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Invest Smart, Invest in Moms

The Huffington Post's Living section joins Mothers Day Every Day, a joint campaign of the White Ribbon Alliance and CARE, in a daily countdown to Mothers Day with special voices working to help save the lives of mothers and newborns around the world. Mothers Day Every Day is advocating for more progress and investments toward safe pregnancy and healthy babies because when women survive childbirth, they give birth to healthier families, communities, and nations.

On Mother's Day, we look for ways to thank our Mom. We buy cards and gifts in honor of everything she's given us -- the love, comfort, security and health. This year, we urge you to consider giving something more -- a gift that could help save the life of a mother or child - and help make a difference in the world in which we live.

Investing in women and families globally is one of the best ways to secure a safe and healthy world for all. Progress is being made, but hundreds of thousands of women are still dying each year due to complications developed during pregnancy and childbirth. Millions more suffer debilitating illnesses and lifelong disabilities.

By joining together this Mother's Day and throughout the year, we can help turn these horrific statistics around. The vast majority of maternal deaths are avoidable when women have access to vital health care before, during and after childbirth. Access to basic services like clean water, sanitation and skilled health workers are proven to significantly increase maternal and infant survival rates.

By investing in affordable measures to improve maternal and newborn health, we can also achieve other important health and security outcomes. These investments not only save women and babies at risk during pregnancy and childbirth; they are also investments in health workers and health systems that can provide education, vaccines and interventions to reduce other problems like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

Moreover, when women survive childbirth, the benefits are exponential: their children are more likely to survive past age five, be educated, vaccinated and contribute to the

peace and stability of their countries. In short, healthy mothers create healthier families, communities and nations.

One of our goals is to increase the investment by the US government on global health, which now is a mere 0.2 percent of its overall budget. Maternal health is one of the best indicators of global health systems; investments can have a tremendous impact. By doing so, we would not only benefit from increased moral standing and goodwill, but we also help create a safer, more stable world.

There's an enormous connection between security and health. Millions of women and girls live in poverty, experience gender discrimination and are subject to violence, abuse and exploitation. The result is a continuing cycle of oppression and abuse. We have the power to break this cycle and invest in women.

Through our collective work at UNICEF and the Commission on Smart Global Health Policy, we know that global investments and the efforts of organizations around the world are working, but more needs to be done. We also know that this crucial issue cuts across gender, politics and areas of expertise. Celebrating women by ensuring they survive childbirth matters to everyone: men and women, public and private sector, Democrats and Republicans, the US and the rest of the world.

And so last year when the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood (WRA) and CARE launched Mothers Day Every Day, the unprecedented bipartisan campaign for healthy moms and newborns globally, we signed on as co-chairs. This year, we continue our work to give mothers a gift with global impact this year. We joined a bipartisan group of Mothers Day Every Day Advisors last week to send a letter to Congress requesting robust funding for maternal and child health programs in this year's budget. To accelerate progress, we need smarter resources and smarter power, not just from governments, but from people who collectively can make a powerful impact.

So this year, let your voice be heard. While you are thinking what to get for your Mom for Mother's Day, consider gifts that are smart global investments; that help save the life of a mother or child. Let's honor all Moms and families by giving something that could have a more meaningful, long-lasting impact and help make a safer world for all children. Together we can make sure the gift of motherhood is a gift for all.

Secretaries Veneman and Shalala are the Co-Chairs of Mothers Day Every Day. Check out the rest of our Countdown to Mothers Day series:

www.huffingtonpost.com/diane-von-furstenberg/mothers-day-a-tribute-to_b_561583.html

www.huffingtonpost.com/amb-mark-dybul/mothers-day-mothers-have_b_557219.html

www.huffingtonpost.com/mary-matalin/mothers-day-sisterhood-of_b_557317.html

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-rajiv-shah/healthy-mothers-nurture-h_b_561068.html