

# Women in politics: ‘You can’t win if you don’t run’



## Your Turn

Gretchen Clarke  
Guest Columnist

In 1974 my grandmother, Winona Jones Knight, became the first woman elected to the city council in her Alabama community. Only recently did she tell me her stories of going door-to-door as a “nobody” wanting to make a difference. She also beat an incumbent. Sadly, she passed away a few weeks ago.

“You can’t win if you don’t run,” she would have said as she looked you sharp in the eye. If you were a woman with an issue who also wanted to make a difference, she would have added, “Why aren’t you running?”

A New York-based research group, CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance, found that wins or losses of political elections nationwide were

about the same for both genders. The gap lies in who is running for office. More men than women run year after year, the likely factor in men’s success rate. Simply put, their odds are better. How can you win if you don’t run?

Women consistently underestimate their abilities and think they are less qualified than men to run for office, so we aren’t getting on the ballot in the first place. Why? I am reminded of what Sheryl Sandberg said in her 2010 TED Talk, “Women are not making it to the top of any profession anywhere in the world. The numbers tell the story quite clearly. There are 190 heads of state — nine are women. Of all the people in parliament in the world, 13 percent are women.”

In September 2017 CUNY Institute published more recent findings. “In the United States, less than a quarter of federal and state elected officials are women: 19.4 percent of Congress and

24.6 percent of state legislatures. Despite an increasing awareness in the lack of women in elected office, experts estimate that at the current rate of progress, it will take nearly 500 years for women to reach fair representation in government.”

So why aren’t women running?

When asked, women seem to consider choices between professional success and personal fulfillment. These considerations translate into choosing one or the other, not both. Here is how we “consider” the question. “Well, if I run for office, it would be like juggling 17 fire batons at the same time, on one foot and blindfolded. And I don’t know enough about this bill or that issue. How can I do that and manage my responsibilities as a wife and mother? And for four years? I’m already exhausted just thinking about it.”

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