

The Case for a Woman as Vice President, Then President

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Unless something extraordinary happens, in 2008 as in every other presidential election in U.S. history, a man will be elected president of the United States; and (almost all) Democrats hope that man is Barack Obama. And (almost all) Democrats hope that President Obama will be re-elected in 2012. But in 2016 ...

Although the office of vice president carries little inherent power, it positions its occupant to be the natural frontrunner to succeed a successful president. And because no political party plans for its presidential nominee to not be successful, almost every time a party holds a convention, it is in effect nominating not just one presidential candidate but potentially, hopefully two (The recent precedent of the GOP nominating Dick Cheney as vice president has been an aberration—as well as an abomination—but apparently in the White House there had to be a grown-up, such as he was, to hold little Georgie's hand). [Please forgive my frustration with the status quo.]

In the wake of Sen. Hillary Clinton nearly becoming the Democratic presidential nominee, serious consideration is now being given to her as the party's vice presidential nominee. What's

more, there may well also be serious consideration of other women for the VP slot. But in that, there is a difficult political dilemma.

If Clinton were chosen, many would say that Obama (with the counsel of his advisors) was "pandering" to her and her constituency, who fought such a passionate fight against him. On the other hand, if a woman other than Clinton were chosen, many would say that Obama was giving her, and by extension her supporters, a "slap in the face." Damned if you do, damned if you don't, that might well argue against Obama choosing Clinton or any woman as running mate. And of course, there are other important factors as Obama considers Clinton, including the compatibility of the two strong personalities who have just spent months in something other than a love fest.

But the question remains: Should the Democrats nominate a woman to be vice president in 2008 and, thus, potentially, hopefully president in 2016? Should gender be a factor at all? Shouldn't this very important decision, potentially affecting every person on earth, be "gender neutral"?

Well, at the risk of offending all those who recoil at anything even remotely resembling "affirmative action," here are a few facts to consider.

There have been 55 presidential elections in U.S. history. If those elections had been gender neutral (and of course we know that they haven't been but bear with me a moment so you can see just how "un-neutral" they have been) then in each contest there would be a 50/50 chance of electing a woman and a 50/50 chance of electing a man. Actually, since the U.S. population has, at least in modern times, had slightly more women than men, the odds would slightly favor a woman being elected, all else being equal (Ay, there's the rub!).

Conversely, there would be one chance out of two that a woman would not be elected in one election; one chance out of four that no woman would be elected in two elections; one chance out of eight, in three elections; and so forth. Thus, the chance that U.S. presidential elections to date have been gender neutral is just one out of two to the 55th power, or one chance out of 36,028,797,018,963,968 (36 quadrillion, 28 trillion ...)—there's more chance of George W. Bush having legitimately won the last election!

To put it another way, if a company had equal numbers of male and female employees but had chosen from its staff only men to fill the role of CEO in every one of 55 appointments, then should they really be surprised if they were charged with "sexual discrimination"? What if all the CEOs had been women?

"But," I'm often interrupted, "that's not a fair appraisal. Why, women weren't even allowed to vote in national elections, let alone hold the presidency, until 1920!"

If ever there were a more damning assessment of the status of women in America than that, it eludes me (even former slaves were allowed to vote a half century before that) ... except to say that even since 1920, there has not yet been a woman nominated by a major U.S. political party to be president—let alone elected—and there has been just one woman nominated to be vice president (Please don't make me get out my calculator again to tell you how pitiful those odds are as well).

The bottom line is that there has been blatant discrimination against women to fill the role of president, or vice president ... unless, of course, one were to argue that women are inherently incapable of fulfilling the duties of president: of being chief executive, commander-in-chief, and head of state.

But of course, women have fulfilled those roles in nations as diverse as the United Kingdom, India, and the Philippines. Women are chief executives of multinational corporations. Women are generals and admirals in the U.S. military (since the 1970s). And of course, women as queens have served as heads of state throughout history—some good, some not so good, on average probably no better or worse than the kings.

"But wait!" another interruption blares, "That is the fatal flaw in your argument. Unlike kings or

queens, our presidents are not born into their positions; with very few exceptions (Poor Gore), they are ultimately elected by a majority of the people. If you are to condemn our nominating process and elections as sexist, then you are ultimately condemning the American people as sexist as well!"

Well ... what can I say? While it's true that "we the people" have very little say in who the slate of candidates we vote on are in the first place, the broad field of potential nominees with a realistic chance of winning the presidency is mostly, usually almost entirely, male; but that is primarily because there are far more men than women elected as governors, senators, and representatives—once again, hardly a defense against a charge of sexism, all across America.

Let's face it: Women have not been given a fair share of the power in this country, and others; and both parties—and both sexes, at least since women have been voting—are guilty, or at least ultimately responsible.

Gender is, thus, a legitimate factor to consider when selecting a vice presidential and potentially presidential nominee. Then again, there are many other legitimate factors—all the qualities that make the individuals being considered considerable in the first place. There are many men whose names are being floated as potential running mates for Obama who would make excellent vice presidents and eventually presidents.

But on a purely self-serving partisan note, **do we Democrats want the Republicans to**

beat us to the punch? [Quoted by [The Guardian \(UK\)](#)] Remember that the first female prime minister of the United Kingdom was a conservative and the first female justice of the U.S. Supreme Court was as well.

What if John McCain chose as his running mate, say, Condoleezza Rice?