



When women (of every political persuasion) participate in government, Wyoming wins. Women are more supportive of legislation that address issues that affect women and children.¹² Women bring an important perspective to policy discussions (e.g., taxes on gendered products).³

“My male co-sponsors could not have been finer advocates, but a woman’s voice is different; a woman brings a different perspective: different thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs. If our democracy is to be truly representative, all our voices must be heard, and heard equally.”

*-Rev. Dr. Bernadine Craft,
Wyoming House of Representatives 2007-2013,
Wyoming Senate 2013-2017*

In 1869, Wyoming was the first state in the nation to recognize women’s right to vote and hold office.⁴ Almost three decades later, Estelle Reel became the first woman to hold a statewide elected office as superintendent of public instruction.⁵ Another eight years later, in 1902, Mary Godat Bellamy became the first woman elected to the Wyoming Legislature.⁶ According to 2019 Census Bureau estimates, 49% of the Wyoming population are women, yet women continue to be underrepresented in elected roles at the state and local levels.⁷

In the 2020 primary and general elections, 1,000 Wyoming women ran for some elected office.⁸ At the start of the legislative session in 2021, women held just 18% of the 90

seats in the state legislature.⁹ In addition to representation at the state level, women are also underrepresented in local offices. Only one in five county commissioners are women, and six of Wyoming’s 23 counties do not have a single female commissioner.

Wyoming’s first female governor, Nellie Tayloe Ross, served in 1925 following a special election after the death of her husband. Wyoming has not had a female governor in the nearly 100 years since. There are five total statewide elected executive positions (State Auditor, Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Treasurer, Secretary of State, and Governor). Since Estelle won in 1894, only 23 women have since been in a statewide elected executive role.¹⁰

In 1995, Barbara Cubin became the first woman to represent Wyoming in the United States Congress. She is one of only three women, Cynthia Lummis (2009-2016) and Liz Cheney (2017-present), from Wyoming to hold a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.¹¹ When sworn in on January 3rd, 2021, Cynthia Lummis became the first woman to represent the state of Wyoming in the U.S. Senate.

Over 100 years after Mary Godat Bellamy was elected, Wyoming has the sixth lowest percent of women serving in the state legislature with just 16 of the 90 (18%) legislators being women.¹² Wyoming outperformed the nation in female representation from the late 1970s until the mid-1990s.¹³ However, since then, Wyoming has seen the percentage of women in the state legislature drop substantially, while the national average has risen.¹⁴

Why are Women Underrepresented in Elected Roles?

A myriad of factors contribute to women's underrepresentation in elected office. Evidence suggests that the political opportunity structure and the absence of women in politically adjacent careers (e.g. law, business, and journalism) are associated with women's underrepresentation.¹⁵ Although the number of women in these professions has increased, the national percentage of women in political institutions is still small.¹⁶ Factors associated with the gender gap in politics include, but are not limited to, the following:

UNDER-RECRUITMENT AND THE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT

Women are under-recruited by political party leadership. This is driven by the belief that female candidates are less competitive, less confident, and more risk averse than their male counterparts.¹⁷ Women are less likely than men to be encouraged to run – by anyone.¹⁸

The experiences of high profile candidates like Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton have shaped women's perceptions of gender bias in the electoral arena. In one study, the majority of female potential candidates believed that Palin and Clinton were subjected to sexist media coverage, penalized for speaking with confidence, and that too much attention was paid to their appearance.¹⁹ This can also be true in the state legislature where women have to carefully navigate between appearing weak and appearing overly ambitious and aggressive in order to be heard.²⁰

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

- Women are responsible for the majority of unpaid childcare and household labor, making it difficult to participate in political campaigns.²¹ In an average week, women spend nine hours more than men engaged in primary childcare (child care done as the main activity -- bathing, feeding, playing) and 14 more hours than men

engaged in secondary child care (caring for children while simultaneously completing other tasks -- cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping).²² Additionally, women spend more hours per week completing household activities, household shopping, caring for adult family members, and helping non-household adults or the community.²³

- The structure of Wyoming's citizen legislature was not designed to include citizens who also do the majority of child rearing and household work for their families. For these Wyomingites, who cannot afford to be away from their families for long periods, long commute times and extreme weather conditions may discourage participation. Additionally, women —and men— who need to work year-round often cannot afford to take a leave of absence and a pay cut for the two or more months of legislative session.
- Wyoming's legislative salaries are among the lowest in the nation and are too low to cover legislator's basic expenses. Wyoming women earn just \$0.68 for every \$1 men earn,²⁴ leaving them with less discretionary income to supplement these low salaries. In addition, women spend fewer years in the workforce (often because they are primary caregivers for children and aging parents).^{25,26} Women, on average, live longer than men, spend fewer years working, earn less money, and need to save more for a longer retirement.²⁷
- Childcare services are not available in the state capitol building adding an additional burden to parents who wish to serve as elected officials.²⁸
- When women are not well represented in politics, it discourages other women from seeking out and participating in political platforms.²⁹

A Closer Look at Structural Barriers

HOURS SPENT PER WEEK ON UNPAID LABOR

Household Activities

Cooking, cleaning, lawn care, and household management



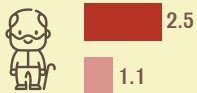
Household Shopping

Grocery shopping, banking, and accessing medical care



Caring for Adult Family Members

Activities to care for or help any adults in the household



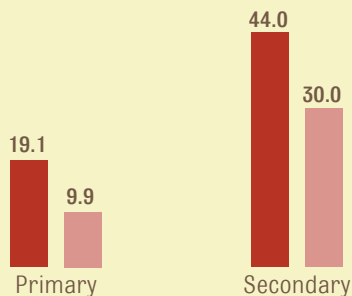
Helping Non Household Adults or the Community

Activities to care for or help any adults living outside household



Primary and Secondary Childcare

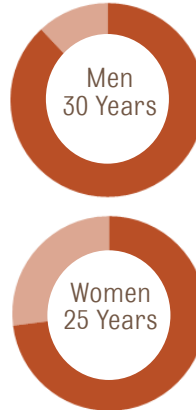
Childcare as the main activity (primary) or while simultaneously doing other activities (secondary)



Source: American Time Use Survey (2019)

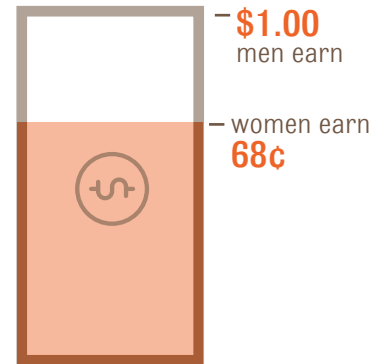
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

On average, women spend fewer years in the labor force between the ages of 18 and 52.



WAGE GAP

Women in Wyoming earn less than men. For every...



Source: Wyoming Department of Workforce Services

WEALTH GAP

Women who are caregivers for children or elderly parents have significantly less money saved for retirement than their male counterparts.

Parents

Women		Men	
Under 50	50+	Under 50	50+
\$24,317-\$36,000	\$61,866-\$87,100	\$45,369-\$89,636	\$135,741-\$240,000

Caregivers for Elderly Parents

Women		Men	
Under 50	50+	Under 50	50+
\$23,000	\$97,955	\$35,000	\$208,283

Source: National Institute on Retirement Security

How Can We Make Elected Roles More Accessible to Women?

RECOGNIZE AND ADDRESS STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

- Close the gender wage gap.
- Challenge the gendered division of unpaid household labor responsibilities³⁰ and implement policies that address unpaid caregiving responsibilities.
- Increase pay for legislators to be enough to cover family costs while away and add a reimbursement for childcare expenses for parents of children under 12.
- Change campaign finance laws to explicitly allow candidates to use campaign funds to cover child care.³¹

ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO BE MORE POLITICALLY INVOLVED

- Wyoming's elected, appointed and community business leaders should seek out women from diverse backgrounds, generations, and political views to engage in civil discussions to increase women's exposure to politics.
- Current and past elected officials are in an especially influential position to recommend women for elected roles and encourage them to run for office.
- Connect women you know who have the potential to serve in office to local, state, and national politicians to increase their exposure and expand their socio-political

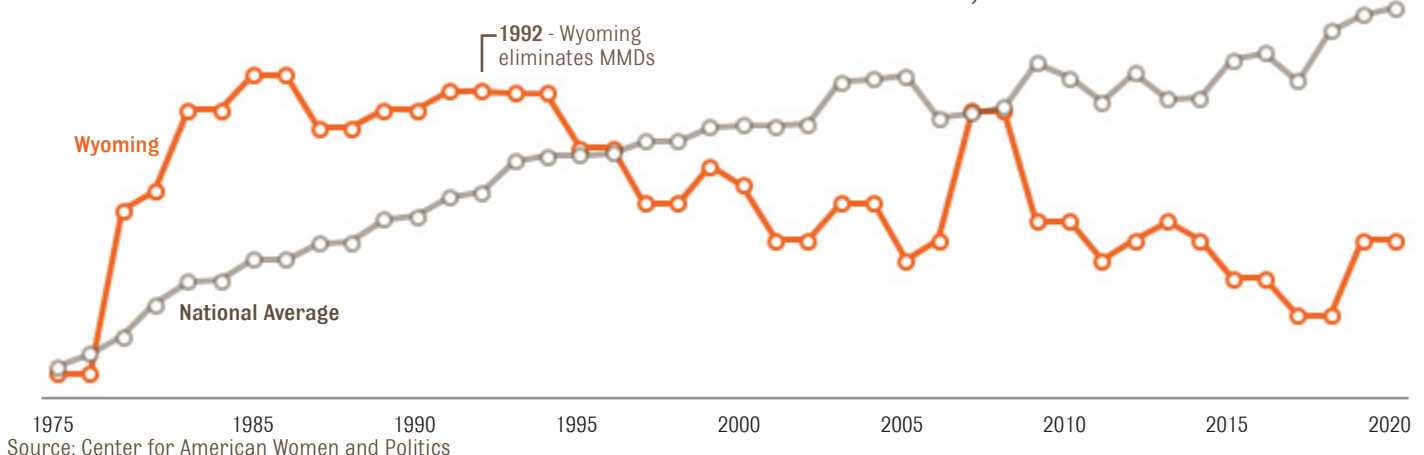
networks.

- Political donors can invest in women's campaigns and in organizations that work toward increasing representation in local and national leadership roles.
- Review the list of upcoming and current vacancies for boards and commissions and invite women to apply.

IMPLEMENT SYSTEMS THAT CONFER EQUAL ADVANTAGES TO ALL CANDIDATES

- In 1992, Wyoming eliminated multi-member districts (MMD) in favor of single-member districts (SMD).³² This change may have contributed to the trend in female legislators. The single-winner system has been shown to disadvantage women, particularly women from historically underrepresented groups, and has slowed progress toward gender parity.³³ MMDs where more than one candidate is elected to represent the entire district, are not, per se, unconstitutional and can influence both the supply and demand for female candidates.^{34,35} MMDs should be considered when creating redistricting plans.
- Ranked-choice systems, in which voters rank candidates by preferences on their ballots, increase opportunities for more diverse candidates to win elections, including more women.³⁶ Ranked-choice systems reduce the cost of running which is an obstacle to women running for office.³⁷

PERCENT OF WOMEN IN STATE LEGISLATURE, 1975-2020



Wyoming Women are Ready and Successful!

WYOMING WOMEN ARE READY TO RUN

While only 31% of Wyoming women have thought of running for an elected office,

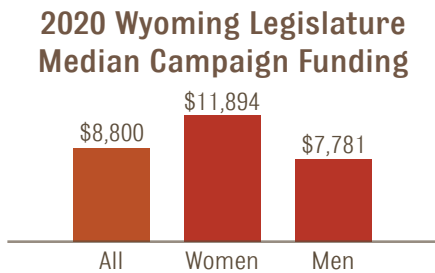


60% said they would not rule out running for office at some point in the future.³⁸



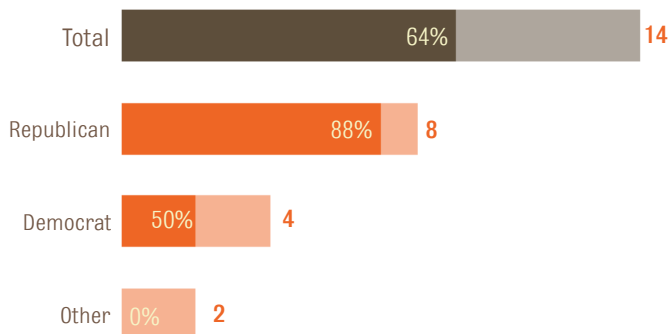
WYOMING WOMEN HAVE CAMPAIGN SUPPORT

In 2020, women running for state legislature had a higher median campaign funding than men. Although fewer women run for state legislature, when they do, they have financial support.³⁹



2020 COUNTY COMMISSION RESULTS

14 women ran in the general election. Percent of women who won, by political party:



WYOMING WOMEN ARE READY TO WIN

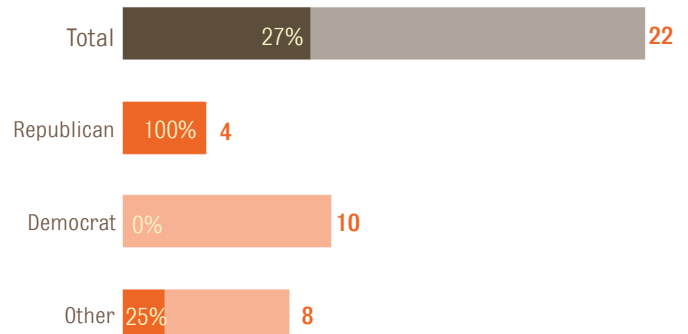
In 2020, 696 Wyoming women and 980 men ran in primary elections for state and local offices including school boards, district representatives, commissioners, town and city council, and state representatives.⁴⁰ Of the nearly one thousand women who ran, 538 (54%) won in the primary election, while 677 (69%) men won.⁴¹

Some roles are determined in the primaries (e.g., precinct committeewoman), and others do not have primaries. Because of these factors, the number of women competing in the general election does not equal the number of primary winners. In the 2020 general elections, 451 Wyoming women and 777 men ran for 877 open positions. Of those women, 317 won (70%). In comparison, 560 men (70%) who ran for office won.⁴²

In 2020, 18 women competed in primary races for county commissioner, and 10 (56%) won. Fourteen women ran for 37 available county commissioner positions in the general election, nine (64%) were successful. Thirty-four women ran in the primary races for state legislature, of these 22 (65%) won their party's nomination. In the 2020 general elections for state legislature, 22 women and 62 men contested 58 seats. Of the 22 female candidates, six (27%) won seats in the state legislature. Political party heavily impacted both county commissioner and state legislative election outcomes. Republican Candidates were the most successful.⁴³

2020 STATE LEGISLATURE RESULTS

22 women ran in the general election. Percent of women who won, by political party:



Endnotes

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The cover photo is the Historic Wyoming Supreme Court Chambers in the Wyoming Capitol building (renovated to reflect the original design in 2019). These chambers were the location where the Wyoming Suffrage Act of 1869, recognizing women's right to vote in Wyoming, was signed. Photo provided by the Wyoming Legislative Service Office.

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