

Opinion: The harsh reality conservatives refuse to acknowledge

Article in CNN by Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, executive director and co-founder of MomsRising.org, a nonprofit national organization that supports policies to improve family economic security.

Moms, women and caregivers are beyond angry – we’re overwhelmed, out of time and ready to vote. The midterms are coming, and American women are registering to vote at record levels, and according to polling, many are motivated by the fight for abortion rights and the crushing blows of having to persist without a care infrastructure. Something has to give – because moms, women and families can’t give any more.

It can’t be overlooked that while regularly discounted, dismissed and underpaid – moms are the people who make things happen in their families, in their workplaces, and in their communities, including motivating friends, adult children, other family members and their community members to vote. And, to be clear, moms aren’t only a motivating force, they are also a voting force: A full 86% of women become moms in the US, making nearly 75 million registered voters mom voters.

Throughout our nation, moms are (and will be) voting to build and fortify structures of safety and care, instead of structures of harm and criminalization. This year, more than any other year, that means voting by issue, and crossing party lines if needed. Because every single one of our families – Democrat, Republican, Independent, Libertarian, Green Party or other – are losing out without the care infrastructure we all need.

Childcare is impossibly unaffordable and hard to find. We still don’t guarantee any paid family/medical leave despite most other nations in the world already having this critical policy. All this is happening even as maternal morbidity is rising, leading to our nation having one of the highest maternal mortality rates of all industrialized nations in the world, which is disproportionately hurting and killing Black, indigenous and other moms of color. And, a growing body of research demonstrates that disparities remain even when controlling for education, income and health.

The pandemic has laid bare the disaster of our country’s lack of a care infrastructure that has turned endemic. Caitlin, a MomsRising member in South Carolina, manages a fast food restaurant. She told us, “I didn’t have any paid leave when I gave birth. Shortly before I gave birth, I moved into a new apartment because my old one wasn’t fit to bring a baby home to. It was actually condemned shortly after I moved out. So when I gave birth and lost my income, I was just completely broke.”

The child poverty rate fell by nearly half in 2021 as enhanced child tax credit sent billions of dollars to families

Meanwhile, thanks to Census Bureau data released Tuesday, we know that the share of children in poverty dropped nearly by half in 2021 – primarily because of a one-year

enhancement of the Child Tax Credit that Democratic leadership in Congress fought to pass. Studies showed that the credit helped to significantly reduce hardship among families with kids, and at the same time the overall national budget deficit has been lowered, which is proof positive that policy change can significantly lift our economy and our families in helpful ways.

But Republicans – and moderate Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia – have so far blocked the extension of that enhanced credit beyond one year. Without this extension, experts say they don't expect the historic advances in child poverty reduction to last.

The status quo is not okay. Our nation has unfinished business for women, for families, for our economy – and the upcoming midterm elections are a key way to move that much-needed change forward.

Yes, the recently enacted Inflation Reduction Act had significant wins for climate, prescription drug pricing and health care coverage, paid for by a long-overdue move to finally make the wealthiest corporations pay their fair share – but the plight of moms and caregivers across America demands more action. Our primal screams cannot just become background music to our daily lives.

And here's the thing: Much of this unfinished business can be done through the upcoming midterm elections where each vote matters more than many think, particularly now. Traditionally only about 40% of eligible voters vote in midterm elections but in Kansas around 50% of voters (more voters than any primary in the state's history) turned out to cast ballots against a constitutional amendment that would have allowed lawmakers to end abortion protections. When voting surges, much-needed change happens.

Of course just blindly casting a ballot won't get us to solutions. In voting, we need to be clear on who has just been paying lip service to families and who has actually been working for them.

Winning just two more seats in the US Senate for Democrats, and holding the US House, could very easily lead to Congress finally passing those much-needed policies. These wins are within our sights and they are imperative, because we are in the midst of a national emergency.

Being a mom is a greater predictor of wage and hiring discrimination than gender, moms of color experience compounded wage discrimination due to structural racism; and studies show that care infrastructure policies help lower the wage gaps. But we simply don't have the care infrastructure that we, our businesses, and our economy need. This is pushing people out of much-needed jobs, disrupting supply chains, raising family costs and playing a role in wage discrimination – and while some states do have select care policies in place, analysis shows that the states with the most restrictive abortion care laws, those that are under the control of Republican leaders, also have the lowest levels of care policies in place. This isn't a coincidence.

Stacey, another MomsRising member in Massachusetts, told us, “I desperately need to work but I can’t. By the time you pay someone to watch your children, that’s your whole paycheck. We moved in with my partner’s parents to save money.” Like parents across the nation, Stacey is struggling with the fact that childcare now costs more than college and that her family, like most others, needs her wages to stay afloat. At the same time, childcare workers are some of the lowest paid workers in our nation – and absolutely need living wages in order to make ends meet.

This is an untenable situation.

If families really mattered to the majority of Republican leaders at the state and national levels, then instead of either playing a role in or standing by silently as their Republican colleagues work against what matters to families – by banning books, blocking family economic security policies from moving forward, punishing us for who we love, undermining our votes and imposing government interference on our bodies by banning abortion care – they would prioritize working on what matters most to families instead: Paid family medical leave, affordable childcare and home care, fair pay and smart economic policies that work.

But they aren’t.

So now is time for Democrats to double down on the smart strategy of convincing the country that things are going to be different after their votes are cast in the midterm elections, that the Democrats are going to continue to prioritize – and pass – the policies that matter to moms and families. And, when they do, candidates will be rewarded because moms are mobilized and activated and planning to vote to protect their interests, improve their lives and expand their rights this year.