

**YWCA of Edmonton - One Woman One Vote  
Women's Political Action Forum  
February 26-28, 2004  
Edmonton Alberta**

Saturday's facilitated discussions at the Women's Political Action Forum included large and small group work activities. Groups were divided to ensure geographical differences at each table. General consensus was obtained throughout the process of creating the Outcome Statement, Themes, Strategic Opportunities and Commitments to Actions resulting from the Women's Political Action Forum.

**Outcome Statement**

Legislation, public policies, and priorities reflect the needs of women and their families to allow more women who want to make a difference for women to participate actively in the political process.

Four key **Themes** emerged from discussions:

- A. electoral reform,
- B. electing women
- C. recruiting, training and supporting women in the electoral process
- D. public and media awareness and understanding.

**Strategic Opportunities** for action were identified by the participants.

**Commitment to Actions** – individual and organizational commitments were made publicly as calls to action. The YWCA of Edmonton offered to send out a Letter of Interest to all women and women's organizations attending the Forum to create a national strategy based on the actions discussed at the Forum.

## **Theme: A. Electoral Reform**

### **What difference do we want to make?**

To reform Canada's electoral system so that all votes count in a fair and democratic process resulting in more women elected.

### **What can we do collectively to help make this difference?**

Potential Areas for Collective Action:

- Current "first past the post" system
  - Adversarial
  - Male dominated
  - Not proportional
  
- Electoral reform
  - Little information available in all communities
  - Public notified early of changes, i.e., electoral boundaries
  
- Do a gender analysis of electoral reform options
  - How much better will proportional representation be for women?
  - National, provincial
  - Whatever options are discussed they must do better (much better) by women.
  - If women not treated equally women's organizations should not support.
  
- Identify champions
  
- Membership in Fair Vote Canada to change electoral system
  - Petition: circulate and sign
  - Encourage people to join Fair Vote - raise awareness by talking about it
  - Need a capsule explanation. Use Fair Vote materials
  - Link groups across the country to chapters of Fair Vote of Canada
  - YWCA(s) in partnership with Fair Vote
  
- Proportional Representation (PR)
  - Education – types of PR
  - There are many models of PR but the general sentiment is that we must better represent the votes of Canadians
  - Youth, minorities and immigrant population
  - Culturally sensitive, language accessible parties
  - Central system- candidates posted
  - Public relations strategy for PR-letters to editor, guest columns
    - re: aspect demographics, 80% city 20% rural
    - needs to be clearly brought forward

- pros and cons
- nationally for everyone to decide
- The Law Commission is going to recommend a model of PR for Canada
- Support BC and the organizations there to win the PR reform.
- Challenge PEI to provide leadership on women's representation under a reformed electoral system.
- Youth Parliament based on electoral reform
  
- Equal Voice: An Action Group for the Election of Women
  - Take on letter writing campaign that Equal Voice has started and share the information
  
- Finances
  - Tax breaks to women candidates
  - We cannot forget election finance reform
  - Donate to women candidates who support equality in their platform
  
- Education
  - Need to understand what we are asking for and what the process of asking is
  - Utilize presentations that already exists from Forum
  - Plain language, simple language is necessary
  - NFU for rural
  - Picture graphics for non English speaking women and translations
  
- Strategic plans
  - Sharing information is key, too.
  - Letters to government
  - Letters to editor
  - Partnerships
  - Phone calls
  - Champions
  - Letters (Media)
  - Network
  - (i.e. work together, partnerships ...)
  - Links to places where people can give money, time
  - Women's groups-have this in their lobbying " list of demands"
  - Public health nurses for rural links
  - Success stories on provincial level
  
- Consider electoral system as in NWT, no parties elect candidates  
accountability based
- Change hours of elections -end time consistent across country
- Advocate for creation of permanent Standing Committee on Status of Women  
equivalent
- I.A.-Indian Act

- Band Council/Elections
- Rules and Regulations
- Running: On and Off Reserve
- Voting: On and Off Reserve

## **Theme: B. Electing Women**

### **What difference do we want to make?**

To increase opportunities and chances of success for women to be nominated and elected to public office.

### **What can we do collectively to help make this difference?**

- Getting Women to vote
  - Women need to support women who support equality
  - Learn to support each other rather than compete
  
- There needs to be some ongoing education, like workshop for women to realize how to go about getting involved in the process.
  - Activity in community organizations
  - Service clubs
  - Boards and commissions appointments
  - School Board
  - Prepare women for the process, hardship of running
  - Best practices on running campaigns
  
- Identify women leaders
  - Identifying and supporting
  - Profile development
  - Targeted female professionals organizations (teachers, lawyers, doctors) to ask for contributors to women
  - Almost every union has a women's committee/women's group. Ask them to organize
  - Have women in advisory positions in campaign teams
  
- Encouraging more women to run at the municipal levels
  - Giving money/Tax breaks for municipal contributions
  - Public funding for municipal campaigns
  - Lobby Education of Community Municipalities
  - Engraining women at the very fundamental level. Local gov't the easiest way to do this.
  - Public funding to municipal candidates
  - Lobby FCM for tax deductions to municipal campaigns

- Involvement in party politics
  - Choose a party and buy membership
  - Involvement in riding associations
  - Prepare for Nomination
  - Best practices of parties on women's recruitment
  - What are parties doing to actively encourage women
  
- Removing barriers
  - Why are more capable, qualified women (i.e., those in attendance here) not running for politics?
  - The adversarial nature of politics is not attractive to many women (who would prefer more consensus-based approach). For politics to be more attractive, it needs to change
  - Educate candidates
  - Support them financially and with your time, skills, energy
  - Look at what seats women are put into.
  - Central clearing house of common tools
  
- Education
  - Coordinated media program on value of Women in Gov't
  - Experience with elections
  - Networking to gain knowledge, skills
  - Teaching tool (PowerPoint) that uses graphs (like Trimble's/Arscott's/Young's) to illustrate the number of women in elections and their success.
  
- Election finances
  - Contribute to campaigns
  - Women must donate to women's candidate
  - National financial strategy to raise individual contributions.
  - Use new election funding laws to get bigger contributions.
  - If money is key, we have to get parties to make rules about spending limits, etc → lobbying parties is very important
  - \$ money pool fund for women
  - Coordination of funding sources-voice
  - Somehow, women must encouraged also to donate to female candidates→ it is an important investment and a tax break i.e. for every \$100.00 donation, you'll get \$ 75.00 back (tax)
  - Women can relay mobilize around this
  
- Campaigns for voting/electing women
  - Write letters to parties about nominating women
  - It is a two-pronged process → parties need to be encouraged to nominate more women BUT women who are more capable and qualified must be sought after. It does not suffice to just nominate ANY woman!

Brainstorm candidates to ask to run in communities  
No \$ campaigns  
Back room supporters  
Women's church groups  
Commitment women's equality in campaign and after  
Professional association provide network of support

- Target Young Women
  - Offer to speak to Women's studies classes.
  - Become involved in politics
  
- Meeting/Networks
  - We need to get the ball rolling in our own communities
  - Fair vote
  - Women's church groups. Speak to them
  - Sharing networks of coordination of people
  - Support of religious, ethnic, sport organizations
  - Capitalize connections
  - Mentoring/support work
  - Remember existing network + use it.
  - Involving unions in action campaigns.
  - Ensure people in influential positions are in the backroom
  - Develop umbrella group-connections/equal voice
  
- Maybe there should be a press conference in the near future, specifically asking, "Where are the women?" Re: the upcoming federal election.
- Or, there could be even concurrent press conferences.
- You need to target the public, as well as the political parties.
- Reinstatement of a national advisory council on women's issues (i.e.: Status of Women)

## **Theme: C. Recruiting, Training and Supporting Women in the Political Process**

### **What difference do we want to make?**

To increase the number, quantity and confidence of women in the political process.

### **What can we do collectively to help make this difference?**

- We need to get a woman out to VOTE. That it is the first step and it is something we can work on now
  - Educate/train women to be able to participate effectively
  - Making rides (transportation) to voting
  - Babysitting
  - “Get information. Make an informed choice. Vote”
- Getting young women to VOTE.
  - There would have to be some sort of campaign to convince them that their vote matters
  - Proportional representation
- Research to see how many women voted
  - Municipal, provincial and federal elections
- Campaign schools available to different regional, economic, cultural areas and needs
  - Many women do not see them selves as having the necessary skills
  - Political Training workshops should recognize different roles in campaign: i.e. fundraising, media support, candidates
  - Train women campaign managers
  - Develop an electronic/internet/digital campaign school to provide knowledge and preparedness of participating
  - Using technology to spread campaign school to other regions, Bring campaign school to smaller regions
  - Rural woman- teleconferencing link for schools
  - Raise funds to seek out capable, qualified women and to send them to workshops and schools.
  - Grants, fundraising, bursaries
  - Support women to go to campaign school-bursary program
  - increase amount and what it covers: i.e. hotel to travel
  - Offer billeting for those who go elsewhere for training
  - Women need media training
  - Alberta location for BC school-increase frequency > 1/yr

- Campaign school for women in universities (role models)
- Canada program for young women
  - Junior high and high school women
  - School system -curriculum program-high school (role models)
  - Alberta - Kindergarten – Grade 9 call for approved learning resources
  - In Britain, there is a campaign called “Engendered “→ if we’re going to appeal to young women we have to tell them why.
  - Start young-summer camps
  - Political leadership workshops for girl-school curriculum
  - To embrace and support educational initiative-i.e. Interns in schools
  - Offer more awards (YWCA Women Distinction etc.) that recognizes the value of women’s political contributions (don’t make these awards for “Young Women” –make them but do not call them young women awards!)
  
- Get involved –network with people in political process
  - Host round-table discussion
  - Non-partisan based criteria-applicants (equality seeking)
  - How do women run campaigns vs. how men run campaigns?
  - Attend Town Hall meetings.
  - Develop relationships with elected officials both as an individual and group
  - Working with unions
  - Ask other elected women and supportive elected men to support the electoral process at other levels
  - Approach women’s political caucus (see Jane Run, etc.)
  - Identify allies
  - Creating an old girls network to break down infighting
  - Posting biographies of elected women and women with political process as way to encourage women.
  - Help reframe (i.e. preschool board is political!)
  - Behind scenes- need to be conscious influence nomination outcome
  - A checklist of things to improve yourself in the political process

- Create a candidate-support group
  - Each woman needs a mentor/role model
  - Mentoring with current and previous politicians and people who have been involved in campaigns
  - Mentorship SWAT Team to whoosh in to support her on women's issues
  - Rah! Rah! Team
  - Support women after they get elected
  
- Coordination role for a key women's organization in each province/territory
  - Look at natural structures (institutions) tap in to (YWCA)
  - Use networks already established nationwide to develop brochure of women issues
  - Database of eligible women, for appointments /boards in each province
  - What are the qualifications?
  - What about recruitment women from diverse backgrounds?
  - Round table of women issues
  
- National
  - National Training strategy with funding strategy to increase training opportunities.
  - National coalition to help increase diversity of women in the political process
  - National media campaign on value of woman in political process-inform, educate, link, motivate women to get involved
  - National program to help deliver more campaign schools across the country
  - National clearinghouse directory of classes, schools, etc available for gaining leadership skills!
  - Need to understand what we are asking for from our governments and what is the best way to ask for what we want?
    - i.e. funding for Status of Women vs. creation of a permanent standing Committee on Women Issues
  - Go together with national strategy to status of women
  - Women's organization, one central location for Canadian women
  - Self gov't standardize the process towards self gov't

- Information exchanges
  - Broaden all-inclusive list-services maybe through [www.canadaelections.net](http://www.canadaelections.net)
  - Let people know what information is available - public-training-support-reaching/advertising
  - Information networks, to educate women for self-government
  - Seek assistance of women's group to expand networks
  
- Financial reform
  - A foundation for the purpose of financially supporting women to run
  - Election financing reform
  - Fundraising
  - Focus effort on nomination process
  - Financially support women candidates
  - Pool funds - creating a fund to support women candidates overcoming \$ obstacles
  - No cost campaigns
  
- Public awareness strategic connected to fund strategy
  - Lobbying status of women re: funding
  - Targeted fundraising-using relationship and strategic planning-network
  - Communications plan-corporate
  - Use of new technology-internet for education and fundraising
  
- Motivation, energy, compassion→ We could come up with for broader criteria than parties
  - The way boundaries are set up will have an impact
  - Learn from Women's Advisory Council of Manitoba.

## **Theme: D. Public and Media Awareness & Understanding in the Political Process**

### **What difference do we want to make?**

To increase the public and media's knowledge and understanding of the importance of women being involved in the political process as voters, candidates, elected representatives, and party leaders.

### **What can we do collectively to help make this difference?**

- Get the facts out re: Women in Politics
  - Consider research conducted by Trimble and Arscott, it needs to be disseminated.
  - We can use our networks to spread such information
  - Trimble currently is conducting a content analysis of the Tory leadership race→ it's shocking
  - During elections provide information on records of parties running women, women candidates, accessible databases of media, receptive of women issues
- National campaign to get women to vote
  - Every women here commits talking to women about voting
  - Talk to schools to get women prepared to vote and run for office
- Present/inform the media as a barrier to women's accessibility to politics (Trimble & Arscott's work)
  - The media needs to be made aware that the coverage given to women by the media is not satisfactory, unacceptable
  - The recent treatments of Belinda Stronach and Miriam Bedard especially, is both abhorrent and very telling of the sort of images portrayed to the public of women in politics
  - Letter from this group to media outlets regarding negative media attentions paid to Belinda Stronach campaign, one group to draft and email to other groups. Monthly letters to go out on media issues
  - National Boycott of print media by all women groups – 1
- Strategies to Target Media re: portrayal of women in media
  - Talking to women & male journalists (while they are in school)
  - Using women journalists for open call for candidates "Dames for Democracy". Send names in for people who should run
  - Rural media - awareness

Maybe if we had a few key national institutions, talking points  
- every women's group could push them along with their goals.

Develop quick response Re: Negative Media

Targeting people in media who put women down and talk to them, meet with them, call them on it, awareness raising

Meet with editors - how to deal with negative pictorial editorials.

Write letters to the editors, opinion pieces as often as possible

Writing editorials to newspapers about their handling of coverage of women

Encourage and create women's political columns, radio shows, provide information

Organize letters to editor - other public communities supporting women candidates

Write also to offending person, demand more than "I'm sorry"

- Portrayal of Politics

The portrayal of politics is all about the conflict and nastiness, thus it is often unappealing to women

Something must be done to change the image of politics  
Shed some light on the behaviour of PC MLA in session: they play cards, pick their teeth with business cards, yell, etc.

- Women in Politics

Training women to use all forms of media

Build Relationship with Media /Reporters early on

Training Women on handling tricky issues

Support women who are in media

Workshops→ find some media personnel willing to participate

Educational package

- PSA's

- Template Development: letters to editor

- Make it easy.

- Use technology

Elections Canada has website for encouraging young people. Check your head in Vancouver is doing election/advocacy education

Link websites to each other

Use websites i.e. Media Watch

Link: mechanism to co-ordinate info, media strategies centrally  
www.ncwc.ca→ federal election questions in an elections guide  
Share all election guides (FemJEPP, one women one vote, etc)  
Email list of forum participants  
Par-I - University of NB listserve  
Point Organization to coordinate/take lead in posting news on website regarding groups here -use established listserves  
National-central clearing center, standard letters to assist in writing concise letters

- Commit to having bi-annual political forum (like this one)
  - A point organization to coordinate
  - Strategy to facilitate face to face workshops
  - roundtables, forums, traveling
  - workshops, women circles
  
- Multicultural audiences
- Local TV-utilize free advertising PSA through media
- TV PSA –i.e. importance of women in politics-proposal to CND Heritage-look for government funding courses
- Posters in Friendship Centers
- Piggyback with organizations like Junior Achievement, Girl Guides - non partisan political interests-volunteer
- Create Resource kit for girls on politics
- Access empty buildings and windows “one women one vote” or other poster. Talk to developers about creating window displays.
- Something must be done immediately but, additionally it would be useful to use this conference as a point of departure from which to organize a new collection action.
- We also need to be efficient; it is not prudent continually to reinvent “the wheel”. Let’s work together and share results

### **Strategic Opportunities for Action**

- There are currently nine Supreme Court Justices -three of the nine are women. With Hon. Madam Justice Louise Arbour leaving, only two women Justices will remain
  
- Write letter to PM to influence that selection of next judge be female
  
- Sign petition circulated by Fair Vote Canada at the Forum

- Centennial dollars 2005 – Alberta, Saskatchewan – to recognize women’s contributions
- Belinda Stronach – opportunity to discuss women candidates issues in election
- Federal election activities
- Provincial Elections – Alberta, British Columbia and referendum in BC on proportional representation
- Civic elections – Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Northwest Territories (18 months), Band Councils (ongoing)
- Female Governor General
  - Adrienne Clarkson leaving soon?
  - Appointed position – to lobby for another Lieutenant Governor, Governor General to be a woman
- Potential electoral reform - BC, Ontario, New Brunswick, PEI, Saskatchewan, and NWT (self-government)
- Educate public health nurses in rural Alberta about proportional representation
- Beijing + 10 Conference in Brazil

## **Commitments to Actions**

### Organizational Commitments

#### **YWCA Edmonton**

Send Letter of Interest to invite an adhoc committee that has representation from across the country.

Committee take the priorities and identify specific actions – national strategies.

#### **City of Edmonton Councillor** Janice Melnychuk

Offered to let her own campaign be a learning experience for other women.

#### **Wendy Wheeler**, independent business woman

Offered YWCA labour and 16-foot window display space in historic Hudson Bay Building.

#### **Tania Kajner** with Status of Women Canada

Central list of related funding projects

Ally / source.

#### **Kristin Lund** - PEI

Putting resources on Status of Women website.

#### **Women's Equality Coalition**

NAWL and seven other organizations including National YWCA.

[www.canadaelections.org](http://www.canadaelections.org)

Launched March 7, 2004.

Can post any equality materials

Access women in labour

NAWL and 4 women's organizations is [www.canadaelections.net](http://www.canadaelections.net).

**Winning Women** and **YWCA Lethbridge** – roundtable together.

#### **Status of Women Council NWT**

Resources on our website, e.g. to create a permanent standing committee

Women's leadership manual on website in future.

## Individual Commitments

- Letters – need templates on a site  
Effective letters are not form letters but letters addressed to person  
Senator Milne does not reply to form letters.  
Get points from others but create own letter
- Writing and faxing letters to editors and publishers, Carla Kozak, Canada Council of Women
- Buy memberships to organizations – use their info. e.g. Fair Vote Canada, Canadian Women Voters Congress, Equal Voice, YWCA's
- Connection with academic institutions and women academics doing studies (Trimble, Arscott, Young, M. Tremblay)
- Buy memberships for Belinda Stronach, others
- Carolyn Nikodym, Grant MacEwan College Journalism student – she will research journalism schools in Canada regarding how they teach portrayal of women. Will research journalism schools – so we can speak as one - women issues
- Sign petitions
- Hot link websites of organizations participating at the Forum.
- Connect with Aboriginal women and organizations serving them
- Connect with women in poverty and organizations serving them
- Connect with immigrant women and organizations serving them.