



Why we need more women lawmakers — and how to help them win

Dispatcher: 911, what's your emergency?

Caller: America's healthcare system is broken and people are dying! (ambulance siren)

Welcome to **Code WACK!**, where we shine a light on America's callous healthcare system, how it hurts us and what we can do about it. I'm your host, **Brenda Gazzar**.

(music)

This time on **Code WACK!** How does diversity in politics affect the policies that impact our everyday lives? What challenges do women face when running for office and once they get there, how do their life experiences influence their political work? To find out, we spoke to **California Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo**, the only Democrat to unseat a Republican incumbent in the state assembly last November. This is the second episode in a two-part series.

Welcome back to Code WACK!, Pilar!

(00:49):

Schiavo: Thank you.

(00:50):

Q: California now has 50, that's 5-0 women (out of 120 lawmakers) serving in the state legislature, the largest group of women ever in the state's history. What do you think women lawmakers bring to the table?

(01:01):

Schiavo: I think it's – being in Sacramento and seeing the different spaces, there's different caucuses and it really is so important to have diversity in your legislature and any decision making body, right? And you see that as in our Women's Caucus where, you know, we're really prioritizing women and children. Childcare — affordable childcare is a huge priority for us as a caucus. I can't imagine any other, you know, caucus or group of folks in Sacramento really prioritizing that if it's not women and you know, so just things like that.

The Women's Caucus is the one who's, you know, sponsoring these 17 bills around reproductive rights and justice and health care. And so, you know, women who have these kinds of frontline experiences know what it's like to experience pay inequity or harassment in the workplace, or sexual violence, attacks on bodily autonomy. Having those firsthand experiences and then, you know, going to Sacramento and having an opportunity to make policy and shape policy to address those issues, I think is critical.

(02:12):

And it's really exciting. You know, right now we have more women in the legislature than we've ever had. We have 50 women, which is a quarter of all the women who have ever served in the California legislature basically. And so it's a really exciting time to be a woman during Women's History month in the legislature right now with this, you know, largest ever historic group of women and there's a lot of energy and excitement and feeling of the power that that brings when we're able to collectively come together and fight for policies that really make a difference in women and children's lives. And so you see through the policy that's put forward, what a difference it makes to have women in these roles with a voice and a seat at the table and able to lead on policy to statewide level. It's critical.

(02:59):

Q: Why do we need moms and women in office and why do we need to support them? How can we better support women who are candidates?

(03:05):

Schiavo: You know, there's a lot of things you can do. <Laugh> I just spoke to a group of women the other day and they asked to talk about one thing that, you know, one piece of advice for women. And I think I rattled off about eight as quickly as I could in the six minutes I had to talk because it is really hard to run for office. And you know, I ran as a single mom, which adds a whole bunch of other challenges to it too. And so it can be everything from, you know, definitely turning out to volunteer and speak with voters. That's the number one most important thing that you can do, having those conversations. You can't win elections without having conversations with voters. And that's what we really prioritized. And I believe deeply that you have to be connected to your community and the issues that are important to them to be able to work to benefit that community and win.

(03:57):

Donations, as I said, it's extremely hard for women to fundraise and unfortunately, your ability to fundraise has a lot to do with how you are seen in the political world about whether or not you're viable or not. That's what the whole discussion is when you start to run, are they viable? Can they fundraise? And so those early dollars make a huge, huge difference, especially for women. And then I think other things like offering childcare or doing a meal train or things like that that just help a candidate meet the needs of their kids and their family while they're trying to balance maybe a job and running for office. It's incredibly challenging. And so those little things make a huge, huge difference in people's lives. And, you know, and just creating a village because it really takes a village to be able to make it through a campaign and win.

(04:52):

Q: Do you feel like you got some of that support with the childcare and the meal train or was that offered to you when you were a candidate?

(04:57):

Schiavo: I did have some people making food for me. My parents came and stayed the last 10 days of the primary and the general election to help me with childcare around the election and cooking and just make sure my kid was taken care of <laugh> while I was talking to as many voters as I could. And you know, and then there's some really great organizations out there and you know, there's a real difference in organizations that focus on supporting moms. Moms in Office, for example, is one of the organizations that supported me and they actually give a donation of childcare to you as one of the things that they'll provide as endorsement support. And no other organization did that. And, you know, just

those kinds of things make a huge difference and really help you feel like you have the backing that you need to be able to make that leap.

(05:50):

Q: Wow, that's really great. So now that you're in the assembly, talk about your legislative goals?

(05:55):

Schiavo: So health care, housing, homelessness, the H's, the three H's, those are the things that we're really focusing on. You know, as I talked about earlier, homelessness has become a personal issue because of my involvement in the organization I co-founded and just being so frustrated that we weren't seeing more movement and solution around that, you know, that really has a lot to do with decades of underinvestment in housing and no investment in solving homelessness for many years until just recently, the last few years. So it's gonna take some work and some dollars, but I have four different bills focus on addressing homelessness from, you know, local governmental accountability and transparency to, you know, just helping make sure people have IDs because you can't get a job, you can't get housing, you can't get on your feet if you don't have an id, and really making sure that we're ending this or, or you know, helping to end the foster youth to homelessness pipeline. So we have a series of bills focused on that. We have multiple bills also on housing and then health care. We have multiple bills too. I talked about one of them earlier. Another one is going to basically bring those dollars that people are paying and the individual penalties if they're not, you know, purchasing insurance and help those dollars come back to lower the cost of insurance for people.

(07:20):

California is among several states today where there are penalties for being without health coverage. The bill AB 1208 would reduce healthcare costs for thousands of low-and middle-income Californians enrolled in insurance through the state's health insurance marketplace.

(07:33):

Schiavo: And then I have some other, you know, issue areas. I got an EV car last year and that made me realize we got a lot of work to do <laugh> and so I ended up starting to get involved in that space as well. And then I'm on, you know, the committee Water, Parks and Wildlife. So I'm able to work in that space and Emergency Management. I have my fingers in a whole lot of things. It's really fun to

be able to impact a lot of important areas, but I know you also have to be really focused to make a deep impact and so we really are focusing on housing, homelessness and health care as priorities for our district and our office.

(08:10):

Q: Oh wow. Your plate's really full, Pilar. That's great. What else do you hope to achieve in office?

(08:15):

Schiavo: This is such an incredible opportunity to make sure that we bring the power of the state back to our district, and so making sure that we're connecting our district with resources at the state, support at the state. We just celebrated a hundred days in office and put out information about the things that we've accomplished. And, you know, our district office has been amazing at supporting the community here and helping with EDD cases, you know, around unemployment and other issues that, you know, people are having with state agencies.

And we've been able to help recover \$245,000 for constituents in our district just in the first 100 days. We've been, you know, just making sure that we're trying to bring resources and support out to the district as much as possible and also talking with local organizations, agencies and find ways that we can support and bring dollars back to the district to make sure that we're getting the support to the community that really needs it.

(09:15):

Because ultimately that's why you do this work <laugh> and why you run for office is to make sure that you are bringing resources back to your district, supporting folks in your community to make sure that, you know, this is a very hard time for folks and we want to make sure that we're supporting people and making sure that they can thrive and they can make ends meet when, you know, inflation is rising. Gas prices just, you know, did a crazy spike and we've been involved in all of those issues to try to make sure that folks really have the support that they need. And our office is really a resource for our community. So making that community connection and providing that kind of community support is a top priority for us.

(09:55):

Q: Got it. So do you have a story of a constituent that you can share with us that relates to your main priorities while in office?

(10:02):

Schiavo: Yeah, I mean, one of the, we got a lot of stories when gas prices spiked and one of them that really stuck with me is a woman wrote in who is a senior and she's on a fixed income and you know, she said her gas bill in November was \$99 and in January it was \$444 and, you know, you know that she can't afford that and how difficult that is. And so, you know, we really sprung into action around that. I'm on the utility and energy ommittee where we had a hearing on the gas spike and so I was able to, you know, challenge SoCal gas around why that happened and what they're doing about it and how are they supporting customers. We signed on to letters to support them and an nvestigation that's happening around that and are putting pressure at the top to make sure that that doesn't happen again.

(10:58):

And that there's also ways that people are supported and fortunately we're able to, you know, I'm sure some of the frustration and pushing led to them investing \$10 million in, you know, trying to help give some relief to folks who had these high bills, especially low-income folks, you know, and it's divided in a few different programs. But, you know, really I think having this opportunity to be able to ask questions of SoCal gas or huge corporations, right? When things like that happen and make sure we put on the pressure that people are taken care of, right? But, you know, a number of folks who have been struggling, one, you know, I heard about earlier when I was talking to one of our staff who'd worked on a case of someone who had had surgery, they were, you know, had a medical injury and couldn't work and they got \$80,000 themselves as an award for unemployment. And we were finally able to get all of the paperwork that they needed to be able to get it in and push that through the process that had just been stalled until we got involved. And so that's \$80,000 for someone in your community who really needs it is a huge, huge benefit. And so we're just really excited to be able to be a part of those successes that are really gonna make a difference in people's lives and just everyday lives to support folks in our community.

(12:20):

Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

(12:23):

Schiavo: I don't think so. Thank you so much.

(12:26):

Thank you, Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo.

(music)

Do you have a personal story you'd like to share about our 'wack' healthcare system? Contact us through our website at heal-ca.org.

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