

March 18, 2015

Women quietly do extraordinary things every day. To help shed light on the resilience and strength of Hoosier women and celebrate their accomplishments and contributions to history we are releasing an article every day in the month of March. These articles showcase how women have moved Indiana and our country forward and who inspire others to do great things in their own lives.

Women in Indiana have an important role to play. You can make a difference by:

- Learning more about the issues affecting women in Indiana.
- Voicing your opinion on issues important to you
- Serving as an advocate for women
- Mentoring another woman
- Join ICW's mailing list or social media outlets to be notified of upcoming events, programs and resources available to women

Go to www.in.gov/icw to learn more about the Indiana Commission for Women and their current initiatives.

Women's History Month 2015

Telling 31 stories in 31 days this March.

Women in State-Level Offices

Ever since women have been able to vote in elections, they have been serving in elected offices. Julia D. Nelson became the first female legislator when she was appointed as Indiana State Representative shortly after the November 1920 election. However, only one hundred fifty-one (151) women have served in the Indiana General Assembly since 1920, which represents only about one percent of all legislative seats that have been held by women since they began to seek elected office. Nine of those women have been elected to both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

It wasn't until 1943 before the number of women in the Indiana General Assembly surpassed three, climbing to seven. The number of women serving in the legislative branch did not reach double digits until 1979, almost sixty years after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. Today, thirty-one women are serving as state legislators

Even though women have been serving in state-level executive offices since 1926, only nineteen women have served in these positions. Grace B. Urbahns was the first woman to serve in a state-level executive office when she was appointed to State Treasurer in 1926 after her husband, Bernhardt Urbahns, died in office. She was later elected and served until 1932. The second woman to hold a state-level elected office wasn't elected until 1961 when Dorothy Gardner was elected to State Auditor.

Currently, and for the first time in Indiana history, five of the seven state-level executive offices are held by women. Secretary of State Connie Lawson, Auditor Suzanne Crouch, and Treasurer Kelly Mitchell were elected in the November 2014 General Elections. They join Lt. Governor Sue Ellspermann and Superintendent of Public Instruction Glenda Ritz, who were elected in 2012.

Only two women have served on the Indiana Supreme Court. Myra Selby made history when she became the first woman and the first African-American to be appointed to the state's highest court in 1995. In 1999, the Indiana Supreme Court appointed Selby to chair its Commission on Race and Gender Fairness, which is charged with ensuring fairness and diversity in the legal system. After stepping down from the Bench in 1999, Selby continues serving on the commission as a current member. In 2012, Loretta Rush was appointed to the Indiana Supreme Court by Governor Mitch Daniels. She then became Chief Justice in 2014. Chief Justice Rush serves on the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana and the Indiana Conference for Legal Education Opportunity.

Sources:

- **Center for American Women and Politics**, Rutgers University (http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/resources/state_fact_sheets/IN.php)
- **Chief Justice Loretta Rush** (<http://www.in.gov/judiciary/citc/3582.htm>)
- **Hoosier Women Lead**, Indiana Commission for Women (<http://www.in.gov/icw/2415.htm>)
- **Myra Selby** (<http://www.icemiller.com/people/myra-c-selby/#sthash.7ixx25Xb.dpuf>)

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