

VOTING & ELECTIONS

FACT SHEET

Why Women Should Vote: To Make Sure That Courts Protect Women's Legal Rights

May 2012

Judges appointed to the federal courts have the responsibility of ruling on women's hard-won legal rights. By voting, women can make sure our leaders in Washington appoint and confirm federal judges who are committed to applying the law fairly and who understand the laws' real world impact on women's lives.

Federal judges make decisions every day that shape women's lives.

Judges decide issues of particular importance to women, including:

- Whether the government can interfere in a woman's personal decisionmaking, including the decision to use contraception or have an abortion under *Roe v. Wade*.
 - Whether the Constitution protects women from discrimination.
 - Whether the courts will protect big corporations and powerful interests, or stand with individual women facing pay discrimination, sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, and other kinds of discrimination on the job.
 - Whether young women will have a strong Title IX, protecting them against discrimination and harassment in the classroom and on the playing fields.
 - Whether state universities and public schools can adopt programs to break down barriers that girls and women still face in education, particularly in fields where they are underrepresented, such as science and engineering.
- Whether women will have the opportunity to work as firefighters, police officers, and other positions traditionally held by men.
 - Whether Congress can design national solutions to national problems women face, such as obstacles to obtaining affordable health care and health insurance.
 - Whether laws written to protect individuals from discrimination will be interpreted consistent with the lawmakers' intent and purpose.
 - Whether women will be able to enforce rights established under federal laws and programs, including the right to benefits like Medicaid, public housing, child support enforcement, and public assistance that are especially important to low-income women and their families.

Judges' decisions have a broad and lasting impact.

- Federal judges are appointed for life. The decisions they make can affect women and their families for generations.
- For Justices who retired after 1970, the average length of time spent on the Supreme Court is over 26 years.

We're at a critical juncture.

- There are currently nearly 80 vacancies in federal courts around the country. When positions on the federal bench remain unfilled, people must wait for justice.
- When the judiciary is diverse, judges bring a greater breadth of life experiences to their work and a deeper understanding of the law's real world effect on individuals. But only 236 of the more than 750 active federal appellate and trial court judges are women, and only 66 among them are women of color. There are no Native American federal judges at all, and only one female Asian American federal appeals court judge. Seven federal courts of appeal do not have a single active minority female judge.

- Four of the current Supreme Court Justices are over age 70, raising the possibility of one or more retirements in the next several years.

The judicial nominations process matters.

- The President nominates federal judges.
- The Constitution provides that the Senate must provide advice and consent to the President's nominations. Senators both recommend nominees for federal judicial positions in their states and vote on whether to confirm nominees.

When women vote, leaders listen.

REGISTER. VOTE.

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