



## **The 2017 Women2Women Policy Agenda**

### *A Message from Main Street's President and CEO*

When we began the Women2Women Conversations Tour in 2014, our idea was that it would be an outreach and education effort that would bring Congresswomen from the Republican Main Street Partnership together with gatherings of women from all walks of life and all parts of the country. Our hope was that the women who came to the tour stops would appreciate that the members of Congress were listening to them and were eager to hear what they had to say.

The dialogue that emerged from these events was fascinating. But it quickly became clear that the women who attended the tour wanted more than just a discussion. They wanted our Congresswomen to go back to Washington and try to find solutions to the problems that they were dealing with in their homes and communities.

And that's exactly what happened. Our Congresswomen listened and learned from what they heard from the women who came to the tour. Then they took action. They worked with their male colleagues in the Republican Main Street Partnership, and other legislators from both parties, to drive a positive agenda of policies through Congress.

The women who came to our events wanted Congress to address the national crisis of inadequate care and facilities for family members suffering from mental health disorders — and our members drove through the first serious mental health reform legislation since President John F. Kennedy's administration. Our audiences wanted our members to do something about

the terrible epidemic of substance abuse that's afflicting millions of families throughout the country — and our members championed a comprehensive program to prevent, reduce, and treat opioid addiction.

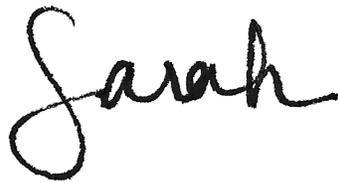
Our audiences also wanted our members to take action on a variety of issues that disproportionately affect women and girls. These included help for individuals with eating disorders, support for survivors of sexual assault, greater investment in the discovery and delivery of medical cures, and greater opportunities for women in the military. And now, thanks to our members' efforts, these measures have passed Congress and have been signed into law.

That's how democracy is supposed to work. The women who came to the tour spoke out, Main Street's Congresswomen responded and convinced their male colleagues to support them on legislation to address problems that particularly affect women. I want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart to all of the women who came to the Women2Women Tour, made your voices heard, and helped to make a difference in the lives of millions of Americans.

But we're just getting started. As a new Congress and presidential administration takes office, Main Street's Congresswomen are advancing a new set of policies to address problems that have a disproportionate impact on women. This year's agenda is based on unfinished business from last year as well as on emerging issues that we've heard from the most recent Women2Women gatherings. Our new agenda will push Congress to address challenges and opportunities that American women face in their capacities as employees, mothers, caregivers, small business owners, students, and bill-payers. And we'll also be leading a special effort to make the Republican Party more responsive to women's needs and concerns. Women are going to drive a lot of the GOP's 2017 agenda — and we're going to get results.

I want to thank the thousands of women who have participated in the Women2Women Conversations Tour since its launch. We could not have done this without you. We hope you will follow our progress in fighting for your priorities in the coming year. Please check in with us at

www.mainstreetadvocacy.com or follow me on Twitter at @MainStreetSarah and on Facebook @SarahChamberlain. I hope we will all move the country forward in 2016. Thank you and God bless you —

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large loop on the 'S' and a long tail on the 'h'.

*Sarah Chamberlain  
President and CEO  
Republican Main Street Partnership*

### ***The Women2Women 2017 Policy Agenda***

The Republican Main Street Partnership's members have united around a Women2Women Policy Agenda. It addresses the need of American women for greater and more equal opportunity, better health for women as well as the recipients of their care, improved education and training for women and their families, and greater participation of women at every level of the political process including electoral office. At the heart of this agenda are legislation and policy proposals responding to concerns raised by participants in the Women2Women Conversations Tour and supported by Main Street's Congresswomen.

#### ***1. Women and Opportunity***

Recent years have seen continued progress toward gender equality and an explosion of women's creation and ownership of small businesses. But women's workforce participation rates have dropped over the past decade, due in large part to the rising costs of childcare. All women are affected by

economic stagnation and unequal distribution of income. Women still bear a heavier burden than men when it comes to balancing work and care of children as well as care for the ill, the aged, and the disabled. The Women2Women Policy Agenda supports policies for greater and more equal women's opportunity in the following areas:

- **Incentivizing Workplace Flexibility**
- **Helping Working Parents with Child Care**
- **Improving Maternity and Family Leave Policies**
- **Delivering Small Business Tax and Regulatory Relief**
- **Increasing Small Business' Access to Capital**
- **Reducing Occupational Licensing and Other Regulatory Obstacles**
- **Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit**
- **Encouraging Women's Financial Literacy**

## 2. *Women and Health*

In the political battles over access to health care, the particular health needs of women and their children often get overlooked. But this omission can no longer be tolerated at a time when life expectancy for many American women is decreasing, for the first time in decades. The Women2Women Policy Agenda supports efforts to provide for better health and life outcomes for women in the following policy areas:

- **Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care**
- **Facilitating Family Health Care Flexibility**
- **Reducing Substance Abuse and Addiction**
- **Improving Dementia Care and Treatment**
- **Preventing Cancer Through Safer Sunscreens**
- **Ensuring the Safety of Personal Care Products**
- **Allowing Terminal Patients the "Right to Try" Experimental Therapies**

### 3. *Women and Education*

Inadequacies in our public education system, and the lack of high-quality childhood education, pose a threat to our children's futures. So too do the out-of-control increases in college costs and student debt. The Women2Women Policy Agenda supports policies in these areas to make education better, more accessible, and more affordable:

- **Expanding Access to High-Quality Preschool**
- **Enabling State Pre-K and Head Start Partnerships**
- **Lifting Obstacles to School Reform**
- **Bolstering 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills Training**
- **Improving 529 College Savings Plans**
- **Enhancing Pell Grant Flexibility**
- **Encouraging Cost Containment and Innovative Low-Cost Education**
- **Enabling Student Debt Interest Rate Refinancing**
- **Increasing Loan Repayment Flexibility**
- **Facilitating Employer Student Loan Payments on Behalf of Employees**

### *Women and Politics*

The media is full of stories about the difference in voting preferences between women and men. In the 2016 presidential election, this "gender gap" between our two principal political parties reached a new record as the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, won with men by 12 points and lost with women by the same margin.

But another political gender gap is more troubling: Women's underrepresentation in politics and government. Women are a majority of

voters, but Congress is 80 percent male. The situation is even more acute for Republicans: GOP Congressmen outnumber GOP Congresswomen by a more than 11-to-1 ratio. And this problem is getting worse over time.

When women run for political office, they're just as likely as men to win election. But few women throw their hats in the political ring because they need a lot more encouragement than men to become candidates. It's a matter of confidence — or women's lack of it. Numerous studies have shown that men who consider running for office think they're extremely well qualified — even when they're not. But even highly qualified women don't believe they meet the bar to run for office.

There's more to women's underrepresentation in politics than that, though. Because there are so few women in politics, potential women candidates lack familiarity with the structure that could shepherd them through primary elections. Women candidates also lack familiarity with fundraising, which is the biggest perceived barrier to running for higher office. Women are less likely than men to ask for money — or to ask for enough money.

The reality is that when it comes to political campaigns, men are still the ones who write the checks. Political observers have seen time and again how a male candidate and a female candidate will receive radically different treatment when they speak to a potential (male) donor. The male candidate will have a friendly chat with the donor about sports, fraternities, and the people and networks they have in common. The female candidate will receive none of the pleasantries, she'll be expected to know twice as much about policy, and she'll walk out with a check that's half the size of the man's.

And a further reality is that women candidates face more obstacles on the Republican side. Thirty years ago, there were approximately the same numbers of Republican and Democratic women members of Congress, but now the Democratic women outnumber the Republican women by 3 to 1. That's because the Democratic Party has done a much better job of developing

recruitment networks for women candidates, encouraging them to run, and connecting them with the mentors and fundraisers they need to win.

Since the Women2Women Conversations Tour began in 2014, it has brought Republican Congresswomen together with audiences of women around the country, in informal gatherings that allow for a lot of back-and-forth discussion. The concerns raised by women in our audiences about the problems their families and communities face have inspired our Congresswomen to get Washington to do something about these issues.

But the Women2Women Conversations Tour has also been spreading the message that the Republican Party wants more women to run for office. Now it's time to move from encouragement to action.

In the coming year, Main Street Advocacy will develop a women-focused GOP fundraising capacity — sort of like the Republican equivalent of EMILY's List. It will aim to recruit more Republican women to run for office. It will offer those candidates access to a network of women who can give them the support and guidance they need.

And, more generally, Main Street Advocacy will invest greater resources and effort to increasing women's political participation across the board. With your help, we will give women a greater voice and presence in our government, and make our political system more responsive to women's needs and concerns.

Increasingly, girls are growing up to believe that they are capable of achieving anything — but barriers and glass ceilings undoubtedly remain. The Women2Women Policy Agenda calls for greater efforts to educate girls for success and overcome the obstacles that prevent women from equal representation and full participation in the fields of science and technology, business and entrepreneurship, and government.