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State wage gap

Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau place Nevada among the five states with the lowest wage gap between male and female workers. Women in Nevada earn 82 cents for every \$1 men earn, which puts us behind only California (84.8 cents), Vermont (83.8) and Maryland (82.4). The national figure is 76.2 cents.

Some observers attributed the numbers to Nevada's heavily unionized service industry sector. Others said a more competitive and vibrant economy influenced the state's showing.

But while the Census Bureau report is certainly good news for Nevada, it's worth noting that the numbers don't tell the whole story.

When you control for factors such as educational background, time in the work force and profession, the so-called wage gap narrows dramatically.

“When women behave in the workplace as men do, the wage gap between them is small,” notes a study by the National Center for Policy Analysis, a Washington-D.C. think tank. June O’Neill, former director of the Congressional Budget Office, found that among people ages 27 to 33 who have never had a child, women’s earnings approach 98 percent of men’s.

“Women who hold positions and have skills and experience similar to those of men face wage

disparities of less than 10 percent, and many are within a couple of points. Claims of unequal pay almost always involve comparing apples and oranges.”

In addition, as more and more women have entered the workforce over the past 20 years, and have selected professions traditionally dominated by men, any gap has been narrowing significantly.

The most important question does not revolve around raw Census data, but whether men and women in comparable jobs with comparable backgrounds and comparable levels of responsibility earn comparable salaries. And in most cases they do.

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