

**Liberal Party of Canada Renewal Commission**  
**Notes from a Task Force on Women Meeting**  
**July 10, 2006 in Toronto**

**Participants:** The Hon. Anne McLellan, Mehreen Raza, Lesley Byrne, Lynne Steele, Louisa Moya, Michelle Simson, Kim Donaldson, the Hon. Elinor Caplan, Nancy Coldham, Sandra Anstey, Theresa Nowakowski, Andrea Harrison, Yasmin Ratansi (MP), Paddy Torsney, Lia Quickert, Farah Mohamed, Elaine Flis, Pamela Jeffrey, Adrian Lang, Kate Acs, Phyllis Morris, Lori Spadorcia.

**Barriers that prevent/discourage women from entering political realm:**

- Not an intellectual problem, but a practical problem -- women see working, raising a family and caring for aging parents as an impediment to entering the political realm (work/life balance);
- Women are disillusioned and see politics as being “dumbed down”. They see politicians as only caring about ego and lacking vision/idealism and passion;
- Politicians are viewed as liars, and women don’t want to be associated with that;
- Mentality of old boys club prevalent. Male-dominated environment makes it toxic for women and that culture needs to change;
- Women lack the financial backing to enter the political realm;
- Politics is extremely difficult on marriages and family life;
- Women are more involved in other levels of government (local, municipal, provincial) as they feel they can have a greater impact on policies;
- Role of media deters women – media can be very critical of females, and are normally not as interested in women candidates;
- Women aren’t given the same PR as men;
- Nasty nomination battles and membership drives don’t entice women. Women lack the competitive edge and the toughness of men – women care what people think, men don’t. Women need to take charge and empower themselves;
- Women aren’t taken as seriously as men;
- Women are shut out of the process. They aren’t given top portfolios – when has a woman been Minister of Finance?
- The atmosphere in Question Period is seen as malicious;

**Strategies for getting more women involved in politics:**

- Party needs to identify and recruit potential women candidates early on;
- Once women are selected, a coaching and mentoring process needs to be put in place -- we need women to feel like there is an opportunity to win and not be left behind. A possible structure to support this system could include hiring a full-time employee/manager. This person could organize a curriculum and train these candidates over a long period of time;
- There needs to be a support system put in place for women. Men take care of one another, women don’t -- women need to support one another, instead of cutting each other down;
- It is crucial that women are put into winnable ridings;
- Change needs to take place within the executive and through the nomination process;
- Need to educate women about the value of becoming politically engaged;

- Need to target women at a younger age, including mentoring and educating about the importance of getting involved in politics. Most haven't thought of themselves as candidates (young women don't understand the socialization aspect until later when they enter the working world);
- Organizations need to encourage women to enter politics. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities is studying women's participation. Equal Voice is another force determined to get more women involved ([www.equalvoice.ca](http://www.equalvoice.ca));
- Women should be appointed – mentality of entitlement for men, but the same does not exist for women. When men are nominated, not an issue, when women are nominated, it becomes a big issue;
- There are no mechanisms or apparatus in place to protect female candidates – this has to change. Entire apparatus is male-dominated;

### **Liberal Party Structure and Policy Agenda:**

- Liberals have a 25% target, while not embedded in the rules, is it enough when women represent 52% of the population;
- Liberals, when in power, did very little to encourage women to enter the political realm. Now down and out, will this change? Liberals need to be committed to changing the male-dominated political world;
- The Liberal brand is in trouble, and women need to become more involved as a result. As the party is rebuilding, women need to take control and change the dynamic of the party;
- Liberals should study and assess the report submitted by the Law Commission of Canada that suggested proportional representation as an effective way of getting more women elected;
- Liberals should follow NDP and make it a campaign to recruit women;
- The party should look at quotas;
- Women need to become members of the Liberal party, then think about whom they vote for in the Leadership and the Executive;
- Women need to get involved as campaign managers, policy people and teachers/mentors ;
- Leadership needs to get involved -- we put men in leadership roles, but we need to put women in leadership roles, including party executive;
- Policy platform of the Liberals being decided upon by men and that needs to change -- men don't understand women's issues, as such, platform does not reflect the views of women;
- Party needs to send out female pundits – at present, female pundits are almost non-existent. These women can help to change the perception of the media and society as a whole;
- Party needs to invest more resources -- both in people-power and financially;
- Women need to use the National Women's Liberal Commission. On that note, National Women's Liberal Commission needs to take ownership;