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Opinion: Column

Politicians harmful, not helpful for women's rights

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Women's rights have been a point of debate since the women's suffrage movement. Yet despite all the improvements fought for and won by the women of the past, it seems that with any step made forward another two are moving us back.

It is the nature of media today that provides the population with a very specific idea of femininity and womanhood. Many television programs and advertisements depict women as sexual beings needing to look and to act a certain way in order to be desirable. In turn, men can buy products that will make women flock to them and throw themselves at them because, apparently, women can't control their sexual desires. When women are objectified and portrayed in such a light, it belittles their sense of humanness and makes it easier for them to believe that their rights and their bodies aren't actually their own, belonging, instead, to their male counterparts.

donate Women who do excel are challenged. For instance, Olympian Caster Semenya has been [gender](#) tested because she was too fast to possibly be a woman. Women's accomplishments, while no less important than those of men, are degraded and discounted. Gabby Douglas, a gold medalist in the 2012 Olympics, received a great deal of media coverage not for her accomplishments, but instead for her [hair](#). A man has never had his gender questioned or hair discussed in the way that these women are judged and ridiculed.

It is clear that the media, and indeed society as a whole, doesn't comprehend what it means to be a woman. Sadly, the politicians of Wisconsin have proven that they suffer from a similar lack of understanding. Last year, Gov. [Scott Walker repealed](#) the equal pay law for women and men. The law, stating that the two genders must receive equal pay for equal work, stood for equality and protected workers from receiving unfair wages because of their sex. This sparked great outrage, and declarations of a "war on women" were screamed by Walker's opponents.

Today, the battle wages on.

A woman's right to choose has been disputed ever since the famous Roe v. Wade ruling in 1973, a momentous decision by the Supreme Court which legalized abortions within the United States under most circumstances. This ruling was controversial in 1973 and proves even more controversial now.

Not only is a woman's right to make life-altering decisions about her reproductive health being

attacked, but many politicians are also working tirelessly to contest the law, which would provide free birth control pills to women with health care.

Isn't this a huge contradiction? Abortion is argued to be unlawful because it involves the termination of a human life. For many, birth control pills are a luxury that cannot be afforded. With health care providers offering free birth control to their customers, unwanted pregnancies and, in turn, abortions will become avoidable. Why, then, is abolishing the availability of free birth control being fought for on Capitol Hill? And what about Planned Parenthood?

Planned Parenthood is a non-profit organization providing healthcare screenings and advice for women. Its right to exist is debated and many politicians have fought to shut it down because they believe it to be an abortion factory. While the organization does provide abortions, it also offers a great deal more. It supplies STD screenings and mammary exams, both of which are crucial to a woman's health and well-being. Planned Parenthood provides these services affordably and discreetly; the abolishment of the organization would be detrimental not only to women's health, but the idea of women's rights. It would further the idea that the future of a woman's body is to be decided upon by a man.

We are witnessing a disconcerting trend — with increasing regularity, women's issues have fallen into the hands of male politicians. This raises an important question — why is it right or just that the power and control over a woman's reproduction is given to a handful of men? A man's reproduction has never been debated as vigorously as a woman's. And while politicians battle over a woman's body and her reproduction, making claims of what is “right” and “wrong,” women are being left out of the discussion.

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