

Miller

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numbers are staggering and, as we all learned from an early age, there is strength and safety in numbers.

The bright light being shone on this issue has included women staffers, cabinet members, and electeds on Capitol Hill and in state capitols from Juneau to Honolulu and all points between speaking candidly of everything from inappropriate touching and being chased around desks to unwanted advances and crude “invitations.”

In Washington, D.C., widespread sexual harassment in the halls of Congress was, it appears, an open secret. The problem was so bad that female lawmakers, staffers and interns kept and shared with one another an informal “creep list” of men to avoid.

That these behaviors had been allowed to continue unchecked for so long speaks to the inherent disadvantages faced by women in our political and governmental institutions. Strong, smart, accomplished women stood silent for decades because they lacked the sense of communion that comes with numbers and through which individual voices become a

chorus that demands to be heard.

The Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida seeks to influence these disparities at the local and regional level in three ways. First, our series of educational programs is designed to help women develop the skills they need to present themselves effectively and authoritatively in any political, civic, or professional setting. Second, women with political aspirations have the opportunity to explore and develop their personal brands and political identities by seeking advice, guidance, and mentorship from past and current women candidates and officeholders. Third, our Key Connections networking events bring together all of our members — those who have political aspirations and those who seek only to encourage and support those who do — to build the all-important sense of sorority and camaraderie that will allow more women to confidently and fearlessly step into the political arena.

As we look ahead, there is already much being made of the 2018 midterm elections. A bevy of offices at the local, regional, state, and national levels are up for election. Ideally, there would be at least one woman candidate in every race.

So far, women have pre-filed to run for U. S. Senate representing Florida

(seat currently held by Senator Bill Nelson); Florida governor, attorney general, and chief financial officer; Florida House District 1, First Judicial Circuit Court Group 7, Santa Rosa County Commission District 2, Escambia County School Board District 3, and Santa Rosa County School Board District 3. It is encouraging that so many women have pre-filed, but there are a number of races in which there currently are no announced women candidates.

Will the momentum of the “me too” movement result in 2018 being the next “Year of the Woman” in American politics? Only time will tell.

Hopefully, the Institute’s training, mentorship, camaraderie, and encouragement will inspire even more women to stand as candidates in 2018 and beyond, because it is only through achieving parity in elected representation and governmental appointments that the unique voice women bring to the political discourse can truly be heard.

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