

The Washington Times

April 10, 2006

Penalizing women

By Greg Pierce

First, there was the No Child Left Behind Act to overhaul federal education law. Now comes "Leaving Women Behind: Modern Families, Outdated Laws," a new book that says many government programs "penalize working wives, single mothers and widows."

Kimberley A. Strassel, one of the book's three co-authors, spoke Friday to about 40 women at the monthly Conservative Women's Network luncheon at the Heritage Foundation. She cited

as an example federal labor laws that bar employers from offering workers the option of taking compensatory time off rather than overtime pay for working more than 40 hours in a week.

Although federal workers were given that flexibility as far back as 1978, an attempt in 1997 by then-Sen. John Ashcroft, Missouri Republican, to extend it to the private sector failed in the face of union opposition.

The Fair Labor Standards Act

of 1938, commonly referred to as the wage-and-hour law, was designed to curb abuses of the era, but "it has become abusive itself," said Mrs. Strassel, an editorial writer for the Wall Street Journal.

Similarly, tax laws that encourage businesses to provide benefits in lieu of higher wages hurt women, she contends, because part-timers - mostly women - usually don't get benefits. "The deck is pretty much stacked against women who are part-time workers," she said.