

Submission to Anne McLellan from Scott Brison

1. ***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?

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

I think it is incumbent upon the Liberal Party of Canada, and all political parties for that matter, to work much harder to ensure female representation in the House of Commons. Women represent over half of the Canadian population, but are terribly underrepresented in federal politics. But first, we should start with our own candidate nomination process. The Liberal Party did in fact meet its goal of 25% of candidates being female. It was 25.6%, compared to a lousy 12.3% of Conservative candidates. I think it is a realistic target to say by 2011 – in five years – we will have 50% women candidates in place. That is a goal I would work to achieve.

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?

The ability to appoint candidates is a tool that the leader should have, but one which he or she should only use judiciously. If necessary, I would use it to achieve the target I have set out.

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

There should be a process in place at the riding level to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to have at least one female candidate run for nomination in each riding. But it's not good enough to have a high percentage of

female candidates, only to have them nominated in unwinnable ridings. I would work with the National Women's Liberal Commission and the Liberal Women's Caucus, as well as the National Campaign Committee, to determine how we achieve our targets, particularly in winnable ridings.

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

The mentoring, training and funding of women candidates should begin by first recognizing those women who are distinguishing themselves in student councils, municipal politics, or as volunteers in charities, community organizations or other NGOs. For example, more than ever, young women are being elected as student body presidents. As leader, I would directly reach out to these young women who are demonstrating leadership outside of partisan politics. We should develop a long-term mentoring strategy to encourage them to continue to be engaged in civic life and to develop links between them and the Liberal Party. Once we have built a network of distinguished Liberal women, young and old, from all walks of life and from every corner of the country, these future candidates should be paired up with mentors and also be provided with funding for "Liberal College" courses on effective communication, leadership and fundraising. These courses would take place in summer and winter sessions that would also be offered as week-long "intensives."

I would also look at best practices around the world. For instance, David Cameron, leader of the UK Conservative Party, has made this his number one priority and is taking serious steps to ensure 50% of his candidates in the next general election are women.

I also think it's an issue that the leader must deal with directly. Women are less likely to come forward and self-identify as potential candidates than men are. The leader must pick up the phone and encourage strong Liberal women to run for office. This would be a priority for me.

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

A recent Statistics Canada study reported that although things are getting measurably better, women still do the greater share of housework and child care in most families. They also feel they bear the responsibility for keeping their family unit functioning well. This is a major barrier to full participation in the workforce and in seeking elected office. The Liberal government's National Early Learning and Child Care program would have helped those women looking to reduce their child care obligations, allowing them to make full use of their skills and qualifications. The Liberal government also doubled the length of parental leave from six months to a year. This type of support for working parents is what is necessary to encourage greater numbers of women to run for elected office.

Electoral financing has always been a systemic barrier for female candidates, but recent electoral financing reform, including Bill C-24 introduced and passed by a Liberal government, should help to level the playing field for women.

But what we need is a leader who is committed to reversing this trend. As I have noted, this would be a priority for me as leader. We could start with bite-sized measures like providing childcare at national conventions, or by organizing women's fora across the country on policy development. As a longer term strategy, we could also provide the aforementioned network of distinguished Liberal women their own "strategy team" that would be responsible for the production of discussion papers. These papers would be given top priority in the creation of the party platform. And of course, nominating female candidates in winnable ridings is key. But I am open to ideas on how to address this very important issue.

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?

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

I think it would be appropriate for a percentage of party revenues to be dedicated to the mentorship, training and funding of women candidates. This percentage should be developed and decided upon in a vote at the annual LPC convention, and reviewed following elections. I would make that commitment now.

The Women's Commission is doing the best job it can, given its resources. But more has to be provided to them by way of funding and establishing the networking, training and mentoring infrastructure.

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

An office should be dedicated to this purpose, housed at the LPC national office.

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?

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

Yes, the party executive should go through the same process that occurs at the riding level to ensure that all steps are taken to promote women into senior elected positions. We also need to ensure that parity is reached in appointed committees, such as the National Campaign Committee.