

WASHINGTON, DC (April 20, 2010) – Rep. Jan Schakowsky (IL-9) released the following statement on the 47th anniversary of the signing of the Equal Pay Act, also known as Pay Equity Day 2010.

“Today I stand with the women of this country in recognizing Pay Equity Day and to highlight that on this 47th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act’s signing, equal pay for equal work has still not been fully realized. As a longtime defender of women’s and girls’ rights and as Democratic Co-Chair of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues, I am committed to seeing equal pay through to reality.

“A significant wage gap persists in America between men and women who do the very same work. According to the National Women’s Law Center and 2007 data from the Census Bureau, women earn an average of 78 cents for every dollar earned by men. That’s up from when the Equal Pay Act was first enacted and women earned 59 cents on the dollar paid to men, but it still falls far short of wage equality.

“Moreover, today’s average of 78 cents per dollar earned by men doesn’t apply to all women in this country. In fact, women in Illinois earn less on average: 73 cents for every dollar earned by men. And the wage disparity is even more pronounced for the country’s minority women when compared to white males: African American women earned 62 cents for every dollar earned by white males and Hispanic women earned 53 cents per dollar.

“Equal pay is not just about the fundamental importance of ensuring gender equity; it is about protecting the livelihood of hardworking women who are struggling to provide for their families in a very difficult economic environment. Unemployment rates are painfully high for both men and women right now, but women may have less in savings due to their lower earnings – a disadvantage that may put them and their children at greater risk when a woman loses her job. And the Institute for Women’s Policy Research has found that women who lose their jobs are less likely to get unemployment insurance benefits. Such instability for our sisters, mothers and daughters is simply not acceptable. We need to see pay equity for women through to fruition.

“In January 2009, the President signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act into law, which restored the right of women and other workers to challenge unfair pay in court, but we still need better protections for our country’s female wage earners. I urge the Senate to follow the House’s lead and pass the Paycheck Fairness Act, sponsored in the House by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (CT-3), and strengthen the equity protections for women by closing loopholes and setting stiffer penalties for employers who discriminate based on gender.”