

# ONE COUNTRY

## BUILDING A FUTURE FOR WORKING FAMILIES

It's not easy to raise a family in rural America. Couples can't be certain they'll have enough leave to welcome a new child to their family. Families with young children and aging parents face the stress of juggling multiple responsibilities while trying not to miss time at work. The cost of child care is burdensome, if child care is even available at all. Accessing healthcare often requires travel, particularly for specialists and advanced testing.

In the face of these challenges, many couples are choosing not to build their family. This is helping to drive disinvestment and decline in many rural areas and contributing to falling birth rates across America. For rural America to grow and thrive, we need to implement programs that support families, expand access to care, support caregivers, and improve outcomes.

The vision for rural America laid out in Project 2025 and the GOP Platform lay in stark contrast to what is really needed to help families and communities. Although the plans in these documents purport to support working families, they offer no solutions to the problems they face. The far right leaders in rural America have a record of denying families access to critical support programs, defunding nutrition assistance, failing to provide child care, removing women's ability to plan their families, and attacking health care systems.

One Country supports plans that improve rural life and help rural residents feel they can have fulfilling lives in their rural communities, without having to relocate to larger metro areas. These include supports for child care, ensuring access to reproductive health, improving maternal health outcomes, and providing families the time they need to care for each other.

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# Reproductive Health

Republicans claim they want to protect women and girls, yet have championed the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, continue proposing state-level reproductive restrictions, and push for a national abortion ban. In addition to banning abortion, Republicans have challenged the FDA's decades-long approval of abortion medication mifepristone, impeded couples' ability to access IVF treatment, and threatened access to even birth control. Today, 14 red states have full abortion bans in effect, while three more have six-week bans that prohibit abortion often before women even realize they're pregnant.

Everyone deserves the right to plan their own families. Republican politicians' overreach into women's health care decisions – inserting themselves into conversations between women and their doctors – is an assault on American freedom. And being denied an abortion limits women's education, workforce participation, and ability to earn and save – [causing economic harm](#) not just to them but also with consequences to their children's lives.

The majority of Americans ([seven in 10](#)) support access to abortion and are deeply opposed to nationwide and even state bans. Since the fall of *Roe*, [six states](#) – California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Vermont, and Ohio – have seen high turnout of voters even in off-cycle elections to protect abortion in ballot measures, either to push back against restrictions or enshrine the right to reproductive autonomy.

This November, as many as 13 states may have abortion-related constitutional measures on the ballot – another opportunity to keep politicians out of personal decisions and defend women's reproductive rights.

## What to Say

- Reversing decades of progress in improving women's health and well-being and eroding personal rights is a misguided priority that Republicans continue to double down on, in spite of most Americans' opinions on the matter.
- Voters in several states have registered their opposition to ballot measures limiting access to abortion, and it is time Republicans listened to our citizens and particularly to women.
- Despite the overwhelming rejection of extremist restrictions on reproductive care, Republicans continue to advance even more arcane limits on reproductive health and support a national abortion ban.

## Endorsements

### **Reproductive Freedom for All Act**

This bill establishes a general right of all persons to make certain reproductive decisions, including regarding pregnancy termination and contraception, without undue government interference.

### **Protecting Service Members and Military Families' Access to Reproductive Care Act of 2023**

This bill provides statutory authority for a Department of Defense (DOD) policy that provides for the granting of an administrative absence at the request of a member of the Armed Forces for purposes of receiving non-covered reproductive health care or to accompany a spouse or other dependent who receives non-covered reproductive health care.

### **Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act**

This bill sets out protections for and establishes programs to support health care providers who offer reproductive health care services that are lawful in the state where the services are provided. Reproductive health care services refer to abortion services; contraceptive services; in vitro fertilization; or other reproductive care, education, and counseling that is provided (1) at a health care site or via telehealth, and (2) in a medically accurate manner.

# Maternal Health

The U.S. is in a maternal mortality crisis. The maternal death rate is much higher than other high-income countries, driven largely by racial disparities: Black mothers are [three times](#) more likely to die during childbirth than their white counterparts.

Most maternal deaths are preventable – but in many rural regions, there isn't anyone to prevent them. Rural counties have been losing hospital-based obstetric services for years. From 2010 to 2022, [over 100 rural counties](#) have lost obstetric services. By 2022, [58.8% of rural counties](#) had no hospital-based obstetric services. Two in three maternity care deserts are in rural counties. One in four Native American babies and one in six Black babies are born in areas with [limited to no access](#) to maternity care.

Republicans' attacks on reproductive health have had negative repercussions on maternal health more broadly, exacerbating maternity care deserts. Many of the deep-red states with abortion bans are the same states whose leadership has refused to expand Medicaid, leaving nearly [800,000 women uninsured](#) and limited in their health care options.

Idaho lost [22% of its OB-GYNs](#) as doctors, in fear of being prosecuted for providing necessary health care, sought to practice in more health-friendly states. Additionally, since Texas enacted its near-total abortion ban in 2021, infant mortality has increased [over 12%](#).

The Biden administration recently proposed standards that would require billions of dollars in investments in maternal health and safety for hospitals to remain in Medicaid and Medicare programs.

## What to Say

- For too long, the health of women has been overlooked and the U.S. has troubling statistics for maternal health outcomes. Every woman deserves access to quality pre- and post-natal care, in addition to reliable delivery care, regardless of their zip code.
- Poor health outcomes for mothers means poor health outcomes for children – and this impacts our future generations. We must prioritize efforts to support families and ensure a strong start to life.

## Endorsements

### **Maternal Health for Veterans Act**

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to report annually through FY2028 on its activities relating to the coordination of maternity health care. The reports must also include (1) data on the maternal health outcomes of veterans who receive medical care or services from the VA or a non-VA provider that is authorized to provide care or services under VA programs, and (2) VA recommendations to improve the maternal health outcomes of veterans.

### **Maternal and Child Health Stillbirth Prevention Act**

This bill expands the scope of the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant to include research and activities to prevent stillbirths.

### **Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act**

This bill directs multi-agency efforts to improve maternal health with a particular focus on racial and ethnic minority groups, veterans, and other vulnerable populations.

# □ Paid Family Leave

The U.S. is one of [one of only seven countries](#) in the world without a guarantee of paid family and medical leave (PFML). Without federal programs or legislation, hardworking Americans are forced to take unpaid medical leave or outright leave the workforce to recover from their own illnesses or care for families.

The lack of PFML has a [disproportionate](#) impact on workers in rural regions. Rural workers typically are employed by smaller firms that offer limited or no benefits, live significantly far from medical care facilities and require more time to attend appointments, and are part of communities with a population significantly older than the rest of the country who need greater care.

PFML is a pro-worker, pro-family policy. PFML enables workers to continue receiving compensation when they need to take extended time off to bond with a new child, recover from their own serious illness, or care for a loved one. While Republican opposition in Congress has prevented bipartisan efforts to establish a national PFML program, states throughout the country have taken the matters into their own hands.

## What to Say

- Paid family and medical leave enables our workforce to care for their families, whether that is a new child, a parent, or partner. This not only makes sense economically for American households, it improves health outcomes for those we hold near and dear.
- Paid family and medical leave allows both parents to care for newborns or newly adopted children. This [contributes](#) to healthy development, improves maternal health, and enhances economic security.
- Paid family and medical leave allows workers to care for themselves and loved ones when sick, injured, experiencing trauma, or seeking routine care. The reduction in financial stress and insecurity increases worker retention, lowers costs for employers, and creates more financial stability for families.

## Endorsements

### **Paid Family and Medical Leave Tax Credit Extension and Enhancement Act**

This bill modifies the employer tax credit for paid family and medical leave. Specifically, the bill (1) makes such credit permanent, (2) allows the credit in states or localities that either mandate or do not mandate paid family and medical leave, (3) allows employers to claim the credit for a portion of their paid family leave insurance premiums, (4) reduces the minimum employment period eligibility requirement, and (5) requires the Small Business Administration and the Internal Revenue Service to conduct targeted outreach to employers and other relevant parties regarding the availability and requirements of the credit.

### **FAMILY Act**

This bill would create a comprehensive Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program administered under the Social Security Administration as a new social benefit program.

### **Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act**

This bill provides expands the current benefit federal employees receive to include reasons beyond parental leave to ensure all family medical circumstances are eligible for up to 12 weeks of paid leave.

# Child Care

Early childhood education and care services help children develop [social, emotional, and cognitive skills](#) before entering school, and help parents, especially mothers, stay in the workforce and provide for their families.

However, nearly [60%](#) of families in rural areas live in a child care desert, forcing one parent – disproportionately women – to leave their job to care for their kids. This departure from the workforce will cost the U.S. economy up to [\\$50 billion](#) over the next 10 years.

Where it is available, child care is still often expensive. [80% of Kansans](#) struggle to afford child care. Only 46% of children in the state receive child care services. 85,000 more children are unserved. With such a glaring undersupply of child care, it's no surprise that Kansans want [more state investment in programs](#): 78% of Kansans favored expansion of a child care tax credit – and 73% are against policies that loosen regulations guaranteeing providers' qualifications in order to address the shortage, which [passed in Utah](#), concerning parents and providers.

Federal child care investments dropped sharply after September 30, 2023, when pandemic-era funding ended. While many companies are responding to increased demands by [offering child care benefits](#), smaller firms in rural areas can't afford to do the same for working parents.

Much like paid family leave, Republicans have blocked passage of a child tax credit extension. Without policies that seek to eliminate rural child care deserts, many rural families – children and families alike – will get [left behind](#).

## What to Say

- Child care programs reduce worker absenteeism by 30% and worker turnover by over 60% for employers.
- Child care programs reduce both financial and emotional stress on working families.
- Child care programs help children learn important social skills and provide educational advantages for students as they begin school.



## Endorsements

### **Right Start Child Care and Education Act of 2024**

This bill increases or allows new child care tax credits and increases the tax exclusion for employer-provided dependent care assistance. Specifically, the bill doubles the rate and the maximum allowable amount of the employer-provided child care credit. It also allows an additional increase for certain small businesses. The bill allows a new three-year tax credit for individuals who hold child care-related educational degrees and who work in licensed child care facilities. The bill increases the tax exclusion for employer-provided dependent care assistance.

### **WFCA Act of 2023**

This bill includes certain additional expenses in a dependent care flexible spending arrangement (FSA), specifically qualified sports, tutoring, and music or art expenses. It also increases the eligibility age for dependent care benefits to 15, allows a carry forward of unused benefits to the next plan year, and increases to \$15,000 the maximum amount of dependent care benefits excludible from employee gross income.

### **Expanding Childcare in Rural America Act of 2023**

This bill would empower the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out an initiative to develop, expand, and improve rural child care.