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# OPINION

## GENDER GAP



## Declaring War on Women, Moms or Not

### GOP gender chasm may get bigger

BY MARTHA BURK

The so-called "mommy wars" are heating up again. Once more, we're seeing stay-at-home moms supposedly pitted against moms with paid jobs during an election year.



The latest episode started when Democratic analyst Hilary Rosen questioned Ann Romney's credentials for serving as her husband's adviser on women's economic priorities, saying Romney had "never worked a day in her life." Rosen soon apologized, insisting she meant no offense to stay-at-home moms like Ann Romney.

But with a family nest egg of at least \$200 million, Ann's economic view is rather distant from the vantage point of the millions of American women working for the minimum wage. And nearly two-thirds of minimum-wage workers are adult women. In case you haven't done the math, at the current \$7.25 per hour, that's \$15,080 per year with no vacation.

But the dichotomy between "working mothers" and those who stay at home with kids is false. Even

though we trot out the flowers and overdone pancakes every Mother's Day, the truth is we don't value our mothers very much in this country — at least not as a matter of social policy.

Take the wage gap. Women working full-time and year-round earn 78 cents on the dollar when compared to men. But that's not the whole story. According to MomsRising.org, mothers earn 27 percent less than their male counterparts, and single mothers earn a whopping 34 to 44 percent less than men.

And those stay-at-home moms who care for their kids and elderly parents? They get a big fat zero in their Social Security accounts for every year they stay out of the workforce. Other industrialized countries grant "caregiver credits" for such family service. U.S. women's groups have been campaigning for this for years, but what they get in return are proposals to privatize Social Security or do away with it altogether.

More mothers might join the workforce if they could rely on decent, affordable child care. That's another area where our national policies fall woefully short. Many

European countries have some form of universal child care. They treat it as a benefit comparable to a public school education. Not here.

In the United States, child care is viewed as a strictly personal problem except for the poorest families. According to the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, child care is the second-largest family expenditure, running from \$3,850 to \$18,200 per child per year. By contrast, tuition at a state university averages \$7,600 per year. And even if a few working mothers do have the big bucks to pay for child care, and then have something left in their piggy banks, it doesn't solve the problem. Reliable child care centers are hard to find, since many are corporate-owned and squeeze the employees (overwhelmingly female) with notoriously low wages and few benefits.

During the Rosen-Romney flap, MomsRising CEO Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner noted that we don't really have a "mommy war" here. What we have is a war on mommies — working outside the home or not.


Our national policies would seem to support that view. Mitt Romney, as usual, is on both sides. For him, it depends on whether you're talking about rich mommies or poor

ones. While he certainly supported Ann's decision to stay home to raise their five sons, the de facto Republican presidential nominee said in January that he'd tell mothers receiving public assistance, "Even if you have a child two years of age, you need to go to work ... And people said, 'Well that's heartless.' And I said, 'No, no, I'm willing to spend more giving day care to allow those parents to go back to work. It'll cost the state more providing that day care, but I want the individuals to have the dignity of work.'"

If Romney gets elected, we'll see about that child care promise.

Women have comprised the majority of voters for over a generation. That means women, most of whom are also mothers, can control any election if we vote our own priorities. It's about time we did. CNN's latest polling shows that women support President Barack Obama by 16 percentage points over Romney, whose party is most assuredly declaring war on women, moms or not. And that gender chasm may get even bigger.

Martha Burk is the director of the Corporate Accountability Project for the National Council of Women's Organizations.

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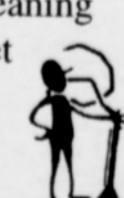
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