



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

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Close the Gap: Races to Watch

SACRAMENTO – 15 October, 2026 – With California’s Legislature just two seats away from achieving gender parity, a dynamic midterm election season has emerged thanks to redistricting, open statewide seats, and partisan trends. Credible women candidates are competing hard up and down the ballot this November to protect hard-fought gains in representation, including 10 courageous Close the Gap women running in open and flippable state legislative seats from the Sacramento Valley down to San Diego.

80% of Close the Gap Class of 2026 members are women of color, and 20% are LGBTQ+. Many are trailblazers who would become powerful “firsts” for representation.

History-making races to watch:

- In AD 31, Annalisa Perea would become the first LGBTQ+ legislator in the Central Valley.
- In AD 36, Dr. Ida Obeso-Martinez would be the first Latina elected to represent the district.
- In AD 47, Leila Namvar would be the first Muslim and the first Iranian American to represent the district.
- In AD 66, Dr. Sara Deen would be the first Pakistani American to serve in the Legislature.
- In AD 68, Jessie Lopez would be the first Latina elected to represent the district.
- In AD 70, Dr. Paula Swift would be the first Black legislator to represent Orange County.

“The care and dedication of the CTG team, along with the sense of community they foster, made a real difference in my preparation to run,” stated Class of 2026 member and candidate for State Assembly Jessie Lopez. “Being a CTG Recruit means knowing you’re not alone, that there’s a network of people who believe in you and are ready to help you succeed.”

While there are fewer open seats in 2026 than in the previous two election cycles, a relatively high turnover still provides increased opportunity for women. Close the Gap strategically recruited women in more swing districts in 2026 than typical. As a result, 18 contests will decide if women can achieve full parity across the Assembly and Senate. Progress will depend most on progressive women flipping red seats and prevailing in tough open seat contests in safe blue districts, against well-resourced men.

Top districts to watch for increasing women’s representation:

- AD 07: Dr. Amy Slavensky (D, CTG Class of 2026) challenging incumbent Joshua Hoover (R)
- AD 12: Jackie Elward (D) running in open seat contest
- AD 31: Annalisa Perea (D, CTG Class of 2026) running in open seat contest
- AD 36: Dr. Ida Obeso-Martinez (D, CTG Class of 2026) challenging incumbent Jeff Gonzalez (R)
- AD 42: Deborah Klein Lopez (D, CTG Class of 2026) running in open seat contest*
- AD 47: Leila Namvar (D, CTG Class of 2026) challenging incumbent Greg Wallis (R)
- AD 66: Dr. Sara Deen (D, CTG Class of 2026) running in open seat contest
- AD 68: Jessie Lopez (D, CTG Class of 2026) running in open seat contest
- AD 70: Dr. Paula Swift (D, CTG Class of 2026) challenging incumbent Tri Ta (R)

**Running to replace departing woman legislator, ensuring continued women's representation*

California's meteoric climb over the last decade from 19th to a top five state in the nation for women's representation has been [spurred by Close the Gap's targeted recruitment of progressive women](#). The State Legislature has achieved gender parity in the Senate and is just two seats away from parity across both chambers. After a decade of success, Close the Gap is now expanding our proven model to recruit County Supervisors and state legislators in Ohio and Florida for the 2028 election cycle.

With at least ten incumbent women exiting, parity in the California Legislature will be harder to reach this year than it may appear. Term limits create open seats on a predictable schedule, providing opportunities for women to run and win legislative seats. Term limits also create challenges for achieving and sustaining parity, as women legislators must leave after 12 years. Additionally, building the pipeline means that increasing numbers of women are strongly positioned to compete for sudden vacancies in higher office.

"Achieving and maintaining our numbers is not guaranteed," stated Susannah Delano, Executive Director of Close the Gap California. "The reality is that with at least 10 incumbent women legislators departing in 2026, California stands a very real chance of backsliding on women's representation this year. Women are proving over and over that they are up to any challenge, and from housing to affordability, the scope of California's challenges demand that we keep building women's numbers in elected office."

For voters, practitioners, and supporters looking for opportunities to make progress this cycle, women's robust field presence in 2026 is a powerful demonstration of what's needed to further the historic momentum, and break through the highest and hardest glass ceilings for years to come.

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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, and 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