

The Status of Women in Utah Politics: A 2022 Update

Although Utah has a rich heritage of women’s involvement in voting, advocacy, and various types of political involvement, Utah has lagged behind most states in terms of women running for and serving in elected political roles for decades. To track progress, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) began reporting on the status of women in Utah politics in 2014, with updates in 2017, 2021, and now 2022. Although strides have been made in increasing the number of women serving in political roles in recent years, there is still work to be done. Research continues to confirm that when both men and women serve together in communities, counties, and states, all residents are better served and are more likely to thrive.¹ Overall, while Utah women have continually gained elected seats since 2014, Utah still ranks last in Wallethub’s “Best & Worst States for Women’s Equality”² (with four of 17 key indicators being focused on political empowerment) and 47th of 50 states on the Represent Women’s “Gender Parity Index,”³ which measures women’s political representation.

This report updates the research and policy brief titled “[The Status of Women in Utah Politics: A 2021 Update](#)” and provides both Utah and national data for the following seven areas: Congress, statewide executive offices, state legislatures, counties, mayors, city councils, and boards of education. The brief concludes with a summary of findings, mention of why more women do not run for public office, and links to related reports.

Congress

National

The most current 2022 data show that, at the national level, women hold 26.9% of seats (144 of 535) in the 117th US Congress.⁴ In the US Senate, 24.0% of the 100 seats (two more than last year) are held by women (16 D, 8 R).⁵ In the US House of Representatives, a record 27.6% (120 of 435, two more than last year) of seats are held by women, 75.2% of whom are Democrats (89 D, 31 R). Both seats gained were Republican,⁶ continuing the trend of record numbers of Republican women serving in the 117th US Congress.⁷

In the 117th Congress, 40 of the 50 states have at least one woman serving in Congress, leaving 10 states with no women serving in their congressional delegation (there were 11 such states in 2021); Utah is on this list.⁸ Also, four female delegates represent the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and Puerto Rico in the US House.⁹

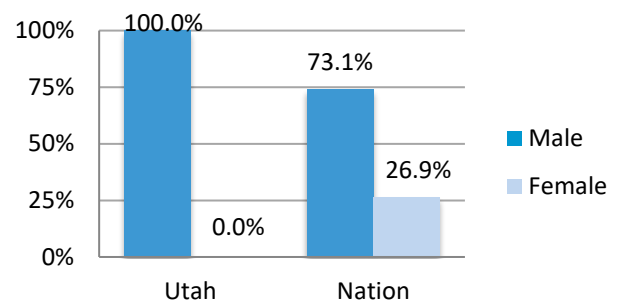
The number of states that have yet to elect a woman to serve in Congress is down to one (Vermont)¹⁰; Mississippi recently dropped from the list, electing its first female representative

in 2018.¹¹ In addition, the 117th Congress has one less woman of color since 2021, when we reported the highest count of women of color in US history; New Mexico’s US representative Debra Haaland was appointed Secretary of the Interior.¹² Currently, 45 Democrats and 5 Republicans are women of color. The first Korean-American woman was elected to Congress in 2020.¹³ Finally, in 2021 Kamala Harris began her term as the first woman elected vice president. She is the first Black and the first South Asian to hold that office.

Utah

Utah has six seats in its national delegation (two senators and four representatives). None of Utah’s congressional seats are currently held by women. The most recent woman in Utah’s congressional delegation was Mia Love, who served in the US House of Representatives from 2015 to 2019.¹⁴ Love was the first Utah woman elected to Congress since 1995. Figure 1 compares Utah with the national average in terms of congressional seats by gender.

Figure 1: US Congress by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



Only four Utah women have served in Congress since its statehood in 1896: Rep. Reva Z. Beck Bosone (1949–1953), Rep. Karen Shepherd (1993–1995), Rep. Enid Greene Waldholtz (1995–1997), and Rep. Mia Love (2015–2019).¹⁵ Two of the four served one two-year term. Utah has never elected a woman to serve in the US Senate, though two are currently vying for the senate seat currently held by Senator Mike Lee.¹⁶

Statewide Executive Offices

National

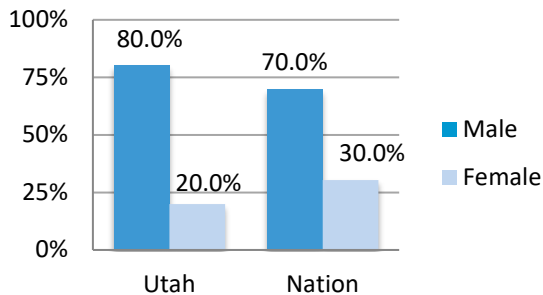
At the national level, 2021 data show that women now hold 30.0% (93 of 310) of the statewide executive offices (SEO) (52 D, 39 R, 2 NP), one less than in our last brief.¹⁷ At the close of 2021, 45 women (27 D, 18 R) had served as governors in 31 states.¹⁸ The highest number of women serving as governors at the same time is nine, which occurred in 2004, 2007, 2019, and in 2021.¹⁹ In 2021, nine states have female

governors: Alabama, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, and South Dakota (6 D 3 R), while 17 states have female lieutenant governors (10 D, 7 R).²⁰ In 2021, 8 of the 50 (16.0%) state attorney general seats in the US were held by women (5 D, 3 R). Finally, 12 (25.5%) secretary of state seats, 10 (20.8%) state treasurer seats, and 10 (20.8%) state auditor seats in the country are held by women.²¹

Utah

There is currently one woman serving in Utah Statewide Executive Office (SEO), as Deidre Henderson won the 2020 election for lieutenant governor. Of the five statewide offices up for election in 2020—governor/lieutenant governor, attorney general, state auditor, and state treasurer—both the Democrat and Republican parties nominated a female candidate for lieutenant governor. Figure 2 compares Utah with the national average in terms of SEO by gender.

Figure 2: Statewide Executive Office Seats by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



Throughout its history, Utah has never elected a woman to serve as governor. However, Utah has had one female governor and two lieutenant governors. Olene Walker served as lieutenant governor to Mike Leavitt from 1993–2003, until he was nominated to serve as the Secretary of the US Department of Health & Human Services. Walker was then appointed as governor to serve until the end of Leavitt’s term (2003–2005). The only other woman to serve in a Utah statewide officer role was Jan Graham (D), who was attorney general from 1993–2001.²²

State Legislatures

National

According to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers, a record-breaking 2,297 women are serving in state legislatures in 2022 (31.3%, 21 added since the last brief).²³ Overall, the percentage of women in state legislatures has increased through the years as follows:

1971: 4.5%	2013: 24.2%
1981: 12.1%	2015: 24.3%
1991: 18.3%	2017: 24.8%
2001: 22.4%	2020: 29.3%
2011: 23.7%	2022: 31.3%

By the end of 2021, Nevada and Oregon set the national highs for women in their legislatures (60.3% and 45.6%, respectively), followed by Colorado (45.0%), Arizona (44.4%), Rhode Island (44.2%), Maine (44.1%), New Mexico (43.8%), Maryland (42.6%), Vermont (42.2%), and Washington (41.5%). The ten states with the lowest percentages were ranked as follows: West Virginia (12.7%), Mississippi (15.5%), Tennessee (16.7%), Alabama (17.1%), South Carolina (17.6%), Wyoming (17.8%), Louisiana (18.8%), Oklahoma (20.8%), North Dakota (22.7%), and Arkansas (23.0%).²⁴ Notably, Utah is no longer included in the bottom 10. Interestingly, Democrats make up 66.0% of the total number of women elected in legislatures.

Utah

In 2020, Utah was ranked 32nd in the nation in terms of women serving in the state legislature, a ranking that fell to 39th in 2022.²⁵ In 2022, 17.2% of the Utah senators, or 5 of 29 (4 D, 1 R), and 29.3% of the House of Representatives, or 22 of 75 (12 D, 10 R), are female. Overall, in 2022, 26.0% (27 of 104) of Utah legislators are women, gaining two Republican seats from 2021.²⁶ Figure 3 compares Utah to the national average in terms of Utah state legislative seats by gender.

Figure 3: State Legislative Seats by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)

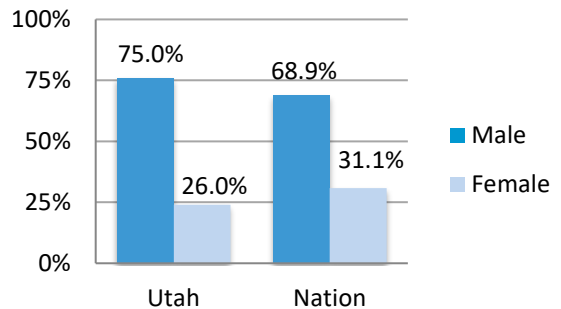


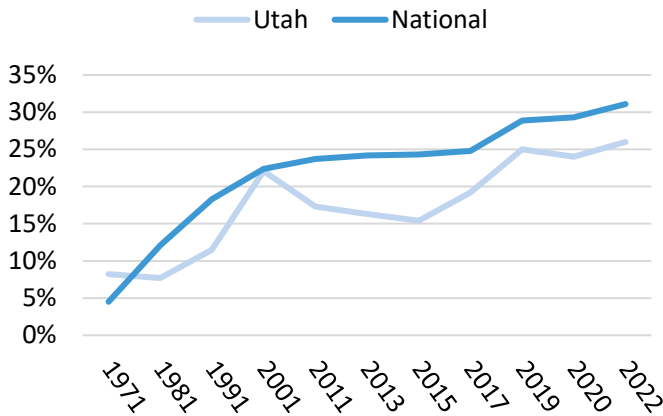
Table 1 illustrates the Utah state legislature numbers and percentages since 1971 by party and gender. Interestingly, in 1971, 8.2% of Utah state legislators were women, while only 4.5% of seats were held by women nationally. By 1981, Utah had slipped below the national average. In Utah, female legislators are more likely to be Democrat than Republican.

Table 1: Female Utah State Legislators²⁷

Year	Democrat	Republican	Total	%	Rank
1971	7	1	8	8.2	-
1981	4	4	8	7.7	36
1991	6	6	12	11.5	40
2001	12	11	23	22.1	26
2011	12	6	18	17.3	43
2013	11	6	17	16.3	46
2015	10	6	16	15.4	44
2017	12	8	20	19.2	35
2019	16	10	26	25.0	35
2020	16	9	25	24.0	40
2022	16	11	27	26.0	39

The trendline for the share of women serving in Utah’s state legislature has steadily increased since 2015 (see Figure 4 for a comparison of this national versus Utah trend).

Figure 4: Female State Legislature Trends



As reported in the 2021 brief, seven states had women serving as Speakers of House of Representatives, which has not changed.²⁸ In terms of the 2021 leadership in Utah, of the 11 leadership positions in the House of Representatives, two are held by women Democrats: Minority Whip Karen Kwan, and Minority Assistant Whip Jennifer Dailey-Provost²⁹ (one less than 2021). The Senate also has 11 leadership positions, four of which are held by women (3 D, 1 R): Majority Whip Ann Millner, Minority Leader Karen Mayne, Minority Whip Luz Escamilla, and Assistant Minority Whip Jani Iwamoto.³⁰

Counties

County government also plays an important organizational role in the state. The National Associations of Counties (NACo) points out that counties deal heavily with transportation and infrastructure, community health, criminal justice, and public safety.³¹ In addition, counties oversee important community issues such as agriculture, workforce development, energy, land use, and education.³² Working with NACo’s research team, we were able to collect data from the most recent gender study they conducted of county elected officials in 2015. According to NACo, women made up 12.7% of county boards and just 7.8% of county executives. Interestingly, women held 38.2% of elected county row officer seats (e.g., clerk, auditor, treasurer, recorder, assessor, sheriff, controller, district attorney, register of wills, coroner). Overall, at least in 2015, women made up 24.8% of elected county positions nationally.³³

Utah

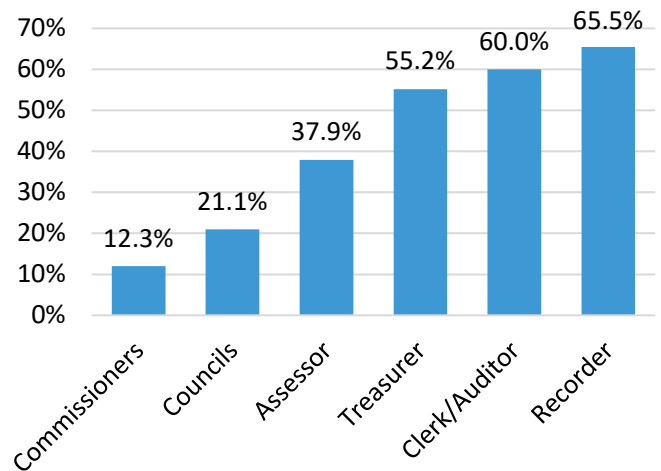
For Utah, we collected 2022 county data from links listed on the Utah Association of Counties website. Of the 29 counties in Utah, 23 have elected commissioners, while six have elected county councils (Cache, Morgan, Salt Lake, Summit, Tooele, and Wasatch). In addition, each county elects a clerk/auditor, treasurer, recorder, and assessor. In 2022, of the 73 county commissioners in Utah, 64 (87.8%) are men, and 9 (12.3%) are women, who serve in the counties of Beaver,

Davis, Duchesne, Grand, Iron, Millard, and Utah. Of the six county councils with a total of 38 seats, 30 (78.9%) council members are men, while 8 (21.1%) are women.

Additional elected county positions for 2022 revealed that, of the 35 county clerk/auditor seats, 21 (60.0%) are held by women and 14 (40.0%) by men. There are more than 29 positions, as some counties split the position of clerk and auditor, while most combine the two into one position. For county treasurer, 55.2% of seats are held by women. Women hold 19 of 29 (65.5%) county recorder seats, 11 of 29 (37.9%) county assessor seats, and only one county (Salt Lake) has a female sheriff (3.4%). Comparing county data to 2021 show that women gained 3 net seats in 2022.

Overall, the legislative bodies of county commissions and councils in Utah are overwhelmingly held by men (84.7%), while 54.7% of the predominately full-time elected positions of clerk/auditor, treasurer, recorder, and assessor are held by women. See Figure 5 for a summary of county offices held by Utah women in 2022.

Figure 5: County Seats Held by Utah Women



Because there are no recent national gender data available, we are unable to compare Utah to the nation in terms of county elected posts held by women. It is also important to note that our data did not include many of the male-dominated positions (e.g., attorney) often found in counties across the US because they are not found within Utah counties.

Mayors

Nation

According to the National Foundation for Women Legislators,³⁴ the number of women serving as mayors, city councilors, and county commissioners is slightly on the rise. As of May 2021, the percentage of female mayors of cities with a population of at least 30,000 increased to 25.1%, a 3.1% increase since 2019.³⁵ Since the last brief in 2021, Utah has 13 female mayors (up from 10 in 2021): Michelle G. Kaufusi (Provo), Dawn R. Ramsey (South Jordan), Kristie Steadman Overson (Taylorsville), Holly H. Daines (Logan), Debbie Winn (Tooele), Joy Petro (Layton), Kelly Bush (Kearns),

Tamara Tran (Kaysville), Erin Mendenhall (Salt Lake City), Kendalyn Harris (Bountiful), Karen Lang (West Valley City), Monica Zoltanski (Sandy), and Michele Randall (St. George). Among the 100 largest cities in the US, 31 had women mayors in 2021, an increase from 27 in 2019.³⁶ In 2019, 59 (20.8%) of the 284 US cities with a population over 100,000 had women mayors.³⁷

Utah

Of the 252 municipalities in Utah, 60 have women mayors (23.8%), reflecting a 6.5% increase from the 17.3% reported in 2021, and a 14.7% increase from 2017. Of the 60, 13 represent cities with populations of 30,000 or more (from 3 in 2017); in Utah, 34 cities have populations of that size, which means that 38.2% of mayors of those cities are women. Notably, 3 of the 4 Utah cities that have populations over 100,000 are led by women. Most female mayors in Utah serve cities with populations of 10,000 or less (see Table 2).

Table 2: Women Mayors in Utah by Population

Municipality Population	No. of Female Mayors	Total No. of Mayors	% of Female Mayors
100,000+	3	4	75.0%
65,000–99,999	4	7	57.1%
30,000–64,999	6	23	26.1%
10,000–29,999	10	28	35.7%
1,000–9,999	14	84	16.7%
1–999	23	106	21.7%
Total	60	252	23.8%

City Councils

Nation

The National League of Cities (NLC) no longer tracks gender data and has not for years. *Next City* reported that the overall share of women city council members in the 15 largest cities in the US declined from 33.0% in 2010 to 30.0% in 2016.³⁸ For this update we used data from Represent Women and found that, among the largest 100 US cities in 2020, the average percentage of women on city councils with single-member districts (the vast majority of city and town councils in Utah) was 39.4%, up from 32.0% in 2019.³⁹ In terms of more national historical data on city councils, the NLC reported that representation of women on US city councils increased between 1989 and 2001 and that the proportion of women grew from 21.0% to 25.0% in small cities, 25.0% to 36.0% in medium-sized cities, and 33.0% to 36.0% in large cities.⁴⁰ However, between 1979 and 1989, there was a drop in gender diversity on city councils from 32.0% to 26.0%.

Utah

For Utah, we collected data from every municipality in the state that had a council (N=254). We gathered information from websites, and then emails and calls were made to obtain the data that were not available online.⁴¹ In Utah, 29.8% of

city/town council seats were held by women in 2022, nearly the same as in 2021, at 29.3% (see Table 3). The city councils from the four largest cities in Utah are 38.5% female. All other population ranges now have between 24.6% and 40.0% women serving in these positions, compared to between 17.4% and 36.4% in 2021. This shows some progress.

Table 3: Women Council Members in Utah by Municipality Population

Municipality Population	No. of Females	Total No. of Seats	% of Females
100,000+	10	26	38.5%
65,000–99,999	16	40	40.0%
30,000–64,999	41	116	35.3%
10,000–29,999	56	141	39.7%
1,000–9,999	104	423	24.6%
1–999	124	433	28.6%
Total	351	1,179	29.8%

Our analysis showed that there are 44 councils with no women (down from 47 in 2021). Of these councils, 54.5% were from municipalities with populations of 1–999, and 38.6% from municipalities with populations of 1,000–9,999. The four largest city councils include women members, with West Valley City having one woman serving (20.0%). Salt Lake City, Provo, and West Jordan each have three women serving (42.9%). The seven cities with populations of 65,000–99,999 each have one or more women members on their councils. Cities with populations of 30,000–64,999 show a range of representation, with only one municipality (Saratoga Springs) having zero women members. For cities with a population of 10,000–29,999, only two had no women (Hurricane and Vernal). Of municipalities with populations of 1,000–9,999, 17 have no women, and 6 had councils with more 50.0% or more women (Sunset, Providence, Hooper, Fruit Heights, Helper, and Uintah). The story is similar for councils representing populations of 1–999, where 24 have no female representation, although 10 are 75.0% female.

It appears that 106 councils in Utah had one woman serving in 2022, while 73 had two women, 28 had three, and none had all seats held by women. Overall, 29.8% of all council members in Utah municipalities are female, which puts Utah below the national average of data gathered historically in 1979 (32.0%),⁴² 2016 (30.0–33.0%), and 2019 (32.0%).

In 2021, four cities and towns elected their first female mayors: North Logan, West Valley City, Park City, and Parowan.⁴³ Only one town or city in Utah’s history has had an all-female mayor and city council. According to *Southern Utah News*, “Kanab made history in 1912, when its newly-elected mayor and city council took the oath of office making it the first time in the history of the United States where the town board and mayor were entirely comprised of women.”⁴⁴ Between 2021 and 2022, the following municipal councils increased seats held by women: Woodruff went from zero to

three of four seats held by women, while Vineyard, Circleville, Rocky Ridge, and Tabiona went from one seat to three of four seats held by women. In addition to these, the following councils are now majority women: South Salt Lake (6 of 7), Murray (4 of 5), Cleveland, Alta, Clarkston, Koo-sharem, and Millcreek (3 of 4). Notably, of those, both Vineyard and South Salt Lake also have female mayors.

Boards of Education

Nation

In January 2014, the National Association of State Boards of Education provided a list of each state's board of education membership by gender.⁴⁵ In 2014, 48.6% of state board members across the country were female. The states with the highest percentages of females at that time were Colorado (85.0%), South Dakota (78.0%), Alabama and Nebraska (75.0%), and Louisiana (72.0%). The states with the lowest percentages were Missouri (16.7%), Mississippi (22.2%), Oklahoma and West Virginia (25.0%).

Historical national data of school district board gender makeup is sparse. A 2002 report stated that 38.9% of board seats nationally were held by women at that time, with larger districts having higher percentages than smaller districts.⁴⁶ Studies by National School Boards Association (NSBA) reported that in 2010, 44.0% of school district board seats across the US were held by women compared to 49.0% in 2018.⁴⁷ As of 2020, NSBA data show that among the 100 largest school districts in the US, 66.0% of school board members were women. In 10 of those districts, 100% of members are women, in 31 districts, more than 80.0% were women, and in 52 more than 70.0% of members are women.⁴⁸

Utah

In 2017, 11 of 15 (73.3%) State Board of Education elected seats in Utah were held by women; thus, Utah ranked among the highest states nationally. However, by 2020 that number declined to 9 of 15 (60.0%) and has remained the same in 2022. Currently, the Utah State Charter School Board of Education has 5 of 7 (71.4%) seats held by women, but these positions are appointed.

Utah has 41 school districts, and each district has an elected board of education, typically comprised of either 5 or 7 seats. In 2022, based on their websites, there are 234 total district board of education elected seats, and women held 115 (49.1%, up from 47.6% in 2021). Since our 2021 brief, 10 districts lost female seats, and 11 gained female seats. The boards with the highest percentages of women include Ogden City, Grand, Murray, and Park City, all of which have at least 80.0% female representation. Canyons, Provo, Box Elder, Davis, and Granite have 71.4% female representation. Twelve other districts also have more than 50.0% female representation, while an additional 10 hovered around 40.0%. Two districts were at 28.6%, 5 at 20.0%, and these 3 districts currently have no women serving (last brief there were 5): Duchesne, Rich, and South Sanpete. The larger districts appear to have more women, and the districts that have no

women tend to be in rural areas. Yet, some rural districts do have a strong percentage of women serving. Overall, Utah is at least average, if not slightly above, the national average for women holding district board seats.

Summary

Overall, these results show some progress in more women serving in public office. Yet, there is still work to be done. Here is a summary of these findings:

- *US Congress*: 0.0% of the Utah delegation to Congress is female, compared to 26.9% nationally.
- *SEO*: 20.0% of the Utah SEO seats are held by women, compared to 30.0% nationally.
- *State Legislature*: 26.0% of Utah State legislators are women, compared to 31.1% nationally.
- *Counties*: 15.3% of Utah county commission and council seats are held by women, compared to 54.7% of the predominately full-time elected positions of clerk/auditor, treasurer, recorder, and assessor.
- *Mayors*: 23.8% of Utah mayors are now women, which is a 6.5% increase from 2021 and a 14.7% increase from 2017. More of Utah's larger cities are being led by women (up to 13 from 3 in 2017).
- *City Councils*: 29.8% of council members in Utah municipalities are female, which puts Utah below the national average of 32.0%.
- *Boards of Education*: Utah is at least average, if not slightly above, the national average for women holding district board seats.

Conclusion

The last few years have been record-setting years for women running for office across the country, and we are seeing similar trends in Utah. When more women run, more women win. The lack of women running for office through the years has been one of many challenges related to why Utah does not have more women serving in elected public office. While we believe the tide is turning, understanding and removing the barriers women face when running for public office in Utah are critical to moving forward. In other UWLP reports, we have explored several factors accounting for why more women do not run for office, including societal attitudes, worse treatment of female candidates who do run, and biases in party politics toward traditional practices that keep women from running and networking (see "[The Status of Utah Women in Politics: a 2017 Update](#)" and "[An Analysis of Utah Media: Women & Politics](#)"). For recommendations on how to move the needle in Utah so that more women will run and serve in these roles, see this 2021 brief, "[Perceptions of Women Elected Officials in Utah: Challenges, Benefits, and Lessons Learned](#)," as well as other UWLP [research and policy](#) [briefs](#), [snapshots](#), and [resources](#).

This brief has summarized available research on the status of women in Utah politics. It provides a detailed look at the past and current state of affairs and, as with the previous briefs, should be beneficial as a benchmark for measuring improvement in years to come. It was also written as a *call to action* for Utah residents and leaders to do more to encourage and support future efforts to diversify voices on Utah's Capitol Hill and in cities, towns, and counties around the state. Although there has been some progress in recent years, we encourage Utah leaders and residents to do more to implement and support these efforts.

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¹⁹ CAWP. (2021). *History of women governors*.

²⁰ CAWP. (2021). *Women in statewide elective executive office 2021*.

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²⁴ CAWP. (2021). *A record number of women will serve in state legislatures in 2021*.

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