

# Territory lags in women's political representation

*'Ideally we would like more women in the Legislative Assembly,' says Caroline Cochrane*

by Avery Zingel  
Northern News Services  
NWT

Mentorship, public debate and training will be instrumental to improving the NWT's meagre numbers for women's political representation, says MLA Julie Green.

A March 6 motion from Green, backed by Minister Caroline Cochrane supports the goal of increasing women's representation to 20 per cent by 2023 and 30 per cent by 2027.

Women in the NWT represent only 10 per cent of the legislative body, despite making up 48.7 per cent of the population – compared to 26 per cent representation at the federal level.

Top jobs in the North have rarely been held by women, with a number of exceptions including former-MLA Jane Groenewegen and politicians like the late Nellie Cournoyea, who in 1991 became Canada's second female premier.

Since the creation of Nunavut, Cournoyea was the last woman to be elected to a legislative position outside of Yellowknife and Hay River.

"Women have been under-represented, accounting for no more than 15 per cent of members of the legislative assembly in any given assembly," the motion states.

NWT falls shy of UN targets for participation

The United Nations sets targets for boosting the participation of women in policies, seeking a critical mass of 30 per cent.

"The lack of representation by women may have resulted in the creation of legislation and policy that does not take their needs and concerns fully into account, to the detriment of all Northwest Territories residents," said Green.

Green also moved for public debate, training and mentorship to bring more women into leadership roles.

Accessing programs like the Campaign Schools for Women was instrumental in Cochrane's win as MLA Range Lake, she told *News/North*.

The Campaign Schools aim to break down barriers and give women the knowledge they need to break into "traditionally" male roles, said Cochrane.

When the Campaign schools started, it focused narrowly on the legislative assembly,

and have expanded to draw candidates towards municipal governments, and even school boards, she said.

Prior to the existence of the Campaign Schools for Women programs, candidate Nigit'stil Norbert ran her own grassroots campaign in 2015 to unseat long-serving Premier Bob McLeod. Norbert ran independently against McLeod after he was elected uncontested and made premier by acclamation in 2011.

Though McLeod ultimately won the seat, Norbert ran on a platform that sought to address violence against women and Indigenous peoples, and pushed for public influence on whether the fracking industry could set up projects that impact their water and land.

At the time, McLeod told local outlets he was "pleased" to run against another candidate.

"If we don't try, we fail," said Cochrane. "Ideally we would like more women in the legislative assembly."

In fundraising and door-knocking, "some of the barriers are huge," said Cochrane. "Women traditionally don't have a lot of confidence in asking for money."

"Even for myself, when I thought of running for politics, I knew nothing. I don't think I would be where I am today if I didn't take part in the Campaign School. It gave me the tools, knowledge and confidence."

"Women have been socialized to be timid," said Cochrane. "Any time we're assertive, we're frowned upon. Often assertive women are misconstrued as aggressive women."

Women consistently face barriers to equality including living wage, diversity in education, substance abuse, employment and breaking the glass-ceiling, she said.

"Until women are in power and have a voice at the table we will always struggle," said Cochrane.

"We need to push ourselves forward to make sure we have an equal voice. It's not a physical fight, but its a fight that women have been doing for decades," she said.

"I don't want to wait for my grandchild to have to grow up and still have the same battle where she walks into the Leg and there are only two (women) out of 19 (seats). I would like her to notice that half the members are women."

**"Women have been socialized to be timid."**

Caroline Cochrane



**CAROLINE COCHRANE:** said she supports the goal of increasing women's representation in politics.



**JULIE GREEN:** said training will be instrumental to improving numbers for women's political representation.



**NIGIT'STIL NORBERT:** ran her own grassroots campaign in 2015 to unseat long-serving Premier Bob McLeod.

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Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

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