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## Heitkamp urges youth, women to run for office

If women and young people want a world where government policies reflect their values, they need to run

By: [Helmut Schmidt](#), INFORUM

If women and young people want a world where government policies reflect their values, they need to run for office, says Heidi Heitkamp, a former North Dakota attorney general.

"When you are the boss, you get to decide what is important," Heitkamp said Monday, speaking at a League of Women Voters of the Red River Valley luncheon in Moorhead.

"You say 'yes' to leadership every day. I want you to say 'yes' " to running for state office, she said at the Lunch With Leaders.

Heitkamp said issues such as early childhood education or tax breaks to encourage young people to stay in North Dakota won't get the attention they need from the current crop of lawmakers, mostly middle-age and older males.

"Women have different life experiences than men. It's the diversity of that life experience, I think, that makes for good legislation and makes for good public policy," Heitkamp said.

Suzanne Al-Kayali, a senior at Minnesota State University Moorhead, said she's thought about taking a crack at public office.

"You should care about politics because that's what's governing your entire life," Al-Kayali said.

The high point for women holding statewide elected office was in 1999 and 2001, when 27.6 percent of those posts were held by women, the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University reports. That has since slipped to 22.5 percent.

Heitkamp points to the success of Minnesota, which the Rutgers' center says is fourth in the nation among states, with 34.8 percent of its legislators being women. In contrast, CAWP says North Dakota has one of the lowest percentages of women in its Legislature, ranking 43rd at 16.3 percent.

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