The Status of Women in Utah Politics: Congress, Statewide Executive Offices, and the State Legislature

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A host of national reports and media (e.g., Chu & Posner, 2013) in the past decade have ranked Utah last or near last in terms of women being in positions of decision making and leadership, and women in Utah politics is foundational to this issue. Raising awareness of the reasons why this is the case is critical to social change efforts focused on improving the representation of women in political roles within the state. Women serving in public office within the state of Utah have positive implications for women's health. Research shows that when more women are involved in decision-making roles related to public policy, families and societies benefit (Madsen, 2015). Female legislators tend to extend greater support than their male counterparts toward legislation focused on health, education, and social programs that tend to positively impact families and society. This report compares current Utah data to national trends in terms of women in Utah politics, with a specific focus on Congress, state executive offices, and state legislatures. Tracking progress through updated status reports is an important way to help decision makers and other influencers clarify what is working and to determine and refine best steps moving forward.

Congress

National : The most current 2019 data show that, at the national level, women hold 23.7% of seats (127 of 535) in the 116th U.S. Congress (House and Senate) (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2019), which is an increase from the 113th U.S. Congress (CAWP, 2012). With 25% of U.S. Senate seats held by women, the total number of women serving in the chamber is at a record high (25 of 100) (CAWP, 2019). Of the 25 female Senators, eight are Republican. In addition, 23.4% (102 of 435) of the seats in the U.S. House of Representatives—up from 79 seats reported in 2014 (Madsen & Backus, 2014)—are now held by women, with 87.2% of them being Democrat (89 D, 13 R) (CAWP, 2019). It is interesting to note that of the 83 women who served in the House in 2017, two defeated incumbents in their district, eight won open seats, and 73 were re-elected as incumbents (CAWP, 2016d).

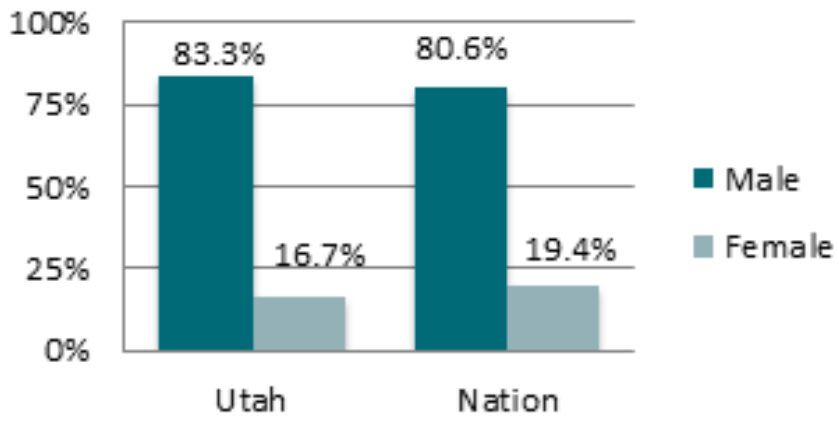
Four women non-voting delegates (2D, 2R) represent American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands in the United States House of Representatives. (CAWP, 2019). New Hampshire, Washington, Nevada, and California continue to have both of their Senate seats filled by women. Vermont is the only state that has yet to elect a woman to serve in; Mississippi recently dropped from the list, electing its first female senator in 2018. In addition, the 116th

Congress has the highest count of women of color in United States history, with 36 Democrats and three Republicans, a total of 39 seats (CAWP, 2019a). In addition, Washington elected the first Indian American Woman to the Congress in 2016.

Historically, the first woman in the House, Jeannette Rankin, a Montana Republican, was elected in 1917. However, it was not until 1978 that a woman, Nancy Landon Kassebaum (R-KS), was elected to the Senate without having previously filled an unexpired term (CAWP, 2016a). Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) became the first female Speaker of the House in 2007.

Utah: Utah has six seats in its national delegation (two senators and four representatives). Congresswoman Mia Love was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2014, taking office in 2015, which put Utah at 16.7% (1 of 6) of its congressional delegation as female. Love, who was the first Utah woman elected to Congress since 1995, was not re-elected in 2018, so at this time there are no women in Utah's national delegation. Figure 1 compares Utah with the national average in terms of congressional seats by gender as of 2016.

Figure 1: U.S. Congress by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



Prior to Congresswoman Love's victory, only three Utah women had served in Congress since its statehood: Rep. Reva Z. Beck Bosone (1949–1953), Rep. Karen Shepherd (1993–1995), and Rep. Enid Greene Waldholtz Mickelsen (1995–1997) (CAWP, n.d.). Two of the three served one two-year term. Utah has never elected a woman to serve in the U.S. Senate; in 2018, Jenny Wilson ran as the Democratic candidate but was not elected. However, in electing former Rep. Love to its congressional delegation, the state has made some progress since the 2014 Utah Women & Leadership Research & Policy Brief (Madsen, & Backus, 2014).

Statewide Executive Offices

National

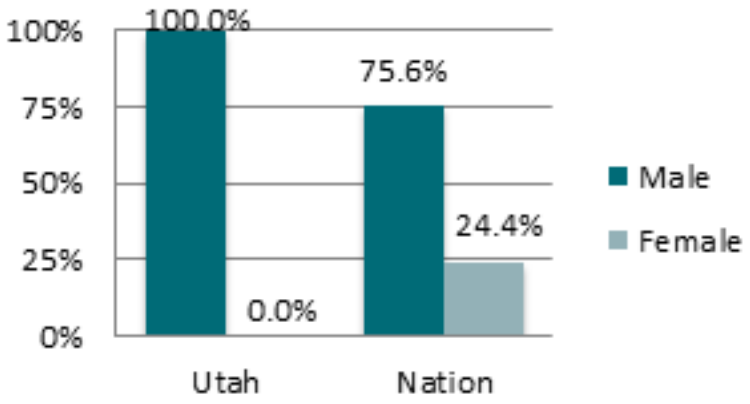
At the national level, 2019 data show that women now hold 27.6% (86 of 312) of the statewide elective executive offices (SEO) (46 D, 38 R) (CAWP, 2016e), having picked up additional seats since 2014 (Madsen & Backus, 2014). The six most often discussed SEOs include the positions of governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, state treasurer, attorney general, and state auditor. As of May 2019, 44 women (26 D, 18 R) have served as governors in 30 states (CAWP, 2016c). Of these female governors, 30 were elected in their own right, three replaced their husbands, and 11 became governor by constitutional succession, with

six of them subsequently winning a full term. The largest number of women serving as governors at the same time is nine, which occurred in 2004 and 2007 and has occurred again in 2019. In 2019, nine states have female governors (Oregon, New Mexico, Alabama, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, South Dakota, and Rhode Island), six Democrats and three Republicans (Fairygodboss), while 15 states have females serving as lieutenant governors (9 D, 6 R) (CAWP, 2016e). As of May 2019, seven of the 50 (14%) state attorney general seats in the nation were held by women (5 D, 2 R) (CAWP, 2016e). Finally, 11 (22%) secretary of state seats, ten (20%) state treasurer seats, and ten (20%) state auditor seats in the country currently are held by women (CAWP, 2016e). All of these numbers reflect increases from the national findings reported in 2014 (Madsen & Backus, 2014).

Utah

There are currently no women serving in Utah statewide executive offices (SEO) (CAWP, 2016f). Figure 2 compares Utah with the national average in terms of SEO by gender (national data as of 2016).

Figure 2: Statewide Executive Office Seats by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



Throughout its history, Utah has never elected a woman to serve as governor. However, Utah has had one female governor and lieutenant governor. Olene Walker served as lieutenant governor to Mike Leavitt from 1993–2003, when he was nominated by the Bush Administration to serve as the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Walker was then appointed as governor to serve until the end of Leavitt's term from 2003–2005. She sought re-election but did not win the Republican nomination at convention. The only other woman to serve in a Utah statewide officer role was Jan Graham (D), who was attorney general from 1993–2001 (CAWP, n.d.).

State Legislatures

National : According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 1,875women are serving in state legislatures in 2019 (25.4%) (NCSL, 2019). Overall, the percentage of women in state legislatures has increased through the years as follows:

1971: 4.5%
1981: 12.1%
1991: 18.3%
2001: 22.4%
2011: 23.7%
2013: 24.2%
2015: 24.5 % (CAWP, 2016h)
2017: 24.8% (CAWP, 2016b)
2018: 25.4% (NCSL)

In 2016, Arizona and Vermont set the national highs for women in their legislatures (40.0% and 39.4%, respectively), followed by Nevada (38.1%), Colorado (38.0%), Washington (37.4%), Illinois (35.0%), Maine (33.9), Maryland (33.5%), Oregon (33.3%), and Rhode Island (31.9%). In the past, Utah was among the ten states with the lowest percentages, but with 24.0% women in the legislature, this no longer is the case. (CAWP, n.d.).

It is also interesting to note that, nationally, Democrats make up 62.0% of the total women elected in legislatures, with elected Republican women making up 37.3% and the remaining 1% of seats being held by independents, non-partisans, and other parties.

According to a CAWP report from 10 years ago (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2009), as well as more recent CAWP data, the numbers of Democratic women legislators has continued to increase, while the numbers of female Republican legislators declined since 1981.

Utah

Table 1 (CAWP, n.d.) illustrates the Utah state legislature numbers and percentages since 1971 by party and gender. It is interesting to note that in 1971, 8.2% of Utah state legislators were women, while at the national level only 4.5% of seats were held by women. By 1981 Utah had slipped below the national average. In Utah, data also show that female legislators are more likely to be Democrat than Republican.

Table 1: Female Utah State Legislators

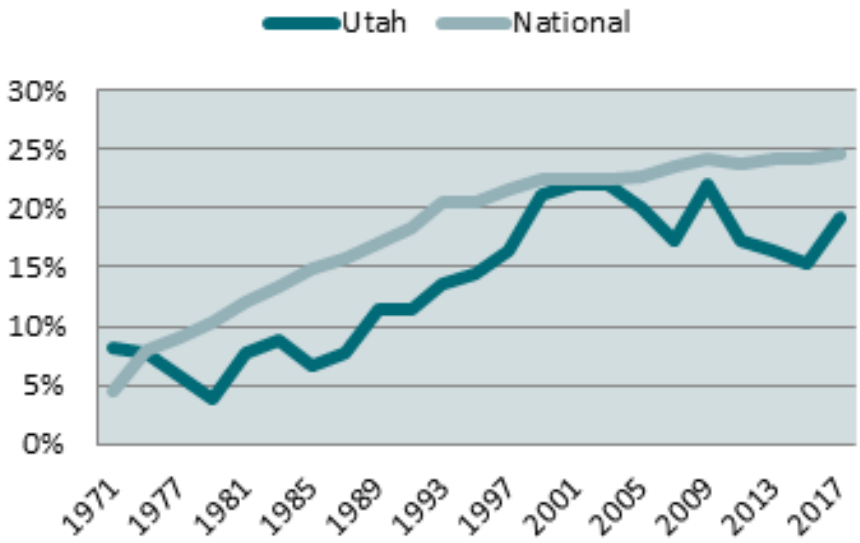
Year	Democrat	Republican	Total	%	Rank
1971	7	1	8	8.2	-
1981	4	4	8	7.7	36
1991	6	6	12	11.5	40
2001	12	11	23	22.1	26
2011	12	6	18	17.3	43
2013	11	6	17	16.3	46
2015	10	6	16	15.4	44
2017	12	9	20	20.2	35
2019	16	9	25	24.0	36

The total number of women serving in Utah's state legislature had actually been decreasing since 2009, until 2017. The percentage of women serving in the legislature increased by 3.8% between the 2016 and 2017 legislative sessions (see Figure 4 for a comparison of this national versus Utah trend).

In 2014, six states had women serving as Speakers of their House of Representatives, with Utah's own late Becky Lockhart accounting for one of them (Madsen & Backus, 2014). In 2019, that number has increased to seven (CAWP, 2019b). In terms of 2019 legislative leadership in Utah, of the 12 leadership positions in the House of Representatives, three are held by women, all Democrats: Minority Whip Carol Spackman Moss, Minority Assistant Whip Angela Romero and Minority Caucus Manager Karen Kwan (Utah House of Representatives, 2019). The Senate has 11 leadership positions, four of which are held by women: Assistant Majority Whip Ann Millner (R), Minority Leader Karen Mayne (D), Minority Whip Luz Escamilla, and Assistant Minority Whip Jani Iwamoto (Utah Senate, 2019).

Implications

Figure 4: Female State Legislature Trends



These data support the notion that we do need more women to run for office at the highest levels in state and national government. Understanding why women do not run is critical to this conversation and can help leaders design more effective interventions to increase the percentage of women serving in these important public roles. We offer a few explanations. First, societal attitudes about electing women are not as much a deterrent as they were in past years, but research tells us that gender socialization still plays a substantial role in whether individuals "self-identify with politics and express ambition to seek elected office" (Lawless & Fox, 2004). Role socialization starts during childhood and extends into adolescence and adulthood.

Second, women's aspirations and motivations for public office are typically lower than those of men. However, research from the past decade continues to confirm that women are as effective and successful in leadership positions as men (Zenger Folkman, 2012). Yet, studies (e.g., Madsen, 2008a; Madsen, 2008b) have found that women are more likely than men to struggle with envisioning themselves as leaders (leadership identity). If women do not see themselves as leaders and/or do not believe they can be leaders, they will not step forward to do so. Even though men and women often have the same qualifications, one study (Lawless & Fox, 2005) reported that women are significantly less likely than men to view themselves as qualified to run for office. Women often have different motivations to lead as well (leadership purpose). They focus, to a larger extent, on their desires to help the community, to be a voice for those who cannot speak, and to make a difference in people's lives. If they do not see a leadership role as giving them an opportunity to do these things (or do not understand that a particular role may offer these opportunities), they most likely will not step forward to run.

Third, research continues to confirm that more women will run for office if others suggest they do so and provide support and encouragement. In 2008, the Center for American Women and Politics conducted a national study (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009), attempting to understand the reasons women decided to run for public office. Researchers found that women and men seek state legislative office for somewhat different reasons. They asked, "Other than your desire to serve the public, what was the single most important reason that you decided to seek the office you now hold?" Of the six primary replies, women responded significantly higher than men to the following: 1) "a party leader or an elected official asked me to run or serve"; and 2) "my concern about one or more specific political issues." Men responded significantly higher to

the following two reasons: 1) "my longstanding desire to be involved in politics"; and 2) "my desire to change the way government works."

One study (Lawless & Fox, 2005) found that a key factor in explaining the gender gap was that women were far less likely than men to be encouraged to run for office. Interestingly, other researchers (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009) discovered that women were actually more likely than men to run for their first elected office because they were recruited. This was the primary response in one survey where participants were asked about their decisions to seek office. The bottom line is this: women are encouraged less often to run for office, but when they are encouraged and/or recruited, they are more likely to step forward.

Fourth, gender socialization is typically unconscious, and girls and women are often socialized toward an "imposter syndrome" mentality, in which women do not feel they are qualified even when they may actually have more knowledge, skills, and abilities than their male counterparts (Guensburg, 2016). In addition, studies have found that women face a "double-bind"—they are expected to be compassionate, kind, competent, and strong (not tough), but when people believe leaders need to be "tough" to "do the job," then women do not "fit" a leader role (Phillips, 2016). Women struggle with feeling and being "authentic" within political environments because of pervasive social norms (Ngunjiri & Madsen, 2015).

Fifth, there are differences, both perceived and literal, in female candidates' treatment. Researchers (e.g., Guensburg, 2016) have found that women candidates experience widespread bias and are scrutinized for appearance and questioned about family responsibilities when men are not.

Sixth, national research shows that the "Good Old Boys Network" continues to have a stronghold in party politics, and Utah is no exception. Both conscious and unconscious biases continue to influence decision makers toward traditional practices, policies, and processes that keep women from running, networking, and succeeding if they do run. Yet, the evidence is clear (Madsen, 2015): Utah residents, groups, organizations, and communities will benefit from having both men and women serve together in elected public offices. Extensive research has found that the "tipping point" is 30%, which means that to obtain the benefits outlined in Madsen (2015), a leadership team, board, or political body, for example, needs to have at least 30% female representation. These are only six of many reasons that help answer the question related to why more women do not run for public office.

Although there has been some progress in the last few years, we encourage Utah leaders and residents to do more to implement and support these efforts. We also call upon the Utah women to step forward and better serve our communities by adding their important voices to govern and lead Utah and its municipalities and counties. In her introduction of the 1993 book, Women Legislators of Utah, 1896–1993, former Utah Representative Beverly White provided the following advice to Utah women: "We won't be hypocritical and say it will be easy. It won't. It takes time, energy, funds and determination to be elected to any political office but if you have resources to give either in education or experience, you should be willing to share them and give to the office you choose your loyalty and dedication. The rewards are further education for you and a satisfaction only you can understand and appreciate and a public that will be well served by the devotion of women who are giving of their time and talents to make this a better world in which to live" (Abbott & White, 1993, p. 3).

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