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Cecile Richards Of Planned Parenthood: Election Shows GOP Should Embrace Family-Planning Roots

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WASHINGTON -- As Republicans lick their wounds and [rethink a strategy for reaching out to women](#), Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards has some advice: Go back to your family-planning roots.

"Back in the olden days, the Republican Party was the party that supported people's individual rights and keeping government out of personal health care decisions, so I think there's a history they can go back to," Richards told The Huffington Post in an interview on Wednesday. "A lot of Republicans used to support family planning, and Richard Nixon signed that first federal planning program into law. There's a clear pathway to [win back women's support], and it's to listen to the middle of their party instead of the extreme fringe."

Indeed, back in the 1970s and 1980s, Republicans supported family planning initiatives and took a softer stance on abortion rights. Nixon was so enthusiastic about a federal family planning initiative for low-income women that he declared it a "national goal" in 1969 before signing Title X into law. President George H.W. Bush earned the nickname "Rubbers" as a congressman for his passion for increasing access to contraception. Even Mitt Romney, as recently as 2002, called himself "pro-choice," [attended Planned Parenthood fundraisers](#) and sought the organization's endorsement.

But this year, Romney said that he would "get rid of" Planned Parenthood funding and backed a bill that would have allowed employers to refuse to cover birth control in their female employees' insurance plans. Ten state legislatures across the country voted to defund Planned Parenthood because some of its clinics offer abortions, and Republicans in Congress used family planning funding as a political football in federal budget negotiations.

Female voters sent a clear message to the Republican Party on Tuesday, [turning out in huge numbers](#) to elect a record number of pro-choice women to the House and Senate, defeating all the Republican candidates who made offensive comments about rape and abortion, and rejecting a ballot measure in Florida that would have [rolled back women's right to reproductive "privacy."](#)

Even conservative pundits [acknowledged on Wednesday](#) that the Republican Party has a "woman problem" and made a strategic mistake in dismissing women's issues as distractions.

Richards, who hit the campaign trail for President Barack Obama this year, said all Republicans should heed the warning.

"Anyone who doesn't get this message -- and I know there are people who don't, because House folks are already trying to spin this -- boy, it was clear in this country that despite Mitt Romney trying to say that women didn't care about women's health issues, they obviously did, because they didn't vote for him," Richards said. "This was such an overwhelming statement about where women are in this country."