

## Denish vs. Martinez for New Mexico Governor: A Rare 2-Woman Race



**Jill Lawrence**

Columnist  
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It says something about how far women haven't come that the governor's race in New Mexico is only the country's third to feature a woman competing against a woman. In this case it will be Democratic Lt. Gov. **Diane Denish**, a former businesswoman and state party chair, versus Republican **Susana Martinez**, a district attorney with a crime-fighter reputation.

Denish has been second in command to Gov. Bill Richardson for eight years and is trying to convince voters she represents a break from the past (one of her slogans is "**A New Way Forward**"). Martinez's Web site features a **strategy memo** that highlights her support from Latinos, voter unhappiness with Richardson, and Denish's ties to Richardson. Both women won their nominations Tuesday.

There have only been two other gubernatorial races pitting women against each other: in Hawaii, Republican Linda Lingle beat Democrat Mazie Hirono in 2002, and in Nebraska, Republican Kay Orr beat Democrat Helen Boosalis in 1986. That is it, according to a chart from the **Center for American Women and Politics** (CAWP) at Rutgers University.



Martinez, left, and Denish (AP)

What jumps out from the chart is the paucity of all-women governor's races compared to other offices. There have been eight female match-ups for the Senate and dozens for House seats. This is not good news for women because, former Sen. Barack Obama notwithstanding, most

presidents these days do not come from Congress. They come from governor's mansions. (Just for a start, think George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter).

There are currently **six women governors**: Hawaii's Lingle, Michigan Democrat Jennifer Granholm, Connecticut Republican Jodi Rell, Washington Democrat Christine Gregoire, North Carolina Democrat Beverly Perdue and Arizona Republican Jan Brewer. There would have been eight if Sarah Palin had

not resigned last year as Alaska governor and Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas had not become Obama's secretary of health and human services. That would have tied the all-time high of eight female governors in 2006, says CAWP director Debbie Walsh.

"This is clearly the road to the White House and we don't have a lot of women walking that path," Walsh said in an interview. But she added that there is potential for significant gains this year by women. That's because 23 of the 36 governor's races are open seats with no incumbent, making them easier to win. And most of the **women running** or considered candidates – 20 of 23 – are targeting those open seats.

As primaries produce nominees, there could be more all-female face-offs, most likely in Oklahoma and Minnesota. Another sign of progress is that women are strong contenders in two huge, politically important states – Republican Meg Whitman in California and Democrat Alex Sink in Florida.

The 23 women, running in 18 states, represent gains from 2006, when Walsh says there were only 17 women running for governor at this point. But 2010 is not a benchmark – that came in 1994, when 34 women ran for governor.

Cracking the lock on executive mansions has been harder for women than winning seats in Congress or state legislatures. That's because those jobs – based on collaboration and teamwork -- "fit more of the stereotype of how women work," Walsh said. "The chief executive is the final arbiter, the place where the buck stops. It's been a bigger challenge for voters to see women in that light, for women to run for these offices and be taken seriously."

Since the last raft of gubernatorial elections in 2006, Nancy Pelosi became speaker of the House and Hillary Clinton nearly won the Democratic presidential nomination. Voters are growing more accustomed to women wielding power. Changing attitudes and this year's many open seats (up from nine of 36 in 2006) suggest a hospitable general-election environment for women who win nominations for governor in 2010.