



THE COST OF BEING A WOMAN

ECONOMIC SEXISM

CAPSULE ONE

SECTION 5

MARCH 2ND - MARCH 15TH 2026

OVERVIEW

Our fifth policy focus for our first capsule, The Cost of Being a Woman, centers on Economic Sexism. Since its establishment, NOW has worked to dismantle the structural economic disadvantages imposed on women, particularly through unequal pay, discriminatory pricing practices often referred to as the “pink tax,” and inequitable access to essential menstrual health products.

FOUNDATIONS

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, NOW tackled wage discrimination and employment inequities head-on. In 1966, NOW officers and members petitioned the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce its prohibition against sex discrimination in “Help Wanted” ads. In 1969, NOW attorney Sylvia Roberts argued the first sex discrimination case appealed under Title VII, *Weeks v. Southern Bell*, challenging restrictions that barred women from higher-paying positions. The Fifth Circuit ruled in favor of Lorena Weeks, setting an important precedent for pay equity and helping dismantle arbitrary employment barriers.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Throughout the following decades, NOW continued to prioritize equal pay as a cornerstone of economic justice. The organization advocated for strengthening the Equal Pay Act, supported litigation and public awareness campaigns highlighting wage disparities, and elevated national conversations around pay inequity. In the 2000s, NOW brought attention to the Ledbetter case and advocated for passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, reinforcing the principle that women deserve full and fair compensation for their work.
- Alongside wage equity, NOW has increasingly spotlighted the economic burden of the pink tax, the higher prices women often pay for comparable goods and services. From personal care products to everyday necessities, gender-based pricing disparities contribute to the cumulative financial penalty of being a woman. NOW supports policies promoting pricing transparency and consumer protections to eliminate these inequities at both state and federal levels.
- Closely connected to pink tax advocacy is NOW’s leadership on menstrual equity. Menstrual products are essential health items, yet historically have been taxed as luxury goods and remain inaccessible to many low-income women and girls. NOW supports legislation such as the Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2025, which seeks to remove discriminatory taxes on menstrual products, expand access in schools and public facilities, and ensure menstrual health is recognized as a matter of economic justice.



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LEGISLATION

From 2016 to the present, NOW has continued advancing these priorities. On Black Women's Equal Pay Day (August 3, 2021), NOW highlighted the disproportionate wage gap affecting Black women and urged passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act (S. 1115 / H.R. 17). In October 2023, NOW joined coalition efforts pressing Congress to pass stronger equal pay protections, emphasizing the compounded economic disparities faced by women of color. NOW continues to support and monitor key federal bills that address economic sexism in the areas of pay equity, discriminatory pricing, and menstrual access, including::

- Paycheck Fairness Act (S. 1115 / H.R. 17)
- Pink Tax Repeal Act (H.R. 3374)
- Menstrual Equity For All Act of 2025 (H.R. 3644)
- H.Con.Res.21 – Equal Pay Recognition Resolution

TODAY

In February 2026, Massachusetts NOW hosted the Period Power & People Power: Youth Organizing for Menstrual Equity Governor's Youth Summit, convening young advocates to mobilize around period access, product transparency, and broader economic justice issues. By investing in youth leadership and grassroots organizing, Massachusetts NOW demonstrates how national priorities are translated into meaningful local action.

Ensuring equitable pay, eliminating gender-based pricing discrimination, and securing menstrual equity remain central pillars of NOW's economic justice agenda. The organization advances these priorities through comprehensive federal advocacy while also empowering state and local chapters to drive change within their own communities. Chapters can bring this work to life by:

- Organizing pay transparency workshops and wage equity advocacy trainings
- Supporting local efforts to eliminate pink tax practices
- Hosting educational sessions and supply drives focused on menstrual equity
- Advocating at local, state, and federal levels for fair pay and menstrual access protections

Through sustained policy advocacy and grassroots mobilization, NOW continues to confront the systemic costs imposed on women and fight for an economy in which women's labor, health needs, and purchasing power are treated with fairness and dignity.