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*Spring 2009*  
**LINES IN THE SAND**

*To Run the World, Power Up Feminism*  
**by Gloria Feldt**

In our **Spring '09 edition, On The Issues Magazine** writers and artists discuss feminist and progressive values that transcend politics -- our **Lines In The Sand**.

Were you thinking we were done with elections and could take a few minutes to celebrate a pro-woman administration and a Democratically-controlled Congress that appears ready to embrace pro-choice and pro-equality measures? Sorry, my Sisters. Elections are never over when they are over.

Candidates are already gearing up for 2010 and 2012. It's critically important that feminists review the lessons of 1992 and its parallels to 2008 so we can avoid repeating mistakes—and more urgently, so we can charge ahead with strategies that advance a bold vision of gender equality and justice.

After all, men have been making America's political decisions for over 200 years now, and I don't need to tell you it's not a pretty picture. Women, especially those not afraid to identify themselves with the F-word, are the change we need. But whether women will be the change we get depends on whether we use the power we have.

For the one constant in politics is that every victory sows the seeds of the next defeat and every defeat sows the seeds of the next victory, unless eternal vigilance is applied. This means using a movement mentality that continually advances bold new ideas and keeps its grassroots watered.

**Ideological Whiplash Sneaks Up**

A quick look back: 1992's "**Year of the Woman**" was deemed a transformational moment similar to 2008. The nation was ready for change, tired of Republican presidents who took us into war while taking the economy downhill, and disgusted with wedge-issue politics that kept the country fighting about abortion and homosexuality when people were hurting from bread-and-butter woes. Women voters were especially outraged (read that, "activated") over the Senate's treatment of **Anita Hill** after she accused the eminently unqualified conservative Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment.

**"Year of the Woman." Then,**



[@Liz Whitney Quisgard](#)

Then, Boom! In 1994, the right came roaring back with the Gingrich Revolution and ultra-conservative "Contract for America," (or as I prefer, a "Contract on America"). Republicans, mostly of the hard right variety, grabbed a net gain of eight Senate and 54 House seats.

**Karan English**, a pro-choice Democrat supported by Emily's List, typifies what happened. English was elected to Congress from Northern Arizona's swing District 6 in 1992. Though backed even by "Mr. Conservative," the late Senator

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• Merle Hoffman, publisher of On The Issues Magazine



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## Boom! The Right came roaring back.

Barry Goldwater (who in his inimitable way said that "all go kick Jerry Falwell in the ass"), she was defeated in 1994 by Republican **J.D. Hayworth**.

Far from being passé, conservative political strength regain Congress and the national psyche. This scared the bejeezus still wet-behind-the-ears administration. In Texas, George Governor Ann Richards that same year, setting the stage for presidential win, which by any measure has been devastating advances in civil rights, women's rights and reproductive justice.

It's tempting to credit the likes of Gingrich and Bush's spinmeister Karl Rove with right wing ideological whiplash could have been prevented if only the women who turned out to vote in droves returned to the polls in 1994. Instead, women demonstrated voting power, and then too many political firmament. The right, on the other hand, never, ever goes away.

In 2008, **Ann Kirkpatrick reclaimed** English's district (now redrawn Dist. 1) for the Democrats right-wing incumbent Rick Renzi, again securing even some conservative endorsements. But will 2010?

## Get Serious About Gender Parity

Power unused is power useless. It takes sustained ethical use of power to get and secure liberty we must understand that power is not inherently bad; it's our responsibility to use power in the values both in political office and in influencing policy decisions. Feminists must get a bigger vision female equality in making public policy, and mean business about achieving it by date certain. **Identify** what that agenda includes. My take is that we all know it when we see it, so don't let it agreed to by every women's group keep us from taking action without delay.

It's true that gender politics has become more nuanced, as the paradox of faux feminist Sarah F that makes it even more important to support women (and men--see below) who explicitly and feminist values and policies. That's not necessarily partisan, incidentally, since the Republican party support the ERA. It's all about who wields voting power most effectively, and the Republicans' side because of right-wing organizing precinct by precinct is yet one more cautionary tale.

## Deal A Three-Handed Strategy

This three-point strategy will get us our rightful half of the policy-making pie: 1) elect women who promote women for appointive office, and 3) mobilize movement and grassroots support for political equality and justice for women.

### 1. Elect women (and men) with feminist values

Women make up only 17 percent of the U.S. Senate and 16 percent of the House. At the current rate will take **70 years to reach parity**. Personally, I can't wait that long. It's well past time for women in all decision making bodies, especially the reins of political power. So let's set specific goals and hold them accountable to reach them:

- 50 percent feminist legislators by 2015. They may be male or female, but all must proactively progress toward gender equality in a legislative agenda and in electoral office. It's going to take men and women to make change, so why not bring men into the effort for gender parity?
- Full gender parity in Congress and state legislatures by 2025. If **nations as diverse** as Sweden and Rwanda (56 percent) can do it, why can't the U.S.? Not surprisingly, the quality of democracy when women exceed the **UN's "critical mass" definition**, or 30 percent, and, according to the World Bank, the more women in parliament, **the less corruption**. So everybody benefits.

### 2. Promote women for appointive office

Essentially the same commitments apply as in the electoral strategy. Think about the judiciary, **Lithwick speculates** on what we mean when we say there should be more female judges and suffice it to remember how Sandra Day O'Connor cobbled together majorities to hold onto Roe v Wade's ever-diminishing thread during her tenure. Multiply this by cabinet posts, and local, state and federal offices, and the impact is exponential.

[IntimateWars.com](#)

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Go for it. Seek out an appointment. It's also a good way to get your feet wet and prepare to run office yourself.

### 3. Mobilize movement and grassroots support for women's equality and justice

We need to dramatically beef up support and encouragement for women officials at all levels of government through a strategic coalition of the burgeoning existing organizations **dedicated to recruiting and training women** to run for office. The infrastructure is there, but could easily be leveraged with some forward looking leadership.

## Get us our rightful half.

South Dakotans faced and defeated a ballot measure almost identical to the one rejected in Arizona in 1992. Now, several states are mounting draconian **egg-as-persons initiatives for 2010**.

We should change the dynamic by mobilizing supporters around initiatives like the **Prevention First Act** and the **Freedom of Choice Act** at state and federal levels.

Activists need to act, so let's act from the power of setting our own agenda rather than reacting to attacks from the other side.

## Hard Times Make Good Chances

Gender parity won't solve all problems, but women's lives will be significantly better and our laws more just if we commit to carrying out these three strategies.

The current economic mess is the best opportunity we will ever have to hasten the pace of change toward gender parity, since people are more open to breaking boundaries during chaotic times. But like any profound change, it won't just happen. It's up to women to elect, promote, and mobilize our way to equality and justice.

**Gloria Feldt** is the author of "The War on Choice: the Right-Wing Attack on Women's Lives" and "How to Fight Back," and former president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America and its political arm, the Planned Parenthood Action Fund. She's currently working on a book about women's relationship with power. Her blog is **Heartfeldt Politics**. Reach her at Gloria@gloriafeldt.com or Twitter @Heartfeldt. See more at **GloriaFeldt.com**.

Also see **Equal Rights Amendment Still Brings Out Ranters** by Jennifer S. Macleod in this edition of On The Issues Magazine.

Also see **Common Enemies: LGBT, Abortion Share Foes** by Pam Chamberlain in this edition of On The Issues Magazine.

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