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Presidential Voting, Combined With Redistricting, Gives Women Best Chance in 20 Years to Win Office

October Surprise: Women Considering a Run Should File Now

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ and PALO ALTO, Calif., Oct. 24, 2011 -- When presidential elections overlap with redistricting – which happens only once every 20 years – opportunities increase vastly for women candidates, according to analysis by The 2012 Project, a non-partisan campaign to elect more women to office.

“The election of 1992 – known as ‘The Year of the Woman’ – was not an accident,” said Mary Hughes, founder and director of The 2012 Project. “Voting patterns unique to presidential elections, combined with new and open seats resulting from redistricting, created a perfect storm for women candidates. It’s about to happen again, and we need to make the most of it.”

New candidates, including women, are historically more likely to win newly drawn seats and open seats created by term limits or retirements. In 1992, 22 of the 24 new women elected to Congress won open seats.

Also, in presidential election years, the overall number of voters increases substantially. Women consistently vote in higher numbers than men, and the uptick in overall voters in presidential years is slightly higher for women compared to men. Thus women candidates, especially Democrats, might anticipate a potential boost in support.

The 2012 Project, a campaign of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, is taking advantage of these opportunities by educating and inspiring women to run for Congress and state legislatures. In addition to national outreach, The 2012 Project has launched statewide initiatives in Illinois, Alabama, Texas, Pennsylvania, California, Iowa, Nevada, Missouri, South Carolina, Washington, Georgia, Arizona and Florida. Other local initiatives are in the works.

Leaders from state and local organizations committed to women’s political participation explain women’s underrepresentation in politics, the unique opportunities of 2012, and the resources available for women to run.

“We’re helping to set off an unprecedented level of collaboration around the country,” said Debbie Walsh, director of CAWP. “Our campaign is marking the one-year countdown to

Election Day with this urgent message: State candidate filing deadlines begin in December and go through next summer. Women considering a run for office should do it now.”

Women now make up 17 percent of Congress and 24 percent of state legislatures. The 2010 elections saw the first significant decline in women state legislators in decades, and the first drop in the number of women in Congress in more than 30 years. The US now ranks 69th in the world in the number of women in office, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Learn more at www.the2012project.us.

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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