

Putting a Period on the Tampon Tax

Under any circumstances, there are certain commodities that are absolutely essential to a healthy life, that are often taken for granted. Clean water, adequate clothing, and nutritious food are just a few of these necessities. One category of items that might go unnoticed by many, however, is the range of women's hygiene products, especially menstrual health products. Tampons, pads, panty liners, menstrual cups, and more all fall into this category, and for at least fifty years of a woman's life, she relies upon these products for one week every month and must purchase them accordingly. This does not come without a cost, however—thirty-nine of the fifty United States have a sales tax on menstrual hygiene products, the so-called “tampon tax.” As of late, this tax has become highly controversial as many individuals begin to speak out in support of or against it at both state and federal levels. The sales tax on tampons, pads, and other menstrual products must be abolished in all fifty states, as it is economically harmful towards those who need these necessary items and discriminatory towards women.

First, some may argue that the tax provides needed income for the government for programs that require funding; however, the tampon tax does more economic harm to women than economic good to the government. Every day, women go without tampons, pads, and other hygiene products they need because they cannot afford to buy them. According to a study published recently, “...two out of three [women] had to go without feminine hygiene products at least once over the prior year, due to cost... About one-fifth — 21 percent — said this happened on a monthly basis, and nearly half said they often had to make tough choices between buying food or period-related products” (Mundell). If one were to choose between the health of a poor woman and the ability for the government to have just a bit more funding, the obvious choice

would be to give the woman access to the care she needs. Even if the government might benefit from this sales tax, the women to whom it applies are only harmed for as long as it is in place.

On another hand, others might believe that tampons and other menstrual hygiene products are not necessary items. Any woman who menstruates would agree that having a period is absolutely not a luxury, and the products needed during this time are necessary for women's health and should not be taxed. All women would argue that tampons, pads, and etc are necessary items, and their costs can easily add up, especially with the tax. In the state of New York, for example, "...if a woman buys a 36-count pack of overnight Maxi Pads with Wings for \$9.27, she would pay between \$0.71 and \$1.08 per pack in sales tax" (Mundell). Many women need more than 40 pads to last a week-long period, and often they have to get by on far less because they cannot afford to buy more, and women in prisons are provided with even less. Periods are painful and messy, and women should not have to suffer the extra stress of wondering whether or not they can pay for the healthcare items they need. All in all, feminine hygiene products are indeed necessary for the women who use them, and they should not be restricted from accessing the resources they need.

Ultimately, the tampon tax is discriminatory towards all women who menstruate, who make up a large portion of the population. By its very nature, the tampon tax is unconstitutional on grounds of discrimination towards women and should be abolished in all states. Women's healthcare products are subject to the sales tax, while men's healthcare products are not taxed, clear evidence of this discrimination. To be more specific, "sales tax is exempt on some products related to agriculture, dietary supplements, drugs and over-the-counter drugs and medicines... This applies to products like condoms and Viagra" (Dotray). As women's healthcare products are essential to their lives and a necessity required each and every month, for these items to be

subject to a sales tax while less necessary items, such as the aforementioned condoms and Viagra, are not, the female population is greatly harmed while the male population is largely unaffected or even benefited. If this society wants to strive for gender equality, this would be an excellent first step, as well as a way for women's voices to finally be heard. There is still much progress to be made in many different fields, especially that of women's healthcare and its availability to all women. To put it simply, according to an article from TIME magazine, "Tax repeal is a 'step in the right direction,' [Nancy Kramer, advertising executive] says, but universal accessibility would be the real win" (Rhodan). Eliminating sexism in contemporary society will be a complicated process, but removal of the sales tax on feminine hygiene products is a good first step to take in striving for equality and the end of discrimination, and a necessary one as well. Even after considering many arguments, the fact is, the tampon tax is rooted in discrimination towards women and needs to be abolished immediately.

Because it is economically harmful and discriminatory towards women who need these necessary items, the tampon tax must be removed in every one of the United States. Every little extra cost that the tax adds contributes to many women being unable to afford these products, which are absolutely essential to a woman's life for a week every month. And, in addition, the very principles behind this sales tax are discriminatory towards women, and it should be eliminated. This issue should not go unnoticed any longer. The tampon tax has been removed in eleven states, but there are still thirty-nine to go, thirty-nine states where women still go without the necessity of basic hygiene needs. A healthy life cannot be lived while this tax is still in place. This needs to stop. Period.

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