

Families benefit when women take office

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GUESTVIEW

When university researchers Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox surveyed college-educated women in May 2017, they found that the overall gender gap in political ambition was not significantly different from what it was 15 years ago.

However, there are more women in state government throughout the country. From 1992 to 2014 the percentage of women in legislative roles increased from 11 percent to 18.3 percent. This increase in women's representation may have an important impact on family-oriented social policies. Research suggests that women legislators are more likely than men to guide political debates and policy recommendations toward such issues as domestic vio-

lence, child care, education, and economic independence.

Social policies are the decisions that result in the design and implementation of a course of action. It is often the case that the needs of a particular group may receive serious consideration only when the need becomes a pressing social problem or when the group takes concerted action. For example, the Violence against Women Act of 1994 resulted from long-term lobbying by feminist groups.

There is evidence that gender gaps in the social policy preferences and priorities of the electorate are reflected in those of elected officials. The majority of elected officials are white men. This has an impact when women perform most of the society's unpaid care work and where family leave is unpaid and child care is undervalued.

These are all issues that affect the health, vibrancy, and stability of families.

Men and women experience the world differently. Considering that women are more susceptible to old-age poverty, lower wages, interrupted work histories, less capital, longer lives, caregiver responsibilities, and less access to employer pension plans, any change in social policy regarding welfare, Social Security, health care, and labor laws will have an impact on them.

Having more women in legislative and other government leadership roles would help direct more focus on the circumstances affecting the well-being of families. The policy records of women legislators show that both Republican and Democratic women have focused on social policy issues of the greatest concern to women and fam-

ilies. This suggests that the policy opinions of women are informed by their experiences and personal responsibilities along with the needs of their constituents.

Playwright Eugene Ionesco wrote, "Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together." I hope that our dreams for a better future for our families will result in supporting more women in state and national government leadership roles to act on issues which will ultimately benefit all of us.

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