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Ann Romney's choice to stay home is one many lack

by Colman McCarthy



Ann Romney attends a campaign event May 2 in Chantilly, Va. (Newscom/MCT/Abaca Press/Olivier Douliery)

COLUMN

If Mark Twain was right, that work is what you do when you would rather be doing something else, then Hilary Rosen's jibe that Ann Romney "never worked a day in her life" was credible. Rosen, a CNN talker and Beltway operative who toils in Washington in the election strategizing industry, intended her comment as a putdown of the wife of Mitt Romney.

Heat from the resulting firestorm caused Rosen to back off. She apologized to Ann Romney. But why? She was right, doubly so.

In her married life, Ann Romney has never been in the labor force hustling for a paycheck. Her mothering of five boys was not at all work because no evidence exists that she would rather have been doing

something else than being at home raising her sons. By most accounts, the Romney boys have turned out well: not an unkempt wild one among them, much less one who is about to shy away from traveling the land talking up the greatness of Dad the Candidate. By more accounts still, Mother Romney, however she may be typecast as just another pol's wife standing by her man, never hankered to be anyplace else but in the hearth. Or in her case, several hearths -- summer homes in Michigan, winter homes in California, the governor's mansion in Massachusetts. It was not quite the seven homes that John McCain couldn't keep track of when he was running for president, but it did demand remembering where to settle in next.

In the debate between work inside the home versus work outside, Ann Romney attempted to make her case by tweeting on April 11: "I made a choice to stay home and raise five boys. Believe me, it was hard work." It would have helped if she supplied a post-tweet elaboration on what she meant by "hard work." Pardon my doubting nature, but I find it hard to believe that her waking hours were spent cleaning toilet bowls, making beds, scrubbing floors, doing laundry, ironing clothes, darning socks, loading and emptying dishwashers, vacuuming rugs, cleaning windows, taking out trash, cooking breakfast, making lunch and dinner, paying bills, grocery shopping, taking in and picking up the dry cleaning -- those are the indoor labors of love -- and outdoors cutting grass, shoveling snow, trimming hedges and shrubs, raking leaves, weeding the lawn, walking the dogs, chauffeuring the boys to and from school and then to the playing fields of their choice, and rushing home to gussy up for when Mitt walks in the door.

If Ann Romney did even half of that, or one-tenth, without household help -- maids, nannies, babysitters, gardeners (no illegal immigrants, please, Mitt doesn't like them) -- she deserves to be called the Super Mom of All Time.

Let's not be conned by Ann Romney. She had, as she said, a choice -- an atypical one that many women whose husbands are not millionaires lack. MomsRising, an advocacy nonprofit that works to enact state and federal laws that are family-supportive, states that "families with a stay-at-home parent are seven times more likely to live in poverty, and millions of moms don't have the option to choose to stay at home because their wages are needed to put food on the table and roof over the heads of their families. With the cost of raising a child to age 18 -- not including college -- these days over \$200,000 per child, the wages of mothers are increasingly needed to make ends meet."

Ann Romney could choose domesticity because she won the marriage lottery. She landed a well-born man who ended up a multimillionaire. Paycheck-independent, she had the economic freedom to stay at home with the children while Mitt was out mastering the arts of dealmaking and moneymaking at Bain Capital that would enable them to enjoy the good life, starting with his-and-her Cadillacs in the garage.

On the campaign trail, Ann Romney has only one unarguable message for American women: Sisters, marry up.

[Colman McCarthy directs the Center for Teaching Peace in Washington and teaches courses on nonviolence at four universities and two high schools.]

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