

OUR VIEW — Women’s voices still aren’t fully heard in local government

By SENTINEL EDITORIAL BOARD

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Holland, MI — Since the mid-19th century, American women had been fighting to be fully recognized members of society with all the privileges and responsibilities that go along with that. Women won the right to vote 90 years ago Thursday with the passage of the 19th Amendment, but while great strides have been made since then, American politics remains far from a balanced landscape. Women remain underrepresented in elected office at all levels of government, and the few women who do enter the political fray are often held to a different standard than their male counterparts.

A few statistics: Women represent 17 percent of the members of Congress, 24 percent of state legislators and 17 percent of the mayors of U.S. cities over 30,000 population, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. Locally, the numbers tell another story. We broke down the number of men and women on the city councils and township boards in the six largest municipalities in the Holland-Zeeland area, countywide officials and county board members in Ottawa and Allegan counties and among our five local state legislators and found only 10 of the 81 are female. That breaks down to slightly more than 12 percent. Only the Ottawa County board has more than one woman (it has two). The Allegan County Board of Commissioners and the Holland Township Board of Trustees are entirely male.

There are no easy answers to explain why women remain so underrepresented in political office. But even in an era when three of the leading names in American politics are Nancy Pelosi, Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton, it’s clear that women are often treated apart from men running for office. The most obvious “offense:” A man running for office is never accused of being less than a man for doing so. Women with strong opinions and an assertive manner still face a social stigma that is seldom, if ever, applied to men.

It’s not that American women shy away from politics. Women have exercised the right to vote vigorously. And since 1980, the proportion of eligible women who vote has exceeded that of men. In the 2004 presidential election, for instance, 8.8 million more women than men voted.

Now we don’t subscribe to the belief that our elected officials need to exactly mirror the breakdown of the nation’s different demographic groups. It’s not as if a man can’t represent women’s interests, any more than a white or African-American legislator can’t adequately represent constituents of another race. But the lack of female elected officials means our local communities are deprived of an important perspective on decisions. It’s obvious that women bring different concerns, outlooks and life experiences to the table than men. We believe a diversity of outlooks brings better representation and enriches the political and governmental process. We hope more local women will share their skills and talents and run for political office in the future, and help bring the full participation envisioned by the supporters of the 19th Amendment so long ago a little closer to reality.

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I always thought elected officials had to run for office.

The above article is a bunch of claptrap. The only thing that needs to happen is this: More women must run for office. Now the last time I looked, there were virtually no women on the ballot. So whose fault is that? Men’s fault? I think not. Nor have I seen any notices posted anywhere that prohibits women (any woman) from running for office.

So what is the solution? How do we get more women into elected positions? Answer: Get them to run for office. It will not happen any other way and just because 8.8 million more women than men voted, does not matter one whit. They must enter the race and run and have their name on the ballot.

So; you go girl, and get involved.

whyallthehate

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