

Whose Job is it Anyway?

The Life and Work of an MLA

Research and Recommendations on Work-Life Balance for PEI MLAs



PEI Coalition for Women in Government
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Executive Summary

The PEI Coalition for Women in Government began its work of encouraging the election of more women in 2004 with research to determine why women weren't being elected. Having more women elected will bring more diversity of experience to the decision-making table, increasing the potential for policy and programs that speak to women's experience and lives. Key findings of that early research indicated that one of the main reasons women do not run for public office is the perceived lack of work life balance for PEI politicians. The Coalition undertook to find out whether that perception is a reality and from this research, set out to identify best practices and recommendations for supporting PEI's elected members to have balance between work and personal areas of their lives.

The report highlights findings from a national survey conducted with sitting MLA's from across the country, a third of which were from PEI, and interviews with current and former PEI MLAs and staff people.

Unrealistic Expectations and Lack of Respect Plague Role of PEI MLA

The survey research indicates that PEI MLAs spend more time than MLAs in other provinces and territories on constituency duties, including meeting with or corresponding with individual constituents, attending private functions (such as funerals and birthday parties), and helping constituents to access employment. Four times as many Island respondents as respondents from outside PEI say they spend at least six hours a week helping constituents to find work. A former Cabinet Minister highlighted the difference between jurisdictions when she said, *"I was at the airport waiting to fly home and the Minister from Quebec was there and he asked what I was doing for the weekend. I told him that I was going to this and that event, going to some anniversaries and other events, and he just looked at me. I asked him what he was doing and he told me that he spends every weekend with his family."*

High constituent expectations is the most cited explanation of the challenge PEI MLAs face in balancing work with personal time. Many focus group and workshop participants defined the expectations of some constituents as unreasonable. A former Cabinet Minister is quoted as saying, *"I remember one MLA telling me that he had a call from this woman because there was a cat on her roof - he had to go with a ladder and get the cat down."*

In this document, the Coalition reminds Government of its 2008 Throne Speech in which it promised to constitute a Special Committee on the Role of the MLA and suggests that committee also explore ways to create reasonable public expectations and restore public trust and respect to the office of MLA.

Do Women and Men Experience Public Office Differently?

It seems as though many of society's divisions of labour based on gender hold true even when you are an MLA. Results of the research show that just as women in the whole of society spend more time on home management and family care giving than men, women respondents to the

survey spend more time on these tasks, as well. Often, it is these duties which are credited for keeping women away from running for public office. A former Cabinet Minister interviewed said, *“I observed that it was much more difficult for women, especially if they had children. Women tended to enter politics, a lot of them later or not at all, because they waited until their children were older.”*

Once they get elected, however, women and men tend to rate their work life balance similarly. Men were marginally more likely to indicate balance than women, with 56.3% of male respondents saying they felt they had some balance, compared to 47.1% of women.

The document reminds readers that the job of MLA is not the only job that can bring about imbalance. A current Cabinet Minister points out that, *“In some situations it’s not a choice. If I were a single mom pouring coffee at Tim’s and needed to make more money to pay for bills, but wanting to spend time with my children, I may not have a choice. When you choose to be a politician, you hopefully go into it with your eyes wide open. [And then,] you need to make sure that you find that time for you. The fact that I’m a female in a political role is no different than being a female in any other role.”*

Recommendations

With ideas generated from the research participants and those in attendance at a November 2008 workshop, the Coalition makes 17 recommendations to government and political parties. Key recommendations include a call to Government to bring together the Special Committee on the Role of the MLA promised in the 2008 Speech from the Throne, and to develop an Ombudsperson Office to assist constituents to efficiently access services and problem solving, when they might otherwise call their MLAs. Recommendations to political parties centre on increased support to attract diverse candidates, and a recommendation that each party work towards the goal of nominating at least nine women in the 2011 Provincial election.

Background

Beginning in 2007, the Coalition undertook research to determine which perceptions of work-life balance are closer to reality, and if there is a lack of balance, to find out how it shows itself. From this research, we set out to identify best practices and recommendations for supporting PEI's elected members to have balance between work and personal areas of their lives.

Our Research Participants

Thirty-six MLAs participated in the survey. Twelve were from PEI and twenty-four were from Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and the Yukon. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the survey participants were male and fifty-two percent (52%) were female. Sixty-nine percent (69%) reported being a backbencher; fourteen percent (14%) stated they were Cabinet Ministers; seventeen percent (17%) had additional responsibilities, such as deputy speaker or member of the Opposition. Forty two percent (42%) represent districts of less than 10,000 constituents. Half of respondents were in office for less than five years, with the other half in office for more than five years. As well, we held interviews and focus groups with 12 current and former PEI MLAs and staff that work with them.

One would hope that the general public in PEI is aware that their MLAs work hard for them. On occasion, we hear from people who do not believe that, or who protest the amount MLAs are paid for their work. On the other hand, there are those who believe that MLAs work so hard that they do not have balance between their work and their life outside of work.

A lack of work life balance might make the job less appealing to some potential candidates, including women. The PEI Coalition for Women in Government is interested in seeing more women elected, and to reducing the barriers to women being nominated to run. Having more women elected will bring more diversity of experience to the decision-making table, increasing the potential for policy and programs that speak to women's experience and lives.

Highlights of National Research on Work-Life Balance for MLAs

Legislative Duties

Most members of the general public are likely aware that when the House is in session, our MLAs work at least the time it takes to attend sessions, which, in PEI, is 16 hours a week. Less obvious to the public are the many additional hours that MLAs spend at their jobs both when the House is open and when it is not. Those hours include reading briefing materials in preparation for House sessions, attending caucus meetings, correspondence related to the legislative part of their jobs, meeting with staff and colleagues and, when the House is not in session, attending Standing Committee meetings.

The highest percentage of respondents nationally (47%) stated that they spend between one and five hours per week traveling to and from work. A further 34% indicated that they spend more than five hours a week.

The majority of those who responded to our survey nationally spend between 11 and 30 hours a week on these tasks. Cabinet Ministers and MLAs with additional responsibilities, such as Speaker or Opposition Leader, spend more time. Add to that travel time to and from work, a significant amount if you are not representing a district near Charlottetown, and you have a full-time work week (see insert at right).

That, however, is just the work connected to their legislative duties. MLAs have another aspect of their jobs that is at least as time consuming, and, our research suggests, even more so for PEI MLAs - constituency work.

Constituency Work

Our research indicates that PEI MLAs spend more time on constituency duties than elected representatives in other provinces and territories, including meeting with or corresponding with individual constituents, attending private functions (such as funerals and birthday parties), and helping constituents to access employment.

A third (33.4%) of PEI respondents say they spend more than 11 hours a week meeting or communicating with individual constituents, compared to 8.4% of respondents from other

Until now the general public view politicians a little different not much is going to change. It's that whole paradigm shift that if you elect them, do you elect them to do policy, program and services or to meet constituent needs? That's what most people seem to think they are electing you for. Basically the way it is right now is that people want you do the constituency work. - Opposition member

provinces or territories. The highest percentage of PEI respondents (41.7%) said they spend six to ten hours a week on constituency correspondence, compared to the highest percentage of MLAs from other jurisdictions (54.2%) who said they spend one to five hours a week. Four times as many Island respondents (33.3%) as respondents from outside PEI (8.3%) say they spend at least six hours a week helping

PEI MLAs spend more time than MLAs in other provinces and territories on constituency duties, including meeting with or corresponding with individual constituents, attending private functions (such as funerals and birthday parties), and helping constituents to access employment.

One member said she was busy during tax season. She did her constituents' tax returns -- stacks of them. I could blow my work-life balance out of the water, too, if I wanted to take on tasks like that.
- focus group member

constituents to find work. A full third of PEI respondents say they spend at least six hours a week attending private events within the constituency, compared to 16.7% of MLAs from outside PEI.

Women and men seem to divide their time in their constituencies differently, with women spending more time meeting and corresponding with individual constituents and men spending more time attending private functions. Women are more than twice as likely to spend at least 11 hours a week on constituency

I remember one MLA telling me that he had a call from this woman because there was a cat on her roof - he had to go with a ladder and get the cat down. - former Cabinet Minister

Women and men spend their constituency time differently, with women spending more time meeting and corresponding with individual constituents and men spending more time attending private functions.

correspondence than men and 53% of women indicated that they spend at least six hours a week meeting or communicating with individual constituents, compared to 25.1% of male respondents.

Men, however, appear to spend more time than women attending private functions in their constituencies. While the majority of all respondents (78.8%) spend less than five hours a week at this activity, 31.3% of men indicate that they spend at least six hours a week, compared to 11.8% of women.

It's ingrained into politics – if you start saying no to too many things, you'll have a political problem.
- former Cabinet Minister

Not surprisingly, backbenchers indicate spending more time doing constituency work than Cabinet Ministers. 52% of backbenchers spend more than six hours a week meeting and communicating with constituents, compared to 16.7% of those with additional responsibilities and no Cabinet Ministers. 80% of Cabinet Ministers and 83.3% of those with additional responsibilities spend between one and five hours a week meeting with individual constituents. Cabinet members, however, spend just as much time, or more, finding work for constituents, and attending private events in their districts.

Home Management and Family Care Giving

It seems as though many of society's divisions of labour based on gender hold true even when you are an MLA. Results of the research show that just as women in the whole of society spend more time on home management and family care giving than men, women respondents to our survey spend more time on these tasks, too.

Women MLAs spend more time on home management and family care giving than men.

I observed that it was much more difficult for women, especially if they had children. Women tended to enter politics, a lot of them later or not at all, because they waited until their children were older. - former Cabinet Minister

While all female respondents said they spend at least some time managing their homes, a full 25% of male respondents said that this category was not applicable. The largest percentage of both men (50%) and women (47.1%) said they spend one to five hours a week on home management; however the next largest percentage of men (25%) said that this category was not applicable and the next largest percentage of women (41.2%) said they spend six to ten hours a week.

A full 40% of respondents indicated that family care giving is not an activity that is applicable to them, highlighting that politics more likely attracts those who do not have care giving responsibilities, who have someone else to take on their family care giving, or whose major care giving responsibilities are completed. What is interesting from the gender breakdown is that 47.1% of female respondents indicated that caring for family members is not an applicable category, compared to 25% of men. This may suggest that it is more important to women to have no care giving responsibilities before they say yes to running for office, than it is for men.

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Of those that do spend time caring for family, those that say they spend the most time are women, and

PEI MLAs. The women who report spending time taking care of family are more likely than men to spend more time doing it per week. Of women, 29.4% indicated that they spend at least six hours a week caring for family, compared to 18.9% of male respondents. Of PEI MLAs surveyed, 41.6% say they spend more than six hours a week caring for family, compared to only 12.5% of other respondents.

Personal Time

I've got good intentions - I've tried to book out time to actually walk at lunchtime or through the day and there are a couple of days where I actually got to do that. There always seems to be something that comes up...and if the public has something come up, those people can't help that happening and they need some help and support to resolve the situation. - Opposition Member

There is little time for taking care of self, engaging in activities such as exercise, and participating in favourite hobbies, when you are an elected MLA. Almost half of respondents (44.4%) say they do less than one hour a week of physical activity.

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Those who are likely to spend more time on physical activity are MLAs representing districts larger than 10,000 constituents, backbenchers, and those in office more than five years. Almost half (47.1%),] of respondents with more than five years in office say they spend more than six hours a week doing physical activity, compared to 5.6% of those with less than five years. Given that 10 out of 12 PEI respondents have been in office less than five years, PEI MLAs fare very well in making time to exercise. Although the highest percentage of those with less than five years (44.4%) indicated they spend less than one hour a week doing physical activities, PEI respondents fared better, with the highest percentage (41.7%) indicating they spend one to five hours a week. The highest percentage of those representing other jurisdictions say they spend less than one hour a week doing physical activities.

While the majority of respondents spend less than five hours a week on non-exercise hobbies, those spending the most time are women and those in office more than five years. The largest percentage of women say that they spend between one and five hours a week on personal hobbies, compared to the largest percentage of men indicating they spend less than one hour a

week. The highest percentage of those with less than five years in office spend less than one hour a week on personal hobbies, while the highest percentage of those with more than five years in office spend six to ten hours a week. Because more respondents from PEI fell into the category of less than five years in office, this could explain why PEI respondents also indicate they spend less time on personal hobbies than respondents from other jurisdictions. Two thirds (66.6%) of PEI respondents indicate they spend less than one hour a week on personal hobbies, or that it is not applicable, compared to 37.5% of respondents from other jurisdictions.

PEI MLAs spend less time on personal hobbies than those from other jurisdictions. Two thirds (66.6%) of PEI respondents say they spend less than one hour a week on personal hobbies.

I felt like I wasn't doing justice to either (work or family) – you could go every night and every weekend if you wanted to. - former Cabinet Minister

Those who spend the most time with family and friends are women, MLAs with less than five years in office, and MLAs outside of PEI. More than a third (37.6%) of male respondents said that they spend less than one hour a week with family or that spending time with family and friends is not applicable to them. All female respondents indicated that they spend at least one hour a week with family, with the majority (53%) spending more than six hours a week with family. The majority of men (56.4%) spend less than five hours a week.

Every Friday, my assistant creates a schedule for the week that gets posted on the fridge at home, and family stuff gets put in as well, so that they can see where they fit in and we can make plans. I put time out for myself on the schedule - 3 mornings a week I try to get in early and go for 5k walk with a friend. - Cabinet Minister

PEI MLAs spend less time with family and friends than other MLAs. Half of respondents from other jurisdictions say they spend at least six hours a week with family and friends, compared to only one third of PEI MLAs.

Responses indicate that MLAs with less than five years in office spend more time with family and friends than those with more time in office. The highest percentage of respondents with less than five years indicated they spend more than six hours a week with family. The highest percentage of those with more than five years in office spend one to five hours a week.

One theory to explain this is that MLAs new to the job require some time to realize that something has to give and try to continue to have the same routines as before being elected. This could also be explained by the notion that the longer a person is in office the less likely it is that they have a

young family, and as children grow, family time decreases. Despite those with less than five years frequently saying they spend more time with family and friends, PEI MLAs indicate they spend less time with family and friends than other respondents. Half of respondents from other jurisdictions say they spend at least six hours a week with family and friends, compared to only one third of PEI MLAs.

I was at the airport waiting to fly home and the Minister from Quebec was there and he asked what I was doing for the weekend. I told him that I was going to this and that event, going to some anniversaries and other events, and he just looked at me. I asked him what he was doing and he told me that he spends every weekend with his family. - former Cabinet Minister

How Do the Respondents Rate Their Balance?

We asked MLAs to rate the level of balance they have between work and personal time, as well as to indicate how much control they have over their schedules.

There is a fairly even split between those who indicate they are somewhat balanced or very well balanced between work and personal life, and those who said they are somewhat or very unbalanced. The factors of gender, time in office, size of district, role, and province or territory made little difference. Men were marginally more likely to indicate balance than women, with 56.3% of male respondents saying they felt they had some balance, compared to 47.1% of women who said they had some balance.

Despite having indicated less time for family and self, MLAs representing smaller districts are more likely to say they have some work life balance.

Men were marginally more likely to indicate balance than women, with 56.3% of male respondents saying they felt they had some balance, compared to 47.1% of women.

Despite having indicated less time for family and self, MLAs representing districts of less than 10,000 are more likely (60%) to indicate that they rate their work life balance either somewhat balanced or very well balanced than MLAs in districts over 10,000 (47.6%).

You can block some [time] out and say, 'don't make any plans for me next Monday', and then the phone rings on Sunday and there's part of your Monday gone. I found it very difficult to find that balance - I really don't think I ever found it. - former Cabinet Minister

While the majority of respondents indicated that they have only some control over their schedules, men were almost twice as likely as women to indicate that they have full control.

Others most likely to indicate full control over their schedules were MLAs representing larger districts of more than 10,000 constituents, MLAs in office more than five years, and backbenchers. Some research participants indicated that the culture of politics on Prince Edward is such that having balance is difficult. A former Cabinet Minister said, *“It’s especially difficult in government to talk about any sign of perceived weakness. Everybody’s got to be strong and happy and everything’s just rosy.”* An MLA indicated that until the expectations change, there is little that can be done about what the job entails: *“Boundaries for politicians don’t exist - that’s just reality. And when you are a Minister you can multiply that by 10. People just assume you’re always on.”*

There are those, however, who realistically point out that the job of MLA is not the only job that can bring about imbalance. A current Cabinet Minister points out that, *“In some situations its not a choice. If I were a single mom pouring coffee at Tim’s and needed to make more money to pay for bills, but wanting to spend time with my children, I may not have a choice. When you choose to be a politician, you hopefully go into it with your eyes wide open. [And then,] you need to make sure that you find that time for you. The fact that I’m a female in a political role is no different than being a female in any other role.”*

Some Research Participants would improve work-life balance of MLAs by:

- ✓ funding **constituency offices**, with executive assistant/office manager shared between neighbouring MLAs
- ✓ offering **strategy sessions** on managing work life balance for MLAs and their families
- ✓ holding Committee meetings across the Island to **spread out the driving**
- ✓ providing **skills building** for those chairing meetings to improve efficiency
- ✓ providing MLAs with **time management software**, to analyse time spent on various activities and better set priorities
- ✓ **including an MLA’s family** in most political party events
- ✓ adopting a **Legislative Calendar** including days upon which the House or Committees *may* meet, and days upon which they may *not* meet
- ✓ eliminating scheduling of Committee meetings or House sessions during **March Break**
- ✓ having **childcare** on premises for employees and MLAs

Interviews and Focus Groups

In addition to gathering information through the National survey, the Coalition conducted interviews and focus groups with 12 current and former PEI MLAs and staff that work with them. Participants were asked to comment on work life balance for themselves or their observations of MLAs they work or worked with.

All of the current and former MLAs interviewed indicated that finding a balance between work as a politician and personal life is very challenging. Some indicated that they believe the challenge to be greater for PEI MLAs because of the expectations placed on Island MLAs.

Some past MLAs interviewed indicated that they don't believe they had work life balance. A former Cabinet Minister said, "I felt like I wasn't doing justice to either [family or work]. You could go every night and every weekend if you wanted to."

I did what most women do, I overextended myself, I just tried to make time for literally everything - stayed involved in organizations in the church and other volunteer positions, because I kind of felt obligated to do that. But I think I did try to balance it - I didn't miss a lot of crucial family gatherings but I was only half there. - former Cabinet Minister

Some of the current MLAs interviewed felt that their past work helped to prepare them for the hard work required to find a balance. One MLA said, "People just assume you're always on. I don't battle with that a whole lot maybe because I had a little bit of a public persona before this job. I was used to it to some extent, but not like it is now." A current Cabinet Minister indicated, "It's learning how to be very flexible and I think it depends on what your career has been. The demands on my past work were such that you had to be very flexible - you learn how to go with the flow."

A former Premier indicated that although work before public life was demanding, it does not always serve to prepare an MLA, as the demands are paired with the sometimes unrealistic expectations of constituents: "I had been extremely busy in business but its different in politics because the phone never stops ringing and everybody that calls has a problem that they want looked after right away. In business you could prioritize your functions better."

The expectations placed on PEI MLAs is the most cited reason for the challenge of a work life balance. However, a focus group member commented that the constituents are not the only ones to blame for a lack of work life balance for PEI's MLAs - the MLAs themselves have to take some responsibility: "The members have fed Islanders' pathology and expectations about what they "should" be doing. Why respond to that? Is that really your role to chase that cow out of the neighbours' garden? Is that your role as an elected legislator on Prince Edward Island?"

Some MLAs agreed that they have a role to play in deciding what their job is and isn't. Said one current MLA, "I have a personal philosophy. I do not go to the wake of a person I don't know. I offer my condolences in different ways, like sending a card. But I realize its different in rural

constituencies.” Others stressed having to learn to say no and make yourself a priority: “ I’ve had to make a conscious effort to make time for myself, because I enjoy sport and I like to be fit and healthy. But there are days when there really isn’t a choice and I have to attend to the things that need attending and do my job. The balance is something that I need to create. It’s not the kind of job that you necessarily leave when you leave the office.”

Some of the ways that those interviewed attempt balance is to make time to exercise, schedule time with family and friends and block out time in “off hours”, such as early morning and late evening, for reading or walking. Several interviewees indicated that they sometimes have to leave the province to find time to relax. One MLAs said, “Going [out of Province] to visit my parents is real life. They keep you honest - they don’t give a crap that you’re a politician - being around people that remind you of who you are can separate you from your work.”

You have to just make a real effort to do things that you like to do for yourself. Not for your spouse, not for your kids, although that’s important. You have to take care of yourself. In this business, you can get fat real quick, you can get depressed and angry real quick. It’s a very volatile business. I’ve seen it happen. - MLA

Immediate Recommendations for Government

To achieve the goal of a Prince Edward Island Legislature which is representative of our Island’s diversity, the PEI Coalition for Women in Government recommends the following steps be taken by Government.

Defining the Role of an MLA

In the April 4, 2008 Speech From the Throne, Government laid out plans for work on the role of the MLA:

“It also is my Government’s view that the role of the MLA is changing. My Government will propose that a Special Committee be established to study and review the role and responsibilities of members.”

Recommendation #1

We recommend that Government constitute the Special Committee on the role and responsibilities of the MLA, as proposed in the Speech From the Throne, invite and appoint participation from all four political parties in PEI, and task that Special Committee with the following;

- explore ways to restore public trust and respect to the office of MLA;
- explore ways to create reasonable public expectations regarding the role of the MLA;
- explore ways to ensure that MLAs are fully removed from the business of finding jobs for individual Islanders;
- develop a clearly defined MLA job description for modern times; and
- explore ways to eliminate identified barriers connected to the role, work and expectations of PEI MLAs, to women entering Provincial politics.

Constituency Support

Our research indicates that constituency work is the main culprit in creating an imbalance between work and personal life for PEI MLAs. Islanders appear to have extremely high expectations of their elected representatives and anticipate very hands-on assistance in problem solving. Research participants have imparted stories of constituents who feel entitled to demand immediate and complete focus on their agendas simply because they voted for the MLA and feel as though they are ‘owed’.

MLAs do not currently receive financial support for their constituency expenses and must pay for these out of pocket, with their homes often becoming their constituency offices and their spouses and family members becoming unpaid staff people answering phones, listening to complaints and attending functions. Finding ways to support MLAs to assist their constituents with problem solving could have the impact of bringing more balance to the work, and, in turn, attracting a more diverse candidate.

Recommendation #2

We recommend that Government create an Ombudsperson Office to provide information as well as direct assistance to Islanders in navigating government and community options for problem solving. We recommend that the Ombudsperson perform a role separate from the role of an MLA or government, at times advocating on behalf of a citizen. We recommend that this office be accessible beyond regular government hours.

Recommendation #3

We recommend that Government provide support and funding for five staffed constituency offices, with one in each of Southern Kings, Eastern Kings, West Prince, East Prince and rural Queens, to be shared by MLAs and where they may conduct constituency communications, hold office hours, and receive constituency problem-solving support from trained staff.

Performance of Legislative Duties

While our research indicates that PEI MLAs spend about the same amount of time on legislative duties as MLAs in other jurisdictions, research participants highlighted the added component of travel for those MLAs representing and residing in districts outside Charlottetown as an element which can add a significant amount of time to an MLA’s work week. Participants in the research indicated that the uncertainty of legislative timelines contributed to difficulty in planning for good balance. They shared ideas for streamlining of legislative tasks which could assist in bringing about a greater degree of balance between work and personal life, not only for MLAs but for the staff which supports them.

Recommendation #4

In order to support current and future MLAs traveling from outside Charlottetown, and those with young families, we recommend that Government eliminate the evening hours of the Legislature.

Recommendation #5

We recommend that Government create a Legislative and Standing Committee Calendar which designates, in addition to the start date, dates when the House *may* sit and when it *may not* sit, when Committees *may* meet and when they *may not*, and designated or agreed upon family or personal days such as March Break or holiday breaks.

Recommendation #6

To reduce travel time for MLAs representing rural ridings, we recommend that more Standing Committee Meetings be planned outside Charlottetown.

Recommendation #7

We recommend that Government provide regularly accessible training for MLAs in chairing and facilitating meetings and time management.

Health and Well Being

Our research highlighted that some MLAs perpetuate the imbalance between their work and personal life by acquiescing to unrealistic demands of constituents or by taking care of the needs of others and ignoring their own needs for health and well being. In recognition of the fact that PEI MLAs currently work long hours and have many demands and pressures on them that most people do not face, and that changes to the political culture, including expectations of constituents, political parties and MLAs themselves, will take time, it is helpful to think about how MLAs can be better supported to meet the demands of work and personal responsibilities in the current climate.

Recommendation #8

We recommend that Government provide a caregiver benefit to MLAs with child or elder caregiving responsibilities.

Recommendation #9

We recommend that an Orientation for new MLAs, and ongoing and regularly accessible training for MLAs, include;

- information about the Employee Assistance Program and other counseling and support available to MLAs; and
- discussion and support regarding time management, including balancing work and personal time.

Recommendation #10

We recommend that, during times when the House is in session and food is provided, healthy choices are available to MLAs and staff.

Immediate Recommendations for Political Parties

To achieve the goal of a Prince Edward Island Legislature which is representative of our Island's diversity, the PEI Coalition for Women in Government recommends the following steps be taken by Political Parties.

Supporting Elected Members

As noted above, MLAs do not currently receive financial support for their constituency expenses and must pay for these out of pocket, with their homes often becoming their constituency offices and their spouses and family members becoming unpaid receptionists. While our research showed that PEI MLAs do not spend exorbitant amounts of time attending party functions, there are party expectations on them to appear at events, either in their own districts or across the province. The constituency duties performed by an MLA can often be non-partisan, however, we note that our culture of party politics in PEI contributes to the amount of constituency work expected of MLAs and that political parties have a role to play in supporting their elected members to meet expectations placed upon them by their party and their party's supporters.

Recommendation #11

We recommend that political parties support their elected members to conduct constituency and party business by providing funding for a separate phone line in their homes.

Recommendation #12

We recommend that political parties plan party events to include families of MLAs when possible and appropriate.

Supporting and Attracting More Diverse Candidates

We know from our current and past research that the job and work of an MLA in PEI is such that certain of our population is deterred from taking on the role. Women, in particular, who hold only 26% of the seats, are not well represented in our Legislature. Implementing measures to support balance for diverse candidates, including women, before, during and after election campaigns could have an impact on the demographics of the eventual Legislature.

Recommendation #13

We recommend that political parties recruit more women to play active roles in the grassroots of the party organization and set specific goals for recruitment.

Recommendation #14

We recommend that political parties commit to working towards a goal of nominating a minimum of 9 women in the 2011 Provincial election.

Recommendation #15

We recommend that political parties support candidates during campaigns by;

- providing child/elder care;
- providing a clothing allowance; and
- providing training on what to expect regarding work as an MLA, time management and balancing work and personal life, along with other pertinent information connected to campaigning.

Defining the Role of an MLA

The participation and support of political parties in redefining the role of the MLA is crucial if we hope to make any real change.

Recommendation #16

We recommend that political parties support and encourage elected members and party organizers to participate in non-partisan, multi-partisan, and other collaborative work on public policy and the function of government and the role of the MLA. In particular, we recommend that political parties collaborate in their participation in a Special Committee on the role and responsibilities of the MLA, as proposed in the Speech From the Throne.

Working Towards Long-Term Change of PEI's Political System

A lot of tradition and history underpin the expectations that citizens and parties place on MLAs. We have found that many of these traditions privilege men and historical male roles at the expense of women and historical women's roles, especially their role as caregivers. Our first-past-the-post electoral system additionally disadvantages small parties, which often in the past have offered more women candidates.

Our other recommendations address incremental change, but it remains clear that the whole system requires a major overhaul to ensure a truly representative democracy, in which elected representatives reflect the diversity of the population.

When we look at democracies around the world, we find that the more women there are in government, the more likely a jurisdiction appears to enact policy which supports women's everyday lives and reflects their life experiences. When we look at the democracies with the most balanced proportion of women, we find that most of these have some form of proportional representation.

Additionally, the form of proportional representation most frequently recommended for Prince Edward Island and Canada, the Mixed Member Proportional system, and other similar models,

have different kinds of MLAs, elected in different ways, representing geography-based constituencies and interest- or issues-based constituencies. Such a system would offer MLAs more diversity in the way they build relationships with constituents and constituencies, leading to new ways to create work life balance.

Recommendation #17

We recommend that Government work together with all political parties and the electorate to explore and implement Proportional Representation for Prince Edward Island.

Appendix A: Job Description of a PEI MLA

(#24 -7) MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FULL-TIME TEMPORARY POSITIONS

LOCATION: Various Locations, Prince Edward Island

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Reporting to the constituents in your local district, the people of PEI in general, MLAs representing other parties, the Leader of your party, your local party executive, your provincial party executive, other party members, and the media, you will assume overall responsibility for providing hands-on support to the people of your district, as well as shared responsibility for maintaining and developing policy and programs for the betterment of the lives of the people of Prince Edward Island.

The successful candidate will be an accessible and confident self-starter, who is well established in the community with a network of contacts. Operationally, you have well-honed skills in time management and interpersonal relations. The successful candidate is extremely patient and will work well in a team atmosphere, offering creativity, enthusiasm and inexhaustible energy to their work.

As the ideal candidate, you have little or no care giving responsibilities, little interest in personal hobbies and require little or no appreciation for your time or work. You are known for your ability to be friendly and accommodating in the face of rudeness as well as your desire to assist constituents and your party to achieve their strategic goals.

Duties may include, and are not limited to:

- ▶ meeting and communicating with constituents wherever they may deem appropriate, including, but not limited to, your office, your home, Winners and the rink;
- ▶ assisting constituents to access programs available through the Province;
- ▶ spending one to ten hours per week assisting constituents to access employment;
- ▶ attending at sessions of the Legislature and at Standing Committee meetings as required;
- ▶ attending at community and Provincial events as required;
- ▶ completing constituent tax returns as required;
- ▶ attending at least one stranger's birthday party, wake, funeral, retirement party or other private event each week; and
- ▶ all other duties as required.

Qualifications: No education is required, however, a Degree in Social Work or Communications is considered an asset. The knowledge and use of technology such as email, cellular phone and hand-held personal devices will be considered an asset by those who wish to contact you at any given time.

This is a full-time temporary position, requiring 50-80 hours of work per week. A lot of travel in the region, and to Charlottetown, as well as weekend and evening work is required.

The Province of Prince Edward Island offers a benefit package as well as the lowest salary in the country, at \$63,750, a full 72.4% of the national average, not at all commensurate with candidate qualifications. If you are interested in becoming a part of the PEI Legislative Team, please forward your resume. THIS COMPETITION IS OPEN TO MALE & FEMALE APPLICANTS.

We thank all applicants for their interest, but only those candidates being considered will be contacted