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Colorado tops percentage of women state legislators as gains inch forward

By Ernest Luning 11/17/08 4:21 PM

Colorado has the highest percentage of women serving as state legislators this year, barely edging out Vermont and New Hampshire, according to a [Christian Science Monitor article](#) published Sunday. Considering both the state House and Senate, 38 percent of Colorado's lawmakers are women, ahead of Vermont's 37.8 percent and New Hampshire's 37.7 percent. In only one chamber in the nation — the New Hampshire state Senate — do women hold a majority of seats. Women also made slight gains in representation in the U.S. Congress, netting a Senate seat and three House seats, for an identical 17 percent membership in each chamber. At the end of October, the U.S. was 71st in the world for its percentage of women in the lower House, the Monitor reported. "At this rate, it will take us till 2063 to reach parity," said Marie Wilson, president of the [White House Project](#), which aims to increase the role of women lawmakers. "I mean, come on! We have to speed things up."

The number of women running for state legislative seats set a record for a presidential election year in 2008, as 2,328 sought office, up from the previous high of 2,302 in 1992. In 2006, even more women ran for state legislator, but more seats are up for election nationwide in non-presidential years, the Monitor noted.

"So 2008 was a record, and it managed to get us from 23.7 percent of women serving in state legislatures to 24.2 percent," Debbie Walsh, director of the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics, told the Monitor.

Advocates said Sen. Hillary Clinton's presidential run and Gov. Sarah Palin's place on the Republican ticket knocked down barriers and could encourage more women to run for office. Others told the Monitor the tremendous number of young women who volunteered in the 2008 campaign could "turn that activism into running for office themselves someday."

"Definitely, I think that young girls know that women can go far," says Katya Ruiz, a high school junior in suburban Orlando. "It's not a question of knowing that. We know that. And I think we're very empowered now."

Her mother, Margarita Koblasz, an instructor in legal studies at the University of Central Florida, adds to the thought: "[That's] different from the generation that we grew up in and different from the generation that our mothers grew up in. ... Now I've got a daughter saying of course women can be president, which wasn't something we could be taught."

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