

Republican women asked to up support

Source URL: <http://chronicle.augusta.com/news/government/elections/south-carolina-elections/south-carolina-governor/2010-08-13/republican>

By Sarita Chourey
Morris News Service
Friday, Aug 13, 2010

COLUMBIA - Amid an election season abuzz with high-profile conservative female candidates, the S.C. GOP is hoping women will join the party's new initiative and open their pocketbooks in the process.

"POWER (Power of Women Electing Republicans) was created with a simple mission: to mobilize the financial power of Republican women to help provide the party with the resources to have a maximum impact on the most important, competitive campaigns in the state," South Carolina Republican Party Chairman Karen Floyd said in a release.

The party's announcement said members of its new initiative will receive daily news from party headquarters and e-mail updates, and might attend an annual POWER Women's Luncheon. It included a suggestion for a \$1,000 donation.

The release quoted praise from Republican gubernatorial nominee Nikki Haley.

"POWER is a phenomenal way to get more women engaged in the political process, and help elect conservative leaders who will help get our state back on track," Haley said.

Women are apparently already participating in elections - less frequently as candidates, but more significantly as voters.

In the 2008 presidential election, about 1.1 million women voted in South Carolina, while only 840,417 men cast ballots, according to state election data.

Democratic Party spokeswoman Keiana Page called it "ironic" that Haley is touting the GOP's initiative but declined to sign a pledge last month put forth by a bipartisan group, which asked candidates, if elected, to make an effort to select qualified women for upper level administration posts. Democratic gubernatorial nominee Vincent Sheheen signed the pledge.

Page said the Democratic Party doesn't target either gender specifically for fundraising, and that the party's policies draw women's support.

"Our elected leadership tends to be more sensitive to women's issues," she said.

"When it comes to voters, we already get more votes from women than Republicans do, and that is because of our platform and our issues."

In the last presidential election, women voters nationwide favored then-Democratic nominee Barack Obama to Republican John McCain 56-43 percent.

There are 17 women in the U.S. Senate, including 13 Democrats and four Republicans. There are 73 women in the U.S. House, including 56 Democrats and 17 Republicans.

South Carolina has the least representation of women in its legislature, according to the Center for American Women and Politics. Women number 17 out of 124 House members and hold no offices in the 46-member S.C. Senate.

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