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**More women to join Assembly as female representation drops in Senate**

While women are making historic gains in the House of Representatives and state governments across the nation, one Wisconsin legislative chamber will actually have fewer female members come January.

In the state Senate, eight of the chamber's 33 seats will be held by women — the lowest since the start of the 2011-12 session. Two of the eight are Republicans — the lowest number from that party in the chamber since the start of the 1987-88 session.

Female representation, hyped by Democratic results on Nov. 6, is higher in the Assembly — the highest since the start of the 1993-94 session. Assembly Democrats will also reach gender parity in their caucus in January, as 18 of their 26 members will be female.

But women in that 99-member chamber will still be in the minority, and the gains they logged mirror similar spikes in that house over the past four decades, according to a WisPolitics.com review.

Republican Mary Panzer, who became the first female Senate majority leader in 2003 after years in both houses of the Legislature, applauded the incoming female class, predicting that broader representation in the Assembly would mean more women will move to the Senate in future years.

"The Assembly is a little different animal than the Senate," she said in an interview this week. "I really think it creates a good training ground for the Senate."

The WisPolitics.com review, which looked at the number of women in both chambers dating back to the start of the 1981-82 session, found the average number of women in the Senate is seven, making the eight that'll be seated next session on par with past decades. In the Assembly, the 28 women who'll be seated in January outpaces the female average of 23.

Assembly Democrats will also see a caucus that's half female come Inauguration Day. The 18 women will be the highest number of female Democrats in the chamber since 1991-92, when 19 women were seated during the start of the new session.

Democrat Shirley Krug — who served in the Assembly from 1985 to 2005, including a stint as minority leader — said there'd be more Democratic female gains if the legislative maps were drawn fairly.

"If the seats had been more balanced, I think there would have been a much larger influx of women both in the Assembly and the Senate," she said in an interview. "It's more difficult to convince anybody to run if the numbers in the seat are approaching a 'Hail Mary' status; it's hard to get people to run if the numbers are balanced against them."

She predicted after the next round of redistricting, Democratic women will run and win in greater numbers at the state level.

But Republican Margaret Farrow, the state's first female lieutenant governor who also served in both the Assembly and Senate, countered those pointing fingers at the maps are shirking blame over the election results.

"There's a lot of things to blame things on so you don't have to blame yourself. If you find a determined woman, you can find one in the district (to run) as it exists now," she told WisPolitics.com, pointing to Democrat Robyn Vining, who edged out GOP state Treasurer Matt Adamczyk to win the seat.

Farrow noted she was first elected to the Assembly in 1986, a time in which Democrats had controlled both houses of the Legislature for more than 20 years — and had "all the good desks, all the wooden desks, all the electric typewriters," while the Republicans had metal desks and smaller offices.

She said Republicans could "cry at that" and blame the maps for their minority, though they ultimately didn't. That's despite, she said, the state Supreme Court's composition of "Democratic-thinking people" who drew those maps.

Meanwhile, the check showed the two Republican women who'll be seated in the Senate this January — Alberta Darling and outgoing state Rep. Kathy Bernier — account for the lowest number of GOP elected officials in that chamber since the start of the 1987-88 session.

Krug blamed those figures on what she sees as poor candidate recruitment from the GOP. She added Republican women could also be feeling disenfranchised because of a national discourse that includes "rhetoric touting non-feminist values about the role of women in society."

While Panzer agreed candidate recruitment efforts are important — adding people need to be shown "the route to do it" — she said "the most important thing" a caucus leader can do is provide mentorship to an incoming freshman class.

Farrow, though, stressed that caucus and party leaders can't talk anyone into running for office. Instead, the best approach is looking at school boards and other local government posts "where people have already stepped forward."

"I think if you have to somehow draft someone into the scene, that's not the best way to get them," said Farrow, who served as the trustee and then president of the Elm Grove Village Board before running for state Assembly.

Still, the three agreed the negative political environment is likely deterring some female candidates from running for office.

"When you get into sort of name calling and personal things, I think it's hard to get people to run and expose themselves to that," Panzer said, noting when she worked on candidate recruitment efforts last in the early 2000s, "it got harder to get people to run" because of fears of exposing themselves and their families to the "bruising" cycle.

The WisPolitics.com check also showed a disparity in the breakdown of Democratic and Republican women in each house. In the Assembly, Democratic women have consistently outnumbered their GOP counterparts, save for a stretch between 1999 and 2006 and the beginning of the 1983-84 session.

But in the Senate, Republican women saw greater numbers up to the 2005-06 session; Democratic women often had higher representation over the most recent cycles. The exceptions are 2007-08, when Republicans and Democrats were tied at four women per caucus; and 2011-12, when GOP women outnumbered their Democratic counterparts five to three at the start of session.

WisPolitics.com analyzed the Legislature's biennial Blue Books to log the total number of women in each chamber per session. The review only compares the number of female lawmakers who were seated in January of each odd-numbered year, meaning it doesn't include any women that were added to the Legislature following special elections that took place later in the session.

At the national level, the House has elected a record number of women this cycle. Meanwhile, in the Nevada Assembly, women won the majority for the first time. And Colorado may also see its first female majority in the state house, though media reports show one race has yet to be called.

In Wisconsin, Krug attributed the lack of female GOP state senators to the decline of moderate candidates.

She said that historically many of the Republican women in that chamber were moderates, including Peggy Rosenzweig, who served in the Assembly and Senate representing the Milwaukee area from 1983 to 2003 before losing in a primary to Tom Reynolds.

"Yes they were Republicans, but they weren't hard-right Republicans," Krug said, adding that these were candidates running in moderate, swing districts where it wouldn't be hard to imagine them "switching their affiliation from 'R' to 'D' and still winning."

But over time, she said, "moderates have been squeezed out" of both parties as each has become more partisan.

But Panzer, who said she was "conservative fiscally" but more moderate on social issues during her time in the Legislature, countered that the appeal of moderates "ebbs and flows."

"I think it comes down to balance," said Panzer, who lost her Senate seat in a Republican primary challenge from conservative Glenn Grothman in 2004. "I think women are open to listen and learn and take in different viewpoints because that's what we do."

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics, and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

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