



Campaign Trail

Rutgers Center Keeps Tabs on Down-Ticket Women

Run Date: 08/12/08

By Alison Bowen
WeNews correspondent

Now that Hillary Clinton's historic bid for the White House is over, the Center for American Women in Politics--a key study group on U.S. women's political stature--says plenty of women remain on the political field.

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (WOMENSENEWS)--Hillary Clinton may be out of the running for president, but plenty of women remain in this year's political field.

That's the message from Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, which follows and trains women running for office. Rutgers is located in New Brunswick, N.J., but the center tracks races nationwide.



Debbie Walsh

This year, 149 women are candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and eight women are running for the Senate. In 2006, 136 women ran for the House and 12 ran for the Senate. Five women also are running for governor in five states.

"There's so much attention at that very top of the ticket, but it is an important moment to also remember that there are races that are 'down-ticket,'" said Walsh, who joined the research group in 1981. "We're still looking to see what happens nationally with those races."

Since the center began in 1971 with a mission to "promote greater understanding and knowledge about women's changing relationship to politics and government," it has been churning out information on women in government, from state legislatures to governors' mansions to Congress. Pollsters and reporters often call the center for data about high-profile races and women's voting patterns.

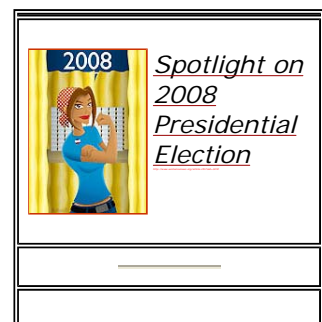
In the past four years the center's home state of New Jersey has been making the kind of progress the center likes to see. In 2004 the state ranked 43rd in the proportion of women in its legislature. Now, the state's 34 female legislators are 28 percent of all lawmakers, propelling it to a shared 15th place with Connecticut.

Getting Women Ready to Run

Walsh thinks the group's training program for female candidates--"Ready to Run," launched in 1998--can take some credit. She estimates one-quarter of the women in New Jersey's legislature went through the one-day training blitzes, which cover political party structures, fundraising and media relations.

Walsh and project manager Jean Sinzduk say women don't consider running for office as easily as men. Often, they say, they need to be encouraged.

Series Stories by Women's eNews



"The message of the whole day is, 'We're asking you to run,'" Sinzdak said.

Ready to Run participants attend the same opening sessions but then break into two afternoon tracks: one for women who have made up their minds to run and are there for tactical advice and one for women looking for more information about entering the ring.

On the eve of the workshops the center offers three Friday night programs with special attractions for Latinas, African Americans and Asian Americans.

In March, a session for New Jersey women provided a crash course in the state's political parties, including guidance on joining a party and gaining membership support.

Ready to Run alumna Meryl Frank, a mother of four, is now in her ninth year as mayor of New Jersey's Borough of Highland Park. Before her first bid she took a training course in 1998.

Nurturing Candidates

Even more helpful than the nuts-and-bolts training of running a campaign, Frank said, is having other women there saying, "Yes, you should do this."

To assist her campaign, Frank tapped contacts in school parent groups and pulled together strategy sessions at 10 p.m. when kids were in bed. She also said she kept a "tantrum voice" of calm when her opponent became combative in debates.

Both Walsh and Sinzdak say the most effective politicians are those frustrated with something in their own town, like a broken stoplight or an arbitrary school policy.

Women, they say, often volunteer in soup kitchens or domestic violence shelters but don't realize they can take charge on a larger scale. "We try to make those connections for them," Walsh said.

The center, housed in a white mansion flanked by an expansive lawn dotted with students, sits on the campus as part of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers.

Women's History on the Wall

The walls of the mansion's rooms are covered with portraits of women making history.

Walsh's office is decorated with a "Madame President" hat, a photo of Walsh with Hillary Clinton and the 2003 children's book "A is for Abigail: an Almanac of Amazing American Women" by Lynne Cheney, the wife of Vice President Dick Cheney.

The center devotes itself to helping women start political bids. Once they do, other groups, such as the nonpartisan Women's Campaign Forum and EMILY's List, a pro-choice political action committee that helps Democrats, often take over by providing financial support and publicity. Another major political machine for women is the White House Project, a New York-based group that galvanizes young women and trains adults to enter politics.

This November, Darcy Burner, a Democrat in Washington state, is making her second run for U.S. Congress, where she is in a high-profile race against incumbent Republican Rep. Dave Reichert, who narrowly defeated her in 2006.

Burner, who has not gone through a Ready to Run workshop, is endorsed by EMILY's List and the Women's Campaign Forum, both based in Washington, D.C.

12 New Writers



Dangerous Trends, Innovative Responses



Women and Islam



India



Rule of Law in Africa



Women and Worship

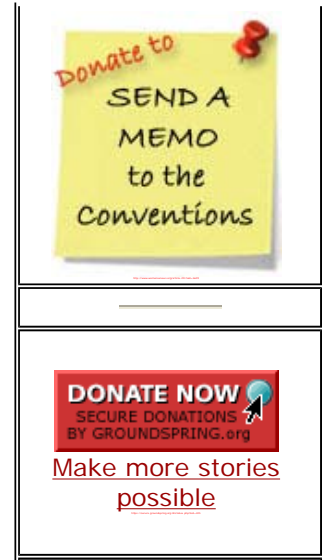
The forum sponsored a conference call with reporters and followed up with an e-mail requesting donations to help Burner buy yard signs, mail campaign literature and hire staff.

In a conference call with reporters earlier this summer about her campaign, she was asked if she had any advice for other women mulling a political move.

"My first piece of advice is just jump in and do it," Burner said.

Alison Bowen is a New York City-based journalist covering the 2008 campaign. Her work also appears in the New York Daily News.

Women's eNews welcomes your comments. E-mail us at editors@womensenews.org.



► **Read More**

Related Stories



[Spotlight on 2008 Presidential Election](#)

<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3410/>



[Female Pols in Comeback Runs Are Breaking Records](#)

<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3690/>

For more information:

[Center for American Women in Politics](#)

<http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>

Note: Women's eNews is not responsible for the content of external Internet sites and the contents of Web pages we link to may change without notice.

Send this story to a friend.

Your Name:

Friend's Email:

Please donate now by going to:



Or donate by check made out to:

The Fund for the City of New York/Women's eNews

and Mail it to:

Women's eNews
135 West 29th Street, Suite 1005
New York, NY 10001

To Obtain Permission to Reprint or Repost This Article: :



For Complete Step-by-Step Instructions: [Reprint FAQs](#)

Copyright 2008 Women's eNews. The information contained in this Women's eNews report may--with the prior written authorization of Women's eNews--be published, broadcast, rewritten or otherwise distributed.

Women's eNews is a nonprofit independent news service covering issues of concern to women and their allies. An incubator program of the International Institute for Community Solutions, Fund for the City of New York, Women's eNews is supported by our readers; reprints and licensing fees; and the Carnegie Corporation of New York; the International Institute for Community Solutions, Fund for the City of New York; the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; the Barbara Lee Family Foundation; the Open Society Institute; the Rockefeller Family Fund; The Helena Rubinstein Foundation; the Sister Fund and the Starry Night Fund. The donations from readers are critical to our success. Donate now by going to <http://www.womensenews.org/support.cfm>.

Women's eNews subscribers may select whether to receive a daily full text, daily summary or weekly summary. To change your email address, send mail to membersvcs@womensenews.org. To change the frequency of your mail or to cancel your subscription, send a message to Member Services (membersvcs@womensenews.org) or use our online form: http://www.womensenews.org/update_subscription.cfm

[Home](#) [About Us](#) [Donate](#) [Arabic Women's eNews](#) [Press Release](#) [Sylvia](#) [Links](#) [Contact us](#)
[Search Archives](#) [Subscription and Membership](#) [Pressroom](#) [Help](#)

21 LEADERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

[REPRINT FAQs](#)

[Make Us Your Homepage!](#)

[sign in](#)

Copyright 2008 Women's eNews Inc.