

## Colorado's percentage of women lawmakers is tops in U.S.

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When B.J. Nikkel - known to her family as Betty June - was sworn in as a state representative last week, Colorado boosted its already impressive record of having the highest percentage of women lawmakers in the country.

Colorado held that distinction even before Nikkel, a Loveland Republican, took office, replacing a male lawmaker who had gone to the state Senate.

Forty percent of Colorado's lawmakers are women; nationally, the average is 24.2 percent.

"I just think it's great that Colorado is leading the way," said Katie Fischer Ziegler, a policy specialist with the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Ziegler said one reason Colorado might be leading the nation is that the White House Project, a national, nonpartisan organization that pushes to put women in leadership, has been "very active in Colorado."

"They did a lot of recruiting," she said.

What makes Colorado's record even more remarkable is that victories by Republican women have dwindled in recent elections. Nancy Spence of Centennial is the lone Republican woman in the Senate.

But eight GOP women serve in the House. "That's our farm team for the Senate, so maybe help is on the way," Spence said.

As Nikkel was sworn in, Rep. Ellen Roberts, R-Durango, beamed. "More women, more women," she said.

Nikkel said several Republican women told her how glad they were to have her expand their ranks.

But the real story is Democratic women. They outnumber Democratic men in the Senate and were able to win two leadership races expected to go to men. Half of the 38 Democrats in the House are women.

Their numbers are such that gender is almost a non-issue.

"It has taken a long time, but people are used to the idea that women can be in these positions," said Rep. Beth McCann, D-Denver, elected to the House in 2008.

"It's commonplace for us," said Speaker Terrance Carroll, D-Denver. "And I'm glad it is. I think having so many women lawmakers is a great thing."

No. 1 in the nation

Colorado has the highest percentage of women state lawmakers in the nation. Forty of its 100 lawmakers are women.

\* COLORADO SENATE

21 Democrats, 12 are women

14 Republicans, 1 is a woman

\* COLORADO HOUSE

38 Democrats, 19 are women

27 Republicans, 8 are women

\* STATES WITH HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN LAWMAKERS

Colorado, 40.0%

Vermont, 37.8%

New Hampshire, 37.3%

Minnesota, 34.8%

Hawaii, 32.9%

\* STATES WITH LOWEST PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN LAWMAKERS

South Carolina, 10.0%

Oklahoma, 11.4%

Alabama, 12.9%

Mississippi, 14.4%

Kentucky, 14.5%

Source: Colorado General Assembly; National Conference of State Legislatures