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Ky. lags in electing women

By Brenna R. Kelly • bkelly@nky.com • August 22, 2009

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More women are being elected in Kentucky than in the past, but the state still lags behind others in electing women to public office, a new report shows.

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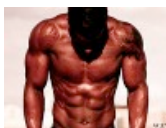
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The report issued by Secretary of State Trey Grayson shows that women experienced gains in the state senate, state house of representatives, Kentucky Court of Appeals, district court judge, county judge-executive, county clerk and county property valuation administrator positions.

The report, "Opening Doors of Opportunity: Empowering and Inspiring Kentucky Women to Public Service," is an update of studies in 2005 and 2007. The study shows that though women have made gains in most elected offices over the last two years, there was a decrease in number of circuit judges and circuit clerks.

And while there are eight female county judge-executives - double the number from 1995 - women represent only 7 percent of the 120 judge-executives in the state.

Kentucky has not had last female governor since Martha Layne Collins was elected in 1983.

"We've just not made much progress," said Kathy Groob, publisher of Elect Woman Magazine, a Web site that focuses on helping women win elected office. "When I was a young businesswoman we had our first woman governor ... I thought this is going to be great, we're going to have a lot of women run for office, and we've just been flat ever since."

The number of women in public office has also been stalled on the national level, said Groob, a Covington Democrat and former Fort Mitchell City Council member who started www.electwomen.com earlier this year.

"We're only making very small incremental gains in the numbers of women - in Congress it's 17 percent," she said. "People don't realize, they think we've seen Sarah Palin and Hillary

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Clinton and some top women that it's all OK now, but when you look behind the curtain and look at the numbers you'll see that it's not OK, we are so far off from some kind of balance."

The study showed that Kentucky rose to 45th in the nation from 49th over the last two years for the number of women holding office in the state legislature, according to the Center for American Women in Politics. Kentucky's House and Senate are now composed of 15 percent and 15.8 percent women, respectively.

The report also features sections about elected women including State Sen. Katie Stine, R-Southgate, the highest ranking woman in the Kentucky legislature, and State Auditor Crit Luallen, the only woman in Kentucky elected to statewide office.

The report also notes there are two female Supreme Court Justices, Lisbeth Hughes Abramson and Mary C. Noble, and two female jailers.

The report shows that Kentucky has made significant improvement since 1995 when a similar report was issued.

For instance, in 1995, only 10.9 percent of the judiciary was women in 1995 compared to 32.5 percent today. In the last 14 years, Kentucky has increased women in nearly every political office.

"Women bring a different style in the way they operate and the way they work together," said Groob, noting that in New Hampshire, where the state senate is 62 percent female and the house is over 40 percent female, the legislature is "getting things done in a more bipartisan, more cooperative manner."

Women make up about half of the U.S. population and 51 percent of the population in Kentucky.

"We need to have a voice of people looking at things from a woman's perspective and it's not always the soft, family-type issues," she said. "It's that we are a large citizen block that is underrepresented."

To see the report go to www.sos.ky.gov/secdesk/initiatives/women.htm.

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