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**WOMEN BUSINESS LEADERS TO EXAMINE STRATEGIES FOR
PROMOTING HEALTHY WORKPLACES**

Illinois First Lady Patricia Blagojevich Joins Women Employed at June 21st
Luncheon for Announcement of *Working Women for Change*, a New Initiative of
Corporate Women Executives and Civic Leaders

Illinois First Lady Patricia Blagojevich will join Women Employed to kick off a new initiative, *Working Women for Change*, at Women Employed's Anniversary Luncheon on June 21st at the Chicago Hilton. The new group's first campaign—to guarantee paid sick days for every Illinois worker—will seek both new public policies and voluntary changes in the private sector. Women Employed, based in Chicago, is a leading national voice for improving the economic status and working conditions of American women.

Announcing the formation of Working Women for Change—the new association of corporate women executives and civic leaders committed to using their personal resources and professional influence to create better working conditions for all women—Ms. Blagojevich, a working mother herself, said:

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“Many hard-working people are forced to work sick or to take time off without pay. Making sure that every working person can care for herself and her family without having to sacrifice her paycheck is an important issue. I’m delighted women business leaders and Women Employed are addressing this challenge.”

Joining Ms. Blagojevich on the Working Women for Change Honorary Committee are Loretta Durbin, the wife of Illinois’ senior U.S. Senator, Dick Durbin; Michelle Obama, the wife of U.S. Senator Barack Obama; Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan; and Congresswomen Jan Schakowsky and Melissa Bean.

Among the leading Chicago-area executives spearheading Working Women for Change are: Gloria Ysasi-Diaz, Vice President, Organizational Excellence, W.W. Grainger, Inc.; Connie Lindsey, Senior Vice President, The Northern Trust Company; and Bridget Gainer, Director of Government Affairs, Aon Corporation;

Ms. Ysasi-Diaz, an executive who has both directly supervised and established policies in the corporate sector for low-wage workers, noted: “Throughout my career, in many different employment settings, I’ve seen just how important paid sick days are to employees. No working person anywhere should be forced to come to work sick or choose between their paycheck and taking care of themselves or a sick family member.”

Ms. Lindsey, a senior executive with a long record of advocacy on behalf of women, said: “The benefits of providing paid sick days are

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obvious here at Northern—healthy and productive employees enable us to better serve our clients and that makes us successful as a business. I can't think of a more positive goal than ensuring that all companies provide reasonable time off for illness and care of family members."

Ms. Gainer, who has been an executive in the public as well as the private sector, commented on the timeliness of this new effort: "For two generations now, women have been leaders in Illinois businesses. We know what it takes to rise in business and civic life. We also know that we all face unscheduled demands when raising children. Many of us have risen to positions where we can negotiate that balance. It is now incumbent upon us to ensure that all women, no matter what their wages or level of employment, have that same opportunity. Paid sick time is a critically important place for us to start."

At the June 21st luncheon, Ms. Gainer will describe the components of Working Women for Change's first campaign: working with the Governor to explore public- and private-sector solutions, legislative initiatives, and a focus on voluntary changes in the retail industry, since a majority of workers in that industry are women. In the nine-county, Chicago region alone, retailers employ over 100,000 cashiers who earn an average of \$16,820 per year and have very limited access to benefits such as paid sick time.

Commenting on the Campaign and its private and public sector strategies, Anne Ladky, Executive Director of Women Employed, noted: "*Working Women for Change* is the right group at the right

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time: Illinois has led the way in increasing the minimum wage, passing an Equal Pay Act, and providing expanded healthcare coverage for low-income children and families. Now is the time to lead on another critical issue: making sure we have a healthy workforce in Illinois.”

Continuing, Ladky said: “I look forward to working with this founding group of 60 outstanding business and civic leaders, who will drive this effort. And I’m confident that with them at the helm, we will achieve success.”

Additional founding members of Working Women for Change include senior executives Cynthia Jared, partner at Sachnoff and Weaver; Margaret Amato of Exelon; Gail H. Morse of Jenner and Block; Laura Thrall, CEO of the YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago; and Rita Fry, a consultant and former Cook County Public Defender.

Keynoting the luncheon, and making the case for paid sick leave, will be Frances Reid, an Academy Award nominee and co-director of the new documentary: “Waging a Living.” The film profiles four low-income workers, and documents the enormous challenges they face in trying to make ends meet. Reid has screened her films for the U.S. Congress, the Council on Foreign Relations and throughout the world.

The 33rd annual Women Employed luncheon will be held from 11a.m.- 1:30 p.m., at the Chicago Hilton, 720 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois. For more information, or to purchase tickets to the luncheon, which cost \$100 /person, call Rosemary Kean at (312) 782-3902 ext.

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245, or Sharon Barry at ext.225.

Founded in 1973, Women Employed's mission is to improve women's economic status and remove barriers to economic equity. Today, Women Employed focuses its advocacy on policies to increase women's wages and benefits, so that all women workers can achieve their aspirations and care for their families. Women Employed's most recent victory was winning \$38 million in FY07 for increased tuition assistance and other supports for low-income college students in Illinois, the majority of whom are women.

See www.womenemployed.org for more information, or call (312) 782-3902.