

Campaign for an Equal Senate for Canada

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For immediate release

Prime Minister Trudeau urged to create a Senate with equal numbers of women and men

Toronto: Over 80 Canadian women from across the country have signed a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau urging him to ensure that the new process of selecting nominees to the Senate of Canada results in a gender-equal Senate.

Signatories to the letter include former Prime Minister Kim Campbell, former Deputy Prime Minister Sheila Copps; former Attorney General of Ontario, Marion Boyd; Pam Palmater, Chair of Indigenous Governance, Ryerson University; Ratna Omidvar, Chair of Lifeline Syria; former politicians, academics, activists, business women, authors, actors and leaders of organizations.

Following Prime Minister Trudeau's appointment of women to half of his cabinet positions, the group urges him to extend the principle of gender equality to the Senate of Canada and to commit to creating a Senate with equal numbers of women and men.

On December 3, 2015, the federal government announced a new process that it will use to fill Senate vacancies. Advisory Boards with federal and provincial representatives will assess potential candidates according to several criteria, including age, residency, independence, non-partisanship, and others. The document states that "Nominees will be considered with a view to achieving gender balance in the Senate", but it includes no pledge of gender equality.

"The proposal to create a Senate which is independent and non-partisan has the potential of increasing the importance of this institution in the governing of Canada" said Donna Dasko, one of two women who organized the letter campaign. "This makes it even more important that women be fairly and equally represented."

"This is an historic opportunity" said Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, the other organizer of the letter campaign. "We can create a Senate that includes women of diverse backgrounds and we will better reflect the incredible diversity of Canada."

Currently, of the 83 sitting Senators, 30 are women, representing 36 percent of the Senate. There are 22 vacancies, and another 4 retirements scheduled for 2016. Senate equality would be achieved if the 22 current vacancies were filled by women. "We want to reach this goal as soon as possible, and organizations supporting the call for an equal Senate such as the YWCA, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), OCASI and Famous 5 Ottawa are willing to help get the word out about Senate vacancies." said Donna Dasko.

The letter is attached.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Donna Dasko, Ph.D.

Co-Founder and Past National Chair, Equal Voice
donna.dasko@gmail.com or 647 282 5727 (cell)

Ceta Ramkhalawansingh

Former City of Toronto Councillor and former Equity and Diversity Manager, City of Toronto
ceta_r@yahoo.ca or 416 593 2601 (res)