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Looking For A Women's Candidate? Check For Daughters

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At this point in my life, reproductive rights are not a big issue. I don't need fair funding for my field hockey team. Equal pay for equal work is not a problem. I don't see any glass ceiling I need to crack.

But I look at my 16-year old daughter, and I wonder. Who will provide the laws and leadership to assure the glorious future that I know awaits my incandescent child?

I think I may have found a surprising answer.

Some wail (literally of late) that our best chance for a women champion was the woman who just suspended her campaign. But I don't see anything in her record that would give me that kind of confidence that I would entrust to her the job of creating a world where my daughter will thrive. A woman who chokes down shots and beers in Pennsylvania and swaps gun stories for votes is not to be trusted when a decision puts votes at risk.

Perhaps there is hope in the flood of women who are now rising through the political ranks. We'll see. But running on women's issues can be a hard sell when your state is red.

In working through who would be my daughter's best legislative protector and supporter, I came across something that told me that those of us with a stake in women's issues do not necessarily have to attach our hopes to one gender.

There is another friend in Congress.

A study (done in 2006 and updated last year) sponsored by Yale University and the National Bureau of Economic Research and authored by Ebonya Washington showed that male legislators with daughters are more likely to support women's issues than those without them.

She came to that conclusion through an analysis of roll-call votes in which she compared votes with family composition. She used rankings by major women's groups on 20

women's issues, such as equal rights, women's safety, economic security, education, health and reproductive rights.

It is a political application that mirrors previous research that shows - just as fathers change daughters, daughters change dads.

Kyle Pruett, the father of daughters and the author of the book, *Fatherhood* studied families with stay-at-home dads over 10 years. Daughters, he contends, make fathers think differently about the world and the future it offers.

It's not a perfect science. George Bush, who would have to master human issues before he could take on women's issues, has two daughters and no sons.

But the Yale-NBER findings do reflect a time when the worlds of fathers and daughters are coming into much closer orbit.

The dependent, passively feminine daddy's little girls of the past have been replaced by a new and thoroughly re-designed model of young female - ambitious, educated, worldly and in need of nobody's protection.

Instead of preparing his daughter for the time-honored matrimonial hand-off, fathers today can - and are increasingly expected to - have a hand in raising powerful and independent women; women fully capable of making their way in a competitive world where the competitors don't always play nice.

More than most, legislators have a chance to shape that world.

As we wish them a happy father's day, let's also hope the elected fathers of daughters make the most of it.