

Letter to the Editor

June 24, 2009

Women, you are already leaders!

There seems to be a lot more talk lately about the lack of women running for political office. In April, Amanda Bittner's, women and politics class at MUN presented a conference that examined some of the barriers to women running for political office. The Women's Policy Office is currently holding a 'lunch and learn' series in communities across the province offering encouragement to women to run in the Fall municipal elections. Equal Voice, a national woman's group, hired Environs Research Group to see if Canadians support having more women in public office. Everyone has their own motives for encouraging women to run for office. My interest is two fold. First, we need women to get involved in local politics to help sustain our rural communities. If we do not have local leadership our community organizations will fold. Second, we need women's voices at all political tables to bring their perspective on economic and social issues into discussions at all levels of government.

Women make up the majority of the volunteers in many communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. According to a Statistics Canada survey released 2007, 50% of females in Newfoundland and Labrador volunteer, as compared to 43% of males. Yet only 24% of municipal elected positions are held by females. We have municipal elections coming up in September and this is our opportunity to change that percentage.

For some reason women don't see themselves as having the ability to be political leaders. They are already leaders in so many other organizations. Somehow municipal politics is thought to be different from all the other volunteer work that women do. It is no different. It involves the same type of work and takes the same skills; planning meetings, discussing issues and taking action! And most of all it takes interest in your community and region. Women have all of this!

As the Vice President of the PACSW, I have helped make women in rural leadership an issue for our Council. Over the next three years the PACSW will work to encourage women to take the plunge into municipal, provincial and national politics. The PACSW has published a Manual on Organizing an Election Campaign; it is available to anyone from our web site www.pacsw.ca. There are lots of reasons why women don't run, let's stop talking about them and let's look at why women should!

Carolyn Lavers
Port Saunders, NL
Vice President
Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women