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Record Number of Women of Color to Serve in Statewide Elected Executive Offices; Numbers Still Low

Next year, a record number of women of color will serve in statewide elected executive offices, according to data from the Center for American Women and Politics ([CAWP](#)), a division of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

Following the midterm elections, at least 14 (11D, 3R) women of color will serve in statewide elected executive offices, including one woman of color governor, making up 4.5% of all 312 such offices nationwide. One woman of color – Gwen Collins-Greenup (D) – is in a runoff contest for Secretary of State in Louisiana. Nine (5D, 3R, 1NP) women of color currently serve in statewide elected executive office around the country; the previous record, set in 2011, was 11 (at that time, however, there were 317 statewide elected executive offices nationwide, so the proportion of offices held by women of color at this previous record level was 3.5%).

“This is movement in the right direction,” said CAWP Director Debbie Walsh. “Women of color made strides in 2018 at this and other levels of office. It’s important to remember, however, that the women filling these 4.5% of seats make up nearly 20% of the U.S. population.”

Prior to this election, only 34 women of color had served in statewide elected office in all of U.S. history. That number will increase next year to 43. Women of color ascending to statewide elective office is still a rarity in the U.S., and a number of women made history throughout the 2018 midterm election cycle: Stacey Abrams (D-GA) became the first Black woman to win a major-party nomination for governor in the nation’s history; Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM) will be the first Democratic woman of color to serve as governor nationwide; Letitia James (D-NY) became the first woman of color elected statewide in New York when she won her race for attorney general; Jeanette Núñez (R-FL), on winning the lieutenant governor’s office, became the first Latina elected to statewide executive office in Florida; Peggy Flanagan (D-MN) will be the first woman of color to serve statewide in Minnesota when she assumes the office of lieutenant governor, as well as just the second Native American woman ever elected to statewide executive office nationwide; and Arizona State Treasurer-elect Kimberly Yee (R-AZ) will become the first GOP woman of color to serve statewide in Arizona.

In 2019, women as a whole will hold at least 86 (46D, 38R, 2NP) statewide elected executive offices, including 9 (6D, 3R) governor’s offices, meeting the current record, and at least 77 (40D, 35R, 2NP) other offices, falling short of record levels. Two women, including one woman of color, remain in statewide executive elections that have yet to be decided. Women of color will be 16.3% of all women holding statewide elected executive offices in 2019, an increase from the current level of 12.2%. By contrast, women of color are close to 40% of the population of women.

“This cycle shows that women of color can win statewide,” said CAWP Senior Scholar Kira Sanbonmatsu. “But it also shows that both political parties need to recruit more women of color to run. The talent is there. It needs to be tapped.”

About CAWP

The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers-New Brunswick, 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.