

Dianne Porter  
[porter@islandtelecom.com](mailto:porter@islandtelecom.com)  
(902) 892-4923

Women in the Liberal Party of Canada.

It is time to create a Party structure which ensures that women and men are full and equal team members. We can no longer afford to leave half the team on the bench while the other part of the team, the men, play the game. To win we need both men and women playing their best game and working together.

When we look at greeting, involving and including a new community, a new group, a new citizen or a new idea into the Liberal Party of Canada (and provincial affiliates); it is important that we do so with an open mind and an open heart. Just as this has been a part of our rich history of the Liberal Party of Canada, this is also what I would ask of a leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.

For many years our Party has been the Party of inclusion, diversity and acceptance of differences. Some might say ours is the Party of equal rights and equity; a Party that seeks fairness and justice. Our Party is the Party of opportunity for all and of hope for the many. Our Party is a reflection of what is good. Above all, it is a Party that continually seeks to improve democracy through careful reflection of our experiences.

There are three positions one could take when analyzing the status and involvement of women within the Liberal Party of Canada.

The position which treats everyone the same, we could call equality, but it does not give us equitable results because it does not encourage and accommodate different genders into the party. This is often called the gender neutral, or gender blind position. It simply states; women can run for any position they want. It is up to them. There is no sensitivity to the cold environment which greets women when they step into a new role.

The second position is the gender separate position, this position treats men and

women differently allowing for different committees, and organizations, ( Liberal Women's Clubs), different levels of involvement and different roles within the Party. This separateness is beneficial for a short while as women become more and more involved and confident in their abilities to contribute in a meaningful way to Party business and policy and men become more comfortable working with women and considering their opinions. This position allows for both men and women to acclimatize to the new environment.

The third position ( the one we should be seeking) is the gender sensitive position, which asks us to always consider what women have to offer as a legitimate and valid contribution to every aspect of the Party.

It is with the gender sensitive position that we will obtain long term equity, fairness and justice within the Liberal Party of Canada. Why is this so? It is so because it is the only position, today, which will get us the results we all desire and women expect.

This position has worked in companies, communities and organizations seeking a greater involvement and participation of women. This, in terms of Liberal Party business is ready to move women into the mainstream. Attendance at policy conventions and annual meetings should keep the gender balance as currently prescribed. This position has a big impact on the Liberal Women's Commission, which will cease to operate.

Within Canada, women in small business are the fastest group of new business owners in the country. They are very good at it and they are very successful. Women make up the majority of professional students, in dental schools, in medical schools and law schools. And the numbers are growing quickly in many other professions as well.

Women challenged the gender neutral position of educational institutions and professions which claimed to treat everyone the same. The old result was women were all but absent from the ranks. When these institutions began to consider women's applications and men's applications separately, they set quotas for both men and women. There was a backlash from each group, each claiming discrimination, and special treatment. for all kinds of different reasons.

Since that time, the evolution of women's involvement in professions has changed

and our acceptance of female professionals has become the new normal. Our thinking has changed.

We have reached the stage where both men and women are respected and indeed, honoured, for their contributions, their intelligence, and their expertise. This was not an easy process and constant vigilance is necessary.

The most important step was for **accommodations to be made** to ease the way for women so women's presence and involvement reflect a new reality, a new norm for the good of all.

The time has come for the Liberal Party of Canada to accommodate women's participation fully into all aspects of the operation of the Party. It is time for full democracy. Saying it is so is not enough, educating members is not enough, creating positions just for women is not enough, and giving women encouragement has not been enough to reach our goal of equality. Words fade, members come and go, and leaders with equality goals retire.

**It is time to create a party structure which ensures that half of the Liberal team does not remain on the bench.** We do so by creating space in our constitution for women, at every level and within every committee and for every policy. We can do this together at our next annual general meeting. By doing so we receive and reflect a broad range of ideas and a better perception of the Liberal Party in its entirety. (of course these women and men will also reflect diversity in other ways: different races, ages, religions, regions of the country with a diversity of experience.)