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## **NEW JERSEY, ONCE AMONG WORST, NOW RANKS AMONG TOP 10 STATES FOR WOMEN IN LEGISLATURE**

Forty third in the nation: that's where New Jersey ranked with regard to women's representation as recently as 2004, according to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), which has tracked the numbers and proportions of women in state legislatures across the country since 1975.

Now, after the appointment of three women to fill vacant seats in the Assembly, the Garden State has risen to tenth, its first appearance in the top ten since CAWP began tracking the national figures. Women currently hold 11 seats (8D, 3R) in the State Senate and 24 seats (15D, 9R) in the Assembly, or 29.2% of all seats.

"New Jersey's success demonstrates how women can build their numbers," says CAWP director Debbie Walsh. "Women are learning what they need to know to succeed in politics, whether from CAWP's own Ready to Run™ campaign training or from other sources. They're leveraging professional experience and community involvement to show they're winners. And they're learning how politics works at the local, county and state levels, getting to know the decision-makers and power brokers so they're well-positioned when a vacancy occurs."

The three most recent additions to the legislature include two Republicans appointed to fill vacancies caused by deaths of Republican assemblymen. Betty Lou DeCroce has replaced her late husband, Assemblyman Alex DeCroce, while Donna Simon fills the seat of Assemblyman Pete Biondi, who died two days after being re-elected. Both women will have to run in special elections in 2012 for the remainder of the terms, which end in January 2014.

Simon was a member of the Readington Township Committee, while DeCroce was a deputy commissioner of community affairs in Gov. Chris Christie's administration.

In addition, Gabriela Mosquera, a Democrat who won an Assembly race in the 2011 elections but was then removed after litigation because she did not meet the state's residency requirement, was appointed to fill the Fourth District seat on an interim basis. She, too, will have to run in a special election in November 2012 to retain her seat.

Walsh noted that while the state's progress in the legislature is good news, women still need to beef up their ranks at other levels of office. "We've had no women in our congressional delegation since 2003. Women hold just 22% of freeholder seats – and in four of our 21 counties, there are no women freeholders at all. There's no good excuse --and certainly no lack of women ready to serve."

Women who want to join the three new assemblywomen in Trenton or seek other New Jersey offices can attend CAWP's next Ready to Run™ campaign training, which will take place March 9-10, 2012 at the Douglass Campus Center at Rutgers in New Brunswick. More than 100 women are expected to attend the program to prepare themselves for candidacies, campaign leadership roles, and high-level appointments. Pre-conference Diversity Initiative sessions on March 9 will highlight distinctive concerns of African American, Latina, and Asian American women who get involved in politics. Information about all of these programs is available at [www.cawp.rutgers.edu](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu) or 732/932-9384, ext. 223.

### **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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