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I write about women, economics, politics, and where they all overlap.

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## Why 2012 Could Be a Year of the Woman -- and Why It's Important that Women Run

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The campaign season has lately been a fight over women’s issues and, more importantly for the candidates, women’s votes. From the battle over contraception coverage to the Ann Romney/Hanna Rosen flare up to Romney’s flap on equal pay, women have been put squarely at the center of the 2012 battle. But what will this election cycle mean for women politicians?



The 2010 midterm elections weren’t great for women. It was the first time that their numbers in Congress slid backward since 1978. Will 2012 be any different? The signs that we could see the ranks of women rise in Congress are promising – perhaps even giving us another Year of the Woman.

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At an event hosted by the 2012 Project in [New York](#) last night, a nonpartisan campaign to increase the number of women in Congress and state legislatures, Director Debbie Walsh was hopeful. This could be “a real year of opportunity much like 1992,” the original Year of the Woman, she said.

What makes her so optimistic? Due to retirements and redistricting, women are running for a bunch of open seats. In fact, 16 women are vying for just such opportunities in the Senate and 71 women are doing so in the House, [according to the Rutgers Center for](#)





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they'll have to work just as hard to target women voters." The best way to do it? "Run women candidates."

This is no small point. Borrowing from Eleanor Roosevelt, Lake said, "It's up to the women... women voters." We'll determine who wins the presidential election this year. Kellyanne Conway, president of polling company WomanTrend and another speaker at the event, estimated, "Obama needs 59 to 60 percent of the women's vote to get reelected." The good news: women tend to be more pro-incumbent. The bad news: men have soured on him. That's no small hurdle.

Getting more women into office also creates a self-reinforcing cycle, Lake pointed out. She noted that there was a "huge surge" in women running after Geraldine Ferraro ran as Vice President on Walter Mondale's ticket in 1984. Women running for office – even staunchly conservative women like [Sarah Palin](#) – encourages more women to run and helps with recruitment.

That's a crucial point, because the 2012 Project has already started setting its sights beyond 2012. Only six women serve as governor in the U.S., a pitiful number that fell from nine in 2004 and 2007. But Walsh pointed out that 34 states will have gubernatorial races in 2014, presenting another huge opportunity for women to run.

But first they have to be convinced throw in their hats – and show up at the polls on November 6th.

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[American Women and Politics](#). On top of that, Walsh pointed out, "We're on track to set records for the number of women filing to run for the U.S. House and Senate." A total 25 women have filed in the Senate with 14 likely women candidates poised to follow suit, and 225 have filed for the House with a potential extra 70 likely candidates set to do the same. Compare that to 36 women who filed in the Senate and 262 who filed in the House in 2010.

This isn't just important for ensuring that our Congress – which has [never been more](#) than 18 percent women – better reflects the country's population. It's also important for getting women to turn out for the election in the first place. At the same event, Celinda Lake, president of polling firm Lake Research Partners, pointed out that while the "War on Women" episode may have gotten women's attention, "to keep women in the Democratic camp

York City. I am Editor of the Roosevelt Institute's New Deal 2.0 blog and my writing has appeared on The Nation, GOOD Magazine, AlterNet, Feministing, and others. From women's issues to

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