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From: Neera Tanden [redacted]
Sent: Monday, November 1, 2010 11:35 PM
To: H

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Hi Hillary,

I hope you are enjoying your travels. I'm trying to keep the Go, Fight, Win spirit, but I must confess, it's a bit hard.

I promise I will do this rarely, if at all, in the future, but I am once again sending my column. This time I am doing so because it references you and also because it created some buzz related to the primaries.

Looking forward to seeing you in December.

Neera

POLITICS

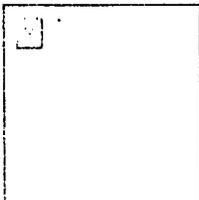
The Female Factor

How the Democrats can regain women's faith—and fight for their interests.

- *Neera Tanden*
- October 22, 2010 | 12:00 am
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Last week, as Democratic candidates across the country reached out to female voters in the final swing before Election Day, the White House released a report on how the president's economic agenda helps women. The report highlights the Obama's administration's efforts and accomplishments on behalf of women's economic success—small business expansion that helps female business owners, jobs tax credits that will help women (and men) find jobs, and laws to enforce equal pay for equal work, among other

initiatives. Yet the report passed with little fanfare and even less media attention—like so many other aspects of the president's remarkably pro-woman policy agenda.

It's almost tragic how this agenda has fallen under the radar during Obama's first two years in office. We hear too often about abortion's controversial role in the year-long health care negotiations—but not enough about other women-centered issues that, after being promoted by activists for years, have finally made it into legislation. These go beyond the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act dramatically expanded child care provisions and Head Start. The health care bill contained over \$1 billion to support nurses visiting new and expectant mothers at home, a program that women's groups and economists alike have championed as a smart investment. An even bigger victory is the CLASS Act, also part of the health care bill, which provides a basic cash benefit to people (often women) who are taking care of the elderly at home.

Yet I can probably count on my hand the number of people, including women, who actually know about these new laws. Amid the din of bad news about the economy and misinformation about health care reform, these policies don't stand a chance, sadly, of getting much media coverage. It doesn't help that the Democrats haven't done enough to shine a public spotlight on them.

But they could soon be lost in an even deeper abyss: The rampant individualism and free-market fundamentalism supported by the Republican Party, which seems on the precipice of controlling the House and possibly the Senate, could undo these initiatives entirely. What's more, the new Republican wave could mute the voice of women and their most important advocates on the national stage.

The Tea Parties, fueled by wealthy multimillionaires, are running extreme candidates—including women like Sharron Angle and Christine O'Donnell—who want to get rid of policies that help women the most. If the health care bill gets repealed, for instance, the new provisions for long-term care would go out the window, making decades worth of advocacy work moot.

But the Tea Parties threaten women in other ways, too. If the Republicans take back the House, the Democratic Party will lose one of its most powerful women: Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who currently has more clout than any woman on the other side of the aisle. Meanwhile, Republicans like Sarah Palin and Nikki Haley will only gain political power—and, with that power, attract more attention to their extreme views. If these Republicans become the nation's loudest voices of seemingly strong women, that could portend for a shift among younger women's allegiances toward the Republican Party and its platform.

Already, despite the stark realities about what Republicans will likely take away from women once they are in power, we are seeing rumbling of such a change: After forming the backbone of Democratic majorities for years, working-class women are wobbling in their support for the Obama administration. According to a *Wall Street Journal* tipoff from last week, while female college graduates favor Democratic over Republican control (56 percent to 36 percent), women with only some college or a vocational education are running almost even (45 percent to 44 percent).

Perhaps, in their growing economic anxiety, this group of women wants to throw out incumbents they perceive have not sufficiently focused on their economic progress. But, of course, if the media paid more attention to Obama's pro-woman agenda—and both advocates and policymakers did more to broadcast it—these key voters would know that the Democrats, not Republicans, are the politicians who have their interests in mind.

Democrats can't let this continue—they can't allow Republicans to brand themselves as the party of strong female leaders, or allow women to gradually become a constituency of the right. That's why it's critical to have standout women in the party. If Pelosi loses, is there a powerful enough Democratic woman to compete with these Republicans in the national spotlight? There's Hillary Clinton who, as Secretary of State, has sent a powerful signal to the country and the world about the importance of female leadership in the Obama administration. But, as a technically non-partisan international figure, Hillary won't be able to do public battle with the rising right.

Perhaps a Governor Sink—if she wins—in Florida could be among a new class of strong female Democrats. The Obama administration would also do well to elevate women in the executive branch and turn public attention to those who are already there.

In addition to presenting women as the face of the party, Democrats must focus on issues like long-term care, child care, and equal pay, all of which could rise to the legislative fore in the coming months. Republicans will likely directly attack or cut back investments in these initiatives. When this happens, the White House (and Democrats more broadly) would be wise to explain what it will mean for women if these initiatives are gutted or lost—and to fight tooth and nail to make sure that doesn't happen.

If it doesn't take these steps, the Democratic Party could lose its grasp on a critical, even central part of its coalition. And women, in the long run, would suffer under conservative laws that parrot family values, but do nothing to value families.

Neera Tanden is the chief operating officer of the Center for American Progress. She served in the Obama and Clinton administrations.

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