

FROM THE DESK OF

Lilly Ledbetter

JACKSONVILLE, AL

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Dear Senator:

My name is Lilly Ledbetter. Tonight, I'll watch President Barack Obama's Address to the Joint Session of Congress from the House gallery, as a guest of First Lady Michelle Obama. Just a few weeks ago, I had the honor of standing behind President Obama as he signed the bill that bears my name. As I watched the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act become the law of the land, I thought about all the women and girls who – thanks to the stroke of the president's pen – will have a better chance of fighting back against pay discrimination. But my bill was only one stop on the long road to fair pay – after all, women still earn only 78 cents for every dollar men earn. **So I write again to advocate for another bill that will bring us even closer to the dream of equal pay for equal work: the Paycheck Fairness Act (S. 182/H.R. 12).**

My own story has become well-known. Thirty years ago, Goodyear hired me to work as supervisor in their tire plant in Gadsden, AL. I gave my all to Goodyear, but they did not give their all to me. Thanks to an anonymous tip I received shortly before my retirement, I discovered that I had been subjected to pay discrimination over the course of my career. I filed a complaint without delay, and at the trial, the jury found that Goodyear had discriminated against me in violation of Title VII. Unfortunately, the ruling was later reversed by the Supreme Court.

I won't lie to you; I was pretty devastated by that decision. But instead of taking it quietly, I've been fighting back from the moment the Court made its ruling. The first step was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which makes sure that people can challenge discriminatory paychecks as long as they continue to receive them: after all, that's what Congress intended all along when it passed the Civil Rights Act back in 1964. But this new law is just a down payment.

The next logical step is the Paycheck Fairness Act, a critical and comprehensive update to the 45-year-old Equal Pay Act that brings equal pay laws in line with other civil rights law. This bill would take real steps to deter wage discrimination by empowering women to negotiate for equal pay, creating stronger incentives for employers to follow the law, and strengthening federal enforcement efforts. In addition, it would establish new training and research initiatives, and create new education programs to help both employers and employees prevent situations like mine from ever happening in the first place. From my perspective, one of the most important provisions of the bill would prohibit retaliation against workers who ask about employers' wage practices or disclose their own wages to others. This provision would have been particularly helpful to me, because Goodyear prohibited me and my colleagues from discussing or sharing our wages. This policy delayed my discovery of the pay inequities between me and my male counterparts by almost two decades.

As I said at a recent AAUW conference, giving women the Ledbetter Act without the Paycheck Fairness Act is like giving them the nail without the hammer. The House has passed the Paycheck Fairness Act already, and I am confident President Obama will sign it into law – he was a cosponsor himself just last year. So now it's up to the Senate. If the Senate follows through, this Congress will truly be remembered for making an historic commitment to pay equity.

I may have lost my legal battle, but I haven't given up. I'm still fighting for all the other women and girls out there who deserve equal pay and equal treatment under the law. Please, **I urge you to join the cause and cosponsor the Paycheck Fairness Act.** We owe it to our daughters, our granddaughters, and ourselves. Call my friends at the American Association of University Women (AAUW) if you have any questions; you can reach Lisa Maatz, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations, at 202-785-7720. She can also set up a telephone call if you'd like to talk directly to me about why I so strongly support this critical legislation.

Sincerely,



Lilly Ledbetter

Plaintiff, *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*