

A. Anne McLellan
Chair
Renewal Commission Task Force on Women's Issues
Liberal Party of Canada

Dear Ms McLellan,

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to respond to questions regarding women and politics. The consultations you are undertaking as Chair of the Renewal Commission Task Force on Women's Issues will provide important insights into the challenges we face as a Party, and as a society, as we seek to increase the participation of women in the political process and their representation through a more gender-balanced make up of the House of Commons.

Women make up more than 50% of our population and yet only slightly more than 10% of our Federal Members of Parliament; and on average only 20% of our elected representatives in general. It is essential that women have equal representation in Government if we are to advance the needs of women in Canadian society. Men and women have different leadership styles, different approaches to problem solving, outreach and collaboration. Stronger representation in the Liberal Party and greater participation in Canada's political process will benefit all of us as we realize the tremendous contributions that women make when they come to the table and play a meaningful role in addressing the challenges we face as individuals, and as a country.

Response to Questions

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

According to the United Nations, 30% is the minimal percentage required for governments to reflect women's concerns. While that is an important milestone to be reached as quickly as possible, I believe the very nature of equality means that the only meaningful goal has to be a 50 – 50 representation of men and women in the Liberal caucus. Only when our elected representatives mirror the make-up of the citizenry they are elected to serve will we have the very best amalgamation of talent and diversity of skills to match our capabilities in Government with that of our people.

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

Within 2 or 3 elections (depending on how many years there are between the next few elections).

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

My strong preference is that thanks to the strong, positive measure set out below, that I would not need to appoint any candidates in order to meet my commitments set out in 1(a) above. If, however, the measures set out below do not result in a Liberal party under my leadership meeting such commitments, I would use my power of appointment judicially to meet my commitments to achieving equality in the Liberal Party of Canada.

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

Ultimately the riding is tasked with the responsibility of finding and choosing winnable candidates. We need to ensure that the Party is working closely with the ridings to ensure each riding's candidate search committee is mandated to find and attract women to enter the nomination contest as part of any slate.

The Party would have dedicated resources to work in concert with the ridings to mentor and encourage women to run and take leadership roles in riding associations between elections as the candidate pool is often drawn from active members of the riding association.

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

Measures I would adopt to increase the representation of women in our Party include:

- Ensuring that 50% of cabinet in any future Liberal government is female.
- Only use the power to appoint to increase issues of diversity.
- Making it a responsibility of provincial presidents and their executive to identify and recruit 50% women.

- Making it a responsibility of all caucus members to outreach and identify candidates for election.
- Fast-tracking and identifying young liberals who should be mentored and keep involved in the political process.
- Ensuring that 50% of all campaign managers are women within 2 or 3 elections.
- Sustained outreach to community and women's groups providing information sessions, materials and tools help women increase their knowledge and further their interests in the political process
- Campaign campus sessions focusing on topics of relevance to women considering running, held regionally as part of our election readiness efforts
- Taking steps to ensure that the role of MP is altered to be more viable with the responsibilities that many women face in their dual role as mothers and caregivers
- A dedicated on-line resource for women providing advice on how to run a successful election campaign, recruit volunteers, raise funds and engage on policy
- Enlisting the many successful involved women in our Party as mentors for other women
- Developing a speakers bureau and outreach program promoting women in politics to service clubs, chambers of commerce, community groups, and student organizations
- Participating in career days to begin to foster political interest in our young people at an earlier age
- Engaging all of our elected representatives to carry the message to their communities that women are wanted as an integral part of the political process and that the Liberal party will support their efforts
- Engage the riding associations to carry the messages to their communities and encourage equal participation in leadership positions within riding associations.

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

Women cite a range of reasons for not running for political office: lack of knowledge regarding the process, lack of engagement or outreach on the part of political parties to women's groups, family responsibilities, and the belief that they can make a greater contribution through volunteer work.

The challenge is greater for diverse women – visible minorities, the disabled, and aboriginal.

We have in our Party some of the finest examples of women who juggle families, community involvement, and their careers while managing their commitment to public service as elected representatives, Riding Presidents and volunteers. It's important that women who are involved, and the people who support them, speak out in their communities and to their peers about their experiences.

Providing assistance with the demands of recruiting volunteers, organizing a campaign team, and raising the funds necessary to run a campaign is also essential.

3.(a) Do you believe 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 it happens?

Yes, I do. The Liberal Party of Canada needs tactical plan with a budget for outreach and execution if we are to move beyond the talking stage to begin to make progress against this goal. My commitment is to develop and fund such a strategy and to begin execution in time for the next general election.

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

From its beginnings in 1928 when a dedicated group of women determined that their role within the party would be strengthened through organization, the Women's Liberal Commission has promoted the role of women in the Party and the development of policies that are fair and relevant to women. It has grown from that first group of women almost 80 years ago to a national organization that plays an important role in our Party. Currently 25% of our elected MPs are women, a fact that is in part attributable to the efforts of the NWLC. The NWLC will be an important element of the equality of gender representation strategy I would put in place in time for the next election.

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

I do not believe a new office is required. Rather, I would support evaluating the current alignment of the National Executive and NWLC women's clubs across the country with the Party in order to ensure that planning, development and execution of programs supporting outreach and engagement of women by our Party are both effective and efficient.

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

Yes absolutely. 23 of the 60 National Executive Positions are currently held by women – and this is a bit skewed because 7 of these positions are NWLC Positions that can only be held by women. There are no women currently on the Financial Management Committee and of the 13 Provincial and Territorial Presidents only 2 are women

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

I think it's essential that a membership communications strategy be developed that will inform all members of our Party of the opportunities to participate that are available to them through the Party. It's important that not only women, but visible minorities, people with disabilities, aboriginals – in short the greatest representation possible of our membership – become more engaged in the development and running of our Party. Only by having a membership driven Party with strong representation across the board will we grow and strengthen our ability to represent the people of Canada and the future of our country.