

For Immediate Release

May 29, 2008

Groundbreaking Political Appointment

The President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women is pleased the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has appointed a woman to the position of government house leader for the first time in the province's history.

Joan Burke was appointed on May 21, 2008.

"I'm delighted a woman will finally take up this important post," says Leslie MacLeod, President of the Advisory Council. "The glass ceiling continues to press down on women, but this appointment helps bring us one step closer to breaking through it."

To date, men exclusively have occupied the positions of lieutenant-governor, premier, deputy premier and government house leader. Burke's appointment is historic for Newfoundland and Labrador.

"On the world stage," says MacLeod, "Canada lags behind when it comes to women in government, which is why this appointment is so meaningful."

According to the World Economic Forum's annual gender gap ranking, Canada measures 36th against other nations in terms of proportional numbers of women in government, coming in behind Sri Lanka and Cuba. Only 20 per cent of Canadian MPs are female. This province does slightly better with women making up 23 per cent of Newfoundland and Labrador's MHAs.

"The problem with this imbalance is that it throws democracy completely off kilter," argues MacLeod. "Women's lives, needs and perspectives are often different from men's. That's why it's so important to get more women in government and, more importantly, in higher levels of government."

Currently in this province, women make up 27.8 per cent of cabinet, which puts Newfoundland and Labrador in fifth place when compared to other Canadian provinces and territories. Quebec comes in at first place with 47.4 per cent while New Brunswick finishes last at 10 per cent.

"I'm happy to see our province making real gains in terms of equal representation," says MacLeod. "For the first time in history, two out of three provincial parties are headed by women and another barrier has fallen with the appointment of Joan Burke to government house leader. From our perspective, things are looking up."

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Backgrounder

Government house leader is the cabinet minister responsible for planning and managing the government's legislative program in the provincial house of assembly. The government house leader works on the government's behalf by negotiating timetables and matters relating to the passage of bills. The holder of the position must be an expert in parliamentary procedure in order to argue points of order before the speaker of the house of assembly as well as be a good strategist and tactician.

World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2007

<http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm>

Proportion of Female Cabinet Ministers by Province
(*Online research of provincial government web pages*)

May, 2008

	Cabinet Ministers	Female Cabinet	Percentage
Quebec	19	9	47.4
Manitoba	18	6	33.3
Ontario	28	9	32.1
Alberta	24	7	29.2
Newfoundland	18	5	27.8
Nunavut	8	2	25
Saskatchewan	18	4	22.2
BC	24	5	20.8
Yukon	10	2	20
PEI	12	2	16.7
Nova Scotia	18	3	16.7
Northwest Territories	7	1	14.3
New Brunswick	20	2	10