

25 years later, P.E.I.'s 'Famous Five' still push for more women in government ^[1]

Former leaders in Island politics, the women noted the Island hasn't made gains in numbers of elected women

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EXCERPTS

Though they're long retired from life in legislature and governance, P.E.I.'s "Famous Five" are still pushing for more women to enter the political realm.

Only 25 years ago, five women held the most influential and powerful positions in the province with Premier Catherine Callbeck, Opposition Leader Pat Mella, Deputy Speaker Elizabeth Hubley, Speaker Nancy Guptill and Lt.-Gov. Marion Reid at the helm.

Fast forward to today and although there are five women elected to the legislature, and a woman serving as Lt.-Gov. once again, P.E.I. is still far behind in terms of electing women, Hubley says.

"It's not really going the way I would like to see it go, I would like to see more women in politics," she said.

The push to encourage more women to enter politics was noted Friday when the Famous Five were acknowledged by Minister for the Status of Women Paula Biggar, Conservative MLA Darlene Compton and Green Party MLA Hannah Bell.

Though just three of the Famous Five were able to attend House proceedings on Friday, all were recognized for their role as pioneers, mentors and trailblazers to the five current women MLAs.

And in the halls after the sitting, Hubley, Guptill and Mella, the three who attended, had something to say about how the Island can elect more women.

Their answers were largely aimed toward mothers entering politics.

Elizabeth Hubley: Remove evening sittings

When Hubley thinks back to 1993, before they were known as the Famous Five, she didn't realize how much influence the group would have.

"It didn't seem to come through to us that this was as special time but since then, and having events like today, we realize now that women do need encouragement to get into politics," Hubley said.

Her biggest suggestion to get more women, particularly single parents, in politics is for the House to move sitting hours to different times and that evening sittings should be slashed altogether.

[Photo available to view online, "Speaker of the House Nancy Guptill, Lieutenant Governor Marion Reid, Leader of the Opposition Pat Mella, Premier Catherine Callbeck, Deputy Speaker Elizabeth (Libbe) Hubley" June 1993].

"There's a time when children need to have their parents there. It may not be every night but they're pretty consistent with what their needs are," she said.

"When I was in politics, I had six children at home and I certainly have the guilt to go along with that because I missed many things and felt badly about it. I don't think that's the way it should be."

Nancy Guptill: Shorter hours during the day

Unlike Hubley, Nancy Guptill said she never minded the evening sittings and that she, at times, actually preferred them.

She acknowledged that many women considering politics today may prefer that evening sittings were slashed and there should be shorter hours during the day so more time can be spent raising a family.

"Times have changed. I think in my day it was something [you were] expected to do, but I think today younger women want to be home with their children more often than not."

"It would be far better, perhaps, to have the shorter hours."

Pat Mella: Childcare is a barrier

Pat Mella said she was "delighted" to be acknowledged as one of the Famous Five but with just five women elected to legislature 25 years down the road, she, like the Hubley and Guptill, wished more had changed since 1993.

"It's disappointing we don't have more women in the legislature because generally speaking, I think the public would like to see more women in the legislature," she said.

"Hopefully, the numbers will change in the years to come."

While shifting the sitting hours was a point Mella mentioned, she said the biggest issue for women politicians is greater access to childcare.

"The necessity of having good childcare in the province is extremely important and there's lots of areas in the province, I've discovered recently, that don't have enough quality childcare."

Another barrier facing women is a lack of confidence in politicians which, she said, largely stems from the political climate in the United States.

"Unfortunately, politicians are not held in high regard right now ... I think there needs to be a more positive discussion."

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