NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER ACTION FUND

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Unpacking the Midterms: Health Care and Reproductive Freedom

The 2026 midterm elections were a clear rebuke of the mismanagement of the Trump administration. 2026's historic coalition—powered by Black women, Latinas, LGBTQIA+ voters, and young voters—delivered transformative victories to candidates who embraced gender and racial justice as part of their proactive message. Our elected leaders have a clear mandate to deliver real change for voters, including on health care and reproductive rights issues. Moving forward, elected leaders must restore health care access, coverage, and affordability, and protect reproductive freedom.

Restore and Improve Access to Low-Cost, Quality Health Care

Democrats won using a clear and unified message on health care: Democrats improve access to health care; Republicans take it away. Many candidates made clear that they believed fundamental changes were needed to expand access to care, including supporting Medicare for All and a public option. Elected officials have a mandate from voters to not only restore and improve access to low-cost, quality health care, but reenvision a health care system that works for us all.

Concerns about health care affordability drove voters to the polls. According to polling conducted by the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) before, during, and immediately after the midterms, 70% of voters said they were somewhat or very worried about their ability to afford health care. One-quarter of voters said health care was one of the three most important issues in their decision to vote.

A commitment to improving and expanding access to health care won big. Health care was a defining issue in this year's election. In races across the country, Democrats held firm to their consistent message that everyone should have access to quality, low-cost health care. This message resonated in urban and rural areas, in northern states and southern states.

- U.S. Senator-elect Dr. Abdul El-Sayed (MI) made Medicare for All a central priority of his campaign, focusing on providing coverage without premiums, copays, or deductibles.
- U.S. Senator-elect Dr. Annie Andrews (SC) prioritized expanding access to Medicaid, lowering pharmaceutical costs, preventing private equity from owning hospitals, and protecting rural hospitals.
- U.S. Senators-elect Troy Jackson (ME) and Peggy Flanagan (MN) campaigned on Medicare for All to expand access to care.
- U.S. Senator-elect Scott Colom (MS) campaigned on health care access and affordability.

Democrats across the country also focused their campaigns on the votes of Republican members of Congress to take health care away from people across the country by decimating Medicaid and allowing Affordable Care Act premiums to spike, all to give tax breaks to the ultra-wealthy and unprecedented amounts of money to Trump's harmful deportation agenda.

- For example, Brian Poindexter (OH-7) campaigned on health care: "We should undo the huge health care funding cuts that have led to double-digit premium increases. My opponent supported the biggest health care cut in American history and allowed the Affordable Care Act tax credits to expire, which is one reason we have seen huge premium increases in Ohio. I support restoring that funding so prices come down. By taking pressure off the system, this will bring down prices for everyone – no matter how you get your insurance."

- Congressman-elect Randy Villegas (CA-22) ran a campaign that held his Republican opponent accountable for casting a key vote for OBBBA: "There's nothing moderate about ripping health insurance from 70,000 of his constituents." He defeated Republican incumbent David Valadao by a strong margin in an upset.

Voters expect Democrats to reverse Republican policies that are more concerned with the pockets of the wealthy, and instead address the health care cost concerns of everyday people.

Protect Reproductive Freedom

The overwhelming Democratic party and state ballot measure wins demonstrate that the American people support access to abortion, birth control, and other reproductive health care. Elected officials must deliver on their promise to protect our fundamental right to reproductive freedom.

Reproductive freedom was a *deciding factor for voters*. According to the NWLC midterm polling, 66% of voters indicated that abortion rights and access was very (41%) or somewhat (25%) important in their decision to vote. Women felt even more strongly: 71% of women said it was very or somewhat important.

For some, reproductive freedom drove their vote: overall, 10% of all voters (14% of women) identified abortion, contraception, and reproductive rights as one of the three most important issues in their decision to vote.

A commitment to abortion rights is a baseline requirement for Democratic candidates. Every Democratic candidate who was on the ballot in U.S. House and Senate races (with a single exception) publicly supports abortion rights, and Democratic candidates who leaned into their support for abortion rights reaped the benefits. For example:

- In Maine, U.S. Senator-elect Troy Jackson campaigned on Susan Collins's devastating vote to confirm Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh, who became a key vote in the decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. In one ad, Jackson said, "Let's put this idea that Susan Collins is pro-choice completely behind us."

- In Wisconsin's governor race, Governor-elect David Crowley announced that he would put forward a constitutional amendment to enshrine abortion rights in the state: "As governor, I will veto any ban, protect birth control, and fight to put your freedom in the state constitution where no politician, court, or billionaire can take it away. Bottom line: I will never stop fighting to defend a woman's right to choose and make their own reproductive health care decisions."

- In Michigan, U.S. Senator-elect Abdul El-Sayed spoke as a doctor about his views supporting reproductive freedom: "As a doctor and former public health official, I believe deeply that decisions about your body and your health belong to you—not politicians. . . ."

- In Georgia, Keisha Lance Bottoms won the governor's race after campaigning on overturning the Georgia abortion ban.

- In Ohio, Governor-elect Amy Acton made her support for reproductive freedom clear in her campaign, saying she "firmly believes that every Ohioan deserves the right to make their own reproductive health care decisions, free from government interference."

- In Iowa, Governor-elect Rob Sand won his race after running on the public health crisis resulting from the state's 6-week abortion ban.

Voters saw through attempts by candidates to run away from their anti-abortion views and they soundly rejected anti-abortion candidates. Knowing how popular reproductive freedom is with voters, Republican candidates dodged the issue or tried to run away from their anti-abortion views. They scrubbed their websites and backtracked on their stances. Voters saw through those disingenuous attempts, and rejected anti-abortion candidates again and again.

- Despite his extreme anti-abortion voting record in both the Pennsylvania Legislature and Congress, Ryan MacKenzie tried to hide his anti-abortion history from voters by removing language from his endorsement by a state anti-abortion organization. He lost to Democrat Bob Brooks for U.S. House (PA-7).

- U.S. Representative Scott Perry (PA-10), who lost his House seat to Janelle Stelson, dodged questions about his support for a bill that would ban abortion nationwide.

- In the Arizona governor race, Republican U.S. Representative Andy Biggs (AZ-05) scrubbed his campaign website of any mention of abortion, despite his anti-abortion record. Voters re-elected sitting Governor Katie Hobbs (D).

- Texas voters rejected both U.S. Senate candidate Ken Paxton, whose brand is anti-abortion zealotry, and Governor Greg Abbott, who has been known for his anti-abortion extremism, including signing multiple abortion bans, including a near-total ban on abortion and a medication abortion ban.

- Voters rejected the Republican candidate for Iowa governor, Zach Lahn, who is a proud anti-abortion extremist and is even banned from a local fertility clinic for trying to save "unborn lives."

- In the Michigan Senate race, Mike Rogers tried to avoid talking about abortion and distance himself from his anti-abortion record, and then backpedaled on comments he made saying he would support a national abortion ban.

Candidates who spoke authentically and affirmatively about abortion connected with voters. This election demonstrated clearly that – as NWLC research has shown – when elected officials speak positively and authentically about abortion from a place of values, voters feel more favorable toward the speaker and more favorable about the issue.

- In Tennessee, Democrat Allie Phillips won her race for state House district 75. She decided to run for office after being denied an abortion and ultimately having to leave the state for care; her personal story and the abortion crisis was a central issue of her campaign.

- In her campaign for Michigan governor, Jocelyn Benson shared her miscarriage story and affirmed the importance of ensuring that abortion rights are not only protected but meaningfully accessible.

- In Kansas, which went 57% to Trump in 2024, Adam Hamilton—an ordained minister—won the U.S. Senate race after a campaign in which he publicly supported abortion rights and demonstrated that faith and abortion rights can go hand-in-hand.

- In Texas, James Talarico - a Presbyterian seminarian - continued to call out his opponent's anti-abortion extremism and spoke about his Christian faith. From his campaign website: "Politicians like John Cornyn and Ken Paxton claim to stand for freedom, family, and faith. But you can't stand for freedom and control what we say, what we read, and what we do with our own bodies."

- In Iowa, State Senator, U.S. Representative-elect (IA-03), and Lutheran Minister Sarah Trone Garriott, before speaking about her pro-abortion stance, started her remarks with religion: "My faith calls me to love my neighbor... It's my life's calling... And being in the State Senate and running for Congress, that's an extension of that calling."

Voters protected abortion in their states. Voters considering state ballot measures voted for abortion rights and access and *against* measures that would restrict abortion, in strong numbers.

- In deep red Missouri, voters resoundingly rejected a ballot measure that would have overturned protections for abortion rights that they had just approved 2 years earlier. In 2024, 51.6% of voters voted to amend the Missouri constitution to provide a right to abortion and reproductive health care. The margin increased this year, with 55.4% of voters voting to maintain that right.

- In Nevada, nearly two-thirds of voters approved an initiative that enshrined the right to abortion in the state constitution. Because Nevada's initiative process requires votes in two consecutive elections, they did so in both the 2024 and the 2026 elections.

- In Virginia, 62.6% of voters approved a ballot measure to protect the right to reproductive freedom in the state constitution.

The energy from voters around health care and reproductive freedom issues was palpable, and the mandate given to elected officials is clear.

Voters want to see health care coverage and access become more affordable and accessible, and they want to see bold visions to protect abortion and other reproductive health care. In NWLC's midterm polling, an overwhelming percentage of respondents – 79% of respondents strongly (59%) or somewhat support (20%) ensuring people across the country have access to health care, regardless of ability to pay – and 74% believe the government is responsible for making health care more affordable. The same survey found that 62% of survey respondents strongly (48%) or somewhat support (14%) protecting abortion rights and access nationwide.

Americans voted for change and will be looking to their newly-elected officials to deliver on their promises from the campaign trail: expand health care and protect reproductive freedom so that all people, including women and families, can live safe and healthy lives.