

Prominent Canadian women urge Trudeau to ensure gender parity in the Senate ^[1]

Author: Chignall, Selina

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A letter signed by 80 prominent Canadian women including former Conservative prime minister Kim Campbell and former Liberal deputy prime minister Sheila Copps is urging Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to ensure the new Senate reform process results in a gender-equal Senate.

For years, Campaign for an Equal Senate co-founder Donna Dasko told iPolitics, she has been working on having gender parity in the Senate. This campaign, she said was inspired by Trudeau's appointment of a gender equal cabinet.

"It's a principle that should be extended to the Senate," Dasko said. "They are appointments after all, like the cabinet," said Dasko, a pollster and former national chair of Equal Voice — an organization that promotes women's involvement in politics.

On December 3, the Liberal government rolled out its plan for Senate reform, which included an advisory board that would assess potential candidates based on a host of criteria: age, non-partisanship, residency and other measures. There was no explicit mention of gender parity except for the recommendation that "nominees will be considered with a view to achieving gender balance in the Senate."

Dasko sent out the signed letter on December 21 to Trudeau and four cabinet ministers: the minister of status of women, the minister of justice and attorney general, the minister of democratic institutions and to the leader of the government in the House of Commons, who Dasko said was the only minister to acknowledge the letter.

When iPolitics asked the PMO about Dasko's letter, Paul Duchesne a spokesperson in the minister of democratic institutions office said in an email: "we share the desire of the signatories to achieve gender balance in the Senate."

"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 Dasko in a press release. "This makes it even more important that women be fairly and equally represented."

Currently, women make up 36 per cent of those appointed to the Senate. There are four retirements scheduled for 2016, and 22 vacancies, the press release said, noting gender parity could be achieved in the Senate if women filled those 22 vacancies.

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