

# Women and Elective Office in Iowa

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Women comprise the majority (50.9 percent) of Iowa's population and the majority of its voters. As of 2000, 52 percent of Iowa's registered voters were women. And women boasted a 66 percent turnout rate, compared to 62 percent for men, in the 2000 elections.

However, Iowa's record of electing women to federal, state, and local political office lags behind the nation in many respects. For example, Iowa is one of only six states that have never sent a woman to either the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives. The others are Alaska, Delaware, Mississippi, New Hampshire and Vermont (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2002a). Three of these states—Delaware, New Hampshire and Vermont—have elected a woman as governor, so Iowa is one of only three states that have never elected a woman U.S. Congressperson or governor (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2002b).

## Statewide Elective Executive Office

Iowa has never elected a woman as Governor. However, in the past 20 years, two women have run for Governor in Iowa—both against former Governor Terry Branstad (R). Roxanne Conlin (D) ran in an open race against Branstad in 1982 and received 47 percent of the vote. Bonnie J. Campbell (D) ran against the incumbent Gov. Branstad in 1994 and received 42 percent of the vote (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2000).

Although Iowa has never elected a woman as governor, three women have served as Lieutenant Governor—Jo Ann Zimmerman (D) from 1987 to 1990, Joy Corning (R) from 1991 to 1998, and Sally Pederson (D), who has served since 1999. They are among the eleven Iowa women who have served in statewide elective executive offices throughout the state's history. The first woman elected to statewide office in Iowa was May E. Francis (R), who served as Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1923 to 1926. Others serving as Superintendents of Public Instruction were Agnes Samuelson (1927-1938) and Jessie M. Parker (1939-1954). Three Iowa women have served as Secretary of State—Ola Miller (D) from 1933 to 1937, Mary Jane Odell (R) from 1980 to 1986, and Elaine Baxter (D) from 1987 to 1995. Miller died in office, and Odell was appointed to fill a vacancy and was subsequently elected to a full term. Bonnie Campbell (D) served as Attorney General from 1991 to 1995. Patty Judge (D) was elected as Secretary of Agriculture in 1999 (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2002a).

## Iowa Legislature

The 34 women who are serving in the Iowa Legislature as of spring 2002 comprise 22.7 percent of its membership, which gives Iowa the rank of 29 out of the 50 states. Nationally, 1,681 women hold 22.6 percent of the 7,424 state legislative seats as of spring 2002 (see Table 4.3). In the Iowa Senate, eleven of 50 members (22.0 percent) are women—seven Republicans and four Democrats. In the Iowa House, 23 of 100 members (23.0 percent) are women—13 Democrats and ten Republicans (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2002c). Twenty years ago, in 1981, the Iowa Legislature was comprised of 18 women members—or 12 percent—which gave Iowa a ranking of 17th among the states, its best showing (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2002a). Although Iowa has almost doubled the number

of women legislators in 20 years, its national ranking has fallen, indicating that other states are making more progress in electing women to the state house.

Mary Kramer (R) is one of seven women nationwide serving as Senate President or Senate President Pro Tempore as of December 2001 (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2001). She has served as president of the Iowa Senate since 1997. No other woman in Iowa has ever served as Senate President or Speaker of the House of Representatives (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2001). Currently, seven women serve as Speakers or Speakers Pro Tempore of the House in their state legislatures. Historically, a total of 13 women have served as Senate Presidents and 22 as Speakers of the House in their state legislatures (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2001).

## County Government

Iowa's record of electing women to county office surpasses its record of electing women to national and state office. For example, in 2000, women held 36 percent of all county elected offices in Iowa. The percentage of women in county elected office has continually increased since 1970, when 21 percent of Iowa county officials were women (Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, 2001).

## Women Judges

Although an increasing number of Iowa women are earning law degrees, few serve as judges. In 2000, women comprised 17.8 percent of the state's judiciary positions, compared to 6 percent in 1990. According to the Iowa Judicial Branch, from 1990 to 2000, women magistrate judges increased from seven to 28 (21 percent of total), associate juvenile/probate judges from two to six (46 percent of total), district associate judges from five to twelve (22 percent of total), district court judges from four to eleven (nine percent of total), court of appeals judges from one

to three (33 percent of total), and supreme court justices from one to two (25 percent of total). None of the state's senior judges were women in 1990 or 2000 (Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, 2001).

## City Government

According to the Iowa League of Cities, currently 97 of the state's 949 mayors—or 10 percent—are women. The largest Iowa cities with women mayors are: Bettendorf (population 31,275), Ann Hutchinson; Clinton (29,992), LaMetta K. Wynn; Chariton (4,573), Mary L Stierwalt; Hampton (4,218), Pat Sackville; and Emmetsburg (3,458), Myrna Hedding (Iowa League of Cities, 2002). Information about the number of women members of city councils in Iowa was not available from any of the organizations contacted.

## Boards of Education

According to the Iowa Association of School Boards, about 70 percent of the state's kindergarten-twelfth grade school districts have five-member boards and 30 percent have seven member boards. In the 2000-01 school year, 2,096 Iowans—656 (31 percent) women and 1,440 (69 percent) men—served on the state's 374 public school boards (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2002). Of the state's approximate 330 school superintendents, only 25 (8 percent) are women (*The Ames Tribune*, 2002).

## 2002 Election

Two Iowa women ran for seats in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2002. Ann Hutchinson (D), the mayor of Bettendorf, won the District 1 primary on June 4 against two male opponents for the Democratic nomination. She will face incumbent Jim Nussle (R) in the general election. In District 2, Cedar Rapids pediatrician Dr. Julie Anne Thomas (D) did not have a primary opponent. She will face incumbent Jim Leach (R) in the general election.

Two women ran for re-election to statewide executive office in 2002—Sally Pederson (D) as Lieutenant Governor and Patty Judge (D) as Secretary of Agriculture. A record 69 women filed to run for seats in the Iowa Legislature—15 for the Senate and 54 for the House. Of the 29 women with primary races on June 4, 14 won and 15 lost—including 6 women who lost to another woman. A record 54 women—up 29% from the 42 women who ran in 2000—ran for seats in the Iowa Legislature in 2002; 11 in races for the Senate and 43 for the House.

Some of the success in encouraging women to run in Iowa in 2002 can be attributed to two grassroots organizations—the Iowa Congressional Committee and Iowa’s Women in Public Policy (WIPP). The Iowa Congressional Committee met over the course of two years to identify and encourage women to run for the U.S. Congress. WIPP was founded in May 2001 to bring more Iowa women into the political arena and to improve their representation in public office. WIPP has sponsored several events in the past year—including four receptions and a luncheon for women political leaders and potential candidates, a “Candidates and Campaigns” workshop attended by 75 women interested in running for public office, and two charity golf open/dinner events with guest speakers Heidi Heitkamp, who ran for Governor of North Dakota in 2000, in 2001 and retired Lt. General Claudia Kennedy in 2002.

Of the women who filed for political office in 2002, 30 attended WIPP events and a number of them indicated that these activities encouraged them to run (Iowa’s Women in Public Policy, 2002). The group’s activities—which were covered by seven newspapers, four newsletters, four television stations, and one radio station—also raised awareness for the need to increase women’s representation in political office in Iowa.

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