

EMILY's List and Women of Color in Office

While the number of women in the U.S. Congress has increased significantly since EMILY's List was founded, the number of women of color has risen even more sharply. In 1985, there was one woman of color in Congress; there are now 20. All but one of the women of color in Congress belongs to the Democratic Party.

The largest financial resource for minority women seeking federal office, EMILY's List has supported all of the Democratic women representatives of color currently serving in Congress. Through the 2006 cycle, EMILY's List raised over \$8.6 million dollars to help pro-choice Democratic women candidates of color run for political office. Over one-third of the 70 women EMILY's List has helped elect to Congress have been women of color.

Women of color have fought for decades to find a place in the U.S. Congress. In 1965, Rep. Patsy Mink, a Democrat from Hawaii, became the first woman of color and the first woman of Asian Pacific Islander descent to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1968, Rep. Shirley Chisholm, a Democrat from New York, became the first African American elected to Congress. Latinas were not represented in the U.S. Congress until the late 1980's. The first Latina elected to the House of Representatives was Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican from Florida, who was elected in 1989.

EMILY's List's work has been significant in helping to elect women of color to the U.S. Congress and has led to a number of firsts for these women. In 1992, Carol Moseley Braun became the first and only African American woman ever elected to the Senate. In the same year, Rep. Nydia Velazquez became the first Puerto Rican woman elected to Congress. In 1996, Rep. Julia Carson, a Democrat from Indiana, became the first African American woman elected from a district with a majority of white constituents.

While much progress has been made in the last two decades, women of color are still sorely underrepresented in Congress. To help achieve parity, the EMILY's List Political Opportunity Program (POP) is committed to ensuring that qualified and experienced candidates of color are prepared when opportunities arise to move up the political ladder and run for Congress.

Over the last two years, many POP women achieved new levels of leadership and recognition, including Karen Bass, who was recently named the next Speaker of the California Assembly. Bass will be the first African American woman to serve as Speaker of any state Assembly. POP first supported Karen Bass in 2004 when she was elected from Los Angeles's 47th district. POP's hard work and support also paid off in Rhode Island where Grace Diaz, the first Dominican female in U.S. history to win a statewide office, was elected to her second term as a state representative.

Of the 87 women serving in the 110th Congress, 20 are women of color (19 Democrats and one Republican). Here is a snapshot of the historic progress of these women in the U.S. Congress and of the work EMILY's List has done to help elect women of color to federal office:

- Thirty-one women of color have served in Congress, with 20 currently serving.
- Twenty-two African American women have served in Congress, with 11 currently serving.
- EMILY's List has supported every one of the 18 African American congresswomen elected since our inception: Barbara Lee, Juanita Millender McDonald, Maxine Waters, Diane Watson, and Laura Richardson of California; Corrine Brown and Carrie Meek of Florida; Cynthia McKinney and Denise Majette of Georgia; Yvette Clarke of New York; Julia Carson of Indiana; Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick of Michigan; Eva Clayton of North Carolina; Stephanie Tubbs Jones of Ohio; Sheila Jackson Lee and Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas; Gwen Moore of Wisconsin; and Barbara Rose-Collins of Michigan.
- All seven Latinas elected to Congress are currently in office.
- EMILY's List has supported all six Latina Democratic women serving in the U.S. House of Representatives: Lucille Roybal-Allard, Grace Napolitano, Linda Sanchez, Loretta Sanchez, and Hilda Solis of California; and Nydia Velazquez of New York.
- In 1992, EMILY's List helped Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois make history by becoming the first African American woman elected to the U.S. Senate.
- Four women of Asian Pacific Islander descent have been elected to Congress, with two currently serving.
- EMILY's List supported Rep. Patsy Mink, Rep. Mazie Hirono of Hawaii; and Rep. Doris Matsui of California, the only three Democratic female Asian Pacific Islanders to serve in Congress.