



Taking stock: Health care in the wake of the 2024 elections

“Women continuing to lose their lives in places where no abortions are available, having a ban that expands into places like California. I'm petrified of that.” - **Ada Briceño**

911. What's your emergency?

America's healthcare system is broken and people are dying.

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!** What could a Trump White House mean for your health care and your family's? What might it mean for public health at a time when the nation is still reeling from the devastating COVID-19 pandemic? And which populations stand to lose the most? To find out, we spoke to **Ada Briceño**, chair of **Orange County Democrats** and co-chair of **Unite Here Local 11**, which represents tens of thousands of workers in hotels, restaurants, airports, and sports arenas in Southern California and Arizona. Ada is also a former National Steering Committee Member for the Labor Campaign for Single-Payer. This is the first episode in a two-part series.

Welcome back to Code WACK! Ada!

Briceño: Thank you so much for having me again.

Q: Like so many, we're still processing the results of the presidential election, and we look forward to your insights as the chair of Orange County Democrats and co-president of Unite Here Local 11 and Unite Here represents tens of thousands of workers in hotels, restaurants, airports, and sports arenas as, as well as other places throughout Southern California and Arizona. So, as Chair of California's Orange County Democrats, you led the campaign for Democrats and against Trump in this historically conservative county. Last I checked, Kamala had a slight lead in Orange County, but we still don't know which way the county's going to go. as of today, Nov. 11. So why do you think it's so close in Orange County and why in the country overall did Trump take the country pretty significantly pretty quickly?

Briceño: No. 1, I agree with you. We're not done counting, right? So it's really hard to speculate. Here in Orange County, I know that the last two times he was on the ballot, he did not win Orange County and I'm praying for the same results this time. It's a difficult situation. Right? There were a lot of factors. I can't tell you which one, but it was a culmination of so many other things, and I just feel like I'm not ready for that question just yet.

Some people are saying Vice President [Kamala] Harris was too liberal for mainstream America, and then some people were saying she wasn't liberal enough. <laugh>.

Briceño: Yep.

Q: And then there's the question, 'did this election result simply reflect the post-pandemic concerns with inflation and immigration like in so many other countries?'

Briceño: Every other country, right, if they were on the left, if they were on the right, they changed their leadership in a dramatic way and I guess it was our turn. I feel like it was a perfect storm. I think that we're gonna be talking about this for weeks, months, and years to come to try to figure [it] out. The immigration situation, I was just in a meeting with many of our union members, and they were like, when we knocked on doors, you know, they said, 'well, Venezuelan people came here in droves and got their documents, and there's people here from Mexico who can't get their documents to work. That's messed up.' So immigrants are on the other side of this – kind of confused, in my opinion – so it's very difficult to decipher. A lot of Latinos, as you know, voted for Trump.

And I think we just need to unravel and try to figure out what it is, the economy, you know, the inflation, the high cost of different things. And even though our economy is in such a better state, there's a lot of people who feel a lot of pain

right now, who have a hard time making ends meet, who on \$16.50 an hour, which is the minimum wage here in California can't make all their financial commitments with just one job. So there's a lot of pain coming out of that. And there was this one woman who I was told said, 'I voted for the other guy because I need to figure out how to make my ends meet.'

Yeah, that says a lot.

Briceño: Yeah. And we have to hear what people are saying and regroup to see how we're gonna turn the corner here in 2026 and beyond.

Q: As for the future of our health care, after this election, when Trump was the 45th president, he tried multiple times to repeal the Affordable Care Act known as Obamacare, which expanded health coverage to millions of Americans and required insurance companies to cover people with pre-existing conditions. Do you think Trump will try to repeal it again? And if so, how would this affect everyday people?

Briceño: I don't know if he's gonna try to repeal it or gut it, but I'm worried about the changes that Biden made to it. Right? And so, you know, the subsidies, the fact that it was more affordable for people, the tremendous increase that we had in participation because of the way that the Biden administration advertised for it, and the fact that it was more affordable for a bigger group of people. I'm concerned that that's gonna go away and I think it was like a 46% increase from 2021 to now of people signing up. So an incredible jump for something that should be a human right. Right? And we are proud of the ACA and how, you know, and how it has enhanced the American people's lives and now to know that it's hanging by a thread or gutted...He may have an opinion that even people from his own party may not go with him to repeal it. Right?

But I am concerned, I'm concerned for Medicaid and Medicare, that he may wanna also gut that. But we have the most precious people in our community, who are elderly, who can't be deciding between their rent and their prescription drugs. He wants to take from the most vulnerable people in our community. And that's exactly what we feared. Right. And that's exactly what we worked day and night to try to defeat him. So yeah, I'm concerned about the ACA, Medicare and Medicaid. I'm concerned about reproductive rights and a national ban. Women continuing to lose their lives in places where no abortions are available, having a ban that expands into places like California. I'm petrified of that.

Q: Right. That was my next question. Reproductive rights have been steadily eroding over time in America, and it's been more than two years since the

constitutional right to abortion was overturned by the Dobbs decision. So what do you expect from the Trump administration when it comes to reproductive rights once he takes office?

Briceño: A national ban. How about you?

He has flipped it seems like on the abortion issue so I'm hoping that he won't do a national ban. I think he does risk alienating a lot of people if he does that.

Briceño: But he's got nothing to lose anymore. He's got a mandate, right, or what he's calling a mandate. And even though he was, I mean, this is just my opinion, right? But even though he was trying to distance himself from Project 2025, I think he just said that to appease us or to appease some of the people that he wanted to win over. But, you know, why wouldn't he finish what he started? He went through great lengths, right, to get us to undo Roe v Wade and he really put his signature on that and did so much to get us this far. And, you know, he tries to spin it and say, 'oh, it should be up to the states.' And no, it's because he wants, I believe some of his allies, especially with the Project 2025, really want that, you know, that [abortion] ban nationwide.

Q: And what do you think that would do for people who do get pregnant and don't want to get pregnant? What kind of impact will that have on their lives?

Briceño: Everything. It is all about every single one of our rights as women. It impacts us further than delivering a child, right? But, you know, the work, our mental health, the environment that we bring an unwanted child into this world, whether you're a girl or whether you're a 50-year-old woman who no longer can have children, it impacts us in a societal way, in such a ginormous. in so many extremes. It's really just difficult, the amount of money that we make, how we're viewed in the workplace. I just think it has just so many impacts and it's all wrapped up in one thing. I know that he's also gonna be really, I believe that he's gonna be really restrictive with, you know, our L-G-B-T-Q families and friends and loved ones. How does he restrict health care for them? You know, what does that look like? I just know that that's gonna be on the chopping block for him.

Right, so things like gender-affirming care...

Briceño: And even the way we think about like mental care, like I'm just nervous overall about what that's gonna look like for, you know, people that we love and are very close to us, an important part of a marginalized society that we have been trying to uplift and care for and so they feel fully integrated. It's just devastating.

Are you talking about mental health care for the LGBTQ-plus community? Yeah, I do know there's a lot of fear in the LGBTQ-plus community, especially in the trans community. I follow an activist on Instagram and he came out with a message of 'your only job now is to survive, is to live.'

Briceño: Absolutely.

And that says a lot, right? A lot of people in the trans community, I think have lost a sense of will to live. It's that bad for them. It's that serious.

Briceño: Oh, yeah. Oh, absolutely. I'm very fearful that they won't receive the same medical attention that we all deserve. I'm fearful that the tools that should be there for all of us will decline for some of us.

And it's already a battle today, I think for the LGBTQ-plus community to get the health care that they need.

Briceño: It's already tough as it is. That's right.

And so the question is how will it change under a Trump administration in terms of them getting culturally competent care in terms of them getting gender-affirming care? And there have been, you know, quite a few bills banning gender-affirming care in states across America. So is that gonna increase? So yeah. Lots of questions.

Briceño: I'm also nervous about Trump saying that RFK Jr. will, you know, have a role, you know, like a prominent role in the public health infrastructure. He's a conspiracy theorist, right? You know, we just went through a pandemic. We know what it means to have vaccines and we know how he feels about vaccines, and this is not the only pandemic that we're gonna have. And so will [RFK Jr.] dismantle, you know, our public health infrastructure? It's really scary. He's on the short list, right, for the Health and Human Services Secretary position.

Since this interview, RFK Jr. has been confirmed as Trump's pick for this position.

[RFK Jr.] also has talked about, you know, like wanting fluoride out of the water. It's just so many, so many crucial things for you and I and for the rest of the American community. This is what we have to contend with. These are the things that we have to be worried about under these scenarios that we're living and the cards that have been dealt to us.

Q: Right. And you mentioned potentially cutting or slashing into Medicare and Medicaid. What are your thoughts on increased privatization of both Medicare and Medicaid, which has been happening progressively over time?

Briceño: Yeah, what I'm nervous [about] is that he will want more money to go to the providers on the backs of our older or the poorest people in our community. I don't feel equipped to talk about the privatization part, but thank you for adding just one more thing for me to worry about <laugh>, but yes, yes, absolutely. I mean, however he can cut the cost, you know, from services that help us. Of course he's gonna want to do it. It's just devastating and why not let somebody make a profit is what he feels. It's scary to think about how we're going to combat that, how we're gonna try to stop under the scenario where he has the Senate.

And since this interview, Republicans now have the House as well.

Briceño: Awfully sad.

Thank you Ada Briceño. Stay tuned for next time when we dive into what a Trump presidency means for single-payer, Medicare for All.

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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