

Bill Richardson for President

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Women for Richardson Announcement

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It is a pleasure to be in New Hampshire to announce our national platform for women. Women in New Hampshire have always led the way politically. Women like Carol Shea Porter, Terri Norelli, Linda Foster, Representative Tara Reardon and Amanda Grady, Policy Director for the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. I'm proud to say that Representative Reardon and Director Grady are both members of the Women for Richardson Steering Committee.

But our platform is not just for the women of New Hampshire - it is for women nationwide. Women like my Education Secretary Dr. Veronica Garcia, and my Women's Health Advisor Giovanna Rossi -- also members of my steering committee.

Let me also take a moment to acknowledge the Co-Chairs of my Women for Richardson Steering Committee. Lt. Governor Diane Denish -- who couldn't be here today because I left her in charge of New Mexico -- and Dr. Martha Burk. Thank you very much for all you have done for my campaign.

Let me begin by saying that women are not a "special interest" as they are so often called by the media. Women are the majority. And we are here to address the concerns of that majority.

I am very proud of the things I have done as Governor of New Mexico to address the concerns and promote the interests of women.

In my administration we have dramatically increased penalties for domestic violence and nearly tripled funding for shelters so women and children get the protection they need.

I am the first New Mexico governor to appoint a women's health advisor, Giovanna Rossi who as I mentioned is here today, and I created the first ever Governor's Women's Health Advisory Council, whose mission it is to create an environment in which every woman and girl will experience optimal health and well-being.

In New Mexico under my administration we have raised our teachers' salaries, expanded the number of children enrolled in our Pre-Kindergarten program for four-year-olds from 2,200 to 3,800, and funded after-school enrichment programs.

I have always appointed women to critical positions -- not out of a sense of duty or to fill a quota, but because they were the most qualified. As Secretary of the Department of Energy, my appointments were two thirds female and minority. I presently have 12 outstanding and extremely qualified female cabinet secretaries, and I am proud to have run now worked closely with for five years Lt. Governor Diane Denish, the first female Lt. Governor in New Mexico's history.

As President, I will not only continue the commitment I have made to women's concerns in New Mexico, I will go farther than any other candidate to support women and their families.

ENDING THE WAR

First, we know that the number one concern of women going into the last election was ending the war, and women in New Hampshire and all across the country tell me every day that it is still a top concern. I am the ONLY candidate that has promised to bring home ALL of our troops now.

PAY EQUITY

I also know that pay equity is something women worry about every day. Women like Lilly Ledbetter, who for 20 years worked alongside men being paid more than her, and was told by the Supreme Court last month that she had no case.

I support the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act now before Congress, and I also support the Paycheck Fairness Act which would beef up enforcement of our existing laws.

But these measures do not go far enough. You know, employers have the right to know everything about you – your family situation, your medical history, even whether you've ever had a parking ticket. Yet women cannot learn even the most basic information about the employer's pay practices.

Much of the inequality would be eliminated if employers reported pay statistics by job classification, gender, and race. Not anybody's salary on a bulletin board, but simple anonymous statistics. That way employees would know if they were being treated fairly, and employers could see if they had a problem that needed correcting. I am the ONLY candidate to call for this kind of basic, sensible and fair information.

Paid Family Leave

Let me also say that working women and men should not have to choose between their jobs and their families in time of need. When I was in Congress I voted for the Family and Medical Leave Act -- it was a great step forward. But we need to do more. We should expand this law by including paid family leave for births and adoptions, or caregiving for elderly parents.

There's a bipartisan bill, sponsored by Senators Dodd and Stevens, that would create an insurance fund allowing workers and their employers to share the costs and benefits of paid family leave. The bill is good for business because it will save enormous amounts of money in turnover and replacement costs, and it helps working families by granting a much needed benefit at a small shared cost.

This is the kind of innovative policy we've been working on in New Mexico -- good for business, good for the economy and good for families.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Working women are not my only concern. The largest group of elderly American living in poverty are retired women on Social Security. Many of those women have low benefits because they took time out of the work force to care for children or elderly parents. And for every year they performed that vital function for society, they got a zero in their Social Security account.

That is wrong and as President, I will work to change that. Caregivers deserve more than lip service for the work they do.

Our retirement system should recognize this valuable work by awarding Social Security credit at least as high as the minimum wage. I am the ONLY candidate to call for a caregiver credit in Social Security.

RIGHT TO CHOOSE

And I want to protect the rights and health of our younger women too. The right to control their own reproductive choices, and the right to medical privacy.

I am the ONLY candidate to explicitly commit to protecting Roe v. Wade through appointing ONLY Supreme Court justices who recognize it as settled law.

Some people call this a "litmus test." I call it respecting precedent and putting women's lives above politics.

The United States should end the global gag rule on family planning and restore funding for women's health research here in the United States.

EDUCATION

We must also make sure our young girls are getting all the educational chances they deserve. We must protect Title IX and our girls' educational opportunities. I would also create 250 Math and Science academies across the country, and I will make sure our young girls know they're welcome there. I'll also do what we're working on in New Mexico, and establish a federal Pre-K program that helps every state offer voluntary pre-kindergarten for every 4-year-old child.

CONCLUSION: EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

And finally, there is one very big thing that our previous president's have talked about, but have not done anything about. And that is the Equal Rights Amendment. We have an Equal Rights Amendment in New Mexico, and I am very proud of that.

Many of the problems I have talked about today would go away if women had simple equality in our constitution. It's fair, it's sensible, it's American. I pledge as President to work for that equality, to make it a priority, so that women, the majority, will have equal status in our society once and for all.

