

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Vice President

Op-ed by Vice President Biden: An Issue Beyond Debate: Congress Should Act Now to Protect Women

The full text of the op-ed by Vice President Joe Biden is printed below. The piece, published online today by McClatchy Newspapers and in hard copies tomorrow, can be read [HERE](#).

An Issue Beyond Debate: Congress Should Act Now to Protect Women By Vice President Biden

I've spent a lot of years in Washington, and in the past, I had always found that even when partisanship was at its worst, there were still certain issues that rose above the normal course of politics. These days, unfortunately, even that precept is being challenged.

Protecting victims of domestic violence, an issue that has always enjoyed bipartisan support and should be well beyond debate, has become the center of one in Congress. And women across the nation are now at risk.

Let me explain what's happening:

In 1994, I wrote the Violence Against Women Act, which established several critical new protections: first, it provides law enforcement with new tools to prosecute domestic violence crimes and put offenders behind bars. Second, it helps victims find safe places to stay so they don't have to choose between living on the streets or living with someone who is hurting them. And third, it gives women a crisis hotline they can call when they need immediate help.

We've made a lot of progress as a nation since the act first became law. Annual rates of domestic violence have dropped by more than 60 percent. The national hotline has answered more than 2 million crisis calls, directing victims to life-saving assistance.

But make no mistake; this violence still happens every day.

We need to continue these programs and we need to add improvements. For example, we now know that new screening tools can help law enforcement and the courts reduce domestic violence homicide rates, helping them to step in before abuse becomes murder. Such tools might have saved Sarah Rosio, a 24-year-old Wisconsin woman who was strangled to death by

her boyfriend after having been abused many times before her death. Two weeks before her death, Sarah was denied a protective order against her abuser. Sarah is gone now, tragically, but we can help others avoid her terrible fate.

To do so, Congress must make the protections in the Violence Against Women Act available to every person in this country who may ever need them. This simply cannot be up for debate in a civilized society like ours.

Every few years, the Violence Against Women Act needs to be reauthorized. And in the past, Congress has worked cooperatively to reauthorize, improve, and expand the reach of the law. Up until now.

Earlier this year, the Senate passed the bill, and they did it with both Democratic and Republican support. Unfortunately, the House did not follow this broadly bipartisan path; Republicans there passed a much weaker version of the bill. While the House bill contains some of the important provisions of the Senate bill, it lacks key improvements - like protecting more victims and requiring dating violence and sexual assault prevention programs on campus - and, in some cases, it actually rolls back current protections for victims of domestic violence.

Support for the Violence Against Women Act runs broad and deep. It includes law enforcement, prosecutors, victims' advocates, faith groups, and Democrats and Republicans alike. So this should be easy - and beyond politics. Instead, the clock is now running out for the more than 23,000 women who call our national domestic abuse hotline every month and for all women who may one day be the victims of violence.

Congress should pass the bipartisan version approved by the U.S. Senate.

I know there are fundamental differences between Democrats and Republicans, and I don't expect those to disappear. But on this issue of basic decency, where there remains so much agreement between us, Republicans and Democrats ought to leave politics at the water's edge. Because women everywhere are counting on us, and they can't wait any longer.

Mr. Biden is Vice President of the United States.

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