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Generations



Why are women so angry?

By Peg DeMarco - Special to The News Herald

One of the comments I received in response to my column regarding the Women's January March in Washington (and around the world) was from a man who asked, "Why are women so angry these days?"

I've been tossing that question around in my head for a couple of weeks, trying to figure out how to respond. It's a tough question with no easy answer that will fit in a small column.

But lo and behold, a few days ago, I read an article in The Washington Post that added another snowflake, or more realistically an immense snowpack, to the avalanche of why women are so angry today. The article was titled, "Utah Republican argues against equal pay for women: It's 'bad for families' and society."

The Post quoted a letter published in two Utah local newspapers sent in by state Senator James Green that criticized a state bill addressing a pay gap in the workforce. Green wrote that men have traditionally earned more than women and, citing "simple economics," argued that things should stay that way.

Huh? Did I read that right?

Green went on to say that men make more than women because they're "the primary breadwinners" of their families, and paying women equally would somehow ruin the makeup of a traditional family where "the Mother" remains at home raising children. He added, "If businesses are forced to pay women the same as male earnings, that means they will have to reduce the pay for the men they employ, simple economics. If that happens, then men will have an even more difficult time earning enough to support their families, which will mean more Mothers will be forced to leave the home (where they may prefer to be) to join the workforce to make up the difference."

I was wondering how many mothers Green had interviewed before he decided that women would prefer to remain in the home, but read on.

Green said that having more women in the workforce would create competition for jobs, "even men's jobs," and that will, in turn, lower the pay for all jobs and force "more and more Mothers" into the workforce.

Green summarized his point of view with, “That’s bad for families and thus for all of society. It’s a vicious cycle that only gets worse the more equality of pay is forced upon us. It’s a situation of well-meaning intentions, but negative unintended consequences.”

Green’s letter to the editor immediately prompted such outrage that within two days, he had written an apology and resigned from his post as vice chair of the Wasatch County Republican Party.

That’s fine and good, but too late because a seed, even in distant Utah, had already been planted. Once again women cringed because they thought such asinine opinions had long been buried along with June Cleaver raising the Beaver.

The bill he was talking about would commission a study on whether there’s a pay gap between male and female workers in the state and would require certain employers to adopt uniform criteria that will be used to determine whether someone should get a raise based on performance. It would create a pay index that states the average pay range for each occupation based on years of experience.

The bill sounds reasonable to me, although I question the need for another study that no doubt will continue to show that women are still paid less than men for doing exactly, or most often more, of the same work.

Apparently, the Utah Women’s Coalition, which supports the bill, agreed and immediately took to social media with its criticism of Green’s comments and they did it simply with a Facebook post: “Are we really having this conversation in 2017?”

I guess we are, so let’s use statistics in Green’s home state to see where women stand in his state’s workforce. Women in Utah make 71 cents for every dollar paid to men for the same occupation, according to the National Women’s Law Center, which is lower than the national average of 80 cents for every dollar paid to men.

Black and Latina women in the state make 56 cents and 47 cents for every dollar paid to white men, respectively, according to the center and both numbers are below the national averages: 63 cents for black women and 54 cents for Latina women.

Green didn’t return a call from The Washington Post as I write this column, but he told a local radio station that he’s been in “hot water” since his letter was published. “You wouldn’t believe the hateful, vile comments and messages I’ve received.”

Senator Green, look at your own state’s statistics to figure out why.

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