



International Women's Day 2019: Women are Done Waiting!

March 8th, International Women's Day, is all about unity, celebration, reflection, advocacy and action. It is a time to honour the women and women's organizations who have tirelessly fought for equality; to celebrate our victories, to connect with those committed to continuing the fight for change, and to raise our voices for justice, equality, and a better future for all women.

We live in interesting times. Federally we have the first ever gender-balanced cabinet. We have a Prime Minister who declares himself a feminist. Here in Newfoundland & Labrador (NL), the cabinet has a new portfolio dedicated to advancing the status of women in our province.

As significant as these decisions are, they do not refute the fact there is still lots to be done, if we are to achieve gender equality.

Although we are 52% of the population, women continue to face inequality in every facet our lives; how we are paid, our access to the services we need, how we are treated at work, at home, in the streets, on the media, and how we are represented in all levels of government.

Some issues, like gender based violence and women's leadership, require a social and cultural change. Government can certainly help us advance these issues by showing their own leadership and acting pro-actively.

There are other issues where government most certainly can and must lead. It is time the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador enacted pay equity legislation, committed to ending the gender pay gap, and increasing the minimum wage to \$15.

The province's own Human Rights Act requires equal pay for equal or similar work. Jobs should be valued based on skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions only. There must be no room for gender discrimination.

Two years ago, a private members bill introduced by NLNDP leader Gerry Rogers, called on the government to take action on pay equity. It was supported unanimously. Yet so far, Government has not begun a process to enact pay equity legislation.

Let's explore some gender-based facts. Today women workers on average, earn 37 per cent less than men. Women make up 66 per cent of the minimum wage workers, earning only \$11.40 an hour. We can't blame this on education. For two decades, the majority of full-time students enrolled in university programs have been women. The majority of the 2017 MUN graduates in disciplines such business, medicine, and science have been women.



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According to the Conference Board of Canada 2017 report on the gender wage gap, NL ranked the worst. “Newfoundland and Labrador (28.9%) gets a “D–“, for having the highest wage gap among all jurisdictions—the gap in weekly full-time earnings between men and women is close to 30 per cent.”

Even more shocking is that we are the only province where the gender wage gap is actually getting wider. “The province’s wage gap in 2016 was over 2 percentage points higher than in 2000.”

How would society and economy benefit if we eliminated the gender pay gap? Here, the Conference Board of Canada is most clear, “Closing the gender wage gap will boost economic growth and have a positive impact on other key societal measures, such as income inequality and poverty.”

Pay equity is ultimately about economic justice for women. When women make less than men over their working lives, they are more likely to live in poverty and end up retiring into poverty.

The short of it is, wage discrimination must end now. We are done waiting. Last year the Federal government introduced pay equity legislation, we are calling on the provincial government to do the same and enact pay equity legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are done waiting for women to be treated fairly and to be given equal opportunity to succeed.

There are many issues where the battle for women’s equality continues, wage discrimination being but one. This March 8th, International Women’s Day, let us find the time to acknowledge those who stood up for women’s rights. Let’s celebrate our accomplishments and commit to advocacy and action by using our power, our activism, and our voices.

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