

Some Early Justification for NDP's Gender Policies

by **Stephen Elliott-Buckley** - Thursday, April 16, 2009

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I saw today three examples that support the need for the BC NDP's affirmative action candidate policies. As much as it has been and will continue to be controversial, today alone justifies it for me.

But first, being in an anti-no-spin zone, my take on this issue is affected by being a white male, with university degrees, raised in an upper middle-class suburban Judeo-Christian, English-speaking home. So of course I lose out on typical affirmative action policies, and I'm fine with that.

As an NDP member and as someone who attended the last convention and voted for the affirmative action policies, it is not because of some kind of male/white/oppressor guilt. It is because breaking generations-long sociological trends can take generations without some intervention.

Not everyone was ready to stop owning people 240 years ago, nor was everyone ready to let non-whites drink out of whites-only public drinking fountains 40-odd years ago. We could have waited for multi-generational educational programs to make the glacial change necessary, while watching old bigots slowly die off.

Honestly, I don't have that kind of patience.

And when David Chudnovsky decided to not run again as my MLA, I was saddened at what would be the end of his accomplishments and his future potential in the ledge. But I also know that over a dozen women were approached to consider running for his seat, and every single one of them had the qualities to be a successful MLA. But how many of them would have considered it if men were allowed to run? That we'll never know for sure, but ask around and you'll find that a few probably wouldn't have.

So what did we lose with the new policy? People of my demographic weren't able to run and that left us in the end with Mable Elmore and Jinny Sims to choose from. Quite a fantastic choice. Each signed up over 500 new members in the riding and were an example of on-the-ground democracy in action for 6 months leading up to the nomination meeting. It was an embarrassment of riches since either would be a fantastic MLA.

As far as I can see, Vancouver-Kensington will not suffer under this policy and I expect that with hard work and dedication of already dozens of committed volunteers and staff, the NDP will keep the riding, for many many reasons.

So what happened today to further vindicate this policy for me?

The Victoria *Times-Colonist* perpetuated sexist reporting yesterday in [remarking on how Carole James "looked comfortable in a brown suit and silver earrings as she began her campaign."](#) The story neglected to comment on how comfortable or uncomfortable Gordon Campbell looked wearing his business suit.

Perhaps the premier was wearing jewelry too, but we'll never know now, nor will we know if that made him more or less comfortable.

Then in the comments section of a *Vancouver Sun* piece today on the carbon tax, [this unenlightened soul wrote about Carole James "Has anybody else noticed that Carole James starts every sentence with the same two words \(Gordon Campbell\)? Thank you for repeatedly reminding us that Gordon Campbell is our current premier. I do believe I shall vote for him in May. Now run along in your Hillary Clinton-esque pant suits and go celebrate your much-anticipated 2nd place finish with your union buddies."](#) No spin necessary here. If you don't get my point, you can stop reading right now.

And finally tonight on Vaughn Palmer's *Voice of BC* show there was discussion of the new candidate policy and how it is being received. To wrap the short conversation on that topic, Palmer mentioned that the Liberals have about two dozen female candidates, to which he added, "and that's not bad for them." Two dozen is [just about right when you look at their list](#).

Wow. What an astonishing accomplishment getting around two dozen of 85 candidates to be women.

I don't mind spinning this if it isn't obvious. No one expects much from a radically right wing party like the neoLiberals in terms of authentic representation, particularly in representing the majority gender of the province. So Palmer is giving a nod to the efforts of the neoLiberals for accomplishing that much anyway. And he's absolutely right when he said that's not bad for them. It isn't bad...for them. But they are a party that is as far from egalitarian in policy and procedure as we have ever seen in BC. And if they are any kind of benchmark we should be seeking, then we are criminally deluded.

In light of these three instances alone, and even without how wonderful it was to choose from two fantastic contenders in Vancouver-Kensington, as a member of the demographic unable to run for the party nomination, I do not begrudge the policy at all and I'm glad I voted for it at the last convention.

Further, I expect it will change the face of the ledge and legitimize in bigots', cynics' and anyone's mind that women can do the job.

And while all the arguments about negative consequences and precedents of affirmative action policies still have merit, a little tweaking now and again can vindicate itself substantially. And I know that the ends justifying the means are not always a strong argument to promote, but inaction is itself a choice with political ramifications. After all, in the STV referendum we are tinkering with our 19th century electoral system that was designed for two broad-based parties that fight for seats. Our population and society don't reflect that party norm today, and frankly the two parties did a poor job of representing everyone 140 years ago anyway.

So while there will continue to be great arguments against this policy, I've found great peace in supporting it so far and I look forward to the day when my idealism is better realized and we can do away with this tweaking because our political culture will have become less bigoted.