

After election, a mixed bag for women in NJ Legislature

This week's election in New Jersey saw a slight shift for women in the State Assembly. But overall, their numbers did not change much.

The Assembly Chambers at the Statehouse (Governor's Office/Tim Larsen)

Debbie Walsh of the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics says between Democrats and Republicans the net increase for the number of Assembly women was one.

"There was very little change in the total number of women who will be serving. I think the significant piece here is the party shift, that we have lost three Republican women in this election cycle. And so the party balance of the women is really shifting," Walsh said.

Before this election in New Jersey, women were pretty equally represented in both the Democratic and Republican caucus, about 32 or 33 percent in both caucuses. But as a result of this election, women on the Democratic side will increase their presence. They are up to now about 35 percent.

But on the Republican side, women have lost ground. So women will only be about a quarter of the Republican caucus in the Assembly side. Walsh says five new women were elected to the Assembly: four Democrats and one Republican.

Debbie Walsh says our state has been improving the mix of women in politics.

"The good news is, New Jersey has been moving up. we are now 11th in the nation. This election, we will remain unmoved in that. But we rank 11th in the nation for the percentage of women serving in our legislature," she said.

Walsh said we have been at 30 percent, and the all time high for us was about 31 percent.

"We are moving in the right direction, just very slowly," Walsh said.

But New Jersey and the nation still have a long way to go in balancing female political participation. Women account for less than 25 percent of women serving in state legislatures across the country. In Congress, Republican women make up only about 10 percent of the Republican caucus. On the Democratic side, it is about a third.

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