

“POLITICALLY SPEAKING”

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Now it's a Fabulous Five.

Pauline Marois in Quebec joins Alison Redford in Alberta, Christy Clark in British Columbia, Eva Aariak in Nunavut, and Kathy Dunderdale in Newfoundland and Labrador. **Now, almost a half of all Canadian Premiers are women.**

THE FACE OF CANADIAN POLITICS IS FINALLY CHANGING – AND SHE IS IMPRESSIVE.

First, congratulations to Pauline Marois, the newly-elected Premier of Quebec. And, to repeat a thank you I expressed to Alison Redford a year ago when she first became Premier of Alberta -- thank you this time to Pauline Marois for significantly increasing the proportion of women at that level of public office.

As I have written before, Canada has a dismal—indeed embarrassing record of female representation in public office. It varies a bit by region and by order of government, but for the most part, we barely make it past 20% in our representation in public office. In the general election of May, 2011, we saw some improvement in the House of Commons – almost 24% of MPs are now women. But let's not forget that women make up a MAJORITY of the Canadian population. That's right, we make up about 52% of the total -- isn't it interesting how “women” keep being lumped in to, and referred to as one of, the “minorities”... Ironically, as a white-skinned woman in Willowdale, I am statistically now part of a visible minority – as a woman, however, I am part of the majority. But perceptions persist.

By 1995 we managed to elect women to about 20% of the total elected offices - which means that not much has really changed in over two decades. We still compare very badly internationally – in terms of the proportion of women in elected office, we still rank behind dozens of other countries. Canada ranks a distant 40th in the world on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's "List of Women in National Parliaments".

I have said in this space before --- I am not one of those who believes that we need more women in public office because they are any "better" at it than men. After many years in law, business and then politics, I do not believe that women, as a rule, are any more cooperative, any more consensus driven, any more collegial, or any 'nicer' than men. But in comprising 52% of the population in Canada, women represent a majority of the people affected by all of the

legislation passed in the House of Commons, in provincial and territorial legislatures, and in municipalities all across Canada. And, whether we like it or not, a lot of legislation can affect women differently than men - funding for childcare as an example. As such, women need to be at the table when the policies behind those decisions are discussed, and should be there as they work through the different legislatures and committee processes before eventually becoming law.

I do not agree with a large number of Pauline Marois' policies – her desire to separate Quebec from the rest of Canada being the most obvious one. As a Canadian, proud of a country that includes such disparate regions to the benefit of all, I would have preferred a different electoral result in Quebec. On the other hand, as a woman, I appreciate the effort that Pauline Marois has put into politics and I admire her success. Democracy, true democracy, can be messy, and people get elected that some people may not like – it's the nature of the beast. But I do appreciate the fact that more and more people will see all of these Premiers in action, and lose the prejudices that many of them have about women in public office.

Let's hope that this achievement encourages more women to say, "I want to run for office, I can run for office -- I will run for office." Let us also hope that the more women hold senior public office, the more not only women but men will get to the point of assuming that women can and should be there just as much as men.

What we see tends to become what we expect – and if we see an increasing number of women leading our provinces and holding other public offices, then we may come to expect it. 49% of Canadians now “see” that they are now governed by a women premier. Soon, we will simply expect it as an option, and I will be happy when I no longer feel the need to write about “women in politics”—it will no longer be an issue.

As always, if you have any thoughts, suggestions or questions, please email me at info@marthahallfindlay.ca or visit NO www.marthahallfindlay.ca