

What a difference a woman makes!

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OUR SOCIAL NETWORKS



To the Editor:

Recently, I went to the Virginia Capitol to participate in the project of a group of VCU students: the creation of a "living monument" to women. As I stood there, in almost the exact same place I stood earlier in the year under different circumstances, I realized what an immense impact the women's rights protest at the Capitol on March 3, 2012 made upon the resurgence of the national women's rights movement as a whole - and what an impact that movement had on the 2012 election results.

The legislative "War on Women" is comprised of attacks on equal pay, access to birth control, domestic violence protection and reproductive rights. The protest on March 3, with over a thousand people in attendance, was sparked by the mandatory ultrasound legislation that passed the Virginia General Assembly.

The tremendous amount of national media coverage following the events of March 3, largely due to the arrests of the protestors sitting on the Capitol steps (for whom the charges were almost all later dropped), added significant momentum to the fight against the barrage of anti-women legislation being proposed in state legislatures and Congress. Photographs and videos of the troopers in riot gear demonstrated the over-the-top response to our peaceful protest - and etched into the minds of Americans a tangible visual of the "War on Women."

As a result of these events, much attention has been paid to the legislative happenings in Virginia. Local photographer, Bob Brown, recently won second place in a "Photo of the Year" contest for his photograph of women's rights activist, Margaret Doyle, passionately reacting to the passing of a "Personhood" bill by a Virginia Senate Committee. Gov. Bob McDonnell has received the moniker, "Governor Ultrasound." New women's rights groups have formed in Virginia (like "Oppose TRAP" and "Cooch Watch") to target specific legislation and regulations.

Protests and campaigns have been staged on every level against each legislative attack in the "War on Women." National women's rights organizations have pooled their resources to help women, locally and nationally, fight these battles. Some have been successful, others not so much, but the overwhelming impact of our organizing has sent a clear and undeniable message: women have noticed, women are angry, women are getting involved . . . and women will make their voices heard at the polls.

And, boy, did we ever! President Obama won a landslide victory, with the largest gender gap in the history of the Gallup poll. All of the male GOP candidates who made ridiculous comments about rape, female anatomy and feminism were defeated. Indeed, the female voters of America "shut that whole thing down."

Of course, it was not just women who elected the president, but women are more than half of the electorate now - and 55 percent of women nationally (54 percent in Virginia) voted for President Obama. It is safe to say

that the fight for women's rights was a major factor in this election. One very important thing for women to remember, though, is that these legislative attacks are still coming; many battles remain.

Here in Virginia, the "Personhood" legislation will resurface in 2013. The new TRAP regulations - imposed on existing women's health care facilities after the Board of Health was bullied into overturning their own decision upon receiving threats from Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli that the board would face a lawsuit (at their own individual expense) if they did not impose the regulations - will go into effect. Virginia women must keep a keen eye on legislation coming through the General Assembly this year.

What we do really does make a difference. We might not win every battle, but our efforts have a cumulative impact. I'm proud to be among the citizens of the United States who are willing to stand up and fight for our rights. My visit to the Virginia Capitol steps was a wonderful reminder of Virginia women's contribution to the fight against the legislative "War on Women." It was also a great reminder that we all hold within us great power for change -if only we will use it.

Shannon E. Fisher

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