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Let's not do this again: False equivalencies and women running for president

By [Yvonne Abraham](#) Globe Columnist, October 9, 2019, 7:16 p.m.



Democratic presidential contender and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren. MEG KINNARD/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Can we not do this again, please? Can we not magnify some purported fault or misstep of a Democratic presidential candidate and make it seem like it's as big a deal as the daily — no, hourly — assaults on truth and decency and the Constitution committed by President Trump?

False equivalency, after all, is one of the ways we got into this mess. (It's weird how Hillary Clinton's purported crimes of having a private e-mail server and potentially [hiding official communications](#) are suddenly so much meh when Trump, his advisers, and his family [appear to be doing it](#), isn't it?)

In this week's installment of Have We Learned Nothing: The controversy over [whether Democratic hopeful Elizabeth Warren was really let go](#) in 1971 from her teaching job in a New Jersey public school because she was pregnant. The story is a staple of Warren's stump speech: Once it became clear she was pregnant, her principal wished the young special needs teacher luck and sent her on her way.

The attempted gotcha, in the conservative Washington Free Beacon, [cited minutes from school board meetings](#) at the time showing that Warren's job contract was renewed, and that the board later accepted her resignation "with regret" to cast doubt on her claims.

As if Warren could be telling the truth only if the record had shown school officials admitted to canning her for being pregnant.

None of the records unearthed contradict Warren's version of events: Her contract was renewed when she was four months' pregnant, but she was let go when she was visibly pregnant, at six months. She did not always talk about being discriminated against because she wasn't always comfortable sharing that part of her story, [she told CBS News](#). The network also interviewed another teacher who worked at the school at the time, who confirmed that women were required to leave when they were five months' pregnant.

Also, every woman on the planet knows of somebody who suffered a similar fate, and not just way back in the 1970s, before there were laws to protect pregnant women.

But never mind all of that. Trump's bootlickers have sprung into action, accusing Warren of deception and character flaws. The Democrat had been "caught lying," the RNC shrieked. Meanwhile, their own candidate shambles around with his pants on fire all day, every day.

Of course, the truth barely matters anymore. Just ask Joe Biden, forced to defend himself repeatedly against the [bald, demonstrable lies](#) Trump and his allies are telling about the former vice president's attempt to fight corruption in Ukraine.

Some voters will cling to the notion that Warren lied about what happened to her in 1971. What's galling is, there's no way to avoid giving the trumped-up scandal oxygen: The president and his allies send the lie up, and even those who debunk it amplify it.

Even more galling: Warren is in the same position as thousands who have paid a professional price for their pregnancies but battle to prove it. Few employers come out and admit they're firing somebody because of a pregnancy — especially since federal and state laws were enacted to outlaw the practice. That doesn't mean it doesn't happen.

“If something is illegal and somebody wants to do it anyway, they will find a way to do it without explicitly making a statement that admits liability,” said Rebecca Pontikes, a Boston labor attorney.

Pontikes has seen employers load extra work on pregnant employees in physical jobs in an attempt to force them out. Nearly [31,000 pregnancy discrimination charges were filed](#) with federal and state agencies between 2010 and 2015, according to the National Partnership for Women and Families.

A February [New York Times investigation](#) found that pregnancy discrimination remains rampant in corporate America, with employers sidelining pregnant women and mothers, passing them over for promotions, and firing them when they complain. In the most egregious cases, employers admitted they viewed pregnant women differently. But most employers are smarter than that.

They discriminate against pregnant women in ways that are harder to prove, forcing them into the very position Warren is in now: Having to piece together a case from imperfect records, while those who benefit most from the discrimination try to

undermine her credibility.

Let's not play right into their hands.

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