



CAWP

Election Watch

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NEW JERSEY ELECTS RECORD NUMBER OF WOMEN
Senate, Assembly Both Top Previous Marks
Elections also held in four other states

When the New Jersey state legislature swears in new members in January, its membership will include more women than ever before, according to 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 a total of 9 women in the Senate (7D, 2R) and 25 women in the Assembly (17D, 8R), New Jersey's legislature will have 34 women (28.3 percent) among its 120 members. New Jersey will share 15th place in the nation for the proportion of women in its legislature with California and Connecticut.

"As recently as 2004, we were 43rd in the country, an abysmal record," observed CAWP director Debbie Walsh. "In just three years, we've leapt into the top twenty, not because others got worse but because New Jersey has done substantially better. Now that we've set a new pattern, we'd like to see our state join the top ten!"

"This is a classic example of preparedness meeting opportunity," added Walsh. "When open seats became available, women were ready to run." She noted that almost a quarter of the women legislators participated in CAWP's own candidate training, Ready to Run™, and pointed out that others in the state, including leaders in both parties, have also organized efforts to groom women candidates.

Among the new lawmakers, 14 will fill open seats, 3 in the Senate and 11 in the Assembly. Many open seats were created by resignations or retirements; Walsh pointed out that party leaders took advantage of these opportunities to add women to their slates, something that happened only rarely in the past.

Among the lawmakers will be 14 women of color, all Democrats, including 5 in the Senate (4 African American women and 1 Latina) and 9 in the Assembly (6 African American women and 3 Latinas.) Teresa Ruiz will be the first Latina in New Jersey's Senate.

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The newly elected women come from a record crop of candidates, CAWP reports. Running for the legislature in the 2007 general election were a total of 59 women – 17 Senate candidates (11D, 6R) and 42 Assembly candidates (28D, 14R).

After the 2005 legislative elections, when only Assembly seats were at stake, New Jersey had 23 women legislators. With additional women appointed to fill recently vacated seats, the number serving in November 2007 is 26. All of the appointed women also ran for and won full terms in this election.

State elections were also held in Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi and Virginia.

In Kentucky, state auditor Crit Luallen (D) was re-elected, the only woman in statewide elective executive office. There were no legislative races.

In Louisiana, results will not be complete until runoff elections on November 17. In districts where no candidate wins more than 50 percent of the votes, a runoff is held between the two top finishers.

In Mississippi, there will be a total of 26 women legislators (14.9 percent), a net increase of two women. With 4 women in the Senate (3D, 1R) and 22 in the House (17D, 5R), Mississippi will continue to rank among the bottom ten states. No women were on the ballot for statewide elective executive offices.

In Virginia, there will be at least 23 women in the legislature, with one Senate race still too close to call. The Virginia legislature will have at least 8 women senators (7D, 1R), while the Assembly will have 15 women (10D, 5R). If the number remains at 23, it will be a net loss of one woman, placing Virginia at 16.4 percent, joining Mississippi among the bottom ten states. There were no races for statewide elective executive offices.

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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