



## **Women and Gender Balance in Politics**

### **TASK FORCE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Women comprise 52% of the Canadian population yet constitute only 20.3% of all Liberal MPs (11.3% of Government MPs and 20.7% in the House of Commons overall). In fact after the 2006 election one less woman sits in the House of Commons than in 2004.

(a) Our party has a “goal” of 25% women candidates. What would your goal be and why?

The goal must be parity in the House of Commons. We would be very unhappy reaching any goal for woman candidates if the number elected remains the same. Our goal should be 50% for candidates, MPs, Ministers, Critics, Senators and for every position within the Party. but we should never lose sight of our main goal to achieve 50% of MP's sitting in the House of Commons. To achieve these goals in a fair, transparent and democratic way may take some time – perhaps 3 or 4 more general election cycles for 50% candidates. With the bold policies I am advocating - but we must avoid a pointless bidding war in which 25%, 33% or 50% female candidates are promised within a very short time, and with no prospect that these candidacies will translate into House seats. I believe that we can achieve dramatic results with a real strategy, an adherence to democratic principles, and persistent and determined leadership. In order to achieve success, all members of the party , men and women, must understand the importance of this issue and support and commit to realistic goals and a meaningful strategy . Irwin Cotler has been a very effective member and champion of women's caucus and our issues.

First, we have to acknowledge that the ultimate goal of parity in the House of Commons with the present electoral system and our voluntary incrementalism would take decades. This is totally unacceptable. We must approach the problem in two ways. We must actively move to change the electoral system. I have included my proposal for a process for electoral reform in (e) below. At the same time, we must make modifications to the present system.

We have to acknowledge that incumbents present a huge barrier to dealing with this issue. We need real targets in the ‘available’ ridings. The fact that Martha Hall Findlay could not find a riding in which to run in 2006 should provoke some sobering reflection on the idea that ‘recruitment of great women candidates’ is the sole solution. In the GTA there were no ‘available’ ridings. I believe there were hundreds

of qualified, motivated women we could have found to run for us – the difficulty was finding ridings for them to run in.

We need to seriously deal with the issue of protecting incumbents. Women have always preferred that policy, as women MPs have been disproportionately targeted. However, protecting incumbents in this present environment with 80% of the seats held by men means we have to accept that the ridings ‘in play’ for women candidates are in very short supply. This needs to be a conversation with the party and not a decision made solely by the leader. The present parliamentary uncertainty and the decisions already taken to protect incumbents and to open nominations make real change very difficult at this time.

In my “Healthy Democracy” paper, I have suggested that, in order to achieve substantial progress in the shortest possible time, all incumbents who choose not to run again should be obligated to attempt to replace themselves with a woman candidate. We would need a party consensus on this, of course, but if there was a goal of 100% woman candidates in the held (obviously winnable !) ridings with an MP stepping down, we could go a long way to increasing our actual numbers in the House of Commons.

I have always had trouble with women running as cannon fodder in unwinnable ridings. It is not enough for a party to boast about a healthy percentage of women candidates if, upon scrutiny they had little chance of victory. Imagine, for example, if the NDP had all its women candidates in Quebec. However, the NDP has done well with their process of rating their ridings, and then set ambitious targets for the winnable ridings.

Yet, most women candidates I worked with in the past election were very uncomfortable with the idea of rating the ridings,. They feared their ridings would be written off as unwinnable. The issue of rating ridings needs a full conversation with the party members. I have dealt with some of the issues in (d) below.

**(b) What is your time frame for achieving this goal?**

If we took the goal of 33% women candidates as a benchmark, we would need over 40% women candidates in the unheld ridings.

I believe the executive of the party and the leadership candidates should charge all ridings with an incumbent who has decided not to run again to find a woman to run in his/her place even if that means an all-woman nomination race.

This 'one time only' approach would provide an opportunity to make substantial gains in at least 10 ridings in this next election. We would then decide if the party was prepared to repeat the policy until we achieved parity in our caucus. But the whole party would have to agree that affirmative action was necessary in order for us to gain back the moral authority we had that earned us the gender split in the vote.

I believe that having as many woman candidates as possible is good for the Liberal Party of Canada.. It demonstrates the dramatic difference between us and Stephen Harper, and there is no reason why we should be outdone by the NDP. Both Jean Charest and Jack Layton have made it a priority and spent the time required to get results. I would be highly motivated to do much better than them! Present election-readiness decisions make overall time frames more difficult. But as we learned in 1993, real progress has been made in 'sweeps' when 'unwinnable' ridings are won. I would love to contemplate a sweep in which all our women candidates in Alberta won. There is definitely a climate of change there.

The strategy I have proposed can produce dramatic change in the proportion of women candidates *and* MPs, with the aim of parity within 3 or 4 election cycles.

(c) If you were the Leader, would you use your power to appoint candidates to guarantee that the percentage identified in 1(a) was achieved?

Parachuting candidates over the wishes of riding associations has caused huge dysfunction for grassroots Liberals, and sometimes resulted only in the loss of the riding. I believe we need to build respectful relationship with the ridings and listen to their wisdom as to what would or would not be helpful in their region.

Extraordinary situations, for example, the takeover of a riding by a special interest group which has disenfranchised the longstanding Liberals in the riding, I believe require extraordinary measures. I believe the Leader would need to have a fair process so that members would understand and accept that an intervention was necessary. It is also crucial that all nomination proceedings are accomplished to the highest standards. I believe this would also lead to the party fielding more women candidates.

I am interested in a proposal for a party ombudsman who would be responsible for the 'Liberal brand' and the best interests of the party members. Another possibility is for the election readiness co-chairs together with the Leader to be able to override an FLA if there was evidence that there was an extraordinary situation. I believe parachuting candidates should generally be avoided. In the extraordinary situations, however, I as Leader would be motivated to find women candidates.

I do believe that, if we can find great 'name' candidates who are willing to run for us, we should put in place a process that includes riding presidents and election co-chairs who should be able to decide in which riding this proposed candidate could be helpful to our electoral success. I believe that most of the time we could find consensus to do this. This process would include a conversation by the Leader with those potential candidates who would need to be persuaded that in the best interest of the Party, they should allow the 'name' candidate to be acclaimed. If consensus cannot be achieved in these regular situations, a nomination process would proceed.

(d) What would you do to ensure that women candidates are given an opportunity to seek nominations for and, run in, “winnable ridings”?

I believe the most effective tool would be to have the affirmative action policy on incumbents who are stepping down which described in (a) and (b) above.

The rating of ridings is still very controversial amongst candidates, particularly women. I believe we have to accept that it is a necessary evil but make sure that the process is fair and transparent, and takes into consideration the wisdom and instincts of the people on the ground. This cannot just be done by polling.

I believe we should evaluate ridings based on the likelihood of electoral success in

A) An opposition majority

B) An opposition minority

C) A Liberal minority

D) A Liberal majority

This will remove the election by election anxiety of someone far away deciding your fate. We must have an evidence-based approach. Each riding would have an arithmetical rating based on the history of the riding, NOT on the possibility of electoral success in the next election. We would target ‘A’ ridings for 50% women candidates.

In the past election, I was delighted to surprise the Conservatives in my ‘bellwether’ riding. They had assumed that the riding would

continue true to its history and send an MP to the government side. I was able to secure a 14,000 vote plurality in my 'C' riding ! So those candidates and ridings with great instincts on the ground need to be listened to and not be written off by some secret process from far away.

**(e) What other measures do you believe need to be put in place to address this inequity?**

#### 1. Electoral Reform

We must move immediately on the issue of electoral reform, not only in order to achieve the reality of parity of women in Parliament but to right the wrongs in the present distortion in our system. For 15.3% of Albertans to have voted Liberal without one Alberta seat is undemocratic. Proportional representation is essential to righting this wrong. The Bloc Quebecois has a disproportionate number of seats in the House of Commons for the proportion of the vote they received.

We must ensure, however, that any reform to our electoral system has as a key criterion the fair representation of women. As Doris Anderson has so clearly pointed out, the Single Transferable Vote System as proposed in British Columbia would not ensure one more woman elected.

In my *Live Discussion* on 'Healthy Democracy' I was asked by 'OCEAN' to outline my approach for electoral reform, and the timelines. Here is a slightly edited version of my response:

*I believe that the Swiss process of 4 years to make big changes is interesting.... They are very dismissive of the Californian 6 month propositions.*

*We would need a true consensus of the need for change... if rushed I am concerned that we will fail.*

## ***Step 1 CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT***

*One year - in order to achieve a true consensus and mandate for change.*

*A citizen engagement process re the 'fairness' of the present system.*

*This would include televised Town halls, online discussions, and material for classroom discussion.*

*Involve Equal Voice, FAIR VOTE Canada, Law Reform Commission and all other interested groups.*

*If there was a consensus that the present system is not fair, we move to:*

## ***Step 2 DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE – Choosing the ‘Made in Canada’ Solution.***

*Probably one year, or at least the school year, September to June - a proper deliberative dialogue process weighing ALL the possible International options. And more made in Canada.*

*Such as the blended system with constituencies and a 'top up' from a list of former candidates. Meeting criteria for underrepresented groups in Parliament: eg women, aboriginals, visible minority, persons with disabilities.*

*This process should be innovative and genuine. I was unhappy with the BC process. And think that the Ontario methodology is flawed; only people prepared to give up 2 weekends per month for months will be involved. Those with kids, cottages, skiers, elderly parents, those who travel in their jobs are all eliminated.*

*I believe that the process that CPRN developed for Romanow, and their youth consultation, had real merit.*

*I would insist upon a legitimate process involving citizens as well as Parliament.*

### **Step 3 COMMUNICATIONS**

*Would be at least a six month robust process of communicating the recommendations of step2 with an opportunity for feedback and fine-tuning.*

### **Step 4 REFERENDUM**

*Would be a national referendum, as part of a federal election or free standing.*

### **Step 5 LEGISLATION**

*A legislative process within Parliament.*

### **PARALLEL PROCESS – PARTY REFORM**

*Any approach to electoral reform must be coupled with party reform. Any approach requiring party lists or 'top up' choices must be made in a fair, transparent and democratic way. Back rooms are no place to decide who should sit in the House of Commons.*

#### **2. Election co-chairs.**

*There must be a female election co-chair nationally, and in each province and territory.*

#### **3. Active recruitment.**

Great women often haven't thought about running for public office. History has shown us that they often need to have it suggested to them and then be actively persuaded.

We need all members of the Liberal party to be seeking out great women to run for us. The Leader's office should have an experienced 'point person' in the office to coordinate recruitment liaison with the party, women's caucus, the Judy LaMarsh Fund, former women Parliamentarians and Equal Voice. As leader I would chair an advisory committee on women's issues which would also deal with ensuring that women move through our organization and the needs of women and their families are reflecting in our policies and platform.

#### 4. Support.

An active mentoring system is essential. I have thoroughly enjoyed the mutual support that has been achieved through the weekly calls with the female candidates I came to know in the 2004 and 2006 elections that began during the last election and have continued ever since. It has also enabled me to be better in touch in the unheld ridings in my critic role.

We need to formalize the twinned riding system for the unheld ridings, as well as a 'shadow caucus' that can inform policy and strategy. In the last election we were unable to describe our early learning and childcare policy as it affected rural families. The women that are trying to save the family farm who are now working in town and need quality childcare. We must be better able to show that we are listening to women in rural Canada. We must also put in place a structure in which women MPs and past and future women candidates can support one another.

#### 5. Long Term Strategies.

In my riding we have been very successful with our 'Women in Politics Day' for young women in the riding taking Grade 12 Politics. Other ridings have done similar things. I think that we should provide

a template for all ridings, for MP's as well as our 'shadow caucus' of past-candidates.

2. In your opinion what barriers, systemic or otherwise, currently prevent women from running as Liberal candidates? How can they be removed or mitigated?

The Lortie Commission cited money and the nomination process as the major barriers.

### MONEY

I believe that once a woman has been nominated as the Liberal candidate, it is now less difficult for her to raise money than it once was. However the nomination process is still brutal. I believe we must change the mandate of the Judy Lamarsh Fund so it can help women fight nomination battles. But we have to deal with the reality that often the old guard have already picked their candidate, and the 'chosen' candidate is out selling memberships long before the nomination is open or anyone knows that the incumbent has decided not to run again.

### NOMINATION

Nomination battles speak to the very worst of our political process. They are completely off-putting to women and to a great many men. It is our ugly underbelly.

During the convention in 2003, Doris Anderson, Judy Erola, Monique Begin, Lyn McLeod and I had lunch and discussed the nomination process.

Here is a summary of our discussion:

*It's about citizenship.*

*Process should be transparent and accountable.*

*It is many people's first exposure to the partisan process.*

*Nomination meetings should be educational and about a choice.*

*There should be compulsory attendance at a real meeting with speeches.*

*or at a regional town hall meeting hearing all candidates.  
The ballot should only issue to those who've heard the speeches and the explicit instructions that regardless of who sold you the membership, you vote for whom you think would be the best candidate.*

*This should be about inspiring and engaging citizens in a meaningful way ... NOT using and abusing them as pawns in a game that they don't understand...bussing and nametags upside down. Telling them who to vote for is a disgrace.*

*There should be Mandatory ID at the meeting.*

*We should enforce sanctions for infractions... paying for other's memberships, forging signatures. We teach democracy in the Third World ... we don't teach this.*

*The schema that big ugly nomination fights are 'good' for the party, building a 'Team' and organization is not evidence based.*

*The coffers fill but the civil war can have serious negative consequences.*

*Often the losing candidates and their teams are so angry that they leave and even can be found working for the opposition or staying home on Election Day.*

*The jury is still out on preferential ballots. There are those that still feel that they can discriminate against women. We need to look at the evidence and decide.*

**3(a) Do you believe that the Party should dedicate financial resources to identify recruit and mentor future female candidates? If so – will you make that commitment now and how will you ensure that it happens?**

I believe we need to dedicate financial resources for adequate staff in the leader's office and in the party to fulfil these tasks of identification, recruitment and mentoring. Liberal Caucus Research

Bureau has benefited by the wise counsel and experience of Kathleen Rothwell. We need to ensure that LRB is well-resourced in order to continue its work on gender analysis and women-centred policy.

The accountability would be in the form of an annual conference of Liberal women - 'thinkers' and 'doers' - at which the leader would be accountable for the status of women in the party and the gender based analysis of the party policies and platform.

To achieve the recruitment and mentoring of female candidates, the party has to develop a number of programs which will require resources. We need to stay in touch with women candidates, thanking them early and often for their efforts before they decide not to run again. We must seek advice from former women candidates about women who might replace them.

We must keep the party operations going between elections much more actively than we do at present, raising funds and paying people to identify new members, including women members. This is something the Conservatives and NDP have learned to do. This would allow us to continue media training, debate coaching, and issues preparation for potential women candidates. We could provide scholarships for women to enable them to participate in these programs. We should also provide training for Riding Associations regarding their role and responsibility in the recruitment of women candidates.

We should maintain a database of all women who have expressed an interest in Liberal issues or taken part in campaigns or events, even if they are not members, so that we can keep trying to get them more involved. We should encourage women to run as Liberals at all levels of government; school boards, municipal, tribal council, provincial, partly as preparation for federal competition.

(b) Do you believe the Women's Commission is fulfilling its role in this regard?

I believe that all Commissions have been conflicted in their roles as 'think tanks' and venues for organizing and power politics. I remember when Maureen Kempston Darkes was CEO of GM Canada she invited all women Parliamentarians to a dinner with their Women's Advisory Committee. It had 2 roles; to ensure that women were moving through the organization and that women would buy their cars. As Chair of Women's Caucus, I saw our job as the same. We needed to ensure that women parliamentarians were appropriately represented on committees, in Cabinet, on delegations etc. and also that that our policies and platform earned the gender split in the vote.

We need to ensure that the Party as a whole has the same capacity for evaluation, audit and gender-based analysis.

(c) Should the Liberal Party establish an office dedicated to this purpose? Where should that office be located: LPC? Leader's office? other?

Yes. There needs to be a point person in the Leader's office as well as a point person in the National Party office. There also needs to be a 'community of interest' on-line that is dedicated to women's issues.

4. Our party has had, in its history, only one female President, Iona Campagnola.

(a) Do you believe that within our Party, we need to do more to encourage women to seek senior executive positions?

One of the mantra of sound management is “if it’s measured, it gets noticed. If it’s noticed it gets done”. We need to be continually monitoring the party structure for gender parity.

I understand that in Ontario presently the current percentage of women riding presidents is 20%. The same as women in Parliament.

We must do better. Setting targets is important. We should ask all ridings to aim for gender parity on their executives. We should do the same for PTA’s and the National Executive. We must seek out great candidates, just as we must for those seeking political office.

I believe that more continuity on the Party Executive could assist in achieving the goal of more women. In many organizations the vice-president automatically becomes the President. As we have vice president English, vice President French, we could alternate the Vice presidents male and female. One year the VP English would be a woman, next time a man and vice versa. Then they would become the President.

We should also ensure that former candidates are given the opportunity to work in advisory committees throughout the party, such as election readiness, fundraising and membership committees, and to serve in government, such as in roles supporting ministers or critics.

**(b)If so, what concrete steps would you take, as Leader, to bring this about?**

The leader will have to live with the decisions made at Convention based upon the recommendations of the Red Ribbon Panel.

It will be important to take those recommendations and submit them to a gender analysis. The party should be engaged on-line in a robust discussion of the additional staffing, recruitment procedures, task forces that will be required to meet our goals of 'Women and Gender Balance' within the Liberal Party of Canada and Canadians Politics.

Political scientists have often cited that we must change the culture of politics if more women are going to want to participate. I am committed to eliminating the 'old style' politics that is so off-putting to women. We have to stop the 'gotcha', 'winners and losers', put-down, one upmanship style, and replace it with a more modern consensus-building sociocracy.

It is chicken-and egg, I know. Until there are 33% women in any organization, it is very difficult to change the culture. That is why we need bold, active steps to achieve that goal both in Parliament and within our party. Canadians are fed up with the games. We need to show them mature governance that is fair, transparent and takes people – especially women – seriously.

In my 'Healthy Democracy' paper I have outlined a number of the changes that I would want to make in order to achieve a real 'democracy between elections', parliamentary reform, party reform and electoral reform. We know we have to change question period, we should be webcasting all committees so that Canadians could see the best of Parliament. E-consultation can radically change the perception of Canadians that they influence government policy – democracy between elections !

I hope that Liberal Party members will take the time to read the paper and comment. We need to get this right.

Our ability to attract more women to politics and to the Liberal Party of Canada will be the ultimate report card on our Rx for the Democratic Deficit.

I believe I know what needs to be done, and I believe that I know how to do it.