The NWLC survey was designed to understand the key differences and similarities between women and men in terms of perceptions about the standing of women in our society and economy, opinions and expectations about economic conditions now and in the years ahead, and attitudes about the role of government today.*

### **The Current Landscape**

Women are significantly more pessimistic than are men in their attitudes about the current state of affairs in America—both on a societal level and in terms of trends in their own lives. In fact, nine in 10 (92%) women feel that the nation overall is experiencing challenging or difficult times and 60% characterize their current personal situation as challenging or difficult.

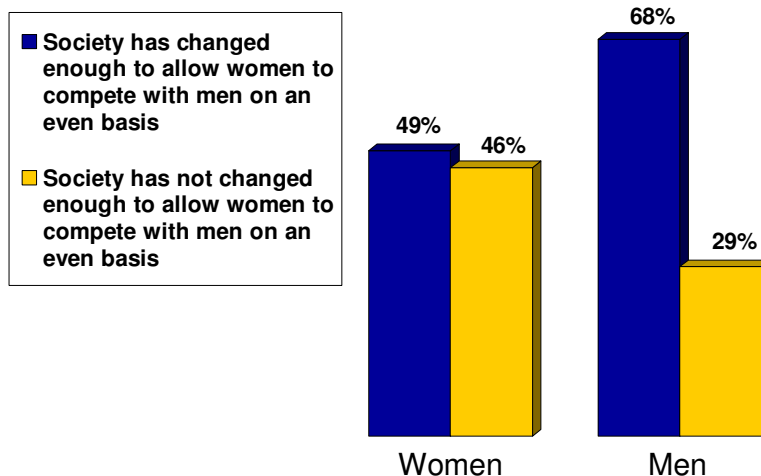
Women are more likely than are men to feel they are falling behind economically, and women are much more likely than are men to be worried and concerned about their economic prospects for the future. Three in five (59%) women, as compared with 46% of men, look ahead to the next five years and say they are more worried and concerned about being able to achieve their economic and financial goals than they are hopeful and confident. Certain to be fueling these concerns are declining incomes. Only 6% of women say that their income is growing faster than the cost of living. A majority (60%) says that their income is actually falling behind the cost of living, while one-third (33%) says their income is keeping pace with it. Lower-income women (75% falling behind), women with a high school degree or less education (68%), and African-American women (70%) feel particularly vulnerable.

## Looking Ahead: Voters Are Worried And Concerned



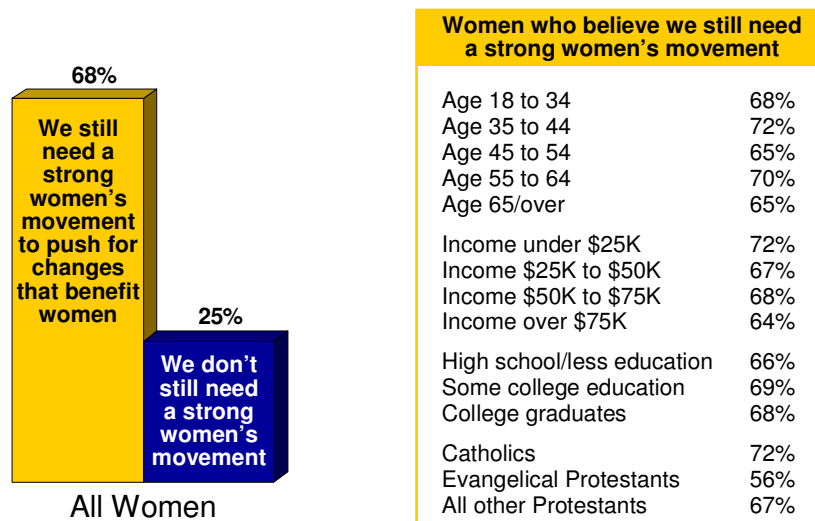
Women and men also have a substantially different view of the position of women in contemporary America. Men overwhelmingly believe that they compete with women on a level playing field, with 68% saying that society has changed enough to allow women to compete with men on an even basis and 29% saying that society has not achieved that point. Women, on the other hand, divide nearly evenly on this question, with about half saying that society has changed enough and 46% saying society still has work to do to level the playing field. Interestingly, among women there is little difference by generation, income level, or education attainment on this question.

## Level Playing Field



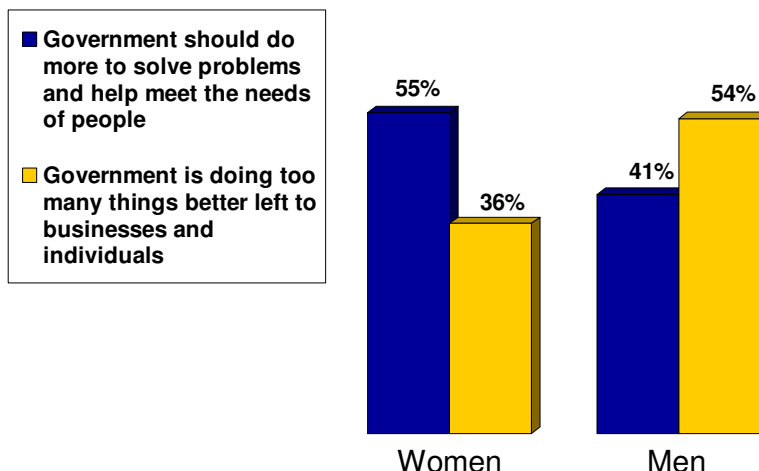
Women more than men believe that there is a continuing need for a strong women's movement. Nearly seven in 10 (68%) women believe our nation needs a strong women's movement to push for changes that benefit women. Just 49% of men share this view. On this measure women demonstrate little difference in level of support for a strong women's movement across generations, income levels, and educational attainment. Among women, the belief in the need for a strong women's movement is solid across most demographic subgroups, as 85% of Democrats, 62% of independents, 43% of Republicans, 56% of evangelical Christian women, and 72% of Catholic women express this belief.

## **Women Believe A Strong Women's Movement Is Still Needed**



At a time when women feel quite vulnerable in the current economic downturn, they are significantly more likely than are men to believe that government should take on greater responsibility and be more active in solving America's problems. More than half (55%) of women say that the government should be doing more to solve problems and help meet the needs of the people, while 36% of women say the government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to subscribe to the latter view, with 54% feeling the government is involved in too many things better left to businesses and individuals. Women also are more likely than are men to want a government that places a higher priority on investing more in maintaining and improving the quality of education, health care, and other government services as opposed to keeping taxes low and reducing government spending—44% say investing more in these services should be the higher priority and 32% of women say keeping taxes low and reducing government spending should be the higher priority.

## **Government Solving Problems**



As the following pages will illustrate, women have a great deal in common regarding their opinions on issues of economic security, equal pay, equal opportunities, health care, child care, and reproductive health. While women are certainly not a homogenous group, the results of this survey show that most women want a government that is committed to doing more to solve the social and economic problems of the American people—they want a government that advances policies and programs that will lead to greater economic security, fairness, and healthy, well-balanced families.

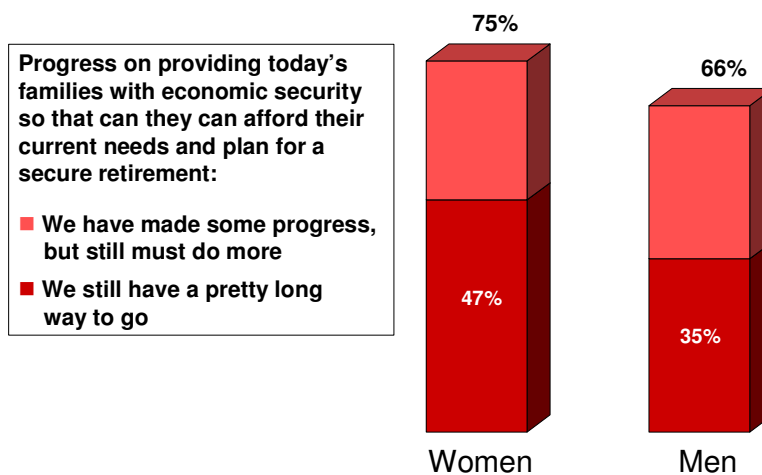
### **1 Economic Security**

While the entire country is struggling with the challenges associated with a declining economy, women—especially working-class women, women with lower levels of education, single mothers, and the elderly—are particularly vulnerable to these challenges. For too many women, economic security is beyond their reach. More than one-third of families headed by single-mothers live in poverty, and the proportion of families headed by single women of color living in poverty is even higher, at more than 40%. One in five single women over age 64 lives in poverty and approximately half of these single women over age 64 rely almost entirely on Social Security for their income. Nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage earners are women, and until recently the federal minimum wage had not increased in more than a decade, causing these working women to fall further and further behind.

This stark reality is not lost on women. At higher rates than their male counterparts on every measure, women strongly support increasing efforts on numerous fronts to attack poverty and provide families with greater economic security. This strong support is echoed across every major demographic subgroup and across the political spectrum.

Three in four (75%) women feel we still must do more or that we still have a long way to go when it comes to providing families with economic security so they can afford their current needs and plan for a secure retirement. This sentiment spans the income and political spectrum, with solid majorities of low-income women making less than \$25,000 annually (82%), women with incomes of more than \$75,000 (70%), Democrats (81%), independents (74%), and Republicans (62%) expressing this view.

## **Providing Families With Economic Security: Still A Long Way To Go**



Across the income and education spectrum women of all ages staunchly support specific policies aimed at reducing poverty and building a foundation for long-term economic security and independence for women. More than three in four women and a majority of men believe the following policies to be extremely or very important for the next Congress and administration to address:

- Develop a long-range comprehensive plan to cut poverty in half over the next 10 years, which would help women and children especially, as they make up a disproportionate share of those currently living below the poverty line (80% of women).
- Raise the minimum wage and ensure that it keeps up with inflation (79%).
  - Nearly half (46%) of women characterize this policy objective as *extremely* important.
  - Well over a majority of women in every major subgroup supports increasing the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation, including 91% of Democrats, 79% of independents, and 63% of Republican women who say this is an extremely or very important policy objective.

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- Invest in child support enforcement so more children receive support from both parents (82%).
- Improve retirement security for widows and other people who are economically at risk by increasing their Social Security benefits (76%).

Women also express strong support for progressive tax policies. More than two in three women and a majority of men say that the following policies are extremely or very important:

- Reform the tax code by allowing the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans to expire and close corporate tax loopholes (68%).
  - Greater than four in five (81%) Democrats, 65% of independents, and 50% of Republican women support this policy.
- Provide additional assistance to low-income workers and families by expanding the child tax credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit (66%).

## **2 Equal Pay And Equal Opportunities**

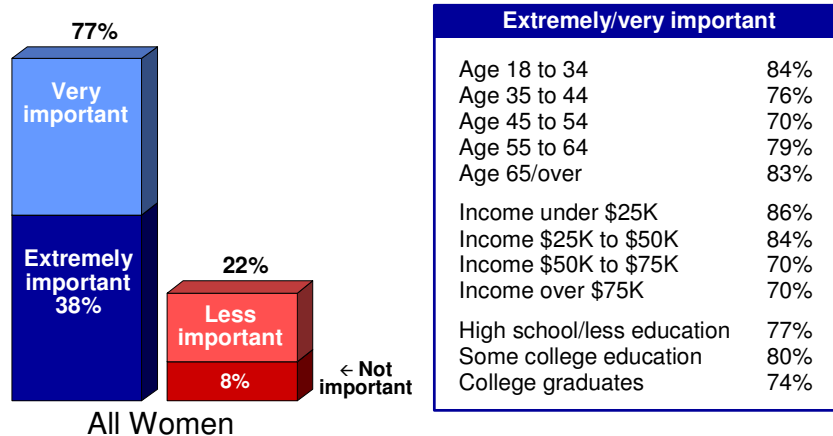
Working women face wage gaps and glass ceilings within nearly every sector of the American economy. On average, women working full time earn just 77 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts. Not surprisingly, only 8% of women feel our nation has come as far as it needs to in providing equal rights for women, including equal pay for equal work, and ending other discrimination in the workplace, while nearly two-thirds (64%) of women say we still must do more or that we still have a long way to go on this front. Just over half of men feel we still must do more or that we still have a long way to go in providing equal rights for women.

To this end, at substantially higher rates than men on every measure, women strongly support policies aimed at providing women with equal opportunities. Large majorities of greater than seven in 10 women say that the following policies are extremely or very important for Congress and the next administration to take up (a majority of men also strongly support these policies):

- Provide women with the legal protections they need to get equal pay (77%).
- Make sure there are effective safeguards against discrimination in the workplace, including protections from sexual harassment (72%).

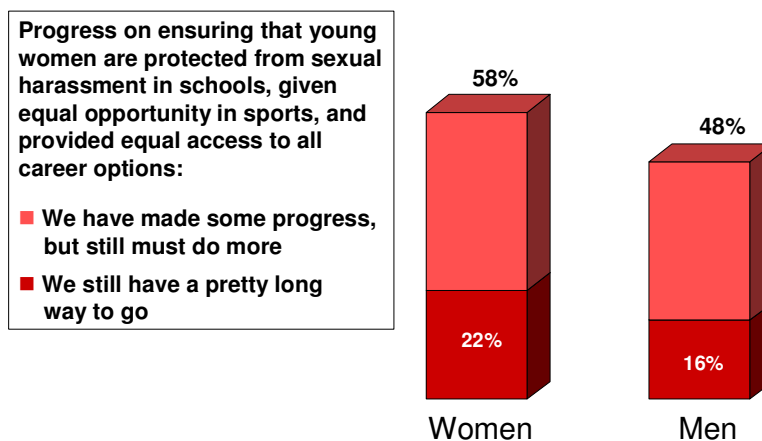
## Strong Support For Legal Protections Needed To Get Equal Pay

*How important is it that the next president and Congress address the issue of providing women with the legal protections they need to get equal pay?*



At higher rates than men, women also recognize that there is still work to be done to pave the way for the generations of young women to come. Three in five (58%) women believe that we still must do more or we still have a long way to go when it comes to ensuring that young women are protected from sexual harassment in schools, given equal opportunity in sports, and provided equal access to all career options (compared with 48% of men).

## Ensuring Women Have Equal Education Opportunities: Still A Long Way To Go



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To provide young people with equal opportunities and equal access, seven in 10 women consider the following to be extremely or very important policies for the next Congress and administration to consider:

- Fund and promote education and training programs that help put women and girls on a path to higher-paying jobs (77%).
- Develop and fund effective dropout prevention programs to help keep both girls and boys in high school through graduation (81%).
- Strengthen Title IX, the law that prohibits sex discrimination in education, to give girls better protection against sexual harassment, equal opportunity in sports, and equal access to all career options (69%).

### **3 Health Care**

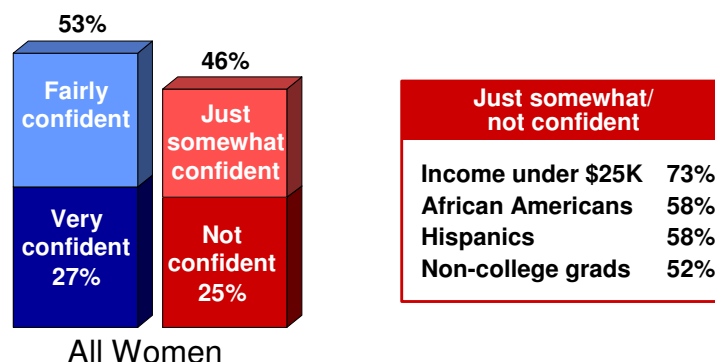
More than 17 million American women lack health insurance coverage—that's roughly 18% of all women. Women are significantly less likely than are men to have access to health insurance through their work, with only about half of women accessing it through work, compared with 62% of men. Only 4% of women say the nation's approach to health care works pretty well, and two-thirds (66%) support major changes or a complete overhaul of the system. Just 27% say only some changes are needed but it basically should be kept the same.

In light of this, women are more pessimistic than are men about their prospects for being able to afford health care in the years ahead. Looking forward, just 27% of women compared with 35% of men feel very confident that they will be able to afford health care costs, including the cost of health insurance premiums for themselves and their families in the next few years. A nearly equal proportion (25%) of women are not confident at all that they will be able to cover their health care costs in the years ahead. Low-income women, women of color, and women with lower education attainment are especially pessimistic about the likelihood that they will be able to afford health care in the future. A large majority (73%) of women making less than \$25,000 a year says they are just somewhat or not confident (with half saying they are not confident at all).



## Low Confidence In Being Able To Afford Health Care Costs

*How confident are you that you will be able to afford health care costs, including the cost of insurance premiums, for you and your family in the next few years?*



Providing greater health care security can go a long way to helping women feel more economic security, and women believe that we as a nation have a long way to go to accomplish this goal. More than half (56%) of women feel that we still have a long way to go when it comes to providing today's families guaranteed access to quality, affordable, comprehensive health care, and another 25% think we have made some progress but still must do more.

- To this end, 84% of women say it's extremely or very important for Congress and the next administration to guarantee access to quality, affordable, comprehensive health care, with a choice of public or private plans, which covers all necessary medical services (half of all women consider this to be an *extremely* important objective for policymakers).

## 4 Reproductive Health

Nearly half of all pregnancies are unintended. One in four young women from age 14 to 19 has a sexually transmitted infection. There is no abortion provider in 87% of all U.S. counties. When it comes to issues of reproductive health, half (49%) of all women feel that we still must do more or we still have a long way to go to protect the right to make personal and private reproductive health decisions by expanding the availability of contraception and family planning counseling and safeguarding the legal right to choose an abortion. Low-income women are more likely to feel that we still have progress to achieve on this front, with 53% of women with incomes below \$25,000 saying we still must do more or we still have a long way to go in this area. However, even among the two in five (41%) women who are more likely to be satisfied that the country has made progress in the area

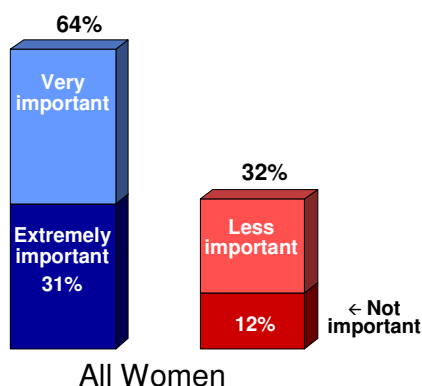
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of reproductive rights, the belief that these rights are secure is not strong, with these women being equally divided on whether they are concerned that the right could be weakened (41%) or are secure that it is a well-established right (44%).

Women and men alike support common-sense policy proposals aimed at reducing unintended pregnancies. By two to one (61% to 31%) women say we should place more emphasis on reducing unintended pregnancies by providing comprehensive sex education and increasing access to contraception and other family planning services, while still keeping abortion a safe and legal option for women, instead of putting more emphasis on promoting abstinence-only information and on restricting a women's access to abortion. Majority support for this approach exists across generations and along the education and income spectrum. Men also favor placing more emphasis on reducing unintended pregnancies by providing comprehensive sex education and increasing access to contraception while still keeping abortion a safe and legal option by nearly two to one (57% to 30%).

### Strong Support For Expanding Access To Contraceptives & Sex Education

*How important is it that the next president and Congress address the issue of helping prevent unintended pregnancies by expanding access to contraceptives and comprehensive sex education?*



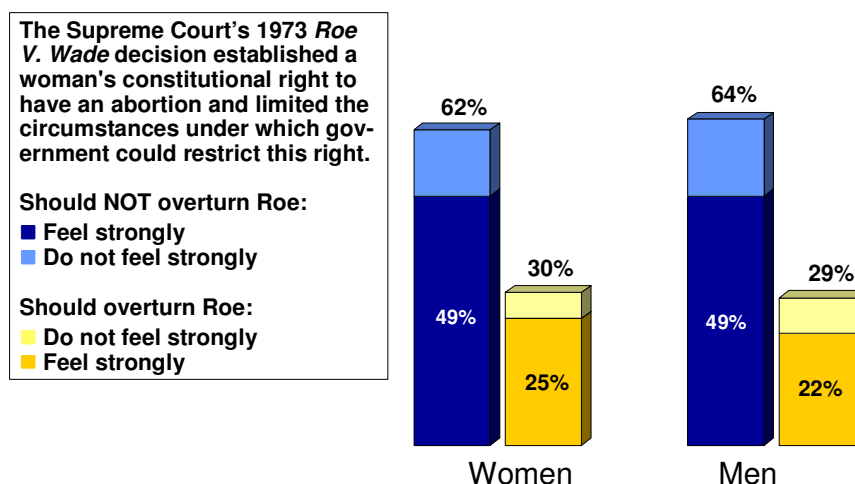
Furthermore, women feel this should be a top priority for government. Two-thirds (64%) of women say it is extremely or very important for Congress and the next administration to address policies that will help prevent unintended pregnancies by expanding access to contraceptives and comprehensive sex education.

Greater than three in five (62%) women feel that *Roe v. Wade* should not be overturned, with half (49%) of all women feeling this way strongly. Just one in four (25%) women feels strongly that it should be overturned and another 5% want to see *Roe* overturned, but they don't feel strongly about it. Men express similar views as women on this question of whether *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned.

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Regarding their position on the legality of abortion, half (50%) of women think that abortion should be legal and subject to varying degrees of regulation and another 15% think abortion should be legal only in extreme cases, but still want to see *Roe* upheld in the courts. Another 15% believe abortion should be legal in only the most extreme cases and want to see *Roe* overturned, and 12% think it should be illegal in all instances.

### Strong Support For Upholding Roe



When it comes to confirming judges, the stronger feelings are on the side of confirming judges who will uphold *Roe v. Wade*. Women favor confirming justices who will uphold *Roe v. Wade* over justices who will overturn the decision by 40% to 25% and men express similar views by a margin of 39% to 19%.

## 5 Child Care

Most women work outside of the home and many find it increasingly difficult to meet their work and family responsibilities. Child care is one of the top three expenses for families with preschool-age children, and for many families, high-quality child care is unaffordable or unavailable. While there is some assistance available, federal child care assistance is provided to only one in seven eligible children. Forty percent (40%) of workers have no job protection under the Family and Medical Leave Act if they need to take leave for the birth or adoption of a child or to take care of their own serious health condition or that of a family member. Across the income, education, and political spectrum, women of all ages believe we as a nation must do more to support women and men as responsible family members and workers. Seven in 10 (71%) women feel that we still must do more or we still have a long way to go when it comes to having laws and policies that reflect the changing realities of today's families so that it is possible to combine

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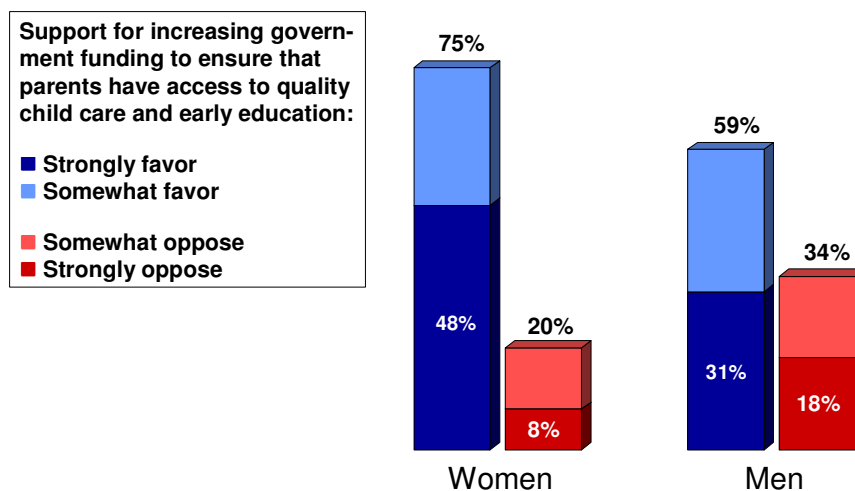
work and family better, including having more affordable child care and more flexible work arrangements.

While nearly two-thirds of men believe that we still have work to do on this front, and a majority of men also support these proposals, very large majorities of women strongly support policies that will help achieve these goals. More than 70% of women believe that it is extremely or very important for Congress and the next administration to address the following policies:

- Expand access to quality affordable child care and early education (76%).
- Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act to make all workers eligible (72%).

Three in four (75%) women also favor increasing government funding to ensure that parents have access to quality child care and early education, including half (49%) who say they *strongly* favor increased government funding for this purpose. Like other policy proposals explored in the survey, high levels of support for increased government funding in this area cut across every major demographic and political subgroup, with 85% of Democrats, 79% of independents, and 55% of Republican women favoring increasing funding in this area. Three in five men also favor increased government funding in this area.

### Strong Support For Increased Child Care Funding



## **Conclusion**

Women in America face enormous challenges. On a daily basis, millions of women struggle to achieve economic security and to secure health care, quality child care, and other critical resources for their children and their families. Women continue to fight for equal access to employment and educational opportunities and for equal pay for the work they contribute to our economy, however, many are concerned about the future and feel that they are falling behind. Women want the country to go forward and not backward when it comes to the reproductive rights and health of women. This survey shines a light on the gender gap in opinions and perspectives that exists across a broad spectrum of social and economic issues and illustrates what women want regarding the role for government and the priority they believe that government should place on addressing those critical issues.