

A Long Term Agenda for Women

By Fran Sussner Rodgers

Founder and past CEO , WFD, Inc (formerly Work/Family Directions)

OVERVIEW

The women's movement is in need of renewed focus. Since the 1960s, a new generation of women's issues has been on the national agenda but despite some obvious progress, in most respects advances have been slow and efforts often seem stalled. Looking back over the last two decades, it seems that the same policy changes and workplace adaptations are proposed over and over and very few advance. In fact, for poor women, one can argue that things are worse. For all women, there is a widespread attack on the reproductive freedom we once took for granted.

Despite setbacks, this is an ideal moment to advance a new women's agenda. The door is open to substantively and permanently change the position of women in the economy. Women now have unprecedented economic presence and attention to our voting is at an all time high, so now is a critical time to leverage our power. Also there is increased interest and funding to move a new agenda forward. Though Congressional gridlock ties up Washington, states and cities have shown a desire to leap ahead, and offer the most fruitful ground to make progress. In states, there is an almost palpable desire from women to speak out – and act – on issues of gender equity, family economic security, and increased prosperity.

Moreover, key groups that address women's equality like CAP, Planned Parenthood, NARAL, SEIU, EMILY's List and Demos all have strong women leaders and have never been more focused and effective. In addition, in Congress we have a new generation of women leaders unafraid to fight for our issues.

But to take advantage of this moment, we have to step back to understand why we have stalled at making progress and commit to doing things differently. What are the underlying reasons and resistances to the full range of women's issues? Do we know what our ultimate goals are and have we figured out the steps to achieve them over time? Have we paid enough attention to cultural barriers and how to move them? Do we function in silos that prevent broad movement building and true cooperation? Do we even have agreement on what makes an issue a woman's issue to take on?

We offer this memo as a catalyst for formulating a series of 10- year goals to help guide and coordinate disparate activities all designed to advance the status of women in the US. In particular, foundations may want to consider new areas of funding that feed long term success. A concerted, coordinated effort that links local and state-based organizing, issue advocacy, and electoral politics could begin to rewrite the rules regarding the status of women. But doing so raises a set of strategic

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questions about the strength of our field, the nature of our opposition, electoral politics, and racial equity.

WHAT'S BEEN MISSING?

In thinking about the past decades there are some obvious missing pieces to our strategy:

1. We have many advocacy groups that work on specific aspects of women's equality but no **clear way to bring various agendas together** so that they are more cohesive and strategic and leverage power together. The silos may now prevent broad movement building that cuts across overarching goals.
2. We do great reports that analyze the barriers women face but tend to go straight to recommending policy solutions. In doing this we avoid the **culture and attitude changes** that must come before policy changes. Culture and attitude changes take more time but lurk as serious barriers causing deep resistance.
3. We fail to explicitly set **long-term goals designed to address root causes** of barriers but instead try to achieve whatever tactical successes we can. We don't sufficiently articulate what we are really after and therefore don't enjoy the success of moving toward something bigger together.
4. We have numerous **splits on class and race issues that create animosity**. If we had a broader, well-articulated set of goals that could demonstrate a concern for everything from poverty to the glass ceiling it would help quell the dissention. Moreover, the full range of issues all contribute to a society where women get a "fair shot."
5. We sometimes fail to anticipate and plan for **intense opposition** to what we want to achieve. Even if we anticipate opposition, there is really no infrastructure in place to proactively define our opponents.
6. We have not had a **critical mass of funders** with the resources and gravitas to define the fight within the context of a women's agenda – and then, through a mix of personal involvement and resource allocation, ensure that the advocacy community moves towards mutual goals.

SUGGESTED PROCESS

For purposes of starting this discussion, we propose that a small group of funders and key thinkers agree to three or four broad and strategic goals with articulated short- and long-term measurable benchmarks. The goals should be crosscutting, movement-oriented and bold but also achievable within a decade. They should not attempt to cover every single issue that affects women, but should

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rather serve to rally women under a few themes where more progress and new tactics are needed. Issues not specifically covered may be critical but simply not under the larger banner designed to address currently unaddressed root causes. Wherever possible, these goals should break down silos; reframe the discussion; and address men as allies. They should address cultural, political and legislative strategies over time.

In setting down tactics, we should set priorities and understand which strategies are most likely to have the largest effect on meeting our goal. Naturally, we will want to also proceed opportunistically but taking advantage of circumstances should be within a broader context.

Once we develop the above roadmap in consultation with many in the movement currently (but not process this to death) we should agree on division of labor, seek needed funding and figure out how to coordinate, monitor, and support the key efforts.

Throughout every step we must be mindful that **race (and class) matters**. The key to lifting the economic fortunes of American families is to improve the economic chances of women. This is particularly true in communities of color, where women of color face intersecting barriers of race and gender in the current economy, and are most likely to be sidelined into low-wage work.

Similarly, we must recognize that a woman's right to comprehensive and affordable reproductive care is all encompassing. Reproductive freedom is the most fundamental basis for women having control over their lives, especially family economic security, and we must consider our commitment to this right as an over-arching principle of our work.

The last step is to develop and execute a multi-year plan and trajectory to WIN, BUILD, and CHANGE THE STORY.

PROPOSED GOALS

As a starting off point, we propose three broad goals:

Goal 1: Translate women's increased economic and political leverage into more robust political power

By 2025 female political power will be increased so significantly that women are no longer seen as a "special interest group" but are understood as the majority with our "issues" central to the health and welfare of the country and its economy.

Discussion:

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We would remove significant resistance to our agenda if more women wielded political power. While not all women have gender interests and sensibilities, if we look at our current women in the Senate as an example, we see how much they matter in elevation of female concerns. Efforts like EMILY's List, Emerge, and Off the Sidelines all have increased female participation as their goal and we need to build on and enhance their accomplishments. Over the next decade, we should also aggressively address some of the root causes that prevent women from assuming their rightful leadership role and also enhance the voting of women including reducing mid-term drop-off. We must also demand the attention that our numbers warrant. There are numerous aspects to the challenge of increasing the political power of women, but key root causes include:

1. Running for office: Among the many reasons women are reluctant to run for office is because they see politics as “dirty,” driven by money and inconsistent with a stable and private personal life. Yet women are not at the forefront of any major effort to reduce money in politics or to improve political practices. Also, as to personal life, women in politics face very similar challenges to those inherent in other roles that are seen as more doable. One could argue in fact that political office gives one more flexibility and control than other occupations that are seen as easier on the family.
2. Taking our concerns more seriously and as central to policy: There is a false and (somehow very male) dichotomy between social and economic issues that lies beneath the difficulty of putting women and family issues at the core of policy. Women's issues are seen as “social” by commentators and politicians alike and although they are tied to all aspects of a healthy economy, are seen as secondary. Men are leading the fight on income inequality at the moment as though it is a new insight. Women have been at the forefront of counteracting growing child poverty, equal pay and education for generations. Yet these efforts, clearly aimed at income inequality, were not taken as “hard” and serious.
3. Structure of parties and policies: In order to have more attention to women's concerns, many committees and other structures have been set up for “women only.” This may have the effect of exacerbating the social/economic dichotomy and the secondary status of women and their issues. If we are the majority, why don't we dominate the main events and resist the sidelines?

Possible Additional Strategies:

1. As a long term effort, create a woman-led effort to “clean up” politics by supporting and getting more involved in existing reform efforts as well as staking out a higher moral ground against campaigns that judge men and women differently, stoop to ugly personal attacks and invade family privacy. This effort should be a companion to the many existing efforts to get more women into politics so that women who run know that other women “have their backs” when they run. It should have a clear brand and push back at media and candidates themselves.

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2. Increase female representation to at least 40% in the majority of legislative bodies.
 - a. Continue to support and grow efforts like EMILY's List, Emerge, Off the Sidelines and Progressive Majority to recruit and support women candidates. Collect good data to make sure that recruitment efforts result in diversity that reflects the US population.
 - b. Encourage more women to run by focusing on the existing women politicians who have happy and full personal lives rather than on the difficulties faced. We need a new generation of women to believe that a political career is possible.
 - c. Create a support network for emerging women politicians that helps feed ambition and encourages them during hard transitions.

3. Make clear to the Democratic Party and to ourselves that we expect to be treated as the majority and refuse second-class status whenever we see it.
 - a. Try to resist separate but not equal efforts to woo women donors and activists. Make sure that party activities reflect women as the majority of the party, because they are.
 - b. Call out every attempt to create a distinction between social and economic issues. Change the language and frame of our policy discussions to acknowledge that the strength of the family, in all its forms, is the central issue of our country.

4. Simplify voting so that we have less female drop-off at midterms. We should “own” voting simplification as a women’s issue. It is women who are busier and often need to care for children and this is especially true for the many lower income, single women raising children. It is unconscionable that they have to stand in long lines and take extra time to vote when we know that vote by mail, same day registration and other existing practices make voting so much easier and differentially impact women.

5. Invest in women of color and grassroots leadership development for political and organizational leadership. A geographically and racially diverse network of women leaders is an essential ingredient to advancing a bolder agenda. In addition, investment in grassroots leadership development itself bolsters women’s political power and can prepare grassroots leaders to move into significant public roles themselves – local political office, key staff positions, community leadership roles. If we want a bolder politics and an economic empowerment agenda that reflects our new demographic reality, then women of color must play a central role in this work.

6. Build the capacity of state and local organizations and invest in their strategies. The state and local level are rich terrain for women’s economic empowerment. Progress requires strong organizations with the capacity to read and understand the political landscape, organize people to act, engage the media, contest for electoral power, lobby, and raise resources. Sufficient funding to build the capacity of local groups to lead - not just implement - is needed; so too are state and local strategies that reflect their particular political reality.

Goal 2: Ensure economic security and prosperity among working and non-working women as a key pillar of a women's agenda

Increase the earning power of the working poor by 50% by 2025 and shore up the safety net for women and children. In the process bring many more women into a middle class life.

Discussion:

There are numerous reasons why female and family poverty has become such a persistent problem. Chief among them are lack of an adequate governmental safety net, the rise of single parent families, the lack of an adequate minimum wage or earned sick time, discrimination in wage levels of female dominated professions, the Hyde Amendment and lack of available and affordable family planning. The “women’s movement” has long been perceived by many as only concerned about middle and upper class women and there must be renewed interest in female poverty as a key element in moving forward.

Underlying Attitudes:

Low- income women are not supported because of deep cultural bias that blames them for their poverty and often their lack of a husband. The fact that so many of these women work long hours and are still poor is just being widely understood through the movement to raise the minimum wage and other supports through such efforts as the Fair Shot Campaign. However, conservatives still see the solution to poverty, as “they should get married.” We know clearly that marriage does not improve the economic circumstances in these families and that the majority of millennials are now starting families outside of marriage. Since almost one third of families are single parent headed, the failure to address this reality undermines the support they need and causes the poverty itself. In addition the safety net and the commitment to keep it adequate has been deeply frayed so that more and more children are falling into poverty.

Possible Strategies:

1. Create a long-term cultural campaign to demonstrate to Americans that female/family poverty is everyone’s problem and that these families are worthy of support and respect. Aim to make more value-neutral the judgments about the majority of young families that now start without marriage - being careful to not disparage the institution of marriage itself. Create baseline data on current attitudes and increase positive associations about these families by x% in ten years. Americans value family but are not facing up to the fact that marriage and family are now separate for a very large segment of the population.

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2. Continue and strengthen the renewed and increasingly successful efforts to pass minimum wage, paid leave, and earned sick time. Introduce this legislation as a bundle yearly in as many municipalities, state legislatures and in both houses of Congress until they pass. Force as many votes as possible so that candidates have to run on their “anti-family values” record.
3. Create a 10-year strategy and roadmap to pass state and/or federal legislation that will raise income 20% above the poverty line for the majority of now poor working Americans in 5 years and for virtually all in 10 years. Do a rigorous economic analysis that looks at what package of laws best gets us to this. How much must the minimum wage be raised in which states? If you add in earned sick time, childcare support, etc; how is this goal best met?
4. Remove all the laws like the Hyde Amendment that deny low-income women the ability to control reproduction. For this to happen, we need a plan to go on the offensive on contraception and abortion by removing the stigma, reintroducing abortion as a routine medical and economic issue.

Goal 3: Redefine a gender neutral “level playing field” for American employers and achieve true gender equality in the workplace

Discussion:

The American workplace and its modern practices were designed after World War II for men with wives at home. Since that time, we have been working at the edges to make incremental, small changes to accommodate women and working families but have failed to change enough at the core. If we were to design the new workplace today, with an understanding of the lives of our population, we would be achieving needed business and other results in very different ways.

A modern workplace would focus on the results needed and give maximum autonomy to individuals on how to achieve them. We would deemphasize hours at work and look more at accomplishments. We would penalize employers who take advantage of exempt employees by expecting unreasonable numbers of work hours when everything after 40 hours is “free” to them. We would create benefits that conform to the majority of families – now single headed and two-career – rather than based on a breadwinner and stay at home spouse.

It is not a level playing field to give everyone an equal chance to compete by rules designed for men with wives at home.

As to equal pay, we have trained women to negotiate better, but they do so in a context where the rules are secret and informal and equal pay for equal work is not the norm. Moreover, we know that women are concentrated in occupations and jobs that pay less. We suggest they choose other career paths but perhaps the larger question is why jobs women choose are valued less. Are teachers

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less valuable than transit workers in many cities? Why are mammography doctors and pediatricians reimbursed less than others? How can we challenge these discrepancies? Are there legal remedies or is it a long-term cultural fight? At the moment there is no major push-back on these discrepancies.

At the poverty end of the spectrum, why are 70% of minimum wage workers female? Where are the men with the same education profile working? Do we tolerate a \$2.50 tipped minimum wage because the population is overwhelmingly female? This goes to the heart of the underlying beliefs about women in poverty.

Possible Strategies:

1. Over the next 10 years encourage a complete reexamination of existing wage and hour and labor laws to modernize them. Look at the barriers to flexibility that fails to distinguish between employer-imposed overtime and mandatory work rules and employee-initiated requests to work on schedules and circumstances that suit personal needs. Cover many more people in mandatory overtime to discourage unreasonable hours for exempt employees.
2. Flip the current work-family discussion around and instead of beseeching employers to do more in flexibility, care, etc., brand a new effort aimed at Modernizing the Workplace for Results. Focus on maximizing autonomy, and personal responsibility and going deeper into practices that hurt personal lives without producing business results. Question long-held business practices that differentially hurt women and have no evidence as to business need.
3. Create a set of principles and practices for 2025 (RESULTS 2025) and organize employees and shareholders to get companies to sign on to them if they are pro-employee and pro-business. Include public and non-profit organizations, since not for profit organizations are equal offenders. Don't allow this effort to be called bad for business but brand current practices as bad for business first. Give kudos to those who commit to these principles and shame those who do not.
4. Conduct deep research into the rationale for discrepancies in pay between male-dominated and female-dominated occupations. Consider legal and organizing action to remedy those differences with no clear reason. Support teachers since this occupation is 70% female and they are being beaten up more than any other occupation. The attack on teachers is like that on contraception – primarily an attack on women.
5. Break out and quantify the different pieces of the gender wage gap – giving a numerical value to workplace policies that produce inequality. Continue and expand efforts to pass the policies that will remedy specific parts of the gender wage gap - pay equity legislation, paid parental AND sick leave, male parental leave and childcare support.

CONCLUSION

We can achieve major advances in the status of American women if we think longer term, stay focused on our goals and work more cohesively as a movement. The goals above can be achieved in 10 years, are good for men and women and are good for our country and society. We have to believe we can make a difference. A new generation of women have the tools and knowledge to take this forward. Let's do it!