

# WOMEN'S HEALTH: A WINNING ISSUE

## An Analysis of the 2013 Virginia Gubernatorial Election



Planned Parenthood Action Fund



*"I strongly believe that women should be able to make their own healthcare decisions without interference from Washington or Richmond... We can't put up walls or send the signal that Virginia is moving backwards on important issues like women's health." – Terry McAuliffe, Virginia Governor-Elect*

*"The lesson for candidates in 2014 is unmistakable: Dismiss and demean women at your peril," – Cecile Richards, President, Planned Parenthood Action Fund*

### Executive Summary

Planned Parenthood Votes, Planned Parenthood Action Fund, and Planned Parenthood Virginia PAC invested \$2.4 million in an integrated campaign around women's health in the Virginia gubernatorial election, helping to propel Terry McAuliffe to victory with a strong 9 point advantage among women. With expected low off-year election voter turnout and historic trends aligned against Terry McAuliffe, Planned Parenthood political and advocacy organizations employed our status as trusted messengers to mobilize key women voters by educating them about Ken Cuccinelli's dangerous agenda on access to birth control, safe and legal abortion, and Planned Parenthood health centers.

"McAuliffe seems to have understood from the start that women could hold outside importance in a contest against Cuccinelli. **When he decided to run for governor, one of his first calls was to Planned Parenthood's political advocacy groups...**" *The Washington Post*, [10/18/13](#)

Over the last several years, Planned Parenthood political and advocacy organizations have become a powerful and effective force in electoral campaigns, especially in battleground states like Virginia. Coming off a landslide election for women's health in 2012, where President Obama won women by 11 points

nationally, it was clearer than ever that the rising American electorate views women's health as a key issue.

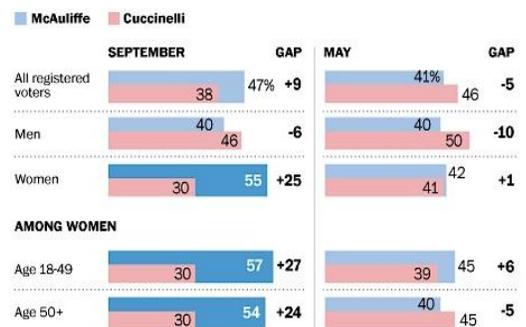
It had been decades since the party holding the White House won the Virginia governor's race. This election was expected to be an uphill battle for Democratic candidate Terry McAuliffe, and polls confirmed it. A *Washington Post* poll in May showed McAuliffe trailing Cuccinelli because he was essentially even with Cuccinelli among women. The women's health issue flipped a switch for voters. The more women learned about the candidates' positions on women's health from a messenger they trust, the more likely they were to vote for Terry McAuliffe and against Ken Cuccinelli.

In the end, women won this race for McAuliffe, with McAuliffe winning women by 9 points – matching Obama's 2012 advantage with Virginia women, beating Obama's 2008 advantage with Virginia women by 2 points, and flipping Republican Governor Bob McDonnell's 8 point advantage with women that propelled him to victory in 2009. Notably, 20 percent of Virginia voters said abortion was the most important issue in determining their vote, and McAuliffe won 59 percent of those votes. Among the rising Virginia electorate, McAuliffe won overwhelmingly, winning among unmarried women by 42 points, and among African American women by 84 points.

### POLL Washington Post/Abt-SRBI Virginia poll

(Among registered voters)

Q: If the election for governor were held today, for whom would you vote, Terry McAuliffe or Ken Cuccinelli?



Note: Libertarian candidate Robert Sarvis not included to ensure comparability across polls.

Full results available at [washingtonpost.com/polls](http://washingtonpost.com/polls).

## The Plan to “Keep Ken Out”



Planned Parenthood advocacy and political organizations had been fighting Ken Cuccinelli’s attacks on women’s health for years, and knew this race would be a priority. Rather than nominating Lieutenant Governor Bill Bolling, the Virginia GOP shut down the normal primary process and allowed a small group of party insiders to nominate the most extreme ticket of any major party in recent history. As it became clear that Cuccinelli would become the nominee, Planned Parenthood political and advocacy launched the \$2.4 million “Keep Ken Out” campaign. The campaign strategically targeted 200,000 key women voters who recognized that affordable health care and birth control are crucial issues, and who supported access to safe and legal abortion.

In sharp contrast to Cuccinelli, Democratic candidate Terry McAuliffe embraced women’s health from day one. Throughout his campaign, McAuliffe made it clear that he trusts women and doctors to make their own health care decisions, and pledged to stand like a “brick wall” when their rights come

under attack.

While conventional wisdom might suggest that we focus on traditionally progressive voters in Northern Virginia, research showed that Planned Parenthood political and advocacy organizations could be a powerful messenger across the Commonwealth – demonstrating just how important women’s access to health care is to a broad group of Virginians. So we ran a robust, layered approach to communicate with key voters in Norfolk and Richmond, while the Democratic Party and the McAuliffe campaign blanketed the airwaves in Northern Virginia highlighting women’s health and other issues important to women.

Planned Parenthood Votes was one of the top five investors in the race outside of the campaigns and the party committees. As it became abundantly clear that these were winning issues, the candidates (up and down the Democratic ticket) and coalition groups embraced women’s health as well. Even climate change advocacy organization NextGen Climate Action, and Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s anti-gun violence group, Independence USA PAC, went on the air with messages about birth control and abortion.

Campaign components included TV, radio, direct mail, social media and online advertising, and a voter contact program at the doors and on the phones.



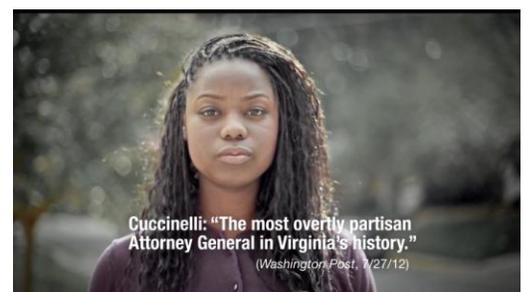
**Boots on the Ground:** Supporters and volunteers knocked over 90,000 doors and made some 26,000 phone calls. Alongside our human-sized birth control pill pack Pillamina, we were actively engaged outside key electoral events, including debates and the GOP convention, holding “Keep Ken Out” signs.

“Most of these people are already fired up — but seeing someone like her, it does give you an extra push,” —Susan Drachsler, VA voter on Cecile Richards campaigning for Terry

*The Washington Post*, 10/26/13

**Paid Media:** Planned Parenthood Votes ran a million-dollar TV and radio ad buy in the swing media markets of Richmond and Norfolk. The first TV ad “Own Decisions” highlighted Ken Cuccinelli’s extreme opposition to safe and legal abortion, access to affordable birth control, and emergency contraception. It ends with “Cuccinelli doesn't trust women. So how can we trust him to be Governor?”

The second TV ad “Wrong” drew attention to the impact that Cuccinelli’s



positions on emergency contraception and abortion would have on rape survivors in the Commonwealth.



**Mail:** The Virginia Democratic Party and the McAuliffe campaign conducted considerable research that determined dropoff voters were most persuaded by women’s health issues and Planned Parenthood was the most trusted brand to deliver this message.

“Planned Parenthood unleashed a wave of mail pieces in Virginia this week blasting Republican gubernatorial nominee Ken Cuccinelli as ‘extremely dangerous for women.’” *CNN*, [8/13/13](#)

As a result, Planned Parenthood Action Fund sent out a six-piece mail series to 155,000 households.

**Digital & Social Media Strategy:** Designed to coincide with the release of Cuccinelli’s book, the “Keep Ken Out” website launched in early February. Over the next several months, Planned Parenthood political and advocacy organizations executed a robust social media program, including a unique @KeepKenOut Twitter handle to educate voters about Cuccinelli’s record and his latest missteps. A new interactive online app allowed people

“Planned Parenthood Launches Strong and Hilarious Attack Against Virginia’s Crazy Ken Cuccinelli.” *Jezebel*, [2/13/13](#)

to insert Cuccinelli and our Keep Ken Out banner into photos of places he didn’t belong. Hundreds of Virginians posted photos, and it generated 44,000 clicks to the website.



The groups also executed strategic digital ad buys to reach key audiences. Around the GOP Convention this spring in Richmond, Planned Parenthood political and advocacy groups staged a “homepage takeover” of the city’s largest news outlet, the *Times-Dispatch*, to educate voters about Cuccinelli’s position as he was receiving the nomination.

## Conclusion

Virginia women sent a message to politicians across the country that attacking women’s health is not only bad policy, but bad politics. If members of Congress, state legislators, and would-be candidates across the country learn one thing from this election, it should be that women do not want politicians to meddle in their personal medical decisions.

The outpouring of activism we saw in Virginia to fight back against these attacks and elect a candidate who stands with women isn’t an outlier – it’s the new normal. More than ever, how candidates approach issues concerning women voters are central to their success. This was true in the 2012 presidential election and again in 2013 in Virginia. Women’s issues are salient to today’s political agenda, and will be in 2014 and beyond.

**TOGETHER WE KEPT KEN OUT!**  
On the heels of our most successful and effective electoral campaign in 2012, Planned Parenthood advocacy and political organizations made the Virginia governor’s race our top priority, investing \$2.4 million and carefully targeting 200,000 key voters.

 ~26,000 phone calls made	 Over 15,300 pledges of support	 Over 90,000 doors knocked
 ~\$1 million spent on TV and radio	 \$2.4 million spent overall	 Over 155,000 households received mail from us

**THANK YOU!**