

# **18<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories**

## **Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly**

Interim Report

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MLA Yellowknife Centre

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INCREASE THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN  
IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

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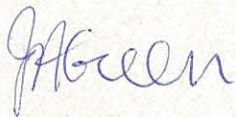
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March 12, 2019.

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly is pleased to provide its *Interim-Report on Increasing the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly* and commends it to the House.



Julie Green  
Chairperson  
Special Committee to Increase the  
Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly

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## **SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INCREASE THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **INTERIM REPORT ON INCREASING THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories (NWT) has the lowest percentage of women Members of any Canadian legislature. NWT voters elected two women to the Assembly in 2015, or 10.5 percent of Members. By comparison, Nunavut has six women Members, or 27.3 percent, and Yukon seven women Members, representing 36.8 percent.

On March 8, 2018, the Legislative Assembly of the NWT adopted a motion to increase the representation of women in the Legislative Assembly to 20 percent by 2023 and 30 percent by 2027. The Assembly created the Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly and tasked it with identifying a wide range of strategies to achieve these goals.

The Special Committee began work on November 28, 2018, and has since held several public hearings, received written submissions and additional requests for meetings with interest groups. Overwhelmingly, we heard that women face many obstacles to running for elected office in the Northwest Territories. In addition, we heard that initiatives to assist women prepare for participation in politics are far too few and infrequent. The Special Committee also heard that the Legislative Assembly should be more family-friendly.

Given this feedback, we decided to provide the public with an interim-report focused on systemic barriers to women's full participation in the NWT's political life.

While the Special Committee's work is not complete, we are sharing what we have heard and recommendations intended to improve conditions for women's engagement in politics. A final report will be tabled before the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly. It will include discussion and recommendations on electoral processes and legislative change.

## **SPECIAL COMMITTEE MANDATE**

On March 8, 2018, the Legislative Assembly unanimously passed Motion 13-18(3) Increasing Women's Participation in the Legislative Assembly. This motion calls on the Members of the Legislative Assembly to

- support "the goal of increasing women's representation in the Legislative Assembly to 20 percent by 2023 and 30 percent by 2027"; "work together and individually, to identify and implement a wide range of strategies, including positive action, public debate, and training and mentoring for women as leaders, to achieve these goals".

On November 1, 2018, the Legislative Assembly adopted a motion and created the Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly. The Terms of Reference detail the Special Committee's tasks and include the following:

- The Special Committee is committed to consult with relevant interest groups within the Northwest Territories, in Canada and internationally, as appropriate.
- The Special Committee will consider relevant studies or reports aimed at increasing the representation of women including the Tabled Document 208-18(3) Discussion Paper - "Temporary Special Measures" To Increase the Representation of Women in the NWT Legislative Assembly.
- The Special Committee will prepare a report and present it to the House no later than the first day of the final sitting of the 18<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly.
- The report should identify, describe, and where appropriate, make recommendations with respect to:
  - The barriers that prevent women from running, incentives that mitigate these barriers, along with incentives to increase the representation of women in the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly;
  - Solutions designed to increase women's representation in the 20th Legislative Assembly to 20 percent, and in the 21st Legislative Assembly to 30 percent; and
  - Changes to any current rules of the Legislative Assembly; and current and related legislation, or policies and programs of the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Legislative Assembly.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Speaker of the NWT Legislative Assembly tabled a report to generate discussion on how to increase women's representation. The discussion paper "Temporary Special

Measures to Increase the Representation of Women in the NWT Legislative Assembly” presents a model based on the system used in Samoa, which amended its constitution to guarantee a minimum number of seats for women. The paper describes how this system could be applied to activate increased women’s participation in our legislature.

Worldwide, governments and political parties have adopted various measures to increase representation by women. These range from constitutional or legislated requirements to voluntary targets set by political parties. Studies show that mandatory or guaranteed seats produce significantly higher numbers and quicker results than voluntary targets. Additionally, more women are elected in systems with proportional representation than in “first-past-the-post” systems such as Canada’s and the NWT’s, where voters indicate on a ballot the candidate of their choice, and the candidate who receives the most votes, wins.

Taiwan (Republic of China) is an interesting example. The state adopted reserved seats for women in the 1950s and was one of the earliest countries in the world to do so. Of Taiwan’s 113 seats, 73 represent single-member-districts elected much as they are in Canada, 34 are filled from party lists on the basis of a nationwide vote for proportional representation, and six seats are reserved for aboriginal representatives from three districts.

Voluntary quotas are not an option in electoral systems without political parties, such as our own consensus government. If guaranteed seats are deemed necessary in the NWT, they would have to be legislated as suggested in the Speaker’s discussion paper.

Before the creation of Nunavut in 1999, an appointed implementation commission recommended a gender-equal Legislative Assembly. A man and a woman would be elected by all voters in each district. The proposal was put to a non-binding public vote in May 1997, resulting in 57 percent of ballots against the idea. Had the system been implemented, Nunavut’s Assembly would have been the world’s first gender-equal, democratically-elected legislature. Currently, six of 22 Members (27 percent) of Nunavut’s Legislative Assembly are women.

Electoral systems cannot be the sole tool to increase women’s representation because the social, cultural, political, historical and economic realities of each jurisdiction will influence the effects that measures and incentives have on women’s participation. Changing the workplace by providing opportunities for work-life balance also can have a positive effect on increasing the share of women in Legislative Assemblies.

## **Political Participation**

The percentage of women in national legislatures has become a standard measure of a country’s achievement in women’s political participation. The presence of women in

legislatures is considered essential to encouraging citizen engagement and building a representative democracy, because women represent half the population.

The number of women in legislatures is increasing throughout the world. The East African country of Rwanda tops the global list with 49 women holding 61.3 percent of the seats in the national legislature. Cuba is second with 53.2 percent, Bolivia third at 53.1 percent, and Mexico is fourth with 48.2 percent. The thirteen countries with representation of women above 40 percent include the Nordic countries Sweden, Finland and Norway, but also Grenada, Namibia, Costa Rica, South Africa and Senegal. When looking at regional averages, the Nordic countries lead with 42.3 percent, followed by the Americas with 30.3 percent, and Europe with 26.5 percent, excluding the Nordic countries.

In 2018, Quebec voters elected 52 women to its National Assembly of 125 seats, or 41.6 percent, the highest in Canada. In the same year, Ontario voters elected 49 women to take 39.5 percent of seats in Queen's Park. In British Columbia, where 111 women ran in the provincial election, 34 were elected, taking 38.5 percent of the seats. Canada's parliament has 90 women Members, representing 26.9 percent, ranking 59th globally.

Research determined that more women are elected in systems with party lists, proportional representation and large districts. Most political parties have introduced candidate quotas for women based on party internal decisions. However, obstacles reported in party systems include barriers in the candidate recruitment and selection process, party discipline and gender-biased media coverage. Tactics such as assigning first-time women candidates to ridings with strong incumbents are a disadvantage to women.

In non-partisan systems like the NWT's and Nunavut's, the individual candidate cannot rely on party support, or expect the barriers mentioned above. In the absence of political parties, candidates run as independents in consensus government.

### **What Women Bring to the Table**

The critical threshold of women required in a legislature to bring about significant and lasting policy change is 30 per cent, according to the United Nations. Globally, 49 countries have exceeded that mark. As of November 2018, the percentage of women in legislatures worldwide was 24.1 percent.

Increasing the number of women in positions of political power affects many aspects of society. Differences in priorities have been studied, with findings that women members of parliament more often address issues of social policy, family policy, and care for the elderly or health care in their election campaigns than their male counterparts.



Research literature suggests that women politicians are more likely than men to advance women's rights in areas such as pay equity, violence against women, health care and family policy.

Researchers investigated the relationship between the growing number of women in Canada's ten provincial governments and changes in population health over time. The authors conclude that women in government can bring about desirable changes in reducing mortality rates by triggering specific types of government spending, including medical care, preventive care, post-secondary education, and social services.

Not all women Members of the Assembly prioritize and find the same solutions to the same problems. While research suggests that women's leadership may reduce partisan combativeness and advance issues of gender-equality, childcare and pensions, it cannot be assumed that women and men implement leadership in the same way, or that leadership styles are distinctly fixed to gender. One research project found women leaders tend to be more relationship-oriented, while their male counterparts were more task-oriented. However, women leaders also tend to abandon their styles when in male-dominated leadership roles.

Women in government appear to govern differently than men. Research suggests that women tend to interrupt less, pay closer attention to other people's non-verbal signs, and use a more collaborative governing style than men. Women also govern differently by behaviour, opinion and attitude, with consequences such as change in internal working procedures or encouragement for more trust in government, according to research.

Women legislators continue to embrace women, children and family as priority issues; men do not share these priorities as often. Research found that women and men legislators over time have been agreeing more on ideas on how to work and develop procedures and process improvements. However, when it comes to choosing subjects, women and men continue to have different priorities in the topics they wish to see addressed.

## **A Slow Process**

The United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women exists since 1946. The 1953 Convention on the Political Rights of Women adopted by the UN General Assembly is the first international treaty guaranteeing women be entitled to vote in all elections, be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, and be entitled to hold public office on equal terms with men.

In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN General Assembly and ratified by 189 states, including Canada. One of its 16 core provisions guarantees women equality in voting,

participation in government and organizations concerned with public and political life of a country.

The 2011 UN General Assembly Resolution on Women's Political Participation expressed concern that women worldwide continue to be marginalized from political activities due to "discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women". This resolution reaffirms obligations of all states to protect human rights, recognizes the role of UN Women, its goal of gender equality and empowerment of women, and recognizes the important contributions "women have made towards the achievement of representative, transparent and accountable Governments in many countries".

Several indexes have been developed to measure gender-equity worldwide. The UN 'Gender-related Development Index', the World Economic Forum 'Gender Gap Index', the International Save the Children Alliance 'Mothers' Index' and the Social Watch 'Gender Equity Index', all rank countries by the number of women in parliament. The rankings are reported on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's website <http://www.ipu.org>.

The pace at which women have been elected to legislatures worldwide has been called 'glacial.'

### **What We Have Heard**

We heard that the essential voices of women are missing in the NWT Legislative Assembly, its Committees, and Cabinet. The Special Committee received passionate and well-informed calls for the Assembly to take action to increase women's participation.

We also heard that equal representation can make a difference, that there is awareness that women's leadership gives strength to and improves political decision-making. When women are equally represented, multiple viewpoints are taken into account and conduct tends to be more respectful.

Cultural barriers, financial and other challenges to campaigning, access to information and knowledge on consensus government, and uncertainty about the responsibilities of Members of the Legislative Assembly were among the most common topics to arise during conversations in public hearings conducted by the Special Committee.

Encouragement and social support for candidates, more consideration for women's roles in the care of children and family, workshops on campaigning, helping young women to see politics as a career choice, and enhancing the Northern Studies curriculum were among the concrete suggestions to help overcome the obstacles women see on their path toward equal political participation.

The Committee has received specific requests to identify how the NWT Legislative Assembly's building can be changed to better accommodate women, and how policies could be improved to create a more women- and family-friendly environment.

## **WOMEN'S CANDIDACY**

Canadian federal elections show that the most important factor in women getting elected is the decision to run for office in the first place. In 2015, of all Parliamentary candidates 29.9 percent were women – today, nearly the same amount, 27 percent, of Canada's Members of Parliament are women.

Since 1999, NWT elections had women candidates in only eight, nine or 10 of 19 ridings. The high was 10 candidates in 2007. In 2015, there were nine women candidates in nine of the 19 ridings – and two were elected.

Women must be willing to stand as candidates in order to be elected. The decision to become a candidate and run for a seat in an election is an individual choice, but women report many obstacles they must consider when choosing to run.

A 2014 study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union found that globally, the top five factors deterring women from entering politics are:

- Domestic responsibilities;
- Prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the roles of women in society;
- Lack of support from family;
- Lack of confidence; and
- Lack of finance.

Media can also play a role in women's participation in public life and politics whether at the local, regional or national level. Gendered comments, sexist jokes, labelling of women politicians, focussing on a woman's physical attributes and using stereotypes detract from women candidates' platforms and achievements.

Discussion is ongoing on how Indigenous communities are impacted by the gendered process of colonization, including the failure of mainstream Indigenous organizations to mobilize around these impacts. Indigenous women's experiences of colonization have had particularly negative impacts on their ability to achieve positions of power within Canadian or Indigenous governments or organizations, according to research.

Research has attempted to connect the historical stereotyping of Indigenous women to the current high numbers of unsolved crimes against them. Colonialist interpretations and misinterpretations based on ethnocentric views have contributed to stereotypes that in turn are said to have led to negligence in solving crimes against Indigenous women. Understanding how gender roles changed during the history of contact with a patriarchal

European colonial society, how it has contributed to today's high rate of violence against Indigenous women and how this in turn has contributed to the low representation of Indigenous women in political leadership is at the heart of some most recent research.

### **Women as Caretakers**

Women in the NWT said one of the biggest barriers to their participation in politics is their role as caretakers of household and family. Overall, there was a strong sense that women are expected, and often expect of themselves, to be the caretaker of extended families. Their professional work and caring for family often leaves little time for preparing to participate in politics.

The Committee also heard about poverty and how it heightens the pressure on women to provide for children and family. We heard often that women provide financially for the extended family and have little to spend on themselves.

We have heard that men should not keep women at home to have babies and take care of the house. We have also heard that in today's world it is the women who have gone to school and have jobs.

Members have heard that stigma plays a big role in women's decision-making on political participation. Women explained that they felt that being a politician is still seen as a man's job, and therefore, many women shy away from political leadership as a choice for themselves.

### **Financial Risks of Campaigning**

The Committee heard from many residents that deciding to run for election requires quitting full-time jobs or interrupting business activities. With the outcome of the campaign being unknown, they felt that the financial risk of running is too great.

Proposals to mitigate this risk include convincing employers to keep the position open and offer unpaid leave to employees who run for elected office. We also heard some women will not consider running for election because they do not want to take a pay cut and reduce their current level of income to the level of earnings made by a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Fundraising strategies are impacted by the size of a riding and type of transportation required. Committee heard there is considerable effort required when running for election in ridings with small and fly-in communities to visit people and households.

Being reliant on flight schedules can even further extend the time away from home. For those who require childcare, the expenses are also higher. It was suggested that eligible electoral expenses include childcare expenses.

The resources required to cover far distances within one riding are a key concern. There was mention of an imbalance in the costs of campaigning amongst NWT's ridings, as for example, ridings within Yellowknife do not require much travel.

### **Recommendation 1**

**The Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly recommends that the Legislative Assembly Board of Management consider childcare expenses as a Constituency Work Allowance Expense.**

An important factor when discussing the extended time away from home due to necessary travel is the increase in number of days for which childcare is required, and the increase in related expenses. One former woman candidate explained she took her child along on her campaign tour, covering the extra travel, in this case airfare, in addition to accommodation expenses.

### **Recommendation 2**

**The Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly recommends that the Legislative Assembly make childcare an allowable election expense.**

## **CAMPAIGN SCHOOLS**

The UN Women's programs on leadership and participation work with civil society to uphold women's rights, including the right to vote and campaign free from electoral violence. The programs advocate legislative and constitutional reforms to ensure women's fair access to all political areas. Training and empowerment are essential components of the UN Women's commitment to advance gender equality. The UN Women Training Centre offers training courses, programs and resources, including an eLearning campus and knowledge-sharing platforms.

Significant efforts to overcome barriers are being made by non-governmental organizations in Canada. A prominent example is Equal Voice, a multi-partisan organization dedicated to electing more women in all orders of government. Its Daughters of the Vote project is receiving \$3.8-million in federal support over three years to encourage young women to consider a career in politics.

In the Northwest Territories, the Status of Women Council has offered information on campaigning for many years. Starting in March 2019, the Status of Women Council and the Native Women's Association will pilot a new Campaign School curriculum. Additional initiatives currently ongoing include Women on the Ballot workshops provided in Yellowknife.

### **What We Have Heard**

Training in leadership, public speaking and how to run a campaign are key suggestions the Committee received in all public hearings. The obstacles women identified, such as not being taught or encouraged to speak in public, lacking self-confidence, having no experience in campaigning, and no information on a Member's duties culminated in the expressed wish for workshops, training and learning opportunities in communities.

Leadership training for women was identified as an important tool to increase participation in politics. The Indigenous Women in Leadership program of the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity was mentioned as a good example of a program for Indigenous women leaders.

The Committee also heard that women encounter the persistent perception that women who run for the first time are not likely to perform well. Women in particular noted that when first-timers run against male incumbents, the public reasoning of women's inexperience in predicting low performance is regarded a gender-based interpretation and a disincentive to potential women candidates. Gendered comments from the public are expected and predicted by the women we heard from. The perception of low chances of electoral success, particularly against male incumbents, is a disincentive to women.

We heard that women seek assistance in preparing for candidacy. Women asked for opportunities to gain knowledge and experience on how to handle the obstacles they must address and overcome before they feel ready to run for election. In particular women asked that the following initiatives be offered in communities:

- Provide a women's forum for discussion and exchange of ideas;
- Inform how to put women's issues on political agendas, locally or regionally;

- Help to organize meetings amongst women for the purpose of strategizing on how to promote women and make their voices heard;
- Train women how to
  - increase self-confidence;
  - speak in public;
  - respond to gendered comments.

Campaign Schools are known to community members. Participants in our public meetings had either attended one of the Status of Women Campaign Schools, or knew someone who had. The majority of references to the workshops were positive and pointed to specific content elements as useful information.

Several times we were told the Campaign Schools' work should be supported and expanded to accommodate the learning needs of women in communities. We heard at every public meeting women seek more knowledge about the scope of the task of being a candidate, and information on the candidacy process should be easily accessible. Many residents recommended that government should continue to offer campaign-readiness courses and workshops in communities, and bring educational events to the smaller communities rather than holding them only in the larger hubs.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories task and fund one or more independent individual(s) or organization(s) to deliver the Campaign School for Women initiatives throughout the Northwest Territories and offer more than two workshops in one fiscal year.**

After all the feedback Committee received on the need for more information and training to help women to prepare to be candidates, we heard that more money needs to be invested into Campaign Schools initiatives.

For example, it was mentioned that a section on roles and responsibilities is a good start to provide needed information. Many women who came to our public meetings are board members in their home communities and already involved in decision-making positions. The women identified that they require additional and concrete information to move forward to compete for roles at the next level of government.

## **CONSENSUS GOVERNMENT**

A recent poll found that there is a clear gap in self-reported political knowledge among men and women in Canada. A 2018 Abacus data study asked individuals how much they know about politics. Responses showed that women were 19 percent less likely than men to say they know a lot or a fair amount about politics. Research has shown that while men are likely to think they are qualified to run for office, women, even in positions of high professional achievement, remain reluctant to run because they are concerned they are not qualified enough.

The Committee heard that women in the NWT perceive themselves as having insufficient knowledge and understanding of political systems, and that they feel a strong need to have easier access to information on the NWT's political system. We heard there is need to improve and broaden women's access to information across the NWT, and to reach each community.

Committee heard that general education and information for candidates is needed in the following areas:

- Learning about the NWT political system;
- Hearing that politics can be a career;
- Understanding functions of the NWT Legislative Assembly;
- Knowing where to find information on how to become a Member of the Legislative Assembly;
- Being aware of the duties and responsibilities of a Member;
- Understanding the requirements to run for an elected seat;
- Understanding the type and depth of knowledge required before one runs for election;
- Learning and practicing public speaking as part of grade school education;
- Knowing where to find opportunities for leadership training for young women.

It was recommended that this information be presented in the form of pamphlets and a video. The format should be easily accessible in communities and in plain language. Information should be provided on tools such as session calendars, the technologies available at the Assembly, and ways to work remotely. The Committee suggests that this might be accomplished through additional and regular communications initiatives.



#### **Recommendation 4**

**The Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly recommends that the Legislative Assembly provide to the public a better understanding of the work of a Member, and make available a video, and other visual and written materials, including information on the prerequisites, roles and responsibilities, and benefits available to Members.**

### **POLITICAL EDUCATION**

Engaging women at a young age, we heard, is at the heart of getting women to participate in politics. Women had little recollection of learning about politics in school or during activities outside of school. Few women recalled any mention of 'politician' as a career choice during their school years. Information on what politicians do and how one becomes one appears to be absent in school curricula and extra-curricular activities.

Young women tend to be exposed to less political information than young men. Research found that regardless of whether the focus is on academic or extracurricular activities or media habits, women are less likely to be surrounded by political discussion and information. This information gap hinders young women's political ambition.

The Committee received feedback on school education and when to best educate students on political systems, including career opportunities. Women recommended including information on civics, consensus government and politics as a career choice in Grade 8 in order to reach women at a young age. In support of young women making career choices for leadership in politics, the Committee heard that it would be necessary to include information on careers in politics in school career programs.

Committee Members also heard words of caution. Being elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly is a position with a time limit. An MLA serves a term of four years until the Assembly is dissolved for the next election. It was questioned if four years could even be considered a career; every Member faces the risk of not being re-elected.

The Northern Studies program, which is part of the Grade 10 NWT curriculum in high schools, includes learning about Canada's parliamentary system. We heard that it does not specifically teach about consensus government and not all schools carry out the program with the same intensity and focus. In cases where the program has left notable impression on the students, it was the teacher's special efforts that made the difference.

Visiting the Legislative Assembly was described as a highlight of learning in school. Involving MLAs in the classes of teaching the Northern Studies program was mentioned as an important hands-on experience.

Committee heard that teaching on consensus government could be intensified and that the Northern Studies program is a good opportunity to inform young students about career choices in politics. Women stressed that while the program is not gender-specific, it provides an excellent opportunity for young women to acquire knowledge on politics that they otherwise may not experience at this age.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly recommends that the Legislative Assembly take the necessary steps to assist in ensuring that information on the NWT's consensus government is made available to any group, organization or government in the Northwest Territories involved in teaching young women.**

**And further,**

**The Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly recommends that the Legislative Assembly encourage its Members to be supportive of hands-on learning activities on consensus government such as school visits to the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories.**

## **WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

The challenge of balancing work and life is magnified for women because women are most often the primary caregivers. Scheduling child care in an environment that requires short-notice adjustments to work schedules is challenging. Add the necessity for work travel and the outcome is a tricky negotiation among priorities.

Researchers have shown that there are factors that make a legislative job particularly challenging for mothers. Such challenges include not being able to take time off to take care of an infant, or to turn off the phone to spend uninterrupted time with children or family. Infant and toddler care may also not be available in close vicinity to the legislature requiring additional arrangements particularly to accommodate late sitting hours.

Research has given some attention to leave policies, employer-supported access to child care, alternative scheduling, and family support to enable work-life balance. However, it has been argued that much work remains to ensure that electoral politics do not present additional barriers to the participation of women.

### **Measures in Canadian Legislatures Supporting Work-life Balance**

In 2016, the House of Commons and the Legislative Assembly of Alberta tasked committees with studying ways to make their legislatures more family-friendly. Each resulted in a report with seven recommendations, many looking to improve Members' schedules. In Alberta, as well as in the NWT, there was concern that votes scheduled at the end of a week's sitting could disrupt the travel arrangements of Members with constituencies furthest away from the Assembly.

Reconciling family and professional life applies to women and men equally, the Committee heard. The topic of sessional schedules and sitting hours was raised several times, often by those who had previously been Members.

We heard that the sessional schedule and long sitting hours did not accommodate women Members who had children and family at home outside of Yellowknife. Arrangements had to be made for child-care in the home community and it was not possible to combine family and work life in one location. Loneliness, we heard, is a hard fact in the lives of women MLAs who spend the weekdays far from their family, home community, riding or constituency.

### **Making the NWT Legislature Child-Friendly**

Changes to facilities, installing change tables in washrooms, and quiet rooms for Members to care for children have been introduced in many public places. More than half of Canadian legislatures have installed change tables in washrooms, and several have designated quiet rooms, including Alberta, Manitoba and the House of Commons.

Daycare facilities are not available to all legislatures. Thirty-eight spaces for children aged between 18 months and five years are provided to Members of the House of Commons in Ottawa. Ontario's Legislature holds a membership to a corporate daycare that ensures a place is available should a Member wish to drop off their child at their own expense. Quebec considered opening an early childhood centre on site, but did not do so as the City of Quebec is already well-served with childcare spaces. Alberta is considering a daycare facility on the Legislature grounds.

Several legislatures allow infants or small children in the Chamber. British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and the House of Commons have either no restriction or have amended rules to allow for infants to be in the House during sittings.

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The NWT Legislative Assembly currently has no family rooms, change tables or any physical features to accommodate small children on the premises. Members who wish to bring their children have no designated spaces to care for them.

The Committee heard that it is time to review how well the NWT Legislative Assembly allows Members to balance work and family life. Suggestions include a review of the building and its facilities with a view to accommodating women, childcare needs, family responsibilities and possible access issues such as special parking or wide enough doors to allow strollers to pass.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**The Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly recommends that the Legislative Assembly investigate practical measures to make the legislature family-friendly, explore the possibility of creating a family room, installing infant change devices in bathrooms, and improving signage indicating location of family-friendly facilities.**

Parental leave and absences due to pregnancy or childbirth are considered acceptable absences in most jurisdictions in Canada, though not always formalized as parental leave but accepted under other leave options such as family or sick leave.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly recommends that the Legislative Assembly Board of Management make allowance for Members to be absent from the Assembly without financial penalty for up to four months due to pregnancy, childbirth or the care of a Member's child following birth or adoption.**

Many jurisdictions have aimed to improve on their Assembly's family-friendliness. Setting parliamentary calendars early in the year is one measure that most legislatures have taken to allow Members to better predict their schedule.

Sitting hours have been adjusted to a four-day week schedule in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Yukon. Quebec reduced its schedule to a three-day week.

Late night sittings were eliminated in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Yukon. In other jurisdictions such as British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta, the frequency of evening sittings has been reduced. Several attempts have been made in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick to make sitting hours more family-friendly, but to date hours have not been changed and evening sittings continue.

Proxy voting and pairing rules for voting enable Members of legislatures to be absent without impacting voting results. Proxy voting allows a Member to vote in her or his absence by delegating the vote to another representative. Most recently, the Parliament of the United Kingdom, in a briefing on 'baby leave', recommended to allow their Members who have had a baby or adopted a child to be entitled, but not required, to discharge their responsibility to vote by proxy.

The House of Commons, Manitoba and Ontario have pairing rules. This arrangement between two Members enables one to be absent without affecting the result of a vote. A Member of the opposition will agree to also not vote, therefore cancelling out the imbalance and avoiding the loss or win of a vote because of absence.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women thanks everyone involved in the discussion of this topic, with particular thanks to those who provided their input and recommendations. We appreciate the feedback received and encourage further discussion and hearing from more groups.

The Committee will continue consultation, research further and will come forward with concrete recommendations to increase the representation of women in the Legislative Assembly of the NWT. The Committee will table its final report before the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly.

All committee reports and public submissions are available on the Legislative Assembly website: [www.assembly.gov.nt.ca](http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca).

## **USEFUL RESOURCES**

### **Northwest Territories**

NWT Campaign School  
[www.statusofwomen.nt.ca](http://www.statusofwomen.nt.ca)  
[www.nativewomensnwt.com](http://www.nativewomensnwt.com)

Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the NWT Legislative Assembly

<https://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/content/special-committee-increase-representation-women>

What is Consensus Government

<https://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/visitors/what-consensus>

### **Other**

Daughters of the Vote

[www.dauthersofthevote.ca](http://www.dauthersofthevote.ca)

Equal Voice: Electing More Women in Canada

[www.equalvoice.ca](http://www.equalvoice.ca)

Getting to the Gate Online Campaign School

[www.gettingtothegate.com](http://www.gettingtothegate.com)

Indigenous Women in Leadership

<https://www.banffcentre.ca/programs/indigenous-women-leadership>

UN Women

<http://www.unwomen.org/en>