

<http://ocolly.com/2008/12/03/fighting-fires-%E2%80%94-and-stereotypes/>

[Archives](#) [PDFs](#) [Photos](#) [Classifieds](#) [Orange Pages](#) [More...](#)

[News](#) [Sports](#) [Features](#) [Entertainment](#) [Opinion](#) [Blogs](#)



Cat got your tongue?
Let O'Colly Online do the talking.



Gender gap still exists in U.S. politics

Fighting fires — and stereotypes

Women have been allowed to vote for less than 100 years, but that hasn't stopped women like Patrice Barnett from serving as leaders.

By **Chelsea Jensen**

Staff Writer

Published: December 03, 2008

She didn't walk into the meeting wearing her power pantsuit or with her hair in a signature up-do.

She wasn't wearing any designer framed glasses.

She was just wearing an old pair of blue jeans and the same navy blue Fire Protection Society T-shirt everyone else was wearing.

You wouldn't have known she held an important role if nobody had told you.

In a classroom that held more than 50 men and only a couple of women, she somehow exuded a sense of power and confidence.

As the time rolled closer to 7 p.m., starting time, all the standing men took a seat.

One of the women took a seat in the back row, and the other, Patrice Barnett, took her seat at the front desk and called the meeting to order.

The meeting consisted of its normal routine: each officer presented an update of the responsibilities they were in charge of completing. As the crowd of men seemed to get bored, they began talking among themselves.

Barnett had to raise her voice and call for silence. Immediately there was a hush in the room. The men quieted, and the meeting resumed.

Barnett is the 2008 Fire Protection Society president.

In a organization that has existed for more than 70 years, Barnett is the first female president the society has ever had.

Women have been struggling to climb ladders to higher positions for many years, and Barnett represents the small portion of women in comparison to men, who have achieved that success.

"I could tell you that two years ago or actually three years ago, when I first joined the Fire Protection Society, then I never would have believed you if you told me that I would be the president," Barnett said.

"I'm quiet. I was never really someone who would put themselves into a situation where you really



have to go out of your comfort zone, not usually."

The number of women in elective office has recently risen in certain offices but the overall trend is that women are still largely underrepresented in comparison to their composition of the population.

Record numbers of women have won races for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, according to the Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers. At the statewide level, in contrast, the number of women serving is expected to drop.

The gender gap that exists in politics is evident. The study *Women in State Policy Leadership* taken between 1998 and 2005, showed that in 40 percent of the states, women's overall share of top executive, legislative and judicial posts, compared to their share of the population, actually fell, remained level or increased by less than .01 percentage points.

Nationwide, in every state in 2005, women's representation in the top ranks of political leadership fell below expected levels of participation based on their percentage of the state's population, according to a report from the Center for Women in Government and Civil Society.

At least 74 women will serve in the 111th Congress though, setting a new all-time high. Ten women will join the 64 incumbents who were re-elected topping the previous record of 71 women set in the 110th Congress.

In 2008, women hold 87, or 16.3 percent, of the 535 seats in the 110th U.S. Congress. Women also hold 16, or 16 percent, of the 100 seats in the Senate and 71, or 16.3 percent, of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives, according to *Women in Elective Office 2008*.

One question is how women can go about receiving more elective office positions, closing the gender gap and possibly shattering the glass ceiling.

In the study *Gender-Related Political Knowledge and the Descriptive Representation of Women*, Kira Sanbonmatsu found that knowledge about the actual level of women's representation in politics is directly related to support for having more women in office.

Sanbonmatsu found that individuals who underestimate the percentage of women in office are more likely than individuals who know the correct percentage to support increasing women's representation. Meanwhile, individuals who overestimate the percentage of women in office are less likely to support increasing women's representation.

The study suggests that women would be more supportive of electing more women to office if they knew the extent of women's underrepresentation.

"Political knowledge about women's underrepresentation can increase support for women's candidacies," Sanbonmatsu said in the study. "Women's candidacies, in turn, provide the opportunity to enhance the descriptive and substantive representation of women."

Gilda Morales is the project manager of information services at the Center for American Women in Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Morales said she "wholeheartedly" agrees with Sanbonmatsu's research.

"When I go out to speak, whether it's to classrooms of students here at the university or out to senior citizens or out to just the general public, they are always amazed that we only have 16 women in the U.S. Senate or that we have 71 women in the House of Representatives out of 435," Morales said. "They are always shocked. They can't believe it. So yes, I do think that if more people knew the underrepresentation of women, that there would be action to change that."

Jari Askins, the lieutenant governor of Oklahoma, said she doesn't think there is anything out in the world that can make it easier for women to get involved in politics, but Askins said she believes it's more about the individual person.

"It's a matter of each woman being able to present herself seriously and being able to respond credibly to questions," Askins said.

"One of my observations is that it doesn't matter what kind of office you're running for, the public is looking for a candidate which in they can connect, and I think that is an opportunity for women to be able to be more personal and personable and reach out to the electorate who are wanting to feel some kind of connection and to feel comfortable with the people they vote for," she said.

On a similar note, Oklahoma County Commissioner Willa Johnson said she also doesn't believe there is anything barring women from getting politically involved.

"I know that there are still some good ole boys clubs where women aren't generally accepted, well maybe accepted might not be a good word, not encouraged to participate in," Johnson said. "With the way our society is now, if a woman is willing to brave whatever she gets once she gets there, I don't see any kind of involvement barring her from participating."

Barnett said she hopes there are more women that will stand up and try to take on higher positions, and she said she thinks the change needs to happen. Just like in the case of the Fire Protection Society, taking more than 70 years to get a woman in the presidential role, it will take time for women to enter that role in the U.S. government.

The future for women in American politics seems bright. Johnson and Morales both said their advice to women who want to get involved would be to start out at a local level.

"It doesn't have to be at the highest levels, it can be at the lowest levels," Morales said. "You can start off at the local level. Be involved in your community. It's always good to be involved whether it's in planning boards or on library commissions or things like that."

Johnson said of the future for women in politics, "I see unlimited opportunities for women in politics in America. I think it's about time, even countries that are not nearly as developed as this wonderful country of ours have had women leaders. And for us to just start thinking about it, in my opinion is horrible. I think now we've got women who are out there, Sarah Palin is one, certainly Hillary Clinton and other women are out there, and we've seen through the debate process that women can hold their own and so I think the tide has turned quite honestly."


Barnett, like Johnson, Morales and Askins, said she is hopeful for the future, and glad to see the great strides that women like Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin have recently achieved.

"I think it's going to be a slow process, it hasn't even been that long- not even a hundred years- since women really had the right to vote," Barnett said. "It's a slow process to change a stereotype, but it's really awesome that it's happening. Maybe, hopefully, there are more women out there that will step up."

This story was published December 3rd, 2008 under [Front Page, News](#). [Permalink](#).

[ShareThis](#)



Orange Pages			
 <p>Stillwater Plasma Center</p> <p>Get weekend money in 1 hour! Donate plasma right on The Strip!</p> <p>orange.ocolly.com/plasma/</p>	<p>Fisher Provence Realtors</p> <p>We love selling Stillwater!</p> <p>orange.ocolly.com/fpr</p>	<p>The Links</p> <p>The Links are a premiere apartment complex in the Stillwater area.</p> <p>orange.ocolly.com/thelinks</p>	<p>University & Community Federal Credit Union</p> <p>So much to offer to you!</p> <p>orange.ocolly.com/ucfcu</p>

One Comment »

- J. Hatfield:**

DEC 03 2008 2:20 pm

Wow, for a second, I thought I was going to read about females in the Fire Protection Society. I was wanting to read the part where she could dead-lift a 160 pound person, on a ladder, with all of her equipment on.

Looks like the ol' bait-and-switch routine.

Oh well.

Submit a comment

Name (required) *

E-Mail (private) *

Website (optional)

Comment

Empty comment text area with a vertical scrollbar on the right side.

Comments are moderated by OColly.com and may not appear until they have been reviewed and deemed appropriate for posting. Also, due to the volume of comments we receive, not all comments will be posted. E-mail addresses are not published. *Mandatory fields are marked **.

Submit Comment



**Cat got your tongue?
Let O'Colly Online do the talking.**




106 Paul Miller Building
Stillwater, OK 74078

Business Office: (405) 744-8373
Newsroom: (405) 744-6363
Fax: (405) 744-7936








Contact Us

Advertising
Business Office
General Manager
Newsroom
OColly.com





Advertise With Us

Classified Rates
Place A Classified Ad
National Rates
Retail Rates
Online Rates
Advertising Policies

RSS Feeds

-  All Articles
-  News
-  Sports
-  Features
-  Entertainment
-  Opinion
-  All Comments

Media

-  Photos
-  PDF Issues iTunes
-  Headlines iTunes
-  Orange Nation iTunes

Subscriptions

Mail
Delivery
Electronic

More...

About Us
Alumni
History
Online History
Multimedia
Remember the 10
Burns Hargis
Pistol Pete

© 2008 The
O'Collegian
Publishing
Company