

Women must maintain social awareness

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Women, said Lobay, are the majority in law and other quota faculties and that they enjoy higher education.

Because of their nurturing natures, women are more empathic than are men.

Speakers on Saturday afternoon discussed women's involvement in backroom politics. The first speaker was Alice Maloy, the national vice-president of the Liberal party.

She challenged the typical image of the backroom as a "group of men in three-piece suits, smoking big cigars and controlling the political process."

But she said the backroom in politics has moved to the floor of conventions and "opened to a much wider cross-section of the country."

According to Maloy, there is a great opportunity "to get involved in the policy and decision making centre."

Despite economic and domestic constraints, women have "natural skills" such as the ability to communicate, to build networks, and to work as part of a team.

However, it is up to women to use these new opportunities and "to move from a team player to a superstar."

Susan Hoplock, assistant to the Conservative opposition in Manitoba, described some of her experiences working on Tory election committees in Manitoba.

She stressed that women don't often get involved because they have less discretionary time are afraid to learn "through the action of doing."

Only recently have women become participants in politics.

Women also risk more by a political career according to Hoplock.

Although most women "cannot plan a political career without at least considering their family (they stand to gain personal growth."

Muriel Abdurahman, mayor of Fort Saskatchewan, said she "did not enter politics because she was a woman," but because she "didn't like the way things were done."

She, too, described her participation in various backrooms, both in municipal and provincial politics.

Abdurahman, however, stressed that women who enter politics should not "go in with a chip on their shoulder."

In order to succeed, women's "policies have to be broad," and women's "involvement should be no different than men."

Abdurahman does not believe that the male counterpart in a political arena does not have concerns about family.

She said they have "the same difficulties to face."

But Lobay said establishing contracts is most important since politics is a game of IOU's."

Lobay's advice for anyone wishing to get involved in politics is to join an organization, work hard, be assertive, establish contacts and start collecting IOU's.

Ford, executive assistant to Elmer MacKay, said women's participation in the political process is beyond being a privilege or a right — it is a duty.

"People get the government they deserve," said Ford. Women must therefore be instrumental in "influencing change . . . they've got to be there or it won't happen."

The best way to get involved, according to Ford, is to get organized. "Lobbying done outside the political system is ineffective."

The best approach is the caucus. Canada's 11 million women must organize into concerned, vocal groups who will orient themselves with and present themselves to the political system.

Other ways of getting involved as prescribed by Ford: become a



MP Copps: "Women have to reinforce our own strength."

card-carrying member of a political party, join a constituency association, get involved in a political campaign, develop a high profile and most important, maintain networks as "politics is a game of who you know."

Greco, Alberta floor captain for the John Turner campaign, outlined the power-getting attributes one needs to get into and survive in the political arena: organizational and communicative skills, patience, diplomacy, stamina, assertiveness, and a bit of masochism.

Like Lobay and Ford, Greco insisted that "involvement is a tool for change." Women must "maintain an awareness of social issues," exercise their right to vote and join political parties.

Greco believes women must set themselves up as a "strong opposition" by getting involved in the political process.

Women discussing their experiences in elected office agreed the hardest part of deciding to run was thinking of the prospect of leaving their families, but the Sunday afternoon session focused on sexism.

Edmonton city councillor Jan Reimer said when she was first elected in 1980, the mayor at the time summoned her for a private meeting.

"I thought we were going to discuss policy and issues, but he said, 'don't worry if you cry. Women cry sometimes.'"

"Then he told me not to neglect

my family. So I told him not to neglect his."

But Reimer said women can use patronizing attitudes to their advantage. "When I was pregnant for the first time, I got a lot of things done I wouldn't have otherwise because of my 'delicate' condition."

She said part of the reason there are not more women running for public office is their reluctance.

"Women downplay what they are. They say they don't know enough about politics or economics, but women know as much as any man."

Calgary MLA Janet Koper agreed women should not limit themselves.

She said when she was first elected to the legislature in 1982, the premier asked her to be chair of the Health Services Caucus Committee.

Koper, who had been involved in education for 25 years, said "I felt Health Services was not what I was good at. It was a real shock, but also a real challenge."

She is now thankful she took the job. "You can't just focus on one area."

One of the few Liberals to have survived the Tory tide this summer, Sheila Copps, debunked the myth that women are their own worst enemies.

"It's a myth perpetrated against us to reinforce the idea that women are catty and can't work with each other." Saying most of her support

is from women, Copps added, "Women have to reinforce our own strength."

Copps, regarded as a fast-rising Liberal star, emphasized the value of "a team approach" to politics.

"Women don't have the same access to money as men, so what you lack in finances, you make up for in woman-power."

When Copps was elected to the Ontario legislative opposition in 1981, she was affronted by numerous incidents of sexism.

She said during a heated debate, the Ontario housing minister said Copps "was as bad as (her) predecessor, only better looking."

She also told of incidents when MLAs waged bets on her weight and compared her bustline to that of a Sunshine Girl.

Copps said the attitudes of her colleagues changed when she publicized the incidents in a newspaper article she was asked to write, breaking legislative conventions.

"When you're elected, you are expected to join the club, to be part of the club, to keep in-house stuff in-house."

But she gained even more respect when she ran for the leadership of the Ontario Liberals in 1982.

"When Bob Rae was selected to lead the Ontario NDP at 33, everyone said he was fresh new face," said Copps "but when I ran, people asked if the province was ready for a young woman leader." Copps was 29 when she came in second to David Peterson.

"My colleagues looked at me differently. No longer was I the sweet young thing that was nice to have around. I became a political threat and a threat to men."

She added that women should not be afraid to fight for issues affecting them.

"I fight for women's issues. After all, farmers fight for theirs, unions fight for theirs, business people fight for theirs."

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