

Oregon women: Hear their votes roar

Posted by Jerry Casey, The Oregonian October 13, 2008 20:21PM



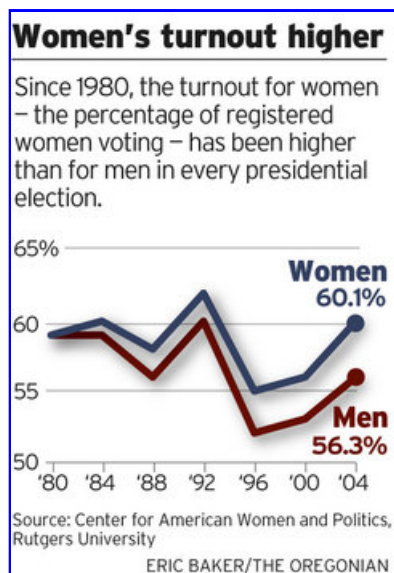
Brent Wojahn/The Oregonian
Debbie Gorman, 35, with her 3-year-old son, Jack Garrison, at their Southeast Portland home, is a "MOMocrats" blogger who began posting about political issues a couple of years ago. "So many women have found a way to pull together," she says.

It started with Hillary Clinton and continued with Sarah Palin. And now -- Miss, Mrs. and Ms. Voter -- the spotlight is on you.

While women candidates have captured a huge amount of attention this election year, women voters will make a difference no matter who wins.

Don't worry guys -- your vote counts, too. But the numbers favor women: The number of women voting has been higher than the number of men voting in every presidential election since 1964.

Women have a higher turnout, too. In every presidential election since 1980, a higher percentage of women who were registered actually cast ballots.



That makes women a gigantic target for campaigns, who try to win over women voters by talking about the issues they care about most.

Women don't vote as a monolithic block, but there are trends. Political scientists who track voting behavior say women tend to be more favorable toward expanding government programs for education and health care. They're slightly more likely to believe a woman has a right to choose abortion. On the economy, women care a lot about how global conditions affect their families at home.

In Oregon, women could be key in deciding the U.S. Senate contest pitting Republican incumbent Gordon Smith against Democrat Jeff Merkley. It's no accident that in their advertising, both candidates have shared their softer sides or let women do the talking for them.

One television spot notes that Merkley is a "devoted husband and father of two young children." More recently, Merkley's television ads feature women chiding Smith for voting against abortion rights.

Meanwhile, a Smith TV spot features a mom who praises the senator for helping her disabled son by fighting cuts to Medicaid. Another features Tiffany Edens, who was raped at 13 and criticizes Merkley for not being tough on criminals.

"Absolutely women are a key factor in this race," says Julie Edwards, a Merkley spokeswoman.

On the other side, Smith spokeswoman Lindsay Gilbride says: "Our strategy is one that naturally appeals to

**Registration deadline
is today**

The deadline for
registering to vote in the
Nov. 4 election is 5

women. Gordon Smith's bipartisan record appeals to the person who is not a partisan ideologue, who cares more about issues that matter to families."

Nationally, recent polls show that women prefer Democrat Barack Obama over Republican John McCain. Depending upon how close that race ends up, they could be the deciding factor, says Susan Carroll, senior scholar with the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

But the gender gap can also work in the opposite way, Carroll says. "Back in 1980, women were really divided between the candidates. Ronald Reagan had a landslide because of men."

In 1996, a high turnout of women voters, particularly independents, helped Democrat Ron Wyden beat Smith in the special election for U.S. Senate.

This year, polling shows Smith and Merkley alternately leading with women voters.

There are a significant number of women who still haven't decided, says Lisa Grove, a Democratic pollster who is not working for the Merkley campaign.

"Independent women often have been how Democrats win in Oregon and are going to be key," Grove says.

They include Tanya Tompkins, who recently switched her political registration from Democrat to the Independent Party because she says she is "frustrated about partisan politics and corporate control over the political process."

A professor who teaches clinical psychology at Linfield College, Tompkins, 36, says she's met Smith and admires his work on mental health insurance parity and suicide prevention.

But she's leaning toward Merkley.

Education and health care top her issues list. She also cares about ensuring a woman's access to abortion.

"I have a young daughter," she says, "and I'd like her to grow up in a culture and society that allows women to have the right to choose."

Planned Parenthood's national political action committee is supporting Merkley. Last weekend, Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards traveled to Oregon to sway women voters.

"Our polling shows that women trust Planned Parenthood in a significant way, not only with health care but when it comes to an election," Richards says.



Doug Beghtel/The Oregonian Laura Flint,

25, is a registered Republican who hasn't quite decided which candidates she'll support in November. Worried about the future for her 8-month-old son, David, Flint says the economy is her No. 1 issue. She also cares about the environment.

Laura Flint, 25, is the kind of voter Planned Parenthood is trying to influence.

Flint, a Republican, says she wouldn't choose abortion for herself but does think it should be an option.

p.m. today. Postmarks will count.

How? Forms are available at post offices, Driver and Motor Vehicle Services offices and elections offices across Oregon. Or go online at www.oregonvotes.org.

Moved? If you have moved since the last election, update your mailing address with your county elections office or you won't get a ballot. You can do it until Election Day.

Change party? Submit a new registration form to local elections officials by 5 p.m. today.

Ballots coming? Ballots will be mailed starting Friday. They must be returned by mail or in person by Election Day.

Contact? Your local elections office: Multnomah County, 503-988-3720; Clackamas County, 503-655-8510; Washington County, 503-846-5800.

More information? Go to oregonlive.com/politics for a complete voter guide and news updates.

This year, however, Flint is more concerned about gas prices and the economy. As a mother of an 8-month-old baby boy, she also cares about the environment.

As of Monday, Flint had not made up her mind about whom she'd vote for in the Senate race.

Quite frankly, she says, the negative ads have caused this Beaverton mom to tune out. "I just change the channel."

Debbie Gorman, 35, says she's definitely made up her mind. A Portland Democrat, Gorman recently recounted on her blog (www.MOMocrats.com) [a conversation she'd had with Merkley](#) about the No Child Left Behind law, the need to end the Iraq war and other issues.

Gorman noted the "even timbre" of Merkley's voice and her discovery that they are nearly neighbors. The tone was both policy wonk and chatty letter.

Was she writing to appeal to other women voters?

Yes -- and no, Gorman says. "I write for myself."

What's important, she says, is that women's voices are being heard in the political arena and in a variety of ways.

"It's so important," she says, "that we not let these conversations die."

-- Michelle Cole; michellecole@news.oregonian.com

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Comments

14freelove says...

yeah, a woman's vote counts just as much as a man's, how about that? all we can say for sure without reviewing their ballots to see how they actually voted is that it's a good day for an anodyne fluff piece devoid of heretofore unknown facts or analysis. like most women, debbie gorman likes a man with an "even timbre" in his voice, and she likes to have it both ways on a yes or no question: "was she writing to appeal to other women voters?" "yes-and no..." it doesn't matter as long as she's hot, which is why we need pics for this article.

Posted on 10/14/08 at 7:53AM

VirginiaHarr says...

Can you even imagine being a woman and not being able to vote?

Thanks to the suffragettes, we have women voters and women candidates, and we are a better world for it!

Women have voices and choices! Just like men.

But few people know ALL of the suffering that our suffragettes had to go through to get the vote for women, and what life was REALLY like for women before they did.

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Posted on 10/14/08 at 7:59AM

realwrld101 says...

Women used to be told they could not vote because men wanted complete political control. Women had to fight to vote! Now we have a similar situation happening in Portland Oregon. Karen a local Portland resident had a McCain sign burned in her front yard, the reasoning? To intimidate her and silence her voice! We should all support her choice to vote as she sees fit! On the national front the situation is similar. The video below shows the results of free speech being exercised in New York. Just as it was with the women's vote in the past, now some people do not believe in your right to an opinion that differs with theirs!

Women do not miss your chance to stop intimidation see this video then vote! This is an important election.

MUST WATCH VIDEO.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQalRPQ8stI>

Posted on 10/14/08 at 9:24AM

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