

Women must take control of their lives

By **State Sen. Leticia Van de Putte**

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A family ... a career ... a social life. Can women really have it all?

I recently overheard a group of female thirtysomethings asking themselves this question. It was rather disheartening to hear - mostly because I've often posed that question to myself. But I'm from an earlier generation. I'd hoped that 30-plus years after I had first pondered this, it would be settled.

Certainly, I've tried to show that the answer is yes - I'm blessed with a loving husband and six children (and grandbabies), a successful career as a pharmacist and for two decades now, a busy life as a Texas legislator. It's certainly not easy, and takes some juggling, but it has been worth it.

My first granddaughter was born just last year, and as she grows into a woman, I hope that she can enjoy a life as fulfilling as mine. But there's only one way that can happen - women must be able to make their own decisions. And lately, it seems like that just hasn't been happening. The news has been exploding lately with story after story of women's lives being directed by someone else.

The most recent example is the decision of [Texas Health and Human Services](#) Commissioner [Tom Suehs](#) last month to sign a rule that will end federal funding for the state's highly successful Women's Health Program (WHP). It's a baffling ruling that could have a crushing effect on many women's abilities to control their own futures.

The rule will prohibit Planned Parenthood and any other organization affiliated with abortion services from being involved in the WHP. But federal law doesn't allow state officials to deny women their choice of practitioners, and federal officials warned Texas that if the ban is enacted, then Medicaid cannot renew the WHP - a crippling blow, since Washington matches every \$1 the state invests with \$9 of federal money. Over the past biennium, this brought \$45.6 million in federal funds to Texas.

Health and Human Services Secretary [Kathleen Sebelius](#) confirmed Friday that Medicaid would discontinue funding the program. She said the money will be phased out between May and September to give women a chance to find alternative care.

Gov. [Rick Perry](#) said last week he will use state money to save the program, but did not provide any details.

The program provides 124,000 low-income women with potentially life-saving health care. If it is discontinued or reduced in scope because of its connection to Planned Parenthood, it won't decrease the number of abortions in Texas. It might even increase the number. How can that be? It's because ending the WHP would cause the closure of clinics that only provide preventative health care, including family planning, not abortions. Planned Parenthood's abortion services are completely separate from its health care operations. So in a nutshell, abortions will continue, and possibly go up due to the increase in unplanned pregnancies.

There are other examples, especially in the realm of women's health care.

You've probably seen the photo going viral on the internet: A panel of five men (none of whom have a uterus) recently testifying before Congress about birth control. A female law student from [Georgetown University](#) with expertise on the issue was asked to be on the panel by some lawmakers, but was rejected by the committee chair as "not an appropriate witness." This prompted people around the country to ask "where are all the women?"

The problem of whether women can determine their own destinies goes beyond health care of course, but these incidents have swept together of late to bring it all into focus. Why are so many decisions about women's lives being made by those in power, rather than individual women themselves?

Fortunately, women are getting angry and fighting back. The [Komen Foundation](#)'s attempt to cut Planned Parenthood from its ring of service providers drew a powerful backlash and reversal.

I haven't seen women this angry since former Texas gubernatorial candidate [Clayton Williams](#) made his awful joke about rape ("If it's inevitable, just relax and enjoy it"). We responded by electing a female governor.

Women are in control of many decisions that affect our families. Now it is time for us to take control of our own lives so that we, our daughters and granddaughters finally can have it all.

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