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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to meeting number 111 of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Just to begin, we had a bit of a membership change during the summer. I would like to welcome our three new committee members. Thank you very much to Sonia Sidhu, and Bob Bratina, as well as the honourable Kellie Leitch.

Today we also have with us Sheri Benson, who is going to be filling in, along with Bryan May, and Ruby Sahota.

Today we're continuing with our study on barriers facing women in politics. I am pleased to welcome, as an individual, William McBeath. We also have Brenda O'Neill, associate professor, department of political science, University of Calgary.

William, we'll begin with you. You have seven minutes.

Mr. William McBeath (As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon, members of the committee.

I'd like to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to be present today and to speak on the issue of the barriers facing women in politics.

My name is William McBeath, and I have had the privilege of working for a number of outstanding women politicians during my time in politics, including the honourable Diane Finley, member of Parliament for Haldimand—Norfolk, and the former Minister for Human Resources and Skills Development; former member of Parliament for Calgary Centre, Joan Crockatt; and the former leader of Alberta's official opposition, and Wildrose Party leader, Danielle Smith.

I'd like to begin by noting that my comments are, of course, second-hand observations. While I may have had the opportunity to work for and with many women candidates and elected officials, I cannot offer a first-hand perspective given that I am not a woman. Given this, I have decided to focus my comments today on something about which I have gained a substantial amount of experience, and something I believe we need to improve if we are to elect more women candidates at all levels of government, namely, the candidate recruitment and candidate nomination processes.

At the provincial and federal levels, I've overseen candidate recruitment and nomination processes for literally hundreds of candidates. In the 2006 and 2008 federal elections, I was directly involved in the recruitment and nomination process for federal Conservative candidates in Alberta and the three northern territories, and I also oversaw candidate recruitment and nominations in the lead-up to the 2012 and 2015 provincial elections for Alberta's Wildrose Party.

In each of those scenarios, one of our goals was to identify, recruit and nominate a slate of outstanding, talented and experienced women candidates who could take on senior roles in future governments. I'm sorry to say that in each of those cycles, I believe, we fell short of that goal despite nominating and electing some incredible women to public office.

I believe that in order to meet the goal of nominating and electing more capable women, we need to reverse course on what has been a trend of late about the provincial and federal levels; namely, the reduction or outright elimination of third party involvement in political party nominations.

Modern-day politics is, as we know, fiercely competitive, and political parties wage aggressive and targeted campaigns in their bids to win seats. The team-based nature of politics means that multipartisan efforts, such as those by Equal Voice—which is an outstanding organization that I've done volunteer work with—will never have the same impact or effectiveness as will groups that are aligned with one single party or section of the political spectrum.

The work of winning a nomination can really be broken down into four areas: recruitment, training, fundraising and networking. It involves identifying, and occasionally persuading, a candidate to seek office; mentoring them when they encounter challenges; building a team of volunteers and professionals to support the nomination campaign; raising money to pay for nomination campaign activities; and connecting the candidate and her team with key stakeholders, influencers and voters in the constituency to build a winning coalition of members or supporters.

The creation of these groups would require changing election legislation, which limits or precludes third party involvement in registered nomination contests. I think political parties also have to review their current nomination processes to allow for the involvement of third party groups with a mandate to help those political parties nominate slates of candidates who reflect the full measure of Canada's diversity.

That brings me to the other solution that has generally been advanced to address the lack of equality when it comes to nominating and electing women candidates, and that would be quotas.

In my opinion, the quota approach is the wrong way to address the problem of recruiting more women candidates, for several reasons. The biggest one is that, I believe, it causes more harm than good to the goal of electing women to public office in the long term.

First, quotas are arbitrary. They are a metric established, and once that quota target has been reached, it sends the message that no more work needs to be done—we have our quota list, and the issue has been managed. Oftentimes, in order to meet the quota, political parties will nominate candidates in ridings in which they are unlikely—or even highly unlikely—to be successful. If they're not going to win in a general election, then this does nothing to further the cause of electing more women candidates to public office.

● (1535)

Second, candidates elected under a quota system frequently face the often unfair perception that their ability to fulfill the role of being an elected official is secondary to their gender. It leads some to call into question the merit of their candidacy and their ability to perform the job.

Third, it creates conflict between the quota and non-quota groups. Canada's diversity includes gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, profession, education, and a whole host of other things. To set one apart through a quota is to set one against the rest, and in doing so foster resentment and discord when the goal should be promoting full diversity, equality and participation for every group.

Ultimately I believe that having third parties aligned with political parties or a section of the political spectrum who are committed to the cause of nominating and electing more women to public office is a significantly better approach than political parties adopting quotas for women candidates in their candidate slates.

Again, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to present before you today, and I very much look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Brenda O'Neill, you have seven minutes.

Professor Brenda O'Neill (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary, As an Individual): Thank you.

First, I have a word of thanks.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting me to speak today in my capacity as an academic conducting research on the subject of women in politics.

For many years, I've been encouraged by the fact that this committee has been studying this very important issue in Canadian politics.

[*English*]

My comments today are going to reflect my own research, which is on public opinion and women in politics. It's going to reflect my research on the question of women's political under-representation in Canada and my reading of the research of others. It's a question that political scientists have been studying for decades. We have a good understanding of what the key barriers are. What we need is for a government with a sufficiently strong commitment to women's equality to be willing to take action on the issue.

I believe that the best and most effective strategy for addressing women's political under-representation is to legislate some type of quota or target that requires parties to increase the number of women they put forward as candidates in elections. This would result in both direct and indirect effects, but the quota doesn't need to be a punitive one. Indeed, I would argue that it should be in some form of financial incentive. It doesn't need to be framed as one to increase the number of women in politics. Instead, it could be framed as one that's putting a ceiling on men's overrepresentation. Voluntary quotas, unlike legislative ones, are unlikely to have any impact since the parties that are likely to adopt them are normally already committed to gender equality.

Political parties play a key role in determining women's access to political office. They're primary gatekeepers, and their willingness to see gender equality as a priority is central to ensuring that women can overcome these barriers.

It's not a new idea. Twenty-seven years ago, Dr. Lisa Young, writing as part of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, noted that political parties, as the primary agents of recruitment and as the gatekeepers of the political process, would have to change their recruitment and nomination practices if there was to be substantial change in the number of women in the House of Commons. This point was reinforced by Dr. Bill Cross whom you heard from earlier this summer. Twenty-seven years later, we have not seen any concrete action on this issue.

When parties commit to gender equality, the results can be impressive. As an example, during the 2015 provincial election, 53% of the Alberta NDP candidates were women. From this, 45% of its caucus was made up of women, and Rachel Notley was then able to appoint a parity cabinet, one of only a handful we've seen in Canada to this point. This occurred in Alberta, which I think many would notice is the most conservative province in the country.

It can be done where the will exists, but the reality is that it's easiest to do when the party isn't expected to take office. Increased competition often pushes women out. We need to move gender parity in all parties across the ideological spectrum and at all levels of competition to ensure that women of all stripes are represented without having to wait for unexpected wins by parties committed to gender parity. The results under these conditions are too often short-lived.

Legislated quotas are key to moving forward because misplaced beliefs about the impact of quotas serve to perpetuate men's political overrepresentation.

One of these myths is that quotas limit the degree to which merit is a factor in the selection of candidates. Research makes clear that the exact opposite is the case. Quotas actually improve the quality of candidates who get elected. This happens because parties appear to be more careful of the skills they would like to see in their political nominees, rather than relying on short-hand mechanisms for selection such as gender and occupation, which tend to exclude women, and because quotas promote more active searches for individuals who possess these skills. The positions currently filled by less competent men in the absence of quotas tend to be replaced by more competent women and men. Merit is given greater, not less, attention under a quota system.

Quotas are also key because of the belief that women's access to political office is constantly improving and will naturally reach parity. That's quite simply wrong. The pipeline argument that women's level of political representation will come to mirror men's, as their education and common occupational makeup do as well, is just not supported by the evidence. Women's political representation has improved in many arenas over time, but in others it has stagnated or regressed. It's not simply a question of being patient. We continue to see gender gaps and income or occupational segregation that mean women do not have access to the same networks as men. This means they are often overlooked when it comes to political office. Who runs often depends on who is asked to run.

Even if we decide to be patient, however, the expected date for reaching gender parity in the House of Commons is long into the future. If we apply the same rate of improvement in women's representation over the past 20 years to future years, we would need to wait until 2075 to reach gender parity. That's not in my lifetime and it's certainly not in my daughter's lifetime.

● (1540)

We need bold action because stereotypes continue to hold that women are less well suited to the rough-and-tumble world of politics. This perception is reinforced by media portrayals of women politicians, as the work by Professor Linda Trimble at the University of Alberta shows. My research on women party leaders with Professor David Stewart shows that women are far more likely to be chosen to lead parties when the party is less electorally competitive. Men are more likely to be seen to possess the qualities required of leaders, such as assertiveness, confidence and self-promotion. Women are less likely to be seen to possess these, and even when they are seen to possess them, they are often penalized for not acting in ways that align with gender stereotypes—"Women should be more communal than agentic."

These stereotypes are a barrier to women's access to political office. They're also difficult to directly and quickly eliminate. The adoption of quotas to improve their representation would do just this, though indirectly. Seeing more women in office acting as strong leaders would serve to dispel the stereotype that women are more suited to supportive roles than to leadership roles and are therefore unsuited to politics. It would also reinforce the role model effect. More women in political office increases the likelihood that women will see politics as an option for them. I think it would also help women to overcome the problem of feeling that they're not competent enough to engage in politics.

I just have one small anecdote as I finish. Women tend to underplay their strengths. This is partly why we don't run. It's a demand-side problem. Just to give a sense of how this works, I have a Ph.D. in political science, and I study women in politics. When I first received the request to come and speak to you, my first response was, "What could I possibly have to say that would be of any importance to this committee?" It was the people around me who told me, "No, you have to participate."

I'll just leave you with that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thanks very much for your speech.

We're going to be starting off with our first round. I'll remind you that it is seven minutes.

Pam, you have the floor.

● (1545)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you to you both for being here. I appreciate your feedback.

I'm going to put this to both of you. Do you have any recommendations for what we as the federal government can do to include the participation of women in politics? Is there anything through the Elections Act? There are certain things that we control, and there are certain things that we don't. Is there anything that you can see legislatively or through the things that we regulate federally that we could do to improve the participation of women?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: Certainly the Elections Act and party financing would be ways in which you could implement a quota. That would be my recommendation.

Mr. William McBeath: We may not agree on the solution, but I will say that I also think we have to make some changes to the Elections Act. In this case, there has been a trend to really clamp down on third party involvement. I think some of that is certainly responsible, for example to prevent money coming in from outside of Canada. However, in the process to preclude third parties from having involvement, if you give a third party a mandate to seek to help elect more women, you're going to have to change the legislation governing political party nomination contests in order to be able to do that.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You've brought that up a few times. When you were talking about third party involvement, you mentioned Equal Voice.

Is this about any third parties that would be involved, or would there be requirements around them?

Mr. William McBeath: There are already rules that govern what a third party can and cannot do. Certainly, they are required to disclose, for example, how their money is spent and who donates their money. In the case of Equal Voice, because they're multi-partisan, I don't think they're going to have the same impact because the nature of politics is such that if you're in a room with people who are not part of your political ideology, you are not going to have the same kind of team-based approach as you would if you know that everybody in the room is a supporter.

For me, it's about saying to third party groups, “You have to form...”. I would say that every party has to form one for themselves, or have one to help progressive candidates and one to help conservative candidates, or whatever the framework is. That is how I'm envisioning it. You've seen a nascent example of that with the She Leads Foundation based out of Alberta, which Jason Kenney has started as leader of the United Conservative Party.

Ms. Pam Damoff: The other group in Alberta that's been trying to mobilize candidates is the Wilberforce Project, which is an anti-abortion group. Do you envision a group like that also being a third party group that could help candidates get elected?

Mr. William McBeath: My understanding is that groups like that already exist and are involving themselves. Again, I believe they are multipartisan. They're not specifically focused on any one group. They're focused on every elected official and every political party. For me, it's about getting over the idea that any form of characteristic can trump the competitive tribal basis of politics, and that's just not true. Whatever common cause groups may have amongst each other, because of the reality of politics, their political ideology trumps almost everything.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You mentioned when you came that you weren't sure what you could contribute because you're a man. You've contributed a lot, and I thank you for that.

I'd like to ask you specifically to expand on what role men and boys can play in encouraging more women to run for office.

Mr. William McBeath: It's a great question, and it has to be taken seriously by everybody, because ultimately, as the professor noted in her comments, there are an awful lot of elected officials who are men and who are involved in politics. If they're not participating in trying to make this situation better, then that's a huge problem.

When I was working for Wildrose, for example, we tried to strongly send the message that any personal characteristic should not be what determines whether or not you seek office. If you believe what we believe, we think you should run for us. It means going out and having meaningful conversations with hundreds of people and asking if they've ever thought of running for office, what they would think about that and if that's something they're interested in.

I would say, too, that we need to get over the mentality and try to really have a zero tolerance policy for when someone steps backwards on this issue. We need to be saying, no, it's not okay if you make an anti-woman joke at a political event, or no, it's not okay if we use language that can only be applied to women, like “shrill”, or “bossy”, or words that you only ever see applied by media, for example, in a female context.

To me, that's where men really have to step up more than they have.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Dr. O'Neill, we had StatsCan here, and they were telling us that women are more likely to vote in municipal and provincial elections. You would think voting would be an early indicator of whether or not they would run, although that's not always the case, and we don't have nearly enough women running at either of those levels. Why do you think you're seeing more participation for lower levels of government, rather than the federal government? Is there anything we can do to encourage more participation at all levels, not just at the federal level?

● (1550)

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: First, tackle the difference in the levels. Much of the research I've seen is basically saying that it's easier for women to stay close to home, and that's partly because they have responsibilities, and responsibilities that they can't rely on their partners to take care of to the same degree men can. There is this notion that they need to be home, if you will, or at least as close as possible to home. Travelling to Ottawa is quite a burden, depending on where you are in the country, and I think that's part of it.

There's also a belief that Ottawa is higher, harder and more important. Again, when we think of political ambition, we know that women tend to downplay their skills. Therefore, even if you have the notion that you might want to participate in politics and that you might want to run.... By the way, we're talking about 1% of women and 5% of men, so it's a very small, and yet large, number of individuals. If you have the sense that you may want to run, you're likely—and I have to admit I've done this—to say well if I'm going to do it, maybe I should do it at the civic level because that's a bit easier; it's not likely to be quite as difficult. You start low, in a way, and it's part of women's political ambition.

The second part of your question was about why they vote but do not run at the same levels. You heard from Melanee Thomas, my colleague at the University of Calgary. She's done a lot of work on the notion of stereotypes and so on, and her early work in her Ph.D. was on political interest and political engagement among women. Part of it is that voting is not as difficult a political act as running for office—those are two very different things. We tend to say it's all about political engagement, but they're not the same; they're very different.

The Chair: Excellent, thank you very much.

Now we're going to move on for the next seven minutes to Rachael Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Welcome to both of you and thank you for being here.

To you, William, my first question is this: You talked about third party organizations and the fact that we need to see more of them, and I just want to follow up on that a little. I'm hoping you can expand on that statement a bit and talk about why that is so important with regards to getting women in particular to the table.

Mr. William McBeath: In looking at third parties, it's quite common for anybody who has looked at American politics to see that third parties play a huge role in their elections. It hasn't been the case as much up here, although it is changing. Certainly the legislation that gets passed by governments at different levels influences whether or not you're going to have third parties becoming political and engaged.

If you look at my home province of Alberta, the moment that the New Democrat government made its first round of election law changes, PACs, political action committees, third parties, sprang up right across the province, from all sorts of different groups with all sorts of different causes.

The problem with political parties is they only focus on what's happening in about the next 15 minutes. I say that as someone who worked for a political party. Long-term planning is obviously extremely difficult. You have changes in leadership, changes from opposition to government and from government back to opposition and in the group of people you have running your political party.

Having a PAC, a permanent group, whose job it is, election after election, year after year, month after month, to go out, find, recruit, train, help and support women candidates means that we're going to smooth out and make it easier for women, rather than when political parties pay attention to nominations for the six or eight months that they pay attention to nominations.

You're going from having somebody focused on it briefly for a political party, versus a group that pays attention to it all the time.

Ms. Rachael Harder: With regard to the fact that they are focused on it for a long period of time, do you see that being advantageous to women in particular, where they'd be able to recruit, train and those sorts of things?

Help me understand why that would benefit women entering into the political field.

Mr. William McBeath: My experience is that it's never been difficult to find men to run for public office. That was never a problem that we had in politics.

I find that in recruiting women, generally they have a lot more questions about how it would work, what elected life is like. I think Professor O'Neill made some really good points about them potentially undervaluing their own worth. It was me saying, “We think you'd be a fantastic candidate and here's why”, and explaining it to them.

I think it requires a conversation. You have to have a meaningful one-on-one relationship with some people who are seeking office in order to convince them to put their names forward. To me, that's the value of a PAC. They aren't going to look at it for six or eight months every four years; they're going to do it full time.

Once it gets established, if I'm a woman who's interested in running for office, I know who I can get in touch with to get my questions answered, talk about building a team and figure out how I'm going to raise the money. There's a permanent group out there that is going to help me and work with me.

I think that would make a very tangible difference in electing more women to office.

● (1555)

Ms. Rachael Harder: William, one of the things you talked about is the importance of recruitment, training, fundraising and networking. I like the way that you framed that into those four things.

When it comes to recruitment, do you believe there are certain types of women who should not be running for political office, or do you think it's an opportunity that should be open to every woman?

Mr. William McBeath: Certainly when I talk to people who run, the only issue I ever say is to make sure that this is the job they actually want to have. There's nothing worse than winning and discovering that this wasn't what they imagined the job was going to be.

I think the important thing is to have that meaningful conversation up front, that this is going to be a very big change from what their life has been like. They're going to go campaigning and have people paying a lot of scrutiny towards them.

For me, there's absolutely no person I would say shouldn't run for office, unless they're not prepared for the journey ahead and the work that comes after winning an election.

By the way, I wouldn't say that's just for women candidates; that's about everybody who misunderstands what holding elected office is about.

Ms. Rachael Harder: That's a fair point. Thank you.

To further the conversation around recruitment, training, fundraising and networking, my colleague asked about the role of men and boys in that.

Can you further describe what that would look like? In order to be able to recruit women and bring them to the table, what would it look like to offer mentorship and champion these women?

I certainly know that I had some very instrumental people play that role in my life. They served my success very well, and I'm very thankful for them.

What would you describe that process looking like? Could you provide some very tangible steps that could be taken by both women and men in helping to recruit and train female candidates?

Mr. William McBeath: I think there are a couple of angles to this.

When I worked at a political party, one of the things was about making sure that we weren't doing things intentionally or unintentionally that sent the message that we were really only looking for male candidates.

I do remember one riding association president who had been telling women who were interested in running that they weren't really looking for a woman to run. I phoned him up and said, “You realize that we're led by Danielle Smith, right?” I said that it was a party that very much wanted to elect women candidates. He said that we had a woman leader, so we wouldn't want to overdo it, and I thought that step one might be that we probably needed a new riding president down there in that riding association.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. William McBeath: I would say that there are a lot of things that we can all do, but it's about being mindful and asking, “Is this sending a message?” Are you holding an event a place that women would want to go or is it in a place that has been traditionally a place where men meet? If they're walking into their first riding association, have we done the work of trying to elect a diverse group of people to that board of the riding association? Or is a woman going to walk in, see 30 men sitting around the table, and then say she's running for office? What kind of reception might that get?

Ultimately, it's about dispelling the idea that some personal characteristic defines whether or not you should run for a political party. I think there's that belief—certainly, I would say on half of the movement I represent, the Conservative side—that we're not looking for certain people. That's completely false. If you believe what we believe, if you're passionate about it, we want you to run for office. I think those are the messages that really have to be reinforced, not just by women but by everybody involved in the political process.

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now turning it over to Sheri Benson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Thank you to both of our witnesses today.

Professor O'Neill, you can see the uncomfortableness when we start to talk about quotas. People have a hard time discussing it and getting into it a little more, and I think we can all relate to what some of that uncomfortableness is. I did appreciate your flipping it and asking why we don't look at the ceiling on men's overrepresentation. I do think that helps us move a little off that, where we're feeling comfortable that it is focused on that.

Your comment was that if we don't do something drastic, it'll be a long time.... Maybe you can expand on that a little more. Why would it change by not.... We've heard around the table here that there is a critical mass that needs to be in a parliament or a legislative body for women to feel and see that as a place that is for them as well. I thought you might want to share a bit more around quotas and why they're important or could make a difference, sooner rather than later.

● (1600)

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: One of them is definitely that if you impose a quota, without question it sends an important message as to the importance of gender equity and makes it clear that the government is committed to this particular issue.

I would also say quotas don't have to last forever. They could be short-lived depending on how effective they become and how quickly they become effective.

I would get to another element of your question, which was why it has taken so long. I would argue one of the reasons why it has taken so long is that the responsibility for improving it has fallen on a very small number of parties that are committed to gender equity but at many levels of government tend not to be the strongest parties, and so tend not to get elected, and so that is one of the consequences of it.

I think it's also the case that we've relied for the most part on those individuals who have structural and situational barriers to their actually getting to the position of election. We're relying on women to do it as opposed to the demanders of nominees. We're relying on the supply, which is the women and the very ones who have those barriers in place. We're waiting for them to somehow magically come forward when we know it's not a level playing field for women and men in politics. This is the problem.

When you have riding presidents saying we have one woman who's the leader of the party and we don't really need any others, this isn't true. This is an issue, and I think adopting a quota, while it is strong and might be easier to implement than some other things like changing our electoral system, which we know is not going to happen—we've tried a number of times—could potentially have a great impact in sending that message, but also in helping all parties see that this is an important thing to be doing.

Although I respect your point, I don't think we should be foisting that responsibility on third parties. I think political parties have the responsibility to ensure women are elected, to ensure a good diversity of individuals are elected. I think it's parties that can, as we've seen in the past. When they desire it, they can get it done, so I think it's parties that should have this responsibility. But, again, I don't think it needs to be punitive. I think it can be a financial incentive that's put in place to help parties.

I know Sarah Childs and Rosie Campbell gave you the example in the U.K., and I think that's an important one to look to. It does have some possibilities here, but it has to be a Canadian quota, something that works here. We don't have to call it a quota. The Abella report called it employment equity, didn't want to call it affirmative action. So give it a different name, but make it clear that it's a priority.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Professor O'Neill, my next question is to ask you to offer your comments about where we might put the quota. In the system of trying to get women into politics, where is the biggest lever, and where is the place people might feel most comfortable including a quota? I know there are all different kinds of systems around where quotas fit in and where they are placed within the system. I know this committee has talked about looking at the nomination and the candidate, so you're getting away from “you win because you're a woman” kind of thing. I would be interested.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: If we looked at gender equity in nominations, say, my worry would be that you might get women put onto the slate without really any recognition. I think where it needs to be is in the number of candidates who are actually put forward and running in the election. Because it's a kind of winner-take-all system, it seems to me that's where that really needs to be in place in order for it to have some kind of impact, and a real impact.

The real impact here is not just having women run, because we know there are sacrificial lambs already. The real impact is getting women to win. I think that's really where you need to see it, because what you want to see is diversity in the House of Commons, not necessarily diversity in the nomination slate. That would be my argument.

● (1605)

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to move over to Bob Bratina, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks for being here.

I ran in four elections and won them all. In three of them my wife, a retired school teacher, was the campaign organizer. Most of my political success came as a result of the hard work of retired school teachers.

After the first term in municipal office as a councillor, I didn't like it. It was an old boys' club, it was not pleasant and I begged my wife to run for my position. She absolutely refused. It's interesting to me because I've asked her and all of her close friends to run—mostly retired teachers, principals, and inner city teachers and principals who had difficult roles to play in the community and were all very successful. They had absolutely no interest in getting into politics.

I don't think it had anything to do with self-confidence or questioning if they really belong. They just didn't seem to want to. Have you noticed that among women you have spoken to in this regard?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: To me, that's a function of the lower level of political interest among women. We know there's a gap in political interest. Men tend to be more interested in politics than women are. If you're not even interested in politics, you're less likely to want to see yourself run.

I also know that Dr. Sylvia Bashevkin talked to you about the difficulties of running in politics as a woman just in terms of safety and security, particularly with the Internet. We know this is an issue at the moment. I think the degree to which you'd want to put yourself forward and risk having that be something that you need to address is an issue for a number of women.

But if we're talking about even in the past.... I talked about gender role stereotyping. Politics is still a man's world. It takes a particular type of woman, I think, to want to enter that world.

When you get a certain number of women around the table, I think it makes a difference. Once we get a certain number of women elected into the House of Commons, or at any level, I think the nature of politics will change. What will also change is the stereotyping of politics as a man's place. I think that will change, but I think it will only change once we have bold action where we get a significant number of women into politics. I think it will change when we have 60% of women sitting in the House of Commons.

Mr. Bob Bratina: How much of your observation would be based on the decorum the public sees in terms of the way politicians behave?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: There's no question that politicians are not the most respected of individuals at the moment. I don't think I'm telling you anything you don't know. I have great respect for politicians, but even in my own family, in my extended family, when we sit around and talk about politicians, that is not something we have....

Again, it's about why you want to enter that arena if you think these individuals are in it for themselves and don't work very hard—all the things that we know not to be true and yet people believe. The only way to change that stereotype is to think about it and to think about what we can do to help it be better in the future.

Mr. Bob Bratina: To both of you, do you feel the media has a role to play or is affecting the discussion at all?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: On a gender basis or just generally about politicians?

Mr. Bob Bratina: On this notion of women in politics.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: Absolutely. You just have to read the work of Dr. Linda Trimble. She just wrote a fascinating book called *Ms. Prime Minister*. In it she looks at different women and how the media have treated those different prime ministers who are women.

So yes, absolutely.

Mr. William McBeath: I think you're absolutely right. I cannot recall the last time a news article mentioned what a male politician was wearing or how their hair had changed.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: Or said “male” Prime Minister.

Mr. William McBeath: That's true. You're absolutely right.

I think the other thing, too, is that for a lot of people who don't follow politics closely, the entire process from “I think I might want to be an elected official” to becoming one is opaque. You just don't know it. You don't know that you have to get nominated at a riding association where there's a vote. You have to sell memberships. You don't know how to get a list. All of these technical things I think are very off-putting to people who don't love politics and breathe it every day.

To make that process better, again, one of the things I think a PAC can do is try to explain it to someone right off the bat. This is what running for office is like. This is how a nomination works. This is how you get lawn signs made. This is how you make phone calls. These are all things that we may take for granted when normal people have absolutely no idea how these things come about.

To me, that's another benefit that I think would help: shed some light on how this works.

● (1610)

Mr. Bob Bratina: Perhaps I could ask about the diverse community. The face of Canada seems to be changing somewhat. Is there any reflection in terms of newcomers or the families of recent immigrants showing more interest in politics? I have to say that in my own world, there seems to be a large group of interested people from the diverse community wanting to get involved. As to whether that means a female from that group will step forward—my time will come soon enough—which I'd like to see, is there any data on or reflection of that aspect of this?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: I haven't looked at that in a while, but what I have looked at in the past is that normally first-generation immigrants tend to be overwhelmed with just getting engaged in setting themselves up. Very often it's the second and future generations that are much more involved in politics and much more engaged.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Right.

Those are my questions. Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll now switch to our second round.

We'll begin with Kellie Leitch for five minutes.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you to both of you for coming today.

Both of you mentioned how leadership plays a very essential role in making sure we progress on diversity. I completely agree with you. It encourages women to either step forward or to step out and not participate. What do you think those characteristics are of a leader or a party that would encourage women to step forward, and of the ones who, quite frankly, would have her decide that this is not the game she wants to be participating in?

Perhaps you could be succinct, because I have two more questions.

Mr. William McBeath: I think you're absolutely right in that the message that's sent by the leader telegraphs right through the party about what is or is not a priority for that organization. Is a leader mentioning recruiting more women candidates frequently, all the time? I will say, Jason Kenney has mentioned it in every single speech I've heard him give, which is probably now in the hundreds, so we know that's a priority.

The other thing that may be a little bit less obvious is the group of people surrounding the leader. Is it a group of people who are also diverse, or talking about diversity, but then the political staff who work for that leader are uniformly all young men, for example? To me, that also gets noticed. Who is the group of people around the leadership? That sends a message, I think, that needs to be taken into account.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: I just reiterate, there is no question that the leader of a party sends a very clear message on what is desired on the part of the party.

I would also make the case that the informal processes that are in the party matter, the things that aren't legislated. Again, research has shown that those are the things that really matter for the degree to which diversity is found in our political parties, candidacies and nominations.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I completely agree with you with respect to that, and a lot of those things the public doesn't know about.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: Yes, yes, exactly. They're hidden.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Yes.

I have been very fortunate to have a career as an orthopaedic surgeon, a rather male-dominated career path. I would be one of 2% of women who are orthopaedic surgeons in the country. I ended up in my role because two fabulous guys decided they wanted more women to be orthopaedic surgeons, Allan Gross and a guy by the name of Jim Wright at The Hospital for Sick Children.

Dr. O'Neill, you say you want a quota. I'm pretty confident that there wasn't a quota to be the head of political science at the University of Calgary, and I'm respectful of your position, but I think that women do well when they earn it and they're seen as equal partners.

You talked about a different language to use. How do we get to that place where an individual like me says, “I don't want a quota because I earned it”, but we are still looking at how we have more women involved?

I was very interested in your idea of a timeline with regard to that affirmative action side of things, but, as I say, I'm not for quotas; I'm very much against them. I think we need to be encouraging men more, but what is that language? How do we get to that place that isn't a quota?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: Language matters, and you're absolutely right.

● (1615)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I agree.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: The minute you use a quota, you're going to get people's backs up, but I take issue with the notion that women who are in positions because of a quota somehow have a harder row to hoe, if you will, than others because of their positions. It's not 2%, but I know within the discipline of political science there aren't as many women. I think we're up at about 30%, so it's still very much male-dominated. The best advice that I ever got from another woman academic was to tell me that if you can get a position because you're a woman, take it, and just show them that you can do it.

It seems to me that part of the stereotyping is because we don't have women in those positions. If we say we can't have quotas, because if you put women in those positions as a result of quotas, they won't be respected, then the end result is that we don't have women in those positions at all, and nothing changes.

I think there are informal processes that keep women from being in those positions. What I would say, then, is you need to do something to kick-start the process so that we do have those changes that show that those stereotypes and those myths don't hold water.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: You see, I fundamentally disagree with you on that, because I think that every woman in this room could earn it, and they don't need that. That being said, that's okay.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: I think there are a lot of women outside of the room who could do it, but don't get a chance.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: As I said, I think that conversation about the language for it could move it a long way, because I think there are many things we're on the same page about. It would be outstanding if we could figure out what that language is.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I have a quick question for you, Mr. McBeath.

On engaging men and boys, what do you think the barriers are for a man deciding to be a mentor to a woman? We don't see enough of them stepping forward with a great female candidate.

Mr. William McBeath: I would say that possibly they have felt that it wasn't their place to be involved, and that definitely needs to be pushed back on hard. It needs to be a message that, again, gets communicated right from the top to the bottom of the party, starting at the leader.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Sonia Sidhu, you have five minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you both for being here.

I just want to acknowledge that I'm here today because of our leader. Our Prime Minister has a great vision, and that's why I am here today. He wanted more women, and that's why I stepped in.

My question is to Professor O'Neill.

In your view, does the riding of a female candidate affect or determine their electoral success?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: Certainly, where they're running determines their success. Absolutely.

We know that in part because right now, there's work—and this isn't my work, this is the work of Melanee Thomas at the University of Calgary, with Marc-André Bodet—that has shown that the "sacrificial lamb" hypothesis still holds in Canada. If we have no quotas or legislation, and barring any kind of different legislation, what often happens is that women will be placed in ridings in which they have less chance to win. Partly, I would argue, because of my work about women leaders, they're less competitive and so it's easier for women to step forward and be selected in those particular ridings. That's what's happening, yes.

As I would also point out, we can't always know which ridings are the ones in which the party's going to win. I think that's an important point we often forget about. When we do get those jumps in the representation of women, it is because the parties that didn't expect to win actually won. They nominated a lot of women in ridings that they didn't think they were going to take, and so you end up with a greater representation for women in that setting.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

According to research, women are less likely than men to be interested in or knowledgeable about politics. Women are also less likely than men to be confident in their political abilities. What factors contribute to women's lower level of political interest? You explored that before: political knowledge and political self-confidence compared to men. What is the main effect of women's interest to run for elected office?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: First, I might not always teach this in statistics. When you're concentrating on gaps between women and men, the difference between the two of them, we often say that women are less interested in politics than men are, therefore they didn't run. That's true, but that doesn't mean that there aren't a whole heck of a lot of women who are interested in politics and who would be willing to run—and I think that's an important point to make. Focusing on the gap is problematic, as far as I'm concerned.

There are a whole host of reasons why you could say women are less interested in politics, but I think one of them is just this perpetuation of the notion that politics is difficult, it's a war, it's combative—all those sorts of stereotypes. The way it's portrayed in the media, I think, reproduces this notion that this is where men should be and women should be doing other kinds of things. We still have this kind of public-private divide.

● (1620)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: The U.S. has seen the rise of powerful PACs. What are your thoughts about that?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: I take exception with the point that was made. I don't think that party always trumps every issue. I think that, on certain occasions, you can get gender to bring women together and to work, even outside party discipline. I think it can be done if the issue is important enough. The role of PACs is one that can certainly provide a spotlight on an issue. It can certainly help with things like raising funds for individuals, and so on. It can certainly help with the educative effect of teaching people what it actually means to run for office and what's involved with it, and so on. I think there's a role to play, but I'm also very cautious about PACs because I think they, in part, can become barriers as well as being helpful.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: What's the family role in that? Do you think it's a positive or a negative role if they have family support?

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: I think it's essential, if you have a family. We know many more women than men are single when they run for office.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Still, they have parents, brothers or sisters.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: Sure. I don't think you can do it alone. Are there many things in life that you can do alone? In politics, particularly if you're leaving home, I think a support system is essential to being able to do this, and more greatly so if you have children.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Do you want to add to that too, William?

Mr. William McBeath: Only that if you don't have your family backing you, it becomes a near-impossible task to successfully run and stay in office, and want to be in that job.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

The Chair: That's excellent.

Due to time we have the chance for each party to have one question each. I will start with CPC because it was going to be their round. CPC, you get one; Sheri, one; and then across to the LPC, whoever you wish.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Maybe I can get an answer to the question I had before, and both of you can feel free to answer it. We do think that men and boys are, obviously, a critical part of this opportunity for women to get involved. My success in orthopaedics was because two men decided that more women should be involved in orthopaedics, and they started actively recruiting young female surgeons. In politics, what do you think the barriers are to men choosing those candidates in winnable ridings? We know there are certain ridings that I think all the parties will say they're pretty safe for their parties, so why aren't we picking women for those ridings? Where is the leadership to do that? What are the barriers to men picking high-quality female candidates for those seats?

Mr. William McBeath: I can't underestimate the importance of having a leader set the direction for the entire party. That isn't a symbolic thing. It means, for example, that if a riding association is asking to hold its nomination race, the leader asks for an account of the work that's been done, the search that's been conducted, a list of women they've spoken with, and the responses the women gave when asked about running for office.

I have a ton of respect for political parties. I've worked for political parties a huge chunk of my life. I accept that they have many limitations, though. One is that I don't think enough care and attention ever gets paid to nominations as a whole. As someone who oversaw recruitment, the biggest issue I had was that I looked at the number—maybe I needed 87, this week we were at 62, and I was happy when next week that number went up to 64.

This is why I want to bring in more groups than just political parties. I think if left up to them, they will not put in the necessary sustained, prolonged effort and investment because that's just not their nature when it comes to these sorts of things.

That wasn't totally your question, I recognize, but I thought it was an important point to make.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: It is helpful.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: There isn't the kind of search that gets women into the spotlight. Dr. Phil Cross spoke to you as well, and his point I think is well taken: Women need to be asked, while men tend to be already working the floors and the networks they need. Women need to be asked not once, but two, three, or four times. If you aren't going out and asking, you tend not to see women. I think that's a key point.

The Chair: Thank you.

Sheri, do you have a question?

Ms. Sheri Benson: I think I'll put this one to Professor O'Neill. In governments that have a different electoral system, we have seen more women represented, in particular in countries that have proportional representation. I know that's a bigger thing to change than what we're talking about here. I believe we can work on multiple fronts, but maybe you could share with us why that is. What do you know from your research?

I can tell you personally about the partisanship we celebrate in Parliament and how we divide people adversarially and that kind of thing. For lots of us who are looking for change in our communities, it's not the way we do it, and it's not the way we've actually gotten change in our communities. You come here, and you see a very foreign way of doing things.

● (1625)

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: The first point I would make is, not all PR systems have better gender equity representation in their the parliaments than we do. It's not a guarantee. One of the things that's true, though, is that if you have a PR system, what you don't normally have are single-member ridings. You often have multi-member ridings, which means that there isn't this business of once one candidate is chosen you no longer...you can't split half a gender, half a gender. If you have four members in a riding you can zipper it: two men, two women. That's easier to do and there's less resistance to that.

Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs pointed out that you can still do it. It's a little bit tougher because we have the single-member ridings. I think there's this resistance to imposing rules on local associations. I think we have to worry about that.

The Chair: Ruby, you have the last question.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): First of all, I want to thank you for your testimony. I've learned some interesting statistics.

I agree with you, Professor, that even though there may be only 1% of the female population that may be interested in politics, that still amounts to a lot of women. I've talked to so many who love politics and want to run and who ask about how to get involved and how to run a nomination. I think we, as politicians ourselves, are great resources to new candidates. We can be that pack for them to give them the guidance they need along the way. A lot of them have questions. What is the work-life balance like? Do you have concerns over your safety? Have you had somebody attack you? A lot of those types of questions go through their mind because of things that do occur and things they've heard. Quite honestly, sometimes I have to tell them the truth about things I have gone through, but sometimes I hesitate a little bit, not wanting to be too honest and too truthful, because I don't want to scare them into not running. I want them to run, and I want to encourage them, but there's also a lot of stuff that I see. We have a gender-balanced cabinet, but after having that gender-balanced cabinet, we saw a lot of the media and even the opposition often criticizing the women who have stepped into those roles, saying they were just there as pawns. The language that I just heard from Ms. Leitch is “didn't earn it”.

What would you say about that? I feel as though we're self-destructive in our way in Parliament, where we're calling each other out for not having earned it yet. We have ministers like Chrystia Freeland who are definitely earning it and doing a fantastic job on an international scale.

Prof. Brenda O'Neill: I would say part of what the House of Commons has to be in the end is about respect for diversity of opinion. I think that's an important principle. Even if there are individuals who believe women who get to their positions because of quotas are there without having necessarily earned it, I still honestly believe the only way to counter or change those in any way, shape or form is to actually get women into those positions and to show that they actually are capable.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think that's why we'll never have quotas, because of that negativity.

The Chair: That's the end of our first panel.

Thank you very much to Brenda O'Neill and William McBeath for coming in and sharing with us.

We're going to suspend for a moment, and then Pam will be taking the chair shortly.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I'm going to call the meeting back to order.

Welcome back to meeting 111 of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

We're continuing our study on barriers facing women in politics.

I'm pleased to welcome, as an individual, Ms. Daniela Chivu. From the Young Women's Leadership Network, we have Ms. Arezoo Najibzadeh, executive director. From the City of Iqaluit, we have Mayor Madeleine Redfern.

Thank you all for being here.

I'll turn the floor over to you, Mayor Redfern, for your opening statement. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern (Mayor, City of Iqaluit): Thank you very much. I'll try to stick to seven minutes. As you all know, politicians have a hard time with that.

I'd like to say good afternoon and thank the committee for allowing me the opportunity to share my experiences and observations of women in politics, especially Inuit women in Nunavut.

My political beginnings start with my volunteerism, when I lived here in Ottawa and volunteered with the Inuit community centre, Tungasuvvingat Inuit, and Kagita Mikam, an indigenous employment training board. I helped set up the Inuit family resource centre, the Wabano health centre and the Inuit Head Start here.

I can tell you that when you work with an NGO, especially an indigenous NGO, it is political.

When I moved back to my home community just before the creation of Nunavut, I did so because I wanted to be part of the fascinating opportunity of creating a new territory and a new territorial government. I wanted my daughter, in particular, to be part of that. When you live in the north, your communities are small. Everything is political.

In those early days, there was an awful lot of work that needed to be done in setting up our territorial government and implementing our land claim agreement.

One of the interesting things that I want to share with the committee is that we had a referendum, as you are probably aware. There was an opportunity for our region to have gender parity. I attended those community consultations. You had people on both sides of the spectrum—those who supported, and those who did not. Interestingly enough, sometimes women did not support gender parity on the basis that we could compete equally despite the fact that there is significant under-representation of women in politics.

The ultimate vote on the referendum was that we would not proceed with gender parity. Not surprisingly, in our first legislative assembly, we had one woman out of 18 MLAs. It was actually a woman who had spoken out against gender parity, interestingly enough.

In the second assembly, there were two out of 18. We had increased by 100%. In the third assembly, we started off with two and then it was reduced to one. In the fourth assembly, we bumped up to three. In our most recent election of last fall, we had a bumper number of women: six out of 22. We jumped up from approximately 5% to 27%. Almost on par with Inuit representation in most of the municipalities or provincial or federal governments.

That is definitely far less than the one half of what we represent in our population.

I would remiss if I did not mention that in Nunavut, politics go well beyond our territorial MLAs. We have our Inuit land claims organizations, including Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, which represents the rights and interests of all Inuit across the territory. We also have our three regional Inuit associations, representing Baffin, Kivalliq and Kitikmeot. Women's representation there is very small, so much so that they actually have often a designated Inuit position on their board of directors. The position is ex officio—non-voting—just the same as our youth. Yet those organizations have millions of dollars of operating budget and are responsible for overseeing millions of our own land claim money that is invested in businesses or in partnerships, and they negotiate the impact benefit agreements whether it's for a major development or a park.

The accountability of those Inuit organizations or corporations is often challenging, if not problematic. For those of you in the room who are lawyers, I would call them *sui generis*. They are creatures of their own. They're creatures created by the land claim agreement. In government, as you well know, there are certain ways by which elected officials can be held accountable. We can all be subject to ATIP, or, if you are a shareholder, you have shareholders' rights.

● (1640)

In my region, they're quasi-public, quasi-corporate, but we don't enjoy the rights of transparency or accountability to the same standards. It was one of the issues that our former Nunavut minister Leona Aglukkaq spoke to in the legislative assembly back in 2008.

In 2010, Pauktuutit, with the Qulliit Status of Women in Nunavut, organized a women's leadership summit. I want to share Sheila Watt-Cloutier's words, which I think resonate quite well.

> Leadership is for all of us, not just for the elected positions, but comes from the grassroots level, whether you are a mother, a grandmother, a manager, an administrator, a teacher, elder, or youth. All of us are leaders in our own right and we all have a role to play in helping to lead on so many issues.

The problem is that those are nice words and there's a lot of truth in them, but when we have the majority of our community organizations that are not represented by Inuit and there's an under-representation of Inuit women, it means that those decisions do not reflect the views, perspectives or priorities of all our community.

Our land claim agreement is a perfect example. If you took a look at it, virtually nothing in there speaks to education, health, language, culture, child care. It's a very male-centric agreement. Why? Because it was negotiated by men and men.

I also want to maybe share with you some personal observations as an elected person myself.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That's your seven minutes.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: Okay. Then later, we can talk a little more.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Okay, thank you.

Ms. Najibzadeh.

Ms. Arezoo Najibzadeh (Executive Director, Young Women's Leadership Network): Hello, everyone.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you about the work of the Young Women's Leadership Network on sexual violence against women in politics.

The Young Women's Leadership Network is a non-profit organization that works with young women to make sure that they have the access and skills they need to be able to compete with their peers, and specifically young men, in political spaces, whether it be on the grassroots level or the institutional level. We also work with institutions, such as political parties, to ensure that we're removing barriers internally as young women are entering those spaces.

It is undeniable that women's increased political participation as elected officials leads to better social, economic and political outcomes for everyone. From increased attention on issues that impact women's lives to an often more collaborative working environment, increasing meaningful representation of women in politics is a crucial factor in strengthening Canada's democracy. With women only representing 27% of our elected officials federally right now, we have a long way to go to ensure that not only do women have equal opportunities within our democratic and political institutions, but also that our institutions are adequately responsive to women's wide range of experiences and needs.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the numerical analysis of women's political participation cannot be the only factor in assessing the state of women's political engagement. We must broaden our definition of women in politics beyond elected officials to include volunteers, interns and staffers, as well as lobbyists and unionists, who often partake in political action and share these spaces with us.

Women, especially young, marginalized women, are entering political spaces at high rates. However, this does not translate into the number of women candidates, elected officials, or women in senior leadership roles within our institutions. We must pay closer attention to the various forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, specifically sexual violence, that impede women's political participation on all levels. Beyond the diversity of women entering politics, we need to ensure that they have access to safe and healthy work environments that foster their empowerment and leadership.

Gender-based sexual violence is the result of normalized misogyny and rape culture within political institutions and the broader society. It is upheld through intersecting systems of oppression, such as sexism, ableism, ageism, colonialism, homophobia and racism, all of which aim to objectify and disempower women and trans folks within our institutions, and simultaneously privilege those who have systemic power.

These systems of oppression permit the abuse of power within institutions such as the Parliament of Canada. The intersections of gender, age, ability, race, economic status and seniority all create imbalanced power dynamics that impact individuals' access to support networks and justice once they experience sexual violence. These power imbalances allow perpetrators to use their positions within our systems to commit sexual violence and to silence survivors.

Our research includes 66 survivors of sexual violence who have been involved in politics, specifically in Ontario on different levels within the past few years, and it shows numerous examples of how their nuanced experiences of sexual violence were also shaped by other forms of violence, such as anti-blackness, Islamophobia, homophobia and classism, as I mentioned before. The dehumanization and objectification of racialized women and trans folks contributes to the hypersexualization and further violence experienced by them, and this reaffirms our calls for intersectional and culturally responsive support mechanisms institutionally.

There are also multiple barriers to the political involvement of those.... I'm going to share some examples of how these systems of power actually manifest as barriers for women who face sexual violence. For women in politics who have visible and non-visible disabilities, this includes campaign offices and event locations that make it difficult for them to access and get engaged in political conversation and discourses. For example, there are methods of engagement that don't keep mental health ability and support in mind, and that prove to be a barrier for folks who experience things such as depression and PTSD, but who are still interested in engaging with our political institutions.

In the event of sexual violence, women with disabilities also face greater barriers to reporting and seeking support services, even though they face disproportionately higher numbers of sexual violence compared to other women. Sixty-three per cent of our research participants were students when they experienced sexual violence in political institutions. Eighty per cent of them have either completely left or decreased their involvement in politics.

● (1645)

This number is significant because it highlights that it's not enough for us to tell young women to lean in and become engaged in politics, because when they do they continue to face extreme forms of violence such as rape and physical assault that force them to choose between their careers and health and safety.

The social and professional isolation faced by these young women is often cited as a deterrent for pursuing other careers in politics as well. That's where they completely disengage from democratic processes.

In partisan politics, survivors are urged to stay silent to protect the party's electoral prospects. Survivors who come forward are often vilified and isolated within political parties. It is crucial to recognize that social capital is a driver of success within politics. This isolation is a major contributor to why women don't seek justice and don't come forward.

At Young Women's Leadership Network, we believe in the importance of fair and accessible sexual violence and harassment policies and report mechanisms. We also focus on creating lasting cultural shifts and preventive measures. Our research shows that only 44% of survivors reported their experiences to campaign or party staff. They identified the lack of clear human resources mechanisms and policies, the fear of public scrutiny and victim blaming, and an overall culture of indifference toward sexual violence as reasons why they didn't come forward. Through all of these disclosures of sexual violence, there was a consistent lack of accountability and consequences for perpetrators.

Young Women's Leadership Network has identified the following recommendations as priority areas for creating adequate sexual violence support mechanisms and culture shifts within political institutions.

On a preventive level, we recommend that political institutions develop or adopt clear sexual violence and anti-oppression policies. They should mandate sexual violence prevention and support training for members on a recurring basis. This can be done annually within legislatures and on the executive teams of political parties and on the grassroots levels with volunteers and EDA officials.

On the intervention level, we propose that campaigns and institutions provide access to survivor-centred and trauma-informed support mechanisms, and provide immediate resources and paid leave for survivors.

● (1650)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You are over your time. How much do you have left?

Ms. Arezoo Najibzadeh: Just one more point.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Okay.

Ms. Arezoo Najibzadeh: In terms of immediate supports, we believe that creating a sexual violence and education role within the administrative team of the institution to centralize the policies, the report mechanisms and the supports for survivors will make a huge difference in terms of encouraging folks to come forward and to find ways to remain within our political institutions.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

Ms. Chivu, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Daniela Chivu (As an Individual): Good afternoon to all.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to share some of my observations and understanding about women's engagement in politics.

As a woman who has been actively involved and engaged in politics for the past 15 years, I believe that a study of this topic is long overdue. I have participated in politics as a volunteer in various municipal, provincial and federal capacities. These experiences allowed me to have a very clear understanding of the challenges of many courageous and capable women who have faced, in the past, the same challenges we are still facing today while being part of the political process.

I call them courageous, because as we all know, it takes courage to run for political office and face the challenges that come with it. I had spoken to and listened to women from across the political spectrum before deciding to be a candidate in the last election for the Conservative Party of Canada.

After the election, we spoke again. At this point in time, I came to the conclusion that I did not want to be a mere female statistic in politics. On the contrary, I want my merits, hard work, knowledge and experience to be appreciated and recognized in order to keep me engaged.

I must give credit where credit is due. My nomination process was fair and transparent. I received support from the party, but not enough to win the elections, and this was coupled with an unfavourable political climate at the time for us. Nevertheless, I have received as much support as humanly possible from the Honourable Jason Kenney, who at the time was minister of national defence, and Quebec senator Jean-Guy Dagenais.

In fact, the real problem for getting women engaged in politics lies within the organization of the parties. The leaders of the parties are seen as gods, surrounded by judges who most of the time elevate themselves to the level of demigods. This trait of character goes for both men and women surrounding the leader in any given political party setting. Unfortunately, some of them are very poor judges of character and experience, yet they are the people who decide whether a woman is fit to be a candidate or not.

Aside from the organizational problem of the parties, there are a few reasons why women are reluctant to take part in the political process. One, a woman with a strong voice and independent opinion is perceived as a threat rather than an asset, which is not the case for a man with the same qualities, who is perceived as a stand-up guy and a principled man.

Two, a woman with drive in politics is seen as dangerous, because there is little faith in her capacity to achieve.

Three, there is a subtle discrimination through labelling, by the organization of the party and media alike. For example, the whole idea of a star candidate creates negative competition among candidates. This approach discredits deserving women candidates and their merits. They are the first victims of this.

Only a very small number of women get winnable ridings, as most important ridings are given to men. A woman has to struggle to ensure her finances during an election year, as parties do not make any effort to financially back women to ensure a successful campaign. Women feel abandoned.

Once you become a candidate, the media will form its own narrative, which may put women in danger. The opinion of the media does not go unnoticed by the population. Therefore, a woman candidate will suffer consequences such as humiliation, harassment, verbal abuse and sometimes even death threats. I have experienced them all.

In my opinion, political parties need to create conditions to encourage and give women equal opportunities to run for office. Nevertheless, as women, we must also realize that if we want to have an equal voice to that of men, we must make an effort to put partisanship aside and work together. It is up to us to choose whether to be divided based on partisanship and ideological lines, or to work toward a compromise to ensure women get elected in the Parliament of Canada. Instead of making politics a scavenger's playground, we could work together.

At the same time, we must take a good look around the House of Commons and see how many members of Parliament who have passed retirement age are still serving. Retirement age is also an important factor to be taken into account. If parties genuinely want women to get involved in politics, they must allow and give them the space, tools and means to carry on.

● (1655)

Unless we form a non-partisan coalition that makes the election of women a larger priority in order to get them elected into the Parliament of Canada, we will never succeed. Unfortunately, women will remain unemployable statistics for having carried one party colour or another and for being equally forgotten by their own parties at the end. It is very sad, but it's true.

In conclusion, I would say that after having experienced and witnessed the pain, struggle and disappointment of my colleagues of all parties who have lost their elections, including me, we may all carry different logos, but in our own ways we all have the best interests of Canadians at heart. This is why I have accepted to testify here today.

Personally, I do not know how my story will end. What I do know is that one day I want Canada to have a woman prime minister who will last longer than three months in Parliament and where women's voices are as strong and as many of those of men. For that, I am ready to work with all of you to make this happen. This can be achieved only through balanced compromise. I personally remain committed to helping to empower women's and girls' aspirations to become members of Parliament, because the responsibility remains with us to ensure that in the future there should be a place for every woman and every girl who wants to make a difference in the House of Commons to serve our country.

Time is too precious to be wasted. In terms of the acceptance of being a statistic, women and girls deserve more than being a collective statistic. Most women I know who are engaged in politics are competent, experienced and knowledgeable individuals with intrinsic values in terms of pursuing political careers and being able to make a difference in the lives of Canadians.

Thank you very much for your attention.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much, and thank you for staying within the seven minutes.

Our first round of questioning is going to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you to all of you. You all have different perspectives.

This study is trying to figure out how to get more women involved in politics, so I appreciate your dream. It's also my dream to see a woman prime minister one day, hopefully in my lifetime.

We do have inherent problems right now. Women are judged differently from their male counterparts when they're competing in elections. We can even see that with the President of the United States being elected despite many allegations and video footage of admission, basically, as well. We're seeing that in many places.

Because of that, there was the #MeToo movement, and now, even in terms of the Supreme Court nominee, a lot is coming out about that. I think it's a very interesting time to be living in, and to see whether we as a society are going to tolerate these things and accept them, or whether we're going to put a stop to them. I commend all the work you're doing in this area.

What do you think we can do at the federal level as parliamentarians here, or at this committee, in order to help put an end to some of the issues you're seeing? What do you think the federal responsibility should be? That's open to all of you, because all of you have different angles and perspectives to bring to this.

● (1700)

Ms. Arezoo Najibzadeh: As I said in my last point, I think that what we could do here in Ottawa, even for just the House of Commons employees and the folks who interact with this institution, is to create an external support mechanism, so that all the reports, all the support systems and all the policies become centralized there.

I think it's really important for folks to have access to non-partisan and survivor-centric supports when they experience these things. A lot of women are entering politics, but they end up leaving because of sexual violence. If we have holistic measures that not only deal with the legal and justice system aspects of the work and the internal mechanisms of the system, but that also provide mental health support through other forms of engagement with a non-political system, that will definitely keep women in politics.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Recently we revisited our code of conduct between members and also between members and staff. I think staff are even more vulnerable in Parliament just because of the lack of authority, maybe, that they actually have here. There has been quite a lot of attention given to this matter, yet there's still this hesitance to come forward and report these incidents of—

Ms. Arezoo Najibzadeh: That has to do with the culture.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

Ms. Arezoo Najibzadeh: No one will go near the policy until they feel they're supported by their community, their bosses, their party staff or their colleagues. Until our culture catches up to where the policy expects us to be, we're not going to see any change. The work we do with our training and making sure that grassroots movements and organizations have access to ways to address these issues focuses specifically on that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think all levels probably need to play a role, because these incidents are happening so frequently. We have a candidate running for mayor in my city, Brampton, right now, who was removed from a provincial party in Ontario, but municipally they don't have the same type of pressure. Parties can do something as well, but at certain levels there are no parties to take action either, so what do you do in that circumstance?

Ms. Daniela Chivu: If I may intercede, you need to establish a non-partisan coalition for women and establish guidelines by which all parties abide. You don't need an established guideline at the municipal level and one at the provincial level in order to establish guidelines when we are discussing women's rights, for example. We all agree that rape is wrong. We all agree that we need more women to be elected in the Parliament of Canada. We all agree that there is a problem currently and we don't know how to deal with it, because there are so many issues that we can institutionalize the issues rather than the solutions.

What we need to do is to put our partisanship and our ideological guidelines aside and make women a priority. If we are incapable of doing that, we're not going to succeed. This is not going to happen.

I have friends from all political parties, including separatists in Quebec, but at the end of the day, we are all women. We all have the same goal. We want to make a difference. How do we achieve that difference if, when we get attached to a political party, we wind up in a whole different hunting game just to win? The prize, yes, is to win, but for what purpose? What do we bring to the table? How do we achieve what we want to bring to the table?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I really like your idea of a non-partisan coalition. I think that's really interesting, because I think the reason women get so frustrated with reporting is that you continue to see the person who may have acted inappropriately or whatever succeed even after the fact. So what was the point, right?

Ms. Daniela Chivu: Absolutely.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You hinted a little bit about cyber-bullying. We've all experienced quite a bit of that. What I have exchanged with my male colleagues is that during difficult issues, they may get some nasty comments as well, but we've compared the types of comments we get. Usually their attacks are on the policy and are not as personal. Females tend to get very personal, aggressive attacks, and even, at times, threats, as you said.

● (1705)

Ms. Daniela Chivu: "If you were Stephen Harper I would have killed you right now."

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What could we do about that? How do we monitor social media in a way that helps encourage women to run?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Daniela Chivu: This was not in the social media. This was face to face. I was confronted face to face while door knocking. The individual actually could have killed me. It's as simple as that. As women, we pay for the rhetoric that is being built, the language that is being built during an election campaign; men are not treated the same way.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: I would just share that in the political landscape with indigenous people, we recognize that we need to do reconciliation. The reality is that we have to do something on women's participation in politics.

The media has a huge role to play. Social media has a huge role to play. I think a lot of sensitivity training needs to happen and there needs to be better moderation of how women are portrayed in politics. For the most part it's still a very male-centric and Caucasian-privileged place. It influences tremendously how the public is going to view women in politics or women in leadership.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

Dr. Leitch, you have seven minutes.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Thank you very much.

I have some questions for each of you. Maybe you can follow up on what you just commented on, Madam Redfern. Obviously, you're a very influential, well-respected individual as a mayor in northern Canada. I grew up in northern Canada and I have to say I commend you as a woman for being able to position yourself as you have.

I want to ask you with respect to both your gender and, since you raised it, your indigenous background what you think are the things that have allowed you to be successful in your political career. What have been the barriers? Is one a greater influence than the other or are they just different?

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: There is an interesting intersection between racism and sexism when you are a woman from a minority background. I would have to say that my confidence probably came from the fact that I went to 11 schools in 13 years. That was pretty tough, being a minority growing up in Yellowknife or Saskatoon or Vancouver. You get a thick skin, which is unfortunate. I don't think any person—or child—should have to be subjected to that.

It also comes from being educated. The fact is that when you know that you have convictions and principles, you're going to say what needs to be said, irrespective of the death threats—absolutely—or of the mistreatment and abuse you get subjected to. You know the truth, and someone has to say it.

However, it's not only at our personal cost—it's a cost to our families. My family gets subjected to abuse—it's out of bounds—facilitated by both the media and social media. I think we need to control that a lot better, because it's not acceptable. I could tell you about the abuse that I've been subjected to in this term alone. I know for a fact that there are women who would have run but won't run now, because they've seen. Why would you put yourself or your family through it?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Yes, there are probably several women at this table who can comment on that. I completely agree with you.

Ms. Chivu, maybe I can ask you a couple of questions along the same lines, about this difference in how women are treated, both by the media and otherwise, even potentially by our own political parties. You're a woman who has grown up in Romania. You came here as an adult. You have a perspective of two countries.

I'd like to ask you two questions, and then the others can comment if they would like to. First, what do you think Canada is doing well? You have a perspective of another nation that has a political system. My second question is about the issue of the media and political parties allowing the bullying of women. What do you think the responsibilities are for the federal government? I recognize the sexual harassment part, but there's a lot of bullying that goes on that also needs to be addressed. How do you think that those conditions can be changed?

You can start, but others can also comment.

● (1710)

Ms. Daniela Chivu: I grew up in a communist environment. I came to Canada after the revolution. I've experienced the kind of—what would one call it?—abomination of democracy that Romania decided to have. Canada is my home. It is the only home I want. It is the only home I love. For that, I will fight fiercely, which is why I believe that what Canada is doing right is taking care of its women and taking women's issues to heart and doing it seriously.

However, we need to see concrete results. It's easier said than done. We establish policies. We discuss the topics. But we need to see all this materialized. So this is done the wrong way. I still have to see results. Yes, it's beautiful to have a fifty-fifty government, but what is beyond that?

I would like to open a parenthesis, if you don't mind. When our government announced that we had a fifty-fifty government, I loved it. I said this was wonderful. But then when the Prime Minister was asked the reason for this, he said it was because it was 2015. I would have said it was because these women are competent; because they are capable individuals; because they will defend Canada with integrity; because they are strong, independent, powerful women who can make a difference. This is what I would have said about the newly elected women.

In that direction we still need to make a lot of improvements. We've just touched the surface at this point. It's not done, and it's not done the right way. I'm sorry.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: If I can intervene, I'll also ask all three of you about this issue of bullying, if you have thoughts on initiatives we should be taking as federal politicians to deal with this issue.

I know that Status of Women Canada when I was there and also currently, is moving forward with initiatives. I think both governments can be commended for that. What are the specific things that you would recommend?

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: I would recommend, under workers' compensation safety board.... I can tell you that harassment, bullying and sexual harassment are not adequately dealt with in that federal piece of legislation.

In Nunavut, interestingly enough, we passed occupational health and safety legislation that extends our employer's obligation not only to our staff but also to our volunteers. It protects the volunteers by ensuring that any form of harassment or bullying is addressed.

Lastly, Israel has some of the most interesting sexual harassment policies. Any time there is a power relationship in the workplace, it is presumed that for the person in power—even if it is consensual or started by the person not in the position of power—that relationship is inappropriate and should never have been allowed. I would recommend that this committee look at that legislation and those policies in Israel.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I have one last question. It will be directed to you again.

We have challenges in having women involved in politics. The previous panel mentioned travel. Having come from a northern community, I recognize how long it probably took you to get here. We obviously have these physical barriers. For example, my sister would never consider running, and her flight would only be from Calgary. Do you have any thoughts on dealing with the management of the travel issue?

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: The biggest issue I have regarding travel is that when our Inuit male leaders travel with their female staff, they think it's a benefit and a perk that they can sexually harass, sexually assault or have relationships with women on the road. I know that's not answering your question, but the bigger problem is that outside the workplace, many of our leaders or managers believe those workplace rules don't exist.

● (1715)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Ms. Benson.

Ms. Sheri Benson: I'm going to try to do two things in my time. One is to do a motion and some committee business. I have five minutes, which I'm probably taking up talking about it now.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You have seven.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you.

What you've brought here has been awesome. It's been an awesome two hours here. I've learned a lot.

I'd like to ask all three of you if could you leave us with one point, note or reflection that you really want us to highlight in the report. I know that's hard to do, but from my point of view it would be helpful for us for you to leave us with a bit of a parting thought, like “Don't forget to do this”, or “This is what's important.”

We can start with Madeleine and go down, if that's okay.

Thank you.

Ms. Madeleine Redfern: I think the fact is that in schools we need to start having the topic of women in politics as part of civic courses. I can't believe how many young men don't even know what sexual harassment or sexual assault is. They literally just think it's rape. They don't think having sex with someone who is unconscious is rape. We see that part of the orientation of employees in the workplace is actually incorporating the whole concept of rights, gender imbalances, power imbalances, what's acceptable and what's not acceptable.

Thank you.

Ms. Arezoo Najibzadeh: I agree with Daniela. I think we need to have external and non-partisan support systems for women considering running for office and also for women at different levels of engagement who are involved with our democratic processes. That can include the realm of policy creation and also actual mental health and wellness supports. A lot of women in politics, aside from experiencing the sexual harassment and cyber violence, go through other experiences that result in mental health issues, such as depression and different things. Focusing on holistic wellness and support systems for women in politics with a non-partisan, trauma-informed and survivor-centric lens will be great for a lot of women.

Ms. Daniela Chivu: I agree with both of my colleagues. I would like you to strongly consider the idea of a non-partisan coalition that would encourage women to get engaged in politics, provide mentorship and guidelines for women to prepare for their political challenges, and in a way answer Ms. Leitch's question regarding bullying in media.

All political parties are responsible for setting the tone when anything is published—a statement, an article or a journal, regardless of what it is. The use of language and the description of your opponent matter, because other people pay for them. Therefore, educating the population is a way to control bullying.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you.

I'm not quite sure how to do this.

I have a motion that everyone has a copy of.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I think you just move the motion.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Can I speak to it?

If agreed to, it would allow us to refer to the report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, and to use it to inform our work here. In other words, we would be building on what has been done already.

I don't know where people are as far as agreeing or not, or if you have any questions. I have another option around amending it if people don't want the whole report. The idea is to take what we learned in that report with regard to the barriers to women in politics, and use it for this study.

I'm moving that, I guess.

● (1720)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

I understand from the clerk that we need to debate it first.

Ruby.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Having been a member of both committees—status of women a while back as a permanent member, and electoral reform—I believe that we should take a holistic approach and bring forth all the witnesses that we want before this committee. That's how we should do it. In electoral reform the aim wasn't necessarily how to remove barriers for women.

You may have narrowed down these specific ones, but there were bits and pieces we heard all over the place, and I think it's not going to be the best approach. We should just have the witnesses here as a part of this new study.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Can I point out to members as well that we're talking about the report? That's the volume of testimony we'd be bringing into it.

Is there any other debate?

Sheri.

Ms. Sheri Benson: I'd like to build on other work that has been done by other committees if it could inform this. My amendment was to enable us to just look at what specifically was talked about from a different perspective in terms of the barriers facing women in politics, not the whole thing. It could form a reference to our work here. That's the amendment.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That was never the lens that testimony was being viewed through. The lens was quite different, and there were different motivations for the people who were testifying at that time to come forward. There were a lot of politically motivated groups. There were organizations whose sole motive was to get a certain type of PR.

We'd be tainting the work of this committee by bringing that evidence in, because it wasn't done from a perspective of just studying the barriers to women in politics. It was done under a different lens and for a different motive.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Bryan May.

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Madam Chair, given that we have witnesses here today and very little time left for questions, can I suggest we call the question?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You have the motion in front of you. We're going to vote on that.

Sorry. Is your motion to adjourn debate?

Mr. Bryan May: No. I want to call the question to vote and get back to the matters of today.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You want to vote on the actual motion. Is there any other debate on this motion?

As long as there is no more debate, we can do that.

You can't actually call the question like we do in municipal politics.

Mr. Bryan May: I try.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Okay. We are voting on the motion, and the motion is to include the testimony from the special committee.

(Motion negatived [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That's your time.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We will now go to Terry Duguid for seven minutes. That will probably be the last question.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Thank you to our witnesses for excellent and passionate presentations.

I'm going to pick up on a line of questioning to earlier witnesses. I led a consultation this summer on engaging men and boys in advancing gender equality. All of us would agree that we all need to be involved in advancing gender equality: men, women, boys, girls, people of all genders. I learned some really great things travelling from coast to coast to just about coast. I got up to Yellowknife but didn't get to Nunavut, so I apologize. We will get there, though.

We had some great examples of men and boys stepping up to advance gender equality. For instance, the banks had some very important leadership by CEOs. All of the banks are led by men in very powerful positions, but through their leadership they have been systematically advancing women. Many women occupy the VP spots and, I have no doubt, will be sitting in the C suite in not too long, at least in some of those institutions. In the workplace, the union movement had men participating in “Don't be a bystander” campaigns reducing toxicity in workplaces. We had football teams, such as the Winnipeg Blue Bombers and the BC Lions, participating in school programs to be good role models for young men in how to reduce many of the things that all of you have talked about.

As we heard earlier, the political landscape is dominated by men: 27% of parliamentarians are women, and the rest are men. I think the statistics are actually worse at the municipal level. I am a former city councillor. I ran for mayor but wasn't successful. I think it's 12% women. The average is around 20%, so it's below that.

I'd like an opinion from all of you. How can men in leadership positions, who do occupy positions of power, step up and change Canadian politics, as well as provincial and municipal politics?

● (1725)

Ms. Daniela Chivu: I believe, yes, that was going in the right direction of trying to educate and engage boys.

There is something that is missing within the education system, and that is life skills in education. Within life skills in education, children should be very much aware of their civic responsibilities, which include women's rights. Unless our education system develops a formula to integrate women's rights as part of boys' education, we're not going to be able to do it. Yes, a father, an uncle or a brother can do that, can say that you treat a girl with the same amount of respect as your sister or your mother, but that's the education a child gets at home. We need our education system to change; therefore, men play an important role by listening and promoting women's rights and equality.

When you listen to a woman's problems, for many men, it's like, women are crying again, they always want something, it's never enough, where does it stop? However, if you had done that listening previously, you wouldn't have to listen to me speaking right now and asking for my rights. This shouldn't even be happening, me asking for my rights as a woman to be part of a political system, or that girls should be protected, or that boys should know how to behave. That should be a given. Men need to take active action and deliver real results on women's issues.

I believe, yes, you are going in the right direction with the consultations you have started, but the United Nations has a program called “HeForShe”, and I believe that you, as a member of Parliament, and your male colleagues, should start promoting that program throughout your riding. The HeForShe program should be a priority throughout Canada, beginning with the mentoring of little boys concerning women's rights, consent, respect and compliance.

That's my personal advice.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Thank you.

Ms. Arezoo Najibzadeh: I think what we should be mindful of is that, in our current culture, respecting women has been so rare in our history that once a man says, "I'm a feminist" or "I respect gender equality", we kind of put him on a pedestal. I think that's been happening nationally and internationally as well, even HeForShe. There was a man who was the leader of the International Youth Council Chapters of HeForShe at the UN, and last week he was removed from his job because of sexual violence. We get a lot of lip service and we congratulate a lot of men for publicly coming out and hashtagging MeToo and talking about this, but again that education piece is missing. So we don't get to recognize who is actually being genuine and who is delivering, and who is just talking about the work happening.

Having curriculums that include equal amounts of women's history and highlight the contributions of women to our society, but also include consent culture at different levels, is very important. We were talking about cyber violence, but we live in a society where women are seen as public property, so that cyber violence is a violation of our digital spaces. That harassment is a violation of our spaces and our existence in these spaces, and it goes up that ladder of consent where at the end we reach a level where we're dealing with sexual violence and rape.

Having that consent education and that education starting early on in our school system and investing in programs like the ones you were talking about will bring about that culture shift that prevents gender-based violence and brings about gender equity.

● (1730)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That's our time, and the bells are going.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here today.

Our next meeting will be on Monday October 1, at 3:30. We will see you then.

The meeting is adjourned.