

## **Miss Utah's Question is Worth Answering Re: Unequal Pay Between Genders**

Article By:

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Marissa Powell's comments on the pay gap at the June 16 Miss USA competition have gotten a lot of attention in the news – but for all the wrong reasons.

Gossip sites and even respectable media sources have homed in on her grammatically shaky response, but let's not duck the question; it is well worth answering again and again.



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As judge NeNe Leakes acknowledged and as I've noted myself [many times](#) in this blog, there is a persistent wage gap in this country, despite the fact that women play an increasingly crucial economic role in America's families. Leakes asked what the pay gap says about society, and I think it's an important question. The fact that the pay gap has decreased over the past 50 years shows that our society is open to change – but the fact that it exists at all shows that change is slow and requires constant support.

Workers can take some responsibility by educating themselves about typical pay scales within their industries and the laws that apply to pay equality, particularly [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) and the [Equal Pay Act](#), which was passed 50 years ago this month.

They should also know the federal agencies that are available to assist with education and

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enforcement, including the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) as well as the Labor Department's [Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs](#), which I lead, and its [Women's Bureau](#). We are constantly updating the department's [equal pay website](#) to ensure that women have the tools and resources they need to level the playing field.

While Ms. Powell's shaky response reflected the stress of responding to an unexpected question in a public forum, her [clarification](#) the next day got right to the heart of the issue: "This is not OK. It needs to be equal pay for equal work; and it's hard enough already to earn a living, and it shouldn't be harder just because you're a woman."

With her response Sunday night, Ms. Powell inadvertently drew more attention to this important question than she could have with a straight answer. That's one small flub for a woman, one giant meme for womankind. And it's a conversation we can all benefit from. After all, the pay gap costs individual women [thousands of dollars in lost pay every year](#) – and [hundreds of thousands](#) across their working lifetimes.

Closing the pay gap has deeply personal repercussions for women around the nation, but it has even greater resonance for society at large. Equality has long been one of cornerstones of our national culture, and its benefits are widespread.

As the president said on the [50th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act](#), closing the pay gap is "part of a broader agenda to create good jobs and to strengthen middle-class security, to keep rebuilding an economy that works for everybody, that gives every American the chance to get ahead, no matter who you are or what you look like, or what your last name is and who you love."

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