

# Challenging Barriers Experienced by Women Within/Entering Politics by Addressing Systemic and Structural Inequality in Society and Funding Non/Multi-Partisan Initiatives

*A Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women by:  
Kayleigh Erickson*

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## **Key Recommendations:**

### ***Tackling Gender Inequality in Society:***

1. Addressing the gender wage gap through requiring employers to publish pay and bonus gaps between their male and female employees, and looking into the establishment of a 'Workplace Gender Equality Agency,' as seen in Australia.<sup>i</sup>
  - In 2017 Canada was ranked the "seventh most unequal of 34 industrialized countries" in regards to the gender pay gap.<sup>ii</sup>
  - Women in Canada earn 31% less than men, which disproportionately impacts racialized women, low-income women, trans women, women with disabilities and Indigenous women.<sup>iii</sup>
  - This has led to companies such as *Innovatia*, located in St. John's, to commit to offering "employees 2 months of full wages and benefits if they're nominated by any party as a candidate in the 2018 provincial election" to encourage more women to run for office, and recognizing that job insecurity, a lack of income during election periods and the gender wage gap are all barriers to women running for elected office.<sup>ivv</sup>
2. Implementing publicly funded universal daycare in recognition of the lack of affordable and accessible childcare spaces in Canada, the widely varying costs of daycare across Canada, the fact that a significant percentage of women's income goes to daycare costs, and that true equality cannot be established without it.<sup>vi</sup>
  - According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 49% of women in Alberta who work part-time said they do so because they cannot afford childcare.<sup>vii</sup>
  - In 2014, 35% of women's income goes to day care in Surrey, 28% in Halifax and 4% in Gatineau, Quebec. This continues to increase.<sup>viii</sup>
3. Poverty reduction through Universal Basic Income.
  - Single mothers are overrepresented in poverty numbers, and in part-time and low-wage work. This is also true of marginalized groups, further marginalized by our economic system.<sup>ix</sup>
  - UBI will increase women's choices, tackle power dynamics and structural discrimination in society, reduce vulnerability and help with the cost of running in an election.<sup>x</sup>

- I also recommend supporting organizations such as *Together Against Poverty Society* to further the work they do to support and advocate for individuals living in poverty.

***Nomination/Recruitment Practices:***

4. In the absence of quotas, voluntary internal targets and enforcement mechanisms within parties are needed to increase women's representation, as well as clear language on the requirements of EDAs to recruit diverse candidates.
  - The result of the last BC election is indicative of the impact these voluntary measures can have. While 1/3 of female candidates running were elected, the NDP's self-imposed equity policy resulted in 46% of their elected MLAs being women, compared to the BC Liberal's 32%.
  - Federally, the NDP doesn't run nomination races until it's demonstrated that efforts have been made to recruit diverse candidates, and they have committed to an Equity Seeking Mandate. The success of this proactive, nomination-based mandate was demonstrated in the 2015 federal election, as 43% of the candidates running for the NDP were women compared to just 31% of Liberals, and less than 20% of Conservatives.
  - Setting targets is a great first step, but if there are no enforcement mechanisms ensuring that these targets are met then equality is stalled and put off until subsequent elections.
  - What does it mean to 'demonstrate efforts to recruit diverse women?'
5. Requiring political parties to place at least 50% of their female candidates in winnable ridings, and providing all female candidates with the supports they need to be successful.
  - Even when women run, they are underrepresented in winnable ridings. In the 2015 federal election, women running for the Liberals and Conservatives won less frequently than their male colleagues.
  - In the last BC election, more than half of men running for the provincial Liberal party won their seat, while only 39% of women won theirs. While the gap is smaller in the NDP, it still exists. Therefore, putting women in another party's stronghold is not just a federal or centre-right issue.
  - A long-term study found that women were less likely to run in their party's stronghold, less likely to run in competitive ridings, and more likely to run in another party's stronghold.<sup>xi</sup>
  - It's not that women aren't running or don't want to be in politics, it's the barriers that prevent them from being candidates, or being placed in unwinnable ridings that contribute to women not being elected.
6. Implementing consistent nomination practices across political parties. Currently political parties begin nominating candidates at different times, have different requirements for recruiting diverse candidates, and have differing qualifications for candidate nominations.

- “Women have reported that the cost and lack of predictability and transparency of the nomination process is, for some, a major disincentive.”<sup>xii</sup>

### ***Addressing Structural Barriers in our Electoral System:***

7. Shifting our Electoral System to a Proportional Representative system as part of a multi-pronged strategy to increase women’s representation.<sup>xiii</sup>
  - Our current First-Past-the-Post system contributes to the under-representation of women in politics. Due to the winner-take-all nature of this system, political parties attempt to maximize their chances of success by running the ‘safest’ candidate. This practice discourages political parties from selecting ‘non-traditional’ candidates, namely women and members of minority groups.
  - According to Dr. Grace Lore, Proportional Representation increases women’s representation due in part to a greater district magnitude, the use of lists, and the ability to “combine proactive policies” with these systems. However, as she notes, “proportional representation is not sufficient,” as proactive strategies such as quotas also need to be in place.<sup>xiv</sup>
8. Providing financial incentives to parties to nominate female candidates following the example set by New Brunswick for provincial campaign expenses.
  - In 2017, New Brunswick made “per-vote funding that parties receive based on their last election result will be 1.5 times higher for the votes cast for their candidates who are women.”<sup>xv</sup> “The new rules will reward parties for running women, and especially for running women in competitive and winnable ridings.”<sup>xvi</sup>
9. Implementing a gender quota for all Federal political parties to rapidly increase the percentage of women in the House of Commons.
  - We know that when more women take their seats in parliaments and legislatures that the way politics is done fundamentally changes, and that there are impacts on descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation.<sup>xvii</sup>
  - According to Equal Voice, it will be another 90+ years until we reach gender parity in the House of Commons, as Canada has become a laggard when it comes to women’s representation. Quotas have the ability to radically increase the amount of women in politics within one election cycle.
  - New Zealand implemented a Mixed Member Proportional system, which included 50% male and female candidates on party lists, and built in a certain percentage for Indigenous candidates. This has increased the number of female politicians, and Indigenous politicians.

### ***Challenging Gender-Bias in the House of Commons:***

10. Extending parental leave to the House of Commons to allow for female MPs who become mothers/have children while in office, to take off a minimum of 2 months leave, integrating teleconference/videoconference technology to allow for new mothers to be digitally present for meetings and sessions, decreasing travel requirements for new mothers, and increasing infant care (0-2 years old) for female politicians.<sup>xviii</sup>
11. Changing the culture in the House of Commons by:
  - Shifting the language we use to describe and to talk about women in politics as our language can either re-enforce or dismantle stereotypes, gender based assumptions, and structures of violence. For example, not objectifying women, focusing on their appearance, or making derogatory or harassing remarks related to gender.
  - Taking proactive and disciplinary measures to reduce gender-based heckling: 20% of respondents, especially female MPs, reported in a survey conducted by Samara Canada, that heckling “not only affected their job performance in the House but even reduced their willingness to participate at all.”<sup>xix</sup>
    - i. A preventative measure could be taking time in orientation to discuss ways to respectfully disagree with your colleagues, and a disciplinary measure could be having the Speaker of the House ask a member to remove themselves from the House for a period of time and to apologize for their remarks.
  - Actively challenging gender-based media bias: A study from the University of Alberta shows that in a review of 2500 newspapers over 37 years, “women who ran for leadership of major Canadian political parties faced scrutiny on physical appearance or traditional gender roles that was disproportionate in relation to their male colleagues.”<sup>xx</sup> This continues today across mediums. As leaders we need to be re-framing the conversation, calling out sexist remarks and questions, and commenting on biased reporting.
12. Addressing sexualized violence and harassment in the workplace and online by implementing the recommendations outlined in the 2017 report published by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, and additionally, establishing an independent, external body to oversee and to implement harassment policies.

***Providing a Counterweight to these Inequalities:***

13. Funding non-partisan initiatives that provide mentorship opportunities for women, and/or establish professional networking opportunities, and/or provide political acumen and training.
  - While no long-term study is in place to show the impacts of these initiatives, having been apart of Equal Voice and the Canadian Women’s Voters Congress, I have seen many women part of both organizations go on to become elected officials at all levels of government. I have also

been told by countless women who have attended women's campaign schools through the Canadian Women's Voters Congress, that they now feel more confident in their skills, have access to a network of women in politics, and the experience increased interest in politics and in being part of a political campaign.

- I recommend funding Equal Voice's Daughters of the Vote program as well as women's campaign schools, model parliaments, and the organization Dancing Backwards, in addition to any and all non-partisan/multi-partisan organizations that offer events dedicated to electing more women.

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<sup>i</sup> Grant, Tavia, "Who is minding the gap?" *The Globe and Mail*. 2017.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/gender-pay-gap-a-persistent-issue-in-canada/article34210790/>

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> McIntyre, Catherine. "These are the key numbers that explain the wage gap for women," *Maclean's*. February 8, 2018. <https://www.macleans.ca/society/pay-equity-statistics-canada/>

<sup>iv</sup> CBC News. "N.B. company promises wages for employees who run in 2018 election," *CBC News*. June 19, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/innovatia-pay-employment-provincial-election-female-gender-parity-2018-nb-1.4167669>

<sup>v</sup> Markusoff, Jason. "Price of admission: The true cost of running for election," *Maclean's*. October 3, 2015. <https://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/price-of-admission-the-true-cost-of-running-for-election/>

<sup>vi</sup> Friendly M., Prentice, S., & Ballantyne, M. "Without the publicly funded child care now commonplace in many countries, Canada lacks this essential pillar of support for women's equality," *Policy Options Politiques*. March 8, 2018. <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/march-2018/no-equality-without-universal-child-care/>

<sup>vii</sup> Macdonald, Donald & Friendly, Martha. "The Parent Trap: Child Care Fees in Canada's Big Cities," *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*. November 2014. [https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2014/11/Parent\\_Trap.pdf](https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2014/11/Parent_Trap.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> Noakes, Susan. "Child-care affordability varies widely across Canada," *CBC News*. November 10, 2014. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/child-care-affordability-varies-widely-across-canada-1.2829817>

<sup>ix</sup> Segal, Hugh. "A universal basic income in Canada is more realistic than you think," *Maclean's*. April 20, 2018. <https://www.macleans.ca/opinion/a-basic-universal-income-in-canada-is-more-realistic-than-you-think/>

<sup>x</sup> Schulz, Patricia. "Universal basic income in a feminist perspective and gender analysis," *Global Social Policy*. 2017.

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1468018116686503>

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- <sup>xi</sup> Thomas, Melanee. "Sacrificial lambs, women candidates, and district competitiveness," *Electoral Studies*. March 2013. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257087018\\_Sacrificial\\_lambs\\_women\\_candidates\\_and\\_district\\_competitiveness\\_in\\_Canada](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257087018_Sacrificial_lambs_women_candidates_and_district_competitiveness_in_Canada)
- <sup>xii</sup> Lore, Grace. "Women's Political Representation & Electoral Systems," *Equal Voice*. February 2018. <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/271/2018/03/Equal-Voice.pdf>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xv</sup> Poitras, Jacques. "Political parties to get financial incentive to run female candidates," *CBC News*. March 22, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/financial-incentive-women-candidates-1.4036359>
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ibid. <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/271/2018/03/Equal-Voice.pdf>
- <sup>xvii</sup> Gender Quotas Database. <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/quotas>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Choi, Jennifer. "It's time to extend a version of parental leave to Members of Parliament: report," *CBC News*. November 30, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/extend-parental-leave-to-mps-1.4427471>
- <sup>xix</sup> Samara Canada. <https://www.samaracanada.com/research/cheering-or-jeering>
- <sup>xx</sup> Ross, Andrea. "Media scrutiny of women in politics spans decades, study says," *CBC News*. December 17, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/media-representation-women-politics-1.4453407>