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## **MORE WOMEN IN THE NEXT HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY?**

### **Major parties nominate more women than ever, says Equal Voice Nova Scotia**

More women than ever are running as candidates in Nova Scotia in the 2009 election. There are 34 women nominated by the three major political parties this time. This is up from 2006 and 2003 when 30 women ran, and up from 1999 when 29 women ran. The record number of female candidates in this 2009 provincial election falls far short of fair representation, says Equal Voice Nova Scotia, but it is an important sign of increased efforts by all major parties to see more women elected.

The women who are running have impressive qualifications from a wide variety of backgrounds. Retired political science professor and Equal Voice member Naomi Black notes: "All of them deserve to be sitting in the House."

The Progressive Conservatives have nominated 7 women candidates, the New Democrats have nominated 16, and the Liberals have nominated 11. More women are running for the NDP than for the Liberals or the Progressive Conservatives, but does that mean that we can expect the NDP caucus to include more women than the other parties?

Dalhousie political scientist Louise Carbert cautions that it's more complicated. When it comes to predicting how many women will actually be elected, she points to the incumbency factor, which makes it difficult for women to enter the House. Nova Scotians are noted for re-electing sitting members, most of whom are men. The province is enriched by their legislative expertise that comes from long experience. But we also need some new faces - including more women.

It's not easy for anyone - male or female - to replace an MLA like Manning MacDonald who has represented Cape Breton South since 1993. Instead, challengers must wait for incumbents like Brooke Taylor to retire. In this case, because of Mr. Taylor's retirement, the seat in Colchester

Musquodoboit Valley is coming open for the first time since 1993. Unfortunately, none of the competitive candidates in that riding are women.

With so many women running against incumbent men, Equal Voice is paying close attention to two women who are running in open races, without competing against sitting MLAs. NDP candidate Lenore Zann is contesting the Truro - Bible Hill seat, vacated by Jamie Muir. Pam Birdsall is also running for the NDP, contesting the Lunenburg seat vacated by Michael Baker.

For years, the Nova Scotia House of Assembly has ranked at the bottom of Canadian provincial legislatures for the proportion of women elected, but now it looks as if Nova Scotia might get up to the national average, in the 20% range.

It's especially important to re-elect all ten women MLAs who are standing again. Carbert emphasizes that it's not enough for women to come into the House through a revolving door, entering as legislative rookies and exiting to a quick defeat after one term. She hopes to see women become deeply entrenched incumbents, just like the men.

Equal Voice Nova Scotia is the provincial chapter of Equal Voice Canada, a multi-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to seeing more women elected to public office.