SUMMARY

Women’s representation in Canadian politics has increased significantly since 1921 when the first woman, Agnes Macphail, was elected to the House of Commons. Despite their growing political participation, women represent only 35% of all legislators in Canada,\(^1\) and remain under-represented at all levels of government. Increasing women’s representation in electoral politics is essential because it can lead to greater gender equality and to better social, economic and political outcomes for all Canadians.

During its hearings held in June and September 2018, the Committee received testimony from 10 organizations, 18 individuals and four federal departments and agencies, and received 12 written briefs from individuals and organizations.

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Many factors may deter women from entering electoral politics. For example, despite being actively involved in their communities, women tend to have lower levels of interest in electoral politics compared to men. Furthermore, gendered stereotypes and gender-based discrimination can affect both women’s decisions to enter electoral politics and their experiences as politicians. As a result of these stereotypes or
discrimination, women may lack confidence in their political abilities and may have lower levels of political ambition than men.

Women can also encounter barriers at the recruitment and nomination stages of running for elected office. The Committee heard that efforts to recruit female candidates may be insufficient and that political parties, electoral district associations and search committees can play an important role in the recruitment of female candidates. For instance, the Committee was told that political parties should be examining their recruitment and selection processes to eliminate any sexism and bias that may implicitly be built into these processes and to recruit more women.\(^2\) As well, women may encounter barriers over the course of the nomination and election processes that their male counterparts do not. For example, women might find it more difficult to finance nomination or election campaigns than men because, on average, women earn less than men.

Once elected, women can also encounter barriers that might prevent them from achieving full and equal participation in a legislature. For example, a lack of gender-sensitive and family-friendly facilities, gender-biased media treatment, and gender-based violence and harassment can negatively affect a woman’s experience working in electoral politics.

The Committee’s report provides possible solutions to the barriers women face when entering electoral politics. The recommendations included in the report are intended to provide guidance to the Government of Canada on measures that could be implemented to help improve the representation of women at all levels of electoral politics in Canada. The Committee’s recommendations are intended to:

- improve the collection of intersectional data on women’s political participation;
- shift societal perceptions regarding women’s political participation;
- support organizations and projects that promote the political participation of women from diverse backgrounds;
- encourage political parties to run more female candidates;

\(^2\) FEWO, *Evidence*, 1\(^{st}\) Session, 42\(^{nd}\) Parliament, 5 June 2018, 1640 (Justine Akman, Director General, Policy and External Relations, Office of the Co-ordinator, Status of Women); and FEWO, *Evidence*, 1\(^{st}\) Session, 42\(^{nd}\) Parliament, 14 June 2018, 1625 (Thérèse Mailloux, Chair, Board of Directors, Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie).
• address the gender-biased media treatment of female politicians.

The Committee commends legislatures on their efforts to foster gender-sensitive and family-friendly political workplaces and looks forward to further initiatives in this area.

The Committee believes that the implementation of its recommendations by the Government of Canada and the consideration of its observations will help improve women’s representation, retention and experiences in electoral politics in Canada.