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ABSTRACT

From its position in the Office of the Secretary of Labor, the Women's Bureau participates in departmental policy making and program planning and serves as a coordinating body in the Department of Labor for programs affecting women. Among its activities are the following: initiating and supporting research in economic, social, and legislative areas and making policy recommendations; testing innovations through demonstration projects; and carrying out an information and education program. Striking demographic changes in the U.S. labor force are shaping education and training needs. The annual growth rate for the labor force from 1990-2005 is projected to be 1.3 percent, down from 1.9 percent in the previous 15-year period. Labor force entrants will be almost equally women and men; those leaving are more likely to be men. The fastest growing segments of the labor force--women and minority groups--are disproportionately employed in slow-growing or declining occupations. Recent Women's Bureau initiatives include the following: 10 regional roundtables on the employment needs of midlife women; directory of nontraditional training and employment programs serving women; network of women's support groups around the country to provide help to women seeking information on job issues; a Women in Highway Construction project; the Glass Ceiling initiative to open up higher level leadership opportunities; and access to mathematics and science education initiative. (YLB)

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Remarks by
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Women's Bureau
U.S. Department of Labor
at the
IVETA Conference's
Panel on Women in the Workplace

December 7, 1991
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Good morning, I bring you greetings from Secretary of Labor Lynn Martin, and personal greetings from Elsie Vartanian, Director of the Women's Bureau. It is always a pleasure to have a chance to get away from Washington. I'm very pleased to be here today as part of this panel addressing the issues of women in the workforce. My focus today is on the training challenges that women will face in the year 2000 and beyond and what we are doing at the Women's Bureau to address these challenges. Challenges of the 21st century are a growing reality today, however with challenges come opportunities. The quality of the U.S. workforce matters now more than ever. Well-trained, motivated workers who can produce high-quality goods and services at low cost help enhance industrial productivity and competitiveness and keep American living standards high. In today's international economy, workers must be prepared to change the way they do their jobs in order to capture the benefits from rapidly evolving technology. Training goes hand-in-hand with productivity, quality, flexibility, and automation in the best performing sectors of our economy.

Before I launch into my remarks about the challenges of training, let me give you a little background about the Women's Bureau. The Bureau is the only U.S. national machinery for women and is one of the oldest agencies in the U.S. Department of Labor. It was created by Congress on June 5, 1920, and given a mandate:

- o "to formulate standards and policies which shall promote the welfare of wage-earning women,
- o improve their working conditions,
- o increase their efficiency,
- o and advance their opportunities for profitable employment."

From its position in the Office of the Secretary of Labor, the Bureau participates in departmental policy making and program planning, and serves as a coordinating body in the Department of Labor for programs affecting women. To establish vital links at local levels, the bureau has offices in the 10 Federal regions across the Nation. The office for this region is located in San Francisco. We work with women's organizations and commissions for women, the private sector, unions, program operators, educational and training personnel, social service agencies, researchers and government at all levels.

To remain in the forefront on issues, the Bureau initiates and supports research and analyses in economic, social and legislative areas, and makes policy recommendations. It also tests innovative ideas and approaches through demonstration projects that help prepare women to enter or reenter the work force, move into new areas of work, or move up their careers. The Bureau carries out an information and education program through publications, audiovisuals, media relations, feature articles, and public speaking. On the international level, the Bureau participates actively in high-level policy development for working women.

Our focus changes each year depending on the state of the economy, the demographics and the priorities of the Secretary of Labor and the Women's Bureau Director. In 1992, the Bureau's primary focus is on issues regarding mid-life women, math and science, the glass ceiling and nontraditional jobs.

I would like to begin by talking about the demographic change of the U.S. labor force which is shaping our education and training needs. This change is striking. The U.S. DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics just last week reported on its economic and employment projections to the year 2005, the Bureau's first look beyond 2000. The 1990-2005 projections suggest that the switch from a goods-producing to a service-producing economy will continue and occupations with a higher level of educational requirements will grow faster than average. Because of the uncertainty that underlies all attempts to project the future, BLS's projections are based on three alternative growth scenarios. I will only focus on the moderate growth scenario.

- Mainly because of slower growth in the population age 16 and over, the annual growth rate for the labor force from 1990-2005 is projected to be 1.3 percent, down from 1.9 percent in the previous 15 year period. By 2005, the labor force-- those working or looking for work--is projected to be 151 million people, an increase of 26 million from 1990. The increase from 1975 to 1990 was 31 million.

-The percent of the population in the labor force is projected to continue to increase, although at a slower rate than during the previous 15 years. This slower increase reflects two

important developments: The aging of the population and the expected smaller increases in the participation of younger women in the labor force.

-Between 1990 and 2005, 55.8 million people are projected to enter the labor force. Nearly 30 million of them will replace workers who leave the labor force for retirement or other reasons. the remainder will account for the projected net growth in the labor force. The entrants will be almost equally women and men. Those leaving the labor force are more likely to be men, however, largely reflecting their higher proportion of the older labor force.

What are the implications of these projections for the future training and job opportunities for women and minority workers, and what are we doing at the Women's Bureau to address them?

First the implications. Presently, the fastest growing segments of the labor force--women, blacks, and Hispanics and other minority and ethnic groups--are disproportionately employed in occupations that are projected to grow more slowly or to decline, or, regardless of growth path, that pay relatively lower wages. Unless these labor force groups are utilized more efficiently, the Nation may face problems in filling the higher skilled, higher paying positions that are expected to grow the fastest in the future. Women, however, are generally in a better position than others to benefit from the growth industries and occupations.

It appears that technological change will continue over time to upgrade the skills necessary in the U.S. job market, with education and vocational training becoming increasingly important. I have seen little evidence to support the position that technological change has had an aggregated deskilling effect on the labor force, where skill is implied to mean the substantive complexity involved in a particular job. However, if present technological trends continue, the growth in the demand for highly skilled labor will continue to outstrip the growth in its supply, resulting in an increase in the wage rate of skilled workers; meanwhile, the demand for relatively unskilled labor will fall relative to its supply, resulting in a decrease in the wage rate of relatively unskilled workers or worker redundancy.

The educational attainment of employed women roughly matches that of the labor force as a whole. Given this, women can be expected to increase their proportions in the higher paying jobs, such as professional specialties, and executive, administrative, and managerial jobs in which they are already significantly represented (40%). Despite their educational attainment, however, women are underrepresented in certain professional occupations such as engineers, health-diagnosing occupations, and lawyers and judges and overrepresented in some lower paying occupations such as administrative support. They are noticeable scarce at the highest levels of management and policy making. One study shows that, on the average, women hold 3 percent of the top 20 positions in the largest companies.

Women's Bureau initiatives;

Midlife Women

We just completed ten regional roundtables on the employment needs of midlife women, particularly as related to education and training to hear from U.S. women workers themselves. Midlife women as a group recently have been largely ignored compared with younger and older workers. The roundtables are intended to provide a better understanding of how these women make decisions about training, what kind of education seems to work best and what kinds of barriers they are encountering. The roundtables will be followed by public hearings in the spring or summer. The discussions and the hearings should help to determine what kind of help midlife women need from the Women's Bureau and the Department of Labor.

Nontraditional jobs for women

Measures aimed at the advancement of women in all types of employment is one of the primary responsibilities of the Women's Bureau. The Bureau promotes full utilization of women in the labor force primarily through its initiatives to encourage women in nontraditional careers where earnings are usually much higher than in work traditionally done by women. This is one of the recurring themes in virtually everything we do to promote the enhancement of women's economic status.

We have established initiatives to address the concerns of women and nontraditional jobs in all ten regions. At the national level, we recently published a directory of nontraditional training and employment programs serving women.

The directory is designed to be a helpful resource in referring women to appropriate training programs and to assist women in obtaining training and employment in skilled nontraditional jobs, including apprenticeship. Over the past two decades women have achieved access to employment in nearly every occupational area. Yet, there remain skilled nontraditional trade and technical careers where women comprise only a fraction of the work force.

Our most recent initiative, Women in the Skilled Trades, is designed to develop paid training opportunities for women in apprenticeships and other manual occupations. We are also in the process of building a network of women's support groups around the country where women seeking information on entry skilled job issues can find help. This initiative is comprised of three basic components:

1. education and technical assistance to women interested in apprenticeship;
2. expanded use of funds under JTPA and the Job Corps to provide pre-apprenticeship training to qualify more women for entry into apprenticeship programs;
3. and increased coordination between the various Labor Department agencies, Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training and The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, with new authority for OFCCP to conduct EEO reviews and enforcement activity.

Another of our current initiatives, jointly developed with the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration, is Women in Highway Construction. The purpose is

to open opportunities for women who want to work or be contractors or subcontractors in the building and rebuilding of our nation's infrastructure. We are very enthusiastic about the highway project and hope it will serve as a model for future undertakings by other government agencies and local communities.

And while we are working to open up new career paths for girls and women, the Bureau recognizes that we must not take our eyes off of the women who are already in the labor market who have reached a particular level above which they are unable to rise. To address this issue the Secretary of labor has launched a is The Glass Ceiling initiative. The thrust of this effort is to open up higher level leadership opportunities for minorities and women who are already in the management pipelines of private industry. We recognize that there are many issues that play a role in a women's opportunity for advancement, such as work and family responsibilities, the need for education or training, stereotyping, preconceptions and misconceptions. But these issues exist, not only at top level management positions, but at all career levels, no matter what the occupation. Therefore, we are working with employers to help remove barriers where they exist, and to ensure that training takes place at the highest possible levels within their corporate structure.

Finally, increasing the access of women and girls to mathematics and science education is a major concern of the Bureau and we are confronting this issue by developing an initiative at the grass root level in each of the 10 regions.

In conclusion, as the world becomes more and more complex, the amount of education and knowledge needed to participate as long term workers becomes greater. Technological changes have prompted all employers to look for workers who have the necessary entry level skills and the ability to grasp new ideas and concepts rapidly. Current entry level jobs and those of the future will require much more of the prospective employee. Today's modern technology requires ample reading, comprehension and thinking skills as well as some computational ability.

Women must continue to prepare themselves for today's and tomorrow's labor market by obtaining the necessary education and skills demanded by the ever-changing work world. Those women already employed may find it necessary to retrain or enhance their current skills to keep abreast of changes at work. Lifelong learning will be the watchword of workers who may change jobs and employers several times over the course of a career.