

# MARTHA HALL FINDLAY *It's time.*

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Dear Anne,

Congratulations on taking on the demanding role of Chair of the Renewal Commission Task Force on Women's Issues, and on having already put so much time and effort into hearing the views of so many across the country. Thank you for soliciting the views of the different Leadership Candidates.

My answers to your questions are attached. I preface my remarks, however, with a comment. The fact that there are three women now running for Leader of the Liberal Party is, in itself, a great step forward. I hope that it serves as a strong example to others. However, we still see references setting us apart as "the female candidates". We are often compared only to each other, with our respective attributes often referred to only in that narrow context. It's time, frankly, for us to move forward.

I do not compare myself only to the other women. I compare myself to *all* of the other candidates. I have said from the beginning that I am not running for the Leadership of the Liberal Party as a woman. I am, however, a woman running—and I am fully aware of the attendant issues, challenges, opportunities, and—importantly—the potential effect on future women politicians. A sitting Liberal MP actually told me that although he likes what I have to offer, he believes that Canada is not ready for a female Prime Minister. Seriously. And if one is willing to say it, how many others think it? Good heavens—this is our Liberal Party? This is our Canada? Kim Campbell already proved this wrong once; I plan on proving it wrong again. In the meantime, I hope that the fact of three women running in this leadership race will help encourage other women to get involved.

There is nothing so strong as leadership by example—you yourself have proved this immeasurably.

Warm regards,



Martha Hall Findlay

*Saisissons  
le moment.*

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**The questions are as follows. My answers are in bold lettering.**

1. Women comprise 52% of the Canadian population yet constitute only 20.3% of all Liberal MPs (11.3% of Government MPs and 20.7% in the House of Commons overall). In fact after the 2006 election one less woman sits in the House of Commons than in 2004.

- (a) Our party has a “goal” of 25% women candidates. What would your goal be and why?

**The “why” is clear: Women make up 52% of the population at large; women therefore make up 52% of those affected by the policies and legislation enacted by government. As such, we should be proportionately represented at the table at which those policies and laws are being debated and enacted.**

**Therefore my goal is also clear: To have approximately 50% women candidates. More importantly, to have women represent approximately 50% of elected Members of Parliament. I say “approximately” on purpose, because at any given time, in any given election, in a country with 308 ridings, all with a desire to elect the best candidate available for the job, it is extremely difficult to meet an exact percentage.**

**To achieve this goal, we must set an immediate goal of increasing the number of women candidates in each successive election until we achieve relative parity.**

- (b) What is your time frame for achieving this goal?

**The timing of my goal of more candidates in each successive election is tied to the timing of elections—each election will see a greater number. How quickly we can reach that 50% range is more difficult, and despite the temptation to make promises, I will not. The size of the increases in each election will depend on how effectively we address the other barriers to women’s participation (discussed below). This may be controversial, but I am leery of quotas. One of my colleagues has suggested a minimum of 33% female candidates in the next election. Another has suggested 30% in the next election if it is held within two years. I respect the effort to be firm; however, what if we have a snap election, and simply do not have enough capable women candidates willing and able to run in the ridings where spots are available? I would not want to shunt a capable man either out of office or aside from a candidacy, for someone who is not as strong a candidate, simply to meet an arbitrarily imposed number. By insisting on increasing the number each time, we ensure some progress. We must work on exceeding those minimums by focusing less on specific numbers and by addressing, through *concrete action*, not just words, the various barriers much more effectively than we have in the past.**

**We have made very little progress in the percentage of women in Parliament in several decades. There are a variety of reasons for this, some of which are more difficult to solve than others. These are discussed below. I have already engaged in efforts toward this goal, through my involvement with both Equal Voice, the**

**multipartisan organization devoted to increasing female participation in politics ([www.equalvoice.ca](http://www.equalvoice.ca)), as well as with the Ontario and National Women's Liberal Commissions ([www.lpc.o.ca/owlc](http://www.lpc.o.ca/owlc) and [www.nwlc-clfn.ca](http://www.nwlc-clfn.ca) respectively). I will build on those efforts.**

(c) If you were the Leader, would you use your power to appoint candidates to guarantee that the percentage identified in 1(a) was achieved?

**Yes, I would.**

**Note, however, my concern about hard and fast numbers. The appointment process is a valuable and important tool, but the discretion it affords must be used properly.**

(d) What would you do to ensure that women candidates are given an opportunity to seek nominations for and, run in, "winnable ridings"?

**Each riding should be required to demonstrate that it has seriously tried to recruit at least one female contender before being allowed to hold a nomination. This process is already followed by the NDP, with some success.**

**The nomination process is the largest single barrier to entry for women. But it is also the largest single barrier to entry to anyone, male or female, who is not "favoured" by those with the power of numbers or influence in any given riding—particularly in "winnable" ridings which are of course the most desirable. We must, as a Party, be honest with ourselves in this. The appearance of democracy, relying purely on numbers of members in any riding, is often illusory. Many ridings are the subject of questionable membership drive tactics; are the subject of undue influence by special interest groups; and can be "controlled" in favour of a particular candidate. We must abide by our own rules of membership. We must discourage undue efforts to control or influence the nomination process. It is also an example of why the power of appointment is important.**

**We must also seriously consider a time limit for sitting as a Member of Parliament. From all of my work in corporate governance, it is clear that limit on terms for Boards of Directors are a critical component of good governance. This would ensure a certain constant rejuvenation of the party, but would also make available to more women a greater supply of "held" and therefore "winnable" ridings over time.**

**On a non-partisan level, we must also seriously consider some form of proportional representation in this country, and in that context consider where the system can be used to increase the participation of women. For example, in a "multi member proportional" system with a separate list to choose additional MPs from, the list could have a minimum number of women. We could also consider, again in a larger move toward more proportional representation, some kind of split riding election, with one man, one woman per riding. At the least, these are ideas that merit more detailed consideration**

**The term “winnable riding” is interesting in another context. There are complaints that as a party we do not provide enough support—financial, volunteer or otherwise—to those women who do manage to clear the hurdles and become candidates, but who run in ridings that are more challenging than others. There are legitimate complaints that even when we get women in as candidates, we then leave them to their own devices. When I first ran in 2004, my riding at the time was viewed as completely “unwinnable”, by our own party and everyone involved. We proved that view wrong by coming within less than 1% of winning. Many recognized, too late, that a little more help might have tipped the balance. The point here is that the Party can do a great deal more to render more “winnable” some of those ridings assumed to be “unwinnable”, with more financial support, more campaign management support, more re-routing of volunteers, more visits from senior members of the Party, etc.**

(e) What other measures do you believe need to be put in place to address this inequity?

**A discussion on the various barriers and how to remove them follows. From the Liberal Party’s perspective, there should be a much greater effort to seek out potential women candidates---there are, after all, many, many capable women out there!! And then, they must be given the support needed to succeed.**

2. In your opinion what barriers, systemic or otherwise, currently prevent women from running as Liberal candidates? How can they be removed or mitigated?

- **Overall societal pressures: women continue to bear far more of the responsibility for children and the home (even those who work full time). There are therefore fewer women in the key age range of 25 – 55 who are in a position to pick up and move to Ottawa for ½ of the time. The geographical aspects alone are difficult but so is the lack of a regular schedule. A politician does not just work between 9-5, which poses real challenges for women with children. It is also far more acceptable in our current society for a man to spend so much time away from home and spouse than the other way around. Women doing so face more criticism and must withstand more guilt.**
- **Financial pressures: Although not always true, women often have less of a financial and societal network that can provide financial and other resources that are necessary for successful campaigns.**
- **Lack of exposure, lack of experience, lack of understanding of the process, and therefore a certain fear of the unknown and a lack of confidence. I have spoken to many women’s groups; I always ask about whether any are interested in getting into politics, and I am always surprised at the number of responses that show this lack of confidence—particularly when they come from women who are very successful in other fields of endeavour. Because of the relatively small number of women already in politics, an even smaller number, relatively in Cabinet; the small number of women sitting on Boards and in other positions of influence, there are not enough examples for others to follow.**

*How can these barriers be removed or mitigated?*

- **It is the societal pressures that are, in my view, the biggest barriers—and they will be the toughest to deal with. I myself could not, in my own mind, run for public office until my children were grown and self-sufficient. Many more women feel that way than men. Until such time as men bear fully equal responsibility for children and home, and it becomes socially ‘acceptable’ for women to make the kind of time commitment necessary, the pool of available, capable women candidates will be smaller than the corresponding pool of male candidates. To be clear, however—a smaller pool does not mean we should have a goal of fewer women. It means that we have to work harder to find those willing and able to participate. In the meantime, we all have to work harder in our communities to make these kinds of commitments as acceptable for women as for men.**
- **Financial pressures: The Judy LaMarsh Fund, which provides financial assistance to federal Liberal women candidates is a big help, but not nearly enough to tip the balance. The numbers are very small given the overall donations made to the Party. The Party can do much to encourage targeted donations to help women candidates. I also suggest that the Party consider establishing a separate Liberal Party foundation, or perhaps a separate trust account within the Liberal Party, dedicated to supporting women candidates and their campaigns, to which donors could contribute knowing that the funds were going specifically to women candidates.**
- **Lack of confidence, lack of knowledge: Mentoring, interactive speaking engagements, having MPs (both women and men) work with women’s groups to conduct sessions on what the whole political world is like, what the processes are, how to get involved—in effect, to take away much of the unknown and to encourage, directly, more participation. These activities are critical to making progress. When in a position to effect these changes, our Party should ensure a greater number of Cabinet Ministers; appointments should ensure far more women to the Boards of Crown Corporations and other entities where the government has the ability to do so. When we have the ability to effect change, we must do so.**

*But in all of this, we must ACT. Many people have been saying these things for years; have been making recommendations about what is needed, and what “should” be done. But talking about it simply isn’t enough. And the blunt reality of ACTING is that it takes resources. Searching, mentoring, planning, coordinating—these things all take time and money. Historically, the money part of the equation has been missing. It’s time to put our money where our mouths are.*

3. (a) Do you believe that the Party should dedicate financial resources to identify, recruit and mentor future female candidates? If so – will you make that commitment now and how will you ensure that it happens?

**YES, and YES. This is a commitment I happily make. The Party must establish a clear budgetary line item to dedicate significant resources for the identification, recruitment and mentoring of future Liberal candidates (as well as the support of all**

**women candidates in campaigns). How to make it happen? By reminding my fellow Party members, as often as necessary, of just how many women voters there are in Canada and how important they are. And of course, through the ability to persuade and encourage that are hallmarks of strong leadership.**

(b) Do you believe the Women's Commission is fulfilling its role in this regard?

**Not enough. To be fair, however, the Women's Commission does not (yet) have a clear enough mandate for these efforts, nor does it have, most importantly, the resources to engage in the necessary activities. As noted above, to ensure that we do more than talk about the barriers, and talk about what actions can be taken, and to instead actually *take action*, sufficient resources must be made available.**

(c) Should the Liberal Party establish an office dedicated to this purpose? Where should that office be located: LPC? Leader's office? other?

**Given that we already have the Women's Commission and its provincial and territorial commissions, I do not see the need for another layer of bureaucracy in the Party. We do, however, need accountability and results.**

**More resources must be available for these critically important efforts, and whoever is given the task must be accountable to the Party President, with a clear reporting line to, and regular communication with, the Party Leader.**

4. Our party has had, in its history, only one female President, Iona Campagnola.

(a) Do you believe that within our Party, we need to do more to encourage women to seek senior executive positions?

**Yes, absolutely. But we also need to recognize that one of the barriers here is our internal party culture. We need to make women feel that they are welcome. This is somewhat intangible, but no less a factor, and no less important. It is, in turn, the participation of more women inside the party structure that will help ensure policies and processes that better represent the needs of women, and which will help ensure more women candidates at the public level.**

(b) If so, what concrete steps would you take, as Leader, to bring this about?

Much the same as all of the above. I would also insist on greater accountability from the Provincial and Territorial Associations, as well as the Party Executive, to show clear results of greater gender parity. We could use the Women's Commission, with a clearer mandate and the necessary resources, to seek out and encourage more women, not only as candidates for MP, but also for positions within the Party. And again, through leadership, insist on improving the culture.