



CAWP

Election Watch

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Women Achieve Record Numbers in State Legislatures, Advance in Statewide Offices; Republican Women See Setbacks at Both Levels

A record number of women will serve in state legislatures in 2009, according to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. The net gains are entirely due to an increase in Democratic women, with the number of Republican women falling to its lowest number since 1988, when women held only 15.8 percent of state legislative seats.

At the same time, the number of women serving in statewide elected executive offices will increase from 75 (45D, 27 R, 3 NP) to 81(53D, 25R, 3NP) in 2009, with women holding the same number of governor's offices and making marginal gains in other statewide posts. Democratic women won at a far greater pace than Republican women; of the 22 women who won statewide elections (out of 36 partisan candidates), 18 were Democrats (out of 26 candidates) and 4 were Republicans (out of 10 candidates). The remainder of statewide officeholders will be holdovers who did not face elections.

"The growing number of women in state offices is good news, even if the progress is slower than we'd like," commented CAWP director Debbie Walsh. "But a healthy democracy depends on competing ideas, so it's disappointing to note the declining number of Republican women."

State Legislatures

Preliminary figures -- subject to adjustment as states finalize their election returns and hold special elections to fill vacancies -- show that 1,784 women (1,261 Democrats, 509 Republicans, 10 elected non-partisan, and 4 Progressives) will serve in legislatures, making up 24.2 percent of all legislators. This surpasses the previous high of 1,749 (23.7 percent) set in 2008.

The women serving in 2009 will include 1,465 (1,025D, 429R, 7NP, 4P) who won elections in 2008, as well as 319 holdovers (236D, 80R, 3NP) who were not up for election. There will be 433 women in state senates (307D, 116R, 10NP) and 1,351 women in state houses or assemblies (954D, 393R, 4P) The winners emerged from 2,332 candidates (1,541D, 774R, 9NP, 7P, 1I).

A notable first was achieved in New Hampshire, where women will make up a majority of the State Senate (13 women out of 24 senators), the first time this has occurred in any legislature. In contrast, the South Carolina Senate will be the only state legislative chamber in the nation with no women.

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Women in State Legislatures: A Comparison of 2008 and 2009

		2008	2009
State Senates	Democrats	294	307
	Republicans	120	116
	Non-Partisans	9	10
	Independents	1	-
Total Women		424	433
State Houses/ Assemblies	Democrats	906	954
	Republicans	415	393
	Progressives	3	4
	Independents	1	-
Total Women		1325	1351

Statewide Elective Executive Offices

Beverly Perdue (D-NC) was the only new woman governor elected in 2008. She joins Christine Gregoire (D-WA), who was re-elected, as the only women to win gubernatorial races. With six incumbent women governors not facing election, the total number of women who will serve as governors in 2009 is 8 (5D, 3R), matching the number and party affiliations of the current women governors.

The only incumbent lieutenant governor up for re-election (Becky Skillman, R-IN) won her race, but no other women won races for lieutenant governor. She will join 8 holdovers (7D, 1R) who did not face election for a total of 9 lieutenant governors, one fewer than in 2008.

Other offices to which women were elected include:

Secretary of State – 6 (6D)

State Treasurer – 2 (1D, 1R)

State Auditor – 2 (2D)

Public Service Commissioner – 3 (3D)

Corporation Commissioner – 2 (1D, 1R)

Insurance Commissioner – 1 (1D)

Superintendent of Public Instruction – 2 (2D)

Labor Commissioner – 1 (1R)

Among the noteworthy election outcomes this year for women in statewide offices:

- Denise Juneau, the newly-elected superintendent of public instruction in Montana, is the first Native American woman elected to statewide executive office.
- Alabama's entire three-member Public Service Commission is now female. Newly elected PSC President Lucy Baxley joins Commissioners Jan Cook and Susan Parker.
- In North Carolina, which elected Beverly Perdue as its first woman governor, six of ten statewide elected positions, known as the Council of State, will be filled by women. In addition to the governor, they are Secretary of State Elaine Marshall, State Treasurer Janet Cowell, State Auditor Beth Wood, Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson, and Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry. All are Democrats except for Berry, who is Republican.

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.