

To Ms. Sylvanie Williams:

I'm sorry, Ms. Williams. We, as a nation, have let you down. Not only you, but women as a whole.

Before I get into what setbacks have happened in our country over the past 100 years, let's discuss the advancements. The first woman pilot to fly solo across the Atlantic was Amelia Earhart in 1932. In 1955, a black woman, Rosa Parks, refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white man, and this ended up launching the Civil Rights movement. A couple of years later, the FDA approved the first birth control pill in 1960. Three years later, President John F. Kennedy ratified a law that prohibited sex-based discrimination in the workplace. A year later, President Lyndon B. Johnson, signed the Civil Rights Act which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, religion, sex, or national origin. In 1966, Betty Friedan founded the organization WomenNOW (National Organization for Women). In 1972, President Richard Nixon signed an amendment that states "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." In 1973, one of the most important decisions was made. The *Roe v. Wade* decision was put into effect, giving women a constitutional right to an abortion. In 1981, the first woman to serve on the supreme court, Sandra Day O'Connor, was sworn in. Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman vice presidential nominee in 1984. In 1997, Madeleine Albright became the first female secretary of state. In 1994, the Violence Against Women Act was signed, which provided funds for programs for victims of rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and gender-related violence. In 2007, Nancy Pelosi became the first female speaker of the House and she held this title twice and became the first lawmaker to hold the office twice, consecutively, in 50 years. In 2013, the military allowed women to serve in combat positions. In 2016, Hillary Clinton became the first woman to receive a presidential nomination from a major political party. In 2021, Kamala Harris was sworn in as the first woman and woman of color as vice president of the United States.

I know what you are thinking: "We've made it so far!" and believe me we have. But recently we were set back. In June of 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and now there are states where abortion is illegal. The Supreme Court even put in rules such as the "heartbeat bill," where abortion is illegal after a fetal heartbeat can be measured. Heartbeats happen around 6 weeks, so even though most women don't even know they are pregnant by then, it's too late. Not only did this set women back, but it also may have opened the doors to overturn many other laws we've fought for such as same-sex marriage, interracial marriage, and more.

It's scary as other things are appearing such as the "pink tax," when products geared toward women are more expensive than their counterparts. Not only in America are setbacks happening, but in Afghanistan the Taliban is banning women from education, forcing them to completely cover up or face punishment and even going as far as covering female mannequin faces in stores. Women are being sent home from government jobs and mass executions were

and still are happening. We've made it so far in America, making it a safe space for women coming from these countries, but if things like this continue, there will be no more safe spaces for women elsewhere.

As a teenage girl, I should not have had to be given a talk after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, informing me of the unchangeable fate that the government has given me. Many Supreme Court justices are trying to make more extreme choices. Women are rarely believed when it comes to sexual assault, especially when the assaulter is well known. How is it that almost every woman knows a survivor, but no man knows a perpetrator?

We have let women as a whole down. We aren't even protected by our government anymore. All of our hard work is down the drain.

I'm sorry Ms. Williams, the U.S. has let you down.

Aenea Hester