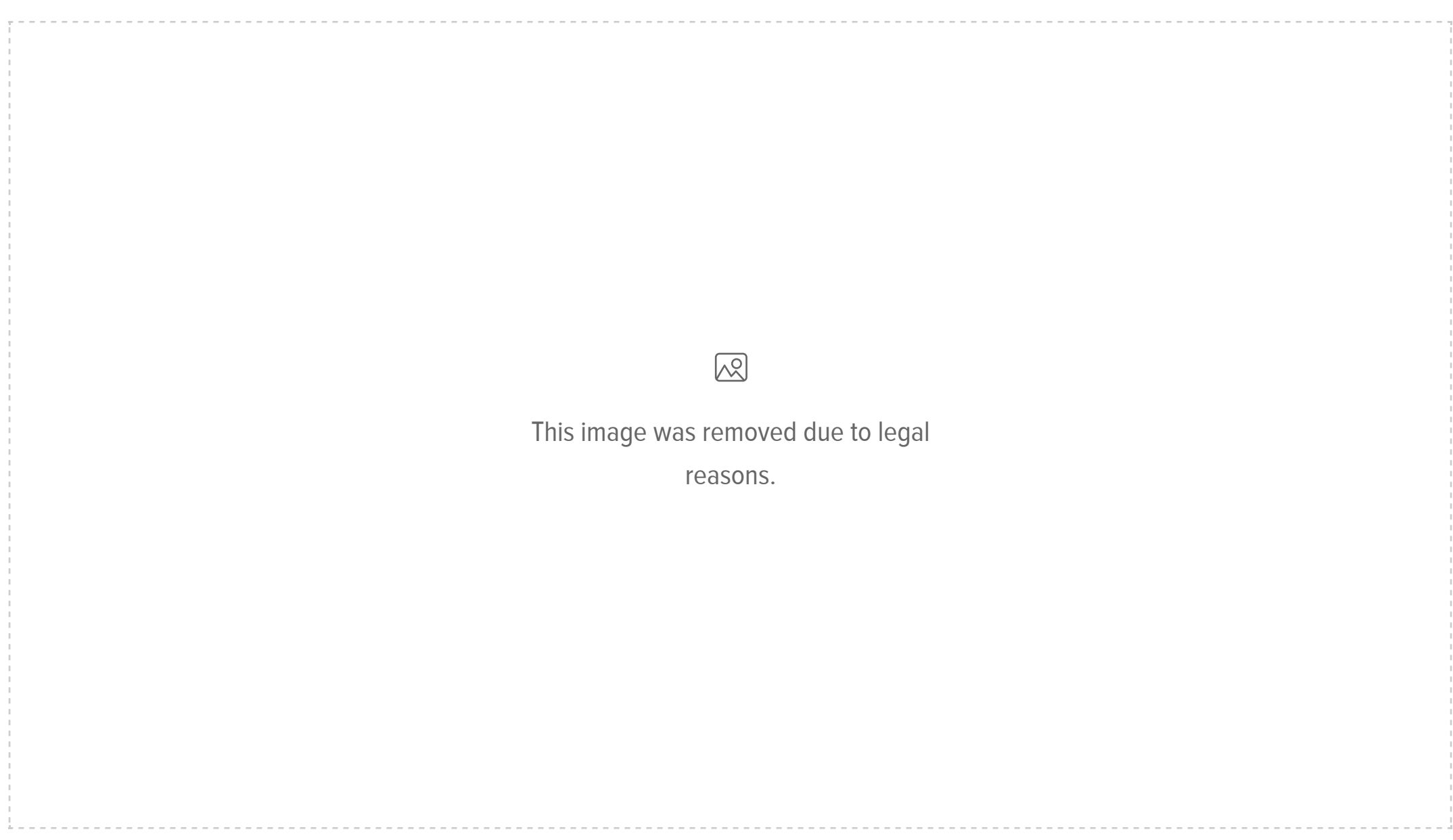




Take it from a Texan: Not every red state is a ‘lost cause,’ thanks

Amy Gentry
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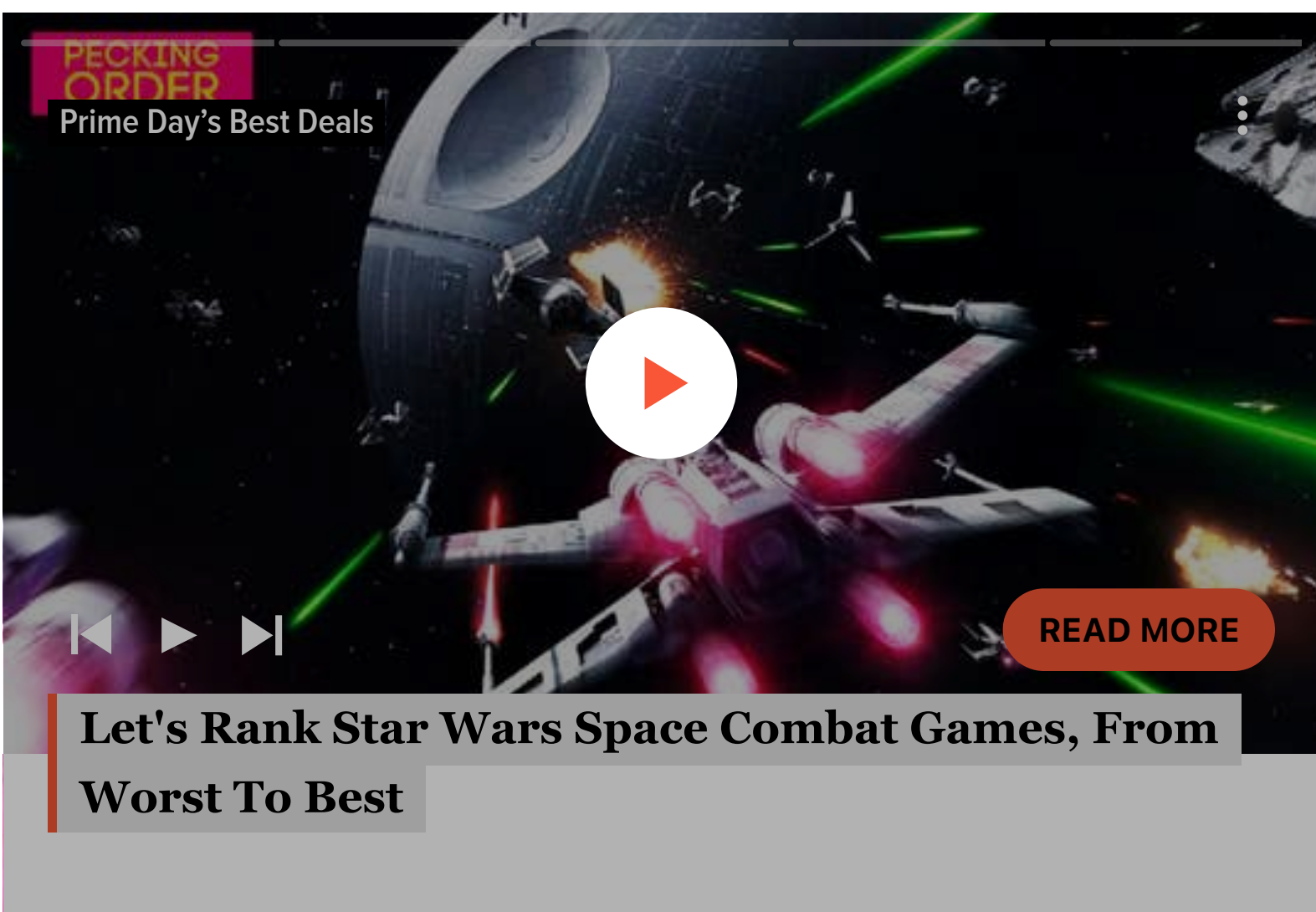
This morning, I can’t stop crying. With the [Supreme Court ruling on *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt*](#), the highest court in the land has [affirmed](#), in no uncertain terms, that Texas women matter. It also affirmed that even in a deep-red state, it’s worth fighting for basic rights like a woman’s right to choose. That no matter how conservative a state seems to be, it’s never a “lost cause.”

Almost exactly three years ago today, I stood among thousands of orange-shirted protesters in the Texas state capitol building, [showing my support](#) for Wendy Davis’s 11-hour filibuster against the anti-abortion omnibus bill HB2. It had been a tough week of uphill struggle. Earlier, we’d witnessed pro-HB2 testimony in our own state capitol comparing Texas women to cattle and crops. We’d heard about how abortion drives men to alcoholism. We’d watched as Republican state representatives guffawed amongst themselves during Texas Medical Association testimony against the bill and [played Candy Crush](#) during painful personal anecdotes about botched back-alley abortions. We’d listened in wide-eyed disbelief as Rep. Jodie Laubenberg, the figurehead for this bill supposedly written to protect women’s health, claimed a woman could be “[cleaned out, basically](#)” by a rape kit, thus rendering abortion for rape victims medically unnecessary.

Finally, that night, after standing with Wendy for 11 hours and erupting into cheers at midnight when she succeeded in her goal of filibustering this toxic bill to death, we witnessed in shock and horror as Republican state senators first raced to cover her win by tampering with the clocks, and then, when too many people were watching, simply called a second special session to ram the bill through.

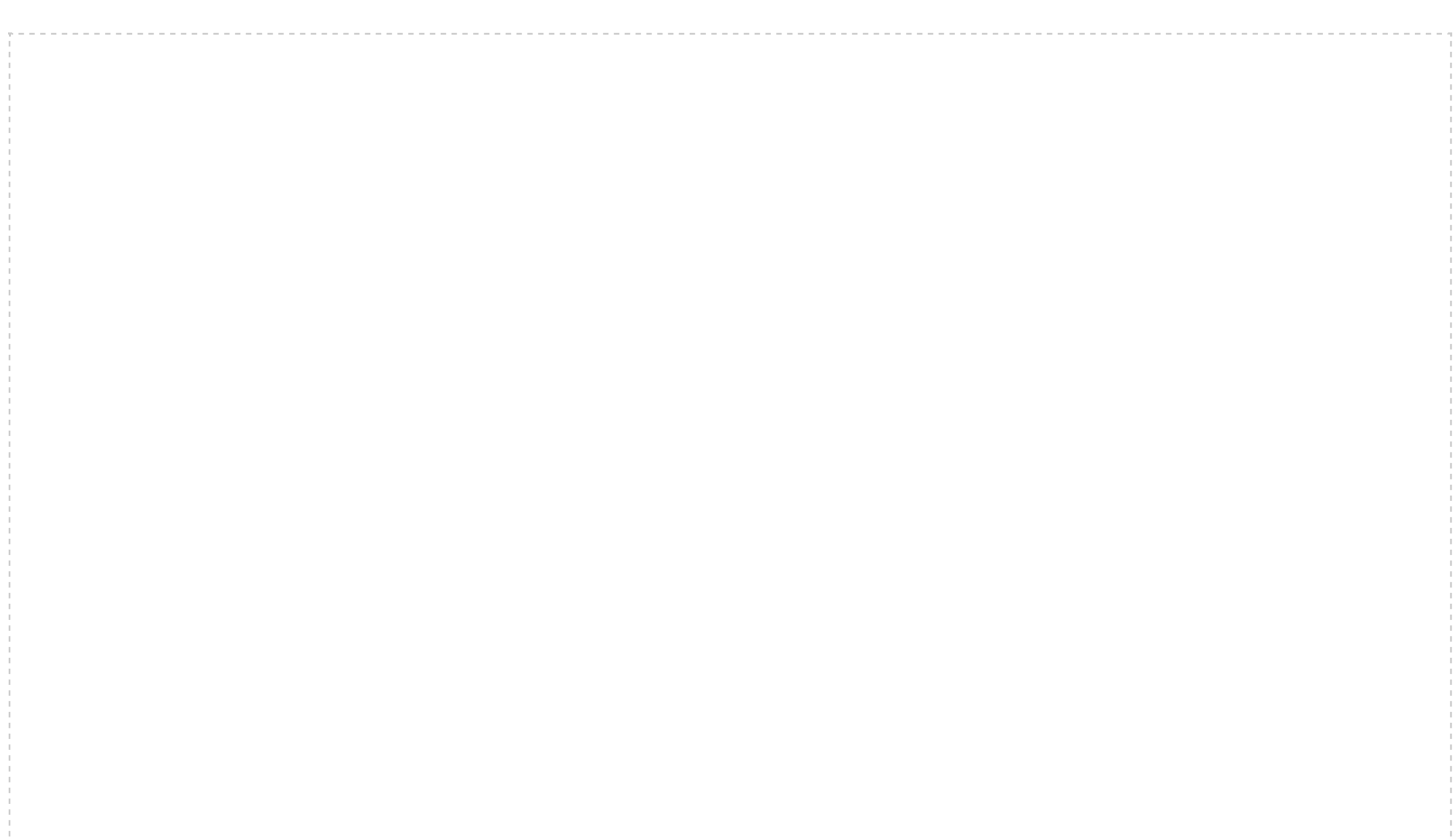
We could scream and we could fight and we could filibuster all we wanted. The clinics were still closing. If we won by the rules, they’d just change ‘em. Texas women heard loud and clear that we—our bodies, our voices, our live—didn’t matter. Last year, the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals broke our hearts by agreeing.

But you want to know what hurt the most during that painful time? [Seeing sentiments](#) from out-of-state liberals, mostly on Twitter, along the lines of “[What do you expect? You live in Texas.](#)” Some urged us to secede so they could be rid of the disgrace of association with our backward ways. Some suggested boycotts of our giant, unwieldy [flyover state](#). Some merely cracked hilarious jokes about inbreeding. Their comments swelled the chorus of voices already telling us that 13 million Texas women didn’t matter. By living in a Republican state the size of France where we had jobs and homes and mothers and fathers and friends and children, they were basically “asking for it.”



This is a refrain familiar to all of us living in red states. Every time something outrageous happens in Louisiana or Mississippi or one of those other states that don’t matter, we hear all about what a flaming garbage-heap that place is anyway, how you’d never catch *them* visiting or, god forbid, living there.

It’s textbook victim-blaming: first suggesting (erroneously) that every Texas woman has a choice in where she lives, and then suggesting (offensively) that if she chooses to live in Texas despite the option to leave, *she deserves whatever she gets*.



I understand the lure of this coping mechanism. I’ve seen it at work among those who deal with victims of sexual assault. When we see something terrible happening, we don’t want to believe it could possibly happen to us. Feeling angry and powerless and afraid, we settle for “It could never happen to me”—even when it means writing off an entire state full of women, men, and children, each with lives that matter just as much as our own—rather than face the fact that we don’t know what to do.

Well, I can tell you the first step: Stop with the “lost cause” bullshit. Stop calling my state a trashy hellhole—and if you are thinking the words “except for Austin!” right now, please fuck right off and examine your life. If you can’t see how classist, racist, sexist, and generally misanthropic that is, you have officially elected yourself the trashiest human in the room.

Don’t tell us we don’t matter. We matter. The Supreme Court says so.

What’s more, by standing up in numbers to face odds you’ve never had to face in your home state, we have made a difference in your lives, too. [Abortion restrictions were coming for you](#), too, Blue State Buddy—still are!—but if you never have to face them in the future, you will have a great many Texas women to thank. To name just a few: former gubernatorial candidate Wendy Davis of Fort Worth, Sen. Judith Zaffirini of Laredo, former Sen. Leticia Van de Putte of San Antonio, Rep. Dawna Dukes of Austin, Rep. Senfronia Thompson of Houston, born in the then-segregated community of Booth, Texas, whose population maxed out at 300 in 1948. Fly. Over. *That*.

And then there are the Texas journalists and signal-boosters who fought tooth and nail to make sure the world didn’t miss what was happening in our state, and the tireless volunteers for LiIith Fund, TEA Fund, Jane’s Due Process, Planned Parenthood of Texas, Whole Women’s Health, and all the other organizations fighting nonstop for reproductive rights in our state full of dumb, lazy, inbred bumpkins. I’m not shouting them out by name; they get enough death threats as it is.

And anyway, today the Supreme Court shouted us all out, backing up the Texas women who have been saying, tweeting, yelling, and screaming for three years (and longer) that we matter—our bodies, our voices, our lives. Thank you, SCOTUS. Thank you, Justice Ginsberg, Justice Sotomayor, Justice Kagan, Justice Breyer and Justice Kennedy. Thank you for telling us that Texas women matter, that *all* women matter. We will not forget. It will fuel us through the next fight.

Amy Gentry is a novelist and freelancer living in Austin, Texas. Her first novel, GOOD AS GONE, comes out July 26 from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Follow her on Twitter: @unlandedgentry.

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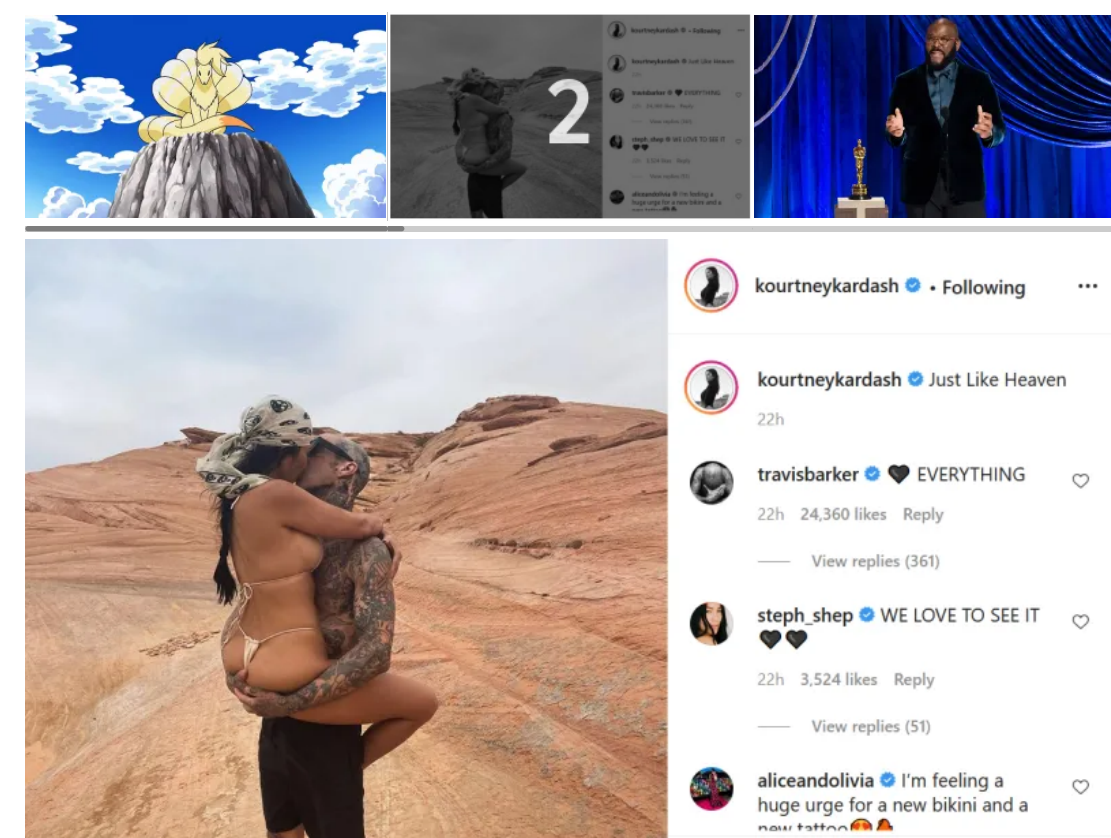
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