



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
Advisory Council on the Status of
WOMEN

POLICY GUIDE

Women and Electoral Reform

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At Issue ...

It is essential to Prince Edward Island women's aspirations — and to the health and strength of our democracy — that the electoral system promote the values at the core of democracy: fairness, choice, equality of opportunity, citizen engagement, and accountability. The Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women sees electoral reform as a cornerstone in creating opportunity for women in decision-making and in renewing politics in the province.

Ask most politicians what motivated them to enter politics: they are likely to answer that they wanted to create positive change in their communities. They wanted to make a difference.

And yet, as a society, we are increasingly disillusioned with politics and the political system. Voter turnout in much of Canada is declining, particularly among youth. Even on Prince Edward Island, where voter turnout continues to be strong, the term "politics" itself has become a bad word: "That was just a political appointment," or "She got laid off because of politics," or "I'm fed up with office politics."

"Politics" has become associated with backroom deals that exclude ordinary citizens. People don't see themselves as part of the political discussions and decisions that profoundly affect their lives. Many people feel that political processes that should actively engage and include all citizens are built to serve only the lucky few: the rich and the powerful.

Part of the reason for public disenchantment is women's under-representation in decision-making: more than fifty percent of voters never see themselves fairly or adequately reflected in the faces of elected officials.

Some argue that women have the same opportunities as men to succeed in politics. They believe there is a "level playing field" in politics. This, however, is not borne out in women's experience. Women report they still face more challenges than men when they enter politics: more difficulty being nominated, more responsibility for unpaid work at home, more criticism of their appearance

and personal choices in the media, more resistance to aggressive and competitive tactics in the legislature, and more feelings of exclusion from decision-making.

Fundamentally, women face a political system that was designed before they were permitted to vote and before they were considered "persons" under the law. Historically, the electoral system was not designed with women's participation in mind. No wonder it fails to reflect women in the present day.

Women need the system to change and to include them because women and vulnerable, marginalized, or disenfranchised groups *need* politics of the best kind — the kind that includes members of the public in all their diversity, the kind that expresses Islanders' priorities in a way that helps ensure citizens' needs are filled.

As citizens we can't afford to be cynical about the political system. Too many needs can only be met in society — in the complex relationships and environments we share with other Islanders. These needs are concrete, constant, and held in common: needs for access to safe food, air, and water; for personal security; for supports for our health and education; needs for recourse to justice, fairness, and human rights.

As a community, we must find ways to make politics work better to meet these needs. We have to cultivate a positive view of politics and to promote the message that good policy and legislation can make a difference. To do so, we must create a politics of inclusion.

The government and political parties take a great deal of responsibility for enacting steps that will restore citizens' faith in politics. A first step must be to take measures to ensure our decision-makers come from diverse backgrounds and experiences and that women are more equally represented in their ranks.

To make that first step possible, governments and political parties must ensure that our electoral system promotes democratic values and advances women's aspirations instead of creating barriers to their political success.

Guiding Principle . . .

One core principle guides the recommendations in this policy guide: that regardless of the results of the November 2005 plebiscite on PEI's Electoral Future, the Government of Prince Edward Island is responsible to make a public commitment to ongoing review and reform of our electoral system and legislative practices to ensure they

- a) match the evolving democratic values of citizens,
- b) meet the principles upheld in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and
- c) model the best international standards and practices in advancing human rights, equity, and diversity.

Given this guiding principle, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women recommends that the Government of Prince Edward Island measure progress towards the following goals:

A provincial legislative assembly that more truly reflects the diversity of the province's population, including increased representation of women in the legislature.

Prince Edward Island's legislative assembly has never seen women fill more than 25% of its seats. The electoral system recognizes that there must be balance of geographic representation and of population. The PEIACSW insists that our electoral system should also recognize the need for gender and diversity balance. As such, benchmarking women's participation in politics as candidates and elected officials will give an important indication of our progress towards more fairness and diversity in the electoral system.

Increased and better-balanced representation of women and diverse Islanders on appointed boards, commissions, and tribunals.

The PEI Coalition for Women in Government reviewed Orders-in-Council from January 2003 to February 2005 and found that Executive Council made 245 appointments of citizens to boards, commissions, and tribunals. Of these, 64.9% were given to men and 35.1% to women. Men were appointed to 61.7% of positions as chair, vice-chair, co-chair, or alternate chair. Similar research by the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women showed a consistent lack of balance by category: women were more often appointed to boards and commissions related to women's traditional work in society.

When the Commission on PEI's Electoral Future was established early in 2005, women made up just 20% of appointees. The ACSW met with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly to review ways the nomination process could have been improved to increase women's participation; however, nomination and appointment processes for all boards should similarly be reviewed to ensure they create no barriers to women's participation.

Increased priority for policy, legislation, and economic development that promote women's equality and diversity.

It goes without saying that the ACSW sees areas of need for policy and legislation that promote women's equality. Among other issues, we've made substantial recommendations regarding women's health services, maternity and parental benefits, early childhood care and education, and preventing family violence. In addition to implementing these high-priority recommendations for women, it is essential that government examine ways in which economic development practices differently affect women and men.

The current focus on developing renewable energy sources offers a case in point. While all women and men on the Island will benefit from renewable energy products, jobs in the energy sector more typically go to men than to women. It is government's responsibility to ensure that their investments in economic development create opportunities for women as well as for men.

The current government has set good precedents for public consultation by establishing advisory councils for seniors and for tourism and by incorporating public sessions into the budget process. But recent Program Renewal calls into question the *meaningfulness* of consultation. When it comes to issues that matter to women and their families, how can we tell that government takes seriously the advice it receives? To be truly accountable, government must establish means of measuring its responsiveness to collaborative public consultation, especially with equity groups, including the ACSW.

Processes for meaningful public consultation in decision-making, including a strong role for women's equality-seeking groups.

The government of Prince Edward Island is party to international agreements such as the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which asks that policy and legislation be examined through a gender lens. As this *Policy Guide* argues, electoral systems and processes are key to women's equality and should be high-priority items to undergo detailed gender- and diversity-based analysis.

Analysis of electoral processes through a gender and diversity lens.

The Province's annual budget must likewise incorporate gender- and diversity-based analysis to examine ways in which budget decisions affect women, men, and diverse groups unequally. For example, women's traditional roles in the volunteer sector and in unpaid caregiving mean that women are disproportionately affected by cuts to caregiving supports; more of the burden and cost shifts to women than to men. It is essential that the measures taken by the new Office of Program Renewal be subject to gender- and diversity-based analysis, particularly given that the job cuts that have already taken place have overwhelmingly affected the Health and Social Services sector, which traditionally employs more women than men.

Gender- and diversity-responsive budgeting.

The following pages outline the Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women's recommendations for matching these principles and meeting these goals.

Central Recommendations for Government . . .

If the November 2005 plebiscite results indicate support for a mixed member proportional electoral system, the ACSW recommends

- a) that government proceed swiftly to put in place a mixed member proportional electoral system based on the model proposed by the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future.
- b) that policies related to implementing the mixed member proportional electoral system be applied to their best advantage to support the goal of improving women's representation in PEI's legislature.

If the plebiscite results indicate insufficient support for a mixed member proportional electoral system at this time, the ACSW recommends

- a) that government move quickly to make a commitment to ongoing electoral reform on a very specific timeline and with concrete targets.
- b) that any electoral reform broadens the conception of fairness in the electoral system beyond geographic and population balance.
- c) that government ensure that women's equality-seeking groups and politically under-represented groups (including women, Aboriginal Islanders, Acadian and Francophone Islanders, visible minorities, Islanders with disabilities or low incomes, and others) are included

More Recommendations for Government . . .

That any model of electoral reform put in place be reviewed on a regular basis and be formally, publicly reviewed following the second election run under the new or updated electoral system.

While electoral reform is desirable and necessary, some reforms will go further than others towards helping PEI meet the principles and goals outlined above. For instance, experience around the world shows that electoral models vary in how well they support women's participation in politics. In Prince Edward Island, electoral reforms in the mid-1990s may have been a factor in producing *decreased* numbers of women in the legislature, because gender equality was not considered when the changes were applied. The only criteria for balance were geography and population.

Changes to the electoral system will affect Islanders' voting patterns in predictable and unpredictable ways. A review should allow at least two elections to take place under a new system so that Islanders have sufficient time to adapt to the system and see it in action. A public review will then allow Islanders to assess the effects. The review should create particular opportunities for women and vulnerable or marginalized groups to have their say on the effects of reform.

That government act immediately (even in advance of the November 2005 plebiscite) to approve the electoral boundaries set forth in the October 5, 2004, report of the PEI Electoral Boundaries Commission.

In 1991, private citizen Donald MacKinnon went to the Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island to force changes to electoral boundaries as a matter of voters' rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Following this court action, the *Election Act* was brought up to date and the Electoral Boundaries Commission was established to prevent future imbalances in the influence of Islanders' votes from one district to the next and to ensure that the public would be consulted regarding electoral boundaries.

Given that governments of the past have shown reluctance to keep our electoral boundaries up to date and that the Court has indicated that electoral boundaries are a matter of fundamental rights for citizens, there is no excuse for the present government to delay in implementing the October 5, 2004, report of the PEI Electoral Boundaries Commission. To implement this report would be an act of good faith with Islanders who participated in consultations on boundaries.

That electoral boundaries be set at least one year in advance of any election, to ensure that political parties are able to approach women candidates and those candidates are able to make arrangements to gain support and be ready to run.

When the PEI Coalition for Women in Government asked focus group participants and party organizers to name some of the barriers to women's nomination and election, *time* proved to be of the essence. Women need ample lead time prior to an election to prepare, in terms of arranging child care and work issues. The Coalition reports that during the focus groups, a candidate recruiter who was turned down over and over by potential women candidates stated the main reason women gave her for saying no was that they didn't have enough time to prepare.

Why do women need more time? Statistics in Canada tell us that women do 2/3 of unpaid work, including child and elder care. Women make less than men, earning an average of 71% of male wages in PEI according to Women's Network PEI. Women are also more likely to be new small business owners. Since 1976, the average annual growth rate of self-employment for women has been 5.3%, compared with 2.2% for men according to the Women Entrepreneurs of Canada. For these and other reasons, women are more likely than men to find it difficult to say yes to being a candidate in a fast-approaching election. Setting electoral boundaries well in advance of any election would give women more of the time they need to be ready to run for office.

In the same way that setting electoral boundaries in advance would help eliminate time barriers to women's participation in electoral politics, implementing fixed election dates would help women plan to run for office.

In addition, Island participants in PEI Coalition for Women in Government focus groups said that women are "discouraged from running because they perceive that politics is about winning a game, not about making a difference." The public perceives the process of setting election dates as an exercise in political game-playing; they see dates being set to gain political advantage for the governing party. This contributes to public cynicism about the purposes of politics. Fixed election dates would eliminate one political "game" from the system and might reduce women's discouragement.

Currently, PEI has no mechanism for the public to vote on important questions and know their vote will bind government to action. The November 2005 plebiscite on PEI's electoral future provides a test case for what might happen when voters' wishes, expressed in a plebiscite, come before a Legislative Assembly in which MLAs may have different political interests from their constituents. Will MLAs be guided by a simple majority of plebiscite voters? Will they examine only the plebiscite results for their ridings before individually voting on electoral reform? Will MLAs ratify electoral reform only if voter turnout in the plebiscite reaches a certain threshold? And who will decide on a valid threshold? All of these questions would be resolved if the Province had a clear and binding referendum legislation.

While referendum legislation would be helpful in cases such as our vote on electoral reform, it might not be desirable for Island women or for minority groups if our referendum legislation were too broad and referendums were called on too wide a range of issues. Referendums must not jeopardize minority rights that are protected in our system of representative democracy. We must not move towards tyranny of the majority. Therefore, equality-seeking and minority groups must be consulted in the development of referendum legislation.

In local consultations undertaken by the PEI Coalition for Women in Government and national roundtables led by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada, women agreed that more women would be attracted to politics if we changed the way our legislatures operate. Again and again, women have expressed their concern about the confrontational nature of question period; about the lack of child care and similar supports for elected officials; and about low pay, long hours, and lack of privacy for MLAs. There is a general consensus that better work/life balance is needed. But there is not a consensus about what work/life balance would look like for politicians. Open public consultation would allow citizens and politicians to participate in a purposeful dialogue about what Islanders can and should expect from politicians and what politicians can and should expect from public life.

The processes government uses to appoint members of boards, commissions, and tribunals may favour men in less-than-obvious ways. Women may be less likely to self-nominate. They may need complete information about time commitment, scheduling, and remuneration before they can put their names forward. They may not have access to the social or political networks that often lead to appointments. As such, government should review appointment policies and processes with gender in mind.

That government implement fixed election dates for provincial elections.

That government develop binding referendum legislation, in consultation with the public and especially women's equality-seeking groups.

That government commit to an open public consultation on reforming the way the legislature works, with a special focus on improving work/life balance for politicians and developing job descriptions for MLAs.

That government review its policies and practices regarding appointment of boards, commissions, and tribunals and apply gender-based analysis to identify barriers to women's full and equal participation.

That government members and members of all provincially appointed boards and commissions be offered child-care and elder-care subsidies in addition to transportation subsidies for the time that they commit to work for the public good.

The provincial government should lead by example, emphasizing the value and importance of caregiving by providing subsidies for child-care and elder-care to anyone who is working for the public good in the legislature or on a board or committee.

A natural extension of this policy would be to require that projects and developments funded by the Province be required to budget for and provide similar subsidies. While these subsidies should be offered to both women and men, measures such as these would go a long way towards supporting women in public life, by acknowledging the unpaid work of caregiving that forms the backbone of our society and that traditionally falls to women more than men.

That government implement financial incentives for parties to meet targets and goals for nominating women candidates.

Research by the PEI Coalition for Women in Government shows that women are not being discriminated against at the polls: the greatest barriers they face are in being nominated. Political parties set individual policy on nomination processes; however, the provincial government could actively encourage women-positive policies by implementing financial incentives for parties that nominate more women.

New Brunswick's Commission on Legislative Democracy recently recommended that the New Brunswick government "include an increase of the annual allowance to political parties by \$1 per valid vote to any party in which women comprise at least 35% of the candidates in the preceding provincial election," a policy to be reviewed when the legislature is made up of at least 45% women. Additionally, the New Brunswick report recommends that parties be required every two years to file reports on the specific measures they have taken to increase women's representation in the legislature. The PEIACSW supports measures such as these.

That government immediately initiate an all-party women's commission, to include all women MLAs.

Issues that matter to women and their families cut across all political parties and jurisdictions. Likewise, women in politics may share many similar positive and negative experiences in their public lives.

In 2004, the federal government established a Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women to inform debate on issues. This is not a women's commission *per se*, and most women's commissions remain partisan, not multi-partisan. However, Nova Scotia has a multi-partisan committee consisting of all women politicians. The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women finds this a helpful and productive group.

If partisanship and competitiveness are barriers to women's participation in politics, a women's commission is another valuable way to demonstrate that government can make decisions in new, more collaborative ways.

That the Department of Education develop curriculum materials that support increased participation of women in all aspects of political life.

Former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell has noted, "In virtually all societies, leadership is gendered male." Currently, the under-representation of women in legislatures in Canada means that young women have few female role models in public leadership. This means that young women continue to grow up with a mental image that equates "politician" with maleness.

Given slow change in how leadership is gendered, it is essential that the education system model for young people that women can be leaders, politicians, and decision-makers. The Department of Education has a representative on the PEI Coalition for Women in Government. This is a positive and important step. It is vital that it translates into curriculum materials that support women's participation in public and political life.

Recommendations for Provincial Political Parties . . .

It is unusual for the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women to direct recommendations to political parties, but in the matter of increasing women's role in decision-making and their participation in politics, political parties have a vital role to play. As research from the Centre for Research and Information on Canada suggests, "Political parties should lead by example in promoting equality," and "having political parties that are committed to gender parity was broached as a possible motivator for women." And since research by the PEI Coalition for Women in Government showed that women face more challenges being nominated than elected, parties need to address inequalities in nomination processes.

In the absence of binding referendum legislation, it will be up to PEI MLAs to decide the fate of plebiscite results after citizens' votes are counted on November 28, 2005. The PEIACSW calls on all MLAs to commit to accepting the plebiscite results, whatever they may be. Regardless of plebiscite results, the PEIACSW and the PEI Coalition for Women in Government will continue to support movement towards some form of proportional representation, a system with distinct advantages for nominating women.

We also call on parties to acknowledge the need for ongoing reform to our electoral system. Keeping electoral reform on the political agenda will require a spirit of collaboration among all provincial political parties.

The PEI Coalition for Women in Government has found a consistent trend in past PEI elections: the more women nominated by provincial parties, the more women get elected by Island voters. The Coalition set a goal of having 1/3 of seats in the next Legislative Assembly filled by women.

In 2004, three provincial political parties — the Liberal Party of PEI, the Progressive Conservative Party of PEI, and the New Democratic Party of PEI — made a public commitment to each nominate at least nine women candidates in the next provincial election, 1/3 of each of their slates of candidates. The Coalition is supporting parties to meet this commitment. Since then, the Green Party has applied for status as a provincial party, and the Coalition will ask the same commitment of them.

Political parties set nomination processes independently, informed by years of tradition and refined understanding of the electoral system. For the most part, nominations are locally controlled. Any electoral reform will bring changes to the system that may affect nomination processes. For instance, a move to a mixed member proportional system could mean increased pressure on nominations for district seats. Parties should implement strategies to ensure tight races do not disadvantage women candidates. Under MMP, there will be opportunities to use party lists to help ensure gender balance in the legislature. Parties should set clear policy on gender balance on party lists.

The PEIACSW calls on all parties to eliminate barriers to women's participation in politics and to set clear targets and goals for women's participation, supported by incentives whenever possible.

The PEIACSW calls on all provincial political parties to actively participate in and, when appropriate, financially contribute to multi-partisan efforts to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making. These initiatives will continue to feed parties' own work in approaching women and asking them to run. Parties should never forget the importance of *just asking* women to run. Hon. Gail Shea, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, has said, "I participated because I was asked."

That provincial political parties and all MLAs publicly commit to accepting the results of the November 2005 plebiscite on PEI's Electoral Future and further commit to collaborating in ongoing electoral reform to keep our electoral system up to date.

That provincial political parties meet their public commitment to the PEI Coalition for Women in Government to each nominate at least nine women candidates in the next provincial election.

That provincial political parties review rules and policies for nominations to identify and eliminate barriers for women's participation. If PEI chooses a mixed member proportional electoral system, this review should lead to clear policies on both district and list nomination processes.

That provincial political parties support non-partisan and multi-partisan initiatives to increase women's participation in government, such as Women's Campaign Schools and an all-party women's commission.

Resources Cited and Consulted . . .

Books, Briefs, and Reports:

- Anderson, Doris. *The Unfinished Revolution; The Status of Women in Twelve Countries*. Toronto: Doubleday, 1991.
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- New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women. "Women and Electoral Reform in New Brunswick." Fredericton: NBACSW, July 2004.
- PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women. "Submission to the Electoral Reform Commission." Charlottetown: PEIACSW, July 2003.

More Organizations with Multiple Resources:

- PEI Coalition for Women in Government. www.wnpei.org/womeningovernment
- PEI Electoral Boundaries Commission. www.electoralboundaries.pe.ca
- Commission on PEI's Electoral Future. www.electoralfuture.pe.ca
- Elections PEI. www.electionspei.ca
- Equal Voice Canada. www.equalvoice.ca

PEIACSW RESOURCES ON WOMEN & ELECTORAL REFORM

In this *Policy Guide* package:

- Recommendations & Analysis
- Fact Sheet
- History of Women & Electoral Reform
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Summary of Recommendations

See also:

Our *Plebiscite Guide* on the mixed member proportional option

- eight-page booklet: *What's in PEI's Electoral Future for Women?*
- one-page summary/poster

Disponible en français:

- *Qu'est-ce que le futur électoral de l'Île renferme pour les femmes?*

Other PEIACSW *Policy Guides* (aussi disponible en français):

- Maternity and Parental Benefits (September 2004)
- Early Childhood Care and Education (June 2003)
- Women and Unpaid Work (January 2003)
- Women's Health (September 2002)
- Family Law (February 2002)
- Addiction Services for Women (May 2001)

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The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women is an arms-length government agency that works for equality and supports women's full and active participation in social, legal, cultural, economic, and political spheres of life.

FACT: IN THE HISTORY OF THE PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, ONLY EIGHTEEN WOMEN HAVE EVER BEEN ELECTED.

These women are as follows:

Jean Canfield (1970-1979)	Marion Murphy (1989-1996)
Catherine Callbeck (1974-78; Premier 1993-96)	Jeannie Lea (1993-1996)
Leone Bagnall (1979-1993)	Pat Mella (1993-2003; PC leader 1990-95)
Marion Reid (1979-1989)	Mildred Dover (1996-present)
Betty Jean Brown (1986-1993)	Beth MacKenzie (1996-present)
Nancy Guptill (1987-1999)	Helen MacDonald (2000-present)
Libbe Hubley (1989-1996)	Eva Rodgerson (2000-present)
Roberta Hubley (1989-1996)	Gail Shea (2000-present)
Rose Marie MacDonald (1988-1996)	Carolyn Bertram (2003-present)

A review of Elections PEI election results shows that at least 108 men served as Members of the Legislative Assembly during the same period (1970-2005).

Prince Edward Island women have had less success federally. Only two women — Mary Margaret Smith MacDonald (1961) and Catherine Callbeck (1988) — have ever been elected by Islanders to serve in the House of Commons in Ottawa.

FACT: PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND VOTERS ARE NOT DISCRIMINATING AGAINST WOMEN AT THE POLLS.

In the four provincial elections between 1993 and 2003, women won 60% of races in which the two main political parties squared off a female candidate against a male candidate, says the PEI Coalition for Women in Government. More than 89% of the time, the candidate was successful in her riding if her party was successful in forming government. This suggests that when choosing their representatives, voters look at candidates' party affiliation ahead of their gender. Coalition analysis shows that the number of women nominated closely corresponds to the number elected.

FACT: WOMEN HAVE NEVER MADE UP MORE THAN 26.9% OF CANDIDATES IN A PROVINCIAL ELECTION ON PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND.

According to research by the PEI Coalition for Women in Government, the Liberal and Conservative parties combined have nominated just 16.7% to 25% women in the last five provincial elections. The rest of female candidates in elections ran for parties that gained little or no representation in the Legislative Assembly. In other words, they ran races that were for all intents and purposes unwinnable.

FACT: THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN EVER TO BE ELECTED AS MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN PEI WAS 25%, IN 1993.

The 1993 election was the high-water mark for women's representation in Prince Edward Island, in elected and appointed office. Not only did women fill a quarter of the seats in the Legislative Assembly, women served in five leadership roles: Premier, Leader of the Opposition, Speaker of the House, Lieutenant-Governor, and Deputy Speaker. The number of women in our Legislative Assembly decreased to 14.8% in the 1996 election and has not reached the 25% mark again.

FACT: **IN 2005, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND RANKED NINTH IN CANADA IN ITS REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN CABINET.**

With women making up only 20% of the province's Executive Council, Prince Edward Island ties with Alberta for ninth place among the thirteen Canadian provinces and territories. If you look at the number of women appointed to Executive Council as a percentage of women elected to government Prince Edward Island also ranks ninth in the country, with 40% of women elected to government selected for Executive Council. In four of Canada's provinces and territories, leaders have appointed more than 50% of women elected to government to their cabinets.

FACT: **FULLY 90% OF CANADIAN VOTERS BELIEVE IN INCREASING THE NUMBER OF WOMEN IN POLITICS TO ACHIEVE A WELL-FUNCTIONING POLITICAL SYSTEM.**

In a survey completed for *Portraits of Canada 2004* by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada, an overwhelming number of Canadians indicated support for having more women in elected office. A majority (54%) indicated *strong support*.

FACT: **AROUND THE WORLD, THE HIGHER THE NUMBER OF WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT, THE LOWER THE LEVEL OF CORRUPTION.**

The World Bank Development Research Group has found a strong relationship between numbers of women in elected office and honest dealing in government. They report: "the greater the representation of women in parliament, the lower the level of corruption." Their findings apply in a wide range of countries in a wide range of circumstances, according to their publication "Are Women Really the 'Fairer' Sex? Corruption and Women in Government."

FACT: **THE UNITED NATIONS SAYS THAT INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN ELECTED OFFICE IN CANADA IS A MATTER OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS.**

According to the United Nations Expert Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, under-representation of women in Canadian government violates our international human rights commitments. The Committee urges the Canadian government "to take additional measures to increase the representation of women in political and public life. It recommends the introduction of temporary special measures with numerical goals and timetables to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions at all levels."

FACT: **ELECTORAL REFORM IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN ELECTED OFFICE.**

According to 2005 research by the PEI Coalition for Women in Government, over 94% of countries in which women hold 30% or more seats use some form of proportional representation to elect their governments. The Coalition's review of international best practices is conclusive: the best way to increase the number of women in government includes a combination of proportional representation and a system of legislated or voluntary quotas for women. Other innovative international practices for increasing women's participation in elected office included legislated encouragement for parties to put forth women candidates, support for women candidates, and support for elected women.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN & ELECTORAL REFORM ON PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND'S VOTING SYSTEM HAS NEVER BEEN EXAMINED AND UPDATED WITH THE GOAL OF ADVANCING WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE.

In his presentation to the *Panel Discussion on Electoral Reform in Prince Edward Island* on June 15, 2005, Hon. Norman Carruthers (Chair of the Prince Edward Island Electoral Reform Commission, 2003) commented: "One of the reasons the debate [on electoral reform] got started in this province was the failure of past governments in this province to maintain our electoral system in an up-to-date manner."

When we look at the history of electoral reform in Prince Edward Island with gender equality in mind, we clearly see what this failure has meant for women's participation in the electoral system — early on, as voters; and later on, as elected or appointed representatives.

Women were excluded from the process that established our electoral system in the early days of the province. Gradually, provincial, national, and international commitments expanded women's ability to participate in the voting system. And yet, women have only recently been represented in the councils, courts, and commissions that have shaped electoral reform. Even today, women are under-represented on these decision-making bodies and in the Legislative Assembly.

Today, citizens have more legal and democratic tools than ever to apply pressure for electoral reform to support gender equality, human rights, and diversity. But the government of Prince Edward Island must not leave it to citizens to apply pressure. The government must make a commitment to ongoing electoral reform to ensure that our voting system matches our values and meets the standards of the Canadian Charter of Rights and international human rights conventions.

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| 1773 | The first House of Assembly of the Island colony is elected by male, Protestant citizens. |
| 1838–56 | The Assembly increases, finally to reach 30 members in 15 dual-member districts spread equitably across the Island by geography. Also established is a Legislative Council to represent electors with property interests. |
| 1861 | Elections for the Legislative Assembly become open to most male citizens. |
| 1893 | The Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council merge, but Council continues to be elected by male property-owners. Electoral boundaries are changed to make them more equitable in terms of population. |
| 1921 | The voting franchise is extended to include most PEI women. Aboriginal women are still excluded. It will be another 30 years before 1951, when Hilda Ramsay becomes the first woman on Prince Edward Island to run for provincial office. Yet another 39 years will pass before 1970, when Prince Edward Island elects its first female Member of the Legislative Assembly, Jean Canfield. |
| 1929 | Women are declared "persons" under Canadian law and can therefore be appointed to the Senate. It will be 26 years until the Government of Canada appoints Florence Elsie Inman as PEI's first female Senator in 1955. |

- 1961** Government appoints a Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, which makes its recommendations in 1963. They recommend extending voting rights to Aboriginal Islanders and abolishing voting based on property ownership.
- 1981** Canada ratifies the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Convention applies to all provincial and territorial governments as well as the federal government. By January 2003, the UN would still be calling on Canada to take “additional measures to increase the representation of women in political and public life” as a matter of international human rights.
- 1985** Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights comes into effect, guaranteeing equal rights for every Canadian. The Charter of Rights becomes an important tool for citizens to press for electoral reform that supports equality rights.
- 1993** After a citizen challenge of Prince Edward Island's electoral boundary descriptions, courts rule that the boundaries violate Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court decision forces government to act on electoral reform. Interestingly, the government that acts on these rulings includes a record 25% women in its ranks and boasts women in five leadership roles: Premier, Leader of the Opposition, Speaker of the House, Lieutenant-Governor, and Deputy Speaker.
- 1996** PEI holds its first election with 27 single-member ridings. Only 14.8% of MLAs elected are women. The NDP wins its first and only seat in the legislature — an accomplishment not repeated, despite the party earning more than 8% of the popular vote in the next election.
- 2000 & 2003** In two consecutive elections under the new electoral system with single-member ridings, the number of women elected holds steady at just 22%. Analysis by the PEI Coalition for Women in Government suggests that women do well at the polls: the greatest barrier for women is getting their names on the ballot.
- 2003** Retired Chief Justice Hon. Norman Carruthers consults with Islanders as head of the PEI Commission on Electoral Reform. His report recommends: “The aspirations of Island women need to be considered very carefully in the design and implementation of any modifications to the present FPTP system to ensure that changes will occur which will result in increased representation for women in the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island.”
- 2005** Government appoints the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future. Only 20% of the Commissioners are women.
- Nov. 2005** With 51% of the population, women will hold the balance of power in a plebiscite on Prince Edward Island's electoral future.

Sources: Elections PEI, "A Brief History of Electoral Reform on Prince Edward Island," www.electionspei.ca; PEI Coalition for Women in Government, "Significant Dates in the History of Women in Politics in PEI," www.wnpei.org/womeningovernment; J. A. Cousins, "Electoral Reform for Prince Edward Island," www.upei.ca/islandstudies/library.htm; Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, "Commitments Abroad, Inequalities at Home," www.fafia-afai.org/; Hon. Norman Carruthers, "2003 Prince Edward Island Electoral Reform Commission Report," www.gov.pe.ca/electoralreform

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Why is electoral reform a women's equality issue?

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Famous Canadian suffragist Nellie McClung predicted that within fifty years of women obtaining the vote, women would fill fifty percent of the seats in Canada's legislatures. Her prediction has not come true. Election after election, women are under-represented in Prince Edward Island and Canadian legislatures. After initial increases in the numbers of women politicians through the twentieth century, women now consistently make up less than a quarter of all our legislators.

However, it's not enough just to notice that women are under-represented in decision-making. Neither is it enough to encourage individual women to run for office. Feminist analysis looks at the structures of our public institutions to determine if women are systematically disadvantaged. An analysis of the PEI electoral system clearly reveals barriers to women, and government in PEI has been slow to address these barriers.

Women's biggest challenge has been getting their names on ballots. Because the electoral system is set up first to balance populations and geographic regions, it doesn't allow parties or governments much flexibility to create balance between genders. Nomination processes take place district by district, unguided by a collective party strategy to increase women's participation. In other parts of the world, electoral systems based on proportional representation frequently create opportunities and offer incentives for parties to nominate women. Because these electoral systems balance more than population and geography, they provide parties with the flexibility they need to strategize for balance between genders, too.

A local example highlights the need for reforms to decrease barriers to women's political participation. The schedule for sittings in the PEI Legislative Assembly is based on the schedule for passenger trains that would allow rural MLAs to get to Charlottetown to take up their seats in the legislature. It has been a long time since we had trains on PEI. It has been longer still since they took passengers. It's time to consider a schedule for sittings that accommodates contemporary realities, including women's work schedules and the caregiving and household management tasks that still usually fall to women.

Electoral reform and legislative reform, undertaken with women's equality in mind as a goal of reform, will reduce the systemic barriers to women. We can look to other sectors of society for examples of success. The number of women in professions has increased dramatically between 1987 and 1999: to 58% in social sciences and religion, to 49% in business and finance; to 47% of doctors and dentists. Increases occurred because women addressed the barriers to their participation. It happened because professional schools themselves recognized the necessity of creating a better gender balance and took steps to recruit and otherwise encourage women's participation, sometimes with quota systems to ensure more equal representation. Likewise, women can't expect their numbers in politics to increase naturally without the barriers to their participation being addressed. It is government's responsibility to address these barriers with reforms.

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What does the under-representation of women in elected office mean for issues important to women?

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As we face tremendous challenges locally and globally, our communities cannot afford to lose the insights of fifty percent of citizens. Right now, under-representation of women results in lack of insight — and of priority! — on issues women have said are important to them.

Women's organizations and other equity-seeking groups work year after year on issues including

violence against women and children, lack of access to legal aid for family law, and lack of affordable, quality early childhood care and education. Women have developed innovative and workable solutions to many of these intractable problems, but the resources never seem to find their way to these issues.

Our political system is built on social and economic networks. Democracy is built on relationships and interrelations. When women and other groups from our community are under-represented in politics and decision-making, the political system is cut off from some of the networks that it relies on to function well. More women in politics will result in more access to networks of women and women's organizations, more access to the networks that offer solutions for the issues that women say are important.

Q How do you know that electoral and legislative reform will help get women in government?

A Electoral and legislative reform may not automatically result in increased representation of women in government. In 1996, the last time Prince Edward Island saw major electoral reform, the Province changed to a system of 27 single-member districts instead of 16 two-member districts, the percentage of women MLAs dropped from 25% to 15%. This drop was due to many factors, including a change of governing party. However, it might also signal that women faced more challenges than usual in being nominated in single-member districts than in double-member districts; that parties had used the two-member system to create gender balance; or that women were more likely to be squeezed out in tight nomination races, with only 27 seats to compete for, rather than 32.

This sounds a cautionary note for women intent on electoral reform, but the lesson is this: if electoral reform is going to benefit women, it must be undertaken with women's equality as a goal. Gender-based analysis must show that there is a good chance that the reform will result in greater representation of women in decision-making. And reform must be stream-lined with community efforts to increase women's participation in political processes.

Q Other than under-representation of women and low priority on issues important to women, is there other evidence that the current system is not working well and needs to be reformed?

A Other than the failing to include women and women's priorities and failing to reflect the Island's demographic diversity, the most obvious evidence that the current electoral system is working poorly is found in our recent history of unbalanced legislatures. Four of the last five provincial elections have returned strong majority governments, with four or fewer opposition members to hold government accountable.

Not only does the Island legislature face the challenge of functioning without effective opposition to balance government, the legislature remains dominated by two parties. These parties often focus on issues that will get them elected district by district, but they have shown little innovative vision on broad-based, province-wide issues. There is not much range in their policies and platforms. There is not much for Islanders to choose between them. As a result, the legislature fails to reflect the range of Islanders' political perspectives. This reinforces Islanders' cynicism that the political system will ever change — or that the political system is an effective vehicle for bringing about social change that voters want.

The clearest sign of health in our system is our high voter turnout. It's true that Prince Edward Island has bucked the national trend of declining voter turnouts for elections. Voter turnout is usually high when elections are closely contested, and the traditional close contests between the two main Island parties create lots of incentive for voters to get out to the polls on election day. However, voter turnout tends to

be higher when people think their votes count, and it remains a fact that the current electoral system fails to count votes for second-, third-, and fourth-ranking parties. It remains a crucial question for our democracy: how long will we be able to maintain voter turnouts when so many votes don't count?

Q I understand the need for electoral reform, but why is the Commission on PEI's Electoral Future recommending that PEI change to a mixed member proportional system? Why not other options?

A The current government of Prince Edward Island limited the plebiscite options and gave the Commission on PEI's Electoral Future a mandate to bring forward a mixed member proportional model for Islanders to vote on. However, there is some history behind government's choice.

In 2001, the PEI legislature asked Elections PEI to prepare a report on proportional representation-based electoral systems around the world. Elections PEI presented a report to government in 2002. In 2003, the legislature appointed retired Chief Justice Norman Carruthers to the PEI Electoral Reform Commission with a mandate to do public consultation and to make recommendations regarding electoral reform.

The Carruthers Commission realized that around the world, there are many, many variations on proportional representation (PR). Each system is individual to the jurisdiction it was designed for. The best systems are the ones that best match the values of the citizens in the jurisdiction. In order to recommend a system of PR for Prince Edward Island, the Carruthers Commission researched electoral systems, considered presentations that Islanders made about electoral systems, and examined Islanders' values.

The Commission recognized that Islanders have strong attachments to the land and their communities, and that they value having local MLAs they can call on to be accountable on local issues. From this, Norman Carruthers determined that a PR system for PEI should retain district members to represent regions and communities.

The mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system combines proportionality and local representation by having two kinds of representatives sit in the legislative assembly: representatives elected by districts (as they are under the current PEI electoral system) and representatives elected under party lists. This mix of members allows for proportional representation — a fair balance between the proportion of popular support a party gets and the number of seats it holds — and accountability to local communities. In recent years, a number of countries with cultures and values similar to PEI have adopted MMP electoral systems, including New Zealand and Scotland.

When the Carruthers Commission on electoral reform made its report, it recommended that “The present First Past the post (FPTP) Electoral System be modified to provide an element of proportionality by electing a certain number of the members of the Legislative Assembly . . . by the FPTP system and by electing a certain number of the members of the Legislative Assembly . . . by the List System so as to provide a Mixed Member Proportional System along the lines of the New Zealand model.”

In 2005, through Motion No. 32, the Legislative Assembly established the grounds for the Commission on PEI's Electoral Future. This commission was appointed to undertake public education about the current and proposed systems and to set a plebiscite date and a plebiscite question. They were mandated by government to work with the recommendations and models presented in the report by Norman Carruthers and the Electoral Reform Commission. In other words, they were asked by government to refine and confirm details of an MMP model, but they were not mandated to look at other electoral systems or to design models other than MMP.

The Commission on PEI's Electoral Future includes eight individuals: one from each of the four federal ridings, one from each provincial political party, and a chair appointed by a Standing Committee of the Legislature. Due to flaws in the appointment process, only two of the eight commissioners are women. The Commission was appointed in February to prepare for a November plebiscite. They are not mandated to have a role after the plebiscite: acting on the plebiscite results will be the work of government.

Q Will a mixed member proportional government lead to minority governments that can't meet their promises or fulfill their agendas?

A Under proportional representation, if the majority of voters choose a party for government, that party forms a majority government. No problem there! Why should we have an electoral system that gives a majority of seats to a party that receives less than a majority of votes, as our current electoral system does? Our current system can give the false legitimacy of a majority government to a party that receives only a plurality (say, 40%) of votes — not a true majority. And even our current electoral system does not guarantee majority governments, especially as third and fourth parties and independents gain strength and “split” the vote.

Under a proportional system, more votes count and the popular vote influences the make-up of the legislature. If voters express their diverse opinions by voting for a wider range of parties, that diversity gets reflected in the legislature, and it might result in a minority government.

Deadlock in government only occurs when legislators and parties fail to create consensus on issues that matter to citizens. Under proportional representation systems, the more diverse legislatures and more and better opposition that exist can *help* get the work of government done. They can hold governments accountable for the commitments they make.

And majority government may be stable, but who says they are effective and accountable? In Canada, many of our most valued programs — including Medicare, including the recent New Deal for Cities — have begun under minority governments. A 2001 survey by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada revealed that “86 percent of Canadians agree that politicians often lie to get elected.” More than 70% percent said they agreed with the statement, “I don't think governments care very much about what people like me think.” These attitudes reveal fundamental problems with the way government works. Canadians perceive that even majority governments have been ineffective in meeting their promises and fulfilling their agendas.

In PEI Coalition for Women in Government focus groups, Island women indicated they want government that is accountable, and they want government that works based on collaboration, not just competition.

Q Will a mixed member proportional electoral system give too much power to political parties?

A Under the current system, political parties have a great deal of power already: for instance, they already control the nominations that women identify as a barrier to succeeding in politics. But for all their control of nominations, the district-by-district nature of nominations leaves parties with few tools other than leadership conventions to make collective decisions about who should represent their policies and their platforms. They have no way to step back, as a party, and look at their list of candidates to ensure it represents a true diversity of Islanders and Island perspectives.

Creating a party list under MMP would give them an opportunity to decide collectively, in public, the

values they want to represent on their list. In choosing their list, they can show their commitment to rural Islanders by ensuring strong rural advocates are on the list. They can demonstrate commitment to gender equality by creating policy to ensure a certain percentage of women candidates. Members of the party and members of the public can insist on direct input into parties' creation of policy to guide their nomination processes.

Political parties are made up of people: members who make democratic choices. There are problems with the way political parties function in the Canadian democratic system. Too often, they are permitted under the Canadian system to function like private enterprises rather than public entities. And too many Canadians feel disconnected and unrepresented by parties. A new national survey by SES/Crossing Boundaries shows "almost two-thirds of Canadians said they want more opportunities to influence government decisions directly," and this despite the fact that only 21% of respondents indicated they had ever joined a political party. Party reform needs to come, but there's a better chance for change if there is a greater variety of political parties with political influence that better matches their popular support!

Q Will proportional representation lead to "fringe" parties and one-issue parties having more influence in government?

A Under the model of proportional representation Islanders are considering, a party would need 5% of the popular vote province-wide to gain just one seat in the legislature. How far to the fringes is a party that receives 5% support? In our 27-member legislature, each seat represents just 3.7% of the population!

Certainly, new parties will form and will run candidates under a proportional representation electoral system. Some of these parties might focus on one issue. Some of these parties might have wacky ideas. Some might strongly oppose policies the PEIACSW supports for increasing women's equality in PEI. That's democracy. We accept that there is a diverse range of political opinion in Prince Edward Island, and we hold that this diversity should be represented in the composition of the legislature, according to Islanders' votes. This will lead to better debate — and better democracy.

Q Is electoral reform just an issue for the province of Prince Edward Island?

A No. Electoral reform is an issue for all governments in Canada. Prince Edward Island is one of four provinces examining proportional representation. The others looking at electoral reform options are New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia. At the federal level, the NDP has been instrumental in pressing for proportional representation for Canada. The risks inherent in the regionalized first-past-the-post electoral system are clear when we look at the contemporary Canadian Parliament, where a regional party such as the Bloc Quebecois can become Official Opposition while a broad-based national party such as the Conservative Party can gain substantial numbers of votes across the regions and still elect few representatives outside Western Canada. The consequences of divisive regionalism make themselves felt in national policy: it becomes well-nigh impossible to broker consensus on issues that matter to the whole country.

As more and more Canadians make their homes in cities, and as more government responsibilities devolve to cities, it becomes increasingly important that municipal governments also respond to citizens' values with electoral systems that are fair and that reflect diversity, including women's active involvement. Then, when municipalities negotiate with governments, women will be at the table, voicing their priorities.

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women across Canada also recognize the importance of ensuring that women from their communities have an equal role in decision-making in Aboriginal governments. The governments that collaborate with Aboriginal governments have a responsibility to tangibly support women's efforts for equal representation. In Prince Edward Island in 2004, 100% of members of the Lennox Island Band Council were women — an achievement for the history books. On the other hand, no members of the Abegweit First Nation Band Council were women. Supporting First Nations women to develop their own leadership in their communities will lead to more consistent and equal results.

Q **What will the PEIACSW and other women's organizations do if the result of the November plebiscite shows a minority of Islanders support proportional representation?**

A A "no" vote by Islanders will not necessarily be an endorsement of the status quo, first-past-the-post electoral system. Many factors will influence people's choices in the plebiscite. The November 2005 plebiscite can only measure Islanders' attitude towards the mixed member proportional model presented by the Commission on PEI's Electoral Future.

The PEIACSW feels strongly that electoral reform is key to a strategy to get more women in politics. We know that keeping our electoral system up to the highest international standards is the responsibility of government.

If Islanders determine that the mixed member proportional electoral system is not a good choice for PEI at this time, the PEIACSW and other women's organizations will continue to work with parties and governments to eliminate barriers to women's participation in politics within the limitations of the first-past-the-post system we currently vote. However, we will also continue to call on government to legislate changes to the electoral system that expand what the system counts as fair. We will continue to actively support and encourage movement towards a form of proportional representation that is acceptable to Islanders and that reflects contemporary values, including equity goals. We will continue to consult with individuals and organizations in the community to determine what model of proportional representation would work best to meet their needs as citizens and what kind of inclusive, democratic process might bring them to support PR.

Q **Where can I find more information about electoral reform and the mixed member proportional model?**

A The PEIACSW has created a plebiscite guide to explain how the proposed mixed member proportional system for PEI would work and how we believe it could benefit Island women. Our booklet, "What's in PEI's Electoral Future for Women," is available by contacting the PEIACSW. It answers specific questions about the MMP model and the plebiscite that are not addressed in this Policy Guide.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Government's responsibility to update the electoral system

The following guiding principle informs the Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women's recommendations on Women and Electoral Reform:

That, regardless of the results of the November 2005 plebiscite on PEI's Electoral Future, the Government of Prince Edward Island is responsible to make a public commitment to ongoing review and reform of our electoral system and legislative practices to ensure they

- a) match the evolving democratic values of citizens,
- b) meet the principles upheld in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and
- c) model the best international standards and practices in advancing human rights, equity, and diversity.

Goals for future electoral reform

Government should measure progress towards goals including

- a) a provincial legislative assembly that more truly reflects the diversity of the province's population, including increased representation of women in the legislature,
- b) increased and better balanced representation of women and diverse Islanders on appointed boards, commissions, and tribunals,
- c) increased priority for policy, legislation, and economic development that promote women's equality and diversity,
- d) processes for meaningful public consultation in decision-making, including a strong role for women's equality-seeking groups,
- e) analysis of electoral processes through a gender and diversity lens,
- f) gender- and diversity-responsive budgeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Actions for government if Islanders choose MMP

If the November 2005 plebiscite results indicate support for a mixed member proportional electoral system, the ACSW recommends

- a) that government proceed swiftly to put in place a mixed member proportional electoral system based on the model proposed by the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future.
- b) that policies related to implementing the mixed member proportional electoral system be applied to their best advantage to support the goal of improving women's representation in PEI's legislature.

Actions for government if Islanders choose FPTP

If the plebiscite results indicate insufficient support for a mixed member proportional electoral system at this time, the ACSW recommends

- a) that government move quickly to make a commitment to ongoing electoral reform on a very specific timeline and with concrete targets.
- b) that any electoral reform broadens the conception of fairness in the electoral system beyond geographic and population balance.
- c) that government ensure that women's equality-seeking groups and politically under-represented groups (including women, Aboriginal Islanders, Acadian and Francophone Islanders, visible minorities, Islanders with disabilities or low incomes, and others) are included in future discussions of electoral reform.

**RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR GOVERNMENT***(continued)**Regularly reviewing
electoral reforms*

That any model of electoral reform put in place be reviewed on a regular basis and be formally, publicly reviewed following the second election run under the new or updated electoral system.

*Accepting electoral
boundaries report*

That government act immediately (even in advance of the Nov. 2005 plebiscite) to approve the electoral boundaries set forth in the October 5, 2004, report of the PEI Electoral Boundaries Commission.

*Setting boundaries in
advance of elections*

That electoral boundaries be set at least one year in advance of any election, to ensure that political parties are able to approach women candidates and those candidates are able to make arrangements to be ready to run.

Setting fixed election dates

That government implement fixed election dates for provincial elections.

*Passing referendum
legislation*

That government develop binding referendum legislation, in consultation with the public and especially women's equality-seeking groups.

*Promoting work/life balance
for elected officials*

That government commit to an open public consultation on reforming the way the legislature works, with a special focus on improving work/life balance for politicians and developing job descriptions for MLAs..

*Equity in appointments to
boards & commissions*

That government review its policies and practices regarding appointment of boards, commissions, and tribunals and apply gender-based analysis to identify barriers to women's full and equal participation.

*Providing caregiving
subsidies*

That government members and members of all provincially appointed boards and commissions be offered caregiving subsidies for the time that they commit to work for the public good.

*Financial incentives for
nominating women*

That government implement financial incentives for parties to meet targets and goals for nominating women candidates.

*Establishing a women's
commission*

That government immediately initiate an all-party women's commission, to include all women MLAs.

*Developing curriculum on
women in politics*

That the Department of Education develop curriculum materials that support increased participation of women in all aspects of political life.

**RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR POLITICAL PARTIES***Accepting plebiscite results*

That provincial political parties and all MLAs publicly commit to accepting the results of the November 2005 plebiscite on PEI's Electoral Future and further commit to collaborating to ongoing electoral reform to keep our electoral system up to date.

Nominating nine women

That provincial political parties meet their public commitment to the PEI Coalition for Women in Government to each nominate at least nine women candidates in the next provincial election.

*Making nomination
processes more equitable*

That provincial political parties review rules and policies for nominations to identify and eliminate barriers for women's participation. If PEI chooses a mixed member proportional electoral system, this review should lead to clear policies on both district and list nomination processes.

*Supporting efforts to
increase women's
participation*

That provincial political parties support non-partisan and multi-partisan initiatives to increase women's participation in government, such as Women's Campaign Schools and an all-party women's commission.