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The New York Times

Health
Goodbye, Tampon Tax (at Least for Some)

By Maya Salam
856 words
9 November 2018
15:50
NYTimes.com Feed
NYTFEED
English
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Nevada became the 10th state to eliminate the so-called tampon tax, freeing consumers of sales tax when buying tampons and sanitary pads.

“When you say you’re for ‘menstrual equity,’ it means you’re for educational equity; it means you’re for workplace equity; it means you’re for health equity.”

— Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, author of the 2017 book “Periods Gone Public”

Tampons and pads are necessary items that half the population must acquire a dozen times a year for about 40 years of their lives. They are not optional — a point that U.S. legislators are, evidently, beginning to recognize.

On Tuesday, Nevada joined nine states — including New York, Florida and Illinois — to eliminate the so-called tampon tax, freeing consumers of a 6.85 percent sales tax when they buy tampons and sanitary pads. Most hygiene items are taxed under state laws (deodorant and soap, for example), but, unlike these items, tampons are considered medically necessary.

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The outcome was a victory for proponents of “menstrual equity,” a phrase created by Jennifer Weiss-Wolf and a movement that aims to eliminate the tampon tax and make menstrual products available to in-need populations: students and those in correctional facilities and those in shelters.

Kenya was the first nation to stop taxing menstrual products, in 2004, in part because millions of Kenyan girls and women cannot afford these products. Canada dropped the tax in 2015, and Malaysia, India and Australia followed suit this year.

In the United States, food and prescription medication are not taxed, because they are deemed “necessary.”

And yet, as Ms. Weiss-Wolf — who works with lawmakers to introduce legislation and policies to support menstrual equity — questioned when I spoke to her by phone: Are items like Viagra, Pop-Tarts and Rogaine really “necessities”?

Leaders from some states, like Utah, have shot down efforts to eliminate the tampon tax on grounds that they don’t want to pick and choose what is tax exempt. But Utah has granted this status to arcade-game tokens, for example, while other states have carved out exemptions for items such as cowboy boots (Texas), gun club memberships (Wisconsin) and chain saws (Idaho).

Women have come to accept that every aspect of our periods are “our own secret problem, and we are making other people uncomfortable if we raise it,” Ms. Weiss-Wolf said. But the truth is, she continued, raising the issue of menstrual equity “hasn’t made legislators very uncomfortable at all.”

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Further reading

* A door to deny birth control coverage. A new move by the Trump administration would allow religious groups, nonprofits and small businesses to deny insurance coverage for “religious or moral” reasons. [HuffPo]

* “Year of the Woman” indeed. A record 34 new women won House seats on Tuesday, beating a previous high set in 1992. [The New York Times]

* Women govern differently. Research suggests that women in politics tend to be more collaborative and bipartisan, and to focus on social issues more than men. [The New York Times]

* A real rainbow wave. More than 150 L.G.B.T.Q. candidates were elected nationwide, and Massachusetts voted to uphold a state law protecting transgender people from discrimination. [The New York Times]

* “This isn’t about shoes, this is about who belongs in ballet and who doesn’t.” Brown point shoes arrive, 200 years after white ones. [The New York Times]

* Missing onscreen: Asian-Americans. Actors of Asian descent have long either been cast in embarrassing, demeaning roles or simply whitewashed out of the picture. [The New York Times Style Magazine]

From the archives: ‘Toxic Shock’

“I went dancing the night before in a black velvet Paris gown, on one of those evenings that was the glamour of New York epitomized,” the reporter Nan Robertson wrote in a 1982 article for The New York Times Magazine. “Twenty-four hours later, I lay dying, my fingers and legs darkening with gangrene.”

The piece, about toxic shock syndrome, would earn Ms. Robertson a Pulitzer Prize.

The article explored Ms. Robertson’s agonizing encounter with the illness, which is caused by the bacterium Staphylococcus aureus and is most closely associated with tampon use, though Ms. Robertson was postmenopausal when she fell ill.

She spent two days in a coma and two months in the hospital. She had to endure partial amputation of eight of her fingers.

Over time, she regained the use of her hands and wrote the article, which was published less than a year after she became ill.

“I have typed the thousands of words of this article, slowly and with difficulty, once again able to practice my craft as a reporter,” Ms. Robertson wrote. “I have written it — at last — with my own hands.”

Gender Letter helps you keep up with the world, and the women shaping it. Tell me what you think at dearmaya@nytimes.com.

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Franziska Barczyk

Document NYTFEED020181109eeb90050l

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The Washington Post

Editorial-Opinion
D.C. moves one step closer to menstrual equity

By Holly Seibold
565 words
27 April 2018
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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In a huge victory for women's equality, D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) included partial funding for the "tampon tax repeal" in her proposed fiscal 2019 budget . If the D.C. Council adopts her proposal, women in the District — who earn just 86 cents to every man's dollar, on average — will no longer face the added indignity of having to pay tax on menstrual products. The mayor's decision to fund the tampon tax repeal demonstrates her leadership on menstrual equity, an issue that has become a national movement.

I founded Bringing Resources to Aid Women's Shelters (BRAWS) in 2015 to address the lack of access to menstrual products many women and girls experience locally. BRAWS is a local nonprofit that collects and distributes menstrual products and new bras and underwear (with tags on) to women in shelters in the District, Maryland and Virginia. Through our work, we became aware of this overwhelming need.

In 2016, D.C. Council member Anita Bonds (D-At Large), a leader in the menstrual-equity fight, introduced tampon tax legislation that passed with near-unanimous support. The mayor signed the Feminine Hygiene and Diaper Sales Tax Amendments Act of 2016 on Dec. 6, 2016, subject to appropriation. This means the law cannot be implemented until it is funded. To date, the D.C. Council has failed to fund the law. If fully funded, the law would remove the sales tax from all menstrual products and diapers in the District.

The District has an opportunity to be at the forefront on menstrual equity, a key women's movement. Laws and policies our society puts in place should take into account that only one gender menstruates. Women are largely the consumers of menstrual products, and a tax on those products unfairly targets women. Menstrual products are expensive, making them inaccessible to some women with low incomes. That can have a negative impact on their jobs and school performance. The sales tax on these products creates even more of a burden.

A woman may use more than 40 pads or tampons over a seven-day period. Women and girls who cannot afford these products may suffer physical and emotional trauma, from vaginal infections to ridicule from classmates or colleagues.

Moreover, the 5.75 percent D.C. sales tax, which is applied uniformly on all taxable purchases regardless of income level, is regressive. Families with low incomes pay a larger percentage of their income to sales taxes.

Some argue that all consumer purchases should be taxed equally to preserve the tax base. However, the District can afford the relatively minor cost of the tampon tax repeal to ensure its tax code does not unfairly burden women. According to the chief financial officer, the District is projected to collect nearly $88.7 million more revenue than anticipated in fiscal 2019.

Menstrual products are exempt from sales tax in at least nine states that have a sales tax. Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania have exempted menstrual products from sales tax, while supporting women and proving that gender equity matters.

The D.C. Council should support the mayor and women and girls who live and work in the District by funding the menstrual products sales-tax exemption in the 2019 budget.

Document WPCOM00020180427ee4r006bw

The Boston Globe

Metro
A once-intimate issue gets a candid reckoning

Stephanie Ebbert
1,441 words
16 June 2019
The Boston Globe
BSTNGB
A.1
ISSN:07431791
English
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In the #MeToo era, a push for 'menstrual equity'

Uncomfortable talking about The Curse? Shark Week? Surfing the Crimson Wave?

Get ready to hear a lot more about it.

In this time of ferocious female discontent, women are increasingly demanding a conversation about their periods and a reconsideration of public policies surrounding the cost and distribution of menstrual products.

Brookline Town Meeting members decided last month to start providing free menstrual products in public bathrooms by 2021 — a move they believe makes their municipality the first in the nation to do so.

Boston city councilors recently proposed providing pads and tampons in city schools to encourage students, most of whom are low-income, to come to school even if they're ill-equipped. Cambridge schools were the first in the area to do so, followed by Somerville, and now Massachusetts lawmakers are considering a bill requiring menstrual products in all public schools, as well as in shelters and prisons.

And the MIT Media Lab is setting out to reimagine the tired old monthly enterprise with a “period hackathon" aimed at brainstorming innovative period products and policies.

A national advocacy group this week even launched a coordinated campaign with influencers including Serena Williams and Karlie Kloss to challenge the sales tax on menstrual products imposed by 35 states (not Massachusetts) as not only annoying but inequitable and illegal.

“This is really big. It isn't just about menstrual products," said Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, an attorney and author of the book “Periods Gone Public," who suggests the lapses say something much larger about societal regard for half the population.

“Is this a sign of what is wrong with the system: That our bodies and our needs aren't accurately reflected in the laws and policies under which we live?" she asked. “What does it say about how we consider women as citizens of this country?"

The idea of “menstrual equity" is finding traction in the #MeToo era as women demand that issues long dismissed as individual female complaints be heard, acknowledged, and reconsidered by society at large.

“I've never met a woman of any age who didn't absorb the lesson directly or indirectly that this was her problem to solve, and also something that had to be hidden from others," said Rebecca Stone, the Brookline Town Meeting member who championed the effort. “That you should be embarrassed if someone knows you're bleeding."

Dismantling time-worn social conventions will be a challenge, of course. Enter the MIT Media Lab, which aims to disrupt the whole notion of the period by throwing a new generation of innovators and agitators at it. In January, the Media Lab plans a weekend-long “period hackathon" called “There Will Be Blood."

The hackathon is the brainchild of two female researchers who previously staged a similar event to reimagine the breast pump. (One of them, Catherine D'Ignazio, is a mother of three who was tired of pumping on a bathroom floor.) They're seeking diverse applicants who can offer new perspectives, noted Alexis Hope, an MIT Media Lab research assistant.

“That's one thing we really care about — ripping open the walls of MIT a little bit, to allow more people to participate in the process of innovation," Hope said.

Menstruators are not all female, mind you, since they include transgender men. But all menstruators will point out that their predicament is not a surprising or original one. It's a predictable and nearly universal occurrence for roughly half the population for nearly half their lives. Why, then, is it not anticipated by public bathrooms and public policies?

“Everything else we do for human body function for public health and hygiene reasons — we provide those products for free," said Stone, pointing to toilet paper, soap, toilet seat covers, paper towels, and even urinal cakes. Not so, pads or tampons.

For some, it's a radical shift of perspective.

“Why can't they just bring their own? Do we have to do everything?" a male constituent at a senior center groused to state Representative Jeffrey Roy, a Franklin Democrat.

“I turned to him and said, 'Bill, do you have toilet paper and hand towels in your pocket right now?' " Roy recounted.

Roy, one of several male politicians in Massachusetts sponsoring period parity bills, argues that menstrual products shouldn't be treated any differently. “It's an idea whose time has come," he said.

“This is the first time I think in Massachusetts that we're really seeing more momentum around the conversation around menstrual equity," said Sasha Goodfriend, president of the Massachusetts chapter of the National Organization for Women, which is pushing a bill on Beacon Hill.

The period parity logic challenges age-old assumptions about whose necessities are really necessary — and the howl-worthy implication of many states' sales tax codes that tampons are not necessities but “luxury" items. (Though the “tampon tax" makes for lovely alliteration, there is no tax specific to menstrual products; it merely means that menstrual products aren't exempt from sales tax as necessities, like food.)

Lawmakers already have done away with the tampon tax in Illinois, New York, Florida, and Connecticut and the cities of Chicago and Washington, D.C. In November, Nevada voters statewide supported a ballot measure to end it.

When Weiss-Wolf's book was published in October 2017, the #MeToo movement was taking off, and her issue seemed “so small compared to that tidal wave of activity and anger," she said in an interview. But she watched the movements run along parallel paths.

“What we learned in #MeToo is that this is what a fully dystopian society looks like when our needs and our stories go fully unacknowledged by the powers that be," Weiss-Wolf said.

With fellow attorney Laura Strausfeld, Weiss-Wolf successfully challenged the tampon tax in New York state — exempting menstrual products from the state's 4 percent sales tax — and created a nonprofit advocacy organization called Period Equity.

Now, they're partnering with the MIT Media Lab on the hackathon, in the hopes of laying the groundwork for a coordinated campaign to repeal the tampon tax, now levied in 35 states.

Though a sales tax is a relatively a small price to pay each month, it's one that non-menstruators (previously known as men) will never pay, creating a point of contention for feminists keenly attuned to gender inequities right now. Menstrual products also can't be purchased with food stamps, and low-income students who can't afford them sometimes skip school rather than risk embarrassment, advocates say.

“Girls shouldn't be worrying about their periods. They should be worrying about their educational experience," Caroline Williams, an 18-year-old recent Medway High School graduate, testified at the State House last week.

Williams, who wrote about the topic for a persuasive writing assignment, spoke with her state legislator, Roy, after he visited her school for a civics presentation. When he asked her to collaborate on a bill, she emphasized two priorities: that students shouldn't be charged for such products and that acquiring them shouldn't require a diversion to a nurse's office.

“A period isn't an illness. It doesn't mean you're sick. It means you're healthy," Williams said.

The push for period products in Cambridge and Somerville schools also came from students. And Brookline's effort was inspired by a young woman, 2018 graduate Sarah Groustra, who wrote a high school newspaper column denouncing period stigma.

Stone, the Brookline Town Meeting member who took up the cause, said she was “blown away that I'd never thought about it. Here I was, not only somebody who had experienced a period and borne two children and

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worked with reproductive rights, and I never thought about it as a rights issue, never thought about it as an equity issue, never thought about the fact that the taboo is part of reinforcing women's second-class status."

Now a student at Kenyon College, Groustra said it was “incredibly gratifying" to hear Stone crediting her for the inspiration and to watch her idea come to fruition in her hometown.

“I really do believe the best way to end a stigma is just to talk about it even in the smallest ways," Groustra said. “And I was happy to put myself out there, to work on combating that."

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Credit: By Stephanie Ebbert Globe Staff

Caption:

Erin Clark for The Boston Globe

Document BSTNGB0020190616ef6g00054

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MarketWatch

News & Commentary

If paper towels are free in public restrooms, why aren't tampons? Jennifer Weiss-Wolf argues that menstruation is the reality of women's lives for most of their lives, and society should recognize that—period

Emma Court
1,296 words
29 November 2017
16:43
MarketWatch
MRKWC
English
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Jennifer Weiss-Wolf argues that menstruation is the reality of women's lives for most of their lives, and society should recognize that—period

While on a whirlwind tour for her new book, activist Jennifer Weiss-Wolf found herself suddenly stopped in her tracks in a Dallas, Texas, airport bathroom.

The sight in front of her was common enough: a metal, hands-free paper towel dispenser, its contents available at no cost. And nearby, a tampon and pad dispenser—with a fee.

If Weiss-Wolf hadn't thought much about this palpable contrast before, she certainly was now. "Why is one free and one not?" she asked. "Who decided it and why?"

A lawyer and vice president of think tank Brennan Center for Justice, Weiss-Wolf first paid attention to equal access to menstrual products back in 2015 when she heard about two teenagers in her community collecting pads and tampons for a local food pantry.

Periods are part of half the population's lives, for most of their lives—something that should be recognized by societal laws and institutions, she believes. It's become the animating idea behind her activism.

Female "experiences are surprising to people — why? Why are our bodies and experiences considered the 'other,'" Weiss-Wolf ponders. "We have a right to ask systems to account for our bodies and our lives."

Weiss-Wolf quickly joined the front lines of a movement to end the "tampon tax" — the retail sales tax applied to menstrual products — and to bring free products to New York City public schools, shelters and prisons, all of which she says is under the umbrella of "menstrual equity."

Read: New York is the latest state to scrap tampon tax

Weiss-Wolf details those experiences and more in the book "Periods Gone Public," which was published Oct. 10. And even though it might seem like women have bigger problems these days amid news of rampant sexual harassment across many sectors, she sees it all as part of a larger, and concerning, theme.

Weiss-Wolf spoke with MarketWatch by phone from her office in New York about how to put a value on menstrual equity and what comes after the tampon tax. Following is an edited version of the conversation.

MarketWatch: We're obviously a financial news site. How is this idea of "menstrual equity" a financial issue?

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf: The equity issue is really rooted in civic participation — the ability to be productive at work, the ability to gain the education we're entitled to in this country. Women are being denied the ability to participate if they are denied access to menstrual products or can't afford them.

The ability to be present and productive at work and school are economic issues as much as anything else. Women's economic success is part of global economic success. We have good portion of the population telling us that their ability to sit productively in class is challenged if they don't have a maxi pad or can't afford it.

It's not just about the people for whom this ability is being compromised. It's all of us — we all suffer when women suffer. And when women succeed In the workplace, as parents, as citizens, it's better for society.

Most of us think it's normal and expected to walk into a public restroom and find toilet paper, soap to wash our hands, something to dry our hands. I'm putting out to the world the idea that menstrual products are also part of that equation. Were we to regulate that provision, we would not only improve the lives of girls and women but we would actually shift that bias and shift what's considered normal.

I'm calling upon our legislators, through this book and this advocacy, to consider menstruation as part of the norm for people who are affected by the laws they pass. Menstruation is a normal bodily function for half of the workforce for a good portion of their lives. And yet we have not treated this as the norm in our lawmaking. It's to our economic benefit to do so.

MW: What would that look like to you?

JWW: That's the fun part of the book. I look at laws through this lens. One example here is flexible spending accounts, which enable us to take care of medical necessities in our lives with tax-free dollars. You can do everything from buying contact lens solution to paying for a doctor's appointment. But menstrual products you can't, because the IRS tax code doesn't deem them a medical necessity.

Who was at the table making that decision? I imagine anyone who menstruates would probably disagree with that characterization. That's 30 cents on the dollar I get to save if that rule is shifted.

Another example is The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), under the Department of Agriculture, for pregnant women and mothers of babies. It also does not include menstrual products, even though the program focuses more holistically on the health and well-being of new mothers with babies.

Women who are postpartum need to use pads, and really giant-sized pads, for about six weeks after childbirth. Yet there's no analysis or acknowledgment of menstruation or that kind of bleeding in any of WIC's considerations. WIC has already branched outside of food in the way it manages the program. Why shouldn't it include menstrual products?

MW: Right, and there are plenty of medical conditions with heavy bleeding, like polycystic ovary syndrome and endometriosis.

JWW: All this stuff intersects. It's not this weird little separate part of our lives, it's just who we are. It's part of how we manage our budgets, our schedules and lots of parts of our lives besides access to tampons.

Related: This drug may be able to treat both women's health disorders and prostate cancer

I think the economics of menstruation have only been avoided and ignored because we've never demanded we put them on the table. There's a real detriment to ignoring it.

MW: What other changes could be made, besides in policy?

JWW: All the changes I'm asking lawmakers to make, anybody can make on their own. Employers can make menstrual products available — my employer does, because I brought it to their attention. Any one of us who's an employee somewhere can remember a time that resulted in a little bit of lost time on the clock, maybe caused you to become a little less productive in a meeting.

It's hard to imagine the cost of providing these products would have an effect on employers' bottom line. Do employers fret about toilet paper costs?

MW: So what comes next?

JWW: We're just getting started, there's so much to do. We're getting more and more states and municipalities to address this issue of access for vulnerable, or marginalized, or low-income members of their community. With the tampon tax, there were 24 bills introduced — four passed, but there are still 36 states that have the tampon tax.

And a broader notion of what it means to make menstruation a focal point of overall legislating. That's like a lifetime of work to do. I want all our laws to be looked at through this lens, to the extent that it's practical. Women's health and well-being is absolutely an economic issue.

Document MRKWC00020171129edbt003bi

Cover
The Fight to End Period Shaming Is Going Mainstream

Abigail Jones
6,196 words
29 April 2016
Newsweek
NSWK
Global Edition
1
Volume 166, Number 16
English
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Let's begin with the obvious: Every woman in the history of humanity has or had a period. Each month, her uterus sheds its lining, sending blood flowing out through her vagina (unless she's pregnant, in which case she gets a lengthy reprieve). This process is as natural as eating, drinking and sleeping, and it's beautiful too: There's no human race without it. Yet most of us loathe talking about it.

When girls first start their periods, they embark on a decades-long journey of silence and dread. Periods hurt. They cause backaches and cramps, not to mention a cloud of emotional ickiness—and this goes on every month, for 30 to 40 years. In public, people discuss periods as often as they discuss diarrhea. Women shove pads or tampons up their sleeves on their way to the bathroom so no one knows it's their "time of the month." They get bloodstains on their clothes. They stick wads of toilet paper in their underwear when they're caught without supplies. Meanwhile, ad campaigns sanitize this bloody mess with scenes of light blue liquids gently cascading onto fluffy white pads while women frolic in form-fitting white jeans.

In a 1978 satire for Ms. magazine, feminist pioneer Gloria Steinem answered the question that so many women have asked: "What would happen, for instance, if suddenly, magically, men could menstruate and women could not? The answer is clear—menstruation would become an enviable, boast-worthy, masculine event: Men would brag about how long and how much," she wrote. Steinem envisioned a world where "men-struation" justifies men's place pretty much everywhere: in combat, political office, religious leadership positions and medical schools. We'd have "Paul Newman Tampons" and "Muhammad Ali's Rope-a-Dope Pads" and a new model for compliments:

"Man, you lookin' good!"

"Yeah, man, I'm on the rag!"

Nearly 40 years later, Steinem's essay still stings because "menstrual equity" has gone almost nowhere. Today, tampons and pads are taxed in most states while adult diapers, Viagra, Rogaine and potato chips are not. Men can walk into any bathroom and access all of the supplies they need to care for themselves: toilet paper, soap, paper towels, even seat covers. Women, however, cannot. In most schools, girls have to trek to the nurse's office to ask for a pad or tampon, as if menstruating is an illness rather than a natural function. In most public and private places, women are lucky if there's a cranky machine on the wall charging a few quarters for a pad that's so uncomfortable you might prefer to use a wad of rough toilet paper instead. No change? You can pay for a parking spot with a credit card, but have you ever seen such technology on a tampon machine in a women's bathroom? The situation for prison inmates and homeless women is far direr.

Even if you do have access to tampons, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require companies to list the ingredients—yet the average woman has a tampon inside her vagina for more than 100,000 hours over her lifetime. Tampons may contain "residue from chemical herbicides," says Sharra Vostral, a historian at Purdue University who wrote Under Wraps: A History of Menstrual Hygiene Technology . "We do not really understand the health consequences, because we are not testing for them in relation to tampons."

If all this sounds unfair, try getting your period in the developing world. Taboos, poverty, inadequate sanitary facilities, meager health education and an enduring culture of silence create an environment in which girls and women are denied what should be a basic right: clean, affordable menstrual materials and safe, private spaces to care for themselves. At least 500 million girls and women globally lack adequate facilities for managing their periods, according to a 2015 report from UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO). In rural India, one in five girls drops out of school after they start menstruating , according to research by

Nielsen and Plan India, and of the 355 million menstruating girls and women in the country, just 12 percent use sanitary napkins.

“In today’s world, if there’s nobody dying it’s not on anyone’s agenda,” says Venkatraman Chandra-Mouli, a WHO scientist who’s worked in adolescent health for the past 20 years. “Menstrual problems don’t kill anyone, but for me, they are still an extremely important issue because they affect how girls view themselves, and they affect confidence, and confidence is the key to everything.”

For something that has over 5,000 slang terms (shark week, Bloody Mary, red wedding), the period is one of the most ignored human rights issues around the globe—affecting everything from education and economics to the environment and public health—but that’s finally starting to change. In the past year, there have been so many pop culture moments around menstruation that NPR called 2015 “the year of the period,” and Cosmopolitan said it was “the year the period went public.” We’ll never have gender equality if we don’t talk about periods, but 2016 signaled the beginning of something better than talk: It’s becoming the year of menstrual change. There’s a movement—propelled by activists, inventors, politicians, startup founders and everyday people—to strip menstruation of its stigma and ensure that public policy keeps up. For the first time, Americans are talking about gender equality, feminism and social change through women’s periods, which, as Steinem puts it, is “evidence of women taking their place as half the human race.”

#HappyToBleed

Menstruation wasn’t always so taboo. In ancient and matrilineal cultures, it was a mark of honor and power, a sacred time for women to rest and revive their bodies. Today, no one is going to the spa or taking a few days off of work to celebrate her period. Menstruation has been cloaked in shame for centuries, but that silence was broken for a brief moment in 1970 when Dr. Edgar Berman, a member of the Democratic Party’s Committee on National Priorities, suggested that women could not hold office because of their “raging hormonal imbalances.” His comments were directed at U.S. Representative Patsy Mink of Hawaii, who had implored her party to focus on women’s issues. Berman asked people to imagine a “menopausal woman president who had to make the decision of the Bay of Pigs,” or the president of a bank “making a loan under these raging hormonal influences.” Mink ridiculed his “disgusting performance,” forced his resignation—and, for a very brief time, women’s periods had the floor. Then 46 years went by without any change.

In January, President Barack Obama may have become the first president to discuss menstruation when 27-year-old YouTube sensation Ingrid Nilsen asked him why tampons and pads are taxed as luxury items in 40 states. Obama was stunned. “I have to tell you, I have no idea why states would tax these as luxury items,” he said. “I suspect it’s because men were making the laws when those taxes were passed.”

Nilsen’s interview went viral, as has her frank approach to one of the most whispered-about issues in American culture and politics: menstruation . “Something that affects people every single day the president didn’t know about! And it’s because it’s one of those things that just gets buried,” she says. “That’s a reflection of how women’s bodies are viewed even today by our government and society.”

If pop culture is your barometer, periods broke into late-night TV in February when Samantha Bee went on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert and riffed on all the ways a female comedian can refer to her “bathing suit area,” as Colbert put it. Bee was just days away from becoming the only woman in late night TV with her show, Full Frontal With Samantha Bee. After reminding Colbert just how much he enjoys talking about the male anatomy (“caucus,” “huevos rancheros,” “Penissippi”), she offered her own list of euphemisms for lady parts, including “Department of the Interior,” “the place where I keep my keys” and “the velour bouncy castle.”

Bee’s bit about “hoo-hos” and “ha-has” didn’t come out of nowhere. Over the last year, a steady stream of pop culture moments propelled menstrual equity—aka period feminism, bathroom equality or simply “life,” as Steinem quips to Newsweek—into the mainstream. Musician Kiran Gandhi ran the 2015 London Marathon without a pad or tampon, crossing the finish line with a large red stain between her legs. When artist Rupi Kaur posted a photo of herself on Instagram, fully-clothed and with a stain on her pants and sheets, the image was “accidentally” taken down. Twice. Comedy Central pair Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele schooled men on periods: “What if we told y’all that once a month, half the human race is in pain? And the other half don’t wanna hear shit about it?” Donald Trump must have missed that skit, because he spawned the hashtag #PeriodsAreNotAnInsult when he complained about tough questions from GOP debate moderator Megyn Kelly, saying she had “blood coming out of her wherever.” From awareness-raising hashtag campaigns (#TheHomelessPeriod , #HappyToBleed , #FreeTheTampons) to a Change.org) to a petition to lift the tampon tax to 20-year-old Arushi Dua asking Mark Zuckerberg to launch an “On my period” button on Facebook to help fight menstrual stigmas in India, periods are having a moment.

This movement has been so widespread that Whoopi Goldberg is now launching a line of medical marijuana products to ease menstrual cramps. Women are using their periods to protest Indiana Governor Mike Pence’s extreme anti-abortion legislation, calling, emailing and tweeting him with detailed updates on their daily flow. Jennifer Lawrence answered the ubiquitous “Who are you wearing?” question with a story about

menstruation, telling Harper's Bazaar that she chose her red cutout Dior gown for the 2016 Golden Globes because the show coincided with her period and she wanted something that was "loose at the front…. The other dress was really tight, and I'm not going to suck in my uterus."

@GovPenceIN @periodsforpence Started my cycle today. When will you be by to check my used pads for HB1337 compliance so I know to be home?

— Sasha P (@Sasha827) April 6, 2016

It Absorbs the Worry…Then Kills You

U.S. consumers spent $3.1 billion on tampons, pads and sanitary panty liners last year, according to Euromonitor, and the global sanitary protection products market reached $30 billion. Y et in the last century, there have only been three significant innovations in the field: disposable sanitary pads, first marketed in the late 19th century and updated with adhesive in 1969; commercial tampons in the 1930s; and menstrual cups, which became popular in the 1980s. "If this isn't a reflection of how women's bodies are viewed, I don't know what is!" says Nilsen. "How could something this important not change over 40 to 50 years?"

Before pads and tampons, women folded soft gauze or flannels and pinned them to their undergarments when they had their periods ("on the rag"). All that changed in the 1920s with Kotex sanitary pads, although they were only a cosmetic improvement. "They'd move, shift, chafe. People talked about getting their skin rubbed raw," says Vostral. "There were big tabs, and you needed an elastic belt. You had to do gymnastics to get them on."

In 1931, a Denver physician named Earle Cleveland Haas invented the modern tampon and cardboard applicator. (He also invented the diaphragm.) As women pursued more physically demanding jobs during World War II, their need for comfortable, discreet, reliable products grew. Between 1937 and 1943, tampons sales increased five-fold , and 25 percent of women regularly used tampons in the early 1940s.

Mainstream American culture gradually embraced fem-care products. Women started using tampons more than pads, and feminists heralded the tampon as a liberator. "No one was thinking about safety hazards. They were just grateful to have a product that plugs it up, literally," says Chris Bobel, president of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research and an associate professor of women's and gender studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston. It was only in fringe, arty circles that people were pushing boundaries on tampon etiquette; feminist artist Judy Chicago's 1971 "Red Flag" captured a grainy, close-up shot of Chicago pulling a bloody tampon out of her vagina. (Many assumed they were looking at a bloody penis, proving her point about period taboos.)

In 1975, Procter & Gamble began test-marketing a tea bag-shaped, super-absorbent tampon called Rely (tagline: "It even absorbs the worry"). They were made of synthetic materials, and the key ingredient was carboxymethylcellulose (CMC), a compound that boosted absorption so much that the tampon could theoretically last for an entire period. "I've talked to many people anecdotally who said, 'I loved those tampons!' It was a fabulous new design," Vostral says. But others found Rely tampons painful to remove: "They absorbed so much fluid that they ripped the internal vaginal skin when you pulled them out." Another problem: The teeth at the tip of the plastic applicator sometimes cut women.

They were also potentially lethal: CMC and polyester in tampons dried out women's vaginas, creating the ideal breeding ground for the toxin-producing bacteria Staphylococcus aureus. In 1980, 890 cases of toxic shock syndrome (TSS) were reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and 91 percent of them were related to menstruation. Thirty-eight women died. At the time, around 70 percent of American women were using tampons, and while Rely had one-quarter of the market, it was responsible for 75 percent of TSS cases, prompting widespread panic. Other super-absorbent tampon brands were implicated, including Playtex and Tampax, but Rely was the only one recalled in September 1980. All tampon manufacturers faced lawsuits over TSS, but over 1,100 were leveled against P&G. In 1982, the FDA. In 1982, the required tampon manufacturers to warn consumers about the link between tampon use and TSS. By June 1983, the CDC had learned about 2,204 cases of TSS. It wasn't until 1989 that the FDA required manufacturers to standardize tampon absorbency levels and include warnings on tampon boxes.

In the 1980s and '90s, the safety profile of tampons improved and the incidence of TSS plummeted, but there were still 636 cases of menstrual-related TSS between 1987 and 1996, according to the CDC , 36 of them fatal. While CMC was no longer used in tampons, an explosive 1995 Village Voice article revealed a new threat: Dioxin, a carcinogen that's "toxic to the immune system" and linked to birth defects, had been found in some commercial tampons. The article slammed the FDA for sitting on memos revealing this link and for not testing tampons.

In a small victory for activists, the tampon industry reformed some bleaching practices to reduce the dioxin risk to trace levels, but problems remain. The FDA does not require companies to disclose the ingredients in tampons and pads, which means we know more about where our clothes are made than we do about what

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women put inside their vaginas. The average woman uses about 12,000 tampons in her lifetime, and that's a conservative estimate, says Philip Tierno, a professor of microbiology at New York University School of Medicine who was among the first to link TSS with the synthetic materials in tampons. "The FDA says dioxin is a trace, but it adds up when you're talking about decades of use." Viscose rayon, which is made from sawdust, is still used in tampons. As Tierno puts it, "it turns out to be one of the best of the bad ingredients."

"We don't have good, reliable data that tells us the things we're putting inside our body, in the most absorbent part of our body, for days at a time, for 40 years, are safe or not," says Bobel. "It's symptomatic of the silence around menstruation."

In 1997, U.S. Representative Carolyn Maloney of New York introduced the Tampon Safety and Research Act (now the Robin Danielson Feminine Hygiene Product Safety Act , named for a woman who died of TSS in 1998) to require the National Institutes of Health to research the health risks associated with menstrual hygiene products, as well as urge the FDA to disclose the list of ingredients in tampons, pads and other period supplies. Since then, she has reintroduced the bill eight times; it's currently sitting with the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health. "It is very difficult to get a bill passed, especially when it concerns women's health. The safety of tampons is not something that is on the minds of many members of Congress," says Maloney, speaking through a spokesperson. "I believe one day we'll get this legislation passed."

Until then, startups like Lola and Conscious Period offer women what Big Business doesn't: transparency. Commercial tampons are made of some combination of cotton, rayon and synthetic fibers, but Lola tampons are made from 100 percent natural cotton. "In the absence of real hard, current data, we'd rather put something that we understand in our bodies," says Jordana Kier, who co-founded the company with Alex Friedman. Since launching last year, Lola has raised $4.2 million and attracted tens of thousands of customers. One box of 18 tampons costs $10 (or two for $18) and can be customized by how many light-, regular- and super-absorbency tampons a customer wants.

Conscious Period sells nontoxic, 100 percent organic, hypoallergenic, biodegradable cotton tampons. Cotton is the third-most sprayed crop in the world, co-founder Margo Lang explains, but the organic cotton in Conscious Period's tampons is free of chemicals, dyes and synthetics. They cost $8.50 for a box of 20, and for each box sold, they give a box of organic pads to a homeless woman. (No, pads aren't the cheap way out. Homeless women say pads are easier for them to change, can be used longer and pose fewer health risks.)

"Not all women are susceptible to TSS, but they have to be aware that it's a possibility with any tampon. I'd put my money on 100 percent cotton, no synthetics," says Tierno. "All cotton provides the lowest risk, whether organic or nonorganic, but manufacturers refuse to go to all cotton because they'd have to adjust all their machines."

If you'd rather keep things on the outside, Vancouver, British Columbia–based Lunapads sells menstrual pads, panty liners and underwear for periods, pregnancy and light bladder leakage, as well as the Diva Cup. "Lots of brands are now making products that are organic and all cotton," says Nilsen. "If they can do it, everyone else can do it too."

'Free for All, All the Time'

Across the U.S., you can buy food, doodads and necessities without being taxed : Pop-Tarts in California, BBQ sunflower seeds in Indiana, Mardi Gras beads in Louisiana, Bibles in Maine and coffins in Mississippi. But in these and 35 other states, menstrual products are taxed anywhere from 4 to 10 percent. "The tampon tax is part of an overall economic system in which the dry cleaner charges more for a blouse than a shirt—in which men are assumed to be buying necessities and women are assumed to be buying luxuries," Steinem says.

Of the 10 states that don't tax tampons, five have no sales tax (Alaska, Delaware, Montana, New Hampshire and Oregon) and five have specifically exempted menstrual products (Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey and Pennsylvania). This year, Chicago removed the city's sales tax on these products. Earlier this month in New York state, the Senate joined the Assembly in unanimously passing legislation to eliminate the tampon tax; once the minor differences in those bills are aligned, the legislation will go to the governor for his signature.

In New Jersey, a bill was recently introduced that would add menstrual cramps to the list of qualifying conditions for medical marijuana. Last summer, Canada axed its national goods and services tax on period products, and the U.K. and France, among other countries, are working to reduce or end the tampon tax.

40 of the 50 U.S. states tax menstrual products. Hover over each state to reveal items that are exempted from sales tax in these states. Click to enlarge .

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Guardian columnist and Feministing founder Jessica Valenti wrote one of the first high-profile critiques of the tax in her 2014 piece "The Case for Free Tampons," where she charged that "women's feminine hygiene products should be free for all, all the time."

Horrified conservatives fired back: If women had access to free tampons, what would come next—cars and food? Don't you want the government out of your uterus? Some have professed concerns about theft (girls will steal all the tampons!), vandalism (girls will stick pads everywhere!) and recouping lost revenues.

"These are excuses," says New York City Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, who introduced a New York City bill aiming to put free tampons and pads in all public school bathrooms, homeless shelters and prisons. "You'll never walk into a bathroom in a public office without toilet paper. You'd be like, 'What the hell?'… I have yet to hear someone say, 'Well, what's the budget on all these [free] condoms?'"

California Assembly members Cristina Garcia and Ling Ling Chang introduced a bill in January to exempt women's menstrual products from sales tax. If it passes, women in that state will have $20 million back in their wallets—the equivalent of just one-hundredth of 1 percent of California's state budget, says Garcia, who has gone from being mocked as "Miss Flow" and "Miss Maxi" to adding 30 co-authors to the bill, including men and women from both parties. "California is a pretty blue state. When I first introduced the bill, my progressive colleagues shut me down," she says. "We're talking about blood, but I can't even say that out loud because it makes them so uncomfortable and squeamish. The closest I get to the word 'blood' is reminding them it's not a blue liquid…. It's taken a lot of work and hand-holding."

This year, U.S. Representative Grace Meng of New York persuaded the Federal Emergency Management Agency to allow homeless shelters to buy feminine hygiene products with federal grant funds. She's also working to ensure women can buy menstrual products with their flexible spending accounts. In Columbus, Ohio, Councilwoman Elizabeth Brown wants to put menstrual products in pools and recreational centers. Michigan, Virginia and Wisconsin are among the other states that have introduced legislation to eliminate the tampon tax. In Utah, an all-male panel voted 8-3 against the proposed Hygiene Tax Act. In Tennessee, a similar bill was rejected.

"Anyone who doesn't think the tampon tax is a problem either isn't a woman or hasn't been poor," says Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, a vice president of the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law and leading writer and advocate for menstrual equity. She's been an architect of the U.S. policy campaign to squash the tampon tax. As she wrote in the 2015 book Legal Change: Lessons From America's Social Movements, real, lasting social change requires more than just viral videos: "It is necessary to win in the court of public opinion and to win in a court of law." The tampon tax is well on its way out. Since the start of 2016, 14 states have introduced tampon tax legislation, and those efforts are still alive in 12 states. "That's 14 of 40 states—a third! That's also really fast," Weiss-Wolf says. "Name another issue in this country that has bipartisan support in such a bold, open way."

The Nike of Menses

"I'm wearing the boy shorts!" Miki Agrawal says, standing up and pulling down her form-fitting houndstooth pants to reveal sleek black underwear. We're sitting in Agrawal's tiny office at the Center for Social Innovation in downtown Manhattan. Photos of grapefruits hang from the walls and colorful underpants hang from a rack dangling above our heads. They look like they could be the latest style of Calvins, but they're Thinx, the high-tech, period-proof underwear Agrawal invented with her twin sister, Radha, and their friend Antonia Saint Dunbar.

Thinx underwear absorb the blood from a woman's period so she doesn't have to wear a pad or tampon (except on her heaviest days, when an extra layer of protection is recommended). Agrawal explains that her patented underwear are anti-microbial, moisture-wicking and leak-proof, keeping women feeling dry, and can absorb up to two tampons' worth of blood. That means more comfort, fewer tampons and less pollution: "There are over 20 million combined tampon applicators, pads and menstrual products that end up in a landfill every year," she says. Thinx come in six styles and cost $24 to $38 a pair. They're washable, reusable and, according to the many journalists who've tried them, they work. Thinx donates a portion of every sale to the Uganda-based AfriPads, which teaches women to make and sell reusable pads. Agrawal is also launching Thinx Global Girls Clubs, which will give out subsidized menstrual products and teach health education, self-defense and entrepreneurship.

Agrawal came up with the idea in 2010, when she met a 12-year-old girl in South Africa. "I asked her why she wasn't in school, and what she said to me completely changed my life. She said, 'It's my week of shame,'" Agrawal recalls. The girl explained that when she gets her period, she stays home from school. "I tried using leaves and mud and plastic bags and old bits of mattresses and old rags," Agrawal remembers her saying. "None of it worked, and eventually I just stopped going."

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Agrawal leans back in her chair and sticks her hand in a bag of popcorn. “There’s a period problem in the first world and a period problem in the developing world. Why no innovation? Why is no one talking about it?”

While Thinx and other like-minded startups, like Dear Kate , are giving menstrual products their first real makeover in half a century, prudish mindsets are making it hard to progress past all the blue liquid. When Thinx submitted an ad campaign to New York’s subways—featuring modestly posed models in underwear and tank tops alongside artful images of juicy grapefruits and falling egg yolks—the reviewing agency, Outfront Media, called the images “inappropriate.” Thinx eventually made it to subway walls, yet Agrawal says the company has been r ejected by New York City Taxi TV and elevator bank TVs. “ We can’t be on morning talk shows,” she adds. “They don’t want to say ‘period.’ It’s nuts!”

Colombian-born Diana Sierra is waging her own fight for menstrual progress by designing underwear that directly responds to the needs of girls and women in developing countries. A couple of years ago, Sierra left her industrial design job at Panasonic when, surrounded by facial steams and massage machines, she realized she was designing “for the 10 percent of people who can pay for this stuff. Ninety percent of the population are worthy of good products, but they don’t have this income, so they’re not seen as a good market,” she says.

In 2014, she launched Be Girl , a design company that creates high-performance menstrual pads and underwear. She got the idea during a United Nations internship in rural Uganda, where she taught locals how to turn arts and crafts into businesses. “I had 11- and 12-year-old girls knocking on the door saying they wanted to be part of the workshop.” A teacher explained why they weren’t in school—they were menstruating. Stunned, Sierra hacked sanitary pads using material from an umbrella and mosquito net. “I come from a developing country, so we’re super-resourceful,” she says. Sierra’s parents were farmers (her father now works in construction, her mother in elder care), but thanks to a scholarship for students from “tough economic backgrounds,” she went to college and got an internship in New York City. She then spent 12 years working at leading global companies like Smart Design, Nike and LG.

Sierra knew girls in Uganda used pieces of cloth to absorb their period blood, so she built underwear with a leak-proof mesh pocket that can be filled with cloth or other clean materials. Since last year, BeGirl has distributed over 15,000 pairs of reusable underwear in Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi and 10 other countries. Be Girl underwear are as bright and cheerful as Victoria’s Secret intimates, and for each sale, the company donates a pair to a girl in need. “You cannot assume just because someone has low income, someone has low expectations or low aspirations,” she says. “I want to be the Nike of menstrual health…. It’s not just giving a girl a panty or pad. It’s giving knowledge, so she can own her body and make informed decisions.”

While sifting through survey results from product pilot tests, Sierra found a dusty page from a girl in Mbola, Tanzania. Answering the question, “What do you like most about the menstrual pads?” the girl wrote that she was “so happy because she knew someone somewhere loved her,” Sierra recalls, “because that person made something so beautiful that she was so proud to be girl.” And so the name of Sierra’s company was born. “Here you have a girl continents away telling you that something as simple as a sanitary pad is giving her...a sense of dignity and pride,” she says. “Being able to run, walk with confidence, be comfortable and clean…. That’s all you want as a designer, that assurance that what you’re doing matters.”

The Menstruating Man

Organic and all-natural cotton tampons shouldn’t be a first-world privilege, but they are, and the fight against tampon taxes, while worthy, doesn’t matter if tampons aren’t available where you live and your culture shuns menstruation. In many countries, periods are like curses. Girls and women cannot cook, touch the water supply or spend time in places of worship or public areas when they’re menstruating. In Africa, one in 10 girls misses school during her period every month. Seventy percent of girls in India have not heard about menstruation before getting their periods, and four in five girls in East Africa lack access to sanitary pads and related health education. In Nepal, some rural families still follow an ancient tradition called chaupadi , banishing girls and women to sheds when they have their period.

“Most girls learn about their periods the day their periods start,” says Chandra-Mouli of the WHO. He recounts a story he hears time after time: “I started having periods at school. Spotting on my clothes. Giggling in class. I didn’t know what was happening. My panties felt wet. My teacher made me wait in the staff room. I thought my insides were rotting. My mother came and wrapped me in a towel, took me home, put me in a bath and said, ‘You’re a woman now. Don’t go out and play with the boys.’”

These systemic issues won’t be solved with a pair of high-tech underwear. “I spent time in Uganda, Kenya and India shadowing organizations working to address these issues,” says Bobel of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research. “They understand there is no silver bullet, but it’s a material solution that funders love, and it’s concrete and scalable. What’s not getting challenged is the actual culture of menstrual secrecy and shame.”

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If product is the sexy solution, the practical path ahead is also the harder one: “Figure out low-cost, sustainable infrastructure solutions,” says Marni Sommer, an associate professor of sociomedical sciences at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health who’s been studying global menstruation for a decade. “If you can break taboos and start getting info to girls and transform some infrastructure so there are safe, private places to manage without worry about being attacked, embarrassed or dirty, that will make a big difference.”

A man known as India’s Menstrual Man is chipping away at this problem. Arunachalam Muruganantham grew up in south India, the son of poor handloom weavers. In 1998, soon after marrying his wife, he realized she was using soiled cloths to manage her period. When she explained that she couldn’t afford to buy sanitary pads as well as milk for their family, he decided to do something.

For years, he experimented with materials and prototypes. He tried to convince his wife to test his products, then he asked local medical students, but they all refused, so Muruganantham tested the sanitary pads himself. He filled a rubber bladder with animal blood, attached a tube that led into his underwear, and spent five days wearing a pad. “The messy days, the lousy days, that wetness. My God, it’s unbelievable,” he said in his 2012 TEDx Bangalore talk.

After six years of research, he built a machine that makes sterilized sanitary napkins—but not before his neighbors thought he’d lost his mind and his wife left him (they’re now back together). Today, he has 2,500 machines in India and a few hundred across 17 other countries. His pads retail for 3 cents a packet, and the machines cost $2,500 each, both below market rates. In 2014, Muruganantham was named one of Time ’s 100 most influential people in the world, and his machines have enabled women to launch their own businesses. As he puts it, “by the women, for the women, to the women.”

Swati Bedekar, a scientist from Gujarat, India, bought one of Muruganantham’s machines in 2010 after visiting desert communities and witnessing girls sitting on stones or pots filled with sand to catch the blood from their periods. She wanted to help them, but the women who used her machine complained that the foot pedal led to back pain. So Bedekar tweaked the machine, simplifying the process, altering the design of the pads and adding wings for comfort. Yet there was another barrier: In most Indian cities and villages, there are no regulations for waste disposal, and used sanitary products are often wrapped in paper or some kind of plastic and thrown out with the trash. Stray dogs often rummage through the waste, and some men worry that women might use the pads for black magic. Bedekar’s husband, Shyam, invented a terra-cotta incinerator that looked like a garden pot and could burn used pads discreetly, quickly and without electricity.

Today, Bedekar has 40 groups of women using her revamped machine to make and sell 50,000 pads a month under the name Sakhi (it means “friend” in Hindi). Inspired by the Ice Bucket Challenge, a fundraising campaign for Lou Gehrig’s disease that went viral in 2014, Bedekar launched the Hygiene Bucket Challenge, where she asked people to buy a bucket’s worth of Sakhi supplies. With the help of her nonprofit Vatsalya Foundation , she gave 6,000 girls a year’s supply of menstrual products in 2015.

While much of the innovation in India focuses on small businesses, ZanaAfrica Foundation provides sanitary pads and reproductive health education to 10,000 girls across Kenya each year. In 2004, Kenya became the first country in the world to eliminate sales tax on menstrual products, but there is still much work to be done. “Menstruation contributes to 1 million adolescent girls in Kenya missing up to six weeks of school each year,” says Gina Reiss-Wilchins, CEO of ZanaAfrica Foundation. “They’re dropping out of school at two times the rate of boys starting at puberty.” In March, the foundation’s social enterprise arm, ZanaAfrica Group , which manufactures menstrual products for girls and women in East Africa, received a four-year $2.6 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to fund a groundbreaking study examining the impact of providing pads along with girl-centered reproductive health information.

“If every girl in Kenya finished secondary school, there would be a 46 percent increase in the country’s [GDP] across her lifetime. There are so many barriers: poverty, abuse, child marriage, pregnancy. Getting your period should not be a barrier,” says Reiss-Wilchins. “We are a quiet little revolution.”

Document NSWK000020160422ec4t00008

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The New York Times

Nicholas Kristof
New York Makes History, with Tampons and Pads

By JENNIFER WEISS-WOLF
850 words
21 June 2016
15:17
NYT Blogs
NYTB
English
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New York City made history today with passage of the nation's first legislative package to ensure access to menstrual products in public schools, shelters and corrections facilities.

In doing so, New York has stepped out as a leader in a growing national and global movement for menstrual equity. The city's new laws acknowledge that the ability to manage menstruation falls squarely at the intersection of sound health, economic and educational policy.

The need to tackle this issue is not new. While menstruation has been a taboo and "off limits" topic since Adam and Eve, around the world there are legions of activists working to raise awareness of the devastating impact caused by lack of access to affordable, safe menstrual products.

America has long lagged behind, but that's beginning to change. A dedicated network of activists, journalists, policy makers and others have ratcheted up national attention to the issue. Last year, menstrual activism captured so many headlines that NPR dubbed it "The Year of the Period" and Cosmopolitan proclaimed it was "the year the period went public."

Public policy has been a key lever for change. Perhaps the issue that has garnered the most global prominence is the "tampon tax." Canada abolished its national Goods and Services Tax on menstrual products last summer. A petition in the United Kingdom garnered more than 300,000 signatures and spurred a ruling by the European Union to allow member states to reduce the Value Added Tax on menstrual products to zero. Kenya not only eliminated the tax but also since 2011 has budgeted the equivalent of $3 million per year to distribute free sanitary pads in schools in low-income communities.

In the United States this year, fifteen of the 40 states that still have a "tampon tax" moved to change it. Illinois and New York State both passed laws that now await their respective governor's signature; Connecticut eliminated the tampon tax in its budget, effective 2018. Just last week, the American Medical Association released a statement urging states to exempt menstrual products from sales tax.

But for those who are struggling, a tax saving of pennies on the dollar isn't likely to provide anything close to real relief. That's why the New York City agenda emphasizes access for the most vulnerable populations, focusing on three areas in particular:

* Schools: Through her Let Girls Learn initiative, First Lady Michelle Obama deemed the provision of tampons and pads an issue of educational equity. Inability to access menstrual products can affect attendance and productivity, a finding documented over and over again in developing countries. The cost of tampons or pads, at $7 – $10 each month, can be one expense too many for struggling families. And unlike toilet paper — which is freely available in public and school restrooms, funded by city budgets and viewed as essential to everyday health and sanitation — those living in poverty are left to access tampons and pads on their own.

* Shelters: Many of the city's homeless women have shared the urgent need for access to tampons and pads in shelters. Inability to access menstrual products is not just unsanitary and unhealthy for the days one is menstruating, but also amounts to having to wear blood-soaked clothing for days or even weeks. It is inhumane to leave fellow citizens, quite literally, to bleed in the streets.

* Correctional facilities: The health and dignity of those who are incarcerated is compromised when prisons and jails fail to provide adequate menstrual products. The Correctional Association of New York released a study in February 2015 designating lack of access to menstrual products among the top reproductive health crises for incarcerated women in New York state (along with shackling women during labor). At one New York prison, doctors insisted that women show a bag filled with their used pads as proof they needed more.

Back in January when President Obama was asked in a live interview about the tampon tax, the tenor of his response was breathtaking. In a nutshell, he said that women's experiences aren't always reflected in our laws because women are often not at the decision-making table. In New York City, leaders like Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland and Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who helped to develop this focus and sponsored related bills, are not just at the table; they are at the head of it. And they are championing our health and lives with gusto.

To quote New York's darling Hamilton (whose Daveed Diggs has put out his own viral video to champion menstrual equity): "History is happening in Manhattan and we just happen to be in the greatest city in the world."

New York City made history for menstrual equity with the passage of this legislation – and the rest of the country, and the world, should follow.

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf (@jweisswolf) is vice president for development at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law and an advocate for menstrual equity.

Document NYTB000020160621ec6l0002t

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News
Tampon tax is real. Women everywhere pay their governments extra to have periods

STEFAN HEUNIS/AFP/Getty Images
1,214 words
18 August 2015
Daily Breeze
CABREEZE
n/a
English
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Sometimes it's hard to be a woman. And sometimes, by which we mean every month for roughly 30 years, it's downright expensive.

If periods are the price women pay for the ability to make new humans, the "tampon tax" - sales tax applied to sanitary products - is the price they pay, er, because the government can make them. Just think of the taxman as a particularly audacious low-cost airline charging you to use the bathroom on a plane.

You can understand why it's making people mad. From Australia to Italy, Malaysia to the UK, many of the countries that charge tampon tax now find themselves the targets of a growing campaign to have such levies scrapped.

So how exactly do women pay extra to have periods? And which countries make them do it? Sorry, sisters: It's more than you might think.

What is tampon tax?

What the world has alliteratively nicknamed the tampon tax really applies not just to those but also to sanitary towels, panty liners, keepers (reusable devices that collect menstrual flow internally) and anything else women buy to stop their monthly blood from running all down their legs. Most governments around the world add on a consumption tax when customers purchase these items, just as they do for the vast majority of goods and services. What we pay in tax is calculated as a percentage of the purchase price, according to a rate decided by the government.

Unlike lots of other things we pay tax on, however, pre-made sanitary protection is something that millions of women and girls cannot do without, month after month and year after year. For them to pay the government a percentage on top of paying for those products is, critics say, an unfair burden on women's wallets - which are all too frequently slimmer than men's to begin with.

Everyone pays tax on everything they buy, though, right? Not exactly. Governments can and do exempt products from consumption tax if they deem them important enough. Alternatively they can tax them at a lower rate than other, non-essential items. What particularly galls the tampon-buying public is when their sanitary products are taxed at a higher rate than, say, truffles, as is the case in Germany.

Where is tampon tax charged?

As we say, most countries around the world make people pay tax when they buy sanitary products. Here are a few examples.

United States: between 4 and 9 percent

Sales tax varies from state to state and of the 50 in the union, only five waive it on sanitary goods: Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Five others don't have a sales tax. The rest do, and don't exempt tampons from it.

United Kingdom: 5 percent

In 1973, the UK began charging women 17.5 percent to buy tampons and pads. Things changed in 2001 when campaigners managed to get VAT, value-added tax, on sanitary goods reduced to 5 percent.

A new generation of activists is now seeking to have that cut to zero. They want VAT on period paraphernalia brought in line with that on - for instance - herbal tea, bingo, printed music, antiques, helicopters and "exotic meat: horse, ostrich, crocodile, kangaroo, etc," all of which are zero-rated for VAT. Because, as this "Bad Blood" parody asks, what can women use instead?

The government's response is that it can't abolish the tampon tax altogether, since the European Union forbids members from lowering VAT below 5 percent. (They can only maintain the 0 percent rate on goods that were already benefiting from it at the time EU legislation came in).

Malaysia: 6 percent

The tampon tax became a hot issue in Malaysia earlier this year when the government overhauled the way it taxes consumers for shopping. Under a new goods and services tax (GST) introduced in April, women pay 6 percent VAT on sanitary items.

The government marketed it as an improvement on an earlier 10 percent sales tax and promised that prices would go down. In reality, women complain, the reform - which changed not just the rate but the way tax was calculated - has seen prices increase. What's more, campaigners have started a petition for Malaysia's tampon tax to be scrapped altogether, arguing that it "infringes on our basic rights to access sanitary aid."

Australia: 10 percent

Even the Aussie prime minister's sister is fed up of paying a 10 percent GST on her sanitary stuff. Christine Forster, cooler younger sibling to PM Tony Abbott, makes a cameo in an anti-tampon-tax rap video that's currently doing the rounds.

The women of Down Under have led one of the liveliest campaigns this year against the tampon tax, which they claim swells the government's coffers by roughly 25 million Australian dollars each year. Meanwhile Canberra allows consumers to buy other health goods, including condoms, lubricants and sunscreen, GST-free.

Despite support from no less than the Australian treasurer, Joe Hockey, Abbott has stated that no reforms are in the pipeline. State and territory treasurers meet this month and could prove more favorable to the idea. Campaigners will be keeping up the pressure until then.

Hungary: 27 percent

Plenty of countries are quietly taxing tampons and getting much less attention for it. Top of the list is Hungary, which has the highest VAT rate in Europe, if not the world. It subjects sanitary products to the standard rate, 27 percent, while offering reduced VAT on "dairy and bakery products," books and medicine. Denmark, Sweden and Norway aren't far behind with standard VAT of 25 percent.

Elsewhere in Europe, austerity measures have seen Greece raise VAT on sanitary goods from 13 percent to 23 percent. Meanwhile campaigners in Italy (tampon tax: 22 percent), France (20 percent) and Germany (19 percent) are petitioning to see their rates go in the opposite direction.

Has anyone scrapped tampon tax?

There's hope yet for those who want cheaper sanitary goods. There are some countries where a girl can get her Tampax without paying extra for the privilege.

Ireland is unique within the EU in having zero VAT on tampons, towels and panty liners. It's allowed the exception because Dublin wasn't charging women VAT on such products when the EU introduced its minimum rates.

Women will also find VAT-free sanitary products in Jamaica, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Tanzania and Lebanon.

The most recent convert is Canada, which as of July 1 this year no longer applies GST to products "marketed exclusively for feminine hygiene purposes." However, tampon tariffs - duties on imported sanitary goods - remain.

Only Kenya has gone further and got rid of both VAT and import duty on sanitary products. So crucial is the matter in rural Kenya, where having the means to manage your period can make the difference between staying in school or not, that on occasion the government hands out sanitary products for free.

The stakes are lower for wealthier women in developed countries.

Want to get really radical, ladies? Forget tampons. Try a menstrual cup that'll last you 10 years.

This article originally appeared on GlobalPost.

Document CABREEZE20150819eb8i0000t

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The Washington Post

Education

Activists call on Education Secretary DeVos to take action for 'menstrual equity' in schools

By Valerie Strauss
940 words
1 February 2019
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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"Menstrual equity" activists are calling on Education Secretary Betsy DeVos to take action to ensure that K-12 school bathrooms are equipped with free menstrual hygiene products to combat what they call "period poverty." They are expected to march Monday near the Education Department headquarters, and they took out a full-page ad directed at DeVos.

The ad, on the back page of The Washington Post's Monday A-section, features a letter sent to DeVos that says in part:

"In 21st century America, schools have an obligation to serve all students equitably. Every student deserves the reassurance that their school restrooms are outfitted with necessities to accommodate their biological needs. Yet, for over half the US student population, there is a glaring exception to this commitment: menstrual hygiene products. . . . We call on you, Secretary DeVos, to fulfill your agency's charge to remove discriminatory barriers that hold students back. Menstrual hygiene products are basic necessities, and the inability to access them affects a student's freedom to study, be healthy, and participate in society with dignity."

The Education Department did not immediately respond to queries about the ad or the issue. Activists planned to hear Monday afternoon from speakers calling on DeVos to act on the issue.

The ad was spearheaded by United for Access — a national grass-roots campaign associated with Thinx, a period solutions company — and by Period, the world's largest youth-run nonprofit dedicated to changing the conversation around periods and providing care to those in need. Period was founded in 2014 by two high school students, Nadya Okamoto and Vincent Forand, and has a few hundred chapters across the country.

The letter printed in the Post ad was signed by about two dozen women, including entertainers Margaret Cho, Padma Lakshmi, Busy Philipps and Cynthia Nixon, as well as the leaders of the two major teachers unions: National Education Association President Lily Eskelsen García and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten.

It calls on DeVos and her department to "address inequity among students by championing menstrual equity."

This includes acknowledging period products as health necessities, advocating for policies that support students who menstruate, funding programs to provide free period products to students in all school restrooms, promoting comprehensive period health education for students of all genders before the age of 12, and commissioning a study to determine the impact period poverty has on students in the United States.

Students and activists around the country have been pressing for years for school bathrooms to be supplied with menstrual products in what has become a national movement for "menstrual equity." Its aim is to provide access to menstrual products to anyone who needs them, especially those from low-income families.

A 2018 poll sponsored by Always, a company that produces menstrual supplies, found that nearly 1 in 5 girls in the United States have left school early or stayed home because they did not have period products. The menstrual equity campaign aims to help not only female but also transgender and non-binary students.

Activists are pushing state legislatures to make menstrual products tax-free, given that more than 35 states still tax them. (Last year the government of India scrapped a hefty tax on sanitary napkins.) In the Washington region, Maryland has exempted menstrual products from state taxes since 1980, and late last year D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) announced the nation's capital would do the same.

Efforts in the Virginia legislature to drop taxes on menstrual products have not yet succeeded though a bill remains alive in the legislature. "Menstrual cramp relievers" are exempt from state taxes, according to a list of tax-free products, as are laxative preparations, wart removers and oil of wintergreen.

Last year at Justice High School in Northern Virginia, the chapter of Girl Up, an international club devoted to gender equality, began a campaign to outfit restrooms with menstrual products. A Washington Post story about the effort quoted Jen Golobic, an English teacher at Justice, as saying that students may have avoided asking for sanitary pads from the school clinic because they felt uncomfortable doing so.

"It should just be part of our culture," said Golobic, who sponsors the Girl Up club. "Girls shouldn't have to be embarrassed about something that's just a natural, biological need."

The cover story of the spring 2019 edition of Teaching Tolerance magazine offers a look at the menstrual equity movement, noting that the issue goes beyond products in school bathrooms and tax policy.

Educators can remove the stigma surrounding menstruation not only by providing access to free menstrual products in schools . . . but also by challenging inequitable school policies. These include dress codes that require khaki bottoms, rather than darker pants or skirts, that make it obvious when a person is bleeding. Educators can also normalize the subject through health education, according to the magazine.

A United for Access petition has at least 35,000 signatures at the Thinx website.

The issue is not confined to the United States; menstrual equity has been a cause in Britain, too, where activists have pushed some schools into providing free menstrual products. A poll published in 2018 in British newspapers, sponsored by a sanitary pad company, found that 7 percent of girls in Britain missed school during the previous year because they couldn't afford sanitary products.

Clarification: A bill in the Virginia legislature for menstrual equity is still alive in the 2019 session. An earlier version said Virginia efforts had not been successful.

Document WPCOM00020190128ef1s007by

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The Washington Post

Editorial-Opinion
Why I don't oppose the 'tampon tax'

Catherine Rampell
801 words
26 January 2016
The Washington Post
WP
FINAL
A15
English
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Maybe this makes me a traitor to my sex, but I support the tampon tax.

Mostly because it's not actually a tampon tax.

For those unaware, "tampon tax" is shorthand for the fact that menstrual products are subject to sales taxes in most states, even though other products considered necessities (such as food and medicine) are often exempted.

In recent months, this has spawned a legion of articles suggesting that squeamish, old, predominantly male politicians are punishing half of humanity for the crime of having a period. Some offer stories about poor women who say "tampon taxes" are cutting into money they desperately need for groceries or other bills.

The issue has gained steam on the left, partly because it fits neatly into both the "war on women" and "war on the poor" narratives. Protests have erupted across the United States and abroad; bills have been introduced in state legislatures around the country, and a change.org petition gathered more than 40,000 signatures. Activists have already logged wins in Canada and France.

Last week, even President Obama got drawn into the battle.

His interviewer, YouTube celebrity Ingrid Nilsen, posited that "pads, tampons and other menstrual products are taxed as luxury goods in 40 states." She asked the president why.

A seemingly surprised Obama responded, "I have to tell you, I have no idea why states would tax these as luxury items. I suspect it's because men were making the laws when those taxes were passed."

But the premise of this question, and of the broader "tampon tax" debate, is wrong-headed.

First of all, it's highly misleading to call the taxes that tampons are subject to "tampon taxes." To my knowledge, no jurisdiction has a tampon-specific tax, as it might an alcohol or yacht tax.

Politicians didn't one day decide that periods were gross and therefore ought to be made more expensive. Instead, when states and cities needed revenue, they passed general sales taxes - which happened to fall upon tampons along with countless other goods.

Then, every interest group on earth came out of the woodwork demanding a carve-out on the grounds that their product or service was a "necessity," just as anti-"tampon tax" activists have recently done.

But what is a "necessity," exactly?

It's a pretty squishy term. Almost any product can be called necessary in modern times. And almost every product has.

In California, the state where a "tampon tax" repeal bill has gotten the most press, such tax-favored purchases include: candy and bottled water, school yearbooks, certain commemorative lapel pins, hot prepared foods sold to airlines, farm equipment, garment alterations and racehorse breeding stock.

The more things you exempt from sales taxes, of course, the higher the tax rates on other products have to rise to make up the lost revenue. That in turn increases the incentive for other interest groups to lobby for yet more exemptions, or find ways to disguise and recategorize their products to dodge taxes. (Is cold pizza a grocery item, and therefore a "necessity," or a prepared food, and a luxury?) Which leads to more carve-outs for more "necessities." Which leads to ever-higher tax rates.

This vicious cycle is one reason tax experts generally caution against creating product-specific exemptions to consumption taxes. Very low tax rates, over a broad base of items, cause fewer distortions, in both what people buy and how many resources get devoted to repackaging and marketing existing products.

Another reason to be skeptical about such exemptions is that they're poorly targeted.

The most common rationale for exempting "necessities" - whether they be milk, Advil or, yes, tampons - is that such taxes especially hurt the poor. Low-income people, after all, spend a higher share of their incomes overall, and particularly more on "necessities," however they're construed.

But when you strip taxes from tampons or groceries, you relieve not just poor students and families from paying them. You're also giving a break to billionaires.

A better way to address the regressivity of sales taxes is to just increase cash transfers to the poor - or to whichever group you think needs money the most. Maybe that's women, since they are more likely than men to buy menstrual products, though I'm skeptical of the idea that government is obligated to address every difference in every demographic group's consumption bundle.

Maybe it seems unfair that in so many states Twizzlers don't get taxed while tampons do. But the solution isn't to dole out yet more tax breaks but to end the ones we have and direct more public funds to people who actually need assistance.

WP20160126op-rampell0126

Document WP00000020160126ec1q0002t

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Growing Number of US States Move to End Tax on Menstrual Products

804 words
4 November 2018
Voice of America Press Releases and Documents
VOA
English
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Growing Number of US States Move to End Tax on Menstrual Products

November 4, 2018 5:30 AM

A growing number of states are moving to end a tax on feminine hygiene products seen as discriminating against women.

The issue will be on a state ballot this November for the first time, with voters in Nevada decided the matter in a referendum.

While there is no specific tax on menstrual products in any U.S. state, many states exempt people from having to pay a tax on "medically necessary" products. These products can include medicines, as well as personal care items such as ChapStick and dandruff shampoo. Women's feminine products, including tampons and pads, have historically not been included in these exemptions.

With state taxes typically running between 4 and 9 percent, activists have increasingly been advocating for eliminating the so-called "tampon tax," saying it unfairly hurts women.

"I think the issue itself has come out of the shadows. It's really quite a no-brainer," said Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, who has written a book on the issue, "Periods Gone Public."

Weiss-Wolf, who also founded the organization Period Equity (https://www.periodequity.org/) to eliminate sales tax on menstrual products, notes that women typically spend $70-$100 per year on such products. Many women typically menstruate between the ages of 12 to 50.

Nadya Okamoto, who named her nonprofit organization PERIOD (https://www.period.org/), said the tampon tax can greatly affect low-income women.

"For some people, the few extra cents or dollars really do make a difference," said Okamoto, whose organization provides menstrual products for those in need.

Okamoto said she became interested in accessible menstrual products when she was younger, and her family did not have a home for a time. During that time, she met homeless women who had to make their own menstrual pads.

"When you don't have a roof over your head, the tampon tax can mean the difference between buying tampons and having to resort to using socks or cardboard, instead," she said.

State legislation

Nine states have specifically exempted feminine hygiene products from sales tax: Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. Five other states have no sales tax at all.

"We still have 36 states to go," said Weiss-Wolf, who expressed optimism the measure would be adopted by other states. "Nationally, this is a policy issue that has extraordinary support," she said, noting that Democrats and Republicans have backed state legislation.

Last year, lawmakers in Nevada passed a bill repealing the tampon tax, with large majorities in both parties supporting the legislation. Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval signed the bill, but the issue must still be decided by voters. Nevada law requires all amendments to sales tax decisions be put to a voter referendum.

"What happens there could be inspiring," said Weiss-Wolf, who explained that the successful passage of a referendum could create another model for activists to use in their campaign to eliminate the tampon tax.

The latest region to adopt the policy change was the District of Columbia. Mayor Muriel Bowser announced in October that the city would no longer charge sales tax on tampons, sanitary napkins, menstrual cups or comparable products.

She explained her decision in a tweet: "Because feminine hygiene is a necessity, not a luxury." Sales tax in the District is 6 percent.

In some states, bills have been circulated but not passed. California Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed legislation in 2016 on the grounds that it would cost the state too much money. California's state Board of Equalization estimated the tampon tax repeal would have cost $20 million in 2016.

Okamoto said the main argument she hears against repeal is from people who "don't see periods as a necessity," and who "don't think their tax dollars should be used on periods."

She said one model that can work for states is to introduce a tax on "something that isn't a necessity, like alcohol, in place of menstrual hygiene products."

International issue

The fight against the tampon tax is relatively new in the United States, with most state legislation introduced in the last few years. Activists say they were influenced by similar campaigns in other countries, including in Britain and Australia.

Years of campaigning in Australia culminated in October, when federal and state governments announced they were removing a 10 percent tax on feminine hygiene products.

A campaign in Spain also scored a victory in October when the government announced that the value-added tax (VAT) on feminine hygiene products will be cut from 10 percent to 4 percent.

In Asia, India and Malaysia ended their tax on feminine hygiene products this year, as well.

Document VOA0000020181105eeb400007

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New York Law Journal

current

Tampon Tax Sparks Law Student Protests

BY KAREN SLOAN

600 words
21 November 2019
New York Law Journal
NYLJ
p.6, col.4
Volume 262; Issue 100
English

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LAW STUDENTS across the country are taking on the so-called tampon tax on Nov. 20.

Aspiring attorneys from two dozen law schools in states that tax menstrual products plan to purchase those items and send in tax refund claims to their respective state taxation agencies as both a form of protest and a bid to raise awareness about what they view as the unfairness of such taxes.

Wednesday's coordinated efforts are spearheaded by the Tax Free. Period project, a collaboration between the nonprofit advocacy group Period Equity and menstrual products maker Lola. Fordham University School of Law's Legislative and Policy Advocacy Clinic took the lead in organizing law student participation in the action, which also includes writing to state lawmakers and state departments of revenue about the unconstitutional nature of tampon taxes. Currently, 33 states have a tampon tax on the books, including Texas, Georgia and California, although the Golden State has adopted a temporary reprieve from collecting taxes on menstrual products.

"The state governments that continue to tax menstrual products have created a tax that is solely directed at people who menstruate," said Mary Kate Cunningham, a third-year Fordham law student who is organizing law school participation. "It's unconstitutional because it's a government action that is solely on the basis of sex."

Period Equity, which was established in 2015, also has Big Law ties. Among the firms that have offered pro bono services are Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr; Mayer Brown; Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison; Hausfeld; and Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady.

The law students, after purchasing menstrual products on Wednesday, will send in their refund claims along with the receipts showing that they paid state sales tax on those items, to either their state tax authority or department of revenue. They are being asked to post photos of their receipts and claims to social media in order to raise awareness of the tampon tax issue and show that the campaign against such taxes is national in scope.

In addition to spreading the word about the tampon tax, which generates an estimated $150 million for states annually, organizers hope the campaign will prompt state tax authorities to think critically about how menstrual products are taxed, said Fordham law professor Elizabeth Cooper, who teaches at the policy advocacy clinic. They also want to get lawmakers interested in the issue and, on a broader level, get people to talk more openly about menstruation, she said.

Emery Celli in 2016 filed a class action lawsuit over New York's tampon tax, and lawmakers eliminated the tax a few months later. Since 2016, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Ohio, Nevada, and Rhode Island have also eliminated the tax on menstrual products.

But that leaves many other states where women are still taxed on menstrual products, despite the fact that food and some other toiletries are exempt. Period Equity co-founder Jennifer Weiss-Wolf and University of California Berkeley School of Law dean Erwin Chemerinsky published an op-ed in the Los Angeles Times last summer arguing that there is wide public support for the elimination of tampon taxes, which are by nature unconstitutional.

"The tampon tax amounts to sex-based discrimination in violation of the equal protection clause, both under state and federal constitutions—making it more than merely unfair or inequitable, but unconstitutional and therefore illegal," they wrote.

The Tax Free. Period project aims to end such tampon taxes by Tax Day 2020.

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Document NYLJ000020191121efbl0001m

opinion
The phony feminism of tampon tax repeal

Patrick Gleason
882 words
31 August 2017
USA Today Online
USATONL
English
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Efforts in an increasing number of states to repeal tampon taxes represent one of the most misguided, falsely advertised and phony policy reform movements in recent history.

For starters, there is no such thing as a “tampon tax. ” There is not a single state, locality or other governing entity in the United States that imposes a special or discriminatory tax on tampons. “Tampon tax” repeal bills, whose introduction has become a recent fad in many state legislatures, merely seek to exempt tampons and other feminine hygiene products from the state sales tax that is applied to most goods and certain services.

In 2016, 13 states considered legislation that would exempt tampons and feminine hygiene products from state sales tax. The District of Columbia and three states - New York, Illinois, Connecticut - ultimately approved such exemptions last year. It’s not just blue state Democratic strongholds that are passing these measures. In May of this year, Florida joined their ranks when it enacted a new law to exempt tampons from state sales tax, making it 14 states that now do not apply sales tax to feminine hygiene products. Florida’s exemption will take effect in January, whereas Connecticut’s will become effective June 2018, and Washington, D. C. ’s comes online in October 2017.

More: Tax Day isn't likely to be easier next year: Bill Sternberg

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As Nicole Kaeding, an economist at the non-partisan Tax Foundation, explains, this “tampon tax” repeal movement tries to sell bad fiscal policy with false advertising:

“Supporters of ‘tampon tax’ repeal bills argue that women face an injustice when buying these necessity items, but that argument doesn’t hold water. First, it’s factually inaccurate - no state subjects tampons to a special or unique tax. Second, the solution - exempting tampons and other feminine hygiene products from the sales tax - violates the principles of sound tax policy. Ideally, sales taxes should tax all final consumer purchases, without regard to whether items are classified as necessities or luxuries…Exempting feminine hygiene products from the sales tax base results in less revenue for state coffers, leading to higher overall rates in the long run. ”

These misleadingly named “tampon tax” repeal bills have been pushed predominantly by Democratic state lawmakers, progressive policy analysts and left wing pundits. What’s clear is that these proposals are a political ploy meant to portray Democratic politicians who are normally hard-pressed to name a tax hike they’d oppose as being in favor of tax relief.

Democrats getting on the “tampon tax” repeal train think they can portray themselves as pro-tax relief, while painting Republicans who oppose the new carve out as anti-woman. Clever plan. Unfortunately for those adopting it, the current national debate over repealing and replacing Obamacare shows how these “tampon tax” repeal proposals are nothing more than cynical political posturing and that it is Democrats, not Republicans, who are pushing anti-woman policies.

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More: Supreme Court imposes church tax

Obamacare, passed with only Democrat votes, includes 20 tax increases, many of which harm women in particular. Take Obamacare’s Medicine Cabinet Tax, which hits 20 million Americans with Health Savings Accounts and 30 million Americans with Flexible Spending Accounts. This tax hike could also be dubbed the Menstrual Cramp Tax, as it raises the cost of Midol and similar products that women rely on. Republicans in Congress have voted numerous times to repeal this anti-woman $5. 6 billion tax hike. Senators Chuck Schumer, Dick Durbin and other Democrats have opposed them every step of the way and continue to do so.

Republicans have also called for repeal of Obamacare's tax on prescription medicine, which raises the cost of birth control, along with other pharmaceuticals that women rely on. Yet Democrats continue to oppose efforts to repeal this anti-woman tax hike. Speaking of birth control, many prominent Republicans - such as Senator Corey Gardner (R-Colo.) and former Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal - have proposed making birth control available over-the-counter without a prescription. Democrats like to grandstand about access to birth control, yet they oppose this commonsense proposal from conservative Republicans to make it more accessible and less costly. The other 18 tax hikes in Obamacare also adversely affect women, yet Democrats strongly oppose Republican efforts to repeal them.

Democrats will continue to feign concern about women by introducing tampon sales tax exemption bills in state capitals. Yet their support for massive national tax increases that do great harm to women, along with Democratic opposition to over-the-counter birth control exposes the "tampon tax" repeal movement as a political stunt meant to conceal and distract from anti-women policies being pushed by the modern Democratic Party. 2016 proved that voters are smarter than Democratic political operatives think. Apparently that lesson hasn't been learned.

Patrick Gleason is director of state affairs at Americans for Tax Reform.

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Document USATONL020170901ed8v000b5

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Personal Finance

New York is the latest state to scrap tampon tax; Making menstrual products tax-exempt has become an activist priority in the last year

Emma Court
821 words
12 April 2016
15:59
MarketWatch
MRKWC
English
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Making menstrual products tax-exempt has become an activist priority in the last year

New York is on track to become the 11th U.S. state to drop the sales tax on menstrual products, with both houses of the state's legislature passing versions of a bill that would put an end to the "tampon tax."

Women are believed to spend up to $20 a year on the tampon tax, so the new law—which NY Gov. Andrew Cuomo has previously indicated support for—could mean up to about $800 in savings on sales tax alone for the average New York woman over her lifetime.

"New York is leading the way in the fight for menstrual equity in the U.S.," said Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, vice president at the Brennan Center for Justice, a nonprofit based at New York University School of Law.

For Weiss-Wolf and her fellow activists, the activity in New York is "tremendous" but also just the first step, with 39 states remaining in which consumers pay taxes on tampons and pads but not on adult diapers, prescription drugs such as Viagra, Rogaine or even candy bars in vending machines, which are among the products deemed "medical necessities" and thus, tax-exempt.

The dollar savings for women won't exactly knock your Thinx off, activists say, but that's not what it's about, exactly.

"From the perspective of women who already earn less and pay more as a result of their gender, paying this sales tax is a burden we should not have to shoulder," said Weiss-Wolf.

Read more: 6 times it's more expensive to be a woman

Weiss-Wolf, a self-described "menstrual equity activist," is on the front lines of the movement to end the tampon tax, which has picked up steam in the last year.

See: It will take 118 years for women's pay to catch up with men's

The issue has made it onto the agenda in about 10 states, seven of which introduced the legislation, including New York (though Utah's never made it out of committee) and three, South Carolina, Tennessee and Illinois, that recently debated it. It has also gone international, with France cutting the sales tax in late 2015 and the European Union taking a stance on the issue this year.

Women have even taken the tax to court: Earlier this month, a group brought a class-action suit against New York to the tune of $28 million dollars, a calculation of less than $3 per person a year in sales tax.

But the tax's cost to any one woman varies widely based on the person, amount and type of menstrual product used and, of course, a state's sales tax.

(Weiss-Wolf's calculation is about $8 of tampon tax a year per woman, which assumes women spend between $70 and $100 a year on menstrual products. If a woman spends between $100 and $225 on such products, as the Diva Cup—which manufactures an alternative menstrual product—estimates, she could relinquish up to $16 a year to the tampon tax.)

But in any case, it adds up: Assuming no interruptions, women spend about 40 years of their lives buying menstrual products. That translates to an up to $800 spend over the course of women's lives on sales tax on period products alone.

https://api.movementventures.com/widget/poll/KcYFemHUBNKLmPgZNvqqPv2HMzm The tampon revolution is now

The tampon tax is just one part of a transformation activists are calling for in how menstrual products are paid for, provided and seen in society.

A big component is accessibility to menstrual products, something particularly hampered by the products' cost.

See more: Here's one way for women to stay out of poverty

On March 22, a New York City councilwoman proposed making menstrual products free in the city's schools, homeless shelters and jails.

Tampon accessibility is something Nancy Kramer, founder of Free the Tampons, said needs to be expanded even more broadly.

Why don't all women's bathrooms have tampons and pads available? "I believe if men got periods we would not be having this conversation," she said. "There's not a woman I know who doesn't have a story about what happens when they get caught without what they needed."

It's an issue of equality, Kramer said, but also one of productivity. She said she often hears anecdotes about women getting their periods right before "a big presentation with a [chief financial officer] and it's just like, 'Seriously? You have to be concerned about that?'"

"Why should a woman be subjected to being humiliated and losing her dignity because her body is functioning in the way it's supposed to?"

Document MRKWC00020160412ec4c002e5

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What Is Menstrual Equity? Her Justice Advocates For Women's Rights

Elizabeth Rosen
712 words
18 October 2018
Mondaq Business Briefing
BBPUB
English
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Menstrual equity. This term is likely one that you've never heard before. I hadn't either, until I attended a discussion hosted by Her Justice, a non-profit that recruits caring, talented attorneys from New York City's law firms, including Proskauer, to provide free legal assistance in the areas of family, divorce and immigration law to women living in poverty, most of whom are victims of domestic violence.

At this discussion, Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, Vice President for Development and Democracy Fellow at the Brennan Center for Justice, spoke about her advocacy efforts surrounding menstrual equity, including legislation and policies that ensure menstrual products are affordable and available for those who need them. While this topic impacts all women in some way, it most significantly affects incarcerated, homeless, or low-income women and girls. Not only is menstrual equity a hygiene and public health issue, but women and girls often have to compromise their productivity to miss work and school because they cannot afford basic necessities. Weiss-Wolf has worked to increase access to menstrual products through, but not limited to, the following initiatives:

State and Federal Tax Efforts

Most states impose sales taxes, and many of these states exempt health and personal care items from such tax, but only a handful include menstrual products in such exemption. However, within the last two years, lawmakers in many states have introduced bills to remove what is being dubbed the "tampon tax." Supporters of this movement argue that menstrual products are a necessity, and should not be subject to any sales tax.

Policy efforts are also underway to push the IRS to amend the tax code so that menstrual products are eligible for reimbursement under flexible spending accounts. Currently, the IRS does not consider tampons or pads medically necessary, despite the fact that the FDA considers such as medical products.

Public Accommodations

State and city governments have been active in proposing and passing legislation to achieve menstrual equity. In July 2016, New York City was the first in the nation to pass a legislative package requiring all correction facilities, shelters, and public schools to distribute menstrual products free of charge.

Moreover, on the federal level, in July 2017, Senators Booker and Warren introduced the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act, which among other things, includes a mandate to distribute tampons and pads to inmates.

As Weiss-Wolf has argued, there is stigma surrounding the topic of menstruation, but if you think it about it from a human rights perspective, women and girls should not have to miss work or school, risk their health, or compromise their dignity because they menstruate. The solutions Weiss-Wolf has championed seem entirely sensible, yet society has a long way to go.

This discussion with Weiss-Wolf was part of the Her Justice "Breakfast Briefing" Series, a quarterly conversation for friends, supporters, volunteers and their networks, featuring a diverse array of external influencers who focus on the issues impacting the clients and work of Her Justice.

In addition to seeking support from volunteer attorneys who take on pro bono cases, Her Justice also relies on the support of institutional sponsors and partners. Not only do I support Her Justice through pro bono work, but I am also a member of their Junior Advisory Board, which is dedicated to expanding the Her Justice network of young professional volunteers and donors. I encourage my fellow associates at Proskauer to get involved with pro bono cases through Her Justice to help more women and children get the justice they deserve.

To find out more about how you can volunteer with Her Justice, visit their website at http://www.herjustice.org/.

What Is Menstrual Equity? Her Justice Advocates For Women's Rights

The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.

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Document BBPUB00020181018eeai0008o

Utah eliminates tampon tax with sweeping reform package

Becky Jacobs
803 words
19 December 2019
The Salt Lake Tribune
SLTR
n/a
ISSN:07463502
English
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After years of failed attempts, Utah has eliminated its sales tax on menstrual products in a sweeping reform passed by the Legislature.

“It’s very humbling to think of women, girls, every person who menstruates, they’re going to have that savings. And that is a beautiful thing," said Emily Bell McCormick, founder of The Policy Project, a health policy group in Salt Lake City.

McCormick helped lead local efforts to end the “tampon tax,” including holding a rally in October at the Utah Capitol. Organizers of the event spoke about how other items, including Rogaine and Viagra, were considered medically necessary, while tampons and pads were not.

The tax savings are “something that men have experienced for a long time with their health needs, and it’s time for women to enjoy that same benefit,” McCormick said.

[Read more: Gov. Gary Herbert signs Utah tax reform bill]

Gov. Gary Herbert announced Thursday that he signed the new tax bill, and it will go into effect early next year. In addition to addressing period products, the reform package passed Dec. 12 during a special session cuts Utah’s income tax and increases the state grocery tax, among other changes.

The bill creates a sales and use tax exemption for menstrual products, including tampons, panty liners, menstrual cups, sanitary napkins or “other similar tangible personal property designed for hygiene in connection with the human menstrual cycle.” It adds that menstrual products do not include soaps or cleaning solutions, shampoo, toothpaste, mouthwash, antiperspirants or suntan lotions or sunscreens.

Rep. Susan Duckworth, D-Magna, had tried for years to exclude disposable hygiene products from the state’s sales tax, without success. McCormick thinks what made the proposal pass this year was “timing and national momentum.”

Utah is the 18th state to eliminate the tampon tax, she said. And there’s a national movement, called Tax Free. Period., from the nonprofit Period Equality and LOLA, an organic period product company, that’s considering legal action against states that haven’t eliminated the tampon tax, based on discrimination law.

But in Utah, specifically, “I think what happened that was different this year is that we were able to organize and get people out there to reframe the issue for our Legislature,” McCormick said.

In the past, this was “seen as a pretty extreme movement,” and it seemed uncomfortable to talk about menstruation in a public space. But “we reframed this as, 'Oh, no, this is totally normal. It’s completely appropriate to talk about. It needs to be talked about," she said.

While eliminating the tampon tax was seen more as an issue supported by Democrats in the past, McCormick said advocates were able to find bipartisan support this time. “That was 100 percent key to the success of this. This has to be seen as nonpartisan,” she said.

Rep. Robert Spendlove, R-Sandy, said he “didn’t know the issue very well. It was honestly because of Emily. ... She did a really good job of kind of explaining the issue to me, helping me understand the inequity that existed in our existing tax system. And once she explained it to me, it was easy for me to support it.”

Spendlove said he thinks removing the tax is “a great move for the state” and “now we really are on the right side of this and helping to make a vital product just a little bit less expensive.”

In June, the Salt Lake City Council created a pilot program to make menstrual products free at bathrooms in some city buildings. And the Salt Lake City International Airport currently provides free hygiene products.

By now removing this sales tax, people have “a little bit more money in their pocket, especially when we look at women who are in need, who have low incomes," McCormick said.

At the October rally in Salt Lake City — held in conjunction with similar rallies across the country and national organizations, such as PERIOD and Days for Girls — McCormick talked about local high school and college students who couldn’t afford menstrual products and instead used cotton balls with rags or Depends.

But “maybe more important is just being recognized in legislation is huge for women,” McCormick said. “Women feel that they’re valued, and that they’re heard. And they’re starting to become more represented in the way that our government and our legislative body, in particular, handles their issues."

Becky Jacobs is a Report for America corps member and writes about the status of women in Utah for The Salt Lake Tribune. Your donation to match our RFA grant helps keep her writing stories like this one; please consider making a tax-deductible gift of any amount today.

Crédito: By Becky Jacobs

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'Tampon Tax' Repeal Benefits Women But Comes At A Cost To States

Stacey Vanek Smith; Constanza Gallardo
704 words
15 March 2019
NPR: Morning Edition
MGED
English
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RACHEL MARTIN: Those of you who don't have to buy tampons may not know that in many states, you pay a sales tax on menstrual products. Several states, though, have either eliminated that tax or are considering doing so. Stacey Vanek Smith and Constanza Gallardo from Planet Money's The Indicator have been adding up the costs of the so-called tampon tax.

STACEY VANEK SMITH: Sales tax - most people in this country pay sales tax on most of the things they buy. It's a big source of state revenue. Some items like food or water that are seen as, like, necessary to survival are not subject to this tax.

CONSTANZA GALLARDO: Prescription and nonprescription drugs are also exempt - medicines like aspirin, DayQuil or Viagra - also medical equipment and supplies, which can be things like ChapStick or gauze.

VANEK SMITH: But tampons, pads, cups and all of the menstrual hygiene products do not fall into the medical supply category in many states. And a lot of people argue that's not fair.

GALLARDO: Zoe Salzman is one of the lawyers that filed a lawsuit in New York to eliminate the sales tax on menstrual products back in 2016. Salzman and her team argued these products are a medical supply, and they should be tax-exempt.

ZOE SALZMAN: And one example the department of tax gave was things like bandages, gauze and dressings. And so those are items that are used to staunch the flow of blood from the human body. And tampons and pads, as well as cups and panty liners - those are used to staunch the flow of blood from the uterus. So again, clearly, you know, these items have to fit within that definition.

VANEK SMITH: Zoe made her case, and the New York Legislature took notice and, in fact, passed a bill back in 2016 to exempt feminine products in New York from sales tax. So that extra cost here in New York - we do not pay it anymore.

GALLARDO: Yeah. But many other women in other states do pay it. And over time, that cost adds up. And a study published this year by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists found that 2 out of 3 low-income women in the U.S. couldn't afford mental products at least once a year. And nearly half of them struggled to buy both food and menstrual hygiene products over the last year. In fact, there's economic research that the tax break on tampons really benefits low-income people. That's based on consumer data after New Jersey's tampon tax was repealed back in 2005. Research showed that by eliminating the tax, it made products cheaper and more accessible to lower-income women.

VANEK SMITH: But some people say the tampon tax needs to stay.

NICOLE KAEDING: When you start moving into this world of exemptions, you start adding complexity because you have to define what is and is not a qualified good under the exemption.

VANEK SMITH: Nicole Kaeding is with the Tax Foundation, a think tank that studies tax policy. She says sales tax exemptions can be problematic because they can mean that states don't have enough money to fund public policies or programs, and as a result, states may have to increase other types of taxes to get that funding back.

GALLARDO: Back in 2016, California Governor Jerry Brown vetoed a bill that planned to eliminate the state's tampon tax. He argued that by not taxing menstrual products, California could lose up to $20 million in annual taxes.

VANEK SMITH: And the governor has a point. Here in New York, where we eliminated the tax on menstrual products, we're losing about $14 million a year in lost tax revenue. Of course, this isn't just an economic issue. It's a political issue, too. Last year, for example, Nevada voted to make menstrual products tax-exempt.

GALLARDO: And this year, Michigan, Georgia, Ohio and California are pushing for legislation to repeal the tampon tax.

VANEK SMITH: Stacey Vanek Smith.

GALLARDO: Constanza Gallardo, NPR News.

Document MGED000020190315ef3f00008

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The Washington Post

Education
Activists call on Education Department to take action for 'menstrual equity'

By Morgan Smith;Valerie Strauss
940 words
29 January 2019
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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The group was small but hard to miss with their large posters and matching yellow beanies.

"Hey hey! Ho ho! Period poverty has got to go!" they chanted.

On Monday, 40 students and some adults marched near Education Department headquarters in Washington, calling on Secretary Betsy DeVos to take action to combat what they call "period poverty." Their list of demands included comprehensive period education for students of all genders before age 12 and programs that would equip K-12 school bathrooms with free menstrual products.

Students and activists have pressed for years for school bathrooms to be supplied with menstrual products as part of a national movement for "menstrual equity." It aims to provide access to menstrual products to anyone who needs them, especially those from low-income families.

The Education Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the issue.

Students from high schools and colleges across the nation traveled to Washington from New York, where they attended Period Con, a weekend of workshops and panels hosted by Period, the world's largest youth-run nonprofit group working to shatter stigma associated with menstruation. Period provides free menstrual products to those in need.

Period was founded in 2014 by two high school students, Nadya Okamoto and Vincent Forand, and has a few hundred chapters across the country.

Many students said they were inspired to join Period after unfortunate personal experiences with menstruation.

Okamoto, 20, recounted growing up in a low-income household and being dependent on reusable menstrual products. There were times during school, she said, when she would have to use toilet paper or brown paper towels because her school's bathrooms weren't equipped with free menstrual products.

"When you don't have access to period products, you don't talk about it — you just grumble and deal with it," Okamoto told the crowd.

London Vallery, an 18-year-old freshman at Harvard University, heard about the rally after connecting with Okamoto over social media. Vallery recently joined Harvard's Period chapter after learning that period poverty affected rural areas more than urban ones.

Misunderstanding, she said, is one of the largest contributors to period poverty. "We need to spread the word. Once people learn more about period poverty, they will understand menstruation is a health issue, not a luxury," she said.

A 2018 poll sponsored by Always, a company that produces menstrual supplies, found that nearly 1 in 5 girls in the United States have left school early or stayed home because they did not have period products. The menstrual equity campaign aims to help not only female but transgender and non-binary students.

Monday's rally was organized by Period and United for Access, a new campaign associated with Thinx, a company that makes feminine hygiene products.

Speakers commended the young activists on their achievements. Chloe Knott, 15, and Abby Rice, 18, who lead a Period chapter in Portland, Ore., persuaded Portland Public Schools to spend $25,000 a year to stock school bathrooms with free menstrual products for students.

Ameer Abdul, 22, and Anusha Singh, 19, led their Period chapter at Ohio State University in pressuring the school to stock bathrooms on campus with free menstrual products. By November, more than 90 campus buildings had access to free menstrual products. The group has also been working with state Rep. Brigid Kelly (D) on a measure that would eliminate the luxury tax on tampons in Ohio.

Activists are pushing state legislatures to make menstrual products tax-free, given that more than 35 states still tax them.

In the Washington region, Maryland has exempted menstrual products from state taxes since 1980, and late last year D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) announced that the nation's capital would do the same.

Efforts in the Virginia legislature to drop taxes on menstrual products have been unsuccessful, although "menstrual cramp relievers" are exempt from state taxes, according to a list of tax-free products, as are laxative preparations, wart removers and oil of wintergreen.

Last year at Justice High School in Northern Virginia, the chapter of Girl Up, an international club devoted to gender equality, began a campaign to outfit restrooms with menstrual products. A Washington Post story about the effort quoted Jen Golobic, an English teacher at Justice, as saying that students may have avoided asking for sanitary pads from the school clinic because they felt uncomfortable doing so.

"It should just be part of our culture," said Golobic, who sponsors the Girl Up club. "Girls shouldn't have to be embarrassed about something that's just a natural, biological need."

The issue is not confined to the United States; menstrual equity has been a cause in Britain, too, where activists have pushed some schools into providing free menstrual products. A poll published in 2018 in British newspapers, sponsored by a sanitary-pad company, found that 7 percent of girls in Britain missed school during the previous year because they couldn't afford sanitary products. Last year, the government of India scrapped a hefty tax on sanitary napkins.

A United for Access petition has at least 35,000 signatures at the Thinx website.

Activists also took out a full-page ad directed at DeVos.

The ad, on the back page of The Washington Post's Monday A-section, features a letter sent to DeVos. The ad was spearheaded by United for Access and Period.

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news

This lawmaker pushed the Trump administration to put tampons in prisons. She isn't stopping there

Eliza Collins
1,640 words
28 May 2019
USA Today Online
USATONL
English
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WASHINGTON — Rep. Grace Meng is known affectionately around Capitol Hill as "the period lady. "

And she's just "fine with that" – at least it means people are talking about what has become the New York Democrat's signature issue and one she has found surprising success pushing during Donald Trump's presidency.

Meng wants women in the U. S. and abroad to have free or affordable access to pads, tampons and other menstrual products. She's already helped secure them in all federal prisons and was key to getting FEMA to allow homeless shelters to buy them using grant money.

Yet, Meng, 43, is not finished. She's now rallying support for two bills that would further expand access to the products. The Menstrual Equity for All Act would make pads and tampons free for girls, the homeless, low-income women and prisoners. It would also make them available at businesses and federal buildings and, if passed, would be purchasable using health savings accounts. Her other bill, the Menstrual Products Right to Know Act, would require companies to disclose chemicals used in their production.

While there are a few partisan sticking points on the issue – such as how to pay for some of the programs – Meng said she hasn't received much pushback over the idea itself. Instead, much of her challenge lies in getting people comfortable talking about periods in the first place.

Sometimes when she tries to pitch Democratic colleagues on her bill, they get squeamish. It's not uncommon for them to sign on as co-sponsors to get her to stop talking.

"Some of them have said that to my face: 'I'll sign on, and you don't need to explain anymore,'" Meng told USA TODAY during an interview in her office in May. "I think that's hilarious … however I can get them to be a co-sponsor if that's part of our strategy, I'm fine with that. "

Meng's pitch hinges on raising awareness through stories, including about women in the United States struggling with access to tampons and pads, such as when girls skip school because they can't afford them.

"A lot of times we are very sympathetic to helping people and the plight that they are enduring from underdeveloped countries, but not realizing that these are oftentimes the same issues that people right here in America, right here in their own district," said Meng, a lawyer who represents Queens, N. Y.

Women on the Hill: In a shared DC apartment building, freshmen women in Congress find mentorship

Truck driving: Women are increasingly joining the deadly world of truck driving, confronting sexism and long days

Championed access for the homeless, prisoners

When she was sworn in to Congress in 2013, it was not her mission to get women and girls pads and tampons. She didn't even know it was a problem until her office got a letter from a junior high school student who wrote that homeless shelters couldn't use grant money to buy the products.

Meng wrote a letter to the Obama Administration asking if they'd change the rules. A few months later she heard back: FEMA policy would now allow homeless shelters to use grant money to buy the products.

Building on her momentum, she wrote to the Department of Justice under Obama. She asked if they would change agency policy to make the products available to inmates at federal prisons. When Trump won the 2016 election, Meng was convinced her request would die in the GOP administration. It didn't. Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions wrote back saying the products would be made available at federal prisons. That policy was codified into law in the bipartisan First Step Act, which was signed into law in December.

Helena Bragg was incarcerated off and on for over 25 years. She said inmates made at most 45 cents an hour and a box of tampons could cost more than 16 times that. She said the high cost forced women to take unsanitary actions like separating sanitary napkins into tampons.

Bragg has worked with an elected official in Virginia on a law that would provide menstrual products at state jails and prisons, which are not covered under federal policy.

Meng has been “shocked and surprised” at the success she’s had with the Trump administration, but she said there’s still work to be done to turn those policies into laws that can’t be undone by future administrations. For the First Step Act, she’d like to see a law that outlines how to implement the program.

Rep. Ayanna Pressley, D-Mass. , a cosponsor of Meng’s menstrual equity bill, says she has a gift for identifying "niche spaces that actually affect a lot of people, but that you wouldn’t have immediately considered. And then she gets you to consider it and she populates the idea. "

Meng's ideas and her enthusiasm are shared by others — including men.

Virginia state Del. Mark Keam was one of the first male lawmakers to introduce legislation that promotes access to menstrual products and he has no problem embracing the topic, saying he's “trying to put the ‘men’ in ‘menstrual equality. ’”

Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney, D-N. Y. , another co-sponsor of Meng's equity bill, acknowledged the issue can be seen as taboo, which he said presents a problem.

“You just wouldn’t treat a subject for men the same way," he said. "The fact that there is some kind of embarrassment or reluctance to say openly what’s going on is, I think a measure of how screwed up the topic still is. ”

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf has been an advocate for “menstrual equity” since she learned that teens in her community were collecting the products. She has worked closely with Meng on the issue. She has long questioned how it is possible that something that affects half the population is “nearly completely absent" from the bill-making process.

“This really does impact people’s ability to be participatory in our society and it seems to me that’s a real detrimental gap in our lawmaking. We’re talking about a normal bodily function for half the population being utterly ignored,” she said.

While Meng is shepherding her bills in Congress, her colleagues are helping push the issue. This year Rep. Zoe Lofrgen, D-Calif. , in her post as chair of the Committee on House Administration, made it official policy that House members could use their budget to purchase menstrual products for their offices. It was discovered to be an issue after Maloney tried to buy them in 2018 and was denied reimbursement.

“It’s not an issue of war and peace. But if you’re menstruating, you have your period, and you can’t find a tampon or a pad that’s an emergency, right?” said the California Democrat, a co-sponsor of Meng’s Menstrual Equity for All bill.

More women in Congress: In a shared DC apartment building, freshmen women in Congress find mentorship

Nancy Pelosi the strategist: How the House speaker is leading divided Democrats through political turmoil

'Devil is always in the details'

Congresswomen on both sides of the aisle who spoke to USA TODAY broadly agree on the importance of access to the products.

In the last Congress, Meng worked with then Kansas GOP Rep. Lynn Jenkins to add a provision to a larger bill that would allow people to use health savings accounts to buy menstrual products. It passed the House, but was never brought up in the Senate.

Former California GOP Rep. Mimi Walters voted in favor of the bill and said she “would be very supportive of females being able to gain access to these hygiene products that are a necessity for women. ”

However, Walters cautioned, “the devil is always in the details of cost, and we would have to be mindful of what the cost would be to the taxpayer. ” Meng's bill does not yet have a cost estimate.

It also does not currently have any Republican co-sponsors. She acknowledged that paying for the programs could be a point of contention and she knows some sections of her bill may be better received by Republicans than others, which is why she is open to breaking it up to pass the bill in pieces.

Congress “is very unpredictable," Meng said. "You never know where you might find allies. And so we will, you know, do whatever we can to make sure that we're working to pass all these pieces, whether it's one piece or separate pieces. "

The crusade for access to menstrual products extends beyond Congress, where the actions of Meng and others seem to have reverberated to the high school level.

Natalie Baumeister, a high school senior, who has had some success expanding access within her own school, appeared at a press conference with Meng as she introduced her bill in March. Last year, Baumeister, the president of her Virginia high school’s chapter of Girl Up, a club focused on gender equality, worked with the administration to stock menstrual products in all the restrooms so students no longer had to go to the nurse’s office and ask.

“It’s just nice to know that it’s not all a government full of corruption. There are still people who know that ‘this is something that my constituents need, this is something that is going to help the people and I’m going to fight for it,’” Baumeister said.

New majority: Powerful minority bloc ready to assert clout in Democratic-controlled House

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The Washington Post

morning-mix

'They're as necessary as toilet paper': New York City Council approves free tampon program ; It's part of a "menstrual equity" movement.

By Katie Mettler
807 words
23 June 2016
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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Periods hv been stigmatized for far too long. Tdy @NYCCouncil leads the nation towards menstrual equity pic.twitter.com/DPufd1PqPk

On Tuesday, in a crowded room in New York City, council member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland whipped out a small, wrapped tampon and waved it in the air.

She did not sneak it from her purse or secretly shove it up her shirt sleeve. She was not on her way to the bathroom. The lawmaker was trying to make a point, and this tampon was her prop.

"They're as necessary as toilet paper," she said.

It was a defiant act against period stigma and a taboo Ferreras-Copeland has been fighting against in her quest for what she calls menstrual equity. On Tuesday, after months of crusading and a colorful public discussion, she led the New York City Council toward a historic decision.

In a 49-0 vote, the council approved a measure that would make New York City the first in the United States to give all women in public schools, prisons and homeless shelters access to feminine hygiene products — free of charge.

"For students who will no longer miss class because they do not have a pad or tampon to mothers at shelters and women in prison who will have access to these critical yet often overlooked products, this package makes our city a more fair place," Ferreras-Copeland said in a council statement.

Her proposal, co-sponsored in part by Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and members Ydanis Rodriguez and Daniel Dromm, would make pads and tampons freely available for the 300,000 schoolgirls in New York City and 23,000 women in public homeless shelters, reported the Associated Press. In correctional institutions, women are provided a limited supply of generic hygiene products, but advocates say that under current regulations, the options are at times scarce, inadequate and dehumanizing. This legislative package would change that, adding the force of law to preexisting standards.

The measure would provide an estimated 2 million tampons and 3.5 million pads each year, just to homeless shelters, reported AP. It will take up about $2.5 million annually in the city's $82 billion budget.

The bill awaits Mayor Bill de Blasio's signature, which is expected.

After the unanimous vote, de Blasio offered his support for the movement on Twitter and Facebook.

Excited to partner with @NYCCouncil to make NYC the largest city to guarantee freetampons and pads at public schools, shelters and jails.

The New York City Council's decision comes amid a national conversation about the high cost of menstrual products, what some advocates call a "womanhood penalty."

Most U.S. states consider period pads and tampons nonessential items and tax them accordingly. Earlier this year, outrage bubbled online and elsewhere over what critics called a discriminatory "tampon tax."

In an interview this year with vlogger Ingrid Nilsen on YouTube, President Obama lambasted the high cost of menstrual products.

"I have no idea why states would tax these as luxury items," Obama said. "I suspect it's because men were making the laws when those taxes were passed."

A month ago, New York state lawmakers voted to eliminate the sales tax on feminine hygiene products, becoming the sixth state to do so.

The package approved Tuesday was Ferreras-Copeland's most recent effort to bring menstrual equity to the city. At the beginning of 2016, she spearheaded a pilot program that brought free pads and tampons to female students in 25 public high schools in Queens and the Bronx.

In support of the measure spreading to all public schools, de Blasio posted a video to Facebook. It read: "So they can focus on their 6th-period test, instead of their period. Girls shouldn't have to miss class because of their period."

In the post, he also quoted Ferreras-Copeland:

"Because tampons and pads aren't luxuries — they're necessities. As Ferreras-Copeland put it: 'A young girl should not have to tell her teacher, to then tell her counselor, to then be sent to the nurse's office, to then be given a pad to then go back to the bathroom while a boy is already taking his exam in his classroom.' "

In an announcement on the steps of city hall Tuesday, with a flock of women's health advocates standing behind her, Ferreras-Copeland praised the legislation, which is just as much about eliminating stigma as it is about providing free access to health products.

"This package is remarkable," Ferreras-Copeland told the crowd, according to the Huffington Post. "It is the only one of its kind, and it says periods are powerful."

Document WPCOM00020160623ec6n001p5

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In tampon tax, a discriminatory California policy lives on: Erwin Chemerinsky

Erwin Chemerinsky; Erwin Chemerinsky
744 words
21 September 2016
Los Angeles Daily News
LAD
English
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[...]a lawsuit was filed in New York last spring to have that state's tax on these products declared unconstitutional as a denial of equal protection. [...]13 states now exempt feminine hygiene products from sales tax, and there is a trend across the world to create such tax exemptions.

If the government were to say that only men or only women had to pay an additional tax of several hundred dollars a year solely because of their sex, that would clearly be an unconstitutional denial of equal protection. Yet that is exactly the effect of California imposing a tax on tampons and sanitary pads.

The California Legislature sought to remedy this and unanimously approved bills that would have exempted diapers and feminine hygiene products from the state's sales tax. Unfortunately, last week, Gov. Jerry Brown, in a misguided effort to save the state a relatively small amount of money, vetoed these bills.

At the very least, compassion and common sense indicate why these legislative measures were desirable. California explicitly exempts "necessities of life" from its sales tax. Most states do so. Food, medicine and medical supplies are all sold without sales tax here.

Diapers are a necessity of life for babies and feminine hygiene products are a necessity of life for women from puberty until menopause.

Moreover, taxing tampons and sanitary pads is sex discrimination. Only women use these products, and thus only women pay the tax. In fact, a lawsuit was filed in New York last spring to have that state's tax on these products declared unconstitutional as a denial of equal protection. The complaint in the case said that the tax "is a vestige of another era, and now it is time to end it." The complaint explained that under New York law, medical items are not taxed. Products like Rogaine, foot powder, dandruff shampoo, chapstick, facial wash, adult diapers and incontinence pads are deemed medical items. But feminine hygiene products were deemed personal hygiene items and taxed.

Before the federal court could decide the case, the New York Legislature adopted a bill to repeal the "tampon tax" and Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed it into law.

In fact, 13 states now exempt feminine hygiene products from sales tax, and there is a trend across the world to create such tax exemptions.

So why not California, especially after the Legislature acted unanimously? Gov. Brown stated: "Tax breaks are the same as new spending." Of course, he is right that there is a cost to giving a tax exemption. But that does not address whether the cost is necessary.

For California, the loss of revenue is relatively small. The tampon tax repeal would have cost the state $20 million this year, according to the Board of Equalization. California spending in fiscal year 2015 was $255 billion. In other words, this involved less than one-hundredth of 1 percent of state revenue.

More important, the question is one of fairness and constitutionality. The question is whether feminine hygiene products should be regarded as necessities, or as luxuries to be taxed. The answer is obvious.

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It is unfortunate that Brown did not acknowledge this and sign the bills. Hopefully the outcry against his veto will continue and when the Legislature passes similar bills, the governor will sign them. Also, a lawsuit like the one filed in New York can be brought challenging the tampon tax as a form of unconstitutional sex discrimination.

Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia, D-Downey, introduced AB1561 and declared: "Fundamentally this is about gender equity and leveling the field. Every month, for 40 years of our lives, we are taxed for being born women. Every month of our adult life we are taxed for our biology. Every month we are told our periods are a luxury, while also being told they are something to be ashamed of and we must hide."

Garcia concluded: "Let me be clear, on biology, periods are not luxuries and they are definitely not something women should be ashamed of, period!"

It is sad and wrong that Gov. Brown did not heed this message.

Credit: Erwin Chemerinsky

Caption: Tammy Compton restocks tampons at Compton's Market in Sacramento on June 22. Gov. Jerry Brown rejected an attempt to waive taxes on tampons and other feminine hygiene products along with other proposed tax breaks on Sept. 13. (Photo by Rich Pedroncelli/Associated Press)

Document LAD0000020161130ec9l007mk

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The Boston Globe

Metro
For young activists, a new cause: period parity

Stephanie Ebbert
1,429 words
12 June 2019
The Boston Globe
BSTNGB
English
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Uncomfortable talking about The Curse? Shark Week? Surfing the Crimson Wave?

Get ready to hear a lot more about it.

In this time of ferocious female discontent, women are increasingly demanding a conversation about their periods and a reconsideration of public policies surrounding the cost and distribution of menstrual products.

Brookline Town Meeting members decided last month to start providing free menstrual products in public bathrooms by 2021 — a move they believe makes their municipality the first in the nation to do so.

Boston City Councilors last week proposed providing pads and tampons in city schools to encourage students, most of whom are low-income, to come to school even if they're ill-equipped. Massachusetts lawmakers are considering a bill requiring menstrual products in all public schools, as well as shelters and prisons.

And the MIT Media Lab is setting out to reimagine the tired old monthly enterprise with a “period hackathon" aimed at brainstorming innovative period products and policies.

A national advocacy group this week even launched a coordinated campaign with influencers including Serena Williams and Karlie Kloss to challenge the sales tax on menstrual products imposed by 35 states (not Massachusetts) as not only annoying but inequitable and illegal.

“This is really big. It isn't just about menstrual products," said Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, an attorney and author of the book, “Periods Gone Public," who suggests the lapses say something much larger about societal regard for half the population.

“Is this a sign of what is wrong with the system: That our bodies and our needs aren't accurately reflected in the laws and policies under which we live?" she asked. “What does it say about how we consider women as citizens of this country?"

The idea of “menstrual equity" is finding traction in the #MeToo era as women demand that issues long dismissed as individual female complaints be heard, acknowledged, and reconsidered by society at large.

“I've never met a woman of any age who didn't absorb the lesson directly or indirectly that this was her problem to solve, and also something that had to be hidden from others," said Rebecca Stone, the Brookline Town Meeting member who championed the effort. “That you should be embarrassed if someone knows you're bleeding."

Dismantling time-worn social conventions will be a challenge, of course. Enter the MIT Media Lab, which aims to disrupt the whole notion of the period by throwing a new generation of innovators and agitators at it. In January, the Media Lab plans a weekend-long “period hackathon" called “There Will Be Blood."

The hackathon is the brainchild of two female researchers who previously staged a similar event to reimagine the breast pump. (One of them, Catherine D'Ignazio, is a mother of three who was tired of pumping on a bathroom floor.) They're seeking diverse applicants who can offer new perspectives, noted Alexis Hope, an MIT Media Lab research assistant.

“That's one thing we really care about — ripping open the walls of MIT a little bit, to allow more people to participate in the process of innovation," Hope said.

Menstruators are not all female, mind you, since they include transgender men. But all menstruators will point that their predicament is not a surprising or original one. It's a predictable and nearly universal occurrence for

roughly half the population for nearly half their lives. Why, then, is it not anticipated by public bathrooms and public policies?

“Everything else we do for human body function for public health and hygiene reasons — we provide those products for free," said Stone, pointing to toilet paper, soap, toilet seat covers, paper towels, and even urinal cakes. Not so, pads or tampons.

For some, it's a radical shift of perspective.

“Why can't they just bring their own? Do we have to do everything?" a male constituent at a senior center groused to state Representative Jeffrey Roy, a Franklin Democrat.

“I turned to him and said, 'Bill, do you have toilet paper and hand towels in your pocket right now?' " Roy recounted.

Roy, one of several male politicians in Massachusetts sponsoring period parity bills, argues that menstrual products shouldn't be treated any differently. “It's an idea whose time has come," he said.

“This is the first time I think in Massachusetts that we're really seeing more momentum around the conversation around menstrual equity," said Sasha Goodfriend, president of the Massachusetts chapter of the National Organization for Women, which is pushing a bill on Beacon Hill.

The period parity logic challenges age-old assumptions about whose necessities are really necessary — and the howl-worthy implication of many states' sales tax codes that tampons are not necessities but “luxury" items. (Though the “tampon tax" makes for lovely alliteration, there is no tax specific to menstrual products; it merely means that menstrual products aren't exempt from sales tax as necessities, like food.)

Lawmakers already have done away with the tampon tax in Illinois, New York, Florida, and Connecticut and the cities of Chicago and Washington, D.C. In November, Nevada voters statewide supported a ballot measure to end it.

When Weiss-Wolf's book was published in October 2017, the #MeToo movement was taking off, and her issue seemed “so small compared to that tidal wave of activity and anger," she said in an interview. But she watched the movements run along parallel paths.

“What we learned in #MeToo is that this is what a fully dystopian society looks like when our needs and our stories go fully unacknowledged by the powers that be," Weiss-Wolf said.

With fellow attorney Laura Strausfeld, Weiss-Wolf successfully challenged the tampon tax in New York state — exempting menstrual products from the state's 4 percent sales tax — and created a nonprofit advocacy organization called Period Equity.

Now, they're partnering with the MIT Media Lab on the hackathon, in the hopes of laying the groundwork for the coordinated campaign to repeal the tampon tax, now levied in 35 states.

Though a sales tax is a relatively a small price to pay each month, it's one that non-menstruators (previously known as men) will never pay, creating a point of contention for feminists keenly attuned to gender inequities right now. Menstrual products also can't be purchased with food stamps, and low-income students who can't afford them sometimes skip school rather than risk embarrassment, advocates say.

“Girls shouldn't be worrying about their periods. They should be worrying about their educational experience," Caroline Williams, an 18-year-old recent Medway High School graduate, testified at the State House last week.

Williams, who wrote about the topic for a persuasive writing assignment, spoke with her state legislator, Roy, after he visited her school for a civics presentation. When he asked her to collaborate on a bill, she emphasized two priorities: That students shouldn't be charged for such products and that acquiring them shouldn't require a diversion to a nurse's office.

“A period isn't an illness. It doesn't mean you're sick. It means you're healthy," Williams said.

Brookline's effort also was inspired by a young woman, 2018 graduate Sarah Groustra, who wrote a high school newspaper column denouncing period stigma.

Stone, the Brookline Town Meeting member who took up the cause, said she was “blown away that I'd never thought about it. Here I was, not only somebody who had experienced a period and borne two children and worked with reproductive rights, and I never thought about it as a rights issue, never thought about it as an equity issue, never thought about the fact that the taboo is part of reinforcing women's second-class status."

Now a student at Kenyon College, Groustra said it was “incredibly gratifying" to hear Stone crediting her for the inspiration and to watch her idea come to fruition in her hometown.

“I really do believe the best way to end a stigma is just to talk about it even in the smallest ways," Groustra said. “And I was happy to put myself out there, to work on combating that."

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Credit: By Stephanie Ebbert Globe Staff

Caption:

Sarah Groustra, a 2018 Brookline High school graduate, wrote a student newspaper column that inspired members of her community to begin offering free menstrual products in public bathrooms.

Erin Clark for The Boston Globe

Document BSTNGB0020190624ef6c000do

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The cost of tampons is hurting low-income girls. Let's fix that

By Nadya Okamoto and Maria Molland for CNN Business Perspectives
745 words
21 October 2019
21:55
CNN Wire
CNNWR
English
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Public awareness about period poverty, the inability to access menstrual hygiene products, has ignited a movement calling for free and accessible pads and tampons in restrooms and public spaces around the world. Period poverty impacts millions of people every day and is pervasive in US schools.

Across the country, thousands of students lack the resources to manage basic menstrual hygiene and are denied equal learning opportunities, as they often skip school or classes while having their period as a result. According to a recent study, a startling one-in-five teens have struggled to afford period products or have not been able to purchase them at all, and one-in-four teens have missed class due the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products.

People with periods are taught from a young age that one of our body's natural processes is something to be ashamed of, and something we should go to great lengths to conceal. We're taught to hide our period products in our sleeves on the way to the restroom, and constantly check our clothes for any leaks or stains. The reality of period poverty, combined with the social stigma attached to having a period, like whispering for a tampon in the middle of class or the perception that periods are strictly prohibited as a topic of conversation, has long-lasting implications on a student's life. Rather than face the stress and shame associated with these conversations, many students just choose to skip school altogether. In fact, students reported that stress and shame were the most common emotions that they associated with menstruation.

The good news is that the menstrual equity movement has been gaining momentum, with policy proposals and pilot programs getting adopted in high schools and on university campuses, as well as legislation calling for the elimination of the 'tampon tax' or 'pink tax' at the state and municipal levels.

For example, Ohio recently passed a proposal repealing the state's sales tax on menstrual products in the House with unanimous support. Connecticut eliminated the "tampon tax" in 2016 as part of the S 502 bill, which went into effect in July of 2018.

New York City now provides menstrual hygiene products free of charge in public schools, prisons and homeless shelters, acknowledging that menstrual hygiene products should be treated and supplied just like toilet paper, soap and water. This removes all financial burdens for students who struggle to afford period products, and stigma by placing these products in a place where students can access them without having to draw attention to the need for them in the first place.

While we are beginning to see change, there is still a lot to be done to achieve universal access to these products for every young person who needs them.

First, we need to repeal the so-called "tampon tax" that essentially puts a luxury tax on anyone who menstruates in 34 states.

It's no secret that the tampon tax places an unfair financial burden on people with periods who already earn less than their cisgender male counterparts. Removing these barriers to make period products more affordable is a crucial first step toward leveling the playing field. Proper hygiene is a right, not a luxury.

Second, Congress must pass federal legislation like the proposed Menstrual Equity for All Act sponsored by Rep. Grace Meng that would enable states to use federal grants to provide students nationwide with period products in schools, require Medicaid to cover the cost of period products and let individuals use their own pre-tax dollars from flexible spending accounts to purchase menstrual products. The legislation currently has 63 Democratic cosponsors.

Third, lawmakers need to prioritize medically accurate sex education at the state level. Period education should be accessible and available for all students, and is possible under the Real Education for Healthy Youth Act.

Period poverty is an unacceptable national epidemic. Let's start by acknowledging that far too many students in our schools are unable to afford basic health products like tampons and pads. Only by acknowledging this tragic reality can we begin to take the steps that we need to dismantle this problem and ensure that everyone has access to the period products they need to live and thrive.

By Nadya Okamoto and Maria Molland for CNN Business Perspectives

Document CNNWR00020191021efal00dff

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theguardian

US news
Tennessee Republicans worry women will go on tampon-buying frenzy

Arwa Mahdawi
724 words
14 February 2020
22:30
The Guardian
GRDN
English
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During an annual three-day holiday, shoppers are allowed to buy computers and clothing tax-free, but a proposal to include tampons has gotten pushback

Women can't be trusted around tax-free tampons. If you cut the price of menstrual products they're bound to go tampon-mad and buy boxes of the stuff, just for the hell of it. They'd line their walls with super-plus, they'd polish their floors with pads; it would be absolute bedlam.

That appears to be what Republicans in Tennessee think, anyway. On Tuesday GOP lawmakers pushed back against a proposal that would include sanitary products in Tennessee's annual sales-tax holiday. The three-day event, held at the end of July, allows shoppers to buy items like computers and clothing without paying the usual 7% state sales tax.

"I would think since it's a sales tax holiday, there's really no limit on the number of items anybody can purchase," said Joey Hensley, the Republican senator, during a debate on the bill. "I don't know how you would limit the number of items someone could purchase."

Hensely's legislative assistant later explained that his questions were prompted by concerns "that the possibility of people purchasing large quantities had not been factored in when determining the cost of the legislation". One would not want Tennessee to be bankrupted by residents bulk-buying tampons, after all.

Menstrual products are a necessity, not a luxury; and yet, across America and around the world, they're still largely taxed as the latter. Products such as Viagra and Rogaine, however, are not subject to sales tax in America because they're considered medically necessary. Why is this the case? As President Obama joked back in 2016, "I suspect it's because men were making the laws when those taxes were passed."

The annual tax revenue from menstrual products is not insignificant, ranging from around $1m in Utah to $20m in California. This is money a lot of states don't want to lose; after all they might then have to make the funds up via drastic measures like taxing billionaires a little more. In 2016, Jerry Brown, the Democratic governor of California at the time, vetoed a bipartisan bill that would have exempted menstrual products from sales tax, saying it would cost the state too much in lost revenue. Brown also shot down similar bills which would have ended certain state taxes for diapers.

Over the last few years there's been increased global activism and awareness around the so-called tampon tax, and some progress has been made. Between 2016 and 2018, five US states (Nevada, New York, Florida, Connecticut and Illinois) got rid of the tax, and at least 22 states introduced bills to repeal the tax last year. California also suspended the tax in a law that went into effect on January 1, though the exemption, which also includes diapers, expires in 2022. As it stands, a tampon tax is still in place across 33 states.

In 2004, Kenya became the first country in the world to end a value-added sales tax on menstrual products. Thanks to pressure from female parliamentarians, the nation has since implemented a number of progressive period policies. In 2010 it allocated almost $4m to provide free sanitary pads to schoolgirls.

Canada, India, Australia, Malaysia, and Germany have all jettisoned the tampon tax in the past few years, following pressure from activists. The UK still has a 5% tax (down from an original 20%), but in 2015 set up a tampon tax fund and pledged that the money raised would be spent on women's charities.

Scrapping sales tax on menstrual products and treating them like the necessities they are is an important step towards period equity. But even without sales tax, the items are still expensive and many women struggle to afford them. Last year a survey of low-income women in St Louis, Missouri, found nearly two-thirds couldn't afford menstrual hygiene products during the previous year, and one in five struggled to

buy the products every month. Meanwhile, just across the border in Tennessee, we've got Republicans worrying women might abuse the system by splurging on tax-free tampons.

Document GRDN000020200214eg2e001jp

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Tennessee Republican lawmakers push back on proposed three-day exemption to 'tampon tax'

By Kelly Mena, CNN
705 words
13 February 2020
23:07
CNN Wire
CNNWR
English
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Tennessee Republican lawmakers are pushing back on a proposed three-day tax exemption on feminine hygiene products, saying it would lead to a loss of too much tax revenue.

Sen. Sara Kyle on Tuesday introduced SB 1724, a bill that would exclude products like tampons, pads, liners, cups and douches from sales tax during the state's annual sales tax holiday.

The annual holiday is held in Tennessee from July 31 to August 2, according to the state's department of revenue website. The holiday is meant to promote buying "back-to-school" items.

Kyle wants to alleviate some of the costs of the products for the state's 1.8 million women between the ages of 15 and 55.

"I come to you today with a very small plea: that we take the tax off these products for just one weekend," said Kyle at a hearing for the bill on Tuesday. "I am urging a very small amount of dollars, but it sends a large signal that our state is taking a very important step of recognizing these products as a necessity and are an essential part of women's health."

Some of the Republicans on the committee -- all of whom are men -- pushed back against the proposal, saying women could potentially buy the items in bulk and cost the state thousands of dollars in revenue. Sen. Joe Hensley asked, "Sen. Kyle, do you have a way to replace the funds?"

According to Kyle, the proposal would cost the state a mere $133,000 in annual revenue of the state's total $40 billion budget.

"Since it's a sales tax holiday, I don't see how you would be able to put a limit on the number of items somebody can purchase," Hensley said at the meeting.

The "tampon tax" issue has played out across the country for the last couple of years.

Eight states — Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Ohio, Nevada, New York, Rhode Island, Utah — have completely eliminated the sales tax or "tampon tax" on feminine hygiene products, and California has a temporary ban until 2023, according to Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, Period Equity co-founder and vice president for development at the Brennan Center for Justice.

Weiss-Wolf noted that the bill would be a good step toward ensuring female students are able to be successful at school.

According to a recent study, one in five teenagers has struggled to afford period products or have not been able to purchase them at all, and one in four teens has missed class due the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products. It's an issue known as period poverty, the inability for a person to access menstrual hygiene products.

"We should be thinking about menstrual products as school supplies," Weiss-Wolf told CNN over the phone.

"There are surely things that students in school need to be successful, productive, present and engaged in their school day...if your parent can't afford tampons or pads on the day your period comes because their paycheck doesn't come until five days later, that doesn't help you be successful in the classroom for the days you need it," she added.

The bill was given another week in committee to allow Kyle to present how she would make up the funds following a recommendation by the only woman on the committee, Sen. Brenda Gilmore, a Democrat.

"This is an uncomfortable conversation to have, but there are even some young girls who even use rags and cloths because they can't afford feminine products. We should not have our young girls be subjected to this humiliation," Gilmore said at the hearing.

If the bill was passed and signed into law, the earliest it could go into effect is July 1, 2020.

"We know it sometimes takes a while for good ideas to stick in the Tennessee General," Brandon Puttbrese, press secretary of the Tennessee Senate Democratic Caucus Assembly, said in an email to CNN. "But cutting the 'tampon tax' is a good idea and, regardless of the outcome this year, we'll continue fighting for it."

By Kelly Mena, CNN

Document CNNWR00020200213eg2d00hqx

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Tampon tax break faces resistance in Tennessee

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI
Associated Press
350 words
11 February 2020
19:33
Associated Press Newswires
APRS
English
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A proposal to include feminine hygiene products during Tennessee's annual sales-tax holiday faced resistance Tuesday from lawmakers concerned about the lack of limit on on such purchases.

The legislation is the latest evolution of a push to eliminate the so-called “tampon tax” on items such as tampons and menstrual pads.

The bill would allow these products to be tax free during Tennessee's three day weekend where certain goods — ranging from $1,500 computers to $100 clothing items — can be purchased tax free. The weekend is held the last Friday in July, when most families are preparing for the new school year.

However, Republicans inside the GOP-dominant Statehouse have pushed back against such proposals to remove the “tampon tax” over the years.

"I would think since it's a sales tax holiday, there's really no limit on the number of items anybody can purchase," said Sen. Joey Hensley, a Republican from Hohenwald, while debating against the bill Tuesday. “I don't know how you would limit the number of items someone could purchase.”

According to the bill's fiscal impact, women spend approximately $120 a year on feminine hygiene products.

Tennessee's current sales tax is 7%, which means the the proposal is estimated to cost the state approximately $132,700 annually.

“It's a very uncomfortable conversation to have, there are some young girls who use rags and cloths because they can't afford these products and we should not allow our young girls to be submitted to this humiliation,” said Democratic Sen. Brenda Gilmore of Goodlettsville.

The Republican-controlled hearing originally was prepared to give the bill a negative recommendation during Tuesday's hearing but held off to give the bill's sponsor, Sen. Sara Kyle, more time to address questions about the funding.

Advocates say 10 U.S. states have eliminated their so-called tampon tax. Kenya became the first country to do so more than a decade ago and nations including Canada and India have followed.

Document APRS000020200211eg2b00ueh

The New York Times

U.S.

22 States Considered Eliminating the 'Tampon Tax' This Year. Here's What Happened.

By Karen Zraick

1,293 words
12 July 2019
11:00
NYTimes.com Feed
NYTFEED
English

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Why are tampons taxed when Viagra isn't?

That's the question at the heart of the push to repeal the so-called tampon tax, a catchy phrase that refers to state sales taxes applied to menstrual products, including pads and cups.

Thirty-five states still tax the items, despite momentum to change that. Opponents of the tax argue that tampons and pads should be treated like groceries and medical supplies: They should be tax-exempt because they are necessities. If you buy a box of pads every month for 40 years, they argue, those charges add up, amounting to yet another example of a "pink tax," a term for the higher prices women pay for gender-specific products.

"The tampon tax amounts to sex-based discrimination," said Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, a co-founder of the nonprofit Period Equity, which is leading a campaign to eliminate the tax.

But others argue that states need the revenue, and that creating exemptions for individual items is misguided. For example, soap is generally taxed, though most people agree that it is a necessity. Where should we draw the line?

"Every time another exemption is passed, it means the tax rate that applies to everything else will have to increase in order to generate that same amount of revenue," said Katherine E. Loughead, a policy analyst at the Tax Foundation, a conservative think tank in Washington.

Despite those concerns, public opposition to the tax appears to be widespread. The market research company OnePoll surveyed 2,000 women in the United States last month on behalf of Intimina, a menstrual cup manufacturer, and found that 67 percent of respondents thought a tax on period products was sexist.

Between 2016 and 2018, Nevada, New York, Florida, Connecticut and Illinois eliminated the tax, while many other states introduced bills to do so. (Five states already had an exemption on the books, and five others do not have sales tax.) Around the world, Canada, India, Malaysia and Australia have nixed the tax, and Britain is on track to do so once Brexit negotiations are settled.

This year, lawmakers in 22 states introduced bills to repeal the tax, but none were signed into law. California and Rhode Island did repeal the tax in their budgets, while Virginia decreased it, and several states took steps to increase access to menstrual products in schools, prisons and shelters.

But the dearth of action on the tax in most states frustrated proponents of "menstrual equity," a concept that refers to equal access to information and period products. They say they are now exploring legal strategies to challenge the tax, and have invited experts to discuss the tactics at a conference this fall at Columbia Law School.

The director of the school's Center for Gender and Sexuality Law, Katherine Franke, said she believes the courts will agree that the tax is an unfair penalty on women. (Of course, trans and nonbinary people may also menstruate.)

"What this case really does is highlight a day-to-day way in which women experience discrimination in one of their most basic bodily functions," she said.

Here's what happened in some key states

Rhode Island repealed the tax in its budget bill. Representative Edith H. Ajello and Senator Louis P. DiPalma, both Democrats, had submitted separate legislation to do so earlier in the year, as they had every year since

2016. The measure, which would cost around $800,000 a year, was effectively approved through the budget, Ms. Ajello said.

“I never heard anybody say it was a bad idea to get rid of the tax,” Ms. Ajello said. “I just heard some people wonder whether we could afford it.”

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, held a news conference in May surrounded by giant boxes of diapers and tampons, and announced a plan to eliminate the tax on both in the state budget. It was a stark contrast to the approach of his predecessor, Jerry Brown, also a Democrat, who had vetoed a bill to eliminate taxes on those items, arguing that “tax breaks are the same as new spending.”

But Mr. Newsom’s exemption will last only two years, in contrast to a law, which would be in place permanently.

“We hope to extend it, but we hope to be in a fiscal position to do so and we want to maintain our prudence,” Mr. Newsom said, according to The Los Angeles Times. The L.A. Times noted that the cost of eliminating the taxes on both period products and diapers was estimated at $76 million per year.

In Maine, the House and Senate passed a bill sponsored by Representative Denise Tepler, a Democrat, to repeal the tax. But lawmakers did not designate money to cover its cost, which was estimated at $817,000 in the next full fiscal year, so it did not advance. It could still be funded next year, at which point it would move to the governor’s desk, Ms. Tepler said.

Ms. Tepler said that she agreed that aspects of the tax code didn’t make sense — for example, she asked, why are diapers taxed when fancy cuts of meat aren’t? She called for a deeper rethinking of sales tax policy.

In Georgia, lawmakers shelved a proposal to nix the 4 percent tax, but allocated funds to provide free menstrual products in schools and community centers in low-income areas.

In Virginia, lawmakers reduced the tax on menstrual products and diapers to 2.5 percent, rather than nixing it entirely. It had been as high as 7 percent in some parts of the state.

Michigan was one of many states where anti-tampon tax proposals failed to gain traction.Senator Winnie Brinks, a Democrat who co-sponsored two such bills, said she was moved to act after years of paying for menstrual products for herself and her three daughters. She said that she couldn’t think of any other tax that was levied on only one sex.

In Louisiana, Senator J.P. Morrell, a Democrat, sponsored a bill to eliminate taxes on diapers and menstrual products. In negotiations, lawmakers sought to combine the measure with tax breaks on firearms and other items, he said. Opponents voiced concern about the cost, and prevailed.

The other states where bills were introduced but did not advance were Arizona, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington and West Virginia, according to a database compiled by Period Equity.

Advocates say they’re “putting states on notice”

Ms. Weiss-Wolf and her colleagues say they’re seeking to mobilize legal action around the idea that a tax on menstrual products amounts to an unconstitutional tax on women. Their new campaign is called Tax Free. Period.

She and Laura Strausfeld, the other founder of Period Equity, were involved in a class-action lawsuit to end the tampon tax in New York in early 2016. Later that year, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, signed a bill to repeal the tax, calling it “a matter of social and economic justice,” and the plaintiffs agreed to drop the suit.

Ms. Weiss-Wolf and Ms. Strausfeld are working on the new campaign in partnership with LOLA, a New York-based company that makes organic pads and tampons. The tennis superstar Serena Williams, who is an investor in the company, said in a statement that she was proud to support the campaign to “end these unfair policies once and for all in the U.S.”

“A tax on periods is wrong,” Ms. Williams said. “Telling half of the population that their needs aren’t important is wrong.”

Document NYTFEED020190712ef7c001uw

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theguardian

US news
Five New York women file class action lawsuit in effort to end tampon tax

Amanda Holpuch in New York
471 words
3 March 2016
19:32
The Guardian
GRDN
English
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The lawsuit filed Thursday challenges a New York state law that grants tax exemptions to products such as Rogaine, but not to tampons and sanitary pads

Five women filed a class action lawsuit on Thursday against a part of New York state law that grants tax exemptions to products such as Rogaine, but not to tampons and sanitary pads.

Plaintiffs say the state's medical device tax law sets an unfair standard and is in violation of the US and state constitutions' equal protection clauses because it treats women's medical needs differently from men's.

"Menstruation products are essential and it is time to acknowledge that access shouldn't depend on who can afford them," plaintiff Margo Seibert told Cosmopolitan. "We hope this case will encourage other states to tackle the issue. It's time to talk periods."

The suit also hopes to get women who have purchased tampons and sanitary pads in the state a sales tax refund.

In New York, products such as hair-growth treatment Rogaine, foot powder and lip balms are considered medical items, and are therefore exempt from sales tax. But feminine hygiene products are not. This includes: tampons, sanitary pads, douches and vaginal products that are not used for contraception.

The New York attorney general's office did not respond to a request for comment.

The plaintiffs include Seibert, co-founder of Racket, a project meant to destigmatize periods and provide equal access to feminine hygiene products; Taja-Nia Henderson, a professor; Catherine O'Neil, a mathematician and data scientist; Jennifer Moore, a children's program coordinator, and Natalie Brasington, a photographer.

They are being represented by lawyers from the firm Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady.

"We hope this case will be the beginning of the end of the tampon tax in this country," said the lead counsel, Ilann Maazel, in a statement.

A New York Times editorial last month called for an end to the tampon tax. "Getting rid of taxes on these products is an important first step toward making them affordable for all," the newspaper said.

Campaigns have been launched in several states to do away with these taxes. Last month, an all-male committee voted to maintain the tax in Utah. And New York state lawmakers have introduced bipartisan legislation that would exempt these products from sales tax.

Barack Obama said in January that it was "pretty sensible" for women in states that have the tampon tax "to work to get those taxes removed".

The US president told YouTube personality Ingrid Nilsen: "I have no idea why states would tax these as luxury items. I suspect it's because men were making the laws when those taxes were passed."

Document GRDN000020160303ec33006mx

NASDAQ OMX | GlobeNewswire

End Period Poverty: Seventh Generation Partners with PERIOD on #NationalPeriodDay

870 words
16 October 2019
14:00
GlobeNewswire
PZON
English
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End Period Poverty: Seventh Generation Partners with PERIOD on #NationalPeriodDay

Introduces charitable co-venture to support organizations working toward period equity

BURLINGTON, Vt., Oct. 16, 2019 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Seventh Generation, a leading household and personal care products company and a pioneer in the eco-friendly products space, is partnering with PERIOD, a non-profit working to end period poverty and period stigma, on the first-ever National Period Day, Saturday, October 19. Youth activists nationwide will rally across all 50 states to raise awareness for the issue of period poverty, demanding clean and healthy period products to be freely accessible in schools, shelters, and prisons, and to call for eliminating the tampon tax.

To reinforce its mission to champion period equity, Seventh Generation has also announced a new charitable co-venture to support organizations, like PERIOD, working toward period equity. Across the brand's full portfolio of period care products, including pads and tampons, 43 cents per package - representative of the average cost of the tampon tax in the United States - will be donated to organizations doing impactful work to reverse period inequity.(1)

"Seventh Generation is committed to championing period equity through our products, our advocacy actions and our partners, and we're proud to be driving this work forward in partnership with PERIOD," said Ashley Orgain, Global Director of Advocacy and Sustainability at Seventh Generation. "At Seventh Generation, we believe access to period care products is a fundamental right, not a privilege. It's our hope the action, support and conversation generated on National Period Day will be an incredible next step towards achieving menstrual equity for all."

Beyond the tampon tax, there is a need for more programs to supply tampons and pads for populations that don't have access to period care products. Seventh Generation believes all who menstruate should have access to green and clean period care options, which is why the brand's tampons are made of 100 percent organic cotton and free of unnecessary fragrances and deodorants.

To bring further attention to the issue of period poverty, Seventh Generation and PERIOD released a PSA, SEE RED, which highlights the insight that if faces were bleeding, someone would do something to help. When blood is hidden, it's much easier to ignore. Not having tampons and pads means not being able to go to school or work.

"I started this organization when I was 16 years old, and Seventh Generation was the first company to donate period care products for us to distribute to the homeless in Portland," said Nadya Okamoto, Founder and Executive Director of PERIOD. "Five years later, now as the largest youth-run NGO in women's health in the world, we've come full circle in our partnership and are together ready to make history in the menstrual movement as we fight for freely accessible period products for all and an end to the tampon tax."

PERIOD's expansive network of youth-run chapters, in partnership with Seventh Generation, will host rallies in all 50 states on October 19. To find the nearest rally, visit NationalPeriodDay.com. Join the conversation on social by using #NationalPeriodDay and tagging @periodmovement and @seventhgeneration to tell us why you fight to end period poverty.

To learn more about Seventh Generation's period care products, please visit SeventhGeneration.com.

About Seventh Generation

For nearly 30 years, it's been Seventh Generation's mission to help you protect your world with our environmentally conscious and effective household products. Our products are solutions for the air, surfaces, fabrics, pets and people within your home -- and for the community and environment outside of it. Seventh Generation offers a full line of laundry, dish and household cleaners, baby products including Free & Clear diapers, training pants and baby wipes, plus recycled paper products and recycled plastic trash bags, and

feminine care products including Organic certified tampons. The company derives its name from the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy that states, "In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations." For information on Seventh Generation cleaning, paper, baby and feminine personal care products, to find store locations, and explore the company's website visit www.seventhgeneration.com.

About PERIOD

Nadya Okamoto started PERIOD when she was 16 years old and living in Portland. Currently a junior at Harvard, Nadya recently published her debut book, Period Power: A Manifesto for the Menstrual Movement with publisher Simon & Schuster.

Founded in 2014, PERIOD is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. PERIOD's mission is to eliminate period poverty and stigma through advocacy, education, and service. With the support of generous partners, sponsors, and individuals PERIOD delivers menstrual products and PERIOD packs to those in need. Through thoughtful education geared to destigmatize the way periods are thought and talked about, the organization is elevating the issue to eliminate the taboo through a growing network of high school, college, and community chapters.

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A photo accompanying this announcement is available at https://www.globenewswire.com/NewsRoom/AttachmentNg/4c988847-583b-4e5c-9478-145e742ec275

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Document PZON000020191016efag0009o

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DAILY NEWS
NYDailyNews.com

NEWS
Chicago nixes tampon tax

Stephen Rex Brown
Stephen Rex Brown
147 words
18 March 2016
New York Daily News
NYDN
SPORTS FINAL
30
English
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CHICAGO IS the latest city to ban the tampon tax.

Its city council voted in favor of the measure Wednesday. Tampons are taxed 10.25% in Chicago - the vote removes the city's portion, which is 1.25%. Earlier this month, five women in New York sued the state, arguing the tampon tax was discriminatory. "It is . . . undisputable that tampons and sanitary pads serve multiple medical purposes. They are not luxury items, but a necessity for women's health," the suit charged. Papers noted that the Empire State does not tax medical items such as Rogaine, foot powder, dandruff shampoo, ChapStick, facial wash, adult diapers and incontinence pads. But medical items used only by women - tampons and sanitary pads - are taxed. The tampon tax has become a national issue, with at least seven states considering legislation.

Document NYDN000020160318ec3i00026

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

USA
Are tampons luxury items or essential goods? Utah measure revives debate.

Story Hinckley Staff
835 words
11 February 2016
The Christian Science Monitor
CHSM
English
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Utah legislators voted to keep a sales tax on tampons and other feminine hygiene products Wednesday, despite growing support for similar "tampon bills."

As part of a larger international debate on eliminating taxes for feminine hygiene products, Utah Rep. Susan Duckworth (D) authored legislation that would have repealed the state's tax classification of tampons as a "luxury good." But even before appearing before members of the taxation forum Wednesday evening, Representative Duckworth didn't hold out much hope.

"I'm going into an all-male committee, and I just don't believe they are going to have much sympathy," Ms. Duckworth told the Associated Press. "The chances of it getting out of committee are probably not very good, but I'm not going to give up on it."

The committee struck down the measure in an 8-3 vote, saying the tax system should stay predictable. Duckworth says she will keep pushing for tax-free tampons because women in Utah pay about $30 a year in taxes for products that are health-related.

"Personal hygiene is a right," she said during the committee hearing. "We're entitled to this."

Similar legislation is also up for review in California, Virginia, Ohio, and New York.

In an interview with YouTube blogger Ingrid Nilsen last month, President Obama seems to be confused by the tax as well.

"I have to tell ya, I have no idea why states would tax these as luxury items. I suspect it's because men were making the laws when those taxes were passed," Mr. Obama told Ms. Nilsen. "And I think its pretty sensible for women in those states that you just mentioned to work to get those taxes removed."

But because they are state taxes, and not federal taxes, Obama urged listeners to take up the issue with their state legislators and governors.

Of the 45 states that charge sales tax, all but five – Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and New Jersey – consider tampons and other feminine hygiene projects "luxury goods."

Opponents of the practice point to what they see as questionable interpretations of what goods should be categorized as luxury versus essential items. For example, candy is considered a tax-exempt staple grocery item in 15 of these states.

Some state legislators and pundits say outrage over the tampon tax is taken out of context: there is not an additional tax imposed on tampons specifically. Feminine products are simply subject to the same taxes of other everyday items like toilet paper and diapers.

"Toilet paper attracts [Goods and services tax], and women use more toilet paper than men; shouldn't toilet paper be exempt from GST? What about nappies, an essential item that's far more expensive than tampons, the costs of which are borne exclusively by families with young children?" asks Australian Guardian columnist Eleanor Robertson.

But state legislators have a clear reason to classify tampons as a luxury good, say opponents: they bring in a pretty penny. Almost every woman spends money on these products every month, for around 40 years. In other words, having a period is not a choice.

If Utah repeals their tampon tax, Duckworth's legislation would reduce Utah's general fund by $1 million a year. On average, women pay $7 a month on tampons and sanitary napkins in California, contributing to $20

million a year in taxes. And while these 45 states rely on tampon tax for revenue, the pricetags add up for women struggling to get buy.

“This is not insignificant to women, especially poor women on a tight budget who struggle to pay for basic necessities like a box of tampon or pads every month for their adult life,” Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia (D), who introduced legislation in California to eliminate the tampon tax, said in a statement. “Women have no choice but to buy these products, so the economic effect is only felt by women and women of color are particularly hard hit by this tax.”

Other state legislators have proposed measures to help low-income women with hygiene costs. New York Rep. Grace Meng (D) introduced a bill that would allow women to pay for tampons and sanitary napkins with their tax-exempt, health care savings accounts. And in Wisconsin, Democratic Rep. Melissa Sargent proposed a bill that would supply all state buildings and publicly funded schools with free feminine hygiene products.

Similar repeal efforts continue in Britain, Australia, and France, where feminine products are subject to the same taxes. But the Canadian government responded to public outcry, eliminating their "tampon tax" last May.

“Finally, the government has listened to reason and put an end to this injustice. That is a victory for all women,” Canadian politician Irene Mathyssen, who introduced the legislation, said in a statement. “The women who made this an issue, their voices have finally been heard.”

This report contains material from the Associated Press.

Document CHSM000020160212ec2b0002u

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California governor under fire over 'tampon tax'

351 words
15 September 2016
03:05
Agence France Presse
AFPR
English
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California Governor Jerry Brown has come under fire for refusing to support legislation that would have scrapped sales taxes on tampons and diapers.

Citing concerns about cost, Brown on Tuesday rejected a bill to repeal the so-called "tampon tax," drawing criticism from state lawmakers who had pushed for the measure.

"Today's lesson: my uterus should carry the burden of fiscal responsibility for the state. Thank goodness GovBrown is around to #mansplain it," tweeted assemblywoman Cristina Garcia, who authored the bill.

The California measure was part of a growing international campaign to do away with taxes on sanitary products for women on grounds they are necessities and should be treated the same way as other essential items such as food and water.

Similar bills were approved earlier this year in New York and Illinois.

The California measure had unanimously been approved last month by lawmakers but Brown vetoed it along with several other bills saying the state could not afford the estimated $300 million in lost revenue.

"Each of these bills creates a new tax break or expands an existing tax break," Brown said in rejecting the bills.

"As I said last year, tax breaks are the same as new spending," he added.

Lawmakers rejected his argument, with some suggesting that a wiser approach would be to tax candy, soda and snacks.

"If you had to tax something, and it had to be candy or tampons and diapers, which would you choose?," assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez was quoted as saying by the Los Angeles Times.

The movement to do away with the "tampon tax" has been gaining traction in recent years and Canada and Ireland are among nations that have scrapped the tax.

In Britain, the government was subjected to a furious backlash when it upheld a five percent tampon tax last year. It subsequently announced it would give millions of pounds raised from the levy to women's charities.

French lawmakers voted last December to reduce the tax rate on women's sanitary products from 20 percent to 5.5 percent.

jz/sg

Document AFPR000020160915ec9f000jh

The Washington Post

wonkblog
The 'tampon tax,' explained ; "Basically we are being taxed for being women."

By Sarah Larimer
883 words
8 January 2016
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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The so-called "tampon tax," the issue Cristina Garcia now finds herself championing, isn't one she just stumbled upon; the California assemblywoman said she has been thinking about this "gender injustice" for awhile.

"I think a lot of women have at some point, thought about it, you know?" Garcia said this week.

Last year, Garcia kicked around the idea of introducing legislation that would make feminine hygiene products exempt from sales taxes in America's most populous state.

She didn't pull the trigger just then. But at a meeting in October, she heard from women in her district, and they talked a lot about their daily struggles and "how it all adds up," she said.

On average, according to Garcia's office, women in California pay $7 per month for 40 years in taxes on tampons and sanitary napkins. Statewide, it adds up to more than $20 million annually.

These products, her office said, "are a basic necessity" that should not be taxed; it's especially "unjust" since the tax only impacts women who are already suffering on the wrong end of the gender wage gap.

And so this week, on the first day of California's 2016 legislative session, Garcia announced Assembly Bill 1561, which proposed an end to the tampon tax.

"I just want people to realize this is not insignificant," said Garcia, a Democrat. "Especially if you're on a tight budget.

"And this is just the first step on a long discussion we need to be having," she added.

Tampons (and similar products) are tax-exempt in only a handful of states, including Maryland and New Jersey.

This map from Fusion shows which states tax tampons and which ones don't:

Fusion's Taryn Hillin explained:

For those uninitiated in the country's tax codes (lucky you!), most states tax all "tangible personal property" but make exemptions for select "necessities" (non-luxury items). Things that are considered necessities usually include groceries, food stamp purchases, medical purchases (prescriptions, prosthetics, some over-the-counter drugs), clothes (in some states), and agriculture supplies. The lists of exemptions vary from state to state.

"Basically we are being taxed for being women," Garcia said in announcing the bill. "This is a step in the right direction to fix this gender injustice. Women have no choice but to buy these products, so the economic effect is only felt by woman [sic] and women of color are particularly hard hit by this tax. You can't just ignore your period, it's not like you can just ignore the constant flow."

[Why you should always buy the men's version of almost anything]

It's an issue that's gaining more and more attention around the world.

Canada's tax on feminine hygiene products was lifted over summer, after thousands signed an online petition on the matter.

In Britain, a few women staged a "tampon tax" protest while on their periods last fall.

In California, Garcia jointly authored the new proposal with assemblywoman Ling Ling Chang, a Republican, who told The Post in a phone interview: "Bottom line is, this bill is about tax relief for women."

"Government is taxing women for something that is totally out of their control," Chang said. "Feminine hygiene is not a choice and should not be taxed."

Chang has called the tax a form of "regulatory discrimination."

At this point, you might be trying to draw a comparison between a tampon and a product that is geared specifically for men to use, like a condom.

That's something that Chang said she'd noticed when reading the comments on stories about tampon taxes.

Those comparisons don't hold up, Chang said.

"I was thinking … that it's a biological function that women can't control," she said. "Which makes it different. I can't really see any other product specifically for men that is comparable."

"I think it's because [as] people, we've been taught to hide this, not talk about it," said Garcia, when asked why so few states have gotten rid of the tax. "The reality is, these institutions of power are male-dominated. It's either they're not thinking about it, or they're afraid to approach it."

Since the bill was introduced, Chang said, some men have told her that they've been waiting for a woman to carry the issue.

That wasn't something she had heard before it was introduced, she said, but it didn't surprise her.

"Talk to some men and they get a little uncomfortable talking about feminine hygiene," she said.

[Ban the bikini body]

The proposed legislation would add tampons and sanitary napkins to the list of products that are exempt from sales tax in the state of California, if it passes. Among the health-related items that are already tax-exempt there: medical ID tags, walkers and prescription medicine.

"If we can't make them free we should at least make them more affordable," Garcia wrote on Facebook. "Having your period when [you're] poor means that once a month you have the added stress of finding a way to pay for these essentials."

ab_1561_bill_20160104_introduced

Document WPCOM00020160108ec18002s7

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Gov. Jerry Brown vetoes bid to lift 'tampon tax'

Teri Sforza; Teri Sforza
831 words
13 September 2016
Los Angeles Daily News
LAD
English
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[...]I cannot sign these measures."

The "tampon tax" lives on. So does the "diaper tax." No jokes, please -- we're talking tens of millions of dollars.

In all, Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed seven bills on Tuesday, including one that would have eliminated sales taxes on feminine hygiene products such as tampons, sanitary napkins, menstrual sponges and the like, and another that eliminated sales tax on diapers.

"Each of these bills creates a new tax break or expands an existing tax break," Brown said in his veto message. "In total, these bills would reduce revenues by about $300 million through 2017-18.

"As I said last year, tax breaks are the same as new spending -- they both cost the General Fund money. ... This is even more important when the state's budget remains precariously balanced. Therefore, I cannot sign these measures."

Necessities -- food, for instance -- are not subject to sales tax, and many feel that these products are long overdue for inclusion in that category. California law already exempts health items like walkers, medical identification tags and Viagra from sales tax, noted Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia, D-Bell Gardens, the no-more-tampon-tax bill's sponsor.

Garcia, and many others, were livid at the governor's veto.

"Please #mansplain why it's ok to balance the budget on women's backs?" she wrote to Brown on Twitter, urging women to call and email the governor "and let him know that your #period is not a luxury."

Brown is on the wrong side of history, she wrote, and promised to keep pushing until the tampon tax is eliminated.

The average woman has 468 periods in her lifetime and a single box of tampons costs $7, she said. Women in California pay $20.2 million a year on sales taxes for tampons and sanitary napkins.

The bill had been promoted by 18-year-old La Palma twins Rachel and Helen Lee.

"It's pretty disheartening," Rachel Lee said. "We were expecting the decision to go the other way. Initially, we were pretty irritated, kind of angry.

"We feel it could've been better than this, that it could've passed and made an impact on women and people with periods."

Last year, Rachel and Helen Lee, 18, created a online petition against the Pink Tax, which refers to pricing disparity between similar male and female products. To date, the petition has more than 24,000 signatures.

Advertisement

In the winter, Garcia discovered the petition and invited the Lees to Sacramento to speak at an April press conference promoting the bill, which Garcia and Assemblywoman Ling Ling Chang, R-Diamond Bar, introduced.

Several states have made the items tax exempt, including New York, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and New Jersey. "Having a period is not a choice for women," she said.

The tampon tax bill got farther than one forbidding a "pink tax" on goods marketed to women, which died in the Legislature. Many nearly identical items are priced higher when they're marketed to girls and women than when they're marketed to boys and men -- everything from razors and deodorant to clothing and toys, research found.

Democrats and Republicans worried about how the bill defined the words "substantially similar" as they applied to products, and sought changes to eliminate strong financial penalties for violations, according to the Consumer Federation of California, which sponsored the bill. The proposed changes also would have made enforcement more difficult, the federation argued.

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs suggested women need look no farther than the men's department for discounts. There's no such luxury for feminine hygiene products, however.

Other tax breaks that Brown announced vetoing Tuesday include:

-SB907, which would have extended personal income tax relief for forgiven debt from mortgage relief provided to homeowners for homes that were underwater during the mortgage crisis;

-AB2127, which would have lowered the amount of ethanol required in a gasoline blend in order for it to qualify for a discounted gas tax;

-AB2728, which would have extended an expiring tax break for investments by insurance companies in lower-income communities;

-SB898, which would have exempted animal blood used by veterinarians from sales taxes. Human blood is already exempt;

-AB724, which would have given the Jimmy Doolittle Museum in Vacaville, Calif., an exemption from paying sales taxes on items purchased for exhibits, allowing the museum to buy a restored Shell Lockheed Vega flown by the famed World War II commander, similar to a tax break for the San Diego Air and Space Museum and the California Science Center.

Credit: Teri Sforza, tsforza@scng.com

Caption: Gov. Jerry Brown on Tuesday rejected an attempt to waive taxes on tampons and other feminine hygiene products along with other proposed tax breaks, saying lawmakers should propose such ideas as part of the annual state budget process rather than as one-off exceptions. The Associated press

Document LAD0000020161130ec9d007b6

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Opinion
OP-ED | Period poverty exacerbated by virus

By Lola Milder and Lucy Duckworth
600 words
6 July 2020
The Philadelphia Inquirer
PHLI
A7
English
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“Free pads and tampons!”

It is a sunny Thursday at South Philadelphia High School, and our table near the exit is piled with 250 paper bags of menstrual products. Families take a few as they leave the meal site, set up to help hungry families during the coronavirus pandemic. Within two hours, the bags are gone.

We see many looks of relief. “Thank God,” one woman tells us. “These things are expensive.”

She’s right: Having a period is expensive. So expensive, in fact, that the difficulty of affording menstrual hygiene products even has its own term: period poverty. A 2019 study of American cities found that two-thirds of low-income women did not have the resources to buy menstrual products at some point within the last year. (This study did not include transgender men or nonbinary people.) Period products are not covered by Medicaid, SNAP (commonly known as food stamps), or WIC.

In Philadelphia, 81% of students in public schools live in poverty. Many students rely on products supplied by their nurses, but these resources are at times insufficient. Some students even take to using socks and other makeshift materials as pads. With schools closed, and the economic effects of the coronavirus disproportionately impacting lower-income communities, where does that leave these students?

The teenage-run Menstrual Equity Project is attempting to help fill that gap.

Sofia Pejcic, our fellow classmate at Julia R. Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration School, began the project after realizing that closing schools also meant cutting off access to menstrual products for many students. If condoms are free for students in Philadelphia, then why aren’t pads and tampons as well?

In partnership with Planned Parenthood Southeastern Pennsylvania, Pejcic began by hand-packing and distributing 200 bags of menstrual products at Northeast High School, where the district was distributing meal boxes. Each kit came with six pads and two tampons, enough to support, or at least supplement, one menstrual cycle. Within four weeks, she had recruited 12 volunteers — including ourselves — to distribute 2,700 kits of products across the city.

But the 2,700 individuals we serviced were just a drop in the bucket. With even more district meal sites opening this June, the Menstrual Equity Project plans to continue distributing products throughout the summer.

Some of our products have been donated by Period, an international youth-led nonprofit with similar ambitions in the fight against period poverty. But most of the funding for the project has come from its crowdsourced campaign on GoFundMe.

The gratitude we received at the meal sites wasn’t just heartwarming — it also made us angry. For decades, activists have challenged their state legislatures to take action toward menstrual equity. And even when states express support for progressive menstrual hygiene legislation, they move at a pace that avoids any real system-wide change.

Our country’s clumsy response to COVID-19 has exacerbated period poverty, magnifying the inaction of our lawmakers, and the burden it imposes on our communities, placing pads and tampons at the expense of groceries or rent. Menstrual products are necessary products, and they need to be treated as such.

Students deserve schools with the resources to care for their health and safety. We need a future where the Philadelphia School District, not solely nonprofits or a group of high school students, takes on that responsibility.

Lola Milder and Lucy Duckworth are rising seniors at Julia R.

Masterman Laboratory and

Demonstration School in

Philadelphia, where they report for their school newspaper,

Voices.

Document PHLI000020200706eg760000q

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New York lawmakers celebrate the passage of the nations first menstrual equity policy; AP Planner; Future News Item; New York City Council

145 words
22 June 2016
AP Planner
APPLAN
English
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Organisation: New York City Council

Description: New York City Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, New York State Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal, the Women's Caucus and advocates hold press conference to celebrate the passage of the nations first menstrual equity policy, to make pads and tampons free and readily available to tens of thousands of New Yorkers at public schools, homeless shelters and Department of Correction jails

Start Date: 2016-06-21

End Date: 2016-06-21

Web Site: council.nyc.gov

Event Time: 10:00

Time Zone: EDT

Summary: New York lawmakers celebrate the passage of the nations first menstrual equity policy

Event Type: In-State Interest Only

Venue: City hall steps, New York, NY

Country: United States

Document APPLAN0020160621ec6l000cl

The U.S. And Equitable Access To Menstruation Products

Michel Martin
1,071 words
28 November 2020
NPR: Weekend All Things Considered
WATC
English
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MICHEL MARTIN: On Tuesday, Scotland became the first country to guarantee that feminine hygiene products will be made freely available to anybody who needs them. The news was celebrated by activists who have argued for years that these essential products are too expensive and too difficult for many women and girls to access. So that got us thinking about what things are like here in the U.S., especially since the coronavirus pandemic has thrown many people's budgets and schedules into chaos.

So we called Jennifer Weiss-Wolf. She is the co-founder of Period Equity. That is an organization founded to ensure accessible, affordable and safe menstruation products in this country. She's with us now. Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, thank you so much for joining us today.

JENNIFER WEISS-WOLF: Thanks so much for having me.

MARTIN: So I just think that for many people who haven't spent any time thinking about this, they might think about this as a personal issue. But you argue that it should be a matter of public policy, also. So for people who aren't familiar with this discussion, just what exactly are you and advocates calling for? What is the problem that you think needs to be addressed?

WEISS-WOLF: We've kind of created this frame and phrase for it called menstrual equity. And, really, what that is all about is ensuring equitable access to menstrual products such that nobody is actually held back from participating in daily life, succeeding in all of the things that, you know, matter to all of us - whether it's going to school, going to work - on account of menstruation and inability to afford menstrual products.

MARTIN: So what are some of the issues here in the United States that you think people need to think more about? I mean, first of all, let's say taxes. Are sales taxes imposed on these feminine hygiene products? Can you buy feminine hygiene products with food stamps, for example, with SNAP benefits if you are of very low income? What are some of the things that are particular to the United States that you think people may not know?

WEISS-WOLF: So you asked about sales taxes. And that's been a pretty live campaign here in the United States for many years, where, right now, there are - 30 of the 50 states actually don't exempt menstrual products from sales tax. Twenty of them do, and 10 of those the result of a very coordinated campaign going back about five years now to demand that legislatures do better and exempt menstrual products from sales tax.

You asked about SNAP and WIC. Neither of those programs include menstrual products as part of their - you know, the things that you're able to purchase with those benefits. So there are many, many ways that these products prove unaffordable and inaccessible for many people but that we could use and leverage public policy to change that. Again, fighting for the tampon tax, as it's publicly called, is one of those ways. But there have been other legislative advances, too, that quite frankly mirror what happened in Scotland this past week, where six states have mandated provision of menstrual products in their schools, and 13 states have mandated provision of menstrual products for people who are incarcerated.

MARTIN: OK. But before we let you go, we will soon have a new administration. What are two suggestions for what you think this incoming administration could do to make people's lives easier, who, as I said - you know? Half the population at some point in their lives needs these products.

WEISS-WOLF: OK. So some of the specifics, actually, that they can do are included in this live legislation called the Menstrual Equity For All Act. So among those provisions, there could be an earned income tax credit for low-income people who need to purchase menstrual products. There is a provision that would require states that accept federal funding for their criminal justice systems to provide menstrual products in

state prisons in order to receive those federal funds. Those are some examples of how federal levers can be pulled to ensure that states and citizens on the ground have access to more affordable menstrual products.

MARTIN: But what about people who aren't in prison? I mean, what about people who work these long hours, don't necessarily have breaks or maybe they have the same break that a man would have but they don't need to do the same thing on their break that a man would - you know? - that what women need to do to take care of themselves is different on a break. Is there something that the government could do to make that less challenging?

WEISS-WOLF: I think that just government and the federal government, in particular, talking about, embracing, acknowledging menstruation in and of itself will spur states and other jurisdictions to take action. I mean, and that's kind of how this has worked here in the United States. It's been a bit of a two-way street. There are some things that are better dealt with at the local and state level. There are some things that - there are federal levers that can be pulled that will nudge us towards change but actually really aren't the cure-all because that's, again, not necessarily how our systems work.

But there's an echo chamber that we can call to ensure that everybody - and especially our lawmakers - are speaking about menstruation and the economics of menstruation and the health of menstruation and the idea that people who exist in the workplace, in schools, in our economy are people who menstruate and that we can't be silent about it because we're all - we all need to be called upon to be part of sort of the creative thought process about how to make the changes that will improve people's lives, especially when it comes to menstruation.

MARTIN: That was Jennifer Weiss-Wolf. She's co-founder of the group Period Equity, and she's author of "Periods Gone Public: Taking A Stand For Menstrual Equity." Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, thank you so much for joining us today.

WEISS-WOLF: Thank you so much for having me.

Document WATC000020201129egbs00007

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THE CAP TIMES
WEISS-WOLF TAKES PERIODS PUBLIC IN MENSTRUAL EQUITY FIGHT

Jessie Opoien
984 words
8 November 2017
The Capital Times & Wisconsin State Journal
XWST
15
ISSN:07494068
English
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PEOPLE

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf can talk about periods for hours. And she does.

Weiss-Wolf, an attorney and vice president for development at New York University's Brennan Center for Justice, is at the forefront of a national movement to increase access to menstrual products - a movement that has made its way to Wisconsin, with the introduction of legislation by Rep. Melissa Sargent, D-Madison.

She spoke with the Cap Times on a recent stop in Madison to promote her new book, "Periods Gone Public: Taking a Stand for Menstrual Equity."

"Menstrual equity" is a phrase that didn't really exist until you started using it.

Until somebody made it up.

The idea of menstrual access and menstruation, the ability to manage menstruation as a policy matter, this is happening throughout the world, but it's very much looked at through a public health frame or a human rights frame. An equity frame is very different, and it actually speaks to participation, engagement. It's not just a matter of free tampons, it's about the ability to contribute fully to society, which is something we all benefit from.

How does this look as a policy discussion?

A couple years ago menstruation just wasn't on the table as a matter of discourse. In fact the only time menstruation had ever really had a political agenda was back in the early '90s around product safety, after the spate of toxic shock syndrome deaths in the '80s.

The outcome is embarrassing for all of us because basically nothing has happened. Legislation was put forward by U.S. Rep. Carolyn Maloney of New York in 1997 to require more transparency in our products.

That legislation has gone nowhere. It's been reintroduced 10 times since 1997.

This whole new attention to the issue of menstruation, particularly around the issue of access and affordability, is new for the United States. Wisconsin's been a leader, both Rep. Sargent and local legislators have been leaders in this national movement. Other states have managed to get certain things done more quickly.

What do you hope this national discussion will accomplish?

It's not just about what people need, although that's part of it, but it's about the values we express through our laws and about the norms we create through our laws. I don't think any of us would ever refer to the government funded toilet paper they use. They would go into a restroom with the expectation of what would be in there for their comfort and use. It's not because anyone had their interests at heart, it's public hygiene. We treat that as normal. Imagine once we have passage of these laws continuing to proliferate across the country - there will be a generation that will just deem this to be normal.

We agree that access to menstrual products, there's an immediate need for that. And then there's sort of the forward looking visionary piece of it about normalizing menstruation more broadly so another generation will grow up talking about it differently in ways that are more open, more healthy, more productive. But there's even another layer, which is I think something we're seeing in our culture and discourse writ large right now, with sexual assault and the #metoo hashtag, people feeling like there's more of a space right now for women to demand that their perspective and their stories and their narrative be heard. There's a huge parallel to

menstruation, which is the idea that our bodies and our experiences are just treated as "the other," even in the most benign administrations and times let alone these very extreme circumstances under which we're all existing right now.

Where does it go from here?

I would love to come to a point in time where we could look at all the laws under which we live through the lens of - if we considered menstruation or the fact that the bodies of the people who live by these laws go through this process, maybe we would consider those laws differently.

Maybe we could do better.

For example, the way the federal tax code classifies menstrual products - the outcome of that technical term is that menstrual products aren't eligible for flexible spending account purchases the way other items are. So if you changed the coding of them, you could make them eligible.

How comfortable were you talking about this, when you started? And what's made it easier to discuss periods publicly?

Well, once you start, you discover it's like you cross over to the other side. I can't imagine a time where I didn't do this anymore. I'm aware of the fact that I catch people off guard often, who aren't expecting it or aren't as comfortable or versed in doing it. I try to be empathetic, I don't want to be mean to people. But I use those moments where they're getting their bearings to further empower myself. I have the upper hand because I am not uncomfortable and they are.

I just let them take their space and I claim it as best I can.

They sort of have no choice but to continue the conversation on my terms, so I've found it to be actually empowering.

I remember when the issue first came to me and the idea of this activism and advocacy began to emerge and I wrote my first essay about it, I would prepare people around me: "I wrote this thing and it's about periods." I did tiptoe a little at first. But I don't even remember what it was like to be that person. It's a whole new frontier.

Credit: By Jessie Opoien

Document XWST000020171109edb800021

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The New York Times

Express; SECT

It's Not Just the Tampon Tax: Why Periods Are Political

By KAREN ZRAICK
1,320 words
23 July 2018
The New York Times
NYTF
The New York Times on the Web
English
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The average woman has her period for 2,535 days of her life. That's nearly seven years' time of making sure you have a pad or tampon, finding a makeshift solution if you don't, and managing pain and discomfort.

And lately, women -- and transgender and nonbinary people who menstruate -- are talking about it in public more than ever before. There are new products and services on the market, from menstrual cups to period underwear to medicinal cannabis and "period coaches." Globally, advocates are pushing for recognition of a woman's right to manage her period with dignity. And in the United States, activists are bringing the concept of "menstrual equity" into the public debate.

Let's unpack that.

"Menstrual equity" refers to equal access to hygiene products, but also to education about reproductive health. And it's the focus of a variety of new laws and policies to provide menstrual products in prisons, shelters, schools and even on Capitol Hill.

Advocates are also urging states to exempt menstrual hygiene products from sales tax, arguing that they're a necessity.

A frequent refrain: Why are tampons taxed when Viagra is not?

Increased media coverage and some high-profile episodes -- like Kiran Gandhi bleeding freely as she ran the London Marathon in 2015 and a backlash over Instagram deleting a photo of a period stain -- have accelerated the shift.

Last month, a member of Britain's Parliament announced in the House of Commons that she was menstruating, to make a point about "period poverty."

A New York congressman recently got into a spat with House administrators over whether he could expense $37.16 worth of tampons for his staff and visitors.

And India said on Saturday that it would eliminate a controversial 12 percent tax on sanitary pads after a campaign by advocacy groups and celebrities. Canada also abolished a sales tax on such products in 2015, and an Australian push to do the same made progress this year.

Here's an overview of the issues that women's health advocates are talking about.

The fight for equal access to menstrual products

Laws in several states now mandate access to menstrual products in correctional facilities, shelters and schools. Two prison reform bills in the Senate -- including the First Step Act, which is backed by the White House -- include provisions on access to menstrual hygiene products, after complaints that the facilities were not providing an adequate supply. And the Justice Department directed federal prisons to provide inmates with free menstrual products last year.

In the House, Representative Grace Meng, Democrat of New York, has introduced two related bills. One aims to make periods more affordable, in part by allowing employees to use flexible spending accounts to buy pads and tampons, and requiring companies with more than 100 employees to provide them. The other would require manufacturers to disclose ingredients in such products.

"Interest in this issue grows every single day," Ms. Meng said. "It's really about accessibility and equity."

That's the same argument that Representative Sean Patrick Maloney, Democrat of New York, made after he was ordered to reimburse the Committee on House Administration for menstrual products.

The committee rebutted Mr. Maloney's account. But that didn't stop him and Ms. Meng from writing a letter to House Speaker Paul Ryan about the matter.

"We applaud you for making toilet paper available," they wrote. "We implore you, however, to go one step further and make feminine hygiene products available to those who need them."

Pressing to end 'the tampon tax'

In the last two years, New York, Illinois, Florida and Connecticut have abolished sales tax on menstrual products. That brings the number of states that tax such products to 36 -- and lawmakers in two dozen of those states have introduced bills to nix the tax.

"That menstrual equity and health would be such a prominent, bipartisan and very public matter is, in my mind, not just really heartening but enormously telling," said Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, author of the 2017 book "Periods Gone Public."

There are similar efforts underway around the world, including in Britain, where the campaign to "ax the tax" got caught up in the Brexit debate. Laura Coryton, a young British activist, started a petition called "Stop Taxing Periods" in 2014 that amassed over 300,000 signatures.

But lawmakers were unable to repeal the tax because of European Union rules, and it became a rallying point for the pro-Brexit camp. Lawmakers have pledged to abolish the tax once Brexit is complete. Until then, taxes from menstrual products are being put into a special fund for women's health.

Canada also abolished sales tax on menstrual products in 2015, and an Australian push to do the same made progress this year.

Bold moves around the world

Dr. Julitta Onabanjo, the regional director for the United Nations Population Fund in East and Southern Africa, said there has been a groundswell of advocacy around menstrual health management.

In May, the organization hosted the first regional symposium on the issue, with leaders from local governments and the nonprofit sector.

Some countries in the region have made bold moves: Kenya and Uganda abolished sales tax on menstrual hygiene products, while Zimbabwe subsidizes local manufacturers. The Kenyan government also provides funding for pads in schools.

But Dr. Onabanjo cautioned that access to products is only one factor. Clean water and sanitation facilities, information and medical treatment are all important. Poverty, of course, greatly complicates the effort to manage periods with discretion and dignity. And some symptoms, like heavy bleeding or debilitating pain during menstruation, can indicate a more serious condition requiring medical attention.

Girls and women around the world must also contend with cultural stigma, shame and social isolation. A recent report published by Dr. Onabanjo's agency noted that there is powerful evidence that girls are more likely to miss school or even drop out if they're unable to manage their cycle, sometimes because of teasing over their periods.

Even more troubling, studies in Kenya have found that poorer girls may trade sex to afford pads, making them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases.

"We really want to ensure that going forward, this is seen as a sexual and reproductive health and rights issue," Dr. Onabanjo said.

Can technical innovation 'solve' the problem of periods?

New products and services are promising to make periods less burdensome, from period-tracking apps and coaching on nutrition and self-care, to items like environmentally friendly reusable pads, absorbent underwear and cups.

The creators of the popular app Clue say they have 2.5 million users in 180 countries, and share anonymized data with women's health researchers from top universities.

Product developers are working on the next generation of devices. The creators of Livia, an electrical stimulation device touted as "the off switch for menstrual pain" collected $1.7 million in orders on the

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crowdfunding site Indiegogo. While some online reviewers found it helpful, many of the comments on Indiegogo focus on shipping delays, device malfunctions and customer service complaints.

In the coaching realm, there's been greater attention to the role that diet and exercise can play in one's period. Many coaches also suggest acupuncture, herbal remedies, meditation and massage.

"What I do is help women become more informed about how their bodies work," said Erica Chidi Cohen, co-founder and chief executive of LOOM, a reproductive health center in Los Angeles that recently introduced a period coaching program.

That includes being aware of hormonal changes throughout the month, and how one's energy might ebb and flow at different points. Some of her clients plan big events, like business trips, based on their cycle.

"It can actually be a very positive thing if we learn what's happening and lean into it," she said.

Document NYTF000020180723ee7n0005g

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News

GENDER EQUITY | Women's periods are having a moment; Nation's first Period Day pushes for menstrual equity and tackles the stigma of talking about it.

By Anna Orso, STAFF WRITER
934 words
6 October 2019
The Philadelphia Inquirer
PHLI
A3
English
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After President Donald Trump was elected in 2016, Jennifer Weiss-Wolf was working on a book about periods and constantly worrying that her exploration of menstruation would flop in the face of everything else happening politically.

Then, the #MeToo movement broke open in 2017, a week after her book's release, and the fear of irrelevance came flooding back.

"But I took a total about-face," she said, "and I thought, 'Actually, this is the exact same thing.' "

Weiss-Wolf, the vice president of development at the Brennan Center for Justice, is one of the pioneers of the movement to achieve menstrual equity — the idea that too few policies, from taxes to public benefits to labor law, account for the half of the population that menstruates each month. The efforts have led dozens of states to consider measures eliminating taxes on menstrual products and improving access to such products in public facilities.

Now comes the nation's first Period Day, a collection of rallies Oct. 19 aimed to bring awareness to periods as the movement aligns itself with both #MeToo and the broader, largely youthdriven, post-Trump activism energy and push to equate menstrual equity with gender equity.

Eliminating the sales tax on period products, including pads and cups, a levy that exists in 35 states, has been the signature push for the movement. So far, though, while legislators in 22 states introduced bills to ditch the tampon tax since summer 2018, none adopted such legislation (though two, California and Rhode Island, got rid of the tax by stripping it from the state budget).

In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, menstrual products haven't been taxed for years, so the focus is now to think beyond the "tampon tax."

Among the biggest goals for young activists: how to get people to talk about periods the way they would, say, the common cold.

The National Period Day planned here for LOVE Park was put together by the Abington Heights High School branch of Period., a national organization founded in 2014 that has hundreds of chapters. The Lackawanna County students said they expect a couple of hundred attendees.

"This is something 50 percent of the population experiences every month, and no one talks about it," said Clare Della Valle, 18, about why she founded the Abington Heights chapter. "I thought that was completely unacceptable."

In tackling that stigma, it helps that periods have become a part of the zeitgeist, maybe even more so than when then-candidate Trump said in 2015 that a debate moderator might have had "blood coming out of her wherever," causing #PeriodsAreNotAnInsult to trend on Twitter.

These days, parents are increasingly throwing their daughters "menstruation celebrations," and Apple announced this year that its new Apple Watch will have a built-in menstrual cycle tracker. Meanwhile, a documentary about menstruation stigma in rural India titled Period. End of Sentence. — that was produced by a University of Pennsylvania student — won an Oscar and drives have popped up across the city to support volunteers who provide menstrual products to those in need.

It’s a cause progressives can get behind in this fraught political landscape. Providing tampons to neighbors or asking a local library chapter to stock pads in the bathroom feels, to some, like a way to easily solve an issue of access.

Lynette Medley said years ago when she started delivering donated menstrual products to people in her Northwest Philadelphia community, it was so hushhush that she felt like “a drug dealer in the middle of the night.” But she said the #MeToo movement changed how women felt talking about their bodies.

“Their eagerness to talk about it enabled me to be more comfortable putting it out there,” said Medley, CEO of No More Secrets in Mount Airy.

Addressing stigma leads to a bit of a chicken-and-egg question for the movement: Do you work to end the taboo to influence public policy? Or do you fight for new policies to eventually change perception, à la seat belts and cigarettes?

Nadya Okamoto, the 21-yearold from Oregon who founded Period. when she was 16, said, “Literally the stigma is standing in the way.” She says she’s met legislators who back the organization privately but don’t want to stand at a podium and voice their support publicly for fear of turning off voters.

State Sen. Maria Collett (D., Montgomery) has a message for her colleagues in Harrisburg who may feel similarly: “Then let me do it.”

Collett said she plans to introduce a bill within the next week that’s modeled off of federal legislation that requires free menstrual products in schools, prisons, and shelters. The federal bill also allows the products to qualify under Medicaid coverage and as a medical expense eligible for reimbursement under a flexible spending arrangement.

But Weiss-Wolf said the problem isn’t getting someone to introduce a bill — it’s getting it across the finish line without being killed or watered down.

It’s why she’s working with groups of attorneys through a recently launched campaign — Tax Free. Period. — to develop a strategy to take the issue to the judicial branch and argue that menstruation should be considered in all the ways the courts look at due process and equal protection.

“I don’t want to be protesting year after year,” she said. “I want this done.” aorso@inquirer.com anna_orso

Document PHLI000020191006efa60001q

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The Washington Post

BookWorld
Fighting for menstrual equity

By Karen Houppert
933 words
20 October 2017
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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Periods are interesting to me.

For 22 years, I've been thinking about them, reading about them, collecting trivia about them, boring folks at dinner parties about them and writing articles about them — beginning with a 1995 cover story in the Village Voice about the menstrual-products industry. The alternative newspaper scandalized sophisticated New Yorkers by putting on its cover an image of a tampon string peeking from between a woman's thighs.

After two decades, I remain obsessed with menstruation as a window on our culture's lack of respect for women's bodies and reproductive rights, and its misunderstanding of consumerism and advertising.

So it was with tremendous pleasure that I heard of Jennifer Weiss-Wolf's new book, "Periods Gone Public: Taking a Stand for Menstrual Equity." Weiss-Wolf argues that menstrual equity is a gateway issue for feminists. "In order to have a fully equitable and participatory society," she writes, "we must have laws and policies that ensure menstrual products are safe and affordable and available for those who need them."

Weiss-Wolf, a lawyer who works at the Brennan Center for Justice, is the force behind the fight to eliminate a sales tax on tampons. She has also drawn attention to the plight of homeless women, girls in developing countries and female inmates, all of whom have difficulty getting the menstrual products they need.

Weiss-Wolf contends that the tampon tax amounts to a "pink tax" on women. Some states that charge sales tax exclude necessities such as food and medicine. Tampons and pads, by comparsion, are taxed 4 to 10 percent. Thanks in part to Weiss-Wolf's efforts, 13 states have scrapped the sales tax on tampons, and legislatures in many other states are weighing similar action.

Weiss-Wolf has joined with other activists in advocating for better Food and Drug Administration oversight of menstrual products. For instance, manufacturers are not required to list components on packages. While they must record "adverse events" related to product use, Weiss-Wolf points out that since "they don't have to share internal studies or research with anyone outside the FDA, we've got no recourse for getting a second opinion."

"Periods Gone Public" catalogues almost everything on the menstrual landscape, making the book an invaluable resource, if not a riveting read. However, Weiss-Wolf stumbles in places. Her discussion of efforts to provide disposable products to women in developing countries overlooks some environmental concerns and the blatant market-driven motivations behind some social entrepreneurs. And her embrace of a movement that she believes will improve the workplace ignores some scary implications. The Red School movement offers what it thinks is a visionary approach to menstruation. In this brave new work world, Weiss-Wolf writes that employees would be "offered an opportunity to chart their cycles" and "assess its impact on work habits and best practices." She suggests that this knowledge, including insights like "I am lethargic and irritable for two days before my period," could "provide guidance for customizing scheduling and assignments."

In July 2016, Fast Company wrote about one office that is already doing that. Thinx, the maker of "period panties for modern women," posts menstrual charts indicating where each employee is in her cycle. "Coworkers are aware when a team member is experiencing premenstrual tension or is likely to have cramps," reporter Elizabeth Segran wrote. "In an ideal situation, they can be more sympathetic to one another. They believe that this approach actually makes everyone more productive."

Weiss-Wolf describes this as "menstrutopia." I see it rather as a menstrual dystopia of "Handmaid's Tale" proportions, where women are reduced to the sum of their publicly chronicled cycles, hemmed in by predictive notions about their efficacy in the workplace at any given time, their emotional fortitude and their fluctuating value in the marketplace based on the state of their hormones.

Dicey science has long been used to evaluate women's abilities in the workplace. During World War II, the government created instructional films for members of the Women's Army Corps and female workers that cited scientific evidence that periods are "no excuse for absenteeism and self-coddling." Postwar studies purported to show a woman's infectiveness during her menstrual cycles. As recently as 1995, when the nation debated women in combat, then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich alluded to the dangers of menstruation and warned about a female soldier's life in a combat ditch, saying that "females have biological problems staying in a ditch for thirty days because they get infections and they don't have upper body strength."

Many programs to foster menstrual awareness in the workplace and elsewhere are driven by the corporate world. Weiss-Wolf casts many small, innovative start-ups in the developing and developed world as allies in the battle to eliminate the stigma and shame associated with monthly bleeding. And large companies such as Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson are seeking major inroads in the developing world. I have little faith in hitching the menstrual wagon to corporate stars in hopes that they will drive an enlightened movement.

"As long as you're promoting products, you're not addressing the stigma of menstruation — you're helping menstruators hide their menstruation more efficiently," says Christina Bobel, an associate professor of women's and gender studies at the University of Massachusetts and president of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research.

Fortunately, despite its flaws, "Periods Gone Public" is a rich picture of the current menstrual landscape — and a promising call to smart activism.

Document WPCOM00020171020edak0066d

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The Washington Post

Local-Politics
The 'tampon tax' fight has reached D.C.

By Aaron C. Davis
415 words
4 April 2016
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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Four D.C. lawmakers say they will introduce a bill to exempt feminine hygiene products and diapers from the District's sales tax, joining activists in liberal states from New York to California in pushing for a remedy to what they see as an unfair tax on women.

Most states have for decades taxed tampons and related products at the same rate as other household goods, but that is changing.

Five states have eliminated taxes for feminine hygiene products while seven have suspended taxes on diapers.

Council member Anita Bonds (D-At Large), the lead author of the bill in D.C., said in a statement that "women should not be taxed because they are women, nor should babies be taxed for being babies."

Bonds has for the last year and a half been the chairman of the council committee studying affordable housing and other problems for low-income families. She said she had reached the conclusion that eliminating a "tampon tax" would help the city's most vulnerable.

She also said it seemed unfair that the District taxes tampons while classifying other items including Viagra as essential and therefore exempt.

"This legislation will especially help low to moderate income mothers manage these costly expenses," she said.

Council members Yvette Alexander (D-Ward 7), Mary M. Cheh (D-Ward 3) and Vincent C. Orange (D-At Large) are co-introducers of the legislation.

The statement from Bonds noted that the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy recently found that the poorest families pay state and local taxes at twice the effective rate of the richest families.

It's time to "stop taxing your period," she said.

The recent push to end the "tampon tax" began in January, when a pair of female legislators, one Democratic and one Republican, co-introduced a measure in the California Assembly to end the tax.

Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia, the Democrat, ventured that women in California pay about $7 per month for 40 years of tampons and sanitary napkins. Statewide, it adds up to "over $20 million annually in taxes," she said.

"Women have no choice but to buy these products, so the economic effect is only felt by woman [sic] and women of color are particularly hard hit by this tax," Garcia said. "You can't just ignore your period. It's not like you can just ignore the constant flow."

aaron.davis@washpost.com

Document WPCOM00020160404ec44003mn

Commentary: Tampon tax ends in Utah. Other states should follow suit.

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf; Emily Bell McCormick
607 words
13 December 2019
The Salt Lake Tribune
SLTR
n/a
ISSN:07463502
English
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It happened. There were doubts. There were moments of elation and moments of frustration. But it happened.

Pending the governor's signature before the end of the year, Utah will become the next state to eliminate the so-called "tampon tax." Introduced for the past four legislative sessions as a stand alone bill, it was killed every time, before reaching the floor for a full vote. Now the exemption of menstrual products from sales tax is about to become law, occupying a line item in Utah's massive tax overhaul.

The bill itself has elicited a mix of criticism and praise. Criticism for its regressive components — like reimplementing sales tax on food, offset for people who are low-income by a food credit. Praise for creating Utah's first ever earned income tax credit.

It is a bittersweet victory. Utah can be the worst. Literally. One 2019 study ranked Utah 50 out of 50 for women's equality — based on workplace environment, education, health, and political empowerment. Utah has the largest salary gap — women earning 70 cents on the dollar earned by male counterparts — 10 cents lower than the national average of 80 cents on the dollar. And the state is among those with the fewest women in politics. These statistics add up to a drastic lack of female economic and political power, making it difficult for women's issues to get air time at all—let alone appear in a major tax reform bill. But timing is critical. Utah legislators may recognize the power of a growing bipartisan demand for menstrual equity.

Efforts to scrap the tax have gained traction worldwide, including in Germany, which lowered it last month, and in Rwanda, where it was eliminated altogether earlier this week. The United States is pushing forward as well. Thirty-two states have taken up the issue over the past four years, and seven succeeded in permanently eliminating the tampon tax: Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New York, Ohio, Nevada and Rhode Island. (California will start exempting menstrual products, too — but only temporarily, for the duration of the state's upcoming two-year budget.)

The Utah Legislature's decision to finally tackle the the tax acknowledges another critical point: Neither Utah, nor any other state, wants to bear the expense of defending what amounts to state-sanctioned discrimination. A sales tax on menstrual products is not just inequitable; it is unconstitutional and illegal. A national coalition called Tax Free. Period. has put states on notice: Be prepared to defend in court laws and regulations that impose a discriminatory tax, or proactively change these laws.

Even in a state that ranks as poorly as Utah does for women, leaders have taken action. So thank you — to the lawmakers who first introduced these bills years ago, as well as to those who cast aside politics to finally get it across the finish line.

And to the remaining states that still tax our tampons? Utah has shown the nation that it can be done. It's time to follow our lead.

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf is cofounder of Period Equity and author of "Periods Gone Public: Taking a Stand for Menstrual Equity." She is an attorney and vice president of the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law.

Emily Bell McCormick is the owner of a boutique communication and advocacy consulting firm and founder of The Policy Project, a group working to implement healthy policy in Utah and the U.S.

Crédito: By Jennifer Weiss-Wolf and Emily Bell McCormick | Special to The Tribune

Document SLTR000020191214efcd0000k

The Washington Post

post-nation

'There's no happy hour for menstruation': Tax liquor instead of tampons, lawmakers say ; State lawmakers in California want to increase excise taxes on liquor to offset removing sales taxes on tampons and feminine hygiene products.

By Kristine Phillips
1,101 words
14 March 2017
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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In September, California Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed legislation that would have eliminated sales tax on feminine hygiene products.

Brown rejected the bill despite bipartisan support. In a blanket veto message on several measures that would have reduced revenue by a total of $300 million, the Democratic governor said the state's "precariously balanced" budget couldn't withstand such a loss.

So one of the sponsors of ill-fated Assembly Bill 1561 came up with what she thinks is a viable alternative: End the "tampon tax" — while raising taxes on liquor to make up for the revenue loss.

"Common sense is that liquor is a choice and a luxury and human biology is not," state Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia (D-Bell Gardens) said in a statement Thursday. "There is no happy hour for menstruation. Our tax code needs to reflect the fact that it's not okay to tax women for being born women. No one can claim liquor is a basic necessity of life. It's basics before booze and ladies over liquor."

Garcia introduced AB 1561 last year. Lawmakers say it would have saved California women about $20 million a year in taxes.

The new Assembly Bill 479, dubbed the Common Cents Tax Reform Act, would exempt tampons, pads and other feminine hygiene products from taxation. To offset the loss of revenue, the bill would impose a $1.20 increase in excise tax per gallon on hard liquor. That would increase the liquor tax from $3.30 per gallon to $4.50.

The increase would affect liquors that are less than 100 proof or are less than 50 percent alcohol. Lawmakers estimate it would be equivalent to an additional 1.5 cents per serving.

"I challenge anyone, Democrat or Republican, who wants to say it's not worth 2 cents per hard alcoholic drink to pay for these very basic necessities," Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher (D-San Diego), the bill's co-sponsor, said Wednesday at a news conference, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Garcia's first attempt to nix sales tax on feminine hygiene products sailed through the Assembly and the Senate last year, but Brown vetoed the bill, along with several others that called for tax breaks.

"As I said last year, tax breaks are the same as new spending — they both cost the General Fund money," Brown wrote in a veto message in September. "As such, they must be considered during budget deliberations so that all spending proposals are weighed against each other at the same time. This is even more important when the state's budget remains precariously balanced."

California's sales tax rate is 6 percent.

Garcia has long been a vocal opponent of the tampon tax. She argues that feminine hygiene products should not be taxed, just as food and prescription medications aren't.

"I just want people to realize this is not insignificant — especially if you're on a tight budget," Garcia told The Washington Post last year.

Garcia said she had been thinking about the "gender injustice" for a while.

"I think a lot of women have at some point thought about it, you know?" she said.

Garcia's bill also would exempt diapers. According to her office, diapers cost at least $80 per child per month, and the Common Cents Tax Reform Act would save each family about $100 every year.

The governor's office has not made any public statements about the bill.

Although sales taxes don't specifically target feminine hygiene products, only a handful of states, including Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, give an exemption. Alaska, Delaware, New Hampshire and Oregon don't have any sales tax.

Last year, New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo (D) signed a bill that eliminated sales tax on feminine hygiene products. The savings for women is expected to be about $10 million a year.

"This is a regressive tax on essential products that women have had to pay for far too long and lifting it is a matter of social and economic justice," Cuomo said in a statement.

Washington, D.C., did the same in November. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) signed legislation that supporters say ended a 5.75 percent tax on diapers and feminine hygiene products, The Post reported.

In Florida, a Tampa woman filed a lawsuit to repeal the state's sales tax on tampons. Carlee Wendell, who sued the Department of Revenue and several retailers, including CVS, Target and Walgreens, argued that taxing feminine hygiene products is "irrational and discriminatory," the Tallahassee Democrat reported. She also pointed to an alleged double standard: Rogaine, which treats baldness for men, is exempt from sales tax, while tampons aren't.

"The 'tampon tax' is patently discriminatory against women and it's wrong," Wendell said, according to the Tallahassee newspaper. "Women should not be forced to pay sales tax on a product that is necessary not only for their health but for public health and safety as well."

President Barack Obama also weighed in on the debate last year.

"I have no idea why states would tax these as luxury items," he told lifestyle blogger Ingrid Nilsen in a YouTube interview. "I suspect it's because men were making laws when those taxes were passed."

"I don't know anyone who has a period who thinks it's a luxury," Nilsen replied.

"Michelle would agree with you on that," Obama said.

State tax codes don't single out tampons as "luxury items," but they're often taxed as nonnecessities, The Post reported.

Garcia and Fletcher aren't the only female lawmakers who've introduced bills this year to try to drive conversations about women's issues.

In Texas, state Rep. Jessica Farrar (D-Houston) recently introduced a satirical bill that would penalize men for "unregulated masturbatory emissions" and would require men to wait 24 hours after an "initial health care consultation" to receive an elective vasectomy, colonoscopy or Viagra prescription, The Post reported.

Farrar knows that the bill, called "Man's Right to Know Act," will never be enacted; but she said she hopes it would start a conversation about "unnecessary" and "invasive" antiabortion legislation, the Texas Tribune reported.

READ MORE:

D.C. to lift sales tax on diapers, tampons

Diapers, tampons and pads closer to becoming tax-free in the District

The sudden controversy around the cost of tampons

Document WPCOM00020170313ed3d004mr

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California governor vetoes bill to repeal tampon tax

389 words
14 September 2016
00:21
Reuters News
LBA
English
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SACRAMENTO, Calif. (Reuters) - California Governor Jerry Brown on Tuesday vetoed a bill to end state sales taxes on feminine hygiene products, angering women and advocates who call the taxes unjust.

Brown, a Democrat, cited imperatives of fiscal restraint and viable revenue streams in blocking the bipartisan bill, which would have added tampons, sanitary napkins and other menstrual products to a list of necessities such as food and prescription medicines that are exempt from sales tax.

Brown also vetoed several similar bills that would have ended certain state taxes for diapers and other items. He said those measures, together with repeal of the tax on feminine hygiene products, would collectively reduce state revenue by $300 million through the coming year.

"Each of these bills creates a new tax break or expands an existing tax break," Brown said in a statement. "As I said last year, tax breaks are the same as new spending – they both cost the general fund money."

State Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia, chief sponsor of the tampon tax relief bill that passed both houses of the state legislature with unanimous support, railed against the veto in a posting on Facebook.

"Jerry Brown please #mansplain why it's OK to balance the budget on women's backs?" she wrote, including a slang portmanteau of "man" and "explain" that is used to disparage men who talk to women in a manner regarded as condescending or patronizing.

Lawmakers in at least 15 states have introduced measures to abolish their sales taxes on menstrual products. New York repealed its tampon tax in June, joining Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and New Jersey.

The movement appeals to Republicans because it would repeal a tax and is favored by Democrats, who say it eliminates an unfair burden on women, especially those living in poverty.

Garcia, the California assemblywoman, said she would press on in seeking repeal, vowing to "keep pushing until we get it done." But it was not immediately clear whether a veto override bid was an option.

Overriding a veto in California requires a two-thirds vote in both the state Senate and Assembly, and the legislative session ended Aug. 31.

(Writing and additional reporting by Curtis Skinner in San Francisco; Editing by Steve Gorman and Matthew Lewis)

Released: 2016-9-13T22:21:37.000Z

Document LBA0000020160913ec9d017ad

The Washington Post

morning-mix

Free tampons for all at Brown University this school year — even in the men's room ; The initiative aims to be transgender-inclusive by stocking all nonresidential men's, women's and gender-neutral bathrooms on campus with free tampons and pads.

By Katie Mettler
1,065 words
9 September 2016
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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At midnight the day before fall classes began at Brown University, Viet Nguyen and six other student government representatives crept through campus, looking for bathrooms.

In their hands they held small baskets of feminine hygiene products to stash inside, name-brand tampons and sanitary pads that the next day students would be encouraged to take and use, all free.

They hit 30 buildings and an estimated 70 bathrooms — men's, women's and gender-neutral — in two hours.

"We were really efficient," Nguyen told The Washington Post early Friday. "It was kind of fun."

Their late-night deliveries marked the launch of a campuswide initiative to promote tampons and pads as not a luxury item, but as much of a bathroom necessity as toilet paper or hand soap — the latest iteration of a national movement sparked earlier this year when debate over the "tampon tax" emerged.

Some states, including Rhode Island, home to Brown, introduced bills to repeal the tampon tax, which labeled feminine hygiene products as luxury goods or nonnecessities, and this summer, New York City officials announced plans to distribute tampons and pads free throughout public schools, homeless shelters and jails.

These efforts motivated Nguyen, student government president, and his executive board to make Brown one of the first — if not the first — higher education institution to follow suit.

"We thought we could be the tipping point," Nguyen said, "pushing conversation to action."

Beginning this week, the Undergraduate Council of Students at Brown will take responsibility for stocking all bathrooms in academic buildings across campus with the products. Once a week, student government representatives will return to replenish supplies.

They hope, eventually, the university will take on that responsibility.

The launch comes on the heels of a months-long effort, organized mostly online between UCS executive board members scattered across the country for the summer. They allocated funds in their budget, provided by the Undergraduate Finance Board, and talked logistics with university officials.

Tuesday, the day before classes resumed, Nguyen, a senior studying education policy, sent a letter to the student body, notifying them of the new program.

"We hope that this step, making Brown one of the first institutions in higher education to implement such a program at this scale, will motivate other universities and student governments to take similar actions to address this issue of equity," the letter read.

And after just two days, Nguyen said they have received a dozen enthusiastic calls and emails from other universities, coast to coast, seeking guidance on how to kick-start their own programs.

But along with the positive feedback, Nguyen said, there has been plenty of opposition.

Almost all of it has centered on one element of the program — the decision to stock the men's room, too.

"We anticipated it," Nguyen said of the backlash, "but it's a different thing to anticipate it and then get the hate mail coming in."

Several conservative news outlets led with that information, prompting reactions like this on social media:

"Only at a liberal cult university, would you find tampon dispensers in the men's room."

"Ivy crazy."

"INSANITY."

"STOP THE MADNESS!"

In its headline, Breitbart wrote "Brown University Providing Tampons in men's bathrooms because 'both sexes menstruate,' " though the quote was unattributed and did not appear in the text of the story. Mediaite, in a similar headline, wrote "Brown Univ. to Put Tampons in ALL Bathrooms: 'Not All People Who Menstruate Are Women,' " though, that quote was unattributed as well.

Nguyen, for his part, said the decision was not about redefining who does and doesn't biologically menstruate. The UCS simply wanted to promote an environment of transgender-inclusivity.

In the letter to the student body, Nguyen wrote that the executive board hopes "to set a more inclusive standard for this issue moving forward, both in terms of the language used and how future initiatives will be implemented, keeping in mind that menstruation is experienced by more than just those who identify as women and that not all people who identify as women menstruate."

Someone can identify as a transgender man and still biologically resemble a woman, so just providing tampons to those who use the women's restroom would not serve all students who require the products, Nguyen said.

It's unclear how much the new initiative will cost UCS, Nguyen said, and he declined to provide estimates. He did, however, say that the products were not generic, but name brand — and that they chose tampons with sleek plastic applicators.

The debate over the "tampon tax," and whether women should be penalized for products they cannot biologically help but need, has been raging for nearly a year. California was one of the first states where a bill was introduced to slash taxes from menstrual products, with State Assembly Member Cristina Garcia (D) leading the fight.

In a news release from January, Garcia wrote that women in California pay over $20 million annually in taxes on tampons and pads — an additional, unnecessary price on products that are already expensive, especially for poor women.

After the bill was introduced in California, similar bills in other states followed. Lawmakers passed them in Illinois, New York and Connecticut. In Rhode Island, where Brown University is located, state legislators introduced a bill but it stalled in committee, reported the Associated Press. State lawmakers vowed to revisit the issue in the upcoming legislative session.

In a statement to the AP about the Brown University initiative, National Organization for Women President Terry O'Neill praised the effort, echoing that tampons are as necessary as toilet paper.

"Students' participation in school should not be hindered by insufficient access to this basic necessity," O'Neill told the AP. "Universities around the country should follow suit."

Nguyen hopes that one day, the program will become "an institutional part of Brown."

More from Morning Mix:

Switch and chips: 20 percent of fish are purposely mislabeled, sometimes dangerously

No 'slave owners': San Francisco school board chief threatened after call to rename George Washington H.S.

Once dismissed as fake, Maya calendar is Americas' oldest manuscript say Brown University scientists

Document WPCOM00020160909ec99001rx

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New York joins global movement to scrap 'tampon tax'

249 words
25 May 2016
22:34
Agence France Presse
AFPR
English
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Women in New York will soon save cents when purchasing sanitary products, as the state joins the global movement denouncing the so-called tampon tax as sexist and unfair.

The state senate on Wednesday unanimously passed legislation to exempt tampons, sanitary napkins and panty liners from the state's four percent sales tax.

The bill will go to Governor Andrew Cuomo to be signed into law, following the states of Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania where similar legislation has already passed.

"Repealing this out-of-touch tax has been decades in the making," said New York state senator Susan Serino, who sponsored the bill. "It's a win for women who have largely shouldered the burden of the tax for generations."

Cuomo welcomed the senate's repeal of what he called a "regressive and unfair tax" on women and said he would sign the legislation.

As international outcry spreads about why sanitary products should be taxed, online petitions have collected hundreds of thousands of signatures in multiple countries. Canada and Ireland are among nations who have scrapped such a tax.

In Britain, the government was subjected to a furious backlash when it upheld a five percent tampon tax last year. It subsequently announced it would give millions of pounds raised from the levy to women's charities.

French lawmakers voted last December to reduce the tax rate on sanitary products from 20 percent to 5.5 percent.

jm/mdo/vlk

Document AFPR000020160525ec5p00ngh

The Washington Post

morning-mix

With governor's veto, California's 'tampon tax' will survive, for now ; The bill's co-author, Assembly member Cristina Garcia, criticized the move, saying Gov. Jerry Brown was "propping up the state budget on the backs of women."

By Derek Hawkins
664 words
15 September 2016
Washington Post.com
WPCOM
English
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A national movement is steadily gaining steam, and its backers have one simple demand: Stop taxing menstrual products.

Some states have heeded the call. In the past year, officials in New York, Illinois and Connecticut have passed measures to end increasingly unpopular sales taxes on tampons, pads, menstrual cups and other feminine-hygiene items.

Five other states have also nixed the "tampon tax," which treats menstrual products as luxury goods rather than tax-free medical necessities.

But America's most populous state won't be joining the push.

On Tuesday, California Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed a bill that would have ended the state's tax on menstrual products. The measure was one of seven pieces of legislation Brown killed Tuesday, citing the state's budget woes.

"Tax breaks are the same thing as new spending," the governor said in a statement.

The veto is a rebuke of the state legislature, which unanimously approved the bill in August to much fanfare. Brown said that the state's finances were "precariously balanced" and that lawmakers should have brought the measure up during budget deliberations.

A Brown aide echoed the governor's remarks in a tweet later in the day.

2nd yr running @JerryBrownGov forced to veto tax break bills that should've been handled in budget #CAFiscalPrudence pic.twitter.com/TNfhzYcsYx

The bill's co-author, Assembly member Cristina Garcia, criticized the move, saying Brown was "propping up the state budget on the backs of women." "Men purchase Viagra and they don't get taxed," Garcia, a Democrat, told the Huffington Post. "There is no other such tax that's gender specific in the tax code. Women matter and we need to send that message to the Governor."

Today's lesson: my uterus should carry the burden of fiscal responsibility for the state. Thank goodness GovBrown is around to #mansplain it — Cristina Garcia (@AsmGarcia) September 14, 2016

More than three dozen states do not consider menstrual products and feminine hygiene items "necessities" — or non-luxury items — making them subject to state sales taxes. Generally speaking, groceries, medical supplies and some agricultural materials are considered necessities exempt from sales taxes.

Garcia's bill would have added menstrual products to a list of health-care goods that are already exempt from California's sales tax, including prescription medicine and walkers. According to her office, Californians have spent about $7 per month per woman over the course of four decades on tampons and sanitary napkins, adding up to $20 million annually in taxes.

She said the burden falls especially hard on poor women, "who struggle to pay for basic necessities like a box of tampons or pads every month for their adult life."

Being poor and having a period "means that once a month you have the added stress of finding a way to pay for these essentials," Garcia said in January when the bill was introduced.

What's particularly ironic about Brown's veto is that Garcia's bill inspired a string of anti-tampon-tax measures in states around the country, several of which have been approved. New York, Illinois and Connecticut all passed theirs in the months that followed, and the New York City Council approved a program to distribute free tampons in schools, prisons and homeless shelters. The District of Columbia is currently weighing whether to eliminate its own taxes on feminine hygiene products and diapers. Chicago was the first jurisdiction to drop a city tax.

And the fight isn't unique to the United States: Canada eliminated its tax on menstrual products over the summer.

Garcia said her fight to end California's tax will go on.

"I will keep pushing," she said, "until we get it done."

Document WPCOM00020160914ec9e00105

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BILLS TO ADDRESS WASHINGTON'S 'TAMPON TAX' DIDN'T GET HEARINGS

Jim Camden
Jim Camden jimc@spokesman.com, (509) 879-7461
616 words
16 March 2016
The Spokesman-Review
SPRV
IDAHO
A001
English
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OLYMPIA - Amid a national discussion on the fairness of taxing feminine hygiene products, two proposals to end that "tampon tax" in Washington didn't get a hearing this year.

Proposals to eliminate the state's sales tax on feminine hygiene products would have saved consumers $4.6 million next year, an official estimate says.

Both bills - one in the House and one in the Senate - were referred to committees that study tax and budget issues, but neither received a hearing.

Republican Sen. Joe Fain, of Auburn, proposed a sales tax exemption on feminine hygiene products that had bipartisan co- sponsors. While he disagrees with many complaints about Washington's sales tax as being regressive, in this case, he thinks it's true.

"I kept hearing about this as 'the luxury tax' on tampons," he said. "It's not a luxury tax, it's just a sales tax. It's not something people can choose to purchase, it's an absolute necessity that they purchase."

Rep. Lynda Wilson, R-Vancouver, said she was aware of the national movement to eliminate the tax, did some rough calculations and concluded the average woman pays about $350 in taxes for feminine hygiene products over her childbearing years. That amount seemed small enough for individual taxpayers that she tried redirecting the money rather than ending the tax. In January, she proposed using it on domestic violence programs, an issue that predominately affects women.

When that bill didn't get a hearing, she proposed another bill in mid-February to eliminate the sales tax on those products.

"I believed if I couldn't get bipartisan support for re- appropriating the taxes, then we should aim to eliminate them since these products are medically necessary for women," Wilson said in an email.

Although the bills didn't get hearings, the Department of Revenue estimated how much sales tax revenue comes into the state general fund from those products. It calculated about $4.6 million per year for the next three years, and $5.5 million a year after that.

With the Legislature in a special session trying to develop a balanced budget, the tax-exemption bills in the Senate are presumed dead. That's because the $4.6 million they would save consumers would be money the state's general fund didn't get, and could have to be replaced by other means.

Fain said the state should take a comprehensive look at the possibility of exempting these products and other necessities, such as diapers and children's school supplies, from the sales tax to help young families. But that's not usually a topic for a supplemental budget, he added.

"We need to to move from (the tampon tax) being a whimsical thing to a serious conversation about lessening the tax burden on necessary things," Fain said. "I'll introduce the bill again next session."

The national push to eliminate sales tax on feminine hygiene products has generated an online petition backed by Cosmopolitan magazine, led seven states to consider legislation and prompted a lawsuit in New York challenging that state's tax, the Associated Press reported recently. Five states do not tax those products.

The lawsuit in New York contends the tax on feminine hygiene products is unconstitutional when some other products used by both genders, such as lip balm, foot powder and dandruff shampoo, are not taxed.

In Washington, however, there is no difference in the tax rate between those items and feminine hygiene products. Consumers pay a sales tax on almost everything except food and prescription drugs.

Document SPRV000020160319ec3g0000y

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Student activists hold press conference to call for elimination of tampon tax; AP Planner; Future News Item; Ohio State University

128 words
25 January 2019
AP Planner
APPLAN
English
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Organisation: Ohio State University

Description: Student activists hold press conference in support of the HB-61 bill to eliminate tampon tax, and urge Ohio State University to implement a policy making free menstrual products available in every building on campus. Attendees include Ohio State Rep. Brigid Kelly, Columbus City Council Member Elizabeth Brown and PERIOD President Anusha Singh

Start Date: 2019-01-24

End Date: 2019-01-24

Web Site: www.osu.edu

Event Time: 02:30

Time Zone: EST

Summary: Student activists hold press conference to call for elimination of tampon tax

Event Type: In-State Interest Only

Venue: Curl Hall, 80 W Woodruff Ave, Columbus, OH

Country: United States

Document APPLAN0020190124ef1o0005l

House panel passes over 'tampon tax exemption' without an up or down vote

Lee Davidson
545 words
8 February 2017
The Salt Lake Tribune
SLTR
ISSN:07463502
English
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The House Revenue and Taxation Committee voted 10-2 to adjourn without a direct vote on HB71, which proposed to remove the sales tax on feminine hygiene products, disposable diapers for adults and children, and underwear and liners for incontinence.[...]Heather Williamson with Americans for Prosperity opposed the bill, preferring broader-based cuts in overall tax rates rather than singling out a few items for tax breaks and creating more new tax exemptions.

For the second year in a row, Utah lawmakers on Wednesday disposed of a proposed “tampon tax exemption.”

The House Revenue and Taxation Committee voted 10-2 to adjourn without a direct vote on HB71, which proposed to remove the sales tax on feminine hygiene products, disposable diapers for adults and children, and underwear and liners for incontinence.

“They don’t want to vote on this,” Rep. Susan Duckworth, D-Magna, the sponsor of the bill, said afterward. She said it is likely dead for the year. “But I’ll be back again next year” with the bill again ccc which was also killed last year.

While she noted her legislation is often called the tampon tax exemption bill, she said it could benefit both men and women, young and old.

She argued that personal hygiene items are not a luxury, and are expensive ccc as are the taxes on them. Duckworth said the state has used similar arguments to exempt prescription drugs from tax and to charge reduced tax on food.

A senior who uses incontinence items would save an estimated $82 a year in taxes, Duckworth said. Parents of babies in diapers would save about $50 a year. She said a woman who buys tampons could save about $17 a year.

Legislative analysts figured the bill could cost the state about $4 million next year in lost sales tax, and cost cities and counties another $1.8 million. Duckworth disputes that, arguing the money saved would be quickly spent on other needed items and generate more sales tax.

Leaders of the recent women’s march on the Capitol ccc which attracted thousands of women on the opening day of the Legislature to protest their treatment ccc testified for Duckworth’s bill.

Taxes on feminine hygiene products are “an additional hardship for a class of people who make less than men already,” said Leslie Durham with Utah Women Unite. “It’s not a luxury for us.”

Kathleen Miller with the group said statues such as New York and Connecticut offer a tax break on such products, “and they are still fiscally sound.”

But Heather Williamson with Americans for Prosperity opposed the bill, preferring broader-based cuts in overall tax rates rather than singling out a few items for tax breaks and creating more new tax exemptions.

Rep. Karianee Lisonbee, R-Clearfield, made the motion to adjourn without a direct vote on the bill, but made clear that she opposed it.

She said because it would give a tax break only to disposable items, it creates an incentive not to buy cloth diapers or other cloth hygiene products. She said that puts more pressure on landfills, so she opposed it.

By Lee Davidson The Salt Lake Tribune

Document SLTR000020170210ed280000b

News
'Tampon Tax' lawsuit against Michigan aims to end sales taxes on menstrual hygiene products

Chanel Stitt; Detroit Free Press
582 words
13 August 2020
USA Today Online
USATONL
English
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DETROIT — Paying taxes on menstrual hygiene products could possibly come to an end because an organization has sued Michigan over the additional costs.

Advocates and an organization called Period Equity assisted three Michigan women in filing a lawsuit against the state, alleging that charging taxes "on the purchase of menstrual products is sex-based discrimination."

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, co-founder of Period Equity, called the menstrual product taxes "unfair, inequitable and unconstitutional." Weiss-Wolf said that the pandemic has added strains to people in Michigan, and relieving menstrual product taxes could help.

"We've been working with economists in the state whose research shows that the economic environment and the circumstances of the pandemic have exacerbated the living the lives, financial status and strength of women disproportionately in the state," Weiss-Wolf said. "We think this is a reasonable and important form of tax relief that the state can offer."

In the lawsuit, the three women, Emily Beggs, Clare Pfeiffer and Wei Ho, allege that Michiganders are paying the 6% sales or use tax, which is adding up to almost $7 million a year. The plaintiffs are also asking that refunds get issued to those who paid menstrual product taxes over the last four years, which the lawsuit states adds up to over $25 million.

Pfeiffer, a volunteer for I Support the Girls — Detroit, says this is a need that should be addressed. She says that menstrual products should not be a luxury item, but she's heard too often that it is.

"We hear all the time about women having to choose whether or not to buy products, feed their families or pay their bills," said Pfeiffer. "To me, the tax on this product that only people who have periods use is unfair because it unfairly picks one sex over another to levy a tax."

Laura Strausfeld, co-founder of Period Equity, said that these taxes affect everyone, especially people who menstruate. She says that bills about the taxes have been introduced many times, but meetings end without it being address. Strausfeld said this is why they're suing.

"It just seems even worse than it use to be that Michigan is collecting tax on medical necessities used by half the population," Strausfeld said.

And Michigan isn't the only state that has been sued over the menstrual product taxes. New York and Ohio are among others where Period Equity has brought the lawsuit to the court.

"We'd be very happy if legislatures around the country, Michigan included, finally get these bills out of committee, put them to a vote and pass them," said Strausfeld.

The Period Equity nonprofit campaign is working to ensure accessible menstrual products, safety and affordability. Its "Tampon Tax" initiative is working to end the sales taxes in the 40 states that were still imposing them. Since they started their initiative, 10 states have ended sales taxes on the products.

"What's really interesting about that track record is that it's blue states, it's red states, it's Republican governors, it's Democratic governors signing those bills," said Weiss-Wolf.

"It's not a partisan issue — it's really a common sense issue. We continue to wage this fight across the nation."

This article originally appeared on Detroit Free Press: 'Tampon Tax' lawsuit against Michigan aims to end sales taxes on menstrual hygiene products

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'Tampon tax' to go away Sunday

NATALIE WICKMAN
509 words
29 December 2016
The News-Gazette
NSGZ
ISSN:10423354
English
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According to the Illinois Department of Revenue, women can expect to save roughly 9 percent in Champaign-Urbana -- or 45 cents for every $5 -- and 8 percent in Savoy.Brigid Leahy, director of public policy at Planned Parenthood of Illinois, said it was a health risk to label feminine hygiene products as luxuries, since skin infections and irritation can result if they're not used regularly.

Come Sunday, the tax on feminine hygiene products in Illinois will decrease, the result of state legislators ditching the so-called "tampon tax" in a move lauded for helping the area's low-income women and furthering gender equity.

In Illinois, and the majority of the country, products such as tampons and menstrual pads are taxed as luxury items. After the change that takes effect Jan. 1, they'll be taxed as necessity items, like shampoo.

According to the Illinois Department of Revenue, women can expect to save roughly 9 percent in Champaign-Urbana -- or 45 cents for every $5 -- and 8 percent in Savoy.

Brigid Leahy, director of public policy at Planned Parenthood of Illinois, said it was a health risk to label feminine hygiene products as luxuries, since skin infections and irritation can result if they're not used regularly.

In addition, she said, women are prone to health problems, including Toxic Shock Syndrome, if they don't have enough of the products to change them when required.

"The tax was unfair," Leahy said. "Only women have periods, so it was inherently sexist."

"There's a crass statement one could make in response to thinking women have the luxury to purchase feminine hygiene products," said Brandon Meline, director of maternal and child health at the Champaign Urbana Public Health District. "Any tax repeal that alleviates pressure on the lower socioeconomic group helps our clients."

Leahy said she was happy to see bipartisan and male support for ending the tax before Gov. Bruce Rauner repealed it in August. She said she's been talking to legislators and researching other ways to make feminine hygiene products cheaper or free to those with low incomes.

"The first step was the gender-equality issue, but we also need to look at this as an issue of access," Leahy said.

Maxwell Haynes, a University of Illinois political science student and president of the UI Anti-Discrimination Task Force, said he believes repealing the tax will have a domino effect on the country, similar to marriage equality and marijuana legalization.

He also said the move could help to strike down cultural taboos around menstruation.

"That's the general shift in our culture -- toward more equality," he said.

"Tampon tax"-elimination bills were passed in Illinois, New York and Connecticut this year alone, following other states in recent years. Around 15 more are reportedly considering following suit.

"It's good for everybody to recognize there are basic things everyone needs, and the government shouldn't restrict access to them," Leahy said.

Credit: By NATALIE WICKMAN, nwickman@news-gazette.com

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The New York Times

Health
It's Not Just the Tampon Tax: Why Periods Are Political

By Karen Zraick
1,424 words
22 July 2018
11:00
NYTimes.com Feed
NYTFEED
English
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The average woman has her period for 2,535 days of her life. That's nearly seven years' time of making sure you have a pad or tampon, finding a makeshift solution if you don't, and managing pain and discomfort.

And lately, women — and transgender and nonbinary people who menstruate — are talking about it in public more than ever before. There are new products and services on the market, from menstrual cups to period underwear to medicinal cannabis and "period coaches." Globally, advocates are pushing for recognition of a woman's right to manage her period with dignity. And in the United States, activists are bringing the concept of "menstrual equity" into the public debate.

Let's unpack that.

"Menstrual equity" refers to equal access to hygiene products, but also to education about reproductive health. And it's the focus of a variety of new laws and policies to provide menstrual products in prisons, shelters, schools and even on Capitol Hill.

Advocates are also urging states to exempt menstrual hygiene products from sales tax, arguing that they're a necessity.

A frequent refrain: Why are tampons taxed when Viagra is not?

Increased media coverage and some high-profile episodes — like Kiran Gandhi bleeding freely as she ran the London Marathon in 2015 and a backlash over Instagram deleting a photo of a period stain — have accelerated the shift.

Last month, a member of Britain's Parliamentannounced in the House of Commons that she was menstruating, to make a point about "period poverty."

A New York congressman recently got into a spat with House administrators over whether he could expense $37.16 worth of tampons for his staff and visitors.

And India said on Saturday that it would eliminate a controversial 12 percent tax on sanitary pads after a campaign by advocacy groups and celebrities. Canada also abolished a sales tax on such products in 2015, and an Australian push to do the same made progress this year.

Here's an overview of the issues that women's health advocates are talking about.

The fight for equal access to menstrual products

Laws in several states now mandate access to menstrual products in correctional facilities, shelters and schools. Two prison reform bills in the Senate — including the First Step Act, which is backed by the White House — include provisions on access to menstrual hygiene products, after complaints that the facilities were not providing an adequate supply. And the Justice Department directed federal prisons to provide inmates with free menstrual products last year.

In the House, Representative Grace Meng, Democrat of New York, has introduced two related bills. One aims to make periods more affordable, in part by allowing employees to use flexible spending accounts to buy pads and tampons, and requiring companies with more than 100 employees to provide them. The other would require manufacturers to disclose ingredients in such products.

"Interest in this issue grows every single day," Ms. Meng said. "It's really about accessibility and equity."

That's the same argument that Representative Sean Patrick Maloney, Democrat of New York, made after he was ordered to reimburse the Committee on House Administration for menstrual products.

The committee rebutted Mr. Maloney's account. But that didn't stop him and Ms. Meng from writing a letter to House Speaker Paul Ryan about the matter.

"We applaud you for making toilet paper available," they wrote. "We implore you, however, to go one step further and make feminine hygiene products available to those who need them."

Pressing to end 'the tampon tax'

In the last two years, New York, Illinois, Florida and Connecticut have abolished sales tax on menstrual products. That brings the number of states that tax such products to 36 — and lawmakers in two dozen of those states have introduced bills to nix the tax.

"That menstrual equity and health would be such a prominent, bipartisan and very public matter is, in my mind, not just really heartening but enormously telling," said Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, author of the 2017 book "Periods Gone Public."

There are similar efforts underway around the world, including in Britain, where the campaign to "ax the tax" got caught up in the Brexit debate. Laura Coryton, a young British activist, started a petition called "Stop Taxing Periods" in 2014 that amassed over 300,000 signatures.

But lawmakers were unable to repeal the tax because of European Union rules, and it became a rallying point for the pro-Brexit camp. Lawmakers have pledged to abolish the tax once Brexit is complete. Until then, taxes from menstrual products are being put into a special fund for women's health.

Canada also abolished sales tax on menstrual products in 2015, and an Australian push to do the same made progress this year.

Bold moves around the world

Dr. Julitta Onabanjo, the regional director for the United Nations Population Fund in East and Southern Africa, said there has been a groundswell of advocacy around menstrual health management.

In May, the organization hosted the first regional symposium on the issue, with leaders from local governments and the nonprofit sector.

Some countries in the region have made bold moves: Kenya and Uganda abolished sales tax on menstrual hygiene products, while Zimbabwe subsidizes local manufacturers. The Kenyan government also provides funding for pads in schools.

But Dr. Onabanjo cautioned that access to products is only one factor. Clean water and sanitation facilities, information and medical treatment are all important. Poverty, of course, greatly complicates the effort to manage periods with discretion and dignity. And some symptoms, like heavy bleeding or debilitating pain during menstruation, can indicate a more serious condition requiring medical attention.

Girls and women around the world must also contend with cultural stigma, shame and social isolation. A recent report published by Dr. Onabanjo's agency noted that there is powerful evidence that girls are more likely to miss school or even drop out if they're unable to manage their cycle, sometimes because of teasing over their periods.

Even more troubling, studies in Kenya have found that poorer girls may trade sex to afford pads, making them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases.

"We really want to ensure that going forward, this is seen as a sexual and reproductive health and rights issue," Dr. Onabanjo said.

Can technical innovation 'solve' the problem of periods?

New products and services are promising to make periods less burdensome, from period-tracking apps and coaching on nutrition and self-care, to items like environmentally friendly reusable pads, absorbent underwear and cups.

The creators of the popular app Clue say they have 2.5 million users in 180 countries, and share anonymized data with women's health researchers from top universities.

Product developers are working on the next generation of devices. The creators of Livia, an electrical stimulation device touted as "the off switch for menstrual pain" collected $1.7 million in orders on the

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crowdfunding site Indiegogo. While some online reviewers found it helpful, many of the comments on Indiegogo focus on shipping delays, device malfunctions and customer service complaints.

In the coaching realm, there's been greater attention to the role that diet and exercise can play in one's period. Many coaches also suggest acupuncture, herbal remedies, meditation and massage.

"What I do is help women become more informed about how their bodies work," said Erica Chidi Cohen, co-founder and chief executive of LOOM, a reproductive health center in Los Angeles that recently introduced a period coaching program.

That includes being aware of hormonal changes throughout the month, and how one's energy might ebb and flow at different points. Some of her clients plan big events, like business trips, based on their cycle.

"It can actually be a very positive thing if we learn what's happening and lean into it," she said.

* Where a Taboo Is Leading to the Deaths of Young Girls

* Menstruation Joins the Economic Conversation

* We're More Honest With Our Phones Than With Our Doctors

Casey Hartnett spoke at a "Period Party" that included storytelling and poetry in honor of World Menstrual Hygiene Day, at the New Women Space in Brooklyn this year. | Jackie Molloy for The New York Times | Sponsored giveaways of menstrual products at the Period Party. | Jackie Molloy for The New York Times | Miss World 2017, Manushi Chhillar, posed with schoolgirls to mark World Menstrual Hygiene Day earlier this year in New Delhi. | Pallav Paliwal/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Document NYTFEED020180722ee7m000ul

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AP-UT--Utah News Digest - 6 pm, UT

1,006 words
10 March 2016
01:48
Associated Press Newswires
APRS
English
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Good evening! Here's an updated look at how AP's general news coverage is shaping up in Utah.

Questions about today's coverage plans are welcome and should be directed to Brady McCombs at 801-322-3405 or apsaltlake@ap.org.

A reminder this information is not for publication or broadcast, and these coverage plans are subject to change. Expected stories may not develop, or late-breaking and more newsworthy events may take precedence. Advisories, digests and digest advisories will keep you up to date. All times are Mountain.

Some TV and radio stations will receive shorter APNewsNow versions of the stories below, along with all updates.

UPCOMING THURSDAY:

LEGISLATIVE SESSION ENDS

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah's 2016 legislative session will come to a close Thursday at midnight after 45 days of debating and passing hundreds of bills and setting the state's roughly $14 billion budget. By Michelle L. Price and Hallie Golden. UPCOMING: 500 words by noon, followed by updates throughout Thursday.

TOP STORIES:

XGR-UTAH BUDGET

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah lawmakers are polishing off a $14.7 billion budget that would pay for more than 9,700 new students expected in public schools next year and a bare-bones Medicaid plan that covers homeless adults. By Michelle L. Price. SENT: 565 words.

XGR--PUBLIC LANDS FIGHT

Utah lawmakers are stashing away nearly $5 million to be used for a potential lawsuit attempting to force the federal government to turn over control of more than 30 million acres of public land in the state. By Michelle L. Price. UPCOMING: 300 words by 6:30 p.m. MT.

UTAH DEALTH PENALTY

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah's Republican-dominated Legislature will cast a final vote this week on a proposal to abolish the death penalty in the conservative state, a year after lawmakers voted to reinstate the use of firing squads in executions when lethal drugs are unavailable. By Michelle L. Price. SENT: 650 words.

DISTRACTING COSTUMES

SALT LAKE CITY — Two Utah women who went to see Disney's "Frozen On Ice" say they were kicked out of the show because their costumes attracted too much attention. SENT: 270 words.

RANCHING STANDOFF

SALT LAKE CITY — A Utah member of the Bundy ranching family will stay behind bars while he awaits trial on charges in a 2014 armed standoff over grazing fees in Nevada, a federal judge in Salt Lake City decided Wednesday. By Lindsay Whitehurst. SENT: 390 words.

REFER:

WESTERN GOVERNORS-ENDANGERED SPECIES

DENVER — Wildlife managers, conservation advocates and business interests from across the West are meeting in Denver as the Republican-led Western Governors Association looks for ways to change the federal government and states protect endangered species. By Dan Elliott. SENT: 625 words.

With:

WESTERN GOVERNORS-ENDANGERED SPECIES-THE LATEST

DENVER — The Latest on a meeting of wildlife managers, conservationists and business interest on how well the Endangered Species Act is working. SENT: 300 words.

TAMPON TAX

NEW YORK — A national movement is gaining steam to abolish the tampon tax. Nationwide, 40 states tax feminine hygiene products while exempting products like foot powder and dandruff shampoo. Six states are considering legislation and five women in New York City have sued. The issue has women across the nation asking whether being female in the United States carries unfair costs. By Colleen Long and Jennifer Peltz. SENT: 890 words. With AP Photos. With: TAMPON TAX-STATES GLANCE.

SPORTS:

BKN--JAZZ-WARRIORS

OAKLAND, Calif. — Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors, who have committed 44 turnovers their past two games, look to extend their record regular-season home winning streak to 46 games when the Utah Jazz visit Oracle Arena. UPCOMING: 750 words, photos. Starts 7:30 p.m. PST. By Janie McCauley.

BKC-MWC-UTAH ST-WYOMING

LAS VEGAS — Shane Rector scored 24, and Jalen Moore scored 19 with nine rebounds and five assists to help ninth-seeded Utah State beat No. 8 seed Wyoming 88-70 Wednesday in the first round of the Mountain West Conference tournament.

BKC-SAN DIEGO ST-MWC

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego State Aztecs were good enough the last four years to earn at-large berths in the NCAA Tournament after failing to win the Mountain West Conference tourney and the accompanying automatic bid.

IN BRIEF:

— XGR-HAMILTON MUSICAL RESOLUTION — Utah state senators are putting their stamp of approval on a Broadway musical about American founding father Alexander Hamilton.

— LION CUBS-UTAH ZOO — For the first time in more than two decades, Utah's Hogle Zoo has lion cubs.

— POLYGAMOUS TOWNS-RAIDS — Federal prosecutors want to seize $191,500 from businesses with ties to a polygamous group accused of carrying out a multi-million dollar food stamp fraud scheme.

— RANCHING STANDOFF — A federal judge in Utah is expected to consider Wednesday whether a member of the Bundy ranching family should stay behind bars while he awaits trial on charges in an armed 2014 standoff over unpaid grazing fees in Nevada.

— EGGING-WOMAN CHARGED — A Utah mother facing criminal charges after prosecutors said she took her daughter egging has agreed to a plea deal.

— AIRPORT POWER OUTAGE-RACCOON — A raccoon that found its way into a Utah power station managed to darken the Salt Lake International Airport and delay a flight.

— FATAL TRUCK FALL — A 53-year-old man is dead after the dump truck he was driving fell 300 feet into a north Salt Lake City quarry.

— JOB CORPS DEATH-LAWSUIT — The mother of a 17-year-old who died at the Clearfield Job Corps Center due to complications with diabetes has filed a wrongful death lawsuit.

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BC-CT--Connecticut News Digest 6 pm, CT

911 words
10 March 2016
00:01
Associated Press Newswires
APRS
English
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Good evening. Here's a look at how AP's general news coverage is shaping up in Connecticut.

Amy Anthony is on the desk until 8 p.m. Questions about today's coverage plans are welcome and can be directed to Mike Melia at 860-246-6876 or mmelia@ap.org.

New England News Editor Bill Kole can be reached at 617-357-8100 or bkole@ap.org. New England Photo Editor Bill Sikes is reachable at 617-357-8106 or bsikes@ap.org.

A reminder that this information is not for publication or broadcast, and these coverage plans are subject to change. Expected stories may not develop, or late-breaking and more newsworthy events may take precedence. Advisories and digests will keep you up to date.

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UPCOMING TOMORROW

XGR-FANTASY SPORTS

HARTFORD — Connecticut is the latest state to consider ways to regulate fantasy sports betting. A legislative committee is expected to act on legislation Thursday that's supposed to help protect consumers from deceptive acts. By Susan Haigh. About 400 words by 4 p.m.

TODAY'S TOP STORIES

50 CENT BANKRUPTCY

HARTFORD — Rapper 50 Cent has been ordered to appear in a Connecticut courtroom to explain photos of him with piles of cash to the judge in his bankruptcy case. The hearing is set for Wednesday afternoon in Hartford. The rapper says the stacks of cash in the Instagram photos are not real and he isn't hiding any assets. The judge has said the photos raise concerns about whether 50 Cent is being truthful about his finances. By Dave Collins. SENT: 445 words, photos. Developing from 2 p.m. court hearing.

With: 50 CENT BANKRUPTCY-THE LATEST

STATE TAXES

HARTFORD — Owners of ambulatory surgical care centers and car washes are urging a legislative committee to repeal recent taxes imposed on their businesses. Business owners say they're suffering from the taxes that Connecticut lawmakers passed last year to help balance the budget. By Susan Haigh. SENT: 130 words. UPCOMING: 400 words.

TAMPON TAX

NEW YORK — A national movement is gaining steam to abolish the tampon tax. Nationwide, 40 states tax feminine hygiene products while exempting products like foot powder and dandruff shampoo. Six states are considering legislation and five women in New York City have sued. The issue has women across the nation asking whether being female in the United States carries unfair costs. By Colleen Long and Jennifer Peltz. SENT: 926 words, photos.

With: TAMPON TAX-STATES-GLANCE

BOSTON MARATHON-SURVIVOR KILLED

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — High speed and alcohol were involved in a Ferrari crash that killed a survivor of the Boston Marathon bombing, a Canadian boxer and two others, a Dubai prosecutor said Wednesday. Officials in Dubai, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to discuss the crash, identified those killed as Boston bombing survivor Victoria McGrath of Connecticut, Northeastern University student Priscilla Perez Torres, Canadian boxer Cody Nixon and James Portuondo. By Malak Harb. SENT: 600 words.

IN BRIEF:

— GRADE CHANGING ARREST: A former University of Connecticut student is accused of stealing his professor's credentials to change his grades and the grades of his classmates. SENT: 130 words.

— STATE PARKS: A bipartisan group of legislators is backing a proposed state constitutional amendment aimed at protecting Connecticut's forests and parks. SENT: 130 words.

— WEAPONIZED DRONES-LAWSUIT: A former Central Connecticut State University student who was expelled after equipping a drone with a gun has filed a lawsuit seeking reinstatement to the school. SENT: 130 words.

— VERMONT PAID SICK LEAVE: President Barack Obama is commending Vermont and Gov. Peter Shumlin for enacting a law that guarantees paid sick leave for working Vermonters. SENT: 130 words.

— WARM WEATHER-S NEW ENGLAND: Temperature records across southern New England have been broken by unseasonable warmth in the region. SENT: 130 words.

— FATAL FIRE: Authorities in Connecticut say a man is dead after a fire at a small shed in Montville. SENT: 130 words.

— SEX TRAFFICKING: A Greenwich woman who admitted to her role in the sex trafficking of minors in Connecticut is headed to prison. SENT: 130 words.

— SYRACUSE-HOTEL RENOVATION: Nearly century-old chandeliers restored in Connecticut have been returned to a landmark downtown Syracuse hotel that's scheduled to reopen this year after a $70 million renovation. SENT: 130 words.

— FISHING MONITORS: A judge's ruling about a new cost imposed on New England fishermen by the federal government could come as soon as this week. SENT: 130 words.

SPORTS:

GRIZZLIES-CELTICS

BOSTON — The Boston Celtics go for their 14th straight home win when they host the Vancouver Grizzlies. By Jimmy Golen. UPCOMING: 600 words, photos by midnight. Game starts at 7 p.m.

RED SOX-PIRATES

BRADENTON, Fla. — The Pittsburgh Pirates host the Boston Red Sox in a spring training game on Wednesday. Game begins at 1:05 p.m. UPCOMING: 500 words, photos.

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BC-IL--Illinois News Digest 6 pm, IL

1,663 words
20 August 2016
02:42
Associated Press Newswires
APRS
English
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Good afternoon. Here's a look at how AP's general news coverage is shaping up in Illinois at 6 p.m. Questions about coverage plans are welcome and should be directed to the AP-Chicago bureau at 312-781-0500 or chifax@ap.org. Herbert McCann is on the desk. A reminder this information is not for publication or broadcast, and these coverage plans are subject to change. Expected stories may not develop, or late-breaking and more newsworthy events may take precedence. Advisories and digests will keep you up to date. All times are Central.

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UPCOMING TOMORROW:

HEALTH OVERHAUL-OBAMACARE'S FUTURE

WASHINGTON — Election Day will open the final act in the nation's long-running political drama over President Barack Obama's health care law. If Donald Trump wins, the unraveling begins. If Hillary Clinton is in the White House, it will be hard to keep arguing for "Obamacare" repeal with a straight face. But after six years of politics, policy and process, another "p-word" has entered the health care debate: people. Health insurance for nearly everybody will be affected in one way or another, in large part because many of the law's protections that ensure people cannot be denied or kicked off their insurance. By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar. 480 words.

With:

HEALTH OVERHAUL-VIGNETTE-RISING COSTS, from CHICAGO: With a household income too high for a federal subsidy, Bruce Mainzer and Beth Shadur are bracing for higher health insurance premiums in 2017. Like many who are self-employed, the suburban Chicago couple's combined income can vary greatly from year to year, but they make too much to qualify for government subsidies that would lessen the bite of monthly premiums. By Carla K. Johnson. 490 words. Photo.

NEW ON THIS DIGEST: TAMPON TAX; FOSTER CHILDREN-ILLINOIS; SIU-EDWARDSVILLE; CHICAGO POLICE-GANG ARRESTS; BBM--MINOR LEAGUERS SUSPENDED.

TOP STORY:

TAMPON TAX

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner signed a law Friday eliminating sales taxes on feminine hygiene products. The Republican's pen repealed the so-called "tampon tax" on items such as tampons and menstrual pads. It takes effect Jan. 1. Illinois became the third state — with New York and Connecticut — to abolish the tax just this year, among 15 states where legislation was introduced, said Jennifer Weiss-Wolf of the Brennan Center for Justice. California's State Assembly is poised to send similar legislation to the governor, she said. By John O'Connor. SENT: 405 words.

STATE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS:

LGBT RIGHTS-ILLINOIS

CHICAGO — Gay rights advocates say an Illinois Supreme Court ruling is a step backward for same-sex couples and will also harm all unmarried domestic partners. The court on Thursday rejected 5-2 a claim by a Chicago woman who was seeking a share in her domestic partner's medical practice after their break-up. The two women were longtime partners who split up in 2008 — years before Illinois legalized same-sex marriage.

Susan Sommer of Lambda Legal calls Thursday's ruling "the height of injustice." By Carla K. Johnson. SENT: 130 words. UPCOMING: 500 words.

Also:

—FOSTER CHILDREN-ILLINOIS: Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner has signed an executive order banning the state from calling children under its care wards and instead instructing they be called "youth in care."

—FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION-ELDERLY: Illinois state Rep. Gary Forby says legislation that Gov. Bruce Rauner signed into law will extend statutes of limitations on crimes that financially exploit the elderly. SENT: 130 words.

AROUND THE STATE:

CHICAGO TERRORISM ARREST

CHICAGO — A suburban Chicago man facing terrorism charges for allegedly trying to set off a bomb in 2012 told a judge he is sane, although he contends the government is going to behead him because of his religion. Adel Daoud spoke during a hearing Friday to decide his mental competency to stand trial on soliciting the murder of the undercover agent in the terrorism case, in addition to the terrorism charges. Prosecutors contend Daoud understands the charges against him and can assist in his own defense. SENT: 130 words. UPCOMING: 300 words.

BACK TO SCHOOL-LIVING LIBRARIES (PHOTO PACKAGE)

Roll over, Melvil Dewey. Behold the 21st-century college library. Hundreds of schools, from Ivy League universities to community colleges, have remade their libraries as colorful hubs of college life. Gone are bound journals, miles of musty books and rules governing proper behavior. In are on-site cafes, group study areas where talking is encouraged, 24-hour access and sofas designed for dozing. By Lisa Leff and Marta Lavandier. SENT: 400 words, photo package. Editors please note Illinois interest in 8th paragraph.

BLACK FAMILY REUNION

CINCINNATI — An event to promote the traditions, values and coping skills of black families is kicking off in southwest Ohio. The Black Family Reunion in the Cincinnati area is the nation's longest-running one, and it and another in Rockford, Illinois, reportedly are the only places in the country that still hold the Black Family Reunion. SENT: 280 words.

EXCHANGE-STATE FAIR-HOG CALLING

GEORGETOWN, Ill. — Andrew Metheney doesn't know much about raising hogs, but he knows how to call them. The Georgetown teen is in hog heaven this week after winning the hog-calling contest at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield on Sunday. The rookie beat out three others, including 10-time champion and 25-year contest veteran Chris Karr of Seymour. "Some people are good at jumping rope, and there's me, making noises," said Metheney, who didn't hone his "soo-ee soo-ee" skills on a hog farm. By Tracy Crane. The (Champaign) News-Gazette. SENT: 580 words, photos pursuing.

EXCHANGE-WELCOMING WAGS

GODFREY, Ill. — Getting a new dog is always a big deal for a boy, but for 12-year-old Daniel Salvato it could be a "life-changing" experience. Daniel, who lives in Godfrey, received Wags, a male golden retriever and an autism service animal, from Virginia-based nonprofit Service Dogs by Warren Retrievers on Aug. 5. Daniel's mother, Penny Salvato, said receiving the dog is a "dream come true," for the family. By Scott Cousins. The (Alton) Telegraph. SENT: 730 words, photo.

BUSINESS:

EARNS-DEERE

MOLINE, Ill. — Deere topped profit expectations and raised its earnings outlook for the year as the farm equipment maker cuts its own costs with farmers under pressure. The U.S. earlier this month raised its expectations for corn and soybeans harvests to record highs, meaning profits for farmers will be more meager. While Deere's profit and revenue fell during the quarter, the Moline, Illinois, company has scaled back in recent years to offset declines, and investors pushed shares up 4 percent at the opening bell. SENT: 370 words.

IN BRIEF:

—SIU-EDWARDSVILLE: Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is advising students that high lead levels have been detected in water at three buildings.

—CHICAGO POLICE-GANG ARRESTS: Chicago Police say they have arrested dozens of people on drug charges, including more than 60 known gang members.

—CANCER PATIENT-BEATING DEATH: Cancer Treatment Centers of America is offering a $25,000 reward for information in the death of a Missouri patient beaten to death outside her Illinois hospital residence.

—FARMER HONOR: Farmers in northern Illinois drove their tractors down the streets of Richmond in a procession to honor a farmer killed in a crash last week.

—VILLAGE PRESIDENT-ACQUITTED: A judge has acquitted the former president of a small village in northern Illinois of misconduct and theft charges.

—WEST NILE VIRUS: Health officials have confirmed the season's first human case of the mosquito-borne West Nile virus in Cook County.

—CHICAGO-AIR AND WATER SHOW: Preparations for the annual Chicago Air and Water Show are underway with practice flights drawing eyes to the skies over the city.

—MUSIC-SEAN COMBS: Sean "Diddy" Combs will be kicking off his tour Sept. 1 in Chicago, later than expected after undergoing surgery for a shoulder injury.

SPORTS:

BBN--CUBS-ROCKIES

DENVER — The Colorado Rockies and Chicago Cubs open a three-game series Friday. UPCOMING: 650 words, photos. Game starts at 7:40 p.m. CT. With hometown lead on losing team.

BBA--ATHLETICS-WHITE SOX

CHICAGO — Adam Eaton and the Chicago White Sox open a three-game series against the Oakland Athletics on Friday. UPCOMING: 600 words, photos. Game starts at 7:10 p.m. CT. With hometown lead on losing team.

With:

—BBM--MINOR LEAGUERS SUSPENDED: Free agent pitcher Oliver Suero has been suspended 72 games and Chicago White Sox first baseman Telvin Nash for 50 games under baseball's minor league drug program.

FBC--PICK SIX-GRADUATE TRANSFERS

Oregon's Vernon Adams showed last year the difference a graduate transfer can make for his new team. Adams, a Championship Subdivision star at Eastern Washington, transferred to Oregon for his final year of eligibility and played exceptionally when he wasn't dealing with injuries. Adams threw for 2,643 yards and 26 touchdowns with only six interceptions to lead all Bowl Subdivision performers in passing efficiency. By Steve Megargee. SENT: 710 words, photos. Editors please note Illinois interest in 8th paragraph.

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