

THE BYSTANDER —★—

the Ultimate #MeToo

Published in the *Baltimore Sun*, April 27, 2018, titled
“When will government admit its #MeToo Infractions?”

For the past year, we’ve witnessed dozens of men admit to sexual assault in backrooms, bedrooms, board rooms, couches and dens, in an assortment of public and private places. They are being outed by victims who are, at times, relating incidents from decades past because absolutely no one would listen until now.

But another sexual predator of American women is not a man---it’s our government, through repeated acts of intrusion onto, and into, our bodies. We’re being violated in our own chambers; not our bed chambers, but in the Chambers of Congress and State Legislatures, through hundreds of new statues, amendments and laws devised to restrict our rights and criminalize our choices. Our most private selves, our reproductive organs, are bound by these laws, which are not based on medical science, best practice, or our best interests.

These laws are proposed in the name of “protection” when what women really need is protection from laws that imply that men are not the other side of this equation. If sexual morality is at risk and needs to be legislated, we *should* see proposals applied to the behavior of, and consequences for, both genders. But only one set of reproductive organs appear to be liable, pliable, visible and available to be constrained.

Science has failed to develop reliable birth control for men; prophylactics and abstinence remain their only solutions. And when that fails, as it often does, the government steps in to dictate what the WOMAN can or can NOT do. It accomplishes that by creating laws that are an additional assault on, and an insult to, women.

Hundreds of state laws have been introduced to restrict access to our Constitutional right to abortion. Here in West Virginia, lawmakers are proposing to change the State Constitution *specifically* to ban abortion from state Medicaid services. They call it “Amendment 1,” which states “nothing in this constitution secures or protects a right to abortion,” and will be included on the November ballot this next election.

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Colorado passed a law prohibiting public employees from paying for an abortion with their *own health insurance*. In Iowa, a bill would outlaw abortion with no exception for rape or incest. A group of Republicans in Ohio and Idaho want to propose a law to charge abortion providers *and* their patients with murder, punishable by death or life in prison. Three states have tried to ban abortion after a fetal heartbeat is detected, which can happen even before a woman knows she is pregnant. Six states have “Trigger Laws” on their books, banning all abortion completely, and would be immediately enforceable (triggered) if *Roe v Wade* is reversed by the Supreme Court.

These laws are a metaphor for the kind of abuse women already experience in everyday life and report in #MeToo messages. They are done on a “law-on-women” basis, touching us in places, and in ways, we do not want to be fondled and groped. Like sexual harassment, these laws are demeaning. Like dark alleys, they are threatening. Like porn, they are everywhere. They are discriminatory, like *sexual discrimination*. They propose that our bodies, for nine months, essentially be under State surveillance. These laws strip away our rights the way a pervert would strip off our clothing, imagining us morally naked, in need of the wisdom of law to clothe us. Our anatomy is *exposed* for all to casually peruse in publications and legal briefs.

The challenge to *Roe* is coming, sooner than later. The lives of women will be altered; the lives of men will remain the same. Meanwhile, it feels like a creepy sex offender has been let loose in our country---only this time, the law rides by his side with an armed posse.