

# Women's election movement crushed modest goals: Green

NWT legislative assembly went from having two women MLAs to nine after 2019 election

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NWT

Efforts to bring more women into the legislative assembly have succeeded beyond expectations, said Health Minister Julie Green.

The minister, who is also MLA for Yellowknife Centre chaired the Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women, which began its work in November of 2018.

That group was formed to examine barriers faced by women considering entering political careers.

At the time, the NWT had the lowest number of female politicians of any Canadian legislature, with just two women in the house, or 10.5 per cent of members.

Among territorial neighbours, in Nunavut there were six MLAs, or 27.3 per cent of the assembly. Yukon had seven women, or 36.8 per cent of MLAs.

"In the original motion to increase the representation of women in the legislative assembly, we set very modest goals for ourselves," Green said. "We hoped to have women represent 20 per cent of MLAs by 2023 and 30 per cent by 2027.

In the seven months the committee was operating, it travelled to 10 communities and met with groups of women to make connections and hear their thoughts on running for public office.

Green herself hosted a campaign school in Yellowknife that ran for six weeks.

"That produced a very tight knit group. Some of them went on to be candidates in the campaign (in 2019). I think the issue got a lot of profile. We've stimulated some interest among women to consider politics as a career."

Though the committee disbanded after it published its final report in June of 2019, its work paid off in the House.

The legislative assembly went from having two women to nine after the election in October of that year.

"I think we got 47 per cent by 2019. That's not what we were expecting. That exceeded my expectations and I was super happy about that. Of the nine women now in the assembly, six are Indigenous. There is good representation. That's how it should be. I'm also happy it wasn't just women from Yellowknife who were elected. There were (also) women from Fort Smith, Inuvik and Norman Wells."

### Lingering election challenges

Among the issues politically-minded women face in the NWT, Green pointed to three challenges.

"There's always a caregiver role question to answer. If you have small children – and in this assembly we do have women with small children – it's challenging to balance that with child care demands. And if they don't live in Yellowknife, having your family in different places can be difficult.

"And I think there are some organizations that haven't had a lot of women in leadership roles. I'm thinking of the Tlicho Government and Sahtu Secretariat. Women haven't always been well represented in those organizations. There still isn't widespread acceptance that it's OK for women to hold leadership roles."

She added that another barrier she learned about when the committee was travelling to the communities is finances, as some political aspirants can't easily afford to fund their campaigns.

One solution to that is a rebate program, Green said.

"The special committee asked if there could be a rebate on campaign expenses. I presented to the committee on rules and procedures and asked if this rebate could go ahead and be available to all



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The woman members of assembly gather in the lobby of the Great Hall. From left to right: Great Slave MLA Katrina Nokleby, Housing minister Paulie Chinna, Thebacha MLA Frieda Martselos, Finance minister Caroline Wawzonek, Kam Lake MLA Caitlin Cleveland, Health Minister MLA Julie Green, Premier Caroline Cochrane, Infrastructure Minister Diane Thom and Inuvik Twin Lakes MLA Lesa Semmler.

candidates, not just women. It supported that recommendation (for the next territorial election). I hope the rebate scheme can be an incentive for women to run. It still has to be debated and either adopted or not."

Under the recommendation, 50 per cent of eligible expenses up to \$5,000 per candidate would qualify for a rebate, a candidate must receive a minimum of five per cent of votes cast in their electoral district, and only cash expenses incurred by the candidate and not offset by fundraising are eligible.

To solidify the success achieved in the 2019 election, Green said the main challenge now is maintaining momentum and sustainability.

More women should be encouraged to think about politics, enrol in campaign schools or find a political mentor.

Funding and programming is available through the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs for hosting campaign schools, she said.

"I'm hoping that communities and women's organiza-

tions apply for that money and get the training in their communities and see if we can influence women in other organizations like school boards or Indigenous govern-

ments. And maybe women who haven't thought about public life or public service can come in for training and have a conversation about it.

"The biggest thing is to

keep women in the pipeline so there are candidates ready to run in the next election. The simple fact is that the more women who run, the more who get elected."



**Celebrate women's achievement.  
Raise awareness against bias.  
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**March 8th is International Women's Day; a day to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.**

On International Women's Day, I encourage all NWT residents to challenge and call out gender bias and inequality and help create an inclusive world.

– A Message from Caroline Wawzonek  
MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN



**#IWD2021 #ChoosetoChallenge**

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"We got 47 per cent by 2019. That's not what we were expecting. That exceeded my expectations and I was super happy about that," said Health Minister Julie Green.