

OPINION

Year of the Woman in Massachusetts? No thanks.

Instead let's continue to make progress toward gender equity.

By Sandy Lish and Evelyn Murphy Updated October 7, 2022, 3:01 a.m.



Massachusetts will probably have its first elected woman governor, Maura Healey (right), and a woman lieutenant governor, Kim Driscoll. But it's time to accept women in political power as normal, not something exceptional to be treated like a rare eclipse. Lane Turner/Globe Staff

Women are poised to win several elections to powerful positions in state government next month, and we've heard talk in various corners of the business and political

communities that some (mostly men) are ready to proclaim 2022 as The Year of the Woman.

Huh? The year — singular?

Perhaps the remarks were intended as a compliment, but it's difficult not to see such simplistic designations as patronizing, a pat on the head, as if this year is an aberration, a once-in-a-generation occurrence, and the natural order of things will soon return.

It's true that Massachusetts will probably have its first elected woman governor and a woman lieutenant governor. The state could elect a woman attorney general, who would be replacing another woman. Our treasurer will remain a woman.

Impressive, yes, but it's time to accept women in political power as normal, not something exceptional to be treated like a rare eclipse. It's what happens when women are given a chance to show what they have done and can do on a level playing field. It's what happens in meritocracies, where the voters do the hiring. They don't vote identity politics, they vote for competence and commitment.

Clearly, though, many fields still tilt against women. Men continue to dominate the C-suites and corporate boards. In the [top 100 public companies in Massachusetts](#), women hold 21 percent of the CEO positions and 27.7 percent of the board seats. While these numbers are considerably higher than they were 10 years ago, it's still clear that we're nowhere near being the Year of the Woman in the Massachusetts business world.

Nor has it ever been the Year of the Woman in academia. Women earn 52 percent of PhDs, yet hold only 22 percent of the president positions at the top 130 elite universities, according to a recent study by [the Eos Foundation's Women's Power Gap initiative](#).

Women remain stubbornly behind men in receiving equal pay for equal work. Although women make up nearly half of the Massachusetts workforce, they are paid about 81 cents to a dollar that a man earns. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it definitely was not the Year of the Woman as a disproportionate percentage of women dropped out of the workforce to care for their families. Instead, it was the year of losing income and forfeiting career traction. That fallout continues.

And let's not forget that it very much was not the Year of the Woman in terms of reproductive rights after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

In "giving" women their very own single year, we wonder if it's a way of saying, "mission accomplished" — we're there, the problems are solved. We're clearly not there, despite some important gains, yet there are signs that something approaching equality is achievable. The pipeline of female talent is formidable. Women outnumber men in college matriculation and college degree attainment, and more and more women are destined to rise in power and influence.

So please keep your specially designated years and let's instead look forward to many years of equity, not only in politics, but also in the workplace.

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