

You won us the right to vote. To pursue education. To control our bodies and our money. Thank you.

By SCHERRY JOHNSON

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FEMINISM: 1. The theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes 2. Organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.

Dear Pioneer Feminists,

We are very late in sending this note; please forgive us. Our lives are so busy and full. As women in America, we all enjoy options that would never have been available to us without you radical, noisy women who stood up – instead of standing by – to push for basic rights for women in this country.

Your work today is taken for granted by those of us who inherited your hard-won legacy. Women's History Month gives us an opportunity to make an amend and send a proper thank-you note to you courageous, persistent pioneers who were proud to call yourselves "feminists."

Thank you for working diligently for more than 80 years so American women could vote. In the most recent presidential election, women represented 54 percent of the total vote. Both progressive and conservative women can take that privilege for granted.

Although you did not envision that women might at times vote against their own best interests, you would be pleased that women fully participate in the political process. Although you would be disappointed by the proportional representation of women in elected office, you would be pleased that for the second time in our history, a woman is serving as secretary of state and talk of a female president in the future is not heresy.

We remember that you, stalwart suffragettes, endured ridicule from tradition-bound women and men, stood up to nay-saying politicians, went to prison where you were tortured and starved – all the while holding fast to the belief that women must have the vote in order to be full citizens.

Thank you for being pushy about opening education to women. It is a disservice to your memory that many of today's young women who train to become doctors, professors, lawyers and engineers are reluctant to be called "feminists" because the word has been so vilified by those who still fear the power of real gender equality.

Thank you for holding firm in your belief that a woman's body is her own and not a property of the government or another person, even her spouse. Thank you for

insisting that a woman's ability to conceive should not become her only defining role.

We are so grateful that we have the means to limit our child-bearing. Without safe contraception, we might have been turned into baby factories like so many unfortunate women worldwide, and then our options for a fully developed life would be much more limited.

Thank you for insisting that responsible women, just like responsible men, should control their own money and credit. It is unimaginable to young women that as recently as 30 years ago, a married woman could get only a department-store credit card issued in her husband's name.

You also set a wonderful example for those today who are still struggling with deeply personal issues – things like religious diversity, abortion and sexual orientation. You were firm in your beliefs that doors should be open for individuals who did not share your personal beliefs.

We apologize for letting you down in so many ways. For example, we have not yet figured out how to protect women and girls from predators. We have not banded together to stop sex slavery and the early death of millions of girls and women in that most heinous trap.

Let us always remember that your example proves "well-behaved women seldom make history!" Thank you for taking unpopular and even dangerous actions on our behalf. I sincerely hope our granddaughters will be able to say the same for this generation.

Sincerely,

The All-American Woman, writing on behalf of all women who have benefited from the struggles of feminists