CLOSE THE GAP
CALIFORNIA | WE RECRUIT

*****PRESS RELEASE*****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Media Contact: Susannah Delano
Phone: 650-326-2216
Email: alice@closethegapca.org

History Made: Women Now Hold Half of California Legislative Seats for the First Time

World's Fourth Largest Economy Reaches Gender Parity in Legislature in Historic Election for Women Nationwide

33 Women Legislators are Close the Gap Recruits

SACRAMENTO – 12 November, 2026 – California women have long been more than 50% of the population, and now for the first time, women will make up 50% of the State Legislature. In an election that saw record numbers of women elected as Governors and members of Congress, California made history by electing its first-ever legislature with gender parity.

"This dramatic progress is what can happen with a targeted campaign to persuade talented women to run and then prepare them to win," said Susannah Delano, Close the Gap Executive Director.

When Close the Gap was founded in 2013, women held only 30 seats in the Legislature. Now women are on track to hold at least 60 seats. A handful of additional races featuring women candidates are still too close to call.

What People Are Saying About This Historic Moment - quote compilation

Victories by progressive women newcomers fueled this achievement, including six Close the Gap Class of 2026 Members who flipped seats previously held by Republicans:

- Dr. Amy Slavensky (AD 07)
- Dr. Ida Obeso-Martinez (AD 36) - the first Latina elected to represent the district

- Leila Namvar (AD 47) - the first Muslim and first Iranian American to represent the district
- Clarissa Cervantes (AD 58)
- Dr. Paula Swift (AD 70) - the first Black legislator to represent Orange County
- Mara Elliott (SD 40) - the first Latina to represent most communities in the district and first Democrat in more than 50 years to represent some areas

Close the Gap Recruits won in a variety of districts all over the state, by strong margins. In fact, a majority of all legislative seats that went from red to blue in 2026 were flipped by CTG Recruits.

Additional newly-elected women in Close the Gap's Class of 2026 include:

- Annalisa Perea (AD 31) - the first LGBTQ+ legislator in the Central Valley
- Deborah Klein Lopez (AD 42)
- Jessie Lopez (AD 68) - the first Latina elected to represent the district

Wins by newcomer progressive champion Jackie Elward (AD 12), Ayanna Davis (AD 65), and Sarah Hernandez (SD 26), as well as incumbent Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria's successful bid for SD 14 all contributed to this historic milestone in 2026.

"When Close the Gap Founder Mary V. Hughes and a determined group of supporters set a course for gender parity back in 2013, their audacious goal seemed like a long shot," stated Close the Gap Executive Director Susannah Delano. "Timing is key to the success of our model. We are already hard at work on our next big goals to maintain and expand parity nationally for generations to come."

More than a decade of strategic intervention by Close the Gap, which recruits progressive women for open and flippable state legislative seats, has helped double the number of women serving and form one of the nation's most diverse and truly reflective legislatures. The nine newly-elected women will join 24 incumbents for a total of 33 Close the Gap Legislators, 73% of whom are women of color. Nearly two-thirds of all Democratic women serving in the Legislature today were recruited by Close the Gap.

"Women get it done. They've authored the majority of Assembly bills addressing foundational affordability issues to put money back in Californians' pockets for two years running, and they've taken the lead on critical modern issues like AI bias and deepfakes," continued Executive Director Susannah Delano. "Gender parity is not only a historic achievement, it's about future impact: California women will define our policy horizons for decades to come."

With its founding goal achieved, Close the Gap is expanding nationally and down ballot. "We are committed to recruiting strong progressive women in California through 2028 to ensure we keep up momentum, and for the first time, we are building progressive women's power on California's County Boards," said Recruiting Director Julia Leitner. "We are also expanding to pilot our

proven model in Florida and Ohio, where term limits will provide an opportunity to advance truly reflective representation and values in these key states.

All 60 Women Who Will Serve in the 2027-2028 California Legislature

Megan Dahle (R), SD 01
Alexandra Duarte (R), SD 04
Angelique Ashby (D), SD 08
Esmeralda Soria (D), SD 14
Melissa Hurtado (D), SD 16 - CTG Recruit
Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh (R), SD 19
Caroline Menjivar (D), SD 20 - CTG Recruit
Monique Limon (D), SD 21 - CTG Recruit
Susan Rubio (D), SD 22
Suzette Martinez Valladares (R), SD 23
Sasha Renee Perez (D), SD 25 - CTG Recruit
Sara Hernandez (D), SD 26
Lola Smallwood-Cuevas (D), SD 28 - CTG Recruit
Eloise Gomez Reyes (D), SD 29 - CTG Recruit
Sabrina Cervantes (D), SD 31 - CTG Recruit
Lena Gonzalez (D), SD 33
Laura Richardson (D), SD 35
Catherine Blakespear (D), SD 38 - CTG Recruit
Akilah Weber (D), SD 39
Mara Elliott (D), SD 40 - CTG Recruit

Heather Hadwick (R), AD 01
Cecilia Aguiar-Curry (D), AD 04 - CTG Recruit
Maggy Krell (D), AD 06
Amy Slavensky (D), AD 07 - CTG Recruit
Stephanie Nguyen (D), AD 10
Lori Wilson (D), AD 11 - CTG Recruit
Jackie Elward (D), AD 12
Rhodesia Ransom (D), AD 13 - CTG Recruit
Buffy Wicks (D), AD 14
Anamarie Avila Farias (D), AD 15
Rebecca Bauer-Kahan (D), AD 16 - CTG Recruit
Mia Bonta (D), AD 18 - CTG Recruit
Catherine Stefani (D), AD 19 - CTG Recruit
Liz Ortega-Toro (D), AD 20
Diane Papan (D), AD 21 - CTG Recruit
Gail Pellerin (D), AD 28 - CTG Recruit
Dawn Addis (D), AD 30 - CTG Recruit
Annalisa Perea (D), AD 31 - CTG Recruit

Ida Obeso-Martinez (D), AD 36 - CTG Recruit
Pilar Schiavo (D), AD 40 - CTG Recruit
Deborah Klein Lopez (D), AD 42 - CTG Recruit
Celeste Rodriguez (D), AD 43 - CTG Recruit
Leila Namvar (D), AD 47 - CTG Recruit
Blanca Rubio (D), AD 48 - CTG Recruit
Jessica Caloza (D), AD 52 - CTG Recruit
Michelle Rodriguez (D), AD 53
Lisa Calderon (D), AD 56
Sade Elhawary (D), AD 57 - CTG Recruit
Clarissa Cervantes (D), AD 58 - CTG Recruit
Tina McKinnor (D), AD 61 - CTG Recruit
Natasha Johnson (R), AD 63
Blanca Pacheco (D), AD 64
Ayanna Davis (D), AD 65
Jessie Lopez (D), AD 68 - CTG Recruit
Paula Swift (D), AD 70 - CTG Recruit
Kate Sanchez (R), AD 71
Cottie Petrie-Norris (D), AD 73
Darshana Patel (D), AD 76 - CTG Recruit
Tasha Boerner (D), AD 77
LaShae Sharp-Collins (D), AD 79

Thank you to our generous Power in Parity Squad supporters

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About Close the Gap California

Close the Gap California (CTG) is a statewide campaign to close the gender gap in the California Legislature by 2028. By recruiting accomplished, progressive women in targeted districts and preparing them to launch competitive campaigns, CTG has been changing the face of the Legislature one cycle at a time since launch in 2013. Twenty-four CTG Recruits (17 of them women of color) are serving in Sacramento today, with nine more incoming after winning their November 2026 elections. Two additional CTG Recruits now serve in the U.S. Congress. CTG Recruits are committed to reproductive freedom, public school funding, and combating poverty.

For more information, visit closethegapca.org