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POLITICS

# Women under-represented in politics

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Paul Newton

Dianne Bystrom gives a presentation on women in politics at the SIU Student Center on Monday, Feb. 25, 2013, in Carbondale, Ill. (Paul Newton / The Southern)

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February 25, 2013 4:00 am • By Caleb Hale, The Southern

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CARBONDALE — A leading authority on women in the political arena visiting SIU Carbondale Monday said more women are entering politics these days, but the scale isn't yet balanced.

Ninety-seven of the 535 members of the U.S. Congress are women, a number Dianne Bystrom of the Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics at Iowa State University said isn't a lot but certainly represents progress. Bystrom was on campus Monday as a guest of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute to discuss women in politics, a subject she has a leading voice on since 1996.

The often contentious world of state and federal politics isn't something most women seek out, Bystrom said, but there is a need for female voices to gain a greater hold among lawmakers, especially when issues such as a reproductive rights and birth control become political focal points, as they did in the most recent presidential election.

Despite the prevalent thought that Democrats are doing better than Republicans in gaining women, Bystrom said the fact is both parties have work to do.

"I'd like to see both political parties encourage more women to run for office," she said, adding that's something that state political parties can really affect if they so choose.

The Simon Institute invited Bystrom to speak Monday as part of an effort to encourage more people – especially women – to work in politics and matters of public policy.

"The problems facing society aren't going to be solved unless everyone has their shoulder at the wheel," said institute director David Yepsen. "We can't be comfortable with political practices that sideline women or people in minority groups."

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