

Lawmakers Call on Wal-Mart to Boost Wages for Female Workers

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Five congressional lawmakers on Tuesday called for a Mothers' Day boycott of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., charging the retailer shortchanges salaries, benefits and promotions for female workers.

"When it comes to the treatment of its women employees, Wal-Mart's low prices come at a cost," Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., said at a Capitol Hill news conference also attended by an organized labor official and a former Miss America.

Standing before an 8-foot, yellow Mother's Day card reading "Love mom, not Wal-Mart," the lawmakers helped launch a campaign asking Americans to boycott Wal-Mart for their Mother's Day purchases.

They said they planned to mail the card to Wal-Mart chief executive officer Lee Scott.

"My children and grandchildren won't be shopping for gifts for me at Wal-Mart," said Rep. Jan **Schakowsky**, D-Ill.

Because Wal-Mart's wages are so low, its workers qualify for public assistance and are being subsidized by the American taxpayer, Schakowsky charged.

Other lawmakers who criticized Wal-Mart at the event were California Democrats George Miller, Linda Sanchez, and Hilda Solis.

A Wal-Mart official responded the criticism is unfounded.

"Wal-Mart does not tolerate discrimination of any kind," spokesman Dan Fogleman said.

"There are hundreds of thousands of women who have wonderful stories to tell about our company and what it has meant to them in terms of their career," he said. "Isolated complaints that may arise from more than 3,000 stores doesn't change that fact."

More than 40 percent of Wal-Mart's managers are women, Fogleman noted.

A class-action, gender-discrimination lawsuit pending against Wal-Mart charges the Bentonville-based retail giant discriminates against women in promotions and wages.

The case was filed in San Francisco in June 2001 on behalf of about 1.6 million current and former female employees who have worked at Wal-Mart since December 1998.

"Wal-Mart is the nation's largest employer of women," said Linda Chavez-Thompson, executive director of the AFL-CIO. "But unfortunately they are being treated without dignity and respect."

About 700,000 women work at Wal-Mart, the lawmakers noted.

"A lot of times these women don't have a voice," said former Miss America Carolyn Sapp, who launched www.walmartversuswomen.com. "They love this company, but they don't like how they are treated."

DeLauro and Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., introduced legislation Tuesday to fix the pay gap between men and women by creating a training program to help women strengthen their negotiation skills and require the Labor Department to boost outreach and training to employers.