

Liberal Party of Canada Renewal Commission
Task Force on Women Notes
May 27, 2006 meeting in Edmonton

Present: Hon. Anne McLellan, Debby Carlson, Mary Amerasinghe, Tamara Kozlowska, Theresa Wacenyca, Marg Johnson, Jayanti Negi, Ann Boylan, Joyce Assen; Olexandra, Norma Spicer, Berdnadette Swan, Indira Saroya, Betsy Hamid, Jane Walker; Bauni MacKay, Sofia Yaquib, Rose-Marie Tremblay, Joan Groft.

The meeting was sponsored and organized by the Edmonton Women's Liberal Policy Association. Here are some of the thoughts that emerged from this fruitful exchange:

Women's Commission:

- Has a vital role and while some would argue for its dissolution, it maintains strong supporters among Liberal members. (many women spoke in favour of maintaining the Women's Commission and the Seniors Commission).
- Commission should not have to fight for meeting times at policy conventions.

How do we encourage more women to overcome obstacles and get involved in politics and/or run for office?

- Judy LaMarsh Campaign effective in recruiting, training and supporting women candidates.
- Should consider legislative changes to allow tax receipts to be issued during nomination campaigns..
- Many capable women choose not to run due to lack of funding. Women must change their mindset about asking for money and that "taking care of business" is not their role.
- Should reconstruct parliamentary language so women, especially those from cultural and visible minorities are encouraged to participate in every way.
- Women from other cultures do not think of themselves as being involved in politics – workshops and seminars would help change these attitudes and encourage women to get involved.
- Important to look at successful models in the world. Women in the Indo-Canadian community are well educated, professional and play a vital role in their families and their communities. Women also have very little time to give to politics, letting their husbands join the party. Need to build awareness.
- One huge barrier to recruiting young women is that they have overwhelming student debt, which keeps them working long hours. They have little time or the financial ability to get involved.
- Cultural confidence" needs to be developed. Many women are actively disengaged because it is not "safe" to become aligned with a political party, especially in Alberta.
- If the candidate is not included in the inner circle of the party's structure, her chances are not good. We still have a very healthy "Old Boys Club". As women, we need to get involved in the Leadership Campaign. Let's use E-Mail Trees to get out information on the candidates and their commitment to gender balance. Include supportive men as well.
- "One on one" mentorship is essential. Need to approach women and ask them to join the party. Network, encourage and support them to run for nomination.

Party Structure:

- Must be fair to everyone. We need to examine the "entire" demographic structure of the party – women, multicultural, youth and Aboriginal.
- How do we set up the executive component of the Party? Must review the nomination process, membership drives.

- Desperate need for renewal at the top – New Brunswick model may be worth studying.
- Must challenge women to run for all levels of leadership in the Party.
- Gender balance should receive a high profile when making structural changes to the Party.
- Need culturally diverse women involved at all levels of the party to act as role models and mentors.
- Concern with the 20%-25% glass ceiling for the party. Simply not good enough – women make up 52% of the population. How can we make this an urgent issue and demand better?

Policies:

- Support electoral reform (including constitutional Senate reforms).
- The Party executive in Ottawa needs to reconnect with the grassroots and to listen to their priorities, to lose its arrogance.
- Health care should remain a key priority – preserving on public health care.
- Poverty levels for women over the age of 60 are inexcusable. The provincial cutbacks in Alberta over the last 15 years have made the situation worse. Seniors living on \$1000/month in pension benefits are having to work well into their seventies.
- Professional credential recognition – still a problem for people who have been in Canada for a decade – remains a key issue for immigrants to Canada.
- Support recommendations of the “Gender Balance in Politics” brief.
- Focus on issues that affect women, their children and their grandchildren: health care, education and community safety to name a few.
- Provincial cutbacks, the homeless and the migration of Aboriginal people to urban centres. Must also better address poverty and human rights issues.
- Liberal women need to network with women’s organizations in the community on key issues of importance (social housing, health care, education, gun control, environment and global peace).