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What Beau Biden Wanted Everyone To Know About The Issue That Defined His Career

BY KAY STEIGER POSTED ON MAY 31, 2015 AT 10:02 AM



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Beau Biden, son of the vice president, died tragically at the age of 46 from brain cancer

on Saturday, but some may not realize that a cause Biden devoted himself to was trying to raise awareness about child sexual abuse.

While Biden served as attorney general in Delaware, a position to which he was elected in 2006, he brought a successful indictment against Dr. Earl Bradley in 2010. The pediatrician was charged with 471 felony counts of child abuse involving 102 girls and one boy. Bradley was convicted in 2011, but sought appeal of his case on the grounds of ineffective counsel last year.

"I cannot say certain things that I am feeling, and I am feeling a great deal. I am determined to see that this defendant will never, ever be in a position again to hurt another child," Biden said in a statement following the indictment.

Biden became something of a national spokesman on the issue, even speaking about the crimes of Penn State's former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky. (His father, Joe Biden, was an early supporter of the Violence Against Women Act, which targeted domestic violence.)

"It's adults' responsibility to protect kids. It's not the kids' responsibility to protect themselves from these predators.... There need to be consequences for violating the law," he said when interviewed by ABC News.

He also penned an op-ed for the News-Journal, highlighting his work with Darkness to Light Foundation's "Stewards of Children" program and its partnership with the state of Delaware. The program teaches "adults how to spot the signs of child abuse and the importance of immediately reporting the abuse to authorities."

According to the foundation, nearly one in ten children suffers from childhood sexual abuse, with about one in seven girls and one in 25 boys experiencing such abuse before they turn 18. For reasons that are unclear, the identified incidents of child sexual abuse have declined about 47 percent from 1993 to 2005-2006. The Department of Justice has found similar statistics.

One of the reasons that childhood sexual abuse is so difficult to tackle is that an estimated 90 percent of victims know their abuser and 30 percent are abused by family members. Sometimes children are abused by older children. Yet just 38 percent of victims disclose the fact that they have been sexually abused — and far fewer incidents are reported to authorities. Darkness to Light further points out that not all abusers are pedophiles, and there are "situational" abusers who often begin abusing children later in life. LGBT youth are at far greater risk of experiencing childhood sexual abuse, perhaps

because abusers target a vulnerable population. Biden also supported Delaware’s protections for gender identity non-discrimination, which can protect transgender youth from stigma they face.

There has been a recent movement to address the issue of childhood sexual abuse and pedophilia in a more complex way, with Canadian researcher James Cantor calling for more mental health treatment of those experiencing pedophilia, but who haven’t abused anyone, to seek counseling without fear of counselors reporting them to the police.

“As adults, we have a legal and moral obligation to stand up and speak out for children who are being abused – they cannot speak for themselves,” Biden wrote in his op-ed.

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