

Paxton Smith
Valedictory Address
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As we leave high school we need to make our voices heard. I was going to get up here and talk to you about TV and content and media because those are things that are very important to me. However, in light of recent events, it feels wrong to talk about anything but what is currently affecting me and millions of other women in this state.

Recently the heartbeat bill was passed in Texas. Starting in September, there will be a ban on abortions that take place after 6 weeks of pregnancy, regardless of whether the pregnancy was a result of rape or incest. 6 weeks. Most women don't even realize they're pregnant by then. And so, before they have the time to decide if they are emotionally, physically, and financially stable enough to carry out a full-term pregnancy, before they have the chance to decide if they can take on the responsibility of bringing another human into the world, the decision has been made for them by a stranger. A decision that will affect the rest of their lives.

I have dreams, hopes, and ambitions. Every girl here does. We have spent our whole lives working towards our futures, and without our consent or input, our control over our futures has been stripped away from us. I am terrified that if my contraceptives fail me, that if I'm raped, then my hopes and efforts and dreams for myself will no longer be relevant. I hope you can feel how gut-wrenching it is, how dehumanizing it is, to have the autonomy over your own body taken from you.

And I'm talking about this today, on a day as important as this, on a day honoring the students' efforts in twelve years of schooling, on a day where we're all brought together, on a day where you will be the most inclined to hear a voice like mine, a woman's voice, to tell you that this is a problem. A problem that can't wait. I refuse to give up this platform to promote complacency and peace, when there is a war on my body and a war on my rights. A war on the rights of your sisters, a war on the rights of your mothers, a war on the rights of your daughters.

We cannot stay silent.