

## Family First



Almost exactly 2 years ago this week my Dad received his cancer diagnosis.

Dad dedicated his life to caring for others. As a family practice physician in a medical community increasingly dominated by paperwork and specialties, he had the soul of an old-fashioned country doctor. He loved people and cared for them tirelessly—taking calls and making home visits at all hours. I still remember some of the patients who regularly called our home phone.

That ethic defined more than his profession. It saturated everything he did, from scouting, to cleaning up after family dinners, to fishing and playing games with the grandkids. He lived to serve.

He knew something was wrong. We all did. But we had no idea how serious it was until his intestine ruptured on our way to the emergency room, leading to emergency surgery and the discovery of a 5-pound tumor in his abdomen. No time. Only two choices. Treatment or no treatment—with no guarantees.

I was heading into the most intense stretch of campaign season. Suddenly, things that had mattered before no longer mattered nearly as much. Dad was determined to fight, and we were with him every step—every surgery, every setback, every moment. I conducted what campaigning I could from his bedside. Returning to the campaign trail now, I find those memories flooding back with an intensity comparable to PTSD.

Dad loved the Carpenters and we listened to a lot of music as we passed the hours in the hospital. One of my most tender memories is an afternoon when a Carpenter's love song came on. Dad lay quiet and weak. I knew what he would have done had he been able. I took my Mom by her hand and pulled her to her feet. We danced.

Dad's eyes were closed. "Dad," I said, "I'm dancing with Mom for you!" The most beautiful smile spread across his face. Then a slow, characteristic nod told me he was dancing with her in his mind.

This is the reason I run.

Family IS the most important thing. Yes, we all want good schools for every child. Yes, we want well-maintained roads and effective government services. Yes, we care about budgets, housing and affordable healthcare. But at the end of the day, family is the *reason* we care about all of it.

I have fought hard to end sexual exploitation, abuse, and the harmful sexualization of children because these things destroy families. My parents' faithfulness and commitment made possible

their loving relationship of over 50 years. I want every child to have the best possible shot at that kind of happiness.

One of the most rewarding parts of being a mother has been watching my children form families of their own and become parents. Seeing them learn to love another person so completely is breathtaking. I fought to put a stop to medical procedures that sterilize minors because I want every child to have a chance to one day experience the incredible joy of being a parent.

Are families perfect? No. But no other institution can ever or will ever outperform the family.

This is one reason I felt so strongly about the pediatric secret transitions act recently signed by Governor Little. A child struggling to accept their biological sex is a child who needs parental support. No one knows, understands, or can support a child in those circumstances better than their own parents. Keeping that information from parents leaves children isolated from their most important support system. Encouraging a child to reject their biological sex without parental knowledge or consent is unethical—completely undermining the parental role.

Contrary to the radical left's vision, I believe that children need parents. I know I needed mine. Losing my Dad—even as a grown woman—has left an empty spot no one else can fill. I believe most parents deeply love their children, and that involving parents is not a threat—it is the only responsible course of action.

I'm grateful to Idaho Governor Brad Little for signing House Bill 822, a powerful win for common sense and Idaho families.

As campaign season swings into full gear, I hear again my Dad's encouragement to run. He was one of my greatest fans. One of the few times I saw tears during his illness was when he realized he couldn't leave the hospital on election day to vote for me. He taught, by example, the value of family. Some will dismiss pro-family priorities as culture war. But I say—do all the other good things, and do them well. Just don't forget the *why*.

No other success can ever fully compensate for the loss of strong, stable families. Without Family First policy, there is no future for America.