

Obama to Act to Reveal More About Pay Differences at Federal Contractors

Actions Part of Broader Campaign to Highlight Gender-Related Pay Disparities

By

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President [Barack Obama](#) will undertake two actions Tuesday aimed at revealing more information about possible pay differences between men and women at federal contractors. The actions are part of a broader campaign by Democrats to highlight gender pay disparities and shore up support for the party's candidates among women voters.

Mr. Obama will sign an executive order that prohibits federal contractors from retaliating against workers for discussing their pay with each other, according to a White House official, who said pay secrecy remains a central challenge to enforcing equal-pay laws. If women don't know they are being underpaid relative to their male counterparts, they can't take steps to challenge the gaps, the official said.

Mr. Obama also will direct the Labor Department to establish regulations requiring federal contractors to give it summary data about their employees' pay based on gender and race, the White House official said. The data will allow the agency to conduct more targeted enforcement, the official said, suggesting that the enforcement may come by using the data to encourage employers to comply voluntarily with equal-pay laws.

A White House official said both actions by Mr. Obama, aimed at making pay data more transparent, would strengthen enforcement of equal-pay laws. Mr. Obama's narrow focus on federal contractors underscores his limitations in raising wages for the broader workforce. A Democratic bill he has backed which would boost the federal minimum wage and help improve pay for women requires greater support in Congress.

The president's executive order could backfire on women, said Carrie Lukas, managing director of the Independent Women's Forum, which advocates free-market policies. The order will likely put "a lot of companies on edge" and discourage them from compensating women in other ways, such as by allowing them to work from home on certain days, she said.

The Senate is set this week to consider the Paycheck Fairness Act, a Democratic bill that would update the Equal Pay Act of 1963 by strengthening remedies for plaintiffs. It would generally forbid employers from punishing workers for sharing salary information with each other and require employers to show that pay disparity is related to job performance, not gender.

The Senate is expected to hold a procedural vote on the bill Wednesday, said a senior Democratic aide. It is unlikely to advance, because Democrats aren't expected to get the 60 votes they need.

Kirsten Kukowski, a spokeswoman for the Republican National Committee, said workplace discrimination persists but called the Paycheck Fairness Act "a desperate political ploy" by Democrats that doesn't advance fairness for women. Instead, it "cuts flexibility in the workplace for working moms and ends merit pay that rewards good work," she said.

Ms. Kukowski said all Republicans support equal pay for equal work, but "we need real solutions that focus on job creation and opportunity for women."

Despite the Equal Pay Act, which requires that men and women in the same workplace be paid the same for equal work, women on average are paid 77 cents for every dollar men are paid, the White House says, an improvement from 59 cents in 1963 but still a rate that trails men's pay.

The White House came under fire Monday for its own pay disparity after the American Enterprise Institute published an analysis of White House salaries that found women making about 12% less than men.

Mr. Obama's chief spokesman, [Jay Carney](#), said men and women in equal roles make the same amount. As an example, he said Mr. Obama's deputy chief of staff for policy, who is a man, makes the same \$172,000 a year as the outgoing deputy chief of staff for operations, who is a woman. Democrats see women voters as a firewall to protect against GOP gains in the fall elections, and Mr. Obama's executive orders will likely be featured on the campaign trail.

One feature of the Republican gains in 2010, when the party won 63 House and six Senate seats, was that the GOP carried women voters, 49% to 48%. That contrasts with the large margins that Mr. Obama rolled up among women voters in his own elections in 2008 and in 2012, when he carried women voters by 11 percentage points.

Democrats have also said their push to increase the minimum wage for tipped and non-tipped workers will help close the gender pay gap, but that bill also lacks support to pass. Republicans say a higher minimum wage hurts the workers that Democrats intend to help, because it would raise costs for employers and prompt them to scale back hiring.

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