



All over but the tears

What happened to the Dems, poll watchers, the Latino vote and the war on women

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What Election 2012 means for women

BY BOB GEARY

If you've paid attention to the women's issues of the 2012 campaign, you might agree with the late Texas Gov. Ann Richards, who said—quoting the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay—that life isn't one thing after another, it's the same damned thing over and over.

A woman's right to use contraception? To terminate a pregnancy? To have affordable access to breast cancer screenings, pap smears and other preventive health-care services? These are old and long-settled questions for a majority of Americans who are not Republican males—as is the question of pay equity between men and women—or so you'd think.

But as Cecile Richards, Ann's daughter and president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, emphasized in Raleigh last week, these questions hung in the balance as Election Day approached. If Mitt Romney wins the White House, Richards said, "He's not promising change. He's just saying let's go back to the way things were before."

Before as in before the pill, which came on the market 52 years ago and launched a sexual revolution. Before *Roe v. Wade*, decided by the Supreme Court 39 years ago, assured that women can control their bodies. Before the landmark Affordable Care Act, signed by President Obama.

"I want a president like Barack Obama," Richards said, "who absolutely gets it in his core that women are equal parts of society, [and] that this society is only as good as it can be if everyone participates equally."

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GOP chairman. "I'm not saying [the lines are] perfectly drawn now and I'm not saying they've been gerrymandered, but hearing Democrats say that is kind of like the pot calling the kettle black."

North Carolina Democrats and the party in general are paying for pushing a leftist agenda that clashes with the typical voter, Hicks said, adding, "President Obama has taken the country just too far to the left and there are some repercussions."

Peter Feaver, a Duke University political science professor, says it's more complicated than that for North Carolina Democrats.

"There already has been a lot of lamentations over the current governor's time in office," Feaver said of Gov. Bev Perdue, who chose not to seek re-election. "She struggled and that hurt the party. When your top Democrat in the state

any election is about a lot of things, and as Richards also said, no single election settles anything. Still, as I await the 2012 returns and consider the impact of an Obama or a Romney victory, I keep coming back to the "war on women" waged by the Republican Party over the last two years—and longer.

Is "war on women" too hyperbolic? *The New York Times'* Nicholas Kristof asked this question over the weekend in a column otherwise sympathetic to the cause. Call it a war on women's equality, then. Or call it a war on working people's equality, because women are the ground troops in an economic fight that working Americans—of both genders—are losing to corporate owners and global capitalists.

Like her mother, Cecile Richards is smart and quick-tongued. She's also a lightning rod for Republicans for her post with Planned Parenthood. Because its local clinics can provide abortions or referrals for abortions, it is a target in the Republican war—despite the fact that 3 million women go there for health screenings and preventive care, including contraceptives that result in fewer abortions.

When Richards sat down in a Raleigh living room Thursday to talk with women activists, she wasn't focused on Planned Parenthood. Instead, she argued that the Affordable Care Act—Obamacare—will be a watershed for women's equality if it survives the election. Romney's Republicans have pledged to repeal it.

The ACA is hugely important, Richards said, because it guarantees for the first time that women can obtain health insurance regardless of pre-existing conditions such as breast cancer. It also guarantees that they won't be charged more than men, and that preventive services, including

is struggling, that hurts everybody else."

President Obama's re-election bid, troubled by an economy growing too slowly for some voters, also plays a part, Feaver said.

Yet the key to a state Democratic rebound could be an influx of Yankees and Californians.

John Davis points out the state's voting is becoming increasingly clustered in urban, politically moderate areas settled by a growing population of non-Southerners. Davis said half of the state's voting is centralized in 13 of the state's 100 counties.

That includes left-leaning voters in Wake, Durham and Orange counties where, in 2008, Obama dominated. He won those counties with 56 percent, 75 percent and 71 percent of the vote, respectively.

"The great hope for Democrats is truly this new urban voter in North Carolina," Davis said. "There is great potential for Democrats in the future." ▲



contraception, will be covered with no co-pays or deductibles. The latter is worth \$50 to \$60 a month for women, she said.

It isn't just women who stand to gain. Men who sleep with women do too. So does the country, because preventing pregnancies and catching cancers early should save money for everyone with insurance, while helping women to be productive, healthy contributors to the economy.

As Richards said, "Preventive care is the best investment we can make as a country."

This all seems so obvious that the younger women conversing with Richards asked, Why are we still fighting these battles?

Dallas Thompson, a Raleigh nonprofit manager, joked that her grandmother, always the activist, wrote fiery papers long ago about equal pay and access to birth control. "When I was little, she was like, 'make policy, not coffee,'" Thompson said. "And I was like, 'what?'"

It was gallows humor, because these women don't think there's anything funny about the Republicans' intentions. It's not funny when Republicans argue that employers should decide whether a woman's insurance pays for her contraception. It's not funny when their candidates for U.S. Senate in Missouri and Indiana explain why some rapes aren't "legitimate," or why the law should require that a woman give birth if she's pregnant by rape—because it's "what God intended."

Richards' answer was that the Republican Party has been captured by right-wing extremists. I think that's part of it. Republicans like Romney, a culture capitalist with few political opinions besides the value of greed, go along with the Christian conservatives because if they don't, they can't be nominated. Romney goes along, I would add, because of the Republicans' broader economic agenda, brought to you by the Koch Brothers.

The dirty little secret of the American economy is that since the advent of the pill 50 years ago, household incomes have barely

budgeted even though productivity is far higher and the rich—the top 1 percent—now enjoy obscene wealth.

Worse, the only reason household incomes have stayed steady is that women flooded the workforce, joining their male (or female) partners to earn as much for a shared household as a man earned by himself in 1960.

And, remember, women are cheap labor, bringing home just 77 cents to the \$1 paid to men.

Without so many working women, the American economy would face an enormous labor shortage; wage rates would be higher. Instead, as the economist Richard Wolff wrote, "Over the last 30 years, the vast majority of U.S. workers have, in fact, gotten poorer, when you sum up flat real wages, reduced benefits ... reduced public services and increased tax burdens."

Capitalists such as Romney want women to work. They have binders of women applicants. What they don't want is for women to have economic or political power.

Why? Because women, in every poll, favored Obama over Romney by 5 points or more, and backed Obama's progressive agenda of gender equality, a stronger public safety net and higher taxes on the rich.

Men, meanwhile, favored Romney in every poll by 5 points or more because—well, partly because the Republicans have convinced a lot of men that what's good for women is bad for them.

Which allows Republicans like Romney to steal away with the riches while their party keeps women down—and working men with them.

So what happened? Did women, men and the country come out ahead? Or did the Republicans win? ▲

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