

All the Voting Ladies

By Andria K. Brown

The question keeps being asked: Why do Republicans hate women so much? It's an understandable question, considering the bizarre flurry of misogynistic legislation and congressional maneuvering going on these days. And when radio host muttonheads who don't deserve their names printed argue the accusation by piling on chauvinistic hoo-ha, the case almost makes itself. But I think that question misses the point. Call me jaded, but I don't really believe most politicians, of any leaning, are on true moral crusades. I think the real question is: What are Republicans trying to gain by being so anti-women?

When the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops spoke out against the Affordable Care Act's requirement that all employer health plans provide contraception coverage, I think that even those who disagreed with their stance felt that their motives were genuine. But when a married congressman with two children argues against birth control, it's hard to follow the reasoning. Do they really believe, as the aforementioned mutton-head suggested, that women who take the pill are wanton and immoral? Do they sincerely believe that restricting access to a reliable form of contraception changes the behavior of either gender? I can't speak for them, of course, but from my view, it seems highly unlikely that they really think that much about it. Most men I know don't.

What they do think about, however, is re-election, and having one's name on a high-profile bill or getting a close-up during a congressional hearing is the cheapest form of campaigning there is. Name recognition is the most valuable asset politicians have, and if it takes sponsoring the newest, craziest legislation to get into the news cycle, so be it. Best case, you expand your appeal with the lunatic fringe, and worst case is that six months from now, you have the most familiar name on the ballot. It's a win/win, really.

Here in our own great state, a "bi-partisan" (read: 13 Republicans and two Democrats, 13 male and two female) group of TN legislators, led by a certain Senator from Germantown, drafted Senate Resolution 84 to urge the administration's reversal of the contraception coverage requirement for church-based entities. Because this was only a resolution and has no actual legislative power, it may not seem to have a direct impact on the women of Tennessee, but any time 15 of our elected officials come together to shout down a basic tenet of women's health, I get a little anxious. Not only because it makes our state look backwards, but also because it gets 15 legislators into the public view who are willing to play off fears and ignorance to get attention and, therefore, votes. After all, where did I hear about this resolution? In Betsy Phillips' scathing (and brilliantly titled) [blog post about it](#). I don't blame Ms. Phillips at all for covering the news, because it's worth noting when our representatives are being ridiculous, but I'm not re-listing any of the resolution's supporters here because they don't deserve another bump. If you're interested in putting them on your do-not-vote list, you can check it out yourself.

It's so deviously genius. Someone *has* to cover these events, because they are far too significant to ignore and the consequences on women's lives are real, but the end result is publicity for the worst abusers of power. I really can't think of a way around it, unless we invent some sort of code the media can use, perhaps labeling each legislator by number and then printing a key for concerned voters before each election. If they're going to treat women as numbers, maybe we gals should do the same.

While we're waiting for that brilliant plan to take shape, however, perhaps the next best option is to make our own headlines and use our own power. I know it's hard to find time, what with the 60-percent of us in the U.S. workforce, more than three quarters of whom have children under the age of 18. We're actually on the cusp of outnumbering men in the world of paid employment, if we haven't already (2008 Bureau of Labor stats were at 49.8-percent and rising). We're also busy making 80-percent of household buying decisions, so when, say, some muttonhead radio host makes horrendously offensive comments on-air, advertisers don't bail out of chivalry, they disassociate because alienating women is the dumbest thing a company can do. If politicians feared the same effect, we wouldn't be having this national debate.

In the last five presidential elections, women have had higher turnout (and less conservative voting patterns) than men. Combined with the basic mathematical fact that women are the majority, it would stand to reason that nothing against our interests should get past us. I won't argue that women are in 100-percent agreement on any issue, but if the 98-percent rate of contraception use is true, we're pretty close on this one. And yet, here we are, battling across the country for basic rights like gender-equal health care. Battling the people we elected or failed to vote against.

The politicians who support this restrictive legislation know that, by limiting access to birth control, they also limit women's personal and professional options. And we're letting that happen. Maybe the question, after all, is: Why do so many women hate women? Or more importantly: Isn't it about time to stop?