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# NY lawsuit: Citigroup used recession to fire women

By LARRY NEUMEISTER (AP) – 20 hours ago

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NEW YORK — Citigroup was accused in a lawsuit Wednesday of using companywide layoffs during the recent financial turmoil to purge its work force of scores of female employees to save the jobs of less-qualified men.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Manhattan accused the company of accepting government bailout money even as it continued a pattern of "pervasive discrimination and retaliation" against female employees during the November 2008 layoffs. It also said women are paid less than men and often lose out on promotions, raises and good assignments.

According to the lawsuit, the company has long been plagued by a "boys club" that ensures that middle and senior management positions will be populated by men, leaving its Senior Leadership Committee composed of 39 men and five women while its Executive Committee comprises 19 men and no women.

"Given this disparity in the most senior-level positions, it is not surprising to find that the 'boys club' filters down through the management ranks to affect all senior and junior level professional positions at Citigroup," the lawsuit said. Filed on behalf of six women, the lawsuit sought unspecified damages, class-action status and a court order to end discrimination.

In a statement, Citigroup said many of the claims by the women "are either totally inaccurate or selectively incomplete. The facts do not support their claims of gender discrimination."

The company defended its efforts to be fair to its employees, saying it has a "long-standing commitment to equal employment practices and to provide a professional and respectful workplace."

It said it has successful diversity programs and has been cited 19 times by Working Mother Magazine as one of the 100 best companies for working mothers.

"We are disciplined, focused, consistent and vigilant in regard to our diversity-related efforts," the company said, noting that women in top positions included the chief executive officer of CitiFinancial North America, chief compliance officer, chief innovation officer, chief marketing officer and chief auditor.

The lawsuit took aim at what it called "recessionary discrimination," saying Citigroup failed shareholders by terminating thousands of female employees while retaining less-qualified men in most circumstances.

Without providing specific numbers related to overall layoffs, the lawsuit said it was unlikely by chance that the company fired a "statistically significant percentage" of female workers compared to the number of men who lost their jobs.

It said the disproportionate firing of women occurred because Citigroup let its supervisors and managers select those employees to terminate, enabling them to use their personal preferences and biases in the decisions.

Even those women who were not fired still face a discriminatory workplace, the lawsuit said. It cited the experience of one plaintiff who alleges she faced inappropriate and offensive comments based on her gender and was paid less than similarly situated male employees. When she returned from maternity leave, she was demoted, the lawsuit said.

"As a result of this companywide discrimination, there is a glass ceiling adversely affecting female employees, especially those female employees who become pregnant, take a maternity leave, or have childcare obligations, at Citigroup in all facets of their employment," the lawsuit said.

In addition, the lawsuit said that at least 50 women who have complained about discriminatory practices against themselves and other women have faced retaliation since March 2007.

The lawsuit provided specific information about Citigroup's Public Finance Department, saying 89 percent of the managing directors and directors were men but only 55 percent of workers in those positions who were terminated in the layoffs were men. Thus, afterward, the percentage of women in those positions fell from 11 percent to 7 percent, it said.