
"Year of the Woman": A Note of Caution

Irwin N. Gertzog, Braun Professor of
Political Science, Allegheny College

Ruth B. Mandel, Director, CAWP

The last primary is over and the slates are set for November 3rd. It's official: 1992 is a banner year for women candidates, with record numbers winning major party nominations for the U.S. Senate (11) and the House of Representatives (108). The jump in women's House nominations is more than three times greater than any previous increase. Over one third of the nominees are vying for open seats, where newcomers' chances are best. Organizations raising money for women candidates have seen unprecedented growth in membership and dollars. Indeed 1992 has been dubbed "the year of the woman."

Observers of women's political progress recognize this label from the 70s, 80s, and even 1990. We'll probably hear it again. Admittedly, the "year of the woman" tag may be a useful device. It calls attention to women's intensified political activities in 1992, focusing and stoking interest. It helps the media to frame a complex story. It aids the women's political movement in building excitement for a worthwhile cause which is always in danger of being lost among competing stories and competing claims for sparse political dollars. Notwithstanding the understandable fondness for catchy lines, the "year of the woman" is a minor prop in a far grander scenario of political change.

During the last twenty years we have seen steady, progressive change in the numbers and status of women in politics. Since the 1970s, hundreds of women have been elected to state legislatures; women now hold almost 20% of legislative seats and statewide elective offices. Those successes have enabled many women to launch congressional races. State and local offices were starting points for many of the approximately 100 women who received U.S. House nominations during the 1960s, the 200 who ran during the 1970s, and the 300 nominated during the 1980s.

The matter of parity for women and men in high public office is not a project of a single political year — or

even a single generation. After all, we are talking about rearranging an ancient pattern, namely men's leadership of the public world. That takes time.

But calling this the "year of the woman" does more than betray history; it is also potentially damaging to the women's political movement. It invites the kind of attention that wanes immediately after one election season when life is likely to return to politics-as-usual. Naming a special year for women in politics seems quintessentially American — an encapsulation and packaging of a great process of social and political change into one year's product. This year's new product line is political woman. If she does not sell, or sells only in very limited quantities, we may not invest much in marketing her again. The political woman as fad, good for one year's sales, then discounted or discarded.

The hoopla over a "year of the woman" also lays too heavy a burden of expectation on the relatively few women who will celebrate victory on November 3rd. Even if we dream about women doubling their numbers this year, women will constitute no more than 12% of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House.

These few women will be expected to prove that 1992 really did mean something decisive. This tag of high expectations also sets up millions of voters for disappointment and anger when the real-life women we send to Washington do not immediately solve the country's problems. Women entering Congress in 1993 will be part of a large group of newcomers; finding their way among the buildings, rules, committees, and labyrinths of Capitol Hill, new lawmakers are typically the least powerful members.

In '94 and '96 and '98 many more women candidates must come forward if the pace of this generation's progress is to continue. More interest, enthusiasm, and money will be required to fuel the campaigns of ever more candidates in the years ahead. Again women will ask for attention to their lack of political parity.

The real story here is very big, perhaps even a tale of epic proportions about democracy in transition. We are witnessing the early stages of a transformation, the shift from a homogeneous leadership representing a diverse constituency to a diverse leadership which mirrors its constituency. How is that story told without sacrificing

a particular chapter's excitement — a year of intense interest and exciting progress — and yet sustaining interest for the entire saga? That may be a question worth pondering as we celebrate the real successes of '92 and anticipate the challenges of election years ahead.

Women Raising Money for Women Candidates

One of the exciting things about the 1992 elections is the unprecedented increase in the amount of money being raised for women candidates. We asked some of the national women's organizations how much money they had raised for women candidates as of October 1, and if there had been a change in the size of their membership/donor base since Anita Hill testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee during the Clarence Thomas confirmation process last October. The results are astounding; each of these organizations also plans to raise more money in the final weeks before the election.

EMILY's List, a donor network for Democratic women candidates, has increased six-fold, rising from 3,500 to 22,000 donors in the past year. EMILY's List has already raised \$4.5 million, tripling the \$1.5 million they raised in the last election.

Leader PAC, a new PAC for Republican women candidates, already has 225 members and has raised \$100,000.

The National Women's Political Caucus, a grassroots membership organization which has a federal PAC, has more than doubled its membership, rising from 15,000 to 35,000 members. At the national level, the Caucus has already raised \$200,000 in this election cycle.

WISH List, founded in March 1992 and modeled on EMILY's List, is a new donor network for pro-choice Republican women candidates. WISH List already boasts a membership of 1,600 and has raised \$400,000.

The Women's Campaign Fund, the oldest women's PAC in the country, has doubled its number of donors since the Thomas hearings. They have raised \$1.3 million this

election cycle, already more than doubling the \$500,000 raised in the last election.

In the next issue of *CAWP News & Notes* we will report on the election activities of all the women's political action committees. In this issue we highlighted only a handful of the national PACs. (The National Organization for Women did not respond by press time.)

Women Candidates in 1992: A Record Year

Please note: The 1990 House number includes Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), who ran for non-voting delegate to the House from Washington, DC. The 1992 figures also include Norton, who is African American, as well as her challenger, Susan Emmerson, who is white.

Women Candidates for Congress

- With all 50 states plus Washington, DC, having completed primaries, record numbers of women have won major party nominations for both U.S. Senate and U.S. House races.

Senate: 11 women have won nominations for U.S. Senate seats, surpassing the record 10 women nominated in 1984.

House: 108 women have won nominations for U.S. House seats, far surpassing the record 70 women nominated in 1990. This is the largest increase ever, more than three times the previous jump of 12 between 1972 and 1974.

- Unprecedented numbers of women have won major party nominations for open seats.

Senate: 3 women have been nominated for open seats in U.S. Senate races, tying the 1986 record.

House: 39 women have been nominated for open seats in U.S. House races, more than three times the 1982 record of 12 women.

- Record numbers of women of color have won nominations.

Senate: Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL) is the first African American woman to win a major party nomination for the U.S. Senate.

House: 22 women of color have been nominated for U.S. House seats: 2 Asian/Pacific American; 13 Black; 6 Hispanic; 1 Native American. A record 14 women of color were nominated for the House in 1990.

- Record numbers of women have been nominated in woman-versus-woman House races.

House: 12 women will face each other in 6 House races: 2 races feature women challenging women incumbents; 4 races are for open seats. A record 6 women faced each other in 3 House races in 1986 and 1974; in each of those races women challenged women incumbents.

Women Candidates for Statewide Elective Executive Office

1992 is an off-year for statewide races; most states will hold statewide elections in 1994. As expected, 1992 is not a record year for women although 37 women have received major party nominations for statewide elective executive offices. In some states, many women will appear on the ballot for statewide elective executive offices including 7 women running in the state of Washington, 6 in North Dakota, 5 in Rhode Island, and 3 in Utah.

Women Candidates for State Legislatures

CAWP is currently tracking all of the women running for state legislatures. As of press time, data are not yet complete; however it looks as if 1992 will be a record year for women legislative candidates. Since the early 1970s when CAWP first began tracking women candidates, the number of women seeking legislative posts has increased in each election.

If more women held office,
the country would be governed...

Better 61%
Worse 12%
No Difference 14%
Don't Know/Refused 13%

Source: *US News and World Reports*, 4/27/92
Sample 1000 adults; margin of error +/- 3.5%

U.S Senate and U.S. House Members Leaving Posts

U.S. Senate - 9*
Retiring: 7* (4D, 3R)
Lost Primary: 1 (1D)
Deceased: 1* (1D)

U.S. House - 91
Retiring: 52 (32D, 20R)
Lost Primary: 19 (14D, 5R)
Lost Primary for Higher Office: 4 (2D, 2R)
Deceased: 2 (2D)
Running for Higher Office: 9 (7D, 2R)
Member versus Member Races: 5
(4 races are D vs R; 1 race is R vs R)

Source: *The Hotline*, 9/16/92
The American Political Network, Inc.

*Senator Conrad (D-ND) announced his retirement in April; however, he is now planning to run in the December special election to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Senator Burdick (D-ND).

Women Candidates in 1992:
A Summary and List of Major Party Nominees
U.S. Senate, U.S. House, Statewide Elective Executives

U.S. Senate — 11 (10D, 1R)

	Filed	Lost Primary	Won Primary	Nominees			Nominees Race/Ethnic.	
				Incum.	Chall.	Open	Black	White
Total	29	18	11	1	7	3	1	10
Democrat	22	12	10	1	6	3	1	9
Republican	7	6	1	0	1	0	0	1

U.S. House of Representatives — 108* (71D, 37R)

	Filed	Lost Primary	Won Primary	Nominees			Nominees Race/Ethnic.**				
				Incum.	Chall.	Open	AP	B	H	NA	W
Total	224*	116	108*	27*	42*	39	2	13*	6	1	86*
Democrat	141	70	71	18	27	26	2	9	4	1	55
Republican	83	46	37	9	15	13	0	4	2	0	31

Governor — 3 (2D, 1R)

Lieutenant Governor — 7 (3D, 4R)

Additional Statewide Elective Executives — 27 (16D, 9R, 2 nonpartisan)

State Legislatures — contact CAWP for information

The following list of women running for U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and statewide elective executive is sorted by office, then state, then district. Beneath the candidate's name, we have included information about occupation and/or public service, where available. (This information was collected from the state parties, the candidates, and from organizations supporting the candidates; information may be incomplete.) We have also noted if the woman candidate is endorsed by one of the national organizations which raises money for women candidates.

The key for endorsements is as follows:

EMILY = EMILY's List (Early Money Is Like Yeast: It Makes the Dough Rise)

NOW = National Organization for Women

NWPC = National Women's Political Caucus

WISH = WISH LIST (Women in the Senate and House)

WCF = Women's Campaign Fund.

(Leader PAC is supporting all of the Republican women nominated for federal races.)

*Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), who is Black, serves as the non-voting delegate to the House from Washington, DC; Susan Emmerson (R), who is white, is running against Norton.

**Race: AP=Asian/Pacific American; B=Black; H=Hispanic; NA=Native American; W=White.