



March 25, 2009

RSS Feed

<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3960>

### Washington Lookout

## Female Candidates Enter 2009 Campaign Queue

Run Date: 03/25/09

By Allison Stevens  
Washington Bureau Chief

*Female hopefuls are already throwing their hats into the ring for elections in 2009 and 2010, vying for vacated seats and challenging incumbents. Political observers say the interest from women could help boost their numbers in Congress.*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (WOMENSENEWS)--Fresh off the 2008 campaign trail, female politicians are setting their sights on their next set of opportunities to inch closer to gender equality in government.

In Illinois, Republican Rosanna Pulido will represent her party in an April 7 contest to replace Rahm Emmanuel, who left his seat to serve as President Obama's chief of staff. It is an uphill fight for Pulido, a conservative Republican running in a Democratic stronghold in Chicago.



Robin Carnahan

And in California, two women--Democrat Judy Chu and Republican Teresa Hernandez--are vying for the right to replace former Rep. Hilda Solis, now secretary of labor in the Obama administration. The primary will be held on May 19 and the special election will be held on July 14.

Meanwhile, prominent women are already being eyed as top candidates in 2010.

EMILY's List, a leading political action committee in Washington, D.C., that backs pro-choice Democratic women, has already endorsed Missouri Secretary of State Robin Carnahan in her bid for the state's open Senate seat. Carnahan's father, Mel, won the seat posthumously in 2000, and her mother, Jean, was subsequently appointed to serve out his term. She lost a bid for a full term in 2002 to former Sen. Jim Talent, who lost in 2008 to Claire McCaskill. If she wins, Missouri would become the fourth state with two female senators.

"Robin Carnahan has a lengthy and impressive record of public service, and has experience running for--and winning--statewide office," EMILY's List president Ellen Malcolm said in a statement.

In California, former eBay chief Meg Whitman--a pro-choice Republican--has declared her candidacy for the state's gubernatorial office.

And if Congress enacts legislation enfranchising residents of the District of Columbia, their long-standing non-voting representative--Eleanor Holmes Norton--would be considered a favorite for the seat in forthcoming elections. But that's still an uncertain prospect.

### Thin Ranks

Women currently hold 73 seats in the House, or 17 percent of the chamber, and 17 seats in the Senate, or 17 percent of that body. Those numbers are up slightly from 2006, when women held 16 seats in the Senate and 72 seats in the House, according to the Center for American Women and Politics, a research

### Series Stories by Women's eNews



### It's the Economy



Highlights of  
the '08  
Elections



# 12 New Writers

organization at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, in New Brunswick.

Women have already seen some slippage as female lawmakers have left the legislative body to join the Obama administration. Losses include Solis and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who was replaced by former Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand, a Democrat from upstate New York. Two men were nominated to run for her now-vacant House seat in a special election to be held on March 31.

In Kansas, former Gov. Kathleen Sebelius--named to oversee the Department of Health and Human Services--will be replaced by Lt. Gov. Mark Parkinson. Former Arizona Gov. Democrat Janet Napolitano, now head of the Department of Homeland Security, was succeeded by a woman, Jan Brewer, a Republican who was Arizona's secretary of state.

Political observers are also predicting possible retirements in 2010 from key congressional women such as Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, a three-term Texas Republican. She is eyeing a bid for governor.

In the House, Oklahoma Republican Mary Fallin, the co-chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, a bipartisan group of female lawmakers in the House, is also said to be considering a gubernatorial run. Her co-chair, Illinois Democrat Jan Schakowsky, is reported to be mulling a bid for the Senate seat held by Roland Burris, who was appointed to replace Barack Obama after the election. And Pennsylvania Rep. Allyson Schwartz may run for her state's Senate seat.

Meanwhile, two New York Democratic women--Reps. Carolyn McCarthy and Carolyn Maloney--are weighing primary challenges to Gillibrand in 2010.

### Offsetting Earlier Gains

Those potential departures could offset some of the gains women have made in recent years.

In every election since 1992, women have made single-digit gains, peaking in 2004 when they picked up eight seats.

In 1992, a year known as the "Year of the Women," women nearly doubled their ranks. They picked up 19 House seats and three Senate seats to amass 47 seats in the House and seven seats in the Senate. Victories were spurred in part by voter outrage over Senate nomination hearings of sex-harassment charges against Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

### Reaching for 20 Percent

Slow progress and possible retirements in 2010 leaves as a far-off goal the 20-percent benchmark that political scientist Sue Thomas identified more than a decade ago as the number needed for a political minority to influence the majority.

In a study of 12 state legislatures Thomas found that when women held at least 1 in 5 state legislative seats, they were more likely to sponsor and push forward women-friendly legislation such as funding for domestic violence shelters and stricter child-support laws.

Marie Wilson, head of the White House Project, a nonpartisan organization in New York that works to elect women to all levels of office, sets that "critical mass" bar higher, at 33 percent. That's closer to women's percentages in legislatures in Scandinavian nations, which have typically led the world in working toward gender equality.

Worldwide, 18 percent of national legislative seats are held by women, according to the Geneva-based Inter Parliamentary Union. It ranks the United States 71st in the world for female representation in government.

Twenty-three nations have at least 30 percent women in their lower houses in



Dangerous Trends, Innovative Responses



Women and Islam



India



Rule of Law in Africa



Women and Worship

<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3232>



Make more stories

national assemblies. Rwanda leads the world with 56 percent of seats in the lower house and 35 percent in the upper house.

Sweden is next, with women holding 47 percent of seats in its single-chamber parliament. Cuba is third with 43 percent.

*Allison Stevens is Washington bureau chief for Women's eNews.*

Women's eNews welcomes your comments. E-mail us at [editors@womensenews.org](mailto:editors@womensenews.org).

---

**Read More** [Washington Lookout](#)

**Related Stories**



Women Could Reach 'Critical Mass' in Congress



Women's Caucus Puts Health at Top of Its '09 List



Deliver 'The Memo' to Conventions



Female Pols in Comeback Runs Are Breaking Records

possible

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:

---