Lori Kersey

July 27--CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- An equal-pay activist said women and minorities still have a long way to go to achieve fairness in the workplace.

"The journey is still going," Lilly Ledbetter said Thursday while speaking in Charleston. "We've won a battle but we have not won the war yet. So we have a lot of work to do."

Ledbetter famously sued Goodyear Tire in the late 1990s for having paid her male coworkers more than her for doing the same work. She won the case but lost on appeal. Her case made it all the way to the Supreme Court, which ultimately ruled against her. The court found that she should have filed her suit soon after receiving her first paycheck from the company.

"I would never have dreamed my life one day would be determined by the Supreme Court, but it was," she said, speaking at a conference of the National Associations of Commissions for Women, held this week at Embassy Suites in Charleston.

Ledbetter worked at Goodyear for 19 years. She did not know she was paid less than her male counterparts until, nearing retirement, she received an anonymous note alerting her that the men were making around $6,000 a month when she made around $3,000.

"My heart almost stopped beating," she said.

Her legal battle lasted about 10 years and inspired the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 -- Pres. Barack Obama's first piece of legislation as president. The law amended the Civil Rights Act statute of limitations for filing lawsuits for pay discrimination. Under the new law, the statute of limitations is reset with each paycheck.

"It's hard to understand," she said. "The women of this country and the minorities -- we have so few rights and they're whittling away at them day by day."

Ledbetter said pay inequality still exists today. Women receive 77 cents for every $1 a man earns, she said.

As political fact-checking organization Politifact has pointed out, however, the figure from the U.S. Census compares all male and female workers regardless of their jobs. Across specific occupations, the income gap is generally smaller but varies, according to Politifact.