

RESEARCH - ANALYSIS - SOLUTIONS

CCPA REVIEW

Economic & Social Trends in Manitoba

March 2008

ARE WE GETTING CLOSER TO GENDER PARITY IN MANITOBA POLITICS?

The United Nations Development Programme declared in 1995 that government policies are unlikely to reflect the needs of women unless they represent at least 30% of total members in legislative assemblies. This 30% threshold is now widely accepted as a benchmark for assessing our progress in achieving gender parity in all levels of government in Canada. In light of this, it would seem appropriate to evaluate where Ottawa and Manitoba stand in relation to this benchmark. We will examine the legislative assemblies in Ottawa and Manitoba, including Manitoba school boards and municipal governments.

Ottawa – Stuck at 20%

Currently, 20.7% of the members of the House of Commons in Ottawa are women. The proportion of women doubled between

1984 and 1997 - from 9.4% to 20.6% - but has since stalled.

There are significant differences between parties in the proportion of women in their caucuses. The number and proportion of women by party are as follows: NDP, 12 (41%); BQ, 17 (33%); Liberal 21 (21%); and Conservative 24 (11%). While these differences in gender ratios reflect a number of factors, it seems likely that they are attributable in part, to differences in the party philosophical positions regarding gender equality and the extent of their commitment to trying to achieve this result in a systematic way.

The proportion of women MPs in Manitoba is above the proportion for the country as a whole. At present, there are four women MPs in Manitoba, namely: Anita Neville (Liberal); Tina Keeper (Liberal); Joy Smith (Conservative); and

The Review of Economic and Social Trends in Manitoba is available free from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Each issue features new independent research and analysis on current social and economic issues in Manitoba. For more information or to provide feedback please call or write:

309 - 323 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1
ph: (204) 927-3200 fax: (204) 927-3201

ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

www.policyalternatives.ca

Judy Wasylycia-Leis (NDP). This is 28.6% of the total federal seats in Manitoba.

Manitoba – A Breakthrough in May 2007

After the votes for the May 2007 election were counted, 18 of the 57 or 31.6% of the seats in the Manitoba legislature were filled by women. This outcome not only exceeded the 30% threshold, but also placed Manitoba at the top of the provinces, followed by Ontario (27%), PEI (25.9%) and Quebec (25.6%).

Moreover, 13 of the 36 or 36.1% of the members in the NDP government caucus are women as compared to 24% for the two opposition parties combined. The continuing progress toward gender parity of the NDP is attributable in large measure to the fact that the NDP nominated women in winnable ridings and then committed the resources they needed to get them elected.

At 33.3%, Manitoba has the second highest proportion of women in cabinet portfolios (namely, Advanced Education and Literacy; Labour and Immigration; Health; Water Stewardship; Healthy Living; and Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives). This proportion is, however, much below the 50% level in Quebec and just one percentage point up on Ontario which is at 32%.

Nevertheless, it seems that the combination of electoral gains for women, and the appointment of a growing number of women to important cabinet portfolios has established a sound foundation for further progress toward the achievement of gender parity in future elections.

Manitoba School Boards – Where Parity Prevails

Manitoba has 38 School Divisions with elected school boards that are responsible for the administration of public education in their jurisdictions. While the boards vary in size, they average about eight members, who are (since 1998) elected for four-year terms.

School board elections in 2006 resulted in the election of 316 individuals of which 161 were men, and 155 women. The respective proportions are 51% and 49%, which is about as close to parity you can get without having parity. As well, 18 of the boards have male majori-

ties, 17 female majorities, and three have equal numbers of men and women (although there are boards that do have significant disparities one way or the other).

When it comes to chairpersons of the boards, who are elected by school board members, there is a disparity, with men having the edge by a margin of 23 to 15 or 60% to 40%. Still this is superior to most other political jurisdictions, including, as will become evident below, municipalities.

What accounts for the gender parity that exists in school boards? In brief, the explanation would seem to have two parts. First, the costs of contesting school board elections and the rewards (monetary, status, etc.) of winning elections are relatively low. This is especially true in rural and remote divisions that do not have large concentrations of population and where seats are often filled by acclamation. And second, education is accepted by women and perceived by the general population as an extension of women’s traditional role of raising and caring for children. The combination of these two factors has allowed women to participate in this important sphere of political life on an equal basis.

Municipal Politics – Where Have All the Women Gone?

Municipal politics in Manitoba stands in marked contrast to the situation with school boards. A comparative review of the gender gap in municipal politics in 2005 (<http://gettingtothegate.com/idx.php?rl=13>) showed that Manitoba was far behind most other provinces in terms of the proportions of women who were councillors and mayors in municipalities. A summary of the relevant data is shown in the following table:

Statistics on Male and Female Participation in Municipal Government, Selected Jurisdictions, 2005

Jurisdiction	Mayor			Councillors			Prov. ranking
	Male	Female	% Female	Male	Female	% * Female	
Manitoba	191	8	4.0%	865	125	12.6%	10
Average of 10 Provinces	320	46	12.6%	1,588	444	21.8%	
British Columbia	148	37	20.0%	850	338	28.4%	1

*All provinces except for Manitoba (12.6%) and Saskatchewan (13.4%) are above 20% in terms of

female representation.

A detailed profile of the Manitoba situation based on the outcomes of the 2006 local elections reveals that women continue to be under-represented at the municipal level. Two hundred and sixty three women (15% of all candidates) ran for municipal office in 2006. One hundred and forty five (55%) of these women candidates were elected and hold 12% of all council positions.

While the under-representation of women in municipal politics is pervasive across the province, it is especially great in Rural Municipalities (RMs) where only 8.9% of councillors are women. But the percentage is also well below the 30% threshold in villages, towns and cities. In contrast to RMs, villages and towns, there is significant variability in the size of cities. Size, however, does not seem to matter. Portage, Steinbach and Winkler do not have any women on their council, while Dauphin has 2 of 7, Selkirk 3 of 7, and Thompson 3 of 8. The proportion of women on councils in the two largest cities is 10% (1 in 10) in Brandon, and 18.8% (3 of 16) in Winnipeg.

A Profile of the Gender Gap in Manitoba Municipalities by Type of Municipality, 2006

	Mayors/Reeves			Councillors		
Type of Municipality	Total	Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %
Rural	115	6	5.2%	704	62	8.9%
Villages	19	4	21.0%	95	23	24.5%
Towns	51	3	5.9%	285	54	18.9%
Cities	8	0	0.0%	70	12	17.1%
Total	193	13	6.7%	1,154	151	13.1%

Source: Calculated from name listings filed with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities.

The explanation for the low proportions of women on municipal councils in Manitoba is no doubt complex. It may be that in rural municipalities, villages and small towns, the dominance of men on councils simply reflects the fact that the kinds of issues dealt with are “men’s issues” such as drainage, roads, sewer and water, policing and environmental problems. This situation is unlikely to change in rural municipalities any time soon, but it may change in villages and towns because of demographic and economic changes that are putting pressure on traditional “women’s issues” like health and social services related to an aging

population, child care services and rural poverty.

Similar perceptions about the appropriate roles for men and women are also a factor in the smaller, conservative cities such as Winkler, Steinbach and Brandon, and probably also in Winnipeg. But the other factor at work in cities relates to the costs and potential benefits of being on a city council.

The first benefit is the salaries paid to Winnipeg’s full-time city councillors and mayor, which are lucrative in comparison to other occupations. Similar considerations are also at work in smaller cities.

Status considerations are also important. Thus, city councillors are invited to functions and activities that are staged by the recipients of city largesse or put on by organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce, that seek to influence the decisions of city councils for their benefit. As well, participation in city councils often leads to opportunities to advance to federal and provincial legislatures. For example, the last three MLAs from Brandon (Scott Smith and Rick Borotsik in Brandon West, and Drew Caldwell in Brandon East) were on Brandon city council. There is, in short, a mix of benefits and opportunities that will prompt individuals interested in politics to compete for a seat on city councils.

Competition for seats raises the costs of seeking election. Moreover, if the city has a robust and expanding economy with emerging economic opportunities, including especially, housing developments and commercial expansion, the competition for seats and the costs of campaigns are accentuated by people with money seeking to ensure that the people elected to council are likely to be sympathetic to their projects and causes.

Closing the gap

Are there steps that can be taken that would increase the number of women seeking office in the large towns and in cities, and the numbers of women elected to civic office, either as mayors or councillors?

The answer we think is yes. Education and mobilization is important. We believe that organizations that are concerned about politics (women’s organizations, labour unions, Aboriginal organizations, anti-poverty groups, etc.)

should be promoting more involvement by women in electoral politics both as candidates and organizers and getting the people resources in place to help get them elected.

Another element that is important is to reduce the costs to individuals of seeking elections in big and growing towns and cities. To achieve this, it is essential that the Manitoba government establish legislation to achieve transparency and accountability of local politicians. Amongst other things, such legislation should prohibit contributions from corporate, business, trade union or other organizations to candidates, set a limit on personal contributions to a campaign of \$250.00, and require disclosure of all contributions and “gifts-in kind” valued at \$25.00 or more and all campaign expenditures. These measures would reduce barriers to individuals who are currently deterred from seeking election in Winnipeg, Brandon and other cities by financial considerations.

CCPA-Mb Needs Your Help

We recognize that we are just scratching the surface on what needs to be done to close the gender gap in municipal politics in Manitoba. In the next while, we want to prepare submissions to the Manitoba government and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities on potential reforms and actions that will move us more quickly to achievement of at least the 30% threshold and ultimately gender parity in our governing bodies.

We need your help. Please send us your ideas on the kinds of measures that we to get this result. How do we educate promote, mobilize to get the results we desire? What kind of ideas do we bring forward regarding reforms and actions that are within the power of governments to implement? Help us, and together we can help to advance the cause of gender parity at all levels of government in Manitoba.

Forward your ideas on how we might reach gender parity in politics to ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

For more information on municipal councils go to www.gov.mb.ca/cgi-bin/iaf/municipalities.pl
www.gov.mb.ca/cgi-bin/iaf/

Errol Black is a Brandon City Councillor and a CCPA- Manitoba board member.



The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives is an independent non-profit public policy research institute. For information about publications or forthcoming events, or to become a member please phone or write:

309-323 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1
ph: (204) 927-3200 fax: (204) 927-3201
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca
www.policyalternatives.ca

CAW 567
OTTAWA