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Hypocrisy of Wal-Mart Bashers

Alicia Colon's "The Hypocrisy of Wal-Mart Bashers" [New York, May 10, 2005] refers to the supposed hypocrisy of Wal-Mart critics who fail to realize how many women the company employs and then goes on to belittle the legitimacy of the plaintiffs in the gender discrimination suit, saying that anyone can find an ex-employee willing to testify against their former bosses.

The problem with this argument is that two of the six women filing suit, including lead plaintiff Betty Dukes, are current Wal-Mart workers who are risking their jobs to fix a company with a sorry record with regard to pay equity and fair promotion of its female employees. They, like the other four ex-employees, are outraged that a company they highly respected (and in some cases still respect) routinely denied them and their fellow female workers promotions and equal wages.

Furthermore, critics never claimed that Wal-Mart fails to hire women. The question, instead, is whether the women Wal-Mart is hiring are given fair

wages and an equitable chance at advancement.

As the court depositions and expert testimony show, this was not the case. According to expert witness Richard Drogan, women who work full-time at Wal-Mart earn \$5,000 less than men in the same position. He further concludes that women earn \$1.16 less than men do in hourly posi-

tions and that women were systematically underpromoted. Former and current employees back up the data with affidavits pointing out how newly hired men often made significantly more than their experienced female counterparts and how women, due to the camaraderie between male managers and male employees, weren't told about otherwise poorly publicized advancement possibilities.

Sadly, the wages that women at Wal-Mart do receive are usually not even enough for a family to break the poverty line. Due to poor or nonexistent health benefits, female workers often do not receive vital preventive screenings or treatment for their children. In fact, an unprecedented number of Wal-Mart workers have to rely on publicly funded programs just to get basic care. What we need is legislation like the Health Care Security Act, which will ensure that companies like Wal-Mart give their female and male employees the coverage they deserve.

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