

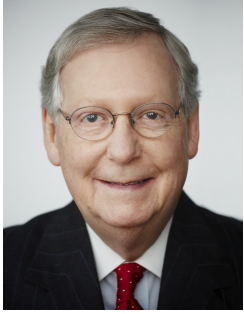
KentuckyToday

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COMMENTARY

Preventing the tragedy of maternal mortality

Posted Wednesday, December 26, 2018 1:46 pm



SENATE MAJORITY LEADER MITCH MCCONNELL

“Throughout my career, I have heard directly from so many families and communities across Kentucky. When they tell me about their struggles, I am called to help.”

By SEN. MITCH MCCONNELL

It's a trend that seems like it should be impossible in the wealthiest nation on Earth. But across America, the rate of maternal mortality is actually climbing – more than doubling in the last three decades.

Beneath these figures are heartbreaking personal tragedies. Sadly, families often face unavoidable health challenges, and it's important that policymakers, community leaders, health providers and researchers continue working together to prevent the health threats that are avoidable.

Throughout my career, I have heard directly from so many families and communities across Kentucky. When they tell me about their struggles, I am called to help.

This month, within days of the bill passing the House, I stood on the floor and led the Senate in passing the **Preventing Maternal Deaths Act**. This bill is the product of months of collaboration between legislators in the House and Senate, medical professionals, advocates, and survivors. After all this hard work, both houses of Congress moved quickly to pass it and send the legislation to the president's desk. When he signed the bill into law, President Trump joined us in taking an important step to reverse the trend of preventable tragedies.

This new law authorizes federal resources for states to establish maternal mortality review committees. These are groups of medical professionals who would collect information on pregnancy-related deaths, study why they happen, and develop recommendations to prevent them in the future.

I'm proud to say that passing this important law is far from the beginning of my involvement in this critical area.

Also in December, the Senate passed the **Improving Access to Maternity Care Act**. It will help remedy the shocking fact that half the counties across our nation lack an **OB/GYN to provide vital care for women by creating new incentives for physicians to practice in these areas.**

Earlier this fall, communities throughout Kentucky celebrated the passage of landmark legislation to combat opioid addiction and substance abuse. I made sure that law included my own **Protecting Mom and Infants Act, which will ensure the federal government does more to improve substance abuse treatment for expecting and new mothers and to help infants born into addiction and suffering from neonatal abstinence syndrome. By promoting the health of both mom and baby from the beginning, they have a better chance at a healthy future.**

That provision built on legislation I sponsored in 2015, which was the first-ever federal law to directly address prenatal opioid exposure.

And going back more than a decade, I secured federal resources to help launch the **University of Kentucky's Centering Pregnancy program** to provide prenatal services to help ensure the health of mothers and their babies. Bringing caregivers and researchers together, the Center is advancing science and developing new ways to save lives.

As Senate Majority Leader, while I still only have one vote, I do have the privilege of setting our schedule. I can personally make sure that Kentucky's needs and priorities receive the full consideration they deserve. And in this case, I made sure that is exactly what happened.

I have been proud to help secure important programs and funding, and I will continue to collaborate with leaders across our state to deliver on solutions here and across the country.

Protecting our expecting and new mothers isn't a partisan issue. Every piece of legislation I've discussed passed the Senate with bipartisan support. Each of them was developed with guidance from medical professionals and experts to help get closer to a goal we all should share: protecting the health of our moms and babies.

Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, is the Senate Majority Leader.

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