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For immediate release

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**New CAWP Research Confirms:
For Women in Congress, Representation Matters**

Women in Congress—across partisan lines—know their presence makes a difference.

That is a key finding in a new research report, [Representation Matters: Women in the U.S. Congress](#), from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, with generous financial support from the Political Parity program at the Swanee Hunt Alternatives Fund.

Women in both the House and Senate in the 114th Congress (2015-16) confronted a difficult political environment, widely perceived as characterized by sharp partisan divisions and legislative gridlock. Women were underrepresented across parties, particularly in the party in power.

Yet the CAWP study, based on interviews with 83 of the 108 women who served as senators, representatives, and delegates, finds that women on both sides of the aisle believe their presence and their voices mattered, and they provided considerable evidence of achievements despite the overall environment and the gender-based challenges they continue to confront.

“We’ve always stressed the need to elect more women from both parties, and this research fuels that argument,” said CAWP director Debbie Walsh. “Both Democratic and Republican women told us that compared to men their female colleagues are more results-oriented, more likely to emphasize achievement over ego, and more concerned with achieving policy outcomes rather than receiving publicity or credit. That approach seems more urgent than ever now.”

Women of color—who constituted a record number of members in the 114th Congress—emphasized the significance of their presence and the imperative of including diverse perspectives more generally in the policymaking process.

The lawmakers also reported that gender-related obstacles to winning congressional seats are tougher than the challenges of serving as women in Washington once elected.

“There was no shortage of resilience expressed among the congresswomen we interviewed,” said CAWP scholar and report author Kelly Dittmar. “Women in Congress are undeterred by the challenges they confront—whether the challenges be gender-based or not—and are determined to succeed on behalf of those for whom they give voice in the House and Senate every day.”

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More generally, the study finds that women bring views, priorities, and agendas that might otherwise be missing or ignored. Not only women's differences from men, but also the diversity among women, point to the need for more females in Congress. The women themselves cited the value of racial, ethnic and partisan diversity, and they indicated that they would like to see more women join them on Capitol Hill.

“Especially in this era of deeply divided partisan politics, it’s vitally important to recognize the **down-to-earth** impact women **bring to Congress**. These insights suggest that electing more women will break open gridlock,” said Swanee Hunt, **co-chair of Political Parity (along with Republican Kerry Healey)**. “**Here’s evidence that** women in high office foster a more **practical** and productive discourse on our critical policy needs.”

The report was authored by CAWP scholars Kelly Dittmar, Kira Sanbonmatusu, and Susan J. Carroll; director Debbie Walsh; and political science graduate student Catherine Wineinger. It relies upon semi-structured interviews with 83 of 108 women in the 114th Congress. Virtually all of the interviews were conducted in person between September 2015 and April 2017 and ranged between 12 and 77 minutes in length. The full report is available at <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/representationmatters.pdf>.

About CAWP

The [Center for American Women and Politics \(CAWP\)](#), a unit of the [Eagleton Institute of Politics](#) at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about American women's political participation. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's participation in politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. CAWP's education and outreach programs translate research findings into action, addressing women's under-representation in political leadership with effective, imaginative programs serving a variety of audiences. As the world has watched Americans considering female candidates for the nation's highest offices, CAWP's over four decades of analyzing and interpreting women's participation in American politics have provided a foundation and context for the discussion.

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