

McCain opposes equal pay bill in Senate

LIBBY QUAID | April 23, 2008 | **AP**

NEW ORLEANS — Republican Sen. John McCain, campaigning through poverty-stricken cities and towns, said Wednesday he opposes a Senate bill that seeks equal pay for women because it would lead to more lawsuits.

Senate Republicans killed the bill Wednesday night on a 56-42 vote that denied the measure the 60 votes needed to advance it to full debate and a vote. Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., had delayed the vote to give McCain's Democratic rivals, Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama, time to return to Washington to support the measure, which would make it easier for women to sue their employers for pay discrimination.

McCain skipped the vote to campaign in New Orleans.

"I am all in favor of pay equity for women, but this kind of legislation, as is typical of what's being proposed by my friends on the other side of the aisle, opens us up to lawsuits for all kinds of problems," the expected GOP presidential nominee told reporters. "This is government playing a much, much greater role in the business of a private enterprise system."

The bill sought to counteract a Supreme Court decision limiting how long workers can wait before suing for pay discrimination.

The bill sought to counteract a Supreme Court decision limiting how long workers can wait before suing for pay discrimination.

The Supreme Court voted 5-4 last year to throw out her complaint, saying she had waited too long to sue.

Democrats criticized McCain for opposing the bill.

"Senator McCain has yet again fallen in line with President Bush while middle-class families are falling by the wayside," Clinton said in a statement following the vote. "Women are earning less, but Senator McCain is offering more of the same."

Democratic National Committee spokeswoman Karen Finney said: "At a time when American families are struggling to keep their homes and jobs while paying more for everything from gasoline to groceries, how on Earth would anyone who thinks they can lead our country also think it's acceptable to oppose equal pay for America's mothers, wives and daughters?"

McCain stated his opposition to the bill as he campaigned in rural eastern Kentucky, where poverty is worse among women than men. The Arizona senator said he was familiar with the disparity but that there are better ways to help women find better paying jobs.

"They need the education and training, particularly since more and more women are heads of their households, as much or more than anybody else," McCain said. "And it's hard for them to leave their families when they don't have somebody to take care of them."

"It's a vicious cycle that's affecting women, particularly in a part of the country like this, where mining is the mainstay; traditionally, women have not gone into that line of work, to say the least," he said.

McCain chose to visit the tiny hamlet of Inez, Ky., because it is where President Lyndon B. Johnson declared war on poverty. But McCain said Johnson's poverty programs had failed.

"I wouldn't be back here today if government had fulfilled the promise that Lyndon Johnson made 44 years ago," he said.

In recent weeks, McCain has proposed a series of tax breaks for corporations, doubling the dependent child tax exemption, government-backed refinancing for struggling homeowners and a summer holiday from gas taxes. He proposed another new program Wednesday: a tax write-off for companies that provide high-speed Internet access for underserved, low-income communities.