

**Liberal Renewal Commission**  
**Notes on Task Force on Women**  
**Halifax May 1, 2006**

**Present :** Hon. Anne McLellan; Kelly Regan; Jackie Moher; Greta Murtagh; Madonna McDonald; Pernille Fischer-Boulter; Carol Young; Joan Faulkner; Jeanne Wilson; Sharon Davis; Carolyn Scott; Daureen Lewis; Judy Robertson; Rosemary Godin; Diana Whalen; MLA, Kyna Boyce; Paula Lunn; Jane Spurr; Councillor Sheila Fougere; Anne Murtagh Coffin.

1. Why are there 32 task forces? Issues of women being lumped in with 31 other task forces, which is problematic because women's issues could be lost in the process.
2. Women are involved at the grass-root level of politics; therefore, why would women want to go to Ottawa?
  - Family is more important;
  - Media chews the politician;
  - Women lack thick skin;
  - Women express themselves differently;
  - Myth of men having the answer;
  - Men have a higher level of credibility – general public perception;
  - Ottawa is too far away;
  - No privacy.
3. Women's involvement is a growing process :
  - Need to attract more women at a young age and mentor them.
  - Women are often asked to run at the peak of their careers. Women need time to make a choice about running; a six-month lead time is not enough.
  - The LPC needs to plan 5, 10, 15 years in advance – and have a process to groom women so they can run when their families are grown and their careers more secure.
4. Lack of support from the work place plays a huge role in deciding whether to run for politics :
  - Consequence of becoming politically active, for example, missing out on promotions.
5. Need to look outside of the Liberal party for support :
  - Need to understand what the public wants/needs/desires.
  - Culture in Nova Scotia is very traditional, which could have a huge impact on where regionally women choose to run. For example, in the HRM, gender was not a pressing issue. There may be a rural/urban split on the issue.
6. Another reason why women may not be inclined to run for politics is because we do not see or hear women speaking for the party in the media :
  - For example, day care. We need male **and** female representatives talking about this issue.
  - We need to see women as the face of the Liberal party, talking about issues that are not considered "women's issues".
7. Notion of tokenism and quotas :
  - Credibility of women in politics is challenged via tokenism and quotas.

- On the other hand, perhaps quotas are a great stepping stone in order to create a critical mass and normalcy (i.e. the example of Wales – the Labour Party there in particular).
  - However, the numbers will not equate to anything without community support.
  - This is a contentious issue that perhaps requires re-wording. If the word “quota” is replaced then women’s involvement will not appear to be as systematic.
  - **Men need to understand that having more women elected to parliament and to leadership positions in the party are crucial to the health of the Liberal party.** Check out the wall at LPC in Ottawa: there’s been one woman president in our history. **One.**
  - Men (besides Irwin Cotler) need to attend the women’s caucus.
  - An all-inclusive approach should be taken to incorporate men into the discussion focusing on women’s political involvement. We need men speaking to women’s issues and vice versa.
  - Men’s involvement is essential in order to desensitize as men tend to be “startled” by women’s involvement.
8. It takes a long time to achieve results in federal politics; whereas, other levels of government have a quicker rate of making change.
- Women often go into politics for a purpose (i.e. they want to change something or right a wrong).
  - Women are doers and want change quickly. Some women may not want to bother with federal politics, they find it too frustrating.
9. Women (and the public in general) do not understand the reality of the job :
- They think what they see on QP is the norm.
  - They don’t understand that the job is really about public service - in much the way that being social worker is about public service.
  - If people understood that most of the job is community building, they’d see it as more attractive.
10. The nature of the job is not family friendly :
- The process of the HOC needs stability when it comes to sitting in the house. If set dates/times were published and adhered to, women could arrange childcare and other duties. Women want control of time in their lives.
  - Women do not like the culture of conflict.
  - The rhetoric is derogatory.
11. Importantly, treatment of women of colour in politics is problematic. The political culture needs to be more open toward including women of colour. It is essential that these barriers be torn down. Perhaps, if the use of “quotas” is adopted it could also include representing women of colour.
12. The role of the Women’s Commission needs to change. It is not meeting its mandate (to increase the number of women elected to party and parliament):
- Cannot solely be about women and politics; needs to look at broader non gender-specific issues too.
  - National Commission needs focus; perhaps take a lobbyist-like approach.
  - Perhaps it’s time to get rid of the Commission.\*
13. **Dream big.** The silver lining of opposition is that it gives us the chance to renew and make things better; let’s seize the moment to make significant change..

\*All women in the room agreed, including the current president of the NSWLC and the three other past presidents in the room.