

# 'Every Issue Is a Women's Issue'

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THE NEW SCHOOL  
Center for  
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Affairs

**'Every Issue Is a Women's Issue':**  
*We talk politics and policy with Na'ilah Amaru, Vice-President of Women Creating Change.*

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**Urban Matters:** Kamala Harris's presidential nomination has clearly energized women voters. And reproductive choice will certainly be a top issue between now and November. Is that sufficient to encourage the engagement in civic affairs and politics **Women Creating Change** pushes for (and that the Center for New York City Affairs has worked with you on **this year and last**)? What else should this fall's national campaigns focus on?

**Na'ilah Amaru:** Vice-President Harris's nomination is a critical milestone in gender representation at the highest levels of civic life, and the focus in this election on reproductive rights can be a powerful encouragement for more women to engage in civic affairs. Combined, that presents a unique opportunity to galvanize women and promote greater gender equity in civic life.

But reproductive justice is only one of many key issues impacting women. Addressing economic inequality, such as the gender pay gap and ensuring equal pay for equal work, is crucial. Women, especially women of color, earn less than their male counterparts, impacting their financial stability, career progression, and retirement. Policies promoting pay transparency, enforcing equal pay laws, and supporting women's career advancement can significantly improve economic outcomes for women, and any national campaign would be wise to prioritize this issue.

UM: Let's turn to New York State, where an [equal rights amendment](#) to the State Constitution will be on the ballot this November. Does WCC have a position on it? What else should State leaders be doing to ensure gender equity and a bigger role for women in civic life?

Amaru: WCC supports passage of the New York ERA. Beyond that, New York State leaders should focus on several key issues.

First, State leaders should implement comprehensive pay equity legislation, ensuring that women receive equal pay for equal work. This includes promoting pay transparency and stringent enforcement of existing equal pay laws. Also, addressing issues like gender-based violence and harassment through stronger legal protections and support services will create safer environments for women to thrive in both professional and civic spheres, and help build a more equitable and inclusive society for all women in New York City and throughout the state.

UM: New York City's 2025 election season is also already getting into gear. Name three gender equity issues WCC would like New York City candidates to focus on.

Amaru: While every issue is a 'women's issue,' we believe that mayoral candidates should specifically address the following issues.

First, the City must implement and enforce policies to close the gender wage gap and ensure pay transparency. This includes initiatives like salary transparency and promoting pay equity audits. These measures can help women achieve financial stability and advance in their careers. When women thrive economically, the entire city benefits.

Improving health care access and reproductive rights is also key. The City must ensure equitable health care access for women, including reproductive health services. This involves expanding funding for women's health clinics, safeguarding access to contraception and abortion services, and providing affordable health care options addressing the specific needs of women. The City should also engage in educational campaigns to inform women about their health care rights and available services.

Finally, strengthening legal protections against gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace and public spaces is crucial. This involves improving reporting mechanisms to make it easier for survivors to come forward, offering better support services such as counseling and legal aid, and implementing educational programs to prevent violence and promote a culture of respect and safety for all women.

**UM:** In a nutshell, how does economic inequality reduce women's civic participation – and how does reduced civic participation impede economic equity?

**Amaru:** Economic inequality significantly reduces women's financial resources and time, essential for engaging in civic activities. It makes it harder to afford costs like transportation, childcare, and campaign contributions. Also, economic inequality forces women to work multiple jobs or longer hours, reducing the time available for community involvement, attending meetings, or running for office. Overall, economic inequality creates barriers that perpetuate underrepresentation and diminish women's influence on policies affecting their lives.

Conversely, reduced civic participation also limits women's influence on policy decisions. Their specific needs and perspectives are less likely to be addressed in legislation or budgets. This can result in insufficient support for equal pay, affordable childcare, health care access, and family leave, all crucial for women's economic stability and advancement. Reduced civic participation also means fewer women in leadership roles advocating for systemic changes that promote gender equity.

**UM:** Final question: Back in 2016, you made history by delivering a presidential **nominating speech** for Hillary Clinton at the Democratic National Convention. Has anything changed for women in government since then; have things moved forward, gone into reverse, or are they just stuck in neutral?

**Amaru:** Political representation matters, and from my experience as a grassroots organizer, Capitol Hill staffer, and public interest lobbyist, when women are elected or serve in key administrative positions, it makes a difference in budget and legislative priorities.

There is no doubt that women have experienced progress when it comes to political representation. But the story is not straightforward. Yes, more women are being elected to political offices at all levels, breaking historical barriers and setting precedents.

However, this progress is uneven. Gender biases and systemic barriers persist, making it difficult for many women, particularly women of color, LGBTQIA+ women, and women with disabilities, to enter and succeed in political spheres. Also, while some geographic regions show significant advances, others remain stagnant or have regressed.

Essentially, the role of women in government has generally moved forward, but this progress is not uniform and accompanied by ongoing challenges. We must safeguard the progress we've made thus far, and recommit to address ongoing barriers, and promote gender equity.

*Na'ilah Amaru is vice-president of policy, advocacy, and government relations at Women Creating Change. She has previously been a policy advisor to former Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed, a legislative aide to the late Georgia Congressman John Lewis, and executive director of the New York City Council's Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus.*