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S.C. women gain little ground

2000-2010: A look back

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Women make up a little more than 51 percent of South Carolina's population, according to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau.

A look at several key women's issues indicates that these South Carolinians are faring better in some ways than they were in 2000, and worse in others.

Jennet Robinson Alterman, executive director of the Charleston-based Center for Women, said that overall, she does not think South Carolina women are better off than they were 10 years ago.

"The number of women elected to the state Legislature has gone down, the wage gap has not closed and South Carolina continues to rank abysmally in too many social issues such as domestic violence and teen pregnancy," Alterman said.

She also points to the fact that South Carolina no longer funds a Commission on Women, which it did in 2000.

South Carolina ranks ninth in the number of women killed by men, according to a report released in October by the Violence Policy Center, based on 2008 data. The same report released 10 years ago, which analyzed 1998 data, ranked South Carolina first.

The teen birth rate in South Carolina in 2008 -- the most recent data available -- was 53.1 per 1,000 15- to 19-year-old females, down from the 60.4 rate 10 years prior, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Still, South Carolina is the 11th highest state in the rate of teens who give birth.

While it hasn't closed, the wage gap has narrowed in the past decade. In 2000, women were making 69 cents for every dollar a man made, and since 2004, women have made 74 cents on the dollar, said Alterman, citing a report by the Darla Moore School of Business.

In the political realm, South Carolina has lost some ground. It has slipped to 50th place in its percentage of legislators who are female. Today, women make up less than 10 percent of the state Legislature. Ten years ago, they held 10.6 percent of seats, and 12 years ago they held 12.9 percent, according to the Center for American Women and Politics. At that time, the state was ranked 44th.

Women now hold 16 seats in the S.C. House of Representatives and zero in the state Senate, according to Barbara Rackes of the Southeastern Institute for Women in Politics.

While the number of women in office is down, Rackes thinks more women are inspired to run. She said many more are contacting the institute about its campaign training.

Though fewer women hold statewide offices, the state soon will be led by a woman for the first time. Rackes thinks that Nikki Haley's successful bid for governor may motivate other South Carolina women to enter politics.