

Back to Article

Click to Print



Thursday, Aug. 19, 2010

A Breakthrough for the GOP: More Women Running

By Jay Newton-Small

Nikki Haley, Meg Whitman, Linda McMahon, Sarah Palin's "Grizzly Mamas," suddenly this year there seems to be a plethora of women Republican candidates for high office. Furthermore, like McMahon who is running for the Senate in Connecticut, a record number of Republican women have sought federal office this year: 129 GOP women in House races and 17 in Senate races. Both figures represent significant increases over the previous records, set in 1994, when 91 ran for the House and 13 for the Senate, according to Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics, which compiles statistics on women candidates.

The problem is, GOP women aren't winning in record numbers. "Republican women are stepping up and running and they're getting support from people like Sarah Palin and the [pro-life] Susan B. Anthony List but an awful lot of them are still struggling to make it through the primaries," says Debbie Walsh, director of the Rutgers center. Thus far only 38 Republican women running for the House have won their primaries and only three have won Senate primaries. ([See photos of Sarah Palin.](#))

That said, the increased number of GOP candidates comes at a time when Democratic women candidates seem to be leveling off. This year 134 Democratic women ran for the House compared to 148 in 2008, and 19 Democratic women ran for the Senate this year compared to the record of 22 in 1992. Still, Democratic women far outpace their GOP counterparts: thus far this year 64 Democratic women have won their House primaries and seven have won their Senate primaries. ([Comment on this story.](#))

(On the gubernatorial front no records were to set for number of women candidates, though a record number could still win their primaries. Thus far seven women candidates have won their primaries — three Dems, four Republicans — 10 have lost their primaries and another nine are waiting to learn their fates. The record year for women gubernatorial candidates was 34 in 1994, out of which 10 competed in the general election.) ([Read about South Carolina's political star, Nikki Haley.](#))

Democratic women complain the presence of more Republican women in the field hasn't raised the level of discourse. If anything, this year has been a bad one for women, topics wise, from Kentucky GOP Senate candidate Rand Paul's infamous aqua Buddha antics — where he allegedly absconded in college with a blindfolded female classmate, jokingly offered her pot and asked her to pray to the "aqua Buddha," to Nevada Republican Senate candidate Sharron Angle's erroneous assertion that abortions lead to breast cancer. Not to mention, Linda McMahon, a Republican running for Senate in Connecticut, whose past performances on her family's World Wrestling Entertainment show included slapping her daughter in the ring.

All of which has led Emily's List, a group that works to elect pro-choice women, to launch a campaign entitled "Sarah Doesn't Speak for Me" which will "provide real opportunities to fight back against the radical agenda of Sarah Palin and her endorsed candidates," according to the press release. Palin responded on twitter: "Who hijacked term: "feminist"? A cackle of rads who want 2 crucify other women w/whom they disagree on a singular issue [abortion]; it's ironic (& passé)."

Republicans are betting that the energy surrounding their candidates — even the ones that have failed — will help them make inroads with women voters, who since 1980 have voted in increasingly larger numbers than men. In 2008, 9.7 million more women voted than men. Traditionally, this bloc has swung Democratic voting for President Obama by 13 points and John Kerry by 3 points. But women voters are more divided than ever and Democrats have seen their historical advantage with the group chip away: 48% of women think the Democrats will lose Congress in November compared to 44% who think Dems will keep it, according to a recent CNN poll.

[See photos of Sarah Palin's fashion looks.](#)

Click to Print

Find this article at:

<http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,2011782,00.html>