

The Republican Army of Moms

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In an email conversation with a few Republican insiders in early 2008, when then-Gov. Sarah Palin was merely a little-known rising star in conservative circles, talk turned to a debate about the ability of Republicans to compete on a broader scale in House districts. I brought up an idea I'd been toying with for some time — I called it the "Smart Mom" rule. It's worth revisiting in a cycle like this one, where upsets are to be expected in marginal districts. This morning I find that, in the wake of Palin's example and in stark opposition to [the other chamber's political idiocies](#) ^[1], the Republican House political leadership seems to be [applying a good idea](#): ^[2]



So far this year, 239 women are candidates for the House and 31 for the Senate, according to data from the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics. Among them, a record 107 Republican women have filed for a House seat, according to the National Republican Congressional Committee — surpassing a previous GOP high of 91 in 1994, and a sharp increase from the 65 who ran in 2008. And those numbers could still grow. In each year Rutgers has been keeping track, the final tally has exceeded the late April figure by more than 20 candidates.

"It looks like it is going to be a record year," said Gilda Morales, who crunches the data for the Rutgers's [sic] women's center. "What's bringing these numbers up is Republican women."

The jump in female GOP candidates mirrors the enthusiasm of Republicans in general, said Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.), who leads efforts to recruit female candidates for the NRCC. "I just think overall candidate recruitment is going well for the Republicans after two cycles where it's been more difficult for us."

Traditionally, one of the biggest reasons conservatives have a male-dominated Chamber of Commerce and local sports hero representation in the lower chamber is that they have a hard time finding female candidates for higher office. This is not because there are insufficient conservative women — as you may know, the gender gap is really just an example of the expanded racial gap than anything else (white women voted for McCain by a margin of 53-46) — but it's because conservative and especially Christian women tend to choose to abandon their careers, or shift to part time work, the instant they have kids.

This is not a bad choice for them, and probably a good one for their families, but it's one that deprives the GOP of a lot of very good candidates — a situation which is only becoming more challenging for Republicans as women overwhelmingly surpass men in educational achievement.

My thought, then, was that if Republicans were smart, in every district where they find a Democrat who has a 60+ edge, and the GOP has no obviously active candidates or farm team members in need of some seasoning, a general rule ought to be: run a Smart Mom.

In every one of these longshot districts, there's a mom — someone who, even if they have a part time career, own a small business, a former teacher, kids in the army, or is approaching retirement. It's an extremely difficult challenge to run a campaign with young kids or teenagers without feeling the ramifications — so instead find moms who came along on the

Reagan train, are now in their 40s and early 50s, and in many cases are adapting to empty nests. The opportunity to do something that's worthwhile, interesting, challenging, and — since it's unlikely they'll raise significant amounts of money — gives them the opportunity to leverage their vast resources of personal connections in lieu of significant funding.

The Smart Mom rule would be a top-down package, providing interested individuals with candidate training schools, a basic web campaign, a few seminars, eager college student volunteers, etc. — and if they make it close in the closing months of the campaign, DC can always send some cash. The ability to cut Rockwellian ad campaigns for normal middle aged suburbanite moms would represent a major break from the traditional over-groomed ambitious white men who typically represent the GOP brand. In the ideal form, these challenger candidates would be difficult to attack, unafraid to speak their minds, have natural connections within church/school communities to offset spending disadvantages, and even in a losing effort, would scare a few entrenched professional politicians in closer-than-expected races. And even if Republicans only adopt this strategy in the districts they expect to lose, in a sea change year the odds would favor a few of these candidates breaking through.

A Smart Mom approach would break away from traditional male candidates who likely have no shot anyway, and are just passing a resume check to get on the ballot. If Rep. McMorris Rodgers is adopting this strategy — essentially, drafting candidates who are like her — it's a positive sign that Republicans are getting away from some of the stagnant old traditions which led to a House caucus that currently has only 17 elected GOP women. Regardless of your opinions of either party, I'm sure we can agree that's a good thing.

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