

# Women Will Get It done

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## Introduction

Having ended my involvement in American political campaigns nearly ten years ago and having cut back on my work over the last few years, I found myself with time to do something I had never had or made the time to do – sit around doing nothing except to let my mind wander.

Over time I came up with a number of propositions.

America is in trouble, not from the threat of foreign powers but from the goings on within its borders. And men are in charge.

The congress, by design or otherwise, is only marginally functional. And men are in charge.

Much of the executive branch suffers at least from benign management dysfunction or worse. And men are in charge.

Americans' trust in all three branches of government is dismally low. Only 28% of Americans trust the legislative branch, 43% trust the executive branch, and, at the lowest measurement on record to date, only 61% trust the judicial branch. Trust in the government has eroded amid a struggling economy and an era of intense partisan gridlock. Collectively, Americans' trust in the three branches of the federal government is lower than at any point in the last two decades. And men are in charge.

The two major political parties are more irrelevant than not. And men are in charge.

The role of the central government in Washington is steadily diminishing. While certain functions will always be controlled nationally other issues of daily life from education to voting rights will be centered in regional enclaves, states or even cities.

Something has to change. As I began to think about various needed changes, I came across the following

*There is one ruinously dysfunctional part of the American story, and that's the breakdown of our political system. It's time for an intervention, to take the keys away.*

- David Ignatius, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013, *Washington Post*

To date the keys have been in the hands of men. That is what needs to change. Women represent more than half of the electorate it is time that their voices be heard and their authority enhanced.

*I have found in my time in politics that when you have a significant number of women sitting in a decision maker's chair, that it can move the discussion and focus in ways that would not have happened before, and I am hopeful that this is one of those instances*

- U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono (D-Hi) May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013 *Washington Post*

A freshman on the Senate Armed Services Committee commenting on efforts to deal with sexual harassment in the armed services

*If the circumstances are such that a female Dalai Lama is more useful, then automatically a female Dalai Lama will come.*

- Dalai Lama, June 2013, Australia

*We have been excluding women...What we need is a revolution led by women. I think women ought to be saying to us men "You have made a mess, just get out of the way and let us in"*

- Bishop Desmond Tutu, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Davos, Switzerland

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Some number of months ago, I began collecting information and ideas. What follows are some facts and reflections. Where this goes from here, I have no present idea. I am interested in your thoughts.

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**Monition: Politics Has No Gender**  
**By Michael Berman, written in the late 1970s**

*During the middle to late 1970s, I drafted a campaign operating manual titled "Beyond the Smoke Filled Room." It was based on my experiences in campaigns beginning in 1964. It was never published. During those campaigns I had become aware that most women were limited in the roles they played in campaigns. I wrote a piece that was included in the book entitled "Monition: Politics Has No Gender." It also was not published.*

*In the past 35-40 years, the landscape has changed and generally improved, but there are still significant issues relating to the role of women in the electoral process and in the workplace. "Women Will Get It Done" is designed to describe that landscape and the solution.*

From the outset of this nation's history, women were excluded from the political process. They have been discriminated against as other minority groups have been, except, women are not a minority group.

Not until 144 years after the Declaration of Independence were women successful in obtaining suffrage. With few exceptions, women who have been involved in politics have been relegated to mechanical roles, excluded from participation in strategy and rarely paid.

The time for a change in the role of women in politics is now. What are your attitudes toward women in politics? What stereotypes affect your response to their involvement? What assumptions have you made about their value in the process?

Some thought must be given to some of the reasons that women have been excluded from many political roles.

The principal reason that women have been excluded is men. In politics, as in other endeavors, men have had the dominant role and have done everything possible to maintain it. Most people in major political roles have ego needs which, when coupled with attitudes of male supremacy, result in a resolve by most men that women should not be permitted in the “smoke-filled rooms” in which political strategies are dictated.

Women have been trained from childhood—by both men and women—that subordinate roles were all they should expect. Consequently, the number of women who tried to break out of the mold was minimal.

The institutions of politics – national, state and local parties as well as campaign organizations—did nothing to provide equal opportunities for women. In fact, through such devices as organizational structures that invariably included a “women’s activities director,” campaign manuals that separated “women’s” activities from other elements of party and campaign activity and chairman/chairwoman titles, the segregation of women was perpetuated. Who can remember a campaign that had a “men’s activities director” or a manual that specifically delineated “men’s” activities?

For a long while many women were not inclined to support the efforts of those women who sought new roles in politics. Women who were successful in obtaining positions of professional responsibility were, understandably, often unwilling to risk their positions by advocating for other women from within

The arguments which have commonly been used against women in politics are for the most part “makeweight.”

1. **Women lack experience:** No one has political experience when they start in politics. Both men and women need training of one kind or another and certainly no argument can be made that men are more easily trained than women. In fact, women often have experience in other areas of endeavor which are particularly applicable to politics.

2. **Women don't have the credentials necessary to have credibility as candidates:** Professional credentials are valued assets, but the electorate increasingly understands that the "traditional" background is not really all that important. In fact, some of the "traditional" credentials have fallen into disrepute. Be that as it may, more women are now involved in traditionally credible professions and increasingly, professions, such as teaching, which are heavily weighted with women are becoming more acceptable backgrounds for politics.
3. **Men won't deal with women in politics:** That argument falls almost by definition. There is no evidence to support that contention; since women have been deprived of significant positions in politics, there has been no opportunity to make any such determination. Men and women deal together in a variety of other settings and there is no reason to assume they won't relate politically.
4. **Men won't vote for or work for female candidates:** This is another argument for which there is no factual basis. In fact, some research has indicated that men have been more willing to vote for female candidates than have been other women. To the extent they desire, female candidates are able to find male campaign managers and staff.
5. **Men have the money and generally do not respond to political fund solicitation by women:** There are many women who are not married or who are married and have their own source of funds from which to make political contributions. Further, there is no showing that women will be less successful than men at soliciting contributions if given the opportunity to contact regular contributors. In addition, there is a discernable increase in the number of women making political contributions directly from "family" funds "earned by their spouses" without having to consult with their husbands.

The climate is rapidly improving for the participation of women in politics.

There is an increased awareness generally, by large numbers of women, as to what their role ought to be in the political process. Many women who have previously not exhibited much concern about the way women have been treated

in business and politics are now exercised by this discrimination. Even though they may not be interested in or able to take on full-time positions in either endeavor, they are beginning to demand that women who have the inclination and the time be granted equal opportunity.

Younger, more modern male politicians appear to be less threatened by the prospect of equality for women in political activities and are helping to break down barriers.

The second generation of women's rights leaders is able to take a little softer line than those who led the way and the efforts of these women are meeting a more affirmative response from the existing power structures.

The continuing re-emphasis on organization and volunteerism creates a special opportunity for women. The organizations and efforts in which women have engaged outside business and political worlds, whether charitable or other civic endeavor, have often involved organizational management of massive volunteer efforts. These women are skilled in all aspects of organization and management including budgeting and fundraising- skills that are needed in politics now more than ever. Women can no longer be expected to volunteer these skills and they must be compensated for their time at the same rate as men for positions of similar responsibility.

Men involved in political activity have become increasingly convinced, either because it make political sense or because it is right or both, that women should have a new role in politics.

What should women do in their efforts to obtain their rightful place in the system? The answer to that question is simple – they and those men who stand with them must do whatever is necessary.

There must be protest against continued discrimination. Such protest ought to be reasoned but should be “unreasoned” if reasoned efforts aren't successful.

Existing political institutions and structures should be abandoned if they don't respond and develop new ones that are responsive. Hopefully, those new institutions won't be exclusive.

Women should take a more aggressive role in the process of soliciting candidates and party leaders.

Particular emphasis should be placed on supporting and working for female candidates, though not to the exclusion of supporting responsible male candidates who make clear their understanding of a need for an equal role of women in politics.

This is not to say that women should support women just because they are women any more than men should support men on that sole basis of sexual similarity.

I do think women, and men as well, should take an extra look at female candidates and give some thought to the need to balance the current inequality in the numbers of women in public office.

The success of female candidates in mounting viable campaigns, even if they are not all victorious, will give a substantial boost to the goal of women's equal involvement in politics.

It is likely that success in electing women to office in the executive branch will have a greater impact than election to the legislative branch because of the higher visibility of constitutional offices.

While women have provided the majority of the manpower in political campaigns for years, there is a need to encourage even more women who possess an obvious abundance of skills to participate. Increasingly, those who really participate in politics will control the process.

There is a need for affirmative action.

We must come to believe that women have a right to equal opportunity in politics and that it is in the best interests of the political process that this equality comes to exist at the earliest possible time.

Women must have roles of prominence and responsibility in campaigns and be paid on the same basis as men for their efforts.

It is necessary for political institutions to abandon traditional paths to leadership, at least for the moment, and place qualified women in positions of power on the ladder of leadership from top to bottom.

Special training experiences should be made available to female candidates and campaign workers.

Political professionals and others with substantial experience, the “pols,” must make themselves available to female candidates to the extent their assistance is desired.

Until there is no longer something unique about female candidates, they may well face some special problems which are rarely, if ever, faced by male candidates. Women may be called upon to justify or defend their right to this new role.

If a woman is married and has young children the question may arise – “who is taking care of the children?” The principal problem with this question, for which there are a variety of good answers, is that it usually does not surface so that it can be handled frontally. It most often takes the form of a whispering campaign. It may be well for female candidates to surface the answer in subtle ways from the outset.

Married women, running for an office which requires them to perform their duties in a town other than where they live, may face questions like: “how will you keep up you family responsibilities if elected?”

What does your husband think of your running for office? This question is more likely to surface in direct questioning from people to the candidate or in another form to her husband. The answer can be very important if it appears that



the husband is not really favorable to his wife's candidacy or worse yet, opposes it; it can have a dampening effect on the campaign. Sometimes you can catch two birds in one net with the answer to that question, i.e. "He is all for me. In fact, he is giving up some of his fishing and golf time to spend more time with the children and some of the household chores."

Candidates must demonstrate an understanding of the emerging roles of women in the political process or face the political consequences.

Candidates should avoid the trap of thinking that women are only concerned about the so-called "women's issues" like the equal rights amendment, abortion and anti-sex discrimination laws, to name a few. Those things are important to many women, but women are also interested in the same issues as men. They are interested in all those things that affect their lives and the people for whom they care.

Would anyone be so foolish to suggest that a woman whose son or daughter is in the army is any less concerned about war than a father?

Would anyone suggest that a sour economy which results in the breadwinner of a family losing his job is of less concern to a woman than a man? In fact, the argument can be made that a woman who is responsible for the household is more greatly affected by a layoff than the husband who loses the job.

No longer will married women necessarily vote as their husbands do any more than married men will necessarily vote as their wives do. No longer can there be a "smoke-filled room" where key decisions are made behind closed doors on which is hung an implicit sign "No Women Allowed."