

IT'S PARITY TIME!

The Liberal Party of Canada (Québec) Notre-Dame-de-Grâce - Lachine Riding Association¹

**Submission to the Liberal Renewal Commission Task Force on Women's Issues
Chaired by the Hon. Anne McLellan
September 2006**

Strengthening the role of women and achieving gender parity should be central to Liberal Party Renewal. The Liberal Party has long championed gender equity in its policies and gender parity in Canadian politics. Yet time and again, we fall short of even the most modest objectives. It's time to move beyond well-meaning rhetoric to a clear plan of action with concrete targets and timetables with a single overarching objective: to achieve gender parity in all appointed and elected positions within both the Liberal Party of Canada and the Parliament of Canada.

WHAT THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA SHOULD DO

Achieving gender parity will require the Liberal Party of Canada to address a broad range of issues from campaign financing to the recruitment, training and support of candidates as well as the structure and culture of the Party itself.

The LPC should immediately implement the following recommendations:

Strengthen the effectiveness, role and resources of the national and regional Women's Commissions so they can fulfill their central mandate: getting more Liberal women into both party and parliamentary positions.

Require the Leader to consult the national and regional Women's Commissions when appointing women candidates and approving nominations.

Create and maintain national, regional and local rosters of potential women candidates for party and parliamentary positions through consultation with national and regional Women's Commissions as well as relevant community and professional organizations.

Provide professionally supervised childcare at all major LPC events, such as leadership and policy conventions, provincial AGMs, etc.

Achieving Gender Parity within the Party

Require gender parity for every position at every level of the Party. In the event of a single position (e.g. riding or Party President), there should be co-presidents (a man and a woman) or alternating male/female terms.

Establish a dedicated position within the Leader's Office to

¹ Please note that this submission is based on the experiences and recommendations of many politically active Liberals, in particular women. It also draws on those stated positions of several Liberal leadership candidates based on the merit of specific proposals for achieving gender parity.

- Coordinate the work of the Liberal Party and Caucus to work gender parity in both the Party and Parliament; and
- Conduct gender-based analyses (i.e. examine the impact on women) of all Party policies and proposals, including campaign platforms and convention resolutions.

Achieving Gender Parity among Liberal MPs

Ensure that 52% of Liberal MPs are women within three general elections through specific targets and timetables as follows:

- If the next election is held within two years, field women candidates in at least 35% of all ridings, including 100% of vacated ridings and $[X\%]^2$ of winnable ridings (defined in terms of X percentage of Liberal support in the last three elections), and
- If the next election is held within 3-4 years, field women candidates in at least 50% of all ridings, including 100% of vacated ridings and X% of winnable ridings, and
- Repeat the latter formula in subsequent elections but increasing the number of women running in “winnable” ridings so that gender parity is achieved within three general elections

Recruiting and Mentoring

Establish and fund a sustained recruitment program led by sitting and former parliamentarians (male and female) that will identify, recruit, mentor and support women to run for the Party.

Actively seek out women leaders in the community, in neighborhoods and a wide range of organizations and fields (academia, advocacy, business, faith, labour, etc.), especially women’s professional and voluntary organizations. Encourage them to run, especially in winnable ridings and/or those vacated by a Liberal man.

If necessary, appoint women candidates in winnable ridings, particularly those that are being vacated by a Liberal MP.

The recruitment process should ensure that the roster of all candidates – men as well as women – reflects the diversity of Canada.

Financing

The LPC fund-raising programme should be overhauled with the aim of:

- increasing the number of contributors at least five-fold
- encouraging smaller contributions of \$25, \$50, \$100 and all amounts in between.
- increasing direct donations
- creating targeted fund-raising campaigns that focus on specific issues and encourage donations in support of specific Liberal initiatives.

The resulting increase in financial resources should be largely allocated to supporting women candidates.

WHAT A LIBERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO

² The precise percentage depends on the definition of “winnable” ridings as well as what proportion of these are currently held by women (to establish a baseline on which to build vigorously so as to achieve overall gender parity within three general elections).

To achieve gender parity within the Government of Canada, the next Liberal Government should immediately implement the following recommendations:

Appoint women to 50% of Cabinet positions, including those traditionally held by men (such as finance, foreign affairs and defence)

Appoint only women to Senate seats until gender parity is achieved in the Senate.

Create a gender advisor/parity officer position in the PMO to:

- examine and advise on all government policies, programs and projects – fiscal, foreign and domestic – in terms of their impact on/implications for women; and
- review and make recommendations regarding all government appointments (crown corporations, courts, parliamentary, diplomatic, etc) to achieve gender parity.

Achieving Gender Parity within Parliament

Review the current first-past-the-post electoral system in terms of its impact on fair representation of the Canadian population, especially women. Consider alternate or additional electoral systems which may increase women's representation in Parliament.

Provide pay equity, professional childcare services and extended maternity/parental leave for women in politics (elected officials as well as party, parliamentary and ministerial staffers)

Establish a family-friendly parliamentary calendar through, for example, shorter, more efficient work weeks in Ottawa, and provide for electronic participation where practicable. Such measures would allow more time with family as well as addressing constituents' concerns in the riding,

Create an ethos of respect and civility by developing and implementing a parliamentary code of conduct to curb disrespectful language and behaviour.

Financing

Provide financial rewards to all parties that get women candidates elected (in addition to other under-represented groups such as aboriginal and visible minority candidates).

Ensure adequate funding to Status of Women Canada to support non-partisan activities that will increase the participation of women in the political process (e.g. an on-line training programme for women candidates).