

MLAs support more women in office

Special committee recommends legislature become more family-friendly

by Meaghan Richens
Northern News Services

The legislative assembly passed a series of motions last week aimed at removing barriers that prevent women from running for office.

The recommendations came from the Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly.

The Northwest Territories currently has the lowest number of female politicians of any Canadian legislature, with two women in the house, or 10.5 per cent of mem-

bers, the committee's interim report states.

Comparatively, Nunavut comes in at 27.3 per cent with six female members and Yukon at 36.8 per cent with seven women.

In March 2018, the assembly adopted a motion to increase representation of women in the legislative assembly to 20 per cent by 2023 and 30 per cent by 2027.

Eight months later, the special committee was created to examine the issue and make recommendations to achieve that goal.

The recommendations in the committee's interim report include allowing childcare expenses to be considered part of a constituency work allowance and including childcare as an election expense.

"My further clarification there is that people who claim childcare expenses as part of their constituency work allowances would not receive less of a constituency work allowance; it would be the full amount plus the childcare expenses, so that those with children who are claiming childcare expenses would not be penalized for doing so," said committee chair Julie Green.

Minister Caroline Cochrane is currently the only woman on cabinet. Before she was the minister responsible for the status of women and minister of Education, Culture and Employment, childcare was a barrier for her as a single parent, Cochrane said.

"We now have more single parents," she said. "The



NNSL file photo

Caroline Cochrane is currently the only woman on cabinet. Cochrane is the minister responsible for the Status of Women and minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Julie Green, is chair of the Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women. The committee tabled its interim report in the legislative assembly last week.

majority of them tend to be women, although there are men who are single-parenting as well, so this will be one way of addressing a huge barrier for not only women, but for all single parents."

The report also recommended the GNWT fund more than two campaign schools for women a year; reach communities outside of Yellowknife; provide information about consensus government to any organization involved in educating women; and create a job description for MLAs and ministers.

"The first thing I asked when I became a minister was, 'What is my job description?'" said Cochrane. "I was told, 'You are a minister. You have no job description. You can do what you want.'"

From then on, very quickly, I was told, 'But you can't do that. But you can't do that. But you can't do that.' I am a firm believer that this motion

is critical to not only women, but to all members so that we have a clear idea of what we

can do and what our limitations are."

The committee's recommendations to fund more campaign schools and provide information about consensus government are based on advice received in the communities, and a general feeling that many young women don't consider politics as a viable career.

"This responds to a well-known principle in increasing women's representation, which is that, if women see women in positions of leadership, then they can see themselves

in that position, as well," said Green.

Some of the recommendations focused on making the legislature more family-friendly. They include adding a family room with a change table and allowing up to four months leave with no financial penalty following birth or adoption.

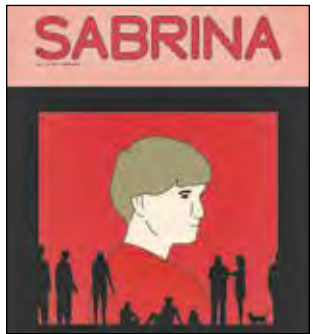
The special committee will continue consultation with public meetings in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk on April 3 and 4, respectively.

The committee is expected to table its final report before the end of the 18th legislative assembly.

SPOTLIGHT on books

with Megan Clark
Yellowknife Public Library

An intimate look at society



Sabrina by Nick Drnaso is not an easy book to read. In fact, if asked to summarize it briefly I would say it is profoundly disturbing. Sabrina tells the story of a missing woman and the devastating and surreal aftermath of her murder, which is broadcast online. The book follows her sister and boyfriend in their grief. Drnaso shows the complexity of grief in the two distinct journeys – the boyfriend, expressing his pain through silence and absence and the sister filled with anger, but ultimately finding relief in community. In a feat of illustration, Drnaso vividly captures their pain and confusion in extremely simple and restrained images.

Sabrina reads like it is from some terrible future, but the story and its characters are very much from today's world – online and off. The book is timely and while a challenging read, it offers a moment in fiction to ruminate about our present state. Drnaso is intimate and unforgiving, serving up an indictment of our current culture of hate, fake-news, and isolation. The book is not absent of hope but it asks an important and difficult question: how do we emerge from the world we've created.

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