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In Nevada, an Abundance of Feminine Riches

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For a state that is so proud of its showgirls, there could be a lot of women on the ballot in Nevada this cycle.

"Nevada is kind of schizophrenic when it comes to its attitude towards women. You've got pictures of girls — no ifs, ands or buts — and legalized prostitution, and you've got women in the Legislature," said former Rep. [Dina Titus](#) (D), who is expected to run for Congress again this cycle. "There are opportunities for women here in politics."

Historically, redistricting has provided additional opportunities for female candidates because of the large number of open-seat races that come with a new map, but nowhere is that more the case than in the Silver State, where, because of a new House district, a Senate race and an upcoming special election, Democrats have the potential to fill the Congressional ballot with women.

The stakes are particularly high for EMILY's List in Nevada, where several of its long-supported candidates are pondering or running for office in 2012.

"I think right now, looking here at '12, Nevada is the shining star in our potential recruitment — once the lines are drawn, of course," EMILY's List President Stephanie Schriock said in a phone interview.

In fact, the large number of female candidates might be too much of a good thing for the organization that supports Democratic, pro-abortion-rights contenders. A few of its favorite names from the past are mulling bids in the same district.

In the Sept. 3 special election to fill newly appointed Republican Sen. [Dean Heller](#)'s former House seat, there are already three Democratic women running — state Treasurer Kate Marshall and former House candidates Jill Derby and Nancy Price — the first two of whom have been endorsed by EMILY's List in past races.

Marshall is the best-known of the crop of female candidates in the free-for-all special election, and Democrats hope she can clear the field before the May 25 filing date.

Local Republicans have filed a lawsuit charging that only candidates officially nominated by party committees can run on that party's ticket in the special contest.

Additionally, Rep. [Shelley Berkley](#) (D) is running for Senate against Heller with EMILY's List's backing.

Titus is also expected to run in one of the newly drawn House seats in the Las Vegas area — what she called a "new, more centrally located district" — instead of running against Rep. [Joe Heck](#) (R), who defeated her last cycle.

"I will not officially be declaring until the lines are drawn," Titus said. "I think the new district will be part of Shelley's old district and part of my old district."

On top of the female candidates running for the House and Senate, Las Vegas voters are picking between two women in the mayoral runoff on June 7: Clark County Commissioner Chris Giunchigliani and the wife of the current mayor, Carolyn Goodman.

"I think the field for female candidates is excellent. There's no question we're going to have a female mayor — the second in the history in the state," former Las Vegas Mayor Jan Jones (D) said. "You've got some really interesting, intelligent, committed, resilient female candidates in Nevada. You have to be resilient anywhere in politics, but particularly in Nevada."

State Controller Kim Wallin has also been mentioned as a potential candidate for Congress, although she did not return a request for comment about her interest.

The 2012 landscape in Nevada hasn't yet been settled, as state lawmakers are wrangling over redistricting. Last month, Republicans proposed their own Congressional map that they said created two districts favorable to Democratic candidates, one competitive district and one competitive district that leans GOP.

However, the Democratic-controlled Legislature took the first steps Saturday to pass its own plan that gives the party an advantage in three of the newly drawn House districts and leaves the GOP with a single-digit edge in the 2nd House district.

Two of the best-known Democrats in the Nevada, state Senate Majority Leader Steven Horsford and Speaker John Oceguera, are looking at running in at least two of those districts. However, other Democrats in Nevada are also hoping that either of the special election candidates, Derby or Price, will step aside and run for a full term in one of the new House districts, depending on how the new map looks.

A state legislative committee passed the Democratic plan over the weekend and, if passed by both chambers, it will head to the desk of Gov. Brian Sandoval (R). If he were to veto the plan, the battle over Nevada's map probably would end up in court.

Despite its current prospects, Nevada does not have a particularly high proportion of female state lawmakers: 28.6 percent of state legislators are women, which ranks 10th in the country, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at the State University of New Jersey.



However, EMILY'S List's Schriock, a Montana native, chalked up women's success in the West in part to the political tradition of the states, which have a strong history of supporting female candidates dating to 1917, when Rep. Jeannette Rankin (R-Mont.) became the first woman ever elected to Congress.

"Our Western states have always tended to support women early on," Schriock said. "That spirit is still very much alive in the West."

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