

PENNSYLVANIA
Center for Women and Politics

AT CHATHAM UNIVERSITY

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE
PENNSYLVANIA 2012 PROJECT
INAUGURAL CONFERENCE

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PENNSYLVANIA 2012 PROJECT

Western Pennsylvania Inaugural Conference

On Friday, September 23, the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics launched its Pennsylvania 2012 Project with an Inaugural Conference that brought together 240 community leaders from academia, government, corporate, and non-profit sectors, all dedicated to the mission of increasing the representation of women in public office.

The conference began with a presentation from a panel of experts comprised of: Senator Jay Costa (D-43); Barry Kauffman, Executive Director of Common Cause Pennsylvania; Senator Jane Earll (R-49); Mary Hughes, Director of The 2012 Project, who addressed the process and gendered implications of redistricting. Deborah Acklin, President and CEO of WQED Multimedia moderated the panel and accompanying question and answer session. The capstone to the program was a celebration of women in public leadership, which featured a keynote luncheon, featuring the 2011 Elsie Hillman Chair in Women and Politics, Governor Christine Todd Whitman.

A seminal goal of the conference was to develop a coalition of community leaders who are dedicated to identifying and recruiting women candidates. *(To participate as a coalition*

member, visit www.chatham.edu/pcwp/education/project2012/)

As a catalyst to this movement, the Center asked conference attendees to participate in small group, facilitated discussions at their tables around the intersecting themes of redistricting and women and politics. These discussions were held after the expert panel and elucidated strategies to employ in anticipation of the 2012 election cycle, as well as tactics to make sustainable increases in women's political representation in the Commonwealth.

This report summarizes the work conducted by the 26 strategy discussion groups. A trained facilitator and Chatham University student notetaker were placed with each discussion group to lead and record the discussion. All notes were recorded anonymously and are presented as such in the summary. Although we come from many different fields and areas of expertise there are some ideas that were shared across groups, which is reflected in the summary comments below. *Please note that the opinions expressed in this document are not those of the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics at Chatham University. Rather, the ideas summarized below have been collected anonymously from conference participants.*

Q: What networks of women in the private and non-profit sector produce strong women leaders?

Many delegates at the conference believed that women in the arts and healthcare (particularly nursing) are an untapped source of future candidates.

The Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics and The 2012 Project are especially interested in reaching out to women in underrepresented fields, such as: energy, science and technology, health, small business, finance, and international relations. If there are any upcoming professional meetings that the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics staff could attend to reach these women, please contact us at pcwp@chatham.edu or 412-365-2725.

In order to help identify women candidates, attend local events, especially when women are being honored, and suggest that they run. An example given by a group was the upcoming 40 Under 40 event sponsored by PUMP and *Pittsburgh Magazine*.

Q: How do we connect with women to make the case for public service?

Delegates tackled this question from multiple angles. Some suggested development at the high school and university level in an effort to spark genuine interest in public leadership amongst young women. (The Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics offers a program for university women, which addresses this: NEW Leadership™) Many also agreed that a bi-partisan approach to this type of education is ideal. While partisan politics has its role, in order to connect women to public service a bi-partisan approach would be most successful.

Politics is a form of public service. It is up to the conference delegates to share that insight with their respective organizations and members.

Q: Why don't women run in Pennsylvania?

Given that there are so few women presenting in office, some conference delegates believed that being a pioneer (as all women in PA politics are) could be a deterrent. Some additional reasons cited by conference participants are the following:

- As women tend to be the primary caregiver in the family they often do not have the time;
- Lack of privacy on the campaign trail;
- Negativity involved with campaigns;
- Politics is exclusive and intimidating in Pennsylvania;
- Women are unsure of how to get involved in party politics;
- The money required to campaign is a turnoff;
- Believe that one needs to already have that connection in order to participate.

One of the more common themes across many discussion groups was the political party system in Pennsylvania. Many delegates at the conference voiced frustration over the lack of transparency in how to get involved at the local level to the endorsement process. In an effort to educate women on party politics and help create a roadmap on how to get involved the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics (PCWP) is offering a one-day campaign school on Saturday, January 21, 2012. The Ready to Run™ is a national training program started out of the Center for American Women and Politics. The PCWP's training program will educate women on how to get involved in the political party system, if they want to, and overall demystify the process of running for office.

Q: What can we do to increase women's representation?

- Attend campaign trainings.
- We need to actively recruit women to run!
- Stay engaged at the local level.
- Pressure current elected officials (like the Governor) to appoint women to boards, commissions, etc. The process as stated by some seems unclear.
 - Write letters to the editor and the Governor.
 - Start a social media movement towards this end.

- Establish a network (social media as well) that you can call upon to support female candidates.
 - As part of that network in your region – meet and discuss possible open seats and weak challengers. Once that is done you can recruit a woman to run for that seat.
- Support female candidates financially.
- Advocate for campaign finance reform.
- Advocate for open primaries instead of the closed primary system that Pennsylvania currently has.
- Some delegates suggested term limits for incumbents.
- Another suggested change to the PA Constitution was to decrease the size of the state legislature.

Q: How can a woman be influential due to her connection to the community? (Below are thoughts on the profile of a viable candidate.)

- Be visible.
- Surround yourself with a diverse group of people you trust.
- Know in advance what you will and will not compromise on.
- Do not insulate – have people around you who will challenge you.
- Be a good listener.
- Be passionate about issues, but don't get burned out.

Please note that we could not include all comments and discussions into this document. The ideas represented in the report are the most common themes across all discussion groups. We hope that this document serves as a catalyst for continuing this discussion amongst community members.

The Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics at Chatham University would like to thank all of the conference participants for sharing their time, energy, and insight on the issue of women and politics in Pennsylvania. Thank you for joining in this movement.

If you were unable to attend the conference, but want to be a part of the Pennsylvania 2012 Project coalition, you can sign up using the online form linked here.





Note from the Executive Director

Over the past several years, women running for office around the country have made headlines, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, to name a few. But these high-profile women obscure a sad truth: the percentage of American women holding public office remains dismally low. Today, women hold 24 percent of state legislative offices; 21 percent of the statewide offices; 17 percent of US Senate seats; 17 percent of the seats in the US House of Representatives and 12 percent of governorships. Only 1 woman serves in Pennsylvania's congressional delegation, and only 17 percent of Pennsylvania's state legislative seats are held by women. The distance we must still travel to achieve parity in our government highlights the urgent need for more women to throw their hats in the ring.

Why women? Women need representation and full participation when laws are written and policies are shaped – when life-altering decisions are made and vast public resources are allocated. As the Washington DC saying goes, “If you're not at the table, you're probably on the menu.” Extensive research shows that the participation of women officeholders changes the agenda, procedures and policies set by legislatures as well the tone of debate. Women legislators make the governing process more transparent, and they have provided increased access to the legislature for groups that have traditionally been disadvantaged in American society.

In order to call attention to the paucity of women in Pennsylvania politics and inspire women to take a seat the table,

the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics (PCWP) has partnered with the national, non-partisan, 2012 Project – a campaign to increase the number of women in Congress and state legislatures by taking advantage of the once-in-a-decade opportunities of 2012. Following the 2010 census, every congressional and state legislative district in the country is being redrawn, creating new and open seats. **It's crucial that women work together to ensure that we achieve greater representation in the legislative bodies where vital policy decisions are being made.** Together the Centers have established the Pennsylvania 2012 Project.

The goals of The Pennsylvania 2012 Project are three-fold:

- Identify, educate, and inspire women to seek public office, and connect all candidates to resources within their states.
- Monitor and focus attention on redistricting to ensure fairness for incumbent women.
- Shine a spotlight on the paucity of women serving in elected office in the state and the value of having gender-balanced policymaking bodies.

As part of the Pennsylvania 2012 Project, the PCWP is offering a Ready to Run™ campaign training on Chatham's Shadyside campus on Saturday, January 21, 2012. We hope that you will join us and be part of the change in 2012!

For more information, or to get information about running for office, visit www.pcwp.org.

Questions? Contact Dana Brown, executive director, Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics at Chatham University at dbrown@chatham.edu.

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