



How The Gig Economy Might Just Advance Women's Job Rights

Insights

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Earlier this year, Arizona Congresswoman Martha McSally, announced the formation of a new working group, comprised of Ms. McSally and several of her Republican colleagues, called the "Working Group on Women in the 21st Century Workforce." By way of background, McSally spent 26 years in the U.S. Air Force before being elected to Congress. While in the Air Force, McSally was the first woman to fly in combat, as well as the first to command a fighter squad in combat.

The stated goal of McSally's Workgroup is to "identify solutions for expanding opportunity and improving outcomes for women." Recognizing that working women have made great strides over the years, the Working Group is also aware that they still face many unique challenges and struggles not faced (or at least not to the same degree) by their male counterparts. Even in 2016, many years after passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, women continue to earn less than men – as much as 21% less, according to a recent comparison of median salaries.

Some of this discrepancy is undoubtedly due to the fact that women still often choose lower-paying career fields than their male counterparts (*i.e.* teaching or nursing as compared to law or medicine). Women also tend to leave the workforce for substantial periods of time to raise children or care for aging parents more frequently than men. Other challenges facing working women include childcare costs and even blatant discrimination. Statistics also show that approximately four in ten American families have women as the sole breadwinner.

This discrepancy in median salaries, when multiplied over an entire career, means that a woman may earn as much as \$430,000 less than a man over her entire career. Naturally, this would be expected to have a seriously detrimental impact on a woman's ability to support herself and her family over her lifetime and into retirement. The National Institute on Retirement Security reports that women are 80% more likely to be impoverished at age 65 or older – a figure that increases with age. All of these statistics should be very alarming to working women in America.

McSally's Working Group plans to crisscross the country engaging in a series of "listening sessions" – meeting with various relevant organizations, think tanks, and scholars with any eye toward identifying solutions to the unique issues facing working women and developing ways to expand opportunity and improve outcomes for women in the American workforce. One concept McSally and her group may find especially plausible is the role that the gig economy can have in women's lives. The 21st century economy includes ever-expanding but non-traditional job opportunities, such as being Airbnb hosts, Uber or Lyft drivers, and other similar ventures. This new economy allows

being Airbnb hosts, Uber or Lyft drivers, and other similar ventures. This new economy allows women (and men) to become self-employed entrepreneurs with limited capital investment and unlimited potential for profit.

Following the recent elections, which resulted in Republican majorities in both the House and Senate, one can reasonably expect McSally's Working Group to garner more support from her colleagues in the coming year and beyond. Hopefully, the gig economy will be a part of the discussion.