

The Gadsden Times

Equal pay commission sought again

By [Dana Beverle](#)

Times Montgomery Bureau

Published: Tuesday, September 28, 2010 at 9:10 p.m.

MONTGOMERY — Alabama Arise Citizens Policy Project and the Alabama chapter of American Association of University Women will try again for an equal pay commission in the 2011 legislative session.

Alabama Arise at its annual meeting approved seeking the creation of an equal pay commission for women and minorities, Alabama Arise state Director Kimble Forrister said Tuesday.

“This was a high vote-getter this year,” Forrister said. “It resonates with a lot of people just for the simple fairness of equal pay for equal work. I think it is a more critical issue in the economic downturn as a lot of people are relying on one income in the family now.”

Alabama AAUW President Jo Ann Cummings of Decatur said equal pay for women and minorities is a national AAUW effort.

“Nationally, you’ll hear that women make 22 percent less on average for full-time work,” Cummings said. “In Alabama, that is 28 percent, and it’s worse for minorities.”

Alabama Arise said the median pay for Alabama men in 2007 was \$40,500 while the median was \$29,300 for women. Alabama Arise said African-American women earn 55 percent of a white male’s median pay while Hispanic women earn 57 percent.

It could be worse for 2009, according to new wage information released by Alabama Arise. Median household income fell 3.5 percent to \$40,489 last year because of the recession, almost \$10,000 below the national average, Forrister said, citing U.S. Census figures released Tuesday.

At least half the work force is female.

“Women are either discriminated against or undervalued for the work they do, and since a lot of single mothers are running households, it’s real tough to support a family,” Cummings said.

While Cummings and Smith do not speak for business, they acknowledge opponents argue that government shouldn’t interfere in private enterprise and employers cannot afford higher pay in “these economic times.”

State Rep. Laura Hall, D-Huntsville, and Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, sponsored resolutions last year creating an equal pay commission, but only three of nine members were appointed in 2009.

“I saw the governor was looking for volunteers and I signed up for it and got appointed to the commission,” Cummings said.

The 2009 commission’s authority lapsed and Figures and Hall tried again in the 2010 legislative session, but resolutions didn’t make it through both houses.

“We believe in being active,” Cummings said in a telephone interview. “We started supporting it in 2005 and it never got passed until 2009.”

Alabama Arise said an equal pay commission among other issues is a priority for the new Legislature that will meet in regular session beginning March 1. “We’re personally lobbying everyone,” Cummings said.

“We need a bill submitted to the Legislature to establish a more permanent commission, so that the commission cannot be dissolved until its work is completed,” Cummings and Janet Smith, president of the AAUW Montgomery branch said in a recent “Arise Report.”

Cummings said whoever is elected governor in November will be asked to support the commission bill.

California First Lady Maria Shriver wrote about women in the Shriver Report for 2009. It’s on the Web at www.shriverreport.com/awn.

The Census Bureau’s economic report, “The American Community Survey,” is online at www.census.gov.