



Do Women Run This Town?

By **Ann Sullivan**

First some facts: there are 17 women in the US Senate and 73 women serving in the US House. That's 17% of the Senators and 16% of the House. Yet, according to the President's numbers, women make up more than half of the workforce and 60% of those earning a bachelor's degree were women.

Perhaps the story that matches this low number of women in the Congress most is the percentage of women who are in executives in Fortune 500 companies and hold board seats in those companies. According to *Catalyst*, only 14% of these executives were women. Women hold only 16% of the board seats of Fortune 500 companies. Contrast that with women business owners. Women owned businesses make up over 1/3 of all businesses in the country. Yet, only a small number of those businesses have revenues over \$1 million.

These statistics point to the fact that while we represent the workforce in equal numbers to men, women do not hold the same positions. While we represent roughly 50% of the voters, we are woefully underrepresented in Congress. There are some clues about why this is the case. A study done by Women's Campaign Forum Foundation, shows that compared to men, only 31% of women make political contributions. Only 35% of women's contributions went to female Congressional candidates. The effect of the lack of giving, according to WCF Foundation, is that women who are running struggle to match their male counterparts' fundraising numbers. And in this environment, it is not possible to win unless the candidate has adequate financial resources to run.

Yet, when it comes to WIPP's agenda, the women in Congress are always the ones to step up to the plate. Who is leading the charge to change the WOSB procurement program? The women in the Senate and the women in the House. Who is championing an extension of the tax deductions important to women business owners? Senator Olympia Snowe and fourteen women in the Senate. Access to capital for small businesses? Senator Mary Landrieu is the champion. Who champions funding for Women Business Centers? Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson.

Let's just imagine that many more women were elected to Congress. Would the Congress change? One change for sure would be the amount of women testifying before Congress. WIPP's analysis of the hearings held in the last year in the House and Senate shows that 20% of all hearings with private sector witnesses had no women testifying. If they don't hear from us, I'm pretty sure decisions are being made without us. Would the partisan atmosphere change? A little known fact is that all the women in the Senate make an effort to go to dinner—Republicans and Democrats. I don't know about you, but it's pretty hard to call someone names that you have dinner with. It seems to me that many more women would move their families to Washington, if elected. That would dramatically change the atmosphere. When your kids play soccer with someone else's kids, it's a little tough to be hostile. In order to change the dynamic in Washington, we have to support women who are running for public office. Start now by contributing to candidates that support your concerns.

Do women run this town? Not yet. If we all band together, the possibilities are endless.