



PRESS release

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Study Finds Minorities and Women Are Underrepresented in Elected and Appointed Positions

Oregon Progress Board Releases Study on Race, Ethnicity and Gender Parity in Public Officials

Salem (OR)—Minorities and women continue to be underrepresented in both elected and appointed positions at the state and local level. So are the findings in a report released today by the Oregon Progress Board entitled *Elected and Appointed Officials in Oregon: A Report on Race, Ethnicity and Gender Parity*.

Every two years, the Oregon Progress Board conducts a survey of local elected and appointed officials to determine how closely the race, ethnicity and gender of Oregon's locally elected officials mirror the population as a whole. Information on statewide elected officials, state legislators and appointed officials is also collected.

“Oregon's population has become increasingly diverse over the last fifteen years and the Board is interested in how this impacts local communities and the state,” says Jeff Tryens, executive director of the Oregon Progress Board. “It is difficult to dispute the notion that more women and minorities in decision making positions would enhance the policy debate and raise our collective consciousness regarding the needs of underrepresented populations in Oregon.”

Oregon recently took a significant step forward in this regard by electing its first Hispanic to statewide elected office. Susan Castillo will soon become Oregon's superintendent of public instruction.

Locally Elected Positions

The study shows that in locally elected positions (city councilors, mayors, county commissioners), racial and ethnic minorities were significantly underrepresented. The most dramatic example is Hispanics who make up eight percent of Oregon's

total population yet comprise only 1.1 percent of all locally elected officials. A similar pattern of underrepresentation was found in other racial categories in locally elected positions:

- African Americans make up 1.6 percent of Oregon's population and hold only 0.3 percent of all locally elected positions.
- Asian Americans make up three percent of Oregon's population and hold only 0.3 percent of all locally elected positions.
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of Oregon's population and hold 0.8 percent of all locally elected positions.

When county officials are separated out and weighted in proportion to their county's percent of the state's overall population, Hispanic representation jumps from 2.5 percent to 8.5 percent. Native American representation increases from 0.8 percent to 3.9 percent. This is because the weighting assigns greater importance to larger urban counties that include more diverse county commissions.

State Elected and Appointed Positions

Racial and ethnic minorities' parity in state elected and appointed offices tended to better reflect Oregon's overall population, except for Hispanics who make up eight percent of Oregon's overall population but only comprise 2.9 percent state officials.

Gender Parity

The study also found that women lag behind their male counterparts in parity at both the state and local level. While women comprise 50.4 percent of Oregon's total population, they make up only 21.2 percent of all county commissioners and 29.8 percent of all mayors and city councilors.

Women fare better at the state level holding 37.5 percent of all elected and appointed positions. Nevertheless, they are still significantly underrepresented when compared to their overall proportion in Oregon's population. The report does note that underrepresentation by women in state elected offices is not unique to Oregon. When compared to other states, Oregon ranks 5th in percentage of state legislators who are women.

Detailed Findings

A PDF copy of this press release and the full report, including an analysis that weights for size of population represented, can be found at www.econ.state.or.us/opb/parity/racethn.htm.