



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 148 | NUMBER 052 | 1st SESSION | 42nd PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 10, 2016

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

C-237, Candidate Gender Equity Act

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on this private member's bill, Bill C-237, the candidate gender equity act.

Let me begin by clearly outlining what this bill would do. Clause 4 of this bill would change the Canada Elections Act to require political parties to run an equal number of male and female candidates. If the party failed to keep the difference between male and female candidates to fewer than 10%, then the party would be punished by being provided with a reduced subsidy following an election.

We want to encourage more women to seek office. I do not think there is any doubt about that. Of course we want to see women in positions of power who are engaged in business, politics, in the private sector, and in the public sector.

When I heard my colleague say that we now have women role models because the Prime Minister appointed a gender-equity cabinet, I would argue that there are many women, not only in this House, on both sides of this House, but within the private sector and the public sector who are excellent role models.

When I ran in the federal election, there were five candidates, four women and one man. As the first elected female mayor of the City of Surrey, along with a majority of women councillors, in fact, my political party had more female candidates than male candidates. We were all elected as a majority of women since 1996.

I have had the privilege over the years to work with many young women. In fact, I felt that it was incumbent on me as a woman to make sure that younger women and younger girls had the opportunity, and had every opportunity we could afford them; and incumbent on me to make sure that we were empowering them and encouraging them to pursue their dreams, and to help them reach their full potential.

In fact, I am sure that all of my female colleagues in this place, regardless of political affiliation, would agree that we all have a distinct privilege of being in positions where we can provide support, mentorship, and guidance to women, not only within our own country but around the world as well.

All of my female colleagues stand in this House today not because a political party was required to fill a female quota to get its expenses covered, but rather because they earned the respect and the trust of their constituents who believed that they were the best candidate to represent them in Ottawa.

I want to see more women stepping forward in politics, not because a political party wants to make sure its expenses are covered to the full amount, but instead because they believe they are the best people to represent their community. I want to see people from all walks of life, regardless of age, ethnicity, or gender, representing Canada in this House.

The Conservatives appointed the first Canadian female cabinet minister in 1957. Half the candidates who ran for the position of Conservative interim leader last year were female. At present, the Conservative Party is the only party with official status in the House of Commons that has a female leader.

All of these successful women got to where they are because they were the best for the job, not because there was a female quota to be filled. Furthermore, this bill would erode democracy by forcing political parties to have a hand in local nomination races. This would do nothing to encourage parties to run the best person to represent the people in the riding.

It is for this reason that I cannot, as a woman, support this bill. I support the efforts of women who want to make their lives better, whose lives we should help make better, but I cannot support a bill that would force me and my colleagues into a quota system. It is not democracy, and that is not progress.