



How about a little XX to go with all that XY?

guest column

By Kathryn Firestone of Portland, Oregon. Kathryn is the executive director of [Emerge Oregon](#).

First, a big *wow!* to the bus project folks who did it again with an amazing turnout, great energy, substantive topics and intermittently wacky (let's see... a tattooed bus on your ass or a quick leap into the brutally cold Deschutes River. So many choices, so little time...) three-day conference.

Second, thanks to the guy across the room - you beat me to the punch. As I stood against the wall listening to the inimitable Henry Kramer and the amazing Rep. Val Hoyle (come on -she's an alumna!) introduce the top-choice progressive ideas and their representative spokespeople, a trend, uh, emerged. Look! It's a young white guy! Look! It's another young white guy! And yes, there followed four more young white guys. As Val and Henry called for questions related to the proposed ideas, another guy across the room pointed out the obvious (to me, anyway) and spoke my mind (to paraphrase): "why is it that there are only young white guys standing at the front of the room?" Now, I don't have anything against young, white guys - I call two of them son and I happen to like them both very much. But the longer I'm immersed in Emerge Oregon, the more disturbing the "trend" becomes.

Here in Oregon, only 26 of our 90 state legislators are women. We have no female members of Congress. We've only had one woman Governor. Two women serve in statewide office. And as a country - well, we're woefully behind; as of the 2008 election, women make up just 17% of Congress. 84th in the world - that's where we rank in terms of the number of women who hold elective office in these great United States. Behind places like China, Pakistan and Mexico.

Why does it matter? According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, having women in office widens the political debate to include a larger group of issues traditionally ignored by male policymakers. These include, but are not limited to, issues like paid family leave, flexible work options, after-school programs, health care for all kids, excellent childcare, fair wages, and strong environmental policy that protects our futures. The [same research \(pdf\)](#), suggests that states with higher averages of female representatives also had more women-friendly policies in place than other states. And according to Politico, [the preliminary findings of a study](#) done by researchers at Stanford and the University of Chicago, indicate that "on average, women in Congress introduce more bills, attract more co-sponsors, and bring home more money (emphasis added) for their districts than their male counterparts do". Witness the front page article in the O about Washington State's [Senator Patty Murray](#).

And here on the ground for me, as I seek to put great female role models in front of the members of the Emerge class, I bump into it all the time. There simply aren't enough of us on the XX side in leadership. According to The Center for American Women and Politics' new report, *Poised to Run*, (the most comprehensive study ever conducted on state legislators' routes to office - [read the full report here \(pdf\)](#)) there are numerous reasons why there aren't more women in elected leadership roles - some of them very familiar ("my kids are too young" and "I can't afford to serve" - because wages for electeds are often too low and women's contribution to family income too important) and some of them are painfully of the gender-cultural variety. Women still (in 2010!) see themselves as the helpers ("I just want to work behind the scenes" or my personal favorite "I don't know enough". Have you looked at Congress lately?). One of the things the study also points out is that women need to be recruited to run - and here at Emerge - we knew that already. It's part of our mission, in fact - to identify, recruit, train and inspire Democratic women to run for office and win.

Too many young white guys at the front of the room? You can help. Tell that amazing woman that you know that she should run. Help us identify the next generation of great Democratic women leaders - we're already recruiting for next year's class. And of course, you could make a donation to Emerge where we're training them today. Check us out at [EmergeOR.org](#).

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- A. I totally agree. Let's get more women elected.
- B. Let me give one more high five to the 6 hard working, dedicated guys who work closely with women on important economic justice, social justice, education, community