



Why Women are Fed Up

Staying home from the polls or pulling the lever for a Republican out of anger at the Democrats is simply self-punishment, says Gloria Feldt, author of *No Excuses: 9 Ways Women Can Change How We Think About Power*. Instead, progressive women must take action Tuesday.

by [Gloria Feldt \(/contributors/gloria-feldt.html\)](/contributors/gloria-feldt.html) | October 29, 2010 5:44 PM EDT

I once had an assistant who kept a sign on her desk that read: “Don’t get mad, get even.”

This was a woman who knew her power. More important, she used it.

But troubling signs portend that this year, women voters, unlike men, aren’t getting mad or even—they’re getting depressed. More accurately, they are turning their anger inward instead of using its energy to [propel action \(http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/21/us/politics/21poll.html?_r=1\)](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/21/us/politics/21poll.html?_r=1).

Instead, Democratic and progressive women of all stripes need to take a “get even” attitude as their new mantra. And they won’t get even by not showing up at the polls or by voting for a Republican out of anger at the Democrats’ failure to live up to their promises. That’s simply self-punishment by leaving power unused.

Instead, women should get productively angry and grab candidates by the virtual short hairs to demand the change we want in exchange for our support. Women can get even with President Obama and the Democratic Congress’ lackluster performance only by using voting power visibly and ratcheting up, not withdrawing from, activism.

Here’s why: Women make up 51 percent of the population and 54 percent of voters—closer to 60 percent if measuring Democratic voters alone. Women hold the power to decide who will win and who will lose elections.

True, progressive women have every right to be discouraged. Obama and the Democrats in control of Congress early on threw them under the bus on [family planning \(/articles/2010/03/22/the-pro-choice-crowd-fights-back.html\)](/articles/2010/03/22/the-pro-choice-crowd-fights-back.html) and [abortion coverage \(/articles/2010/07/16/obama-ban-on-abortion-coverage-sparks-feminist-outrage.html\)](/articles/2010/07/16/obama-ban-on-abortion-coverage-sparks-feminist-outrage.html) and have been molasses-in-January slow about moving the [Paycheck Fairness Act \(http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1338\)](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1338) despite brazenly using Lilly Ledbetter and the more limited legislation [named for her \(/cheats/2009/01/23/time-for-equal-pay.html\)](/cheats/2009/01/23/time-for-equal-pay.html) as a photo-op early in the administration.



Democratic women need to step up and take control by voting. Credit: J.D. Pooley / Getty Images

Many are rightly annoyed by Obama's mealy-mouthed approach to Don't Ask, Don't Tell and his confounding unwillingness to state non-negotiables in health-care reform (contrasted with "health-insurance reform," as he cleverly morphed the language midway into that battle). Then there is his infuriating penchant for gratuitously offering compromises before a [policy debate \(http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/22/AR2009062200349.html\)](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/22/AR2009062200349.html) has even begun. That's like waving red meat before starving lions, then wondering why they snap off your hand.

More women should embrace the anger and grasp the truth, as Clinton did by taking the secretary of State position, that power unused is power useless.

Adding to these insults, supporters of Hillary Clinton have reason to roll their eyes and want to back away from politics when they see that Obama's skills as an executive—a leadership role requiring a bold agenda setter—are inadequate to the task. It's easy to fume smugly that she would have [made the better president \(/articles/2010/09/08/hillary-clinton-foreign-policy-speech-better-than-obama.html\)](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/09/08/hillary-clinton-foreign-policy-speech-better-than-obama.html).

• [Midterm Predictions from the Election Oracle \(http://www.thedailybeast.com/election-oracle/\)](http://www.thedailybeast.com/election-oracle/)

• [Meghan McCain: My Heart Goes Out to Christine \(/articles/2010/10/29/christine-odonnell-sex-scandal-meghan-mccain-defends-her.html\)](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/10/29/christine-odonnell-sex-scandal-meghan-mccain-defends-her.html) But rather than wringing hands, how about letting that simmering anger rise to a boil? More women should embrace the anger that propels their male counterparts into decisive action at the ballot box, and grasp the truth, as Clinton did by taking the secretary of State position, that power unused is power useless.

Too many have forgotten what happened in 1994, two years after the "year of the woman." In 1992, women voted in record numbers ([an upsurge of 16 million voters \(http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/hill/malcom.htm\)](http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/hill/malcom.htm)). And since progressive women far outnumber conservative ones, Bill Clinton was swept into office, along with a record number of women, largely Democrats, and progressive men.

Disappointed with Clinton and the Democratic leadership in 1994, that same 16 million-woman upsurge turned their anger inward and stayed home. The result was the Gingrich revolution and 14 years of right-wing sway in Congress and in the culture.

Today's Mama Grizzlies notwithstanding, it's not progress when female or male elected officials pursue the same policies that threw the economy into a tailspin and eviscerate women's hard-won economic and reproductive rights.

As Karen Middleton, president of Emerge America, an organization that recruits and supports pro-choice Democratic women candidates told me via email, "Obama knows women matter to his success, and if we can deliver a Democratic Congress, we can demand more between now and 2012." She advises progressive women to learn from their adversaries: "Republican women were fired up by Sarah Palin. She and the 'grizzlies' ignited an audience that was being largely ignored by their party."

Sound familiar? Yes, the Democratic Party establishment has been lousy at supporting progressive women candidates, opting instead to recruit Blue Dog conservatives who usually become Trojan Horses: Bart Stupak, who almost deep-sixed health reform over his [anti-choice ideology \(http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-6235073-503544.html\)](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-6235073-503544.html), comes to mind.

The 2010 election is the opportunity for women to flex their power muscles and demand that the president and whatever Democrats are left standing come November 3 work harder than ever for women with progressive values.

Whether or not the Democrats retain their majority in Congress, these three strategies will work far better than getting depressed: 1) Cast votes in greater numbers than ever, being sure to call attention to this fact; 2) Immediately after the elections, remind winners where their power base is—they must understand that getting re-elected requires prioritizing a vigorous pro-woman agenda; and 3) Hold them accountable. Tell them, "You'd better do better, and we're forming a watchdog panel to make sure you do. If you don't, we'll be running one of us against you come the next election cycle."

Women must let that angry energy boil. Point it outward where the real problem is. Then get even with the real oppressor—those on the Republican right who want to take us back to the very policies that failed America during George W. Bush's administration. *That's* what's empowering, and that's women's power *used*.

Gloria Feldt (http://www.GloriaFeldt.com) is an activist, former president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and author, most recently, of No Excuses: 9 Ways Women Can Change How We Think About Power (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1580053289/thedaibe-20).

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