

International Women's Day March 8th, 2017

by State Senator Jon Erpenbach, 27th Senate District

Women all over the world will be recognized for their commitments to our society and for the inequities they face during International Women's Day 2017. While women in Wisconsin don't face some of the challenges women in developing countries face, they still encounter in their lifetimes inequities and tragedies simply because of their gender.

While 1 on 7 men will be victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime, nearly twice as many women will experience that same violence with 1 in 4 suffering severe physical violence by their partner. Additionally, 1 in 7 women have been stalked by an intimate partner during their lifetime to the point in which they felt very fearful or believed that they would be harmed or killed. While 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime, that number drops to 1 in 71 for men. And 91% of the victims of sexual assault are women while 9% are men. Clearly we have a significant problem with violence towards women in our country and our state. As we look for policy solutions that can help stop violence towards women, we should seriously examine the components of our culture that allow for the abuse and assault of women at such a significantly higher rate than men.

Women are also disproportionately paying more for health care. Before the Affordable Care Act, women buying insurance on the individual market were routinely charged up to 50 percent more for monthly premiums than men. The practice known as "gender rating" and is defended simply by saying women live longer, have children and make more frequent visits to the doctor. But in reality by taking maternity off the table, women do not cost anymore to insure than men. The Affordable Care Act prohibited discrimination against women in health insurance costs and made access to birth control easier for women by making most common birth control options free.

Even with the government mandates, women's access to healthcare is far from guaranteed. Women are less likely to be insured than men because their incomes tend to be less. A recent study found that women still face greater financial hardship than men when it comes to paying for healthcare. One in four women reported putting off care for financial reasons, compared with one in five men. As we work to protect the gains made in women's equity in health care, we need to have the honest discussion whether we as a society should punish women for being able to give birth.

International Women's Day is a chance to explore and examine why women in Wisconsin and the world continue to face disparities not just in violence and health care costs but also in income, poverty, education and retirement security. **If you would like more information on International Women's Day or persistent discrimination against women, please contact my office at 608-266-6670 or 888-549-0027 or sen.erpenbach@legis.wi.gov**