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Kentucky women- supporting roles in politics

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What was missing from this year's Fancy Farm Picnic and indeed from this year's election cycle?

Leading ladies.



There is not one person of the same sex as 51% of Kentucky's population running for statewide office in 2010. With the absence of Auditor Crit Luallen on the speakers' platform, the only women in evidence were not there to speak. There were women present – women honored as volunteers, women introduced as wives of candidates and one young woman with a soaring set of vocal chords belting out "The Star Spangled Banner".

One woman's name did come up repeatedly in GOP speeches. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi emerged as the Woman Most Hated by Republicans. Candidate Rand Paul challenged Jack Conway, his opponent, to bring Nancy Pelosi to Kentucky to campaign. Senator McConnell dripped scorn on her name with even more relish than for the man whose job he covets - Senator Harry Reid, majority leader of the Senate.



While Reid will face off in November against a woman, Sharron Angle, who enjoys Tea Party support, Angle is not the only woman running for higher office, on the national stage.

"The prevalence of female candidates for statewide office has been a defining narrative of the 2010 election season, particularly for Republicans. There are 13 GOP and 10 Democratic women running for Senate, according to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers. USA Today June 22, 2010

Kentucky, once a leader in the nation with one of the very first women governors, Martha Layne Collins, has slipped into the shadows. There are bright spots. Women are running for local offices in the fall. Ballard County boasts a woman judge executive and a woman county attorney, both unopposed in their re-election bids. Women serve on city councils and as small town mayors.

But, when it comes to offices that require serious campaign fundraising and recruitment of candidates, women in Kentucky are too often overlooked. Men who raise money look for people who look like them.



The Kentucky Democratic Party has difficulty keeping women in leadership. On August 6th, 2010, Carolyn Belcher stepped down as Vice Chair of the Democratic Party to take a job with the Kentucky Association of Counties as chief financial officer. Belcher, an accountant with her own firm served as county judge exec of Bath County and as a state representative from the 72nd House District.

Belcher's departure followed on the heels of the appointment of Daniel Logsdon's elevation to executive director of the KDP. Logsdon is the son of former state agricultural commissioner Ed Logsdon and worked as deputy chief of staff in Governor Beshear's office. His former boss, Chief of Staff Adam Edelen will be announcing his own plans for elective office in the fall.

Emerge Kentucky, a new organization to assist Democratic women in preparing to electoral office, has twenty four women in its first class. Some will be on the ballot in November. Others are contemplating running.

The GOP, led by Sarah Palin, has done a better job nationally recruiting conservative women to run for office. Palin uses her finances and her bully pulpit to encourage women to run. She touts women voters as her “mother grizzlies” that will bring the GOP victory in November.

Fancy Farm 2010

The women in the front row of the dais are young, attractive and cast as supporting actresses to their husband’s leading men. Watching them on Saturday react to the raucous catcalls of the crowd and the criticism screamed at their husbands was a study in contrast.



Kelly Paul was visibly upset by Jack Conway’s attack speech. One reporter told me that Mrs. Paul shed some tears during Conway’s denunciation.

Mrs. Paul, a slender, beautiful blonde with a sweet smile, should be accustomed to the Paul family limelight. Her father in law ran for president and her husband has been deeply involved in dad’s campaign.

But there is a vast difference in father and son’s political experience. Dr. Ron Paul was not taken seriously enough when he ran to draw the direct fire of activists in either party. If the senior Paul was heckled, it wasn’t by hundreds simultaneously.

Dr. Rand Paul was at Fancy Farm last year. He was subject to heckling from supporters for Trey Grayson. He was ignored by the Democrats. If his wife was present, she was not in the front row before 100 reporters and several thousand screaming activists– some for her husband, some against.



On the other side of the aisle, Jack Conway’s wife, Elizabeth, wasn’t at Fancy Farm last year. A new daughter kept her home. Husband Jack was in a battle for the Democratic nomination with Dr. Dan Mongiardo. She missed the attacks on her husband from supporters of the Lieutenant Governor. This year, the attractive brunette sat behind her husband as he spoke looking reminiscently like a 21st century Jackie Kennedy.

Conclusion

This article could be rewritten using the term “minority candidate” in place of “women candidate”. There was one black elected official at the Fancy Farm Picnic. Rep. Reggie Meeks, a Louisville Democrat, was on the dais and introduced.

Women and minorities do not plead for special treatment or favors. They understand that they don’t deserve elected office simply because they are women or minorities. Conversely, they don’t deserve to be ignored simply because they are women or minorities. Organizations like Emerge Kentucky and individuals like Sarah Palin are working to bring women into public office. Their political philosophies may be diametrically opposed to each other, but their aims are the same.

Auditor Crit Luallen may or may not choose to run again. Whether she does or does not, Luallen understands that one woman is not enough. She is quoted on the Emerge Kentucky website: “...*Our state will never successfully address our many challenges unless all of our people are engaged in providing solutions. We’ve been behind too long in the number of women entering the political arena...*”

Stay tuned. There are leading ladies waiting in the wings for the Ought Eleven election season.