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The New Push for More Women in Politics

The 2012 Project aims to get women into positions of decision-making power

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With a busy medical practice, responsibilities for teaching medical students and taking care of three children, Theresa Rohr-Kirchgraber had never considered running for political office before. But with two kids now in college, she thinks the time might be right to make a contribution on a broader scale. That's why the Indianapolis, Ind. doctor, 50, is considering a run for state representative in 2012. "At some point, at 50, you think, 'What's next? Who needs me now?'" she says. "I've always wanted to be able to have a larger impact and make a change for the better."

The strategists behind [The 2012 Project](#) hope Rohr-Kirchgraber is just one of many women who will vie for seats in Congress and statehouses across the country two years from now. Forget the [November midterms](#), this group is already looking ahead to what it says is the next big chance to get women of all political persuasions into positions of decision-making power.

To get the ball rolling, the non-partisan project, an effort of the [Center for American Women and Politics \(CAWP\)](#) at Rutgers University, is sending former elected female officials across the nation to encourage professionals aged 45 and older working in underrepresented fields to throw their hats into the ring.

They plan to speak to more than 200 conferences, conventions and other gatherings of women in finance, technology, science, energy, environment, international relations, health and small business.

"Women change everything as to agendas, procedures, content and outcome," said Mary Hughes, the project's director. "They bring a different point of view and they have different priorities based on their experience."

Women's legislative voices were sorely missed, for example, in the contentious 1991 [Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings](#) before the Senate Judiciary Committee but made a difference in 1993 when a [group of female lawmakers demanded](#) that the National Institutes of Health include women in medical trials, she points out.

Now with predictions that the number of women in Congress, which currently stands at 17 percent, is [expected to drop for the first time in 30 years](#), the push is even more imperative. "We don't have very many women, and it is hurting us," Hughes says. "These numbers do not represent the talent or activism of women in this country."

The timing of the drive for female candidates is pegged on the [2012 reapportionment](#), which will create new and open seats ripe for newcomers to step up and step in.

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