

RN ADVISOR CONTRIBUTION

A CASE FOR *Women*: THE 2012 PROJECT

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The November election results were a stinging reminder that American women are falling behind. With women currently accounting for 24 percent of state legislators and 17 percent of Congress, the U.S. ranks 73rd in the world for gender parity in governance, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Over the last decade, the number of women representatives in Congress and state legislatures has remained relatively flat, with women gaining an average of 3 or more new Members of Congress each election cycle. This year's results represent a giant step backward from even this incremental progress. Nearly 100 fewer women will serve in state legislatures, across the country, and for the first time in a generation, there will be fewer women in the U.S. House.

The 2012 Project has a plan to reverse these dismal numbers, and we are delighted to have Rachel's Network as our partner in this historic campaign. Together, we can ensure that women leaders from the environmental movement are included among those "invited to run" for office and guided to resources that can make them successful candidates.

Like Rachel's Network, we're looking for "impassioned leaders and agents of change." Research shows that women officeholders bring distinctive perspectives and experiences

to government, putting the needs of women, children, and families on the public agenda more often than men do. Women favor a more open and inclusive style of governing, bringing to the table previously underrepresented groups. So electing more women could be in itself a way to attack tough problems. But how to do it?

Since we know that when women run, women win, our approach is simple: get more women to run. And 2012 is an ideal time to do that as the first election year after a national census and reapportionment. That means opportunity and a more level playing field as new seats are created, district lines are redrawn, and many veterans retire rather than start anew.

The 2012 Project will seek talented women to take up the challenge, and we know where to find them: baby-boomers. Women age 45 and up are ideally positioned to run; their children are headed toward self-sufficiency, their careers are established, and they have strong roots in their communities. We are especially focused on engaging accomplished women from fields that have been under-represented in government, including the environment, energy, and science, along with health care, finance, technology, small business, and international affairs. Outreach to women of color and diverse backgrounds is a priority.



The 2012 Project has a three-pronged strategy to mobilize an unprecedented number of women to run for office:

- **Educate:** At conventions, seminars and regional meetings, our staff and a faculty of former elected women present the facts about women's underrepresentation and the need for a national, coordinated effort to elect more women.
- **Inspire:** Faculty members tell potential candidates why they ran, what they accomplished, and the difference it makes to have women setting the agenda and making decisions about public policy.
- **Connect:** We connect women interested in taking next steps toward a candidacy to leadership institutes, think tanks, campaign training programs and fundraising networks designed to help them succeed in their own states.



RN ADVISOR DEBBIE WALSH, CENTER, CONFERS WITH MICHELLE GREENE, LAURA LEVINE, HEIDI HARTMANN & REP. CYNTHIA LUMMIS AT THE 2009 CONGRESSIONAL WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE.

Visit www.the2012project.us or email info@the2012project.us to learn more. Email the same address to line up 2012 Project speakers for conferences or conventions. Together, we can solve this problem – and new women officeholders can get ready to take on more!