



TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Stephanie Schriock, EMILY's List and Neera Tanden, Center for American Progress Action Fund

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RE: GOP Rebranding – What About Women?

Following the GOP's drubbing in the 2012 elections, the RNC launched its so-called "[Growth and Opportunity Project](#)" to examine how the party can attract the support of women, Latinos, LGBT people, and others who the party has alienated. As a result, the party has made an abrupt course correction on immigration policy in order to avoid perhaps permanently alienating Latinos. And while the party has not moderated its stance on marriage equality (itself an issue [more strongly favored by women](#)), it has at least made an effort to downplay its opposition to LGBT equality.

By contrast, Republicans have made no effort to reverse course on the issues that matter to women and their families. Despite the widening gender gap favoring Democrats, they are doubling down on the very same policies that turned off women in last year's elections.

Republicans Worry Anti-Women Stance Harming the Party

A recent [Pew Center for the People & the Press poll](#) found that fully 62 percent of Americans believe the GOP is "out of touch with American people" and 52 percent believe the Republican Party is "too extreme."

Republican strategists have been blunt in their assessment of their party's badly damaged brand:

"You don't lose five of the last six presidential elections in the popular vote if you have got the right message." – Top GOP pollster [Whit Ayres](#)

The party has been "continually marginalizing itself and unless changes are made it will be increasingly difficult for Republicans to win another presidential election in the near future." - [Sally Bradshaw](#), Florida GOP strategist & co-author of the RNC's post-election "autopsy"

The RNC's [much-discussed post-election "autopsy"](#) noted that even among *Republican* women there is "growing unrest" about "the Party's negative image among women." The report continued, "**[Women] represent more than half the voting population in the country, and our inability to win their votes is losing us elections.**"

Though the report instructs Republicans to identify more women leaders and improve outreach to women, it failed to offer even one substantive policy change to attract women. Instead, the report

merely offered up new messaging and communications strategies meant to gloss over the party's extreme views on issues important to women.

GOP Policy Agenda Driving Low Standing Among Women

While Republican strategists and party grandees suggested that the GOP needed a major overhaul regarding its effort to attract women, little effort appears to have been made. Republicans sputtered in their early post-election attempts to appeal to women. After debuting an all-male committee chair lineup in the U.S. House, they hastily appointed Rep. Candice Miller (MI) to head the House Administration Committee, the [“committee that oversees the chamber’s housekeeping.”](#) They were also forced to offer a seminar at the official House GOP retreat shockingly [explaining why they should stop making offensive comments about rape.](#)

Their party leaders and cadres continue to double down on an agenda that attacks women and their families:

- **Unprecedented GOP Assault on Women’s Rights at the State Level:** Republican-controlled states are engaged in a race to the bottom on women’s health. North Dakota, Arkansas, and other states are pursuing unconstitutional abortion bans. Those states and others, including Virginia, Alabama, Texas, and Indiana, want to regulate abortion providers out of existence through the use of so-called TRAP laws. Still others, like Arizona, are once again seeking to defund Planned Parenthood. Even proposals for now-infamous forced transvaginal probes reappeared this year in Michigan and Indiana.
- **160 Republicans Vote Against Violence Against Women Act:** After blocking the reauthorization of this vital law during the last Congress, 22 Senate Republicans (all of whom were men) and 138 House Republicans, voted against final passage of the law’s reauthorization in February.
- **Extreme Budgets:** The EMILY’s List Women’s Monitor research project conducted in early 2012 showed that women voters were overwhelmingly less likely to vote Republican once they learned about policies in the House Republican budget authored by Rep. Paul Ryan (WI). Yet, this year, House Republicans offered an even more extreme version of their plan. Among other things, it [repeals Obamacare](#), [defunds Planned Parenthood](#) and the [Title X health care program](#), and slashes funding for programs that disproportionately benefit women and children. On the Senate side, Republicans offered no shortage of budget amendments attacking women’s health and rights, including [yet another attempt](#) that could have put women’s bosses in their bedrooms by allowing employers to decide whether women receive contraception coverage. .

The Women’s Vote in the 2012 Election

The women’s vote was a decisive factor in the 2012 elections. Women made up more than half of the electorate (53 percent) and 55 percent of us delivered our votes to President Obama. In fact, nearly one-third of all voters were women who voted for President Obama. 2012 saw a near-record gender gap of 18 points – with the gap growing wider than 2008 among black, white, and Hispanic women. The gap among unmarried women was even wider – an astounding 36 points.

While economic issues like building an economy that works for everyone, pay equity, tax fairness, and the Republican plan to end the Medicare guarantee were at the forefront, the GOP’s extreme, anti-

women policy positions and offensive and outrageous comments about women's bodies and rape made by Republican candidates also drove women to the polls in support of Democrats. These odious remarks and retrograde policies reinforced women's views that they couldn't trust Republican candidates and their misplaced priorities. And they resulted in President Obama staying in the White House, an expanded Democratic majority and a record number of pro-choice women serving in the Senate.

Certainly not the only source of Romney's trouble at the ballot box, but it's clear that Romney's poor showing among women sealed his fate. A [November 2012 GQRR survey](#) found that Mitt Romney's support for "outlawing a woman's right to choose, even in cases of rape, incest, or when a woman's health is in danger" was the number one reason for a core group of swing women voters to oppose Mitt Romney. Another [post-election survey found](#) that 69 percent of women -- 5 points higher than all voters -- had heard, read, or seen something about Mitt Romney's plan to "get rid of" federal funding for Planned Parenthood. A similar pattern was evident regarding his pledge to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Women Back Progressive Agenda

Women, of course, did not just vote against Romney, they voted for the president's agenda. His pledges to invest in education, support for meaningful equal pay measures, and his vow to protect Planned Parenthood and women's right to make their own health care choices [resonated strongly with the Rising American Electorate in general and unmarried women in particular](#).

Women and men alike continue to strongly back a woman's right to make her own health care decisions. In [2012 exit polls](#), 59 percent of all voters believe abortion should be legal. Support for legal abortion is even higher among the fast-growing Latino electorate, with two-thirds backing legal abortion. Just [24 percent and 9 percent of Americans](#), respectively, back the GOP's official positions that *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned and that abortion should be illegal without any exceptions. Obamacare's birth control benefit has [the backing of 55 percent of Americans](#), including 58 percent of Catholics and 65 percent of Millennials (18-29).

Women are also motivated by a progressive agenda on other issues where the GOP has staked out an extreme position. As EMILY's List post-election polling found, women are strongly motivated by candidates focused on building an economy that works for the middle class. Women also trust the president more than Republicans in Congress on the key issues of [immigration](#) and [fiscal policy](#). Women are also more strongly opposed than men to the GOP's proposals [to cut Medicaid](#) and [raise the Medicare eligibility age](#).

Conclusion

If the GOP wants to move forward, help its image and win elections, it should halt its embrace of extreme and out-of-touch policies that attack women and their families. Ending attacks on abortion rights in the states would be a start.