

~ FROM THE DESK OF ~

Lilly Ledbetter

January 6, 2009

Dear Representative:

My name is Lilly Ledbetter. The New Year is always a time for optimism, and with the election of a new president and a new Congress, I'm feeling more hopeful than ever about positive change for women in our country. We've come a long way, but we still have a lot of work to do. So today I write to you in support of two pieces of legislation – one of which bears my name. Together, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act will help move us towards a commonsense goal: equal pay for equal work.

Nobody wants to be the poster child for *unequal* pay for equal work, but that's what happened to me. Thirty years ago, Goodyear hired me to work as supervisor in their tire plant in Gadsden, AL. I sometimes wondered how my pay compared to my colleagues, but there was no way to know for sure because pay levels were kept strictly confidential. Thanks to an anonymous tip I received shortly before my retirement, I finally got some hard evidence of real pay discrimination. I filed a complaint without delay, and at the trial, the jury found that Goodyear had discriminated against me in violation of Title VII. The jury awarded me more than \$3 million in back pay and punitive damages.

Unfortunately, that good moment didn't last long. First, because of damages caps in Title VII, the trial judge was forced to reduce that award to \$300,000 -- a mere ten percent of what the jury had awarded me and hardly more than a slap on the wrist to a company the size of Goodyear. Then, in 2007, my case reached the U.S. Supreme Court. In a disappointing 5-4 ruling, the justices took away the entire award, including the back pay. The Court said I should have complained every time I got a smaller raise than the men, even if I didn't know what the men were getting paid and even if I had no way to prove the decision was discriminatory. In other words, the Court said if you don't figure things out right away, a company can treat you like a second-class citizen for the rest of your career.

I won't lie to you; I was pretty devastated by that decision. But instead of taking it quietly, I've decided to fight back, and the two bills I mentioned would do just that. The first is the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which would address my Supreme Court decision by simply making 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. This bill would protect workers like me and give employers the incentive to fix pay problems voluntarily.

The second bill is the Paycheck Fairness Act, which is a critical update to the 45-year-old Equal Pay Act. This bill would take real steps to empower women to negotiate for equal pay, create stronger incentives for employers to follow the law, and strengthen federal outreach and enforcement efforts. By putting firm protections in place now, this bill will help improve the climate for today's working women as well as girls who haven't yet entered the workforce.

Passing both of these important bills together is crucial. One bill fixes a past mistake, and the other helps ensure that such a mistake won't happen again. Passing the two bills in tandem sends a doubly strong signal that pay equity is a top priority for the new Congress and will give better enforcement tools to the administration, too.

I may have lost my personal 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 support these two critical bills. We owe it to our daughters, our granddaughters, and ourselves.

Sincerely,



Lilly Ledbetter

Plaintiff

Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.