http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/4th-statue-fireworks-s5.jpg



As we celebrate our country's independence on July 4th, it's important for us to remember the incredible progress we've made and to look forward to the work that must be done for all Americans to truly celebrate their freedom.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - When we think of the 4th of July, we often think of parades, fireworks and gatherings throughout our community. It's a day of remembrance and pride for our country. It's the day we officially recognize that our forefathers declared our independence as a separate nation.

The Declaration of Independence serves as a symbol of freedom and promise of equal opportunities for future generations of Americans. After 243 years, we recognize that we're still growing as a country and struggling to achieve the original goals our forefathers agreed upon in 1776. We're aware that our country's politics have made it difficult for many people to truly celebrate their independence.

The Declaration includes the memorable line, "all men are created equal." As we celebrate Independence Day, I urge you to think about the work ahead of us to ensure everyone has equitable access to freedom and opportunity that our country was founded on.

It's been a slow, arduous struggle for women to gain a more equitable status to men in our

country. In 1848, activists organized the first women's rights convention and women adopted their own Declaration of Independence. It wasn't until 1920 women were finally granted the right to vote. It's mind boggling now that women weren't able to apply for credit on their own until the Equal Opportunity Act passed in 1974.

Women finally had more freedom over their own bodies when they could make the decision to have a legal abortion in 1973. In 1978, women could no longer be fired for being pregnant. And in 1993, marital rape was criminalized. We still have a long way to go to ensure women's bodies and their status and compensation in the workplace are treated equally to men.

Our original declaration in this country did not consider the rights of people of color, despite the phrase, all men are created equal… In fact, laws were passed to protect slavery, which drove our southern economy in the 18th Century and even after emancipation well into the 19th Century. Thus, it was controversial when the original draft of the Declaration of Independence included a passage that called for the abolition of slavery. There was not enough support for these seemingly radical demands at the time and it was stricken from the final document.

Of course, slavery was not abolished until 1865. Beyond emancipation, rights for all people of color has been an ongoing struggle as Jim Crow laws, limiting voting rights and other discriminatory practices have made real racial equality elusive.

There always seems to be battles for different segments of our population.



During the past month we celebrated the hard-fought achievements for equality within the LGBTQ community. Throughout our country's history, laws have criminalized individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Many states, passed laws to ban marriage, adoption, medical access and inheritance for citizens who were gay. People could be fired and even denied hiring if they were gay. As recent as 1986, The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states could make homosexual sodomy a crime, a clear indication that these laws were targeting only one segment of the population.

If we truly want this to be a nation where all persons are created equal we must continue to raise our voices and we must remain diligent. Rights can be eroded so easily when we forget our neighbors who are different from us.

During June, we observed Wisconsin's 100th anniversary of ratifying the 19th amendment, Juneteenth Day and Pride Month. These celebrations remind us of the incredible progress we have made. On July 4th, let's remember these historical achievements and look forward to the work that must be done for all Americans to truly celebrate their freedom.