

# Sen. Erpenbach: Call for equal pay heard around the world, inspires a nation

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WEST POINT, WI – After Independence Day last week, we are all feeling a little bit more patriotic, not solely because of the stunning fireworks that lit the sky and the celebration of our independence, but because we were all reminded what it means to be an American.

That same weekend the U.S. women's soccer team won their fourth World Cup Championship, beating the Netherlands 2-0. This amazing accomplishment of an incredible season of breaking records and triumphant victories was complemented by a swift eruption of chants in support of the team, "equal pay, equal pay."

This chant followed the players back to the states, as fans showed up to express their support for the team, and their support for equal rights in the workplace. Carrying homemade signs, and throwing confetti out windows, women, men, and children alike celebrated the victory together, and continued their call for equal pay.

There is no doubt that the U.S. women's soccer team made history, in multiple ways, but their ability to inspire a nation, and bring people from all sides of the aisle together is a truly amazing accomplishment.

So what now? Truthfully, it is sad that in 2019, we are still having this discussion. Everyone deserves equal pay for equal work. It doesn't matter if you are a world-renowned athlete or not – regardless of your profession, everyone deserves to be fairly compensated for their hard work; free from discrimination based on gender.

Wisconsin has always been a leader when it came to women's rights. In fact, in June

1919, Wisconsin became the first state to officially ratify the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment granting national suffrage to women, giving them the right to vote. Additionally, in 2009, Wisconsin had passed an Equal Pay Enforcement Act Law, which ensured fair-pay.

However, Republicans repealed the law in 2012. In doing so, Republicans made it more difficult for women to seek missed compensation due to discrimination. Instead of being able to file a complaint with a state agency, they must engage in a long and drawn-out lawsuit in the courts. Women's rights have been under attack throughout the United States, and it is disappointing that steps towards equality got overturned.

On average, women in Wisconsin earn 80 cents for every dollar a man makes, and that gap is larger for women of color. This pay discrepancy makes it difficult for Wisconsin to have a full and thriving economy. Women make up nearly half of Wisconsin's workforce, and 1/3 of households are headed by women.

The numbers are clear. If women received equal pay for equal work, it would help grow our economy all over the state. With more disposable income, families would have an easier time making large purchases, such as homes and cars, and would be able to enjoy more time supporting local businesses within our communities.

By not paying women their fair share, we are hurting our state monumentally. In order for our communities to thrive, we need to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to succeed. Knowingly discriminating against workers based on their gender, rather than what they bring to the table, hinders our economy, and our ability to compete in a global market.

The women's U.S. soccer team made me feel more patriotic because it reminded me of what makes America an amazing place to live. It is our ability to see injustices within society, and to openly fight for what is right. It is the masses who show up to support our teams, and find common ground, even during distressing times.

With all this said, and as we enter the second half of 2019, we know that enacting equal pay legislation is far overdue. It is time for us to end discrimination in the workplace, and endorse equal pay for equal work. As the chant goes, "U.S.A., Equal Pay."