

# HOUSTON CHRONICLE

## [Opinion: When Abbott, Patrick and Paxton attack Texas women, they attack Texas' future](#)

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As Texas natives from different ideological perspectives who have dedicated our careers to public health, public service and the fight for democracy, we have witnessed firsthand the collective power and strength of Texas women. But the concerted attacks that Gov. Greg Abbott, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, and Attorney General Ken Paxton are waging against the well-being of Texas women are not only contradictory to Texas values but continue to be devastating and deadly — to women, yes, but also to nearly all people, families and communities throughout the entire state.

Abbott, Patrick, and Paxton have supported the state's enforcement of a 1925 law banning abortion, which has been denounced by the nation's leading medical experts as harmful to women's health. Last week, Paxton threatened doctors and nurses throughout the state with criminal and civil penalties if they dared care for women in times of need. Paxton also said he wants to prosecute companies that help employees access care. So much for free enterprise and small government.

This behavior is not surprising. This is a leadership team that, in the initial days of the COVID-19 pandemic, sought to effectively ban abortion in Texas for the first time since 1973. The action forced women to leave the state to seek care amid a deadly global health crisis. Then, in September when Senate Bill 8 went into effect, reports of women having to travel outside the state and endanger their lives and safety to get care became all too common. A state-funded

program that supports crisis pregnancy centers has misled women in need of counseling and care.

Abbott, Patrick and Paxton have not just deprived millions of Texas women of the right to control their reproductive lives, they refused to take even the most basic steps to provide for the health of women and children. Tragically, Texas is the uninsured capital of the United States. Before the pandemic, it was estimated that one in five Texans had no health insurance, including more than a quarter of women of reproductive age — the highest rate in the nation. Texas is one of 12 states that has refused to expand Medicaid, even in light of financial incentives and clear calls from medical and business communities to do so.

For pregnant people and new moms, the health care situation is no better. Too many Texans are dying in childbirth or due to postpartum complications. Many of these maternal deaths are preventable. Abbott, Patrick and Paxton should prioritize preventing those deaths, not banning reproductive health care. The state recently ranked as the worst state in the nation for access to prenatal and maternal health care, according to a study that analyzed data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. And, while Medicaid covers nearly half of all births in Texas, the state has refused to ensure adequate access for new moms. As part of the American Rescue Plan Act, Congress created a pathway to enable states to more easily extend Medicaid to 12 months postpartum — an essential step in addressing maternal mortality. A one-year extension of Medicaid for new moms is supported by the Texas Maternal Mortality Review Committee, which found that, in a review of pregnancy-related deaths in 2013, nearly one-third of maternal deaths occurred within 43 days to one year postpartum. While the extension was passed by a bipartisan majority of the Texas House, the Texas Senate, where Patrick controls the floor, rolled coverage back to six months postpartum.

The night he celebrated the Supreme Court's overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, Abbott stated that he had "prioritized supporting women's health care and expectant mothers in need." These words ring hollow for the millions who have and continue to suffer under the leadership of people who refused to take even the most basic steps to protect women's health.

These are not liberal or conservative issues — they represent basic values. How we treat people, families and communities — how we act in the present and how we guide the future. Indeed, our own respective careers have landed us in different places on the ideological spectrum but this is a place where there is common ground. We've seen red and blue states alike take steps to expand Medicaid access and, at a minimum, extend access for the full year postpartum. Why not here in Texas? We've seen people with differing personal views on abortion unite behind the notion — fundamental in a democratic society — that the government must not have the power to force people into parenthood or to criminalize medical professionals for providing quality care to

people in need. These are things the majority of people understand and support. Why not those in the highest levels of power in Texas?

History has shown us time and again that stability and prosperity are directly connected to the way society treats women. Make no mistake. The campaign against Texas women is a campaign against Texas' present — and its future. It is past time for this state's highest leaders to believe that women's lives are worth saving and that the future is worth fighting for.