

MADAM PRESIDENT?

Only a few women seem to be on possible presidential track

Her success may open doors for others, unless there's such a thing as being too extraordinary

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WASHINGTON—Has Hillary Clinton paved the way for anyone but Hillary Clinton?

It's possible that Clinton's historic successes in her party's presidential primaries—scoring the first victories for a woman in important states such as California, Ohio and Pennsylvania — will clear a path for women seeking the presidency in the future. Regardless of what becomes of Clinton this year, experts say, she has opened a long-bolted door.

"People have seen her as a legitimate contender, going beyond gender," says Doug Schoen, a pollster who has served the Clintons. "The next time there will be less concern about a woman, because we have had a woman running a competitive race.

"We have to bet that she won't be the ultimate nominee," Schoen adds. "But that being said, she has run an extraordinary race. ... I don't see an obvious heir to Hillary's mantle, but if there is one, she is not going to be held back because of gender—and Hillary, I think, has blazed the path."

Yet some say only Clinton, a former first lady in an administration that presided over eight prosperous years and a second-term senator who has established her own credentials, could have achieved the successes she has this year.

Clinton entered this contest with nearly universal name recognition, albeit sharply split between good and bad. And the bench for potential female contenders is still sparsely populated, especially in governors' mansions and Senate seats. Should Clinton fall short of her party's nomination, some say, it's not evident that she has eased the path for others.

"There is no clear answer to that yet," says Ruth Mandel, founder of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. "She has been out there for so many months and under so much pressure and under relentless commentary and scrutiny. ... It's hardly made it look like something that most mortals, human beings male or female, would want to take on. ... I see her as Wonder Woman blazing the trail, but I don't know what that means for mortals coming up behind her."

Who's on deck?

The mere mortals on the bench of potential presidential candidates may be found among the names raised as



potential running mates this year:

- Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D): The first daughter of an American governor (former Gov. John Gilligan of Ohio) to become a governor herself. The second-termer delivered the Democrats' response to the president's State of the Union address in January.
- Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R- Texas): First female senator from Texas, elected in 1993. A lawyer and former state treasurer, she already has a few campaign books on the shelf, including last fall's "Leading Ladies: American Trailblazers."
- Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.): First female senator from Missouri, elected in 2006. First female county prosecutor in Kansas City, first woman elected to the Columbia City Council.
- Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire (D): Second woman elected governor of the state, a former attorney general deeply involved in the lawsuit against the tobacco industry and former director of the state Department of Ecology.

A handful of other women have been mentioned as presidential possibilities as well: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano (D), Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin (R). While few of them seem like obvious candidates, four years ago Sen. [Barack Obama](#) didn't either.

Breaking hard ground

If there are a lot of "firsts" next to these names, it is a measure of how high a hurdle women face in pursuit of the presidency. Only 16 women serve in the Senate, 11 of them Democrats, and 71 in the House, 51 of them Democrats. While 74 women hold statewide offices across the country, just eight are governors.

And if Clinton has cracked some doors, she hasn't opened them all yet.

"We need a first woman to be nominated, and we need a first woman to win, so we have a way to go," Mandel said. "Someone is going to have to go through that forest all over again. ... The default image of a president—if you close your eyes and say 'president'—it's a man."

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