

NIC's Proposal for Equal Participation by Men and Women in the Nunavut Legislative Assembly

In December 1994 the Nunavut Implementation Commission (NIC) released a discussion paper containing a proposal for the make-up of the Nunavut Legislative Assembly. Most of the comments which the NIC has received on the discussion paper have been very positive, however the NIC would like to receive more feedback from the communities before deciding whether to recommend this proposal to the federal government.

The goal of this pamphlet is to summarize the proposal contained in the discussion paper, and to answer some questions about it.

Why does the NIC feel that a proposal for equal participation by men and women in the Nunavut Legislative Assembly is important?

One of the NIC's overall goals is to ensure that both men and women are given every opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of Nunavut society. Equal participation in politics is an important part of this vision. This proposal for the make-up of the legislature is a simple but effective way of achieving that goal.

How would the Legislative Assembly be structured?

Each electoral district would be represented by two members – one male and one female. At election time each voter would cast two ballots – one for a candidate from a list of male candidates, and one for a candidate from a list of female candidates. The male candidate with the most votes and the female candidate with the most votes would both win.

The result would be equal participation by men and women in the Nunavut Legislative Assembly. Another result would be a legislature of between 20 and 24 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) – which most people think is the right size for the Nunavut's legislature.

Would this proposal be more expensive than a legislature with single-member electoral districts?

No. A Legislative Assembly of 20 to 24 MLAs would cost the same no matter how many of the MLAs are men and how many of the MLAs are women.

Could more traditional 'affirmative action' approaches also achieve a balance between men and women in politics?

Past experience suggests not. Many countries have tried various affirmative action measures in politics, but they haven't been very successful. In Canada, the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and New Democratic parties have all tried traditional

'affirmative action' policies – and none of them are even close to having equal participation by men and women. But by having 2 MLAs for each riding, one male and one female, the goal would be achieved simply and efficiently.

Shouldn't MLAs be elected on the basis of merit?

Yes, absolutely. With this proposal all MLAs – both male and female – would be elected on the basis of merit, just as MLAs are today.

Is the NIC making this proposal just to try something different?

No. The NIC developed this proposal as a means of implementing some of its principles. It is true, however, that the residents of Nunavut have a wonderful opportunity to create a government which meets both our needs and our aspirations. This innovative proposal is a way to achieve justice, fairness and equality within the constitutional framework of Canada – the result would be the first legislature in the world with guaranteed equal numbers of male and female representatives, each elected on the basis of individual merit.

Who will decide if this is how the Nunavut legislature will be structured?

If the NIC continues to receive positive feedback from the communities on this proposal, it will recommend it to the federal government. If the federal government approves the proposal it would then have to amend the *Nunavut Act* before equal participation by men and women could be implemented as the basic design of the first Nunavut Legislative Assembly.

How can I learn more about this proposal?

By reading the discussion paper. Inuktitut, English and French copies can be obtained from the NIC's office in Iqaluit. Phone (819) 979-4199 and we'd be happy to send you a copy in the language of your choice.

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