

Why It Matters What's At Stake

Patricia Orrange, March 10, 2012

We are going to drill down more deeply into the issues at stake in the up-coming election later today but before we do, I'd like to share some numbers with you. In 2004, 1.82 million women voted in North Carolina. That number dramatically increased in 2008, the next presidential election year. It was 2.38 million. In 2010, 1.44 million women voted and we can see what happened as a result.

As of February, 2012, there are 3,368,337 registered female voters in North Carolina. There are a total of 6,232,242 total voters altogether. Women currently represent over 54% of the total electorate.

Then we need to go to some numbers that come from the Anne E Casey Foundation.

10 % of the children in North Carolina live in high poverty areas and 25 % of all children in North Carolina live in poverty. This number is up from 19 % who lived in poverty in 2000. Research tells us that these children are the most vulnerable and in need of extra support to be successful in school and later in life.

Three out of 4 or 77 % of mothers with children under the age of 18 are in the labor force and yet last year our state budget cut the allocation to early education and Smart Start by 22 % and then just a couple of weeks ago tried to redefine the meaning of "children at risk" to prohibit access to preschool for thousands more children. And, while the legislature was cutting funding available for Smart Start and preK education, they decided to cap the salaries of the administrators of the Partnership for Children at a substantially lower level. These are all women.

So, we need to consider that from a pay equity perspective women on average still earn only 77 cents on the dollar to men nationally. That number is 67.5 cents on the dollar for African Americans and only 58.7 cents for Latinas. These numbers hold firm for North Carolina and that number is somewhat lower in North Carolina.

Over the past several years what can only be **called all-out blatant attacks against women** have pervaded the social agendas of our legislators at both the state and

national levels. Some say it is a WAR against women...that may sound too militaristic a statement but the sense of it is true. While jobs (finding and keeping them), education, health care (including Medicaid and Medicare) and security (having a home and being able to keep it) are the very most important issues for women, legislators have focused on such things as defunding Planned Parenthood and severely restricting the reproductive freedom for women. Rights we have long since taken for granted are suddenly front and center and threatened. Who knew that our right to contraception would be threatened? The Supreme Court decided decades ago that birth control and contraception were legal. Why now do we need to defend this right?

And as we go forward, the number of women who have been staunch advocates for women's issues and rights in the state legislature is significantly decreasing. Many have decided not to run again for office and a number have been pushed out as a result of the legislative redistricting process. The legislative environment has become toxic.

So what is at stake??? the whole nine yards...the whole ball of wax...The NC Women Matter coalition was formed based on the premise that when women vote, good things happen. When women vote in the numbers that we are - 54 % of the general electorate...smart people are elected...and smart people will realize that 54% of the people who put them in office are women and they had better address their issues and listen very carefully to what they are saying.

So we need to speak loudly and clearly- not necessarily in one voice but with compatible messages. We need to make our presence known. The responsibility is ours. No one else will do this for us. We have a voice - we must use it. We must be heard.