

# What's in Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future for Women?



**The upcoming plebiscite on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future will be historic for PEI women. For the first time, we will have full and equal opportunity to shape the way we elect the government that represents us, to make it match our democratic values. What's more, the mixed member proportional electoral system proposed for PEI is a good model — one that offers Islanders *more: more fairness, more opportunity for women, more say, more choice, more democracy, and more accountability.***

**The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women supports a change to a mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system and encourages Island women to vote "YES" in the plebiscite on **NOVEMBER 28, 2005.****

## **MORE FAIRNESS**

Our current electoral system says that as long as representation is distributed fairly by geography and population, that's fair enough.

✓ A mixed member proportional system keeps these values — and adds to them new ones, such as representing the Island's diversity, making sure more votes count in making up government, and ensuring effective opposition.

## **MORE ACCOUNTABILITY**

The current electoral system is good at dealing with issues that affect a district but has no good way to create consensus around Island-wide issues.

✓ A mixed member proportional system has list candidates to address the interests of the whole province. This is especially important for women, since many issues important to women are Island-wide, not focused in just one district.

## **MORE SAY FOR CITIZENS**

Under the current electoral system, only votes for winning candidates count.

✓ Under a mixed member proportional system, more votes count and fewer votes are wasted. There is a balance between the number of votes a party gets at the polls and the number of seats it gets in the legislature.

## **MORE CHOICE**

Under the current electoral system, voters sometimes must decide between a party they prefer and a local candidate they prefer. Often, they feel the need to vote strategically.

✓ Under a mixed member proportional system, each voter gets two ballots: one for a district representative and one for

a party. More votes count, so voters can express their true preferences. And voters influence the election of eleven representatives, not just one!

## **MORE DEMOCRACY**

The current electoral system ensures regions are represented and can result in stable governments, but these governments are frequently lopsided.

✓ A mixed member proportional system offers regional representation and stable, effective government — and it offers better legislative balance, better representation of parties, better demographic representation, more diversity of ideas, more effective opposition, more value for votes, more regional balance, and more inclusive decisions.

## **MORE OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN**

Under the current electoral system, women have never made up more than 25% of the legislature. Women have a particularly difficult time being nominated.

✓ Experience around the world shows that under a mixed member proportional system, the rules that guide political party nominations change, opening up more opportunities to press for women to be nominated and for issues important to women to take priority.



"I'm so tired of voting in every election and still having no one who represents me or what I believe in. I've been doing it all my life!"

— S.K., PEI voter

## Why change the electoral system?

Through the years, Prince Edward Island has not kept its electoral system up to date. The system we use to vote was designed with male property owners' needs in mind. Gradually, voting rights extended to include women, Aboriginal people, and Islanders without property. But while we have opened up the question of *who* can vote, the way we vote has stayed the same. In the 1990s, even adjustments to electoral boundaries (which reflect fairness in geographical divisions and balance in the influence of votes) only came about after a court challenge under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms! Despite these changes to our electoral system, in almost every election many voters' voices are still not represented in our legislature.

## Why is electoral reform about you?

Electoral reform is about you — because it is about changing the rules that determine how your vote is represented in the legislature.

Democratic elections are one of the most important ways that women, as citizens, decide who will represent the interests of Islanders in government. However, the *system* we use to elect representatives profoundly influences how government is formed. Around the world, there are many different ways to elect democratic governments.

Electoral systems matter because they determine how much choice and influence we have as voters. By voting to change the electoral system in PEI, we have a chance to shape what range of choice we want and how much influence our votes should have.

"Yesterday's successes will not do for today!"  
— Nellie McClung, Canadian suffragist

## Is there an electoral system that could better reflect the values of women in PEI?

We think so. The current electoral system ensures that different geographic regions are fairly represented, and that district boundaries are drawn to ensure that each vote has roughly the same weight. But there are other important democratic ideals that are not served very well under the current system. The proposed mixed member proportional system for PEI is a step in the right direction.

## What kinds of democratic values are poorly served in the current electoral system?

- *Demographic representation* — the principle that the legislature should as much as possible reflect society.
- *Meaningfulness* — the idea that each person's vote should influence the makeup of government.
- *Effective opposition* — the value of holding governments to account and adequately representing the diversity of Islanders' interests and views.

## Which democratic values matter most to you?

Democratic values such as fairness and representation express how we see ourselves as a society. The electoral system expresses shared values and principles we identify with and want to put into practice.

Since the 19th century, our electoral system has made provisions to divide PEI's geography and population fairly and equally.

Surely, in the 21st century, there is room for us to assert other values of fairness, such as gender equality or proportionality in our voting system.

## DEFINITIONS

**Electoral System:** the rules that guide how we vote and how our votes get translated into representation for us in our legislature.

**Electoral Reform:** an ongoing process to keep our electoral system up to date, to ensure the way we vote is fair and matches society's democratic values.

**First Past the Post (FPTP):** the current PEI electoral system. In each riding, the candidate with the most votes wins. The candidate only needs the most votes (a "plurality"), not the majority (50 percent plus one). Votes for candidates who come second or third do not count.

**Proportional Representation (PR):** creates a balance between the number of votes a party gets at the polls (popular vote) and the number of seats it gets in the legislature. There is more than one kind of electoral system that uses proportional representation.

**Mixed Member Proportional (MMP):** a proportional electoral system that combines district candidates (elected the same way we elect candidates now) and provincial list candidates (elected by province-wide popular vote). Under MMP, after a first ballot determines district representation, a second-ballot popular vote determines the composition of the legislature.

## THE MMP OPTION OFFERS MORE ACCOUNTABILITY.

### MMP AND POTHOLE POLITICS

#### *Does our electoral system contribute to making it difficult to get affordable childcare?*

Supporters of the current voting system claim it is an advantage to Islanders that elected district representatives have a direct, “personal” mandate from the community.

It’s true that the mandate voters give to a district representative means that when there’s a pothole in the road outside your house, you know who to call to report the pothole, and you know who to blame if the pothole swallows your car in the springtime. When your MLA comes to your door seeking re-election, it’s easy to thank her for filling the pothole — or to criticize her for ignoring your plea to have it filled. And you can be fairly sure that other neighbours who drive the same road will hold your MLA responsible for that pothole, too.

If 1,000 people drive daily over a pothole in a district of 3,600 voters, an MLA knows she will have to do her best to fill the pothole or else face challenges getting re-elected.

For this reason, the current electoral system is good for addressing local, critical issues that affect a large number of people in one geographic area. The current system is good for getting potholes filled — particularly if the party your district elects is in government!

The current electoral system offers a politician lots of incentive to fix local problems — to fill potholes. The stakes for them are high: re-election or not

But issues important to women are not often “local” — not unless the issue is a local environmental emergency that affects women’s health, or the closure of a fish plant that employs primarily women. Usually, issues of concern to women are spread across the Island.

This explains, in part, why the current system makes it hard for politicians to respond to the social issues women so often identify as their concerns. Exposure to family violence affected the lives of more than 1,000 women last year — but those affected are spread out over 27 electoral districts with 3,600 voters each. It’s hard for politicians to see those 1,000 women as crucial to their re-election campaigns.

Under a mixed member proportional electoral system, each voter participates in electing a district MLA to focus on local issues, but also participates in electing 10 MLAs from a list. To be re-elected, list MLAs have to focus on issues that affect the whole Island — including issues women identify as important.

Compare PEI numbers on the following issues with “district” numbers (1/27 of PEI, if divided evenly across 27 districts):

ISSUE	STATS FOR PEI	1/27 OF PEI
MATERNITY & PARENTAL BENEFITS: 41% of Canadian women in the labour force cannot access benefits because their work is part-time, temporary, contract, seasonal, or self-employed.		
Births per year	1,325	49
EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION: According to a 2003 study, generates about \$22 million a year in PEI. Parents pay over 75%.		
Full- or part-time, centre-based child-care spaces	4,654	172
FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION: Continually underfunded across PEI.		
Women who used Family Violence support services in 2004	1,342	50
FAMILY LAW LEGAL AID: It can be easier for a violent partner to access criminal law legal aid to defend him than for an abused partner to access family law legal aid to divorce him.		
Approved applications for all forms of legal aid (incl. criminal law)	1,265	47
WOMEN’S UNPAID WORK: Much work done by women still counts for nothing in our economy.		
# Women who spend 10 or more hours caring for seniors (unpaid)	2,050	76

No wonder women find it hard to hold district representatives accountable for issues that matter to women and their families. Our issues are spread out across the Island: and so is our electoral power under the current voting system. Vulnerable or marginalized women face an even greater challenge in seeing their concerns reach top priority on the government agenda.

A mixed member proportional system could make a difference in giving issues of concern to women higher political priority. List representatives under MMP are responsible for taking a broader view on what would serve the Island best. Women could approach list MLAs in addition to approaching district MLAs with their concerns.

A switch to MMP could help Prince Edward Island get past pothole politics to rethink government priorities!

## THE MMP OPTION OFFERS MORE SAY FOR CITIZENS.

### FIRST PAST THE POST — FPTP: Our Current Electoral System in PEI

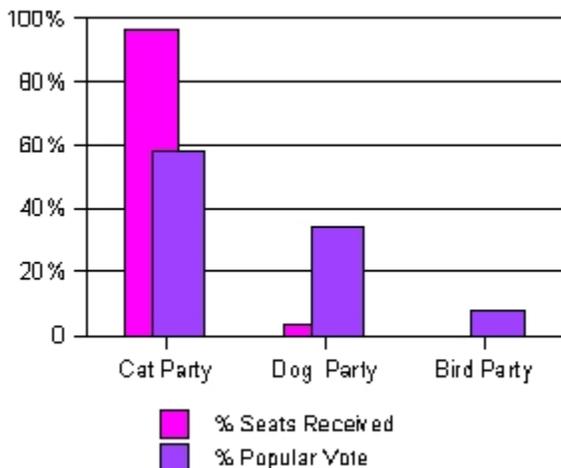
In our *current electoral system* (First Past the Post or FPTP), every voter casts one ballot for a single member in her geographic riding, one of 27 ridings on the Island. The results in one riding don't affect the next; it's as though we have 27 independent elections. A voter's ballot can only affect who gets elected in her district. In each district, the candidate with the most votes wins the seat in the legislature. Since there is just one winner, votes for parties that come second or third do not count towards making up the legislature, even if those parties hold a large percentage of voter support in the popular vote.

This chart shows what can happen to the distribution of seats under our current voting system:

Party	Popular Vote	Total Seats	% of Seats
Cat Party	58%	26	96.3%
Dog Party	34%	1	3.7%
Bird Party	8%	0	0%

The current electoral system gives the advantage to the leading party. This is because it over-represents the party in power and under-represents second- and third-place parties in the legislature. This creates an imbalance between the popular vote for a party and the number of seats a party gains. Supporters of under-represented parties often say their votes are "wasted" because they have had no meaningful effect on forming the government.

The chart below uses the sample election results above to show the imbalance between the percentage of popular vote and the percentage of seats in the legislature:



### MIXED MEMBER PROPORTIONAL — MMP: The Electoral System Proposed for PEI

People who favour a system of *proportional representation* (PR) say that the imbalance created by first past the post is unfair. We say that for an electoral system to be fair, there should be parity or a strong link between popular votes for a party and the number of seats gained in the legislature.

There are many forms of proportional representation around the world, but the system of PR being recommended for Prince Edward Island is the *mixed member proportional* (MMP) system. "Mixed member" means that there are two kinds of MLAs — 17 members elected in districts, and 10 members elected from province-wide lists. "Proportional" refers to the balance between the percentage of popular vote and the number of seats a party gains in the legislature.

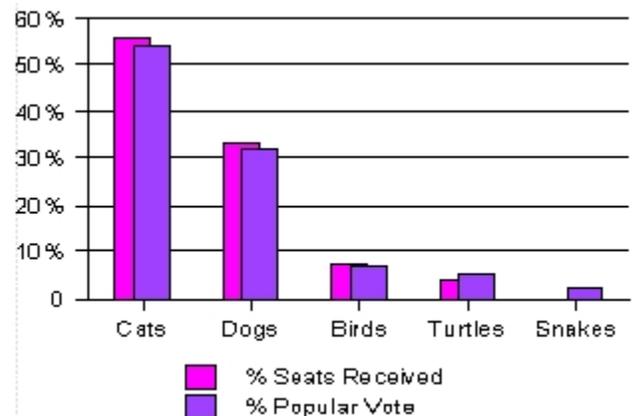
Under the mixed member proportional system, each voter casts two ballots — one for a district representative and one for a party. Under MMP, voters still have a strong local voice in the legislature, but MLAs from the party list also reflect the interests of the broad Island population.

This chart shows possible results of a MMP election:

Party	District Seats	Popular Vote	List Seats	Total Seats	% of Seats *
Cat Party	14	54%	1	15	55.5%
Dog Party	3	32%	6	9	33.3%
Bird Party	0	7%	2	2	7.4%
Turtle Party	0	5%	1	1	3.7%
Snake Party	0	2%	0	0	0%

(\*results do not total 100% due to rounding)

The chart below uses the results above to show the balance between the percentage of popular vote and the percentage of seats in the legislature:



## THE MMP OPTION OFFERS MORE CHOICE FOR CITIZENS.

### WHAT'S NEW OR DIFFERENT IN THE MIXED MEMBER PROPORTIONAL SYSTEM?

The most obvious difference in the mixed member proportional system is casting *two ballots* on election day. Instead of just influencing who is elected from your community, your two ballots influence your district election *and* the composition of the whole legislature that makes decisions on behalf of Islanders.

The *first ballot*, for a district candidate, looks just like the ballot you have used in other elections. It lists the names of individuals running to represent your riding. It includes individuals nominated by parties and any independents seeking office. The results are calculated exactly the same way they are calculated now, and the person with the most votes wins the seat.

Let's look at an example, using the sample results in the second column on the previous page. Your first ballot offers you these choices to represent your district:

- CHEEP, P. (Bird Party)
- FLUFFY, M. (Cat Party)
- RUFF, S. (Dog Party)
- SLOWPOKE, J. (Turtle Party)
- Hiss, S. (Snake Party)

In your district, S. Ruff, representing the Dog Party, wins the election as your district MLA. Across the province, the Dog Party wins only 3 district seats out of 17 (about 18% of the seats). The Cat Party wins 14 seats. No other parties win any seats.

### WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO HAVE A SECOND BALLOT? HOW DOES IT WORK?

Under a mixed member proportional system, the popular vote for each party is important — since each party's share of the vote determines their share of the seats in the legislature. Since you might choose a district representative based on the candidate, not the party, it's necessary to have a separate party vote, determined by a second ballot.

On the *second ballot*, instead of choosing an individual to represent you, you choose the *party* that best represents you and your views. This ballot is used to calculate popular support for each of the parties running candidates in the province. You choose among the parties based on their platforms or based on the list of candidates they nominate.

Each party nominates 10 *list candidates* who represent the whole province, not just one district. (Parties will select their lists according to their own policies, but it has been recommended that they do so in nominating conventions open to all members province-wide.) It is in parties' interests for nomination processes to be open, inclusive, and transparent. It is also in parties' interests to nominate candidates that reflect gender equality and PEI's diversity.

Here are sample lists from two parties:

CAT PARTY OF PEI	DOG PARTY OF PEI
1. PUDDYTAT, S.	1. REX, S.
2. TIGER, D.	2. SPOT, L.
3. NIBS, E.	3. FIDO, H.
4. MEOWSA, L.	4. ACE, J.
5. CHATON, F.	5. WOOFER, W.
6. POOKY, D.	6. PRINCESS, L.
7. STRIPE, P.	7. RASCAL, A.
8. MONKEY, H.	8. BANDIT, G.
9. WHISKERS, K.	9. PUP-PUP, S.
10. SILKY, R.	10. HOTDOG, W.

On your second ballot, you vote for the Cat Party's list of candidates, because you think it has the strongest women candidates and a platform that reflects your views. The Cat Party earns 54% of second-ballot votes, but they already have 14 seats from the first ballot, so they gain only one list seat, and only the first candidate from their list, S. Puddytat, becomes an MLA.

Across the Island, 32% of voters select the Dog Party. The Dog Party already has 3 district seats from the first ballot, but this is far short of 32% of the seats in the legislature! To balance out the difference, the Dog Party gains 6 list seats. This means the top 6 candidates on their list become MLAs, from S. Rex to L. Princess.

The Bird Party and Turtle Party both gain list MLAs on the basis of popular support. The Snake Party receives 2% of the popular vote but gains no representatives because a party must reach a minimum threshold of 5% support to elect an MLA.

Having two ballots gives you more choice and more influence as a voter. Have you ever struggled at the ballot box to decide between the person that best represents you and the party that best represents you? Under MMP, you can cast one ballot for the individual you prefer and a different ballot for the party you prefer. Or you can vote for a candidate and a list from the same party. Your two ballots allow you to affect the election of eleven people — a district MLA and ten list MLAs.

## THE MMP OPTION OFFERS MORE DEMOCRACY.

In 2004, after significant research and public consultation across Canada, the Law Commission of Canada recommended that Canada “adopt a mixed member proportional electoral system.” Their report (available at <http://www.lcc.gc.ca>) compares electoral systems from around the world, including two MMP systems similar to

the one proposed for PEI. Law Commission examined ten criteria for an electoral system to meet the particular needs and challenges of Canada. The table below summarizes their conclusions after comparing Canada’s FPTP system and two examples of MMP systems. (The PEI model for MMP is closest to the Scottish model.)

CRITERIA	FPTP — current system	MMP — German model	MMP — Scottish model
1. Representation of Parties (Does the electoral system make it possible for each party’s representation in the legislature to closely match its voting strength?)		✓	✓
2. Demographic Representation (Does the electoral system help ensure the legislature reflects the diversity of society, including women and minority groups?)		✓	✓
3. Geographic Representation (Does the electoral system ensure that each region can elect a representative to be accountable to that region, its people, and its needs?)	✓	✓	✓
4. Diversity of Ideas (Does the electoral system help ensure the legislature reflects the diversity of perspectives and points of view of the electorate?)		✓	✓
5. Effective Government (Does the electoral system help ensure that the governments elected are able to enact their agendas in legislation and policy?)	✓	✓	✓
6. Accountable Government (Does the electoral system support voters’ ability to identify decision-makers and hold them accountable for their decisions?)	✓	✓	✓
7. Effective Opposition (Does the electoral system help ensure the presence of an opposition that can effectively criticize and improve on government’s agenda?)		✓	✓
8. Valuing Votes (Does the electoral system help voters make a connection between their vote and the election results, so they know it is worth voting?)		✓	✓
9. Regional Balance (Does the electoral system help ensure that all regions of the country are represented in decision-making?)		✓	✓
10. Inclusive Decisions (Does the electoral system help support increased consensus-building and collaboration in government?)		✓	✓
The Law Commission states: “A ✓ represents strengths or potential strengths. The absence of a ✓ does not suggest a total lack of this criterion, but rather our analysis indicates that it is not immediately evident if this criteria could be met in the Canadian context.” This table is adapted from Table 12 in <i>Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada</i> (p. 103).			

## HOW MIGHT ELECTORAL REFORM BENEFIT PEI WOMEN?



The Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women feels strongly that Prince Edward Island women would benefit from a change in the electoral system to the proposed mixed-member proportional system, for a number of reasons.

- **MMP will provide more opportunities for women to be nominated.**

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. A list system under MMP challenges parties to make policies for balance and representation in their slate of candidates. They often recognize the need to present a list with gender balance and geographic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. The list becomes a tool for the public to rank the parties' commitment to values such as gender equality.

- **If the electoral system changes, the rules for nominating candidates will have to change, too.**

Citizens and parties will have to review policies and processes, and we will all have the chance to consider how to make them more equitable.

- **MMP will result in more opposition — and a more diverse opposition.**

Unlike the current electoral system, a mixed-member proportional system distributes the seats based on the proportion of the popular vote that parties receive on the second ballot. This translates into strong opposition in the legislature. And since smaller parties are more likely to get seats, the opposition is more likely to be diverse. More diverse opposition increases the likelihood that issues important to women will be debated.

- **MMP leads to more collaboration among parties to implement policy agendas.**

Women who participated in focus groups held by the PEI Coalition for Women in Government said that the competitive, aggressive nature of party politics was a barrier to them putting their names forward to run for elected office. A mixed member proportional electoral system would lead to more diversity and more opposition in the legislature; it could sometimes lead to minority governments. As a result, governments in power would have to learn to work in more collaborative and cooperative ways to put their policies in place.

- **A better chance for issues important to women to have high political priority.**

The current system puts priority on the issues most likely to get district candidates re-elected: issues with support concentrated in small districts. Right now, each MLA is accountable to 3,600 voters, not to the whole Island. Issues such as family violence, affordable child care, and access to family law legal aid are spread out across PEI. We need legislators who put priority on Island-wide issues. To be re-elected, list candidates in the MMP system would have to keep the whole Island in mind.

- **Women will benefit from an electoral system that is more democratic and fair.**

Not long ago, society thought it was “fair” to exclude women, Aboriginal people, and others from voting. Our current electoral system considers geography and population when it assesses fairness. Isn't it time to consider gender and diversity? Isn't it time to think again about what is “fair” in our political system and our society?

“There cannot be true democracy unless women's voices are heard.”

— Hillary Clinton, US Senator

### LET NO ONE SAY, “IF THE SYSTEM AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT ...”

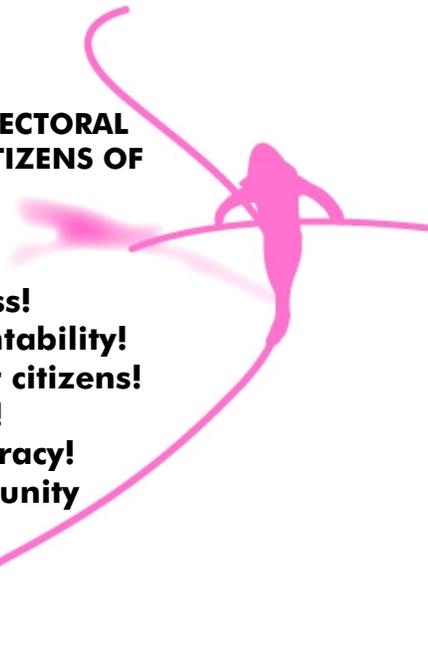
In far too many ways, our current electoral system IS broken.

- Chronic under-representation of women.
- Low priority on issues important to women.
- Lack of effective opposition.
- A legislature dominated by two parties.
- A legislature that does not reflect PEI's diversity.
- A legislature that does not reflect the range of Islanders' political perspectives.
- Focus on issues located in districts.
- Regional division on issues that affect all Islanders.
- Cynicism that the political system will ever change.
- A system that only counts votes for district winners.
- Little means to develop consensus on province-wide priorities.

The system is broken, but it *can* be fixed, with an ongoing commitment to electoral reform. Let's begin.

**A MIXED MEMBER  
PROPORTIONAL ELECTORAL  
SYSTEM OFFERS CITIZENS OF  
PRINCE EDWARD  
ISLAND**

- ✓ **More fairness!**
- ✓ **More accountability!**
- ✓ **More say for citizens!**
- ✓ **More choice!**
- ✓ **More democracy!**
- ✓ **More opportunity  
for women!**



**SEE YOU AT THE POLLS  
NOVEMBER 28, 2005!**

**WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?**

**General information about electoral reform:**

Commission for PEI's Electoral Future  
[www.electoralfuture.pe.ca](http://www.electoralfuture.pe.ca)

Elections PEI  
[www.electionspei.ca](http://www.electionspei.ca)

The Law Commission of Canada  
[www.lcc.gc.ca/about/voting\\_toc-en.asp](http://www.lcc.gc.ca/about/voting_toc-en.asp)

**Women-centred information:**

PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women  
[www.gov.pe.ca/acsw](http://www.gov.pe.ca/acsw)

PEI Coalition for Women in Government  
[www.wnpei.org/womeningovernment](http://www.wnpei.org/womeningovernment)

Equal Voice  
[www.equalvoice.ca/index.htm](http://www.equalvoice.ca/index.htm)

**Proportional representation advocates:**

Every Vote Counts (local)  
[www.everyvotecounts.ca](http://www.everyvotecounts.ca)

Fair Vote Canada (national)  
[www.fairvotecanada.org](http://www.fairvotecanada.org)

**ELECTORAL REFORM: JUST ONE PIECE OF  
THE PUZZLE IN GETTING WOMEN ELECTED**

Electoral reform alone won't get women nominated or elected. Electoral reform alone won't get issues that matter to women on the political agenda.

No matter what system we use to vote, women have work to do *with political parties*, to support them to nominate women; *with women candidates*, to help them overcome barriers to nomination and election; and *with elected officials*, to keep issues that are important to women on the priority list. This work will not stop after a plebiscite.

Still, electoral reform is an important piece of the puzzle in getting more women elected and in paying attention to the issues that are important to women and their families.

Whether or not you agree that the proposed mixed member proportional electoral system is a good choice for PEI women, we urge you to participate in the November 2005 plebiscite. For the first time in Island history, women have a fully equal opportunity to weigh in on the way we vote and form the legislature that represents us.

"Every democratic system evolves its own conventions. It is not only the water but the banks which make the river."

—Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India



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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. For more information on the Advisory Council's recommendations to government on women and electoral reform in PEI, see our *Policy Guide on Women and Electoral Reform*, September 2005.

