

## **OPINION PIECE FROM ALLENTOWN MORNING CALL**

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### **Our View**

#### **Number of women in state government is embarrassing**

August 21, 2008

The percentage of women in appointed positions in state government has been rising, according to the Center for Women in Government & Civil Society at the University of Albany, SUNY. These are cabinet officials, department heads and key advisers. The study also tracked elected positions, including state legislatures and judges. Compared how women are faring among the 50 states, Pennsylvania is below the national average.

Women are governors in nine states, lieutenant governors in 16 states and chief justices in 17 states. In Pennsylvania, the lieutenant governor is Catherine Baker Knoll, the state treasurer is Barbara H. Hafer, and two associate justices on the Supreme Court are women. Eight of 15 Superior Court judges are women, and five of nine Commonwealth Court judges are women.

But in 2004, the percentage of women in appointed positions here was 29.2 percent, which ranked 33rd among the states. Massachusetts, with 50 percent, was first. New Hampshire, with 14 percent, was last. Furthermore, the number of women in this state's Legislature is well below the regional and national averages. In Pennsylvania, only 14.2 percent of the seats are held by women, while the national average is 22.5 percent -- a rate that certainly leaves room for gender-equality improvements.

Administrative and executive appointments are easier to gender-balance; all it takes is a governor with the will to appoint qualified women. Electing more women is more complex. One issue is that women here do not run for office as often as women in other states. Since this state pays legislators better than other states, men are not bashful about running. So, women face competition more here than in states that pay less.

A nonpartisan group in Pittsburgh, "Run, Baby, Run," is trying to recruit female legislative candidates. It meets with women and their campaign managers and schools them in fund-raising and using tools for successful campaigns, such as Web sites and mailing lists. Run, Baby, Run also reaches out to women on college campuses. Focusing on young people makes sense, if this state's numbers are to change.

Those who populate government ought to look like the population they serve -- namely, about 50 percent female. The hard part, at least as far as elected positions go, is that qualified women themselves must do all the work.

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## **RESPONSE FROM PWCF PRESIDENT MARTHA HARRIS:**

Allentown Morning Call  
Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Your August 21 editorial “Number of Women in State Government is Embarrassing” is right on point in a number of ways. We commend the editorial staff for bringing the gender imbalance in Harrisburg to the attention of your readers. An important correction to your editorial: Pennsylvania’s current treasurer is not Barbara Hafer, but rather Robin Weissman, who was appointed by Governor Rendell to fill the remaining term of former Treasurer Bob Casey who was elected to the US Senate in 2006.

The Pennsylvania Women’s Campaign Fund has been working since 1982 to support the election of women to the state House and Senate. We have financially supported candidates in all legislative elections for the past 26 years. PWCF is the only bipartisan statewide political action committee whose sole focus is to support the election of qualified women to the Pennsylvania legislature.

At the time PWCF was founded, women represented 4% of the 253 seats in the state House and Senate. Now, as your editorial confirms, women hold 14% of the seats – and Pennsylvania remains in the bottom tier of states with elected women in the state legislature.

There are many structural reasons for this imbalance – we have one of the largest and most well paid legislatures in the country – making it difficult for women to enter as few men drop out once they are elected. Our political parties often don’t encourage women to run, yet many polls show that voters prefer to elect women. Hillary Clinton carried Pennsylvania handily in the Democratic primary last April – yet we have never had a woman governor in Pennsylvania.

The only way to close this gap is to encourage more qualified women to seek political office, provide the financial resources and training that they need to compete and win. PWCF has sponsored a Winning Edge campaign school every year since 2003 – now 10% of the women currently in the Pennsylvania legislature are graduates of PWCF Campaign Schools. We welcome the continuing coverage of the Allentown Morning Call to keep the election of women foremost in voters’ minds.

Sincerely,

Martha Lester Harris  
President, PWCF