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To Stephen Harper,  
Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada

Dear Mr. Harper:

I am writing to you on behalf of Equal Voice, a national, volunteer advocacy group for the election of more women. As you may know, we are multi-partisan, working with members of all parties, including your own, to build a cross-party consensus on fairer representation in political life.

We wrote to you before the last election about nominating more women candidates, and you replied that women have equal opportunity to run for your party so that no special measures are necessary. We wish you were right—that the playing field in politics were truly level—but we do not think that is so. We believe substantial barriers remain in the way of aspiring women.

One of these is money. Most women simply do not have access to the same financial support as men, particularly for nomination races but also for running for election or for leadership. That being so, we welcomed your proposals to further restrict election giving and spending. Less dependence on private donations should make it easier for women to compete.

However, we believe the nomination process itself remains a substantial barrier. We ask you to consider the result in your own party, which so far has nominated only 10 per cent women candidates.

Political leaders often explain the gap by saying women themselves are reluctant to stand for office. But in many other countries of the world, women have proved that is not so. As soon as they thought they had a fair chance, as in Scandanavia, Wales, Scotland, New Zealand, Spain, Belgium, Rwanda, France's municipal elections, even recently in Afghanistan, women have come forward in great numbers to take part in their nation's public life. Thus, Canada now stands 43<sup>rd</sup> in world rankings by the number of women in national legislatures.

We compell you to consider intervening actively at this stage in nominations to ensure a few more nominations for Conservative

women. And in the longer term, we'd ask for your support for reform of the nomination system to ensure a fairer process, plus electoral reform such as proportional representation to redress the imbalance. |

We in Equal Voice would be proud to work with your party to get the number of women in the House of Commons above the present 21 per cent.

Rosemary Speirs,  
National chair, Equal Voice.