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So We All Can Succeed: 125 Years of Women's Participation in the Economy

Remarks by

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Chair

Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System

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Thank you, and let me say what an honor it is, as an alumna of this great university, to be here today and part of this important occasion.

As we celebrate the 125th anniversary of women being admitted to Brown, it seems appropriate to reflect on the progress that women have achieved in the intervening years. Since 1891, women have made tremendous strides in their ability to pursue their dreams of education and meaningful work and to support themselves and their families. In pursuing these goals, women have helped improve working conditions for *all* workers and have been a major factor in America's prosperity over the past century and a quarter.

Despite this progress, evidence suggests that many women remain unable to achieve their goals. The gap in earnings between women and men, although smaller than it was years ago, is still significant; women continue to be underrepresented in certain industries and occupations; and too many women struggle to combine aspirations for work and family. Further advancement has been hampered by barriers to equal opportunity and workplace rules and norms that fail to support a reasonable work-life balance. If these obstacles persist, we will squander the potential of many of our citizens and incur a substantial loss to the productive capacity of our economy at a time when the aging of the population and weak productivity growth are already weighing on economic growth.

To enliven the history I will present today, I will include the experiences of women graduates of this institution, in most cases in their own words, as related in oral histories preserved by Brown.¹ Among these alumnae, I am proud to say, is a member of my own family who was an early graduate of Pembroke, Elizabeth Stafford Hirschfelder

¹ I am grateful for the assistance of Brown University staff in facilitating access to *Brown Women Speak*, the University's oral history project, and particularly the help of archivist Mary Murphy.

of the Class of 1923. Her career and achievements as a mathematician embody both the opportunities that opened for Pembroke graduates in the decades after she left here and the limitations many women faced and the compromises she, like so many others, was forced to make.

A Historical Perspective on Women in the Labor Force

From the time that Brown began to accept women and into the 1920s, most women in the United States did not work outside the home, and those who did were primarily young and unmarried. In that era, just 20 percent of all women were “gainful workers,” as the Census Bureau then categorized labor force participation outside the home, and only 5 percent of those married were categorized as such.² Of course, these statistics somewhat understate the contributions of married women to the economy beyond housekeeping and childrearing, since women’s work in the home often included work in family businesses and the home production of goods, such as agricultural products, for sale. Also, the aggregate statistics obscure the differential experience of women by race. African American women were about twice as likely to participate in the labor force as were white women at the time, largely because they were more likely to remain in the labor force after marriage.³

² My discussion of the history of female labor force participation draws heavily on the pioneering work of Claudia Goldin, including her 2006 Ely Lecture “The Quiet Revolution that Transformed Women’s Employment, Education, and Family” to the American Economic Association and her 1990 work *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women*, from which the statistics on female labor force participation from the late 19th century until the mid-20th century are drawn. A thorough discussion of the quality of these data and their usefulness in making comparisons over time is included in that work.

³ The higher participation rates of African American women have been attributed to different cultural norms that developed during slavery and the legacy of slavery, which left blacks impoverished and with low levels of education, making women’s wages an important source of family income (Boustan and Collins, 2013; Goldin, 1977).

What was true for women in general was also true of the early graduates of what was then called the Women's College, the large majority of whom got married, raised families, and did not pursue careers. The fact that many women left work upon marriage reflected cultural norms, the nature of the work available to them, and legal strictures. The occupational choices of those young women who did work were severely circumscribed. Most women lacked significant education--only 54 percent of girls aged 5 to 19 were enrolled in school in 1890.⁴ And women with little education mostly toiled as piece workers in factories or as domestic workers, jobs that were dirty and often unsafe. Educated women, like those who attended Brown's Women's College, were scarce. Fewer than 2 percent of all 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in an institution of higher education, and just one-third of those were women.⁵ Such women did not have to perform manual labor, but their choices were likewise constrained. Edna McDonald was a graduate of the Class of 1919, and in her oral history, she summed up the opportunities for her and her classmates: "Let's be frank," she said. "What choices did women have? Teaching. You could teach. You could be a lab technician. Or you could go into office work and be a secretary. Those were the only real choices." Margery Chittenden Leonard graduated from Pembroke in 1929 and went on to earn a J.D. as the only woman in her class at Boston University--after two others withdrew. And with that law degree, her first job was as a secretary, and she continued to struggle to find work as a lawyer. In her oral history, Doris Madeline Hopkins, a 1928 graduate, talked about the opportunity

⁴ U.S. Department of Education (1993).

⁵ U.S. Department of Education (1993), p. 76.

that she had to work, but also about being told she had to leave her job once she got married. Indeed, at the time, marriage bars were widespread.⁶

There were notable exceptions, such as, of course, Mary Emma Woolley, a Brown graduate who went on to serve as the president of Mount Holyoke College, and Ethel Robinson, the first black woman to graduate from Brown, who taught English at Howard University. Helen Butts, from the Class of 1928, taught natural sciences at Smith and later zoology at Wellesley, the beginning of a long and productive career as a biological researcher. Another exception was Betty Stafford, the aunt of my husband, George. She grew up in Providence, earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Brown in mathematics and then rather adventurously headed west, teaching at two universities in Texas in the 1920s before completing her Ph.D. and then teaching at the University of Wisconsin.

Despite the widespread sentiment against women, particularly married women, working outside the home and with the limited opportunities available to them, women did enter the labor force in greater numbers over this period, with participation rates reaching nearly 50 percent for single women by 1930 and nearly 12 percent for married women. This rise suggests that while the incentive, and in many cases the imperative, remained for women to drop out of the labor market at marriage when they could rely on their husband's income, mores were changing. Indeed, these years overlapped with the so-called first wave of the women's movement, when women came together to agitate for change on a variety of social issues, including suffrage and temperance, and which culminated in the ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920 guaranteeing women the right to vote.

⁶ Goldin (1990), pp. 160-66.

Between the 1930s and mid-1970s, women's participation in the economy continued to rise, with the gains primarily owing to an increase in work among married women. By 1970, 50 percent of single women and 40 percent of married women were participating in the labor force.⁷ Several factors contributed to this rise. First, with the advent of mass high school education, graduation rates rose substantially.⁸ At the same time, new technologies contributed to an increased demand for clerical workers, and these jobs were increasingly taken on by women. Moreover, because these jobs tended to be cleaner and safer, the stigma attached to work for a married woman diminished. And while there were still marriage bars that forced women out of the labor force, these formal barriers were gradually removed over the period following World War II. Another innovation was the introduction in the late 1940s of part-time schedules, which combined with the proliferation of modern appliances to make it more feasible for married women to work outside the home.⁹

Over the decades from 1930 to 1970, increasing opportunities also arose for highly educated women, such as the graduates of what was by then called Pembroke College, to work in professions. That said, early in that period, most women still expected to have short careers, and women were still largely viewed as secondary earners whose husbands' careers came first. Thus, while it was becoming more common for women such as Betty Stafford to teach at colleges and universities, their career prospects were not the same as those for men. After earning her Ph.D. at Wisconsin, Betty married a fellow student and over the next decade coauthored five important papers with him and

⁷ Note that for the 1970s and beyond, the participation rate is calculated as a share of those aged 16 and older, whereas for earlier years it is calculated as a share of those aged 15 and older.

⁸ Goldin and Katz (2008).

⁹ Goldin (2006), pp. 5-6.

a well-regarded reference work. But, while her husband progressed from instructor to professor at Wisconsin, Betty worked as an instructor on an ad hoc basis. During World War II, while he worked for the government in Washington and New York, Betty stayed in Madison, teaching math to servicemen. When he took a job teaching in California after the war, they divorced, and it was only then that she was given a position as assistant professor.

As time progressed, attitudes about women working and their employment prospects did change. As women gained experience in the labor force, they increasingly saw that they could balance work and family. A new model of the two-income family emerged.¹⁰ Some women began to attend college and graduate school with the expectation of working, whether or not they planned to marry and have families, as did Rita Schorr-Germain, an immigrant who survived Auschwitz, graduated from Pembroke in 1953, and went on to teach European history while her husband also had a successful academic career. In her oral history, Rita says she was encouraged by many Brown professors and never considered the possibility that her gender would stand in the way of an academic career, a shift in outlook that was becoming increasingly common in the 1950s. As did most women's colleges at the time, Pembroke continued to produce nurses, schoolteachers, and social workers, and many women who worked only until they married and had children. But, from the late 1950s on, it also increasingly graduated writers, doctors, lawyers, diplomats, physicians, psychotherapists, and archeologists, and,

¹⁰ For instance, although many women who had joined the war effort in the 1940s were fired at the end of the war, as the Korean War effort picked up and the demand for the labor of women rose, women, who had learned that they could combine work and family were ready to reenter the labor force, so that by the early 1950s female labor force participation resumed its war-time high (Kessler-Harris, 1982, pp. 302-03). Moreover, evidence suggests that sons whose mothers increased their labor force participation in the wake of World War II had wives who were more likely to work (Fernández, Fogli, and Olivette, 2004).

in 1959, the first female faculty member of Brown University. Among those women fortunate to attend Pembroke in this era of dramatic change was me. I enrolled at Brown fully planning to attend graduate school and have a career, as did many of my classmates in the Class of 1967.

By the 1970s, a dramatic change in women's work lives was under way. In the period after World War II, many women had not expected that they would spend as much of their adult lives working as turned out to be the case. By contrast, in the 1970s young women more commonly expected that they would spend a substantial portion of their lives in the labor force, and they prepared for it, increasing their educational attainment and taking courses and college majors that better equipped them for careers as opposed to just jobs.

In surveys of young people about their expectations of their futures, young women during this era increasingly placed an emphasis on career success.¹¹ Susan Graber Slusky of the Class of 1971 said in her oral history that she chose Pembroke for Brown's excellence in chemistry and physics, because she was already planning the career she went on to have as a researcher. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is also the period in which many all-male colleges admitted women or combined their women's and men's undergraduate schools, as Brown did when it merged Pembroke and Brown College in 1971.

These changes in attitudes and expectations were supported by other changes under way in society. Workplace protections were enhanced through the passage of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act in 1978 and the recognition of sexual harassment in the

¹¹ Interestingly, over this time young men put increasing weight on family. Goldin (2006), pp. 9 and 11.

workplace. Access to birth control increased, which allowed married couples greater control over the size of their families and young women the ability to delay marriage and to plan children around their educational and work choices.¹² And in 1974, women gained, for the first time, the right to apply for credit in their own name without a male co-signer.¹³

By the early 1990s, the labor force participation rate of prime working-age women--those between the ages of 25 and 54--reached just over 74 percent, compared with roughly 93 percent for prime working-age men. By then, the share of women going into the traditional fields of teaching, nursing, social work, and clerical work declined, and more women were becoming doctors, lawyers, managers, and, yes, professors. As women increased their education and joined industries and occupations formerly dominated by men, the gap in earnings between women and men began to close significantly.¹⁴

Positive Spillovers from Women's Increased Participation in the Workforce

Looking back, the story of the past 125 years is one of slow but steady progress toward women's full participation in the economy and the fulfillment of their career goals. Unfortunately, the success of women has often been seen as coming at the expense of men. Indeed, regularly in the late 19th and 20th centuries there were calls to protect men from women's entry into the labor force. The early female graduates of Brown faced such attitudes from fellow students and even from faculty. Ruth Pederson, a

¹² See, for example, Bailey (2010) and Goldin and Katz (2002).

¹³ The Equal Credit Opportunity Act, passed in 1974, prohibited discrimination in the provision of credit on the basis of gender, race, religion, marital status and national origin. It also disallowed credit providers from asking women about their plans for future children.

¹⁴ Blau and Kahn (2016).

member of the Class of 1919, said some professors did not want to teach women and prohibited women from taking their classes. Margery Leonard remembered one Boston University professor who urged her to drop out of law school. When she refused, this professor punished her by forcing her to recite the details of rape and seduction cases before her jeering, stomping classmates. And it wasn't only men who had this attitude. Among the women who were fighting for better labor standards early in the 20th century, many were heavily influenced by elite cultural standards that viewed a woman's place as in the home and argued that men should be paid a "family wage" that would allow them to support their family singlehandedly--a standard that many working-class families could not afford. Moreover, many of the labor protections promoted to protect women were often based on theories about women's weaker nature, and these protections served to circumscribe their work.¹⁵ During the Great Depression, limiting women's role in the workforce was considered a way to address the high rates of unemployment, although the experience of those years showed the importance of women in supporting their families financially.¹⁶ Similarly, women who had successfully worked during World War II, either as part of the war effort or to support their families while their husbands were fighting, often were pushed out of their jobs to make room for returning soldiers.¹⁷

After the war and then single, my relative, Betty Stafford, remained an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin despite an enviable body of research. She married another Wisconsin professor, an eminent chemist, and collaborated with him on his research. But, in 1954, she gave up her assistant professorship, she said, to be able to

¹⁵ Kessler-Harris (1982), pp. 184-85.

¹⁶ Kessler-Harris (1982), pp. 250-58.

¹⁷ Kessler-Harris (1982), pp. 286-87.

accompany her husband on his frequent international travels. Betty later moved with her husband to California, and after his death, she endowed a graduate fellowship in the sciences and a prize in theoretical chemistry. Although Betty's accomplishments were considerable, against the backdrop of increasing opportunity for women over her lifetime I believe that Betty Stafford Hirschfelder was denied opportunities and greater success simply because she was a woman.

Despite the fears of some that women entering into the workforce would crowd out men, the evidence shows that the rise in women's participation has contributed to widespread improvements in the safety and productivity of our workplaces, to the health of families, and to the macroeconomic success that our country has enjoyed over the past 125 years.

In the first decades of the 20th century, the struggle to improve the working conditions of young women drawn into factories was a pillar of the overall movement toward improved labor standards. Women's demands for safer factories, humane workweeks, and higher pay, which were often pursued through organizing and striking, contributed substantially to the social upheaval and public debate of that period that eventually led to the passage of stronger labor standards. These efforts also produced generations of women who went on to be leaders in the broader labor movement and in the broader movements for equality.

The rise in female labor force participation was an early focus of and helped establish the fields of statistics and labor economics in their modern incarnations. Carroll Wright, the first commissioner of what is now known as the Bureau of Labor Statistics and who established the high standards for data collection and analysis for which the

bureau is known, devoted his agency's fourth annual report, for the year 1888, to the topic of Working Women in Large Cities.¹⁸ Moreover, the issues surrounding women's work, such as the minimum wage, pay equity, and maximum workweeks, were topics of great interest to early practitioners of labor economics.¹⁹

It is often said that we should welcome women's presence in the workplace because it allows us to capitalize on the talents of our entire population, and this is certainly true. But it is also good business. A number of studies on how groups perform indicate that workforces that vary on dimensions such as gender, race, and ethnicity produce better decisionmaking processes and better outcomes.²⁰

Evidence also suggests that women's work has positive spillovers to their family lives and to the success of their children, which in turn benefits all of society. It is a well-established finding in the literature on development that maternal education and work are positively associated with better health and educational outcomes for children.²¹ A recent meta-study also suggests that children in the United States with working mothers do as well if not better in school, both academically and behaviorally, than children with mothers that stay home full time. This effect is particularly strong for families that have fewer social and economic resources, including single-parent families.²² As time goes on, girls with working mothers are more likely to be employed and hold supervisory positions, and they earn somewhat more. In addition, sons raised in families with

¹⁸ Bureau of Labor (1889).

¹⁹ Goldin (2006), p. 4.

²⁰ See the discussion of this literature on pp. 232-33 of Bayer and Rouse (2016) and the studies cited therein.

²¹ See, for example, World Bank (2012).

²² Lucas-Thompson, Goldberg, and Prause (2010).

working mothers assume greater childcare responsibilities as adults than sons whose mothers did not work.²³

This is not to say that children do not need attention from both parents to develop into academically successful and socially well-adjusted adults--they certainly do. Also, as I will discuss, women are making choices that reflect their desire to balance work and family. These findings bear on the question of how best to support women's work through public policies aimed at helping women and men better manage work and family.

From a macroeconomic perspective, women's incorporation into the economy contributed importantly to the rapid rise in economic output and well-being over the 20th century. Between 1948 and 1990, the rise in female participation contributed about 1/2 percentage point per year to the potential growth rate of real gross domestic product.²⁴ And this estimate does not take into account the effect of the increases in women's education and work experience that also occurred over that period and boosted their productivity. In addition, since 1979, women have accounted for a majority of the rise in real household income. In dollar terms, the gains were greatest for households in the top third of the earnings distribution, but without the increase in women's earnings, families in the bottom and middle thirds of the distribution would have experienced declines.²⁵

Remaining Challenges and Some Possible Solutions

I have argued thus far that we, as a country, have reaped great benefits from the increasing role that women have played in the economy. But evidence suggests that

²³ McGinn, Ruiz Castro, and Lingo (2015).

²⁴ Board staff calculation using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

²⁵ Boushey and Vaghul (2016).

barriers to women's continued progress remain. The participation rate for prime working-age women peaked in the late 1990s and currently stands at about 75 percent.²⁶ Of course, women, particularly those with lower levels of education, have been affected by the same economic forces that have been pushing down participation among men, including technical change and globalization.²⁷ However, women's participation plateaued at a level well below that of prime working-age men, which stands at over 88 percent. While some married women choose not to work, the size of this disparity should lead us to examine the extent to which structural problems, such as a lack of equal opportunity and challenges to combining work and family, are holding back women's advancement.

As I mentioned earlier, the gap in earnings between men and women has narrowed substantially, but progress has slowed lately, and women working full time still earn about 17 percent less than men, on average, each week.²⁸ Even when we compare men and women in the same or similar occupations who appear nearly identical in background and experience, a gap of about 10 percent typically remains.²⁹ As such, we cannot rule out that gender-related impediments hold back women, including outright

²⁶ The labor force participation rate for all women declined from a peak of 60 percent in 1999 and 2000 and now stands a bit below 57 percent. However, as has been documented elsewhere, much of the decline for all women can be explained by the aging of the baby boomers into their retirement years and lower participation among teens and young adults. It is also possible that the labor force participation rate is still being held down a bit by the waning effects of the Great Recession. Aaronson and others (2014).

²⁷ Aaronson and others (2014). Also see Council of Economic Advisers (2016) and the studies cited therein.

²⁸ Blau and Kahn (2016).

²⁹ Manning and Swaffield (2008) find that although men and women enter the British labor force earning the same amount, among those who worked continuously and full time for 10 years, women would still earn 8 percent less than men, even if they have the same personality traits, were childless, and profess no interest in having children. Also see Blau and Kahn (2016) and Noonan, Corcoran, and Courant (2005).

discrimination, attitudes that reduce women's success in the workplace, and an absence of mentors.

Recent research has shown that although women now enter professional schools in numbers nearly equal to men, they are still substantially less likely to reach the highest echelons of their professions.³⁰ For instance, 47 percent of students at top-50 law schools are female, and women obtain 40 percent of M.B.A.'s from top programs. Nonetheless, women are still poorly represented among corporate CEOs, as partners in top law firms, and as executives in finance.³¹ Even in my own field of economics, women constitute only about one-third of Ph.D. recipients, a number that has barely budged in two decades.³² This lack of success in climbing the professional ladder would seem to explain why the wage gap actually remains largest for those at the top of the earnings distribution.³³

One of the primary factors contributing to the failure of these highly skilled women to reach the tops of their professions and earn equal pay is that top jobs in fields such as law and business require longer workweeks and penalize taking time off. This would have a disproportionately large effect on women, who continue to bear the lion's share of domestic and child-rearing responsibilities.³⁴ Within academia, the short timeframe in which assistant professors have to prove themselves good candidates for

³⁰ Moran (2015); Olson (2016).

³¹ On the status of women in finance and corporations see Bertrand, Goldin, and Katz (2010) and the studies cited therein. For law partnerships, see New York City Bar Association (2016).

³² Bayer and Rouse (2016), p. 223.

³³ Blau and Kahn (2016).

³⁴ Bertrand, Goldin, and Katz (2010); Goldin (2014).

tenure by publishing typically overlaps with the period in which many women contemplate starting a family, forcing difficult trade-offs.³⁵

Employers may require the long hours and short absences for good reasons--for instance, the work may involve relationships with clients or accumulating a significant amount of knowledge about a deal or case in a condensed period of time. If it is costly for employees to share information and split the work, then there would be a high premium, in the form of compensation, for those who can work the long hours.³⁶

Workplaces where the income of employees depends on the effort of co-workers, such as law partnerships, also have an incentive to require long workweeks.³⁷

But however sensible such arrangements may be from a business perspective, it can be difficult for women to meet the demands in these fields once they have children. The very fact that these types of jobs require such long hours likely discourages some women--as well as men--from pursuing these career tracks. Advances in technology have facilitated greater work-sharing and flexibility in scheduling, and there are further opportunities in this direction.³⁸ Economic models also suggest that while it can be difficult for any one employer to move to a model with shorter hours, if many firms were to change their model, they and their workers could all be better off.³⁹

Of course, most women are not employed in fields that require such long hours or that impose such severe penalties for taking time off. But the difficulty of balancing work and family is a widespread problem. In fact, the recent trend in many occupations

³⁵ Unfortunately, in contrast to some of the successful gender neutral policies I discuss below, efforts to address the tenure problem by giving all new parents extra time before the tenure decision has actually had the effect of reducing female tenure rates and raising those of men. Antecol, Bedrard and Stearns, (2016).

³⁶ Goldin (2014).

³⁷ See, for example, Akerlof (1976) and Landers, Rebitzer, and Taylor (1996).

³⁸ See the discussion in Goldin (2014), p. 117.

³⁹ Landers, Rebitzer, and Taylor (1996), p. 334.

is to demand complete scheduling flexibility, which can result in too few hours of work for those with family demands and can make it difficult to schedule childcare.⁴⁰ Reforms that encourage companies to provide some predictability in schedules, cross-train workers to perform different tasks, or require a minimum guaranteed number of hours in exchange for flexibility could improve the lives of workers holding such jobs. Another problem is that in most states, childcare is affordable for fewer than half of all families.⁴¹ And just 5 percent of workers with wages in the bottom quarter of the wage distribution have jobs that provide them with paid family leave.⁴² This circumstance puts many women in the position of having to choose between caring for a sick family member and keeping their jobs.

In this context, it is useful to compare the workforce experiences of American women to those in other advanced economies. In 1990, the labor force participation rate in the United States of prime working-age women, 74 percent, was higher than in all but a few industrialized nations. But in the intervening years, while the participation rate of U.S. women was roughly stable, elsewhere it increased steadily, and by 2010 the United States fell to 17th place out of 22 advanced economies with respect to female labor force participation.⁴³ A number of studies have examined the role of various public policies in explaining patterns in female labor force participation across countries. These studies find that policy differences--in particular, the expansion of paid leave following childbirth, steps to improve the availability and affordability of childcare, and increased availability of part-time work--go a long way toward explaining the divergence between

⁴⁰ Cajner and others (2014); Lambert, Haley-Lock, and Henly (2012).

⁴¹ Bivens and others (2016).

⁴² Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016).

⁴³ Blau and Kahn (2013).

advanced economies.⁴⁴ Evidence suggests that if the United States had policies in place such as those employed in many European countries, female labor force participation could be as high as 82 percent.⁴⁵

However, these policies entail tradeoffs. Women in other advanced economies are more likely than women in the United States to be employed part time, which could reflect a greater ease in arranging flexible schedules and more time with family, but it also comes with costs, including a wage penalty and fewer opportunities for training and advancement. Such findings raise the question of whether the policies enacted overseas in recent years have had the unintended consequence of making it more expensive for employers there to hire women into full-time jobs with opportunities for advancement, as women are more likely to be eligible for and to make use of such benefits.⁴⁶

This possibility should inform our own thinking about policies to make it easier for women and men to combine their family and career aspirations. For instance, improving access to affordable and good quality childcare would appear to fit the bill, as it has been shown to support full-time employment.⁴⁷ Recently, there also seems to be some momentum for providing families with paid leave at the time of childbirth. The experience in Europe suggests picking policies that do not narrowly target childbirth, but instead can be used to meet a variety of the health and caregiving responsibilities.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Note that Blau and Kahn (2013) do not find that *improvement* in the provision of childcare in other advanced economies relative to the United States explain the divergence in participation since the 1990s; however, Thévenon (2013) finds that the greater provision of childcare has a positive effect on full-time employment.

⁴⁵ Blau and Kahn (2013), p. 7.

⁴⁶ In most European countries, men are significantly less likely than women to use paid parental leave, although in a few countries, including Sweden and Iceland, over 40 percent of users of parental leave are men (OECD, 2016).

⁴⁷ Thévenon (2013), p. 26.

⁴⁸ In testimony before the Joint Economic Committee and the House Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, a breakdown of claims on New Jersey's short-

Conclusion

The United States faces a number of longer-term economic challenges, including the aging of the population and the low growth rate of productivity. One recent study estimates that increasing the female participation rate to that of men would raise our gross domestic product by 5 percent.⁴⁹ And, as I have argued, our workplaces and families, as well as women themselves, would benefit from continued progress. However, a number of factors, which I have only had a chance to touch upon, appear to be holding women back, including the difficulty women currently have in trying to combine their careers with other aspects of their lives, including caregiving. In looking to solutions, we should consider improvements to work environments and policies that benefit not only women, but all workers. Pursuing such a strategy would be in keeping with the story of the rise in women's involvement in the workforce, which, as I have described here, has contributed not only to their own well-being but more broadly to the welfare and prosperity of our country.

The title for my remarks today, "So We All Can Succeed," was inspired by Malala Yousafzai, the advocate for girls' and women's education, who said, "We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back."⁵⁰ Brown University has played its own role by admitting women 125 years ago, by educating many thousands of women over the

term disability program in 2000 showed that pregnancy and childbirth constituted just 15 percent of all claims (Lovell, 2008).

⁴⁹ Aguirre and others (2012).

⁵⁰ Yousafzai (2013), paragraph 22.

Note: On May 5, 2017, a typo was corrected to change 83 to 93 in the following sentence on page 8: "By the early 1990s, the labor force participation rate of prime working-age women--those between the ages of 25 and 54--reached just over 74 percent, compared with roughly 83 percent for prime working-age men."

decades, and by continuing to be a place that equips men and women with the means to make our nation and the world a better place.

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