

The Charlotte Observer

Will women get what they really want?

Caroline Baum - November 1st, 2012

NEW YORK This election is making me feel oh so special. One party is gallantly protecting me from the other party's "war on women." The president wants my vote so badly that he's trying to scare me with his opponent's plan to return to "the social policy of the 1950s," which I assume means back-alley abortions. Both parties are aggressively courting me in their quest for the women's vote.

"Women's issues." "Women's reproductive rights." How will I ever readjust to being a mere segment of the human race when I have been singled out for so much special treatment?

Easy. I find the Democrats' one-track appeal to women demeaning. What women want isn't that different from what men want: a job that pays well and offers opportunities for advancement; a good education for our children; access to health care; a government that protects our inalienable rights and keeps us safe.

Focusing on our bodies instead of ourselves actually sets the women's movement back to, well, the 1950s, when men went to work and their wives stayed home to cook and clean and raise the kids. In appealing to women on a single issue, albeit an important one, Democrats, in their own way, are doing exactly what they accuse Republicans of doing: waging a war on women – on our brains, not our bodies. They are treating us as if we're too narrow-minded to see beyond abortion. The economy? Leave that to the men. You women focus on the home. It's insulting, if you ask me.

Why all the focus on women? There are more of us. Of the likely voters in the 2012 presidential election, the demographic breakdown is expected to be 52 percent women, 48 percent men, according to a Gallup analysis. In 2008, those shares were 53 percent and 47 percent, respectively.

While both parties are vying for the women's vote in this closely contested election, by far the greater swing in gender preference in the last four years has been among men. Republican candidate Mitt Romney currently leads President Barack Obama by 14 points among males, according to Gallup, compared with a virtual tie between Obama and John McCain in 2008. Among women, Obama led McCain by 14 points and now has an eight-point advantage over Romney. Just maybe the one-trick-pony tack isn't working.

On the campaign trail, Romney doesn't initiate discussions on social issues; he waits to be asked. I suspect that's because he doesn't share his party's opposition to abortion even in cases of rape.

But that isn't the only reason. In 2004, Republicans thought social issues, especially a ban on gay marriage, would help them garner votes, says David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington.

No longer. Recent polls suggest the public's attitudes have changed. "That sound you don't hear," Boaz says, "is the sound of social change."

The 2012 Republican Party platform calls for constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage and abortion in all cases. That is a big turn-off to some women, including me. It isn't enough of a reason to vote for Obama.

Besides, the United States isn't going back to the social policies of the 1950s under any circumstances, Obama's claims to the contrary notwithstanding. As Boaz notes, the public's views are changing, and social conservatives will have to change if they want to keep their congressional seats.

But back to women. If the Democrats really want to demean the fairer sex, at least they could do it with some flair. Let me show them how it's done.

What do women want? Women want to turn on the TV for the president's State of the Union address to find a drop-dead handsome guy who looks as if he just stepped out of the shower (and unfortunately took time to get dressed first).

We want someone who is good with a spatula, who looks like a million bucks in his chef's apron as he flips a stack of jacks and serves breakfast to 124 members of his immediate family.

We want a rich and generous guy, someone who is always first to pick up the tab.

We want a family man, a guy with a lot of expensive homes, and yes, even ones with car elevators.

The only problem for the Democrats is that what women want seems to line up with Republican Mitt Romney.