

GOVERNMENT IS US

TEXT TO ACCOMPANY SLIDE PRESENTATION

Speakers alternate speaking, by topic.

WELCOME

1. Structures of Canadian government
2. Powers of different Canadian governments
3. Representative and responsible government
4. How political parties operate in the electoral system
5. How to get directly involved:
 - a. political parties
 - b. appointed positions

WRAPPING UP

[SLIDE 1- Government is Us Pogo cartoon]

FIRST SPEAKER: **Welcome**

This event today is called “Government is Us,” echoing the old but famous cartoon that you can see.

IDENTIFY SPEAKERS:

We are going to share the presentation.

Many people think of the government as “the enemy;” we don’t, on the contrary, what we want to say is: Come and meet the government because government is us. But not enough of us realize that fact or act on it.

[SLIDE 2 – Equal Voice Nova Scotia]

This presentation was developed for Equal Voice Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia chapter of Equal Voice Canada.¹

We believe that more people should be involved in the government,

and especially more women.

You may ask: why should we have more women in government? We will answer that question, as we look at how our government works and how *we – you – us* – can become part of it.

[SLIDE 3 Our topics today]

This is the outline of what we shall be talking about.

We hope to make clear that all parts of the government are made up of citizens – us.

And that, even if we are not MPs or officials, we are entitled to take part.

And fully entitled to receive those services that government is there to give us.

For all this, it's necessary to understand just what goes on. So: we will first explain some of the most important features of government here.

This is very basic stuff, the sort of thing you supposedly learned in school.

But even if you are pretty familiar with how the government works, you may find some of it surprising.

We will also talk about how to get access to services and how to get involved:

- which governments can help you with what
- volunteering inside political parties, local government,
- and the agencies, boards, and commissions that are part of our government

This isn't a lecture;

We'd like you to take part with comments or questions.



NEXT SPEAKER: **Structures of Governments**

[SLIDE 4 Structures of Canadian Governments]

Let's start by looking at the structure of our governments, and where the women are – and aren't.

[SLIDE 5 – Canada's National Government; House of Commons marked]

We'll begin with the elected part of governments.

Ours is a parliamentary system, where the legislative assemblies are the central bodies.

It's often called the Westminster System, because it is modelled on the British parliament, that first met at the Palace of Westminster.

Legislative assemblies – also called legislatures or parliaments – discuss and approve policy and are responsible for passing laws and regulations.

[SLIDE 6 - Our federal system has two levels of government – national and provincial]

There are two levels of government in Canada, national and provincial.

There are 10 provinces, and 3 territories that are provinces-in-the-making.

[SLIDE 7 – Nova Scotia’s Provincial Government; House of Assembly marked]

This is the Nova Scotia version – but all the governments in the two constitutional levels are set up the same way.

Though the national level has two houses in its parliament and the provinces each have only one.

The territorial governments operate slightly differently, with no party system.

In constitutional terms, ours is a *federal* system, which means that we have both a central and other governments but the elected members of both the provincial and the federal governments are chosen *directly* by the citizens’ votes. And the governments all have a *direct* impact on the citizens.

[SLIDE 8 – Halifax Regional Municipal Government]

In addition, there is local government, which is set up and controlled by the provinces.

Each adult citizen who is a resident of Nova Scotia has at least 4 chances to choose who, among them, will run their government:

[SLIDE 9 – Who can you vote for?]

In provincial and federal elections, which are held at different times, our votes produce members of legislative assemblies and, at the same time, also decide who will be the head of the government.

Locally, adult citizens can vote for municipal or regional councillors and often also for a Mayor or a Warden, who presides over the Council.

For status Indians, there are band councillors and band chiefs to vote for every two years.²

That's not mentioning the 8 elected school boards with their narrower range of activities.

In Nova Scotia, as in Canada over all, women are just over half the population.

Let's look at this province's elected legislative representatives. Fewer than one-tenth of Nova Scotia's MPs are women – one woman.³

[SLIDE 10 - One woman from Nova Scotia in the House of Commons]

Just under one-quarter of our MLAs are women.⁴

[SLIDE 11- 10 women in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly]

Here is the 23-member Halifax Regional Council again.

We've marked the women in the picture.

There are now 9 women in the council.⁵

[SLIDE 12 - 9 women on Halifax Regional Council]

In the 13 Mi'kmaq bands in Nova Scotia, 4 of the chiefs are women and under a quarter of the councillors.

[SLIDE 13 – 4 women band chiefs in Nova Scotia]

All these elected offices matter a great deal.

[SLIDE 14 – Canada’s National Government, Senate marked]

But there are also *appointed* members of the legislative branch, though only at the federal level.

And that is the Senate.

The Senate, even if not elected, matters because it reviews and has to approve all laws passed by the House of Commons.

It’s sometimes called “the house of sober second thought.”

It basically represents the regions.

It is also supposed to represent Canada’s diversity:

Linguistic, ethnic, religious, and gender

Women have been eligible to be appointed Senators since the Persons Case in 1929. About a third of the Senators are women.

[SLIDE 15 – 1 woman from Nova Scotia in the Senate]

Nova Scotia has ten Senators, and only one of them is a woman.

The numbers that indicate the presence of women – that is, the lack of presence of women - are pretty startling.

[SLIDE 16 – How many women represent Nova Scotia in our Governments?]

Here are the numbers and percentages summed up for you.

And here is a picture of the progress – so to speak –

that women have made across Canada since 1968.

[SLIDE 17 - How do the trends look for getting women elected in Canada?]

So the question arises: how do we get more women into government?

And we think that the answer is:

If more citizens, and especially more women - women like you - understand better how the government works, they will recognize that it belongs to us, and that it is not difficult to play a role.

Now let's look more closely at the government structure and the other *appointed* offices.

We'll start with the provincial level.

[SLIDE 18 - Nova Scotia's Provincial Government Lieutenant Governor highlighted]

There's one Lieutenant Governor for each of the provinces. And of course the Governor General for Canada as a whole. They formally represent our head of state, currently Queen Elizabeth II.

By the customs we call *conventions*, the Governor General and Lieutenant Governors do as the Queen does - which means - what the relevant governments of the day tell them to,

mostly ceremonial tasks like awarding honours, opening parliament, or hosting distinguished visitors.

[SLIDE 19 – Her Honour, Lieutenant Governor Mayann E. Francis carries out her ceremonial duties]

The most meaningful thing they do, and it is meaningful, is to stand for national unity

and whatever features of the province or nation that a government thinks important.

Nova Scotia's Lieutenant Governor, The Honourable Mayann Francis, shows recognition of the long-established African Nova Scotian community.

[SLIDE 20 – Canada's National Government Governor General marked]

Her Excellency, Michaëlle Jean, our current Governor General, represents our immigrant communities and particularly women of colour.

Here's a picture of the federal Speech from the Throne which makes very clear the role of the representatives of the Crown.

[SLIDE 21 – Her Excellency, Governor General Michaëlle Jean]

In this photo the Governor General is sitting on the Queen's throne, about to speak in her name. (Notice that her husband takes the place of the consort of the monarch on the smaller throne.)

The real power, beside her on the other side, is the Prime Minister.

His office actually writes the speech from the throne – the program for each parliamentary session.

In short, no more than the Queen, does her representative have any role in policy or governance.

Not all the monarch's representatives in Canada are women, but women are much more likely to be Governors General or Lieutenant Governors than the truly powerful First Ministers.

[SLIDE 22 – Eva Aariak is the First Minister of Nunavut]⁶

Only one First Minister is currently a woman, Eva Aariak of Nunavut.

[SLIDE 23 – Canada's National Government, marked for courts and administrative branch]

The government also includes the courts, federal, provincial and municipal, with the Supreme Court at the head.

The courts basically enforce the laws that the legislatures pass. Since 1982, in addition, we have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms,

So now the courts can review legislation and basically cancel it if it contradicts the principles set out in the Charter.

Looking at the chart, you can also see the remaining part of the executive branch of the government, the public service

- the people who support the cabinet
- operate the departments, and
- generally run the country under the supervision of the elected officials.

Now you have been reminded of the general structures of Canada's governments.

The rest of this talk will focus on the elected parts of Canadian governments and the political parties, as well as, at the end, the agencies, boards, and commissions, which are not elected but still a section of our government that truly is accessible to everyone.

[SLIDE 24 – Being on the outside, trying to persuade Government to do things differently]

We're including in our discussion those services from the government that we are all entitled to, but we are not going to talk about being on the outside trying to persuade government to do differently. That is, we're not going to talk about the very important topics of citizens' protest or pressure politics, like the vigils and demonstrations that you see here.

Our subject is – being there – being inside.
The first thing we need to know is what all these governments do.

CHANGE SPEAKERS: **The different powers of our Governments**

[SLIDE 25 – The different powers of our Governments]

To understand how government works in Canada today, we need to go back to when it started.

It makes sense to start at the point when the colonies in British North America were combined into a single “dominion” of Canada in 1867.

At that time, the basic structure and powers of our government were set out in the British North America Act – the BNA Act, which is a piece of British legislation.

[SLIDE 26 – British North America became Canada in 1867.]

The tasks expected of the Canadian governments – things that needed to be done for, and on behalf of, the citizens – were divided up then between the new national and provincial governments.

And, allowing for the changes over time and the growth of Canada, the division has stayed roughly the same.

The current Constitution Act incorporates the BNA Act.

At that point in time – 1867 – it was expected that the federal government would be the most powerful.

It gradually took over from the imperial British government all that had to be done about national borders.

[SLIDE 27 - Division of powers highlighting national]

So the military is a federal responsibility and all that follows, including customs, regulation of trade and ports and the coasts, diplomacy, citizenship.

In general the federal government has authority for services that go across international and provincial boundaries or have an obviously national nature. This includes most transportation and means of communication, criminal law and justice, as well as the very large federal work force and the Aboriginal peoples.

The provinces basically have charge of everything else that has to be done for citizens as a group.

[SLIDE 28 - Division of powers highlighting provincial]

Provincial areas of responsibility are carefully spelled out in the BNA Act: natural resources and a wide range of matters related to transportation, commerce, and labour inside provinces, including civil law and justice, as well as, importantly, a range of social services including income support, education, and health.

Social services weren't a big area of government activity in 1867. Most were still provided privately then, by families, churches, charitable associations, or just private companies.

[SLIDE 29 - Social services were privately funded, often by charitable organizations]

Here is a picture of the Home for Friendless Women in Ottawa in 1895, run by a private charity. Note the babies in the baskets, and the elderly woman sitting by herself in the front.

Nowadays social services amount to an enormous range of public activities and a very costly one.

[SLIDE 30 – Constitutional Division of powers highlighting national and provincial]

There is a good deal of overlap or cooperation in practice between the levels of government. A little of the cooperation or overlap is constitutional such as immigration and agriculture, as the SLIDE shows. Usually, if there is a conflict, however, the federal government prevails.

Most federal-provincial cooperation has simply developed over time, through legislation but also through habit and accepted practices.

[SLIDE 31 – Shared jurisdictions require coordination and cooperation]

Local government, by contrast, is quite different from the top two levels of government that are set out in the BNA Act.

[SLIDE 32 - Municipal powers]

Local arrangements are the business of the provinces – which can shut down or change them as they wish.

Even HRM, which has two fifths of the population of Nova Scotia, is entirely dependent on the province.

Local government can raise only as much money as the province allows.

It basically has to rely on property taxes and user fees – like bus fares.

Local governments affect the conduct of our daily life much more obviously than the two constitutionally prescribed levels of government do.

[SLIDE 33 – Municipalities support community organizations with help from other levels of government]

As you can see, local governments maintain most of the everyday services we depend ON.

These are pretty obvious.

What's less noticed is that under their responsibility for parks and recreation, local governments support and promote a whole range of volunteer groups.

To do this, they receive funding from both provincial and federal governments.

In this way, local governments HELP support community, a sense of togetherness, which is the social glue that holds neighbourhoods and cities and nations together.

This complex division of powers makes it difficult for citizens to know where to go for services.

[SLIDE 34 - Where in government should you look for help if ...?]

Test yourself: where should you look for help in the government?

READ SLIDE ALOUD

[SLIDE 35 - Where in government to find help?]

READ SLIDE ALOUD

The blue pages in any telephone directory give municipal, provincial, and federal phone contacts.

The division of powers in the Canadian government can sometimes make us feel as if our government is doing us a favour when it provides the services we are entitled to, that our taxes pay for.

Not so. Government isn't "it" or "them": at all levels. Let's say again: it is us, and the more we know about government, the better.

This leads us to a bit of history and to a new topic, *representative and responsible government*.

CHANGE SPEAKERS: **Representative and Responsible government**

[SLIDE 36 – Representative and Responsible Government]

Government in Nova Scotia goes back farther than we have any written records.

[SLIDE 37 - Aboriginal peoples were self-governing for centuries]

The original First Nations had a democratic system, but it was wiped out when European settlers established control.

Aboriginal peoples and settlers were both drawn into systems based on what existed in the European nations that ruled North America as part of their empires.

For Nova Scotia, and eventually for all of what is now Canada, that meant England – ruler of the British Empire – was the model.

Here in Nova Scotia, we celebrated the 250th anniversary of representative government in 2008.

[SLIDE 38 - On October 2, 1758, the Nova Scotia House of Assembly met for the first time over the objections of Governor Charles Lawrence]

READ TEXT OF LAWRENCE QUOTE

In 1758 representative government began in Nova Scotia.

The first elected assembly was made up of twenty-two Protestant men of property, who were chosen by about 260 men like themselves.

That assembly was an advisory council to the royal Governor, who was in charge of the colony on behalf of the King of England.

The Governor didn't always have to do what those elected representatives wanted.

But it was representative government – you could even say democracy –

because it meant that at least a few people had a say in how they are ruled.

Which was a truly radical idea then, and it still is even now in many places in the world.

[SLIDE 39 – Who got to vote when in Nova Scotia?]

Over time, in Nova Scotia, more and more citizens were included among those who could vote and hold office.

It was the beginning of a process that means today that every adult citizen of Canada can choose his or her representatives, or be elected to join them.

It took awhile, especially for women.

As you see, a few women actually cast votes in the early days of Nova Scotia's elected assembly.

This was an oversight: they happened to have the property qualifications.

Then in 1851 they were actually formally forbidden to vote – 93 years after representative government was established.

Women finally got back the provincial vote, on the same terms as men, in 1918.⁷

But it wasn't until 1951 that aboriginal women were allowed to take part in band elections.

[SLIDE 40 - Gladys Porter, 1st woman elected to the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly]

42 years after women got the provincial vote, Gladys Porter was elected to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in 1960.

[SLIDE 41 - Mary Pierro, 1st woman to be elected Chief of a band council in Nova Scotia]

11 years after Aboriginal women became eligible for band leadership, Mary Pierro of Wagmatcook First Nation became the first woman elected to head a Mi'kmaq community in Nova Scotia.

But let's go back in history again, to look at responsible - not just representative - government.

[SLIDE 42 - Starting responsible government I]

Of course we hope that all of our government are "responsible" in the usual sense that they are not "irresponsible" - flighty, unserious.

And of course, in any representative system, those elected are "responsible" to the electors who picked them out - they won't get re-elected unless the voters like what they have done.

But what we are talking about here is something narrower: the machinery that, through the political parties, enforces the voters' choice.

And at a specific time in history, we moved in Nova Scotia from being just a dependent colony to having a system of what we call "responsible" government.

Nova Scotia was the first British colony to have the new system.

[SLIDE 43 - Starting responsible government II]

From here on, the monarch's representative had to choose his advisors from among the group in his elected assembly that could control it – could get a majority of the Assembly to vote in support of them - that is, those who had the "confidence" of the assembly and their advice was no longer optional, he had to take it.

Inside parliament even today, what happens is this: if an important government proposal is defeated, it means that the House – and by implication those who elected the MPs – are no longer supporting that government – no longer have confidence in it – so there must be another election to justify its staying in power – or not.

We still have responsible government, and this is how it works.

[SLIDE 44 – Members of the Governor's Executive Council must be drawn from the House of Commons and must hold the confidence of the House]

Parties select Leaders, however they wish.

They also select other candidates, all of whom, including the Leader, run for office together as a group – a party.

For each election, each candidate runs in only one place, and each elector votes in only one place also.

Only a few get to vote for or against the party leaders directly.

After the election, the *party* that wins the most seats, sets up Her Majesty's Government.

Its Leader selects from the members of his (or her) party in the legislature those who will run the various departments of the government.

They are Ministers who also make up the committee called the Executive Council, or more usually, the Cabinet.

[SLIDE 45 - Members of the Governor's Executive Council must be drawn from the House, and must hold the confidence of the House]

The job of the First Minister – the *Prime* Minister or Premier - the Leader of the government party - is to preside over the cabinet. This person is the actual executive head of the nation or province - the CEO.

The party with the second largest number of elected members serves as what we call Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

If you think of parliament as having two groups, as it did originally, the *Ins* and the *Outs*, the opposition – the outs - is the government-in-waiting, the alternative government.

Its main role is to hold the government accountable on an ongoing basis.

[SLIDE 46 - Question Period on the floor of the House of Commons]

One of the most visible – and dramatic – means of keeping the government in line is Question Period, when the ministers of the Crown must respond formally, in public, to questions posed by members of the other party or parties.

[SLIDE 47 – A majority government has support from more than 50% of MPs]

When a government's party has more than half of the seats in the House, it is a majority government.

Here is the Nova Scotia government after the 1999 election.

The party in power could win every vote.

It could stay in power for the constitutionally provided five years. Although in most parts of the country, including Nova Scotia, the First Minister can freely choose to call an election after a shorter period than that. And usually does.⁸

Here's another Nova Scotia example, this time of a minority government after the 2006 election.

[SLIDE 48 – A minority government has support from fewer than 50% of MPs]

This is a government that has more MPs than any other party but less than a majority.

So they can't win a vote without support of at least some of the opposition parties.

That is, this government can always be defeated by votes of non-confidence, if opposition parties vote together.

This minority situation has been fairly unusual – historically there have nearly always been majority governments both federally and provincially.

Under minority conditions, third parties can be more important. We got the Canada Health Plan in 1965 because that minority Liberal Government had NDP support to vote the policy into place.

CHANGE SPEAKERS: **Political parties and the electoral system**

[SLIDE 49 – Political parties and the electoral system]

New topic now – political parties and the electoral system

Under the system of responsible government, majority or not, the parties have to work as groups in the assemblies.

That depends on “party discipline,” which usually means simply that the members of a given party are expected to vote the same way

Mostly, this is not a problem.

Members of the same party share a general viewpoint.

They also share the goal of keeping their party in power, or getting it there.

They are on the same team, and that itself produces loyalty.

Meeting privately in caucus they have a chance to air their views to one another and to the party leaders.

In addition, Canada’s parliamentary parties control - or try to control – their members quite tightly.

[SLIDE 50 - Responsible government hangs together by party discipline]

In each party someone actually has the job entitled “party whip.”

As you see, it’s a foxhunting image.

This “whip” is imposed for confidence votes – crucial ones, that will be labelled that way - and then,

All party members are required to vote together, under the threat of being expelled from the party.

However, the role of individual members of parliament continues to be meaningful.

We want to underline the importance of the individual member, because it is often overlooked.

Time for a story. This one is about the Member of Parliament for Cumberland- Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley.

[SLIDE 51 – Bill Casey, the MP for Cumberland-Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley]

Casey is saying, as he stands in the noose, “I knew the Conservatives would support me if I stood up for my principles.” In June 2007, Casey voted against his own Conservative Party budget.

Budget votes are a matter of confidence. With, yes, a whip. But Casey was strongly opposed to that Budget.

As punishment for voting against the budget, Prime Minister Harper expelled Casey from the Conservative Party.

When the Conservative Party riding association declared that it wanted to nominate Casey again, they were told that they had to choose a candidate who was a member of the Conservative Party.

So they nominated Casey again.

The riding association was dissolved and a new official riding association was appointed by Conservative Party headquarters. For the 2008 election, they nominated an official Conservative Party candidate for the riding, who, as expected, lost. Bill Casey won the election as an Independent, with a whopping 69% of the vote.

As this story about Bill Casey shows, there are limits to how much control the Party has over MPs and local members of the party.

[SLIDE 52 – The individual MP makes a difference – Brison]

Something similar had happened in Kings-Hants. Scott Brison was elected as a member of the Progressive Conservative Party, but left it when it merged with the Alliance. He then ran as a Liberal, and now has repeatedly been re-elected.

[SLIDE 53 – The individual Member makes more of a difference to a minority government - Stronach]

In minority legislatures, numbers matter, so the individual MPs have more impact. In 2005 the numbers of members of government and opposition were so close that the minority Liberal government won a key vote of confidence and stayed in office only because Belinda Stronach, elected as a Conservative, crossed the floor to join the Liberal Party.

It seems clear that, ambition aside, Stronach and Brison both changed political parties because of the differences in the nature of the two largest parties.

It was partly at least because of how hospitable – or not – the parties were to non-traditional candidates.

Political parties are more than just the machinery by which responsible government operates.

Of course, they are basically there in order to run elections, and to form or destroy governments.

Political parties also set agendas for elections and for governments.

Each of them combines projects and ideas in a package designed to appeal to as many voters as possible.

But each of these packages is slightly different.

To get the flavour of the cluster of beliefs that characterize the major federal parties, let's look at the questions on this SLIDE.

Think for a moment how you would answer them.

[SLIDE 54 – Which party is right for you? questions]

READ SLIDE ALOUD

Here is another SLIDE that shows something of how Canadians' responses group together to describe the parties.

[SLIDE 55 – Which party is right for you? questions & answers]

READ SLIDE ALOUD

There are real differences, however much (as we said) we do vote for the people not the parties as such.

After all, candidates select parties that fit with their view of the world.

Individuals matter; local connections matter; party beliefs matter.

Now let's look at how our electoral system works - because it makes our involvement in the government easier than in many other places.

[SLIDE 56 – 308 constituencies across Canada in 2008]

In Canada we currently have 308 single-member districts – which we usually call ridings. These are actual physical areas in which any number of candidates may compete but only one person will be elected to represent the people living there.

The legislature of Nova Scotia is elected from 52 single member districts, which work the same way.

[SLIDE 57 – “First past the post” wins the riding]

Sometimes, we refer to the electoral system as *First past the post*. It's a horse-racing image, and we often talk about elections as like horse-races, horse races run by teams composed of candidates for competing parties.

“First past the post” means that in order to win, a candidate *doesn't* need to get a majority or more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the votes cast. He or she only needs to get a *plurality* of the votes, or more than any of the other candidates. This is actual votes cast, not just possible votes.

[SLIDE 58 – Alexa McDonough won by a plurality, not a majority in 2004]

In Canada, candidates usually win by pluralities. In most contests, there are two fairly strong party candidates in any electoral district,
But usually at least one more party draws off some of the votes.

So we have a lot of close contests and MPs or MLAs can win by very few votes.

Believe it or not,
there was actually a tie in the 1999 provincial election.
In the district of Shelburne, the Liberal and Conservatives tied with 3206 votes each,
and the Returning Officer literally pulled a name out of the hat to break the tie.

Even the vote of just over 1000 that got Alexa McDonough back to Ottawa in 2004 was pretty close.

Individual votes matter under Canadian vote arrangements. And individual voters get attention as a result.

We talked earlier about the different parts of the government that provide services.

[SLIDE 59 – Constituency offices are located in handy, close-by locations – strip malls, office buildings]

The basic job of MPs and MLAs is to work with their parties to supply governments and also to produce good policies and laws. MPs and MLAs are also supposed to help their constituents get the services that they are entitled to.

This is part of their job.

Our system of government has the advantage that it connects representatives to people in particular specific places, and encourages politicians to be easily available. You'll find constituency offices in handy, close-by locations – strip malls, office buildings. And you don't even need a stamp on letters to your representatives in Ottawa.

CHANGE SPEAKERS: **How to be directly involved:
political parties**

SLIDE 60 – How to be directly involved: political parties

We've talked about the nature of political parties in Canada, and how they make the system of responsible government work.

Now let's talk about what their members of political parties can do – not the members of parliament – but the many individual members of political parties, the ones who are not elected or appointed to office.

Party members can do a lot more than just give their party votes in elections.

[SLIDE 61 – Party members select party leaders]

Party leaders, who will become national or provincial leaders, are selected by the members of the parties.

Party leaders aren't chosen all that often.

What's more important is the fact that it is party members who nominate candidates to contest elections.

Nomination of candidates is not a complicated process in Canada.

In each riding, each party's riding association, made up of volunteer party members, meets and votes on who will be their candidate for that party in a particular election

[SLIDE 62 - Political parties are surprisingly open and easy to join]

Riding associations are really surprisingly open.

All you have to do is to become a member of a political party.

Party membership is in most cases open to citizens 14 years or older and costs as little as \$5 a year.

Which doesn't even obligate you to vote for it – we have had a secret ballot since 1870.

Memberships are annual, so you don't even have to stay committed for any long period of time.

So it's usually possible to get enough new members for a riding association

that they can nominate the party member they want to see as their candidate.

[SLIDE 63 - Political parties are made up of volunteers]

Even if the central party headquarters would like to see some

star (like Belinda Stronach) join their other MPs,

that star has to be installed as candidate in a particular riding.

In general, the locals pretty much have their own way in nominations.

Though the story of Bill Casey reminds us how complicated things can get.

Then, for the actual elections, a huge amount of volunteer support is needed.

And a candidate is unlikely to win if the local party members won't provide their support

[SLIDE 64 - Political parties need volunteers, especially at election time]

We can see here some more good reasons why MPs and MLAs make themselves very available to help local voters deal with government and why parties welcome any interested person who wants to be part of the machinery of the party system.

Those people you see at candidates' headquarters, or that knock on your door, or phone you at dinner time, or put signs on your lawn, or sit at the various desks in the gym or church hall when you vote, are volunteer party workers. There are only a few, *very few*, paid staff.

The SLIDE shows how much fun the volunteers have – how much satisfaction they get out of their volunteer activities.

It's not even that difficult to start a new political party.

And it's worth doing.

Supporting a party gets publicity for the party's views, at least at the time of the election campaign.

[SLIDE 65 – New small parties also take part in elections]

The Green Party is a good example.

Green parties like it play a large role in European governments, and it hopes to do the same here.

It's worth voting and working even for parties not likely to get candidates elected in a particular place.

It contributes to spreading ideas and forming opinions, which is part of what government is about.

Furthermore, even though there are usually no political parties in local government elections, or territorial ones, there are many opportunities to be actively involved.

CHANGE SPEAKERS: **How to be directly involved:
appointed positions**

**[SLIDE 66 – How to be directly involved: appointed
positions]**

Perhaps all of what we've been saying about the electoral system and the parties is pretty obvious.

Most of us are less aware of the *appointed* parts of the government.

You and I are not likely to be appointed Governor General or Lieutenant Governor, after all, and the Senate is not going to be much of an entry point into government for us either.

[SLIDE 67 – Senator Jane Cordy's activities]

But we should note that our own woman Senator, Jane Cordy, is actually not that unlike a lot of other women active in local affairs and political parties whom you may know.

**[SLIDE 68 - Nova Scotia's Provincial Government,
administrative marked]**

More relevant to most of us are the remaining *appointed* governmental positions: the ABCs: agencies, boards, and commissions.

They exist at federal, provincial, and municipal levels. Formally, they are part of the executive branch of government.

[SLIDE 69 – National agencies, boards, and commissions]

Appointments to the federal ABCs are made by order-in-council, via the regional minister, who is currently Peter MacKay, the Member for Central Nova.

They go to people who are prominent and politically active.

[SLIDE 70 - Daurene Lewis, Principal of Nova Scotia Community College]

One example is Daurene Lewis who you see on this SLIDE. She has many appointments.

However, application for most ABCs at the provincial and municipal levels is public and regularly advertised.

You send a letter or an email nominating yourself. And may even get appointed.

[SLIDE 71 – Nova Scotia Agencies, Boards, and Commissions]

Here's part of a 2008 ad for provincial ABCs that are advisory and therefore open to public applications.

The ones that advertised empty places – and there are more than a hundred of them –

do have some limits on who is eligible to be appointed, of course. But there are many spaces for regular people without special qualifications.

Most of us aren't eligible for or even interested in being on, say, the provincial Weed Control Advisory Committee,

[SLIDE 72 - Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women]

but how about the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which usually has 10 to 12 members, 4 of them appointed or reappointed after advertising in 2008. Here are the current Council members.⁹

The appointed members are required only to be: “representative of the various geographic areas of the province and ... “interested in working to advance the status of women.”

And these are municipal ABCs connected to HRM.

[SLIDE 73 – HRM Agencies, Boards, and Commissions]

None of the ABCs take an enormous amount of time. And all pay expenses.

CHANGE SPEAKERS: **Wrapping up**

[SLIDE 74– Pogo cartoon again]

What we want to leave you with is the thought that

it's not difficult or even costly to get the services you are entitled to or to get actively involved with federal or provincial or local government.

Democracy won't be complete here until women's voices and experience are fully heard at the places where decisions are made.

And until there are more women inside the government – many more -the majority of the population won't be adequately represented there.

We hope – simply - that this very incomplete version of how it all works will show you that government really is – or could be – Us. And that “us” has to include a lot more women than it does now.

NOTES

¹ We use Nova Scotia as our example; it's pretty typical of how things are for women in Canada.

² Can First-Nations people vote in municipal elections? Band elections are based on Indian citizenship; municipal elections are based on residence. So a status Indian living off reserve could vote in both off- and on-reserve elections (Backgrounder, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 30 October 2008).

³ Elected, Canada October 2008. Megan Leslie (Halifax).

⁴ Elected, Nova Scotia June 2009.
Progressive Conservative caucus: Karen Casey (Colchester North).
Liberal caucus: Diana Whalen (Clayton Park), Kelly Regan (Bedford-Birch Cove).
New Democratic Party caucus: Pam Birdsall (Lunenburg), Michele Raymond (Halifax Atlantic), Maureen MacDonald (Halifax Needham), Vicki Conrad (Queen's), Marilyn More (Dartmouth South-Portland Valley), Ramona Jennex (Kings South); Becky Kent (Cole Harbour-Eastern Shore), Denise Peterson-Rafuse (Chester-St. Margaret's Bay), Lenore Zann (Truro-Bible Hill).

⁵ HRM Council elected October 2008: Gloria McCluskey, Jacky Barkhouse, Mary Wile, Dawn Sloane, Sue Uteck, Debbie Hum, Linda Mosher, Lorelei Nicholl, Jennifer Watts.

⁶ From left to right, the First Ministers in the photo are: Ed Stelmach (Alberta), Robert Ghiz (Prince Edward Island), Gary

Doer (Manitoba), Rodney MacDonald (Nova Scotia), Dalton McGuinty (Ontario), Stephen Harper (Canada), Jean Charest (Quebec), Sean Graham (New Brunswick), Brad Wall (Saskatchewan), Danny Williams (Newfoundland and Labrador), Gordon Campbell (British Columbia).

⁷ Women voted on the same terms as men for the first time in the federal election of 1921.

⁸ Federally, and also in British Columbia, we now have fixed election dates every four years. This is intended to take away the First Minister's power to call an election when it would suit his party. However, Elections Canada states that a fixed-election date will not be set under conditions of minority government.

⁹ Advisory Council Members: Linda Carvery, Liz Chisholm, Jean d'Entremont, Shelley Goodwin, Anne Kelly, Patricia Leblanc, Holly Meuse, Doreen Paris, Sonja Power, Rita Warner.