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For immediate release

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Outlook for Women in Senate and House: Not Much Change in Numbers, a Few Likely Landmarks, and Continuing Underrepresentation of GOP Women

(New Brunswick, NJ) New “Closer Look” analyses of the prospects for women in races for the [U.S. Senate](#) and [House of Representatives](#) point to a year of moderate to minimal change, with a few historic landmarks likely. Republican women, who secured fewer nominations this year than in the past, are likely to see their numbers dip further. The number of women who will serve in the 115th Congress will depend heavily on how the parties fare overall, but the number of Republican women will likely decline from the current 22 to 21, based on current election ratings. (A complete list of women candidates for congressional and statewide office is available [here](#). A release with details on the numbers of candidates at each level is [here](#).)

Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics, observed: “History is being made this year with the first woman nominated for President, but on the congressional level, the story is less dramatic, with numbers only marginally different from the past. Any ‘bump’ we might see inspired by a woman running for president is yet to come.”

Walsh added, “Even with the best plausible outcomes for women, they would still hold under a quarter of the seats in Congress, a disappointing showing for a group that constitutes more than half the U.S. population. And the underrepresentation of Republican women shows no sign of changing.”

U.S. Senate (Closer Look [here](#))

Key takeaways:

- A record number of women filed for Senate races, but the number of nominees (15 -- 11D, 4R) is not a record. One more woman (D) is on the ballot in Louisiana’s same-day primary, but is not favored.
- There may be a net increase of women serving in the Senate in the 115th Congress, with two women retiring but one newcomer slightly favored and three others in toss-up races. Women will play key roles in determining the partisan balance of power in the Senate.
- Women hold both party nominations in California and New Hampshire. California has an open seat, while incumbent **Kelly Ayotte** (R-NH) is being challenged by the current governor, **Maggie Hassan** (D-NH).
- California’s contest, with candidates chosen in an open (non-party) primary, is certain to produce a Democratic woman of color as winner, either Attorney General **Kamala Harris** or Congresswoman **Loretta Sanchez**.
- The number of women of color in the Senate will at least double from one to two, including holdover **Mazie Hirono** (D-HI) and the California winner. One other woman of color, Congresswoman **Tammy Duckworth** (D-IL) is favored in her race and another (**Catherine Cortez Masto**, D-NV) is in a toss-up contest, so the number of women of color in the Senate could rise as high as four, all Democrats.

U.S. House of Representatives (Closer Look [here](#))

Key takeaways:

- Two hundred and seventy two (176D, 96R) women filed to run for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2016. 167 women (120D, 47R) won their primaries, just barely setting a new record for women House nominees. The previous record was set in 2012, with 166 women (118D, 48R) making it through their party primaries.
- Four new women (3D, 1R) are very likely to secure House seats, according to ratings from the *Cook Political Report*. Another two Democratic women are rated as likely or leaning to win House seats this year, while 11 women (10D, 1R) are in races rated by Cook as toss-ups.
- Democrat **Lisa Blunt Rochester**, if elected, will be the first woman ever elected to Congress from Delaware. Delaware is one of just three states (along with MS and VT) that have never sent a woman to Congress. Rochester would also be the first person of color to represent Delaware in Washington, DC.
- **Monica Vernon**, if elected, will be first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Iowa. She is challenging incumbent Rod Blum (R) in a contest currently rated as a toss-up. Kim Weaver (D) is also competing for Iowa's 4th Congressional District seat, a seat deemed solidly Republican.
- Republican **Claudia Tenney** and Democrat **Kim Myers** are in a tight race to win the open seat in New York's 22nd district. This is the only woman-versus-woman House race rated as competitive this year. Fourteen other House races have two female nominees this year, and all four of Hawaii's nominees for the state's two House seats are women.
- Democrat **Pramila Jayapal (D-WA)**, if elected, will be the first South Asian American woman ever elected to the U.S. Congress. She would also be the first woman of color to ever serve in Washington's congressional delegation.
- Republican **Liz Cheney**, if elected, will be the first woman elected to hold the same U.S. House seat that her father once held (1979-1989). Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) succeeded her father Frank in the U.S. Senate. Other women members – including Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) and Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) have had fathers who have served in Congress before them, but not in the same seats.

Eleven women (8D, 3R) who serve in the House in 2016 will not be returning. They include four who ran for U.S. Senate seats, one who ran for county supervisor, four who chose to retire, and two who lost their primaries.

About CAWP

The Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey is a university-based research, education and public service center. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's changing relationship to politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. CAWP is a leading authority in its field and a respected bridge between the academic and political worlds.

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