

No excuse not to have pay equity ^[1]

Author: Muzychka, M.

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EXCERPTS

Trust me — on pay equity, 'never' is not good for us

The New Yorker magazine has a great cartoon that is so evergreen, not just for time, but also for issues, that it deserves to be No. 1 on any list, or at least in the top five.

Robert Mankoff's famous cartoon shows a man looking at a calendar in on a desk and speaking into a phone. "No, Thursday's out. How about never — is never good for you?"

The cartoon sums up how I feel about pay equity in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I was in my last year of high school when I learned about equal pay and pay equity. In a couple of years, I'll be reaching the 45th anniversary of that happening, so that tells you just how long that issue has been on my mind.

Yes, I feel like women in this province are constantly being told that "never" is what we have to accept, despite multiple court cases and other Canadian jurisdictions taking action to redress economic discrimination against female workers.

Pay equity is one of the last barriers to economic equality still standing. Maternity leave was hard fought for and we eventually got it, even though it was frequently used as an expendable bargaining chip.

Even the domestic minimum wage finally fell by the wayside in 1989. I was talking about this with a colleague and they had no idea it had actually been legal to pay women half the minimum wage for domestic work. It might have taken longer except for the threat of a Charter of Rights case being brought forward a year after the Charter (and its Section 15) was finalized in 1988.

I get that things take time. Lobbying on the domestic minimum wage had been a focus of the 1970s and early 1980s.

Gaining equal representation in appointments to government agencies, boards and commissions is still a challenge despite a policy that says women and men are to be appointed in equal numbers to reach a minimum of 40 per cent.

My first foray into legalizing midwifery was in 1991. It's now 2022, and we still don't have midwives integrated into the primary care health system.

But back to pay equity. We have a provincial committee in place to manage the process. For a while, the committee met: four times apparently in 2018 and once in June 2018. The next meeting didn't happen until March 21, 2022.

I know there was a lot on the go – hello there, global pandemic! – but it does say a lot about the government's priorities that an important issue like this one was parked on the back burner.

If we are the only Atlantic province – and one of four in all of Canada – without pay equity legislation, there really is no excuse.

Excuses? We've had them by the barrelful. The latest data shows the gap for Canadian women is 89 cents while the gap for women in Newfoundland and Labrador is 66 cents for every dollar men earn. That translates into less power in the marketplace for food, shelter, transportation, and other necessities of life.

It carries over into retirement, assuming they have had a pension to which they could contribute. Many pensions pay out based on your best five years of earnings. If you have been hoping pay equity legislation was coming to boost your pensionable income, don't hold your breath. The Canadian Women's Foundation estimates the gendered gap for pensions is 80 per cent of what men have.

The result means fewer choices. It means women continue to see their work and accompanying knowledge and expertise devalued. Not only that, within the group of women we also see significant disparities – almost 60 per cent – between wages earned by Black, Indigenous and women of colour, women with disabilities and non-gendered individuals.

The Women and Gender Equality minister has said pay equity legislation is a priority, but at the same time has offered no date for the introduction of the new legislation.

These days, I also feel like women are the Charlie Brown to the government's Lucy.

It's time to stop swiping the football and actually give us something to kick at.

Region: Newfoundland ^[3]

Tags: gender equity ^[4]

wages ^[5]

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