



# CAWP

## Election Watch

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### 2007 NJ LEGISLATIVE RACES: OPEN SEATS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

The potential for a record number of open seats in the New Jersey legislature creates a rare opportunity to expand female representation significantly in a state with a poor record for electing women.

“It’s up to the county party chairs. 2007 could be a landmark year for women on both sides of the aisle – or we could see the same old, same old,” observes Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

“New Jersey’s political system is notoriously closed, with nominations often going to hand-picked personal favorites,” Walsh noted. “We call on both parties to use this opportunity to increase the number of women on their tickets, not just as sacrificial lambs but in winnable districts.”

New Jersey ranks 35<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states for women’s representation at the state legislative level. Women hold 7 seats in the Senate and 16 in the Assembly for a total of 23 out of the 120 legislative seats, or 19.2 percent.

Walsh pointed out that openings at each level result in even more available positions as current officeholders seek to move up to higher offices. If an assembly member runs for an open senate seat, that person’s assembly seat becomes available; when a local officeholder seeks state office, there can be a new opportunity at the local level.

Already five senators and three assembly members have indicated that they will not seek reelection to their current posts, and the number is likely to grow in the weeks to come. The deadline for filing to run in the June primary is April 9, but decisions are being made now, and possible candidates must speak with municipal and county party chairs immediately.

Potential women candidates and campaign officials who want to seize this year’s opportunities can get a boost from CAWP’s *Ready to Run*<sup>™</sup> program on Saturday, March 17<sup>th</sup>. The day-long bi-partisan campaign training program is designed to recruit and train women to run for all levels of office in the Garden State. This year, *Ready to Run*<sup>™</sup> will be complemented by three special pre-conference programs on March 16<sup>th</sup> aimed at increasing the participation of women of color in New Jersey politics: *Elección Latina*, *Run Sister Run: Women of the African Diaspora Changing the Political Landscape*, and *Rising Stars: Educating Asian American Women for Politics*. For information about CAWP’s training programs, visit [www.cawp.rutgers.edu](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu) or call Jean Sinzdak at 732/932-9384, ext. 260.

#### 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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