

The Patriot News (PA)

Number of female lawmakers grows

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CHRISTINE BAKER, The Patriot-News From left, Sheryl Delozier, Sen. RoseMarie Swanger, Sen. Pat Vance, Rep. Mauree Gingrich and Rep. Sue Helm on the Capitol steps. They will be among the 37 women filling 253 seats in the Pennsylvania House and Senate for the 193rd legislative session.

After a year when America saw its first woman on the Republican presidential ticket and another become the first woman to be a presidential candidate, more women than ever will serve in state and federal law-making chambers this year.

A record 1,784 women will help craft public policy in state legislatures nationwide this year, an increase of 35 from last year, according to Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics Center for American Women and Politics. Women now hold 24 percent of all state legislative seats.

When [Pennsylvania's](#) 193rd legislative session convenes on Tuesday, 37 women will be filling the 253 seats in the state House and Senate. That matches the record number set last session.

In the nation's Capitol, the number of women in both chambers of Congress have hit all-time highs, according to the Rutgers center.

Women now hold 17 of the 100 seats in the U.S. Senate, besting their previous record by one. The 425-member U.S. House has 75 women members, topping the previous record of 71.

Pennsylvanians helped nudge the U.S. House's female count forward by replacing Republican incumbent Phil English with Kathy Dahlkemper, a Democrat from Erie. Dahlkemper's election brings the number of females in the state's congressional delegation to two, with U.S. Rep. Allyson Schwartz, D-Philadelphia, being the other one.

But despite the added crack in the glass ceiling, Chatham University's Pennsylvania Center for Women, Politics and Public Policy director Allyson Lowe said Pennsylvanians should hold their applause.

"Pennsylvania has not shifted dramatically in the national ranking of states," Lowe said.

Women make up 51 percent of the population nationally and statewide.

The state continues to rank in the bottom 10 of the 50 states in the number of women it elects to serve in state or federal office, according to the Rutgers' center.

In Pennsylvania's state House, women make up only 13 percent of 203 members, whereas in the Senate, women comprise 20 percent. Compare that to New Hampshire, where women for the first time this year hold the majority of Senate seats, 13 of 24.

On a different front, only 9 percent of the Legislature's 253 members are from minority groups, even though minorities represent 14 percent of the state's population.

The importance of having minorities and women in law-making bodies and other elective office is the different perspectives they bring to identifying issues and making laws, analysts say.

Rep. Mauree Gingrich, a four-term GOP incumbent from Lebanon County, contends the reason women don't hold a larger number of elective offices has less to do with the unlikelihood of their getting elected and more to do with the fact they don't try.

"Women's networks are excellent. Maybe they are not a particularly wealthy network, but your network of voters and people who trust you are excellent," Gingrich said. "That's why when they run, they can generally win. But they're not running."

Women tend to need to be recruited to run and don't volunteer as men do, Lowe said. Gingrich admits that was the case with her.

Once elected, women find gender to be less of an issue when serving in their elective office than it is in the general public, said Sen. Patricia Vance, R-Cumberland, the dean of the midstate's female legislators and first female state senator to be elected from Cumberland County. At least, she said, that's been her experience in the Legislature.

"That's probably because all of us, male and female, get there the same way," Vance said.

Lowe said women such as Sen. Hillary Clinton and Alaska Mayor Sarah Palin seeking the nation's highest elective offices will help inspire other women to consider running and improve the state's standing in the national rankings of women in elected office.

BY THE NUMBERS:

- Seats in the 253-member state Legislature held by women: **37**
- Seats held by women in legislatures nationwide: **1,784**
- Number of female governors: **8**
- Seats women hold in Congress: **92**
- Number of women in Pennsylvania's congressional delegation: **2**
- Number of racial minorities serving in state Legislature: **22**
- Percentage of females in state's and nation's population: **51 percent**

Source: Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics Center for American Women and Politics, U.S. Census Bureau

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