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# 2010 Faltered as a New 'Year of the Woman' in Politics

By ASHLEY PARKER

WASHINGTON — Senator [Patty Murray](#) of Washington is still the same self-described “mom in tennis shoes” she was back in 1992, when she was ushered into Congress in what some called the “Year of the Woman.” But this week, Ms. Murray barely eked out a re-election victory, in a cycle that will see no increase in the number of women in Congress — and possibly even a decrease in the House.

Despite “mama grizzly” endorsements and a variety of high-profile female candidates, 2010 will not go down as the new Year of the Woman. Even if the women prevail in all five of the unresolved Congressional races in which they are candidates — an unlikely situation — the overall number of women will not increase for the first time in 30 years. There are currently 90 women in Congress: 17 in the Senate and 73 in the House.

“This was far from a banner year for women in politics,” said Debbie Walsh, the director for the Center for American Women and Politics at [Rutgers University](#). “It is an especially far fall from 2008, when we saw the first viable woman for president, and we saw the first viable woman on the Republican presidential ticket. Given where we were just two years ago, with a lot of people talking about would these women set off a trend, inspiring more women to run, that’s certainly not what we’ve seen.”

Republican women started out strong, with a record 128 filing for House runs. But only 47 won their primaries. Democratic women did not break a record for female House candidates in the primaries, but 91 of them won their primaries and advanced to the general election.

“The Republican women were a missed opportunity, because in a year where there was such a Republican sweep, they simply did not have the kind of numbers of women running in the general to take advantage of that sweep and increase their numbers,” Ms. Walsh said.

Even though the incoming class of House Republicans will include a record number of at least eight new women, Republican men also fared well, and the women will make up only 9 percent of the Republican Congressional Caucus, the same as in the last Congress. The percentage of Democratic women in Congress actually will increase slightly, to 25 percent from 22.5 percent.

Kristi Noem, who defeated the Democratic incumbent Stephanie Herseth Sandlin to win South Dakota’s Congressional seat, said running against another woman had made her contest “a little bit of an easier situation.”

“What was great about two women running here in South Dakota this year is we were able to have forthright conversations about the concerns of the people in South Dakota and not have to worry about perceptions,” Ms. Noem said in a phone interview.

This year’s results for women should be considered in the context of a tough year for Democratic incumbents, many of whom were women, cautioned Jennifer Lawless, the director of the Women and Politics Institute at American University.

“The overall downside of this is people are going to look at a lot of these results and think, ‘Oh, my gosh, women can’t win or women can’t get elected,’ ” Dr. Lawless said.

The idea that 2010 would be the second coming for the Year of the Woman may have been overstated from the beginning. A handful of high-profile candidates, all Republicans — [Carly Fiorina](#) and [Meg Whitman](#) in California, and [Linda McMahon](#) in

Connecticut — generated an inordinate amount of news media attention. Upsets in primaries drew national interest to [Christine O'Donnell](#) in Delaware and [Sharron Angle](#) in Nevada.

“Several of these women,” Dr. Lawless said, “had interesting personal stories or personalities that garnered so much national attention, which obscured the fact that they represented actually a very small portion of the actual candidates.”

The five unresolved contests are the Alaska race for Senate, in which Senator [Lisa Murkowski](#) is a write-in candidate, and four House races — Illinois's Eighth District, where Representative Melissa Bean, a Democrat, is seeking re-election; New York's 25th District, where Ann Marie Buerkle, a Republican, is challenging the incumbent; Arizona's Eighth District, where Representative Gabrielle Giffords, a Democrat, is seeking re-election; and North Carolina's Second District, where a recount may be needed to determine whether Renee Ellmers, a Republican, defeated the incumbent.