



## RH Reality Check

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## Obama's Women's Issues Point Person, Karen Kornbluh, Gets It

Sarah Seltzer on November 24, 2008 - 8:00am

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As the eyes of the press and public try to peer around the curtain surrounding the Obama transition team, women's and reproductive rights advocates feel a certain confidence. [Karen Kornbluh](#), formerly Obama's Senate policy director, is the point person for women's issues during the interim period. Kornbluh has long been tagged by the press as one of the "[brains](#)" behind the Obama juggernaut.

"It's a marvelous signal," says Eleanor Smeal, president of the [Feminist Majority](#). "She's a strong extremely knowledgeable on women's rights issues and women's issues."

Before being hired by Obama early on for his Senate office, Kornbluh was known in DC policy circles for her essays on work-family balance--an issue that shouldn't be relegated to "women's issues" but often is. She coined the term "juggler families" describing families that rely on incomes from two working parents or one single parent: in other words, there's no one at home taking care of the kids, and every dollar coming in is necessary to maintain the household.

"We're delighted that Karen is on the Obama team," says Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, president of advocacy group [Momsrising](#). "We really think she understands the shared struggles of working families, and in particular the struggles of moms. It can't be overestimated how important the economic struggles of moms are."

### Balancing Act

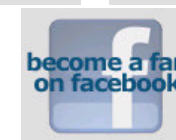
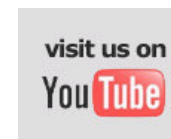
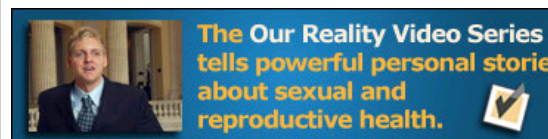
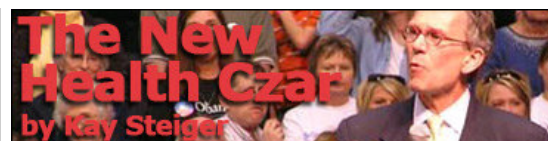
While Kornbluh's primary focus has been on economic issues facing women, she did oversee the drafting of the [Democratic party's platform](#) this year, which included [a strong affirmation of reproductive rights](#) from contraception and comprehensive sex ed to support for mothers and pregnant women, to solid support for abortion rights.

Both "abortion reduction" religious groups and reproductive health groups felt the wording was a victory, which may point to Kornbluh's ability, like her boss, to be inclusive without compromising her agenda.

Laurie Rubiner, Planned Parenthood's Vice-President for Public Policy, says that process earned Kornbluh plaudits from the community and assurance of her deep comprehension of the issues. "She's incredibly thoughtful and strategic and very smart," says Rubiner. "When she wrote the Democratic platform she did a tremendous job balancing all considerations and putting together formidable document. It says a lot, as she has quite a balancing act to do."

### A List of Prescriptions for Working Families

When it comes to actual solutions for families, Kornbluh has a clear and comprehensive prescription--with programs that go as far as many advocates' wilder dreams. She written extensively about what a system that gave equal opportunities to working families [would look like](#).



*Reforms should include citizen-based health insurance, subsidized by income; progressive retirement accounts; new refundable, tax-subsidized accounts to help parents save for the expenses of having a family; universal pre-K and after-school programs; and childcare subsidies and workplaces that do not penalize parents who need flexibility to care for kids.*

But on the same level, Kornbluh has demonstrated the process that leads to these reforms is a nuanced one, that image matters and that sweeping reforms are a process. On the question of whether work-family balance and parental leave should be framed as a "mother's issue," she told an interviewer in [a 2005 article in Brain Child magazine](#):

"I do think it's still important to keep mothers in the title... Mothers are the ones up in the night worrying about what's going to happen to them if they divorce and they're left with a big gaping hole in their Social Security. At the same time, men must start taking their family leave, demanding part-time jobs and childcare before we'll see real change."

#### Setting priorities

As Obama and his staff gets ready to take office, and the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate prep their legislation, Kornbluh, the staff and others are assessing what to prioritize, and women's groups are eager to get cracking.

One reproductive rights bill that may be out of reach until the next election, however, is the [Freedom of Choice Act](#), which, although supported by Obama, would eliminate the obstacles states have put in place for women getting abortions.

"We have 43 solid pro-choice votes. Even if the resolution of both of the outstanding Senate races went our way, we don't have the votes to pass it. That's the reality. It's not because it's not something we care about," says Rubiner of Planned Parenthood.

As for bills like the [REAL Act](#) and the [Prevention First act](#), which seek to expand contraception access and introduce comprehensive sex ed (and of which Barack Obama was a sponsor), Rubiner is more optimistic, saying the tone of the election would benefit the bill as a non-nonsense, solutions-oriented bill. "There's real strong support in congress for that, supporters on both sides of the aisle," says Rubiner.

Rowe-Finkbeiner and Smeal both add that a quick passage of the [Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act](#) and expansion of the [State Children's Health Insurance Program](#) are huge boosts for women that could go through congress and get signed into law fairly quickly.

Momsrising's other priorities are state funding for the Family and Medical Leave Insurance as part of any economic stimulus package, and passage of the [Healthy Families Act](#), which ensures paid sick days, and eliminating waiting periods for immigrant women and children in the process of expanding SCHIP and health care access.

Smeal of the Feminist Majority added that the most important thing the Obama administration could do was start reversing as many of the Bush administrations executive orders and mitigating the effect of midnight appointments. On the international front, she hopes the Obama administration will release funds for UNFPA and reverse the [Global Gag Rule](#).

"In the first 6 months, the damage can be repaired preferably with a bang, right at the beginning." Kornbluh, she adds, "knows the policies and can hit the ground running."

#### More articles by Kornbluh:

[The Joy of Flex](#) in the "Washington Monthly"

[Families Valued \(On "Juggler Families"\)](#) in the New Democracy journal (subscription only).

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## 2 comments

### News & Commentary Unearthing Common Ground

By Debra Haffner on Dec 5, 2008 - 8:00am | 5 comments



It's not about reducing abortion. The advocates for a new common ground correctly note the correlation between poverty and abortion rates. But they fail to mention how poverty first contributes to unintended pregnancies.

### Anti-Abortion Group Pushes Failed "Personhood" Strategy

By Wendy Norris on Dec 5, 2008 - 8:00am | 12 comments



Despite the crushing 3-to-1 loss of a state constitutional amendment to confer civil rights on fertilized human eggs, the American Life League says it's their "only option left".

### Get Real! Women Who Sleep With Women Losing Their Virginity

By Heather Corinna on Dec 5, 2008 - 8:00am | 0 comments



What you're discovering is one of the many ways in which virginity as a concept doesn't make sense. If you two pursue sexual pleasure together, however you choose to do it, you're having sex.

### Principled Choices

By Kirsten Moore on Dec 4, 2008 - 8:00am | 1 comment



President-elect Obama can teach us all a thing or two about respecting the choices that other people make in their lives and carrying that respect through into our public policies.

### Women's Safety and Health in Post-Mumbai India

By Deepali Gaur Singh on Dec 4, 2008 - 8:00am | 1 comment



In response to terrorist attacks in Mumbai, more power will be vested in state machinery to be better prepared for a similar crisis in the future. That very same power can be used to exploit women.

### Strengthening PEPFAR: A Plan for Immediate Action

By Jodi Jacobson on Dec 4, 2008 - 8:00am | 2 comments



PEPFAR presents the President-Elect both opportunities and challenges. The 2008 bill authorizes dramatic increases in funding for treatment and care. But the controversial policies supported by the Bush administration are still in place.

### The Pro-Lie Movement Targets Hillary

By Cristina Page on Dec 3, 2008 - 8:00am | 3 comments



The "Susan B. Anthony List" claims Clinton, as Obama's Secretary of State, will "promote abortion" around the world, because of her support for UNFPA.

### Putting Another Anti-Abortion Myth to Bed

By Cindy Cooper on Dec 3, 2008 - 8:00am | 1 comment



In the wake of the crushing defeat of the South Dakota and Colorado ballot measures to ban abortion, anti-choice activists can no longer say that the "people haven't spoken"

### The Equal Rights Amendment

Why isn't anyone who is discussing women's rights mentioning the ultimate in gender equality progress--the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment? Are we to keep gaining (and then constantly facing threats of losing) women supportive laws in a piece meal fashion generation after generation? Or do we begin at the beginning by granting women constitutional equality? It dismays me that the so-called feminist leaders seem to have abandoned the fight or simply pay lip service to the ERA if asked. Is Kornbluh, whom Smeal says is, "extremely knowledgeable on women's rights issues and women's issues" aware of the ERA and the continuing effort to ratify it? If not, I suggest she visit www.4ERA.org for a quick briefing.

Submitted by Anonymous on November 24, 2008 - 5:23pm.

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### Amen to The Equal Rights Ammendment

I totally agree with the comment above. It seems that every time there is a new President elected it is nail biting time for women's rights. In this day and age we have more than proven ourselves in a man's world. It is about time all these laws protecting women become PERMANENT!

Submitted by Tierneyn Grinavic on November 26, 2008 - 3:05pm.

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## The Last Hurrah? Final Stage for HHS Abortion Rule

Amie Newman, RH Reality Check

Dec 5 2008 - 12:42pm | 0 comments

The HHS "midnight" rules that would allow health care providers and any employees of institutions that provide health care to "opt out" of participating in care, in any way, with which they do not agree is in its final stage of review, as of yesterday. It's the last hurrah for the Bush administration.

## Roundup: Supreme Court to Consider Pregnancy Discrimination, Karen Rayne Reviews "Zack and Miri Make a Porno"

Emily Douglas, RH Reality Check

Dec 5 2008 - 10:33am | 1 comment

Supreme Court to consider "second generation of pregnancy discrimination"; Karen Rayne reviews "Zack and Miri Make a Porno"; Texas high school students to take "paternity awareness" classes; California woman pleads guilty to practicing medicine without a license.

## Goodbye to Ideological Stem Cell Agenda, Guidelines for President-Elect Obama

Amie Newman, RH Reality Check

Dec 4 2008 - 7:42pm | 2 comments

President-Elect Obama has an opportunity to cleanse the federal government of far too many ideological, non-scientifically based restrictions placed upon science by President Bush over the last eight years. One of these has to do with federal funding for embryonic stem cell research.

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- a bird and a bottle
- abortionclinicdays
- ACLU Take Charge Blog
- Advocates for Pregnant Women
- AIDS and Rights
- AIDS Combat Zone
- aidsmatters.org
- A little red hen
- Angry Black Bitch
- Ask Dr. K (sexual health advice)
- Bag News Notes
- BCadvisor
- Belly Tales
- Below The Waist
- Birth Control Watch
- Birthing Joy
- Bitch PhD
- blogher: health & wellness
- Blogs by Women
- Blog for Choice
- CDC Chatter
- ChoiceLinkUp.com
- Choice USA - Choice Words
- Citizen Brand
- Creative Loafing
- Culture Kitchen
- Daily Kos
- Daou Report
- Democratic Underground
- Donkey O.D.
- Echidne of the Snakes
- Fact-esque
- Fair Trade Products
- Family Plan It
- Fertility Notes
- Feministe
- Feministing
- The Feminist Pulse (from Girlistic.com)
- Fundie Watch
- Global Voices
- Gloria Feldt
- Harry834's Blog
- Hot Flash Report
- Is America Burning?
- itslateagain
- Kubatana.net - Zimbabwean activism
- Majikthise
- MedBlog with Leigh Hopper
- Media Girl
- Moms Rising
- Muckraking Mom
- National Abortion Federation Blog:
- Saporta Reporter
- National Network of Abortion Funds
- New Moon
- Nuestra Vida, Nuestra Voz
- OneWorld
- Our Bodies, Our Blog
- Pandagon
- PEPFAR Watch
- Political Animal
- Political Cortex
- Politics1
- Population Action
- POZ Magazine
- Proud Liberal
- Pseudo-Adrienne's
- Liberal-Feminist Bias
- Rachel's Tavern
- Radical Doula
- Religious Right Watch
- Ranting for a Revolution
- Right Wing Watch
- Reproductive Rights Blog
- Reproductive Rights Prof Blog
- Rockridge Nation
- Rox Populi
- SaveRoe.com
- Scarleteen.com
- Sexuality & Religion: What's the Connection?
- Shakespeare Sister
- Technology, Health & Development
- Tell Them SC
- The Carpetbagger Report
- The Crone Speaks
- the f word | contemporary UK feminism
- The HIV Blogs
- The Pump Handle
- The Red Thread
- The Rittenhouse Review
- The Sideshow
- The Well-Timed Period
- The Women's Media Centers
- The Women's Rights Blog
- Think Girl
- TIME Global Health Blog
- Time To Deliver
- Tikvah Girl
- Toys in Babeland
- UN Dispatch
- University Coalition for Global Health
- NYC Unrated & Unfiltered
- WIMN's Voices
- The Women's International Perspective
- Words of Choice
- Women of Color Blog
- Women's Bioethics Project
- Women's Health News
- Women's Health Research News
- Women's Voices for Change
- World Pulse Magazine

### State Blogs:

- The Blue State
- Burnt Orange Report (TX)
- Calitics (CA)
- Colorado Independent
- Minnesota Monitor
- A Moderate From South Dakota
- NYC Unrated and Unfiltered



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