

# CHANGING THE FACE OF POLITICS: ELECTING MORE WOMEN

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The issue of advancing women's health, wealth, and power is quite complex. In the United States, women comprise more than 50% of the country's population,<sup>1</sup> and yet we are still fighting for equal rights on many fronts. While women have come so far since we were granted our right to vote in 1920,<sup>2</sup> and we owe much to our sisters who paved the way, there is still much work to do. Advancing our health, wealth, and power means that we need greater progress on issues such as equal pay. Our college campuses must be a safe place to learn. Often operating as primary caregivers and breadwinners,<sup>3</sup> paid family

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1. *State & County Quick Facts*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html> (last revised Sept. 30, 2015).

2. U.S. CONST. amend XIX.

3. Catherine Rampell, *U.S. Women on the Rise as Family Breadwinner*, N.Y. TIMES, May 30, 2013, at B1.

leave for women is crucial. We must have control over our own bodies and our reproductive health choices.

While there are many issues we must tackle in order to fully empower women, there is one solution that will allow us to make progress on all of these issues and more. We must elect more women to public office.

Every aspect of life is political. Decisions that are made by our elected leaders at all levels—locally, at the state level, and nationally—impact our daily lives in ways many do not realize. At this very moment, someone, somewhere, in some American city or town, is making a decision to require that the local grocery store carry fresh fruits and vegetables, to allow women in the community to readily access reproductive healthcare, or to fund new books and computers at a local school.

The outcome of such critical decisions depends on who is “sitting at the table” when the decisions are made. We are supposed to have a representative democracy; however, we recently made history when we reached 20% women in the U.S. Senate.<sup>4</sup> In California, women make up slightly more than 25% of the State Legislature, a significant decrease from merely one decade ago.<sup>5</sup> California has never had a female governor.<sup>6</sup> Los Angeles, the second largest city in the country, has never had a female mayor.<sup>7</sup> And, two-thirds of local city councils and boards of supervisors in the state have one woman or less as representatives.<sup>8</sup>

Without women “sitting at the table,” our unique perspectives, life experience, priorities, and voices, simply are not heard. How can we expect our needs to be met if we are not part of the conversation? As the saying goes, “If you are not at the table, you are on the menu.” It is no surprise that with a lack of representation comes efforts to roll

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4. Ctr. for Am. Women & Politics, *Current Numbers*, RUTGERS U., <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/current-numbers> (last visited Nov. 6, 2015).

5. *Why We're Here*, CLOSE THE GAP CA, <http://closethegapca.org/about-us/why-were-here/> (last visited Nov. 6, 2015).

6. Cal. State Library, *List of California Governors*, GOVERNORS' GALLERY, <http://governors.library.ca.gov/list.html> (last visited Nov. 6, 2015).

7. CITY OF L.A., THE REPORT ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS, PART 2: LEADERSHIP 7, [http://www.msmu.edu/uploadedFiles/Content/Status\\_of\\_Women\\_and\\_Girls/LACity\\_Part\\_2\\_Leadership.pdf](http://www.msmu.edu/uploadedFiles/Content/Status_of_Women_and_Girls/LACity_Part_2_Leadership.pdf).

8. CAL. LEADERSHIP INST., WOMEN 2014: AN EXAMINATION OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CALIFORNIA STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT 5 (2014), [http://www.leadershipcaliforniainstitute.org/sites/all/files/Women\\_2014.pdf](http://www.leadershipcaliforniainstitute.org/sites/all/files/Women_2014.pdf); Rachel Michelin, *New Study Reveals that Women Represent 28 Percent of California City Council Members*, CAL. WOMEN LEAD (Aug. 28, 2014), <http://cawomenlead.org/new-study-reveals-that-women-represent-less-than-40-percent-of-california-city-council-members/>.

back our rights, like closing community health care clinics, and a lack of equal pay or paid family leave.

Still, electing women is more than just about parity. With more women in government, policies become more comprehensive, transparency increases, and things get done.<sup>9</sup> Women possess a different understanding of policy areas, from healthcare and transportation, to education and jobs.<sup>10</sup> Women in elected office bring a new perspective to social, economic, and environmental issues. And with this perspective, the likelihood of reaching effective and equitable solutions increases.<sup>11</sup>

However, women do not tend to self-nominate to run for public office.<sup>12</sup> While women win elections at the same rate as men,<sup>13</sup> we simply are not running. Women lack political ambition for a variety of reasons: we lack role models; we are neither mentored, nor recruited to run; we often face severe sexism and personal attacks; we are judged more harshly, both on our qualifications and appearance; and we lack confidence as leaders.<sup>14</sup> Sadly, by not running for office, we are giving up our seats at the table and our role in making critical policy decisions. This must change.

If women in the United States are truly concerned about advancing our health, wealth, and power, then we must start taking action to prepare and encourage each other to run for office, and support one another when we do. There are several steps that we can take, which would have a positive impact on the number of women running for office:

1. Educate women about the importance of female leadership in the political arena

Women must understand the policy implications and the direct impact that our underrepresentation at the decision-making table has on our daily lives. Undoubtedly, we have many fantastic male allies who believe in women's equality and support policies that elevate wo-

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9. *Recruiting Progressive Women*, CLOSE THE GAP CA, <http://closethegapca.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Full-EPacket.pdf> (last visited Nov. 6, 2015).

10. *Why Women?*, EMERGE CALIFORNIA, <http://www.emergeca.org/about/women> (last visited Nov. 6, 2015).

11. *Id.*

12. *See id.*

13. JENNIFER L. LAWLESS & RICHARD L. FOX, *Executive Summary to MEN RULE: THE CONTINUED UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN U.S. POLITICS*, at ii (2012), <http://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/2012-Men-Rule-Report-final-web.pdf>.

14. *Id.*

men, children, and families.<sup>15</sup> However, no man can possess the unique perspective that women bring to politics.

## 2. Recruit women to run for office

Unlike men, women have to be asked an average of seven times before they “seriously consider” running for office.<sup>16</sup> As women, we need to stop believing that we need permission to lead. Also, we must make it a priority to ask other intelligent, successful women to run for office, early and often.

## 3. Train women to run for office

Lack of confidence is one of the biggest reasons why women do not run for office as often as men.<sup>17</sup> Women believe that they are not qualified to serve in elected office.<sup>18</sup> We can overcome this challenge by giving women training and the necessary tools, skills, and confidence needed to be strong, viable candidates. Through candidate preparation and training, women will build more confidence and position themselves to be better equipped, better prepared, and ready to run when opportunities arise.

## 4. Mentor and support each other

Every woman should be personally responsible for mentoring other women. As we become empowered, we should empower other women by supporting, encouraging, and celebrating each other’s leadership achievements. Women in office need to: identify other women who can replace them once they vacate their seats; hire women to serve as senior staff members; and support women who choose to run for leadership positions.

## 5. Include men

Since men make up 70% or more of our elected officials at almost all levels of government,<sup>19</sup> we cannot elect more women without including men as part of the solution to this problem. We need our

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15. Kate Karpilow, *Five Steps to Elect More Women*, CAL. CENTER FOR RES. ON WOMEN & FAM. (Mar. 4, 2014), <http://ccrwf.org/five-steps-to-elect-more-women/>.

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

19. See Jay Riestenberg, *Look at Who Controls Government to Understand the Dispute on Planned Parenthood*, COMMON CAUSE (Sept. 28, 2015), <http://www.commoncause.org/democracy-wire/look-at-who-controls-congress-planned-parenthood.html>; CAL. LEADERSHIP INST., *supra* note 8, at 5.

male allies and supporters to help recruit, mentor, and support women running for office. In order to ensure that this change happens, we must educate men about why having more women in office matters.

Finally, if women hope to dramatically level the political playing field and encourage more women to run for, win, and serve in elected office, then we eventually need to shift the burden of female candidate recruitment to the institutions that actually control the political power and recruitment process: namely our local, state, and national political parties; central committees; labor unions; elected officials in leadership positions and advocacy organizations. Change on a broad scale will occur once these institutions begin to take the issue of female representation in elected office seriously.<sup>20</sup>

The solutions to most of today's problems are literally at our fingertips. The question is not whether we can press the button to advance women's status in society. It is: do we really want to press that button? We say, let us use all of our fingers, and toes, to press as many buttons as possible to advance our health, wealth, and power.

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20. LAWLESS & FOX, *supra* note 13, at ii.