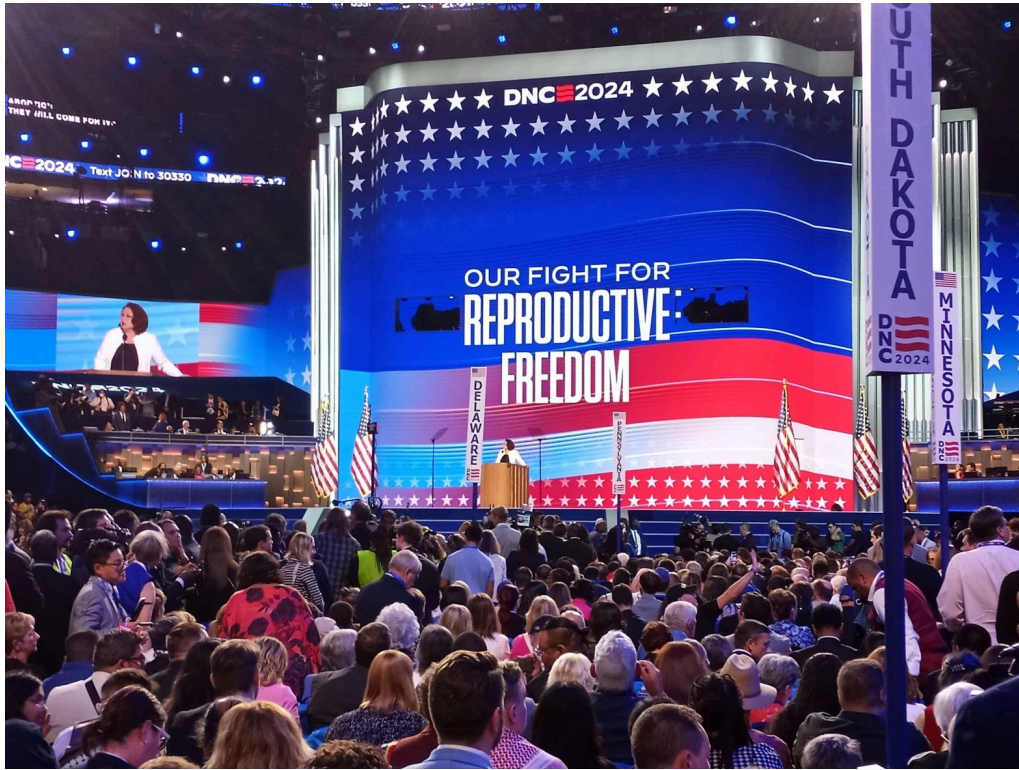


Health Care Takes Center Stage at Democratic National Convention

August 27, 2024 **by Dan McCue**



Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., shares her personal story regarding infertility and reproductive health care at the Democratic National Convention. (Photo by Dan McCue)

CHICAGO — While the main purpose of last week's Democratic National Convention was to reintroduce America to Vice President Kamala Harris as the party's presidential nominee, health care was never far from center stage.

In fact, over the course of the convention's four nights, speaker after speaker — a lineup that included former President Barack Obama, former First Lady Michelle Obama, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and others — spoke at length about health care, prescription drug prices, in vitro fertilization and reproductive health.

This was in marked contrast to the Republican National Convention, held in Milwaukee in July, where the focus of prime-time speeches was the economy, urban crime, immigration and border control.

In her speech accepting the nomination last Thursday night, Harris observed that “in many ways” her Republican opponent, former President Donald Trump, “is an unserious man.”

“But the consequences ... of putting Donald Trump back in the White House are extremely serious,” she said.

With that, she pivoted from a lengthy and detailed recounting of her biography and dove directly into health care.

“We are not going back to when Donald Trump tried to cut Social Security and Medicare,” Harris said. “We are not going back to when he tried to get rid of the Affordable Care Act, when insurance companies could deny people with pre-existing conditions.

“We are not going to let him end programs like Head Start that provide preschool and child care for our children. America, we are not going back,” she added.

Harris then moved on to reproductive rights, an issue that’s proven to be a winner for Democrats in every election held since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* two years ago, and a theme that was a common thread from one night to the next during the convention.

In Harris’ view “America cannot truly be prosperous unless Americans are fully able to make their own decisions about their own lives, especially on matters of heart and home.”

“Tonight, in America, too many women are not able to make those decisions,” the Democratic nominee said. “And let’s be clear about how we got here: Donald Trump handpicked members of the U.S. Supreme Court to take away reproductive freedom. And now, he brags about it.

“In his words, ‘I did it, and I’m proud to have done it,’” she continued.

Harris went on to say that in the two years since the High Court handed down its decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, she’s traveled the country, heard the stories, firsthand, of women, husbands and fathers, who have been adversely impacted by the ruling.

“Stories of women miscarrying in a parking lot, developing sepsis, losing the ability to ever again have children, all because doctors are afraid they may go to jail for caring for their patients. Couples just trying to grow their family, cut off in the middle of IVF treatments,” she said. “Children who have survived sexual assault, potentially being forced to carry a pregnancy to term. This is what’s happening in our country because of Donald Trump.

“And understand, he is not done. As a part of his agenda, he and his allies would limit access to birth control, ban medication abortion and enact a nationwide abortion ban, with or without Congress,” Harris continued.

“And get this. Get this. He plans to create a national anti-abortion coordinator, and force states to report on women’s miscarriages and abortions. Simply put, they are out of their minds. And one must ask — one must ask, why exactly is it that they don’t trust women? Well, we trust women. We trust women.

“And when Congress passes a bill to restore reproductive freedom, as president of the United States, I will proudly sign it into law,” Harris said.

On Wednesday, her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, made many of the same points while pointing to his own record on protecting abortion rights.

He did so, he said, “because in Minnesota we respect our neighbors and the personal choices they make.

“And even if we wouldn’t make those same choices for ourselves, we’ve got a golden rule: Mind your own damn business,” he said.

“Here’s the thing,” said Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, “Americans don’t want to be forced to drive 100 miles to deliver a baby because draconian abortion laws shut down the maternity ward. Americans want the hope of giving birth through IVF not the fear it might be taken away.”

Trump responded to many of Harris’ assertions in real time, on his Truth Social social media platform.

In his longest post, he began by repeating an assertion he’s made in the past, “Everybody, Democrats, Republicans, Liberals, and Conservatives, wanted *Roe v. Wade* terminated, and brought back to the States.

“Like Ronald Reagan and myself, most believe in exceptions. Now the people are voting, which is the way it was supposed to be,” the former president continued. “I do not limit access to birth control or I.V.F – THAT IS A LIE, these are all false stories that she’s making up, that I’ve never even heard of. It’s just words coming out of her mouth.

“I trust women, also, and I will keep women safe,” he added, pulling the immigration issue into the conversation.

“Her open border is destroying the lives of women,” he said.

Trump, in fact, has said he would not sign a national abortion ban and that he believes the issue should be left to individual states.

Since the *Dobbs* decision, 22 states have banned abortion or restricted the procedure to earlier in a pregnancy than had been set by *Roe v. Wade*.

In 14 of these states, abortion is banned in almost all circumstances, with 10 not making an exception for rape or incest.

Trump also claimed that Harris was lying about his planning to limit access to some contraceptive pills and ending taxpayer funding of Planned Parenthood, statements that appeared to be a reference to Project 2025, a compendium of policies published by the Heritage Foundation that conservatives would like to see him implement.

On Truth Social last Thursday night, Trump tried once again to distance himself from the document, which he said, “I have absolutely nothing to do with.”

This statement falls into something of a gray area. While Trump may not have had a direct hand in writing the conservative playbook, an investigation by CNN found that at least 140 former Trump administration officials have been involved in the project.

Perhaps the most electrifying comments of all on reproductive rights — at least as far as the convention delegates were concerned — were those made by Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill,

who lost her right leg near the hip and her left leg below the knee due to injuries sustained when the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter she was copiloting was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade fired by Iraqi insurgents in 2004.

“I went to war to protect America’s rights and freedoms, so I take it personally when a five time draft dodging coward like Donald Trump tries to take away my rights and freedoms,” she said.

She noted that her daughters, Abigail and Maile, “would never have been born without access to reproductive care.”

“That’s because after 10 years of struggling with infertility, I was only able to have them through the miracle of IVF,” she said.

“But now Trump’s anti-woman crusade has put other Americans’ right to have their own families at risk, because if they win, Republicans will not stop at banning abortion. They will come for IVF next. They will prosecute doctors. They will shame and spy on women. And if you think that’s far fetched, just look up what happened in Alabama last year.”

She was referring to the Alabama Supreme Court’s decision last year that frozen embryos have the same rights as children, a ruling that promised to dramatically curtail the use of IVF in the state.

“My struggle with infertility was more painful than any wound I earned on the battlefield,” Duckworth said. “How dare a convicted felon like Donald Trump treat women seeking health care like they’re the ones breaking the law. How dare [Republican vice presidential nominee] JD Vance criticize childless women on cable news then then vote against legislation that would have actually helped Americans to start families?”

“How dare the GOP endanger the dreams of countless veterans whose combat wounds prevent them from having kids without IVF, punishing our heroes for their willingness to serve. It’s simple. Every American deserves the right to be called mommy or daddy without being treated like a criminal,” she said.

Former President Barack Obama, for whom the passage of the Affordable Care Act was a signature accomplishment, also spoke of health care, noting that as vice president Harris “helped take on the drug companies to cap the cost of insulin, lower the cost of health care and give families with kids a tax cut.

“She’s running for president with real plans to lower costs even more, protect Medicare and Social Security, and sign a law to guarantee every woman’s right to make their own health care decisions,” he said.

Later, Obama added, “we should all be proud of the enormous progress we’ve made through the Affordable Care Act — providing millions of people access to affordable coverage and protecting millions more from unscrupulous insurance practices.

“But Kamala knows we can’t stop there, which is why she’ll keep working to limit out-of-pocket costs,” he said.

Currently, Affordable Care Act enrollment stands at just over 21 million people, **according** to KFF, formerly The Kaiser Family Foundation, a San Francisco-based nonprofit in the health care space.

The record enrollment is nearly double the 11 million who were enrolled in 2020, the nonprofit said.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham also addressed the broader issue of healthcare, accusing Trump and Vance of wanting to “dismantle our health care system, repeal the

Affordable Care Act, and eliminate protections for preexisting conditions.”

“Either these guys don’t get it, or they don’t care,” Grisham said.

“Kamala Harris gets it and she cares,” she continued. “As attorney general she took on drug companies that jacked up prices and hospitals that overcharged patients. And when Republicans tried to kill the Affordable Care Act, she stood up in the Senate — voting not just ‘no,’ but ‘hell no.’

“And Kamala Harris hasn’t just stopped Republicans from making our healthcare system worse. She fights to make it better. I spent 20 years working to get Medicare the ability to negotiate lower drug prices. As vice president, Kamala Harris delivered,” Grisham said.

Sanders spoke of health care as being a basic right for all Americans, a right he said, that is still out of reach for too many across the country.

“We need to join the rest of the industrialized world and guarantee health care to all as a human right, not a privilege,” he said.

He then went on to decry high drug prices, which are often in his crosshairs as chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

“We need to take on Big Pharma and cut our prescription drug costs in half so that we no longer pay more than other countries. Joe and Kamala made sure no senior pays over \$35 a month for insulin. We need to make that a reality for every American,” Sanders said.

Walz agreed, promising delegates and viewers at home that “If you’re getting squeezed by prescription drug prices, Kamala Harris is going to take on Big Pharma.”

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