

'Our Bodies, Ourselves' earmarked for US politicians

October 23 2012, by Robert Macpherson

Women's health advocates set out their plan Monday to put a copy of "Our Bodies, Ourselves" in the office of every lawmaker on Capitol Hill, 41 years after the guide to the female body was published.

By doing so, they're aiming to check the danger that senators and congressmen in Washington—and the vast majority are men—might give short shrift to science when forging legislation that impacts on women's health.

A 944-page doorstopper, "Our Bodies, Ourselves" has been translated into some 30 languages since it was first published by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective in 1971 and found its way on to the best-seller lists.

It's become a go-to authority on such topics as sexuality, birth control, childbirth and menopause, and it is mandatory reading in many college women's studies programs.

But in this election year, Judith Norsigian, executive director of the Our Bodies Ourselves organization—as the Boston collective now is known—said more politicians and their aides need to have it at their fingertips.

"We hope to advance evidence-based reproductive health policy-making in this country" by giving copies to all 435 members of House of Representatives and 100 senators, she told reporters in Washington.

To cover the costs of the Educate Congress initiative—the paperback book retails for \$26 a copy—Our Bodies Ourselves is raising \$25,000 by December 18 via the Indiegogo.com crowdfunding website.

Abortion and contraception have been hot-button issues in the run-up to the November 6 elections, with Mitt Romney's Republicans opposing both as they woo social conservative voters in their campaign against President Barack Obama.

In August, congressman Todd Akin, a Republican from Missouri, raised eyebrows when he said he had been told by doctors it was "really rare" for a rape victim to wind up pregnant.

"If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down," he said, prompting Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney to distance himself from the would-be senator's remarks.

Some of the contributors to the latest edition of "Our Bodies, Ourselves" responded by driving from Chicago to Saint Louis, Missouri to hand deliver a copy to Akin's office.

Cindy Pearson, executive director of the National Women's Health Network, said abortion—including a total ban, even when rape is involved—has been a decisive issue among Americans for decades.

"What seems to be escalating somewhat right now is public figures' willingness to make statements of fact that are so badly wrong," she said.

Vivian Pinn, retired director of women's health research at the National Institutes of Health, cited a wider problem of sex education in public schools, which varies widely between states.

"The educational effort has to be diffuse," she said.

Norsigian agreed, citing a medical school professor in Chicago who recently told her about a student who claimed that condoms aggravated the spread of HIV-AIDS.

"Most of us get pretty poor quality sex education and reproductive [health](#) education when we're growing up," she said. "This country has a long way to go in that respect."

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