

Women in politics in South Carolina

By Donald L. Gordon

As South Carolina works to compete in the new global economy of the 21st century, we increasingly depend on the experiences, creativity and expertise of all people in our state. All South Carolinians, no matter their race, gender or cultural associations and preferences are important in helping our businesses, educational institutions and policy makers create the robust "economic engine" South Carolina must have in the new circumstances of a globalized marketplace.

Indeed, the talents of all South Carolinians, and the talents of other diverse people who may consider moving to the state, are crucial to our ability to attract high quality firms and to compete with Europe, China, India, Brazil and other emerging economies.

In this regard, it is important we know where we stand in the process of bringing all South Carolinians to the front lines of economic and social progress.

Beginning in this inaugural issue, *Inclusion* will feature a section on the metrics of diversity. How does South Carolina compare with other states — and to the country — in terms of our people and their participation in the social, policy making and economic arenas of our state? In this issue, we begin to look at gender and in particular, how well our

state does in "mainstreaming" the talents and experiences of South Carolina women.

One way of measuring gender diversity in South Carolina is by looking at the representation of women in our state's policy making arena. Where do we stand in terms of women in our state legislative bodies, our city and county councils and in mayoral offices?

The quick answer is that we don't do very well at all. In fact, South Carolina has the lowest percentage of women elected to the state House of Representatives and the state Senate of any state in the country.

As of August 2008, after the June primary elections in South Carolina, only 5.6% of all legislators in the state are women. There are no women in the state Senate and only 10 of 124 members of the state House are women.

The Southeast average of women in state legislature is 17.6%, almost three times greater, and the national average is almost four times greater at 23.7%. North Carolina has almost five times as many women in the state House and Senate compared to South Carolina.

Finally, when one compares women elected to city and county councils and mayoral offices across the state, women fare somewhat better. Still only 12% of South Carolina's mayors, 13% of our county council members

and 29% of our city council members are women.

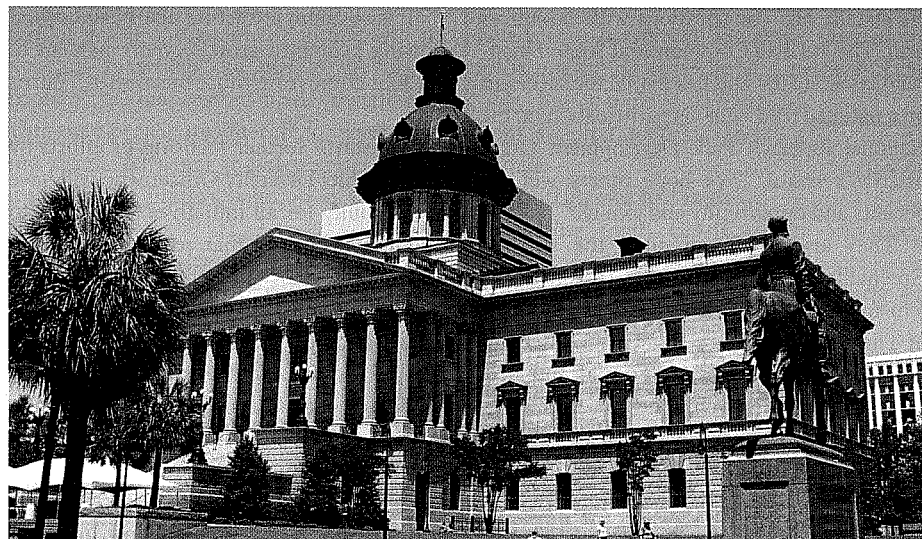
In a state where slightly more than 50% of our population is female, less than one-fourth of all elected officials are women. How will these numbers change over time? Will more of our talented women be elected to office in South Carolina? How do women fare in participation on state and business boards and how many CEOs, COOs and CFOs of major businesses in South Carolina are women? In future issues of *Inclusion*, the Riley Institute at Furman will provide data on these and other diversity metrics.

Information in this report was aggregated by the Riley Institute at Furman and YWCA Greenville from data collected by various state agencies and organizations, and from the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. The data is drawn from a larger study currently underway at the YWCA Greenville, which is tracking information on women in business, government and other institutions in South Carolina and from information developed in the Women and Politics Series of the Riley Institute at Furman. Principal researcher at the YWCA Greenville is Phyllis Martin and at The Riley Institute at Furman is Alexis Sprogis.

In the next issue, we will focus on the participation of African-Americans in the policy processes and economic structures of South Carolina. In future issues, we will expand these metric comparisons to include information on economic and political participation on a wide variety of peoples and groups. We will also track the progress of South Carolina's diverse peoples as participants in the economic development of our state. ■



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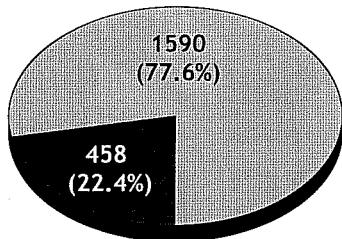


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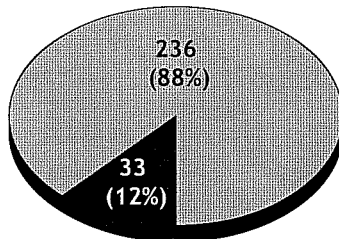
Women in South Carolina politics in 2008

These positions are members of the South Carolina House and Senate, mayors, city council members and county council members.

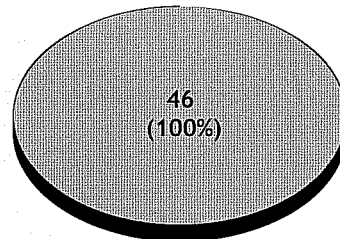
S.C. Women in Politics
458 Women in 2,048 positions



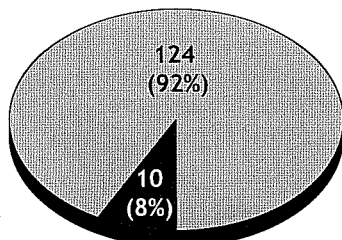
Mayors
33 Women in 269 positions



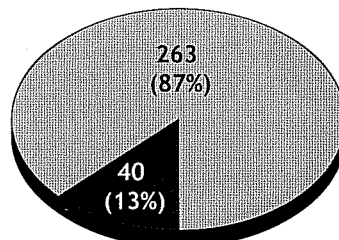
S.C. State Senate
0 Women in 46 positions



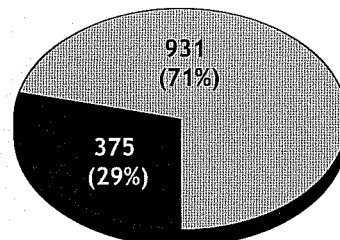
S.C. State Representatives
10 Women in 124 positions



County Councils
40 Women in 303 positions

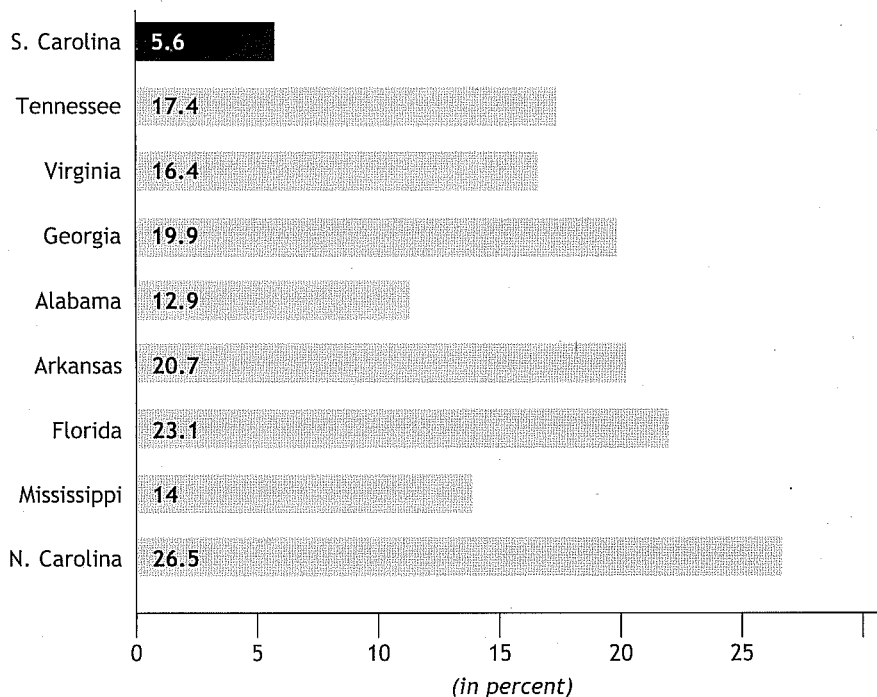


City Councils
375 Women in 1,306 positions



■ = WOMEN □ = MEN

Women in Southeastern State Legislatures in 2008



Women in State Legislatures

