

Greetings to the House Committee on Business and Labor,

This is my personal story from 25 years of work in the high tech world, where women are under-represented at engineering and managerial levels. I do think that the state has a role to play in nudging companies to pay women fairly for work performed because statistically women live longer, earn and save less and more women (than men) with children end up needing state or federal assistance.

My name is Barbara Miner. I have a Ph.D. in Chemistry and have worked as an engineer and engineering manager in two male-dominated high tech firms for 25 years, the last 15 years (1998 to 2013) in Oregon. I had a successful career and made a good living, but I truly thought that things would be more equal by now. In my opinion, only the strongest women persisted and they were rewarded similarly to 2nd tier men.

Over my career, the sexism that I observed was not overt (there were no “no girls allowed” signs), but it was clearly felt. I once filed an official complaint with a vice president based on persistent lack of promoting ANY female engineer. Anger, yelling, dominance by personal power -- which is experienced differently by men than women -- was accepted at all levels.

In my **15 years** working in Oregon, all managers in my direct chain of command – from direct manager to CEO – were male. The system is described as meritocracy – those that perform better make more money. Managers have a large amount of discretion in determining pay raises and bonuses, which separate successful employees doing similar jobs by tens of thousands of dollars. Managers make judgments according to their values; most reward employees who are most like themselves.

One manager, after I demonstrated a 28% increase in lab productivity, wrote on my review that I lacked “a killer instinct”. Since my job was to provide problem-solving data to engineering teams, I viewed collaboration as a more valuable instinct and acted accordingly. (This same manager repeatedly introduced me as “my girl engineer.”) When Mary (a good friend) and “John” were competing for a promotion, the manager told Mary that “John needed it more because his wife just had a baby.” My manager told me once that “it was better for my marriage if my husband made more money than me”. He had some control over both of our pay scales. When I was awarded special stock options after a particularly successful year, he told me directly “don’t tell your husband”.

Employee’s performance sometimes cannot be exactly compared. Statistics are more valuable than anecdotes. I tell my story because it is supported by many credible studies of the disparities between how men and women are compensated.

I received two very large pay increases, one at each company I worked for that was a result of an HR survey of gender pay disparities.

Barbara Miner