



# Perspectives

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## on Women & Politics

Lydia Quarles, J.D., Senior Policy Analyst  
John C. Stennis Institute of Government

### CAPITALIZING ON CURRENCY

The Democratic Party primaries, caucuses, and combinations of the two have been fascinating this spring. It appears as if this fight between a woman and a black man will go all the way to the mat. All the pundits have thought that each succeeding contest heralded the end for Obama, then Clinton. The simple fact is: we don't know what is going to happen. It is unlikely that Pennsylvania will end things. And ultimately, in November, whatever the outcome of the Clinton/Obama duel, it will be the "regulars" versus the "irregulars" or the "same'ole" versus the "revolutionary".

Perhaps women have been too caught up in the prospect that maybe – just maybe – we'd have a woman president in the U.S. to capitalize on what we do have. Think about this:

- 70 women serve in the United States Congress, making up 16.1% of the 435 members.
- 16 women serve in the United States Senate, making up 16% of the 100 members.
- 74 women in America serve in statewide elective positions, making up 23.5% of the 315 statewide elective positions in America.
  - There are 8 women governors.
  - There are 10 women lieutenant governors.
  - There are 4 women attorneys general.
  - There are 12 secretaries of state.
  - There are 11 state treasurers/chief financial officers.
  - There are 4 comptrollers.
  - There are 6 auditors.
  - There are 8 chief education officials.
  - There are 2 insurance commissioners.
  - There are 5 public service commissioners.
  - There is 1 commissioner of labor.
  - There is 1 corporation commissioner.
  - There is 1 public regulation commissioner.
  - There is 1 railroad commissioner.
- 1,741 women in America serve in state legislatures, either as state representatives or state senators, 23.6% of the total of 7,382 legislators of the various states, holding 21.5% of state senate seats and 24.4% of state house seats.

- The state with the highest percentage of women state legislators is Vermont, with 37.8% of legislators being women.
- The state with the lowest percentage of women state legislators is South Carolina, with 8.8% of legislators being women.
- Mississippi ranks 5th from the bottom (or 45th, if you prefer) with 14.4% of state legislators being women.
- In the 100 largest cities in the U.S., there are 11 women mayors.

But hey, who's counting? Among other people, the folks at the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), Eagleton Institute of Politics, and Rutgers University are counting. The folks at the United States Conference of Mayors are counting. Maybe we should be counting, too.

When CAWP began record-keeping in 1979, 3% of the U.S. Congress, 11% of statewide elective officials, and 10% of membership in state legislatures were women. This percentage has risen incrementally each and every year. In 2008 the respective statistics are 16.1%, 23.5% and 23.6%. That is 30 years of work – slow at best – but at least we are not moving backward.

Let's capitalize on our currency – the women that we have in place, in Mississippi and elsewhere. Let's support them with our time, talent, and ingenuity. Let's ensure that these numbers rise – incrementally, if need be – but rise just the same. Let's get involved so that the majority of Americans – American women – can be duly represented at the tables of power in federal, state, and local government.

Why leave it to Hillary? Why don't you run for something?



If you would be interested in attending a seminar on “Applied Politics for Women”, please contact me at [lydia@sig.msstate.edu](mailto:lydia@sig.msstate.edu).

