Introductory remarks

Mary Clancy

I remember being at an international conference of female parliamentarians that was organized by the United Nations. At this conference we decided that there were three major blockages to women's participation in political life. The first, the perennial, was always money. We are lucky in Canada that we have spending limits on election campaigns. We are not lucky because we do not have spending limits on the pre-election process which is where so much of the decision-making is done. The second blocking factor was the responsibilities of women. It's the problem of the "sandwich generation," the people who are responsible for kids, the people who are responsible for parents, the people who are responsible for the good works in their communities. The third blocking factor - and this is the one that I felt was perhaps the highest hurdle - was the invasion of privacy. It's the attacks by the press and the attacks by other political partisans on a non-policy basis over and over again. And we heard about it from women at the United Nations conference over and over again; it didn't matter which country you came from. I remember a woman from Cameroon sitting next to me and saying, "This was the thing I found the hardest to overcome." So whether you are in Central Africa or North America that issue came up. It came up again and again when Dawn Black (NDP Member of Parliament), Barbara Greene (PC Member of Parliament) and I traveled up and down this country doing seminars for an organization called "Winning Women" in the early 1990s. The same questions kept coming up at the seminars with prospective candidates: How do you stand the press scrutiny? How do you stand the attacks? For the majority of women, that is still the major hurdle.

I have just come back from four years as the Canadian Consul-General for New England in Boston. The current Governor of Massachusetts is a woman named Jane Swift. Now, on a policy basis Jane and I would probably disagree on a number of things, but the press and the public hardly ever attack Jane on her policies; they attack her because when she was pregnant with twins, the doctors said she needed to have bed rest. So she went into the hospital and they attacked her for conducting the Governors' Council meeting by speakerphone. A very good friend of mine is Jeanne Shaheen, who is the Governor of New Hampshire. Again, the attacks on Jeanne have very little to do with her policy decisions. This is the thing that we have to get past.

Rosemary Brown (NDP legislator and leadership candidate) used to tell a wonderful story about [columnist] Allan Fotheringham. He never wrote about her policies, but he always described what she was wearing. They were on a television show in Vancouver and before he could get a word in edgewise, she leaned over to him and said into the microphone for all to hear: "Allan, I just want you to know, I have made a new will and I am leaving you all my clothes." Rosemary said that she could have appeared in public wearing a barrel after that and Fotheringham would not have mentioned it.

My background in politics is federal rather than provincial, and there is a reason for that. They are two very different realms. I remember being on a "Winning Women" panel in Halifax with Alexa McDonough when she was a provincial Member in Nova Scotia. The panel also included Sandi Jolly, and another woman who was a cabinet minister in the Buchanan government. The other three women talked about how they hated the Nova Scotia legislature, and I can remember thinking, "Oh God, I love the House of Commons." And so did most of my female colleagues in the House. The difference was that we had hit critical mass, which made it better. One day in the House, the Deputy Speaker, who was my roommate, Shirley Maheu, was signaling to me to approach the Chair. I went up to see what she wanted, and she said, "Look around." It was an ordinary Supply day; it wasn't any special "women's debate," but every member in the House was female. Shirley was in the Chair, my classmate was Deputy Clerk, and all the pages were female. That was a very peaceful day in the House of Commons.

But it's getting worse when we're outside "the presence of women." Women have, I think, to a degree, lost that fire during the past ten years or

so. I was involved in the Women's Parliamentary Association, and that has died. The only thing that keeps me going is the bill that Dawn Black, Mary Collins and I put through the House of Commons to establish a permanent memorial for the Polytechnique women [fourteen engineering students murdered in Montreal on December 6, 1989]. It is still being adhered to. I am not sure if that memorial would have happened if it were not law.

Let me throw another idea out. I think it is a problem that a national voice for women does not exist anymore, and I refer directly to the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). When I started in politics in the 1970s, NAC could speak with credibility for Canadian women from coast to coast because its membership was very broadly based. I don't know if its membership is still, at least on paper, that broadly based. But I do know - and I do not like the expression "mainstream women" - that many women feel, not uncomfortable with what NAC is proposing, but not welcome in NAC because they do not fit a certain profile. Just as the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women was muzzled, so too is NAC marginalized because not enough women support it.

I read Judy Rebick's book *Imagine Democracy*. It made me so mad that I practically went through the roof reading it. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can have an influence, but you also have to remember that Judy Rebick ran for an [NDP] nomination in 1988 and lost. She thinks that it's much more sensible to get involved in an NGO and influence policy from the outside. She cites examples of how she, as President of NAC, had far more influence on pieces of legislation that were passed than any mere backbench Member, but that is not true. I might add this was my time in Parliament that she wrote about. As President of NAC, Judy did have influence - no question. Sometimes the influence may have been negative, sometimes it may have been positive, but she did have influence. Both Kim Campbell when she was Minister of Justice, and the Chrétien government, consulted NAC and listened to NAC on a number of bills, particularly in the areas of gun control and gender legislation. But so were backbench MPs important. Shaughnessy Cohen was an MP who died several years ago on the floor of the House of Commons, and she was my best friend. We would not have gun control legislation in Canada today if it were not for Shaughnessy, who was a backbench MP. To get that legislation passed, she worked the consensus between rural and urban members which - believe me - was not easy. With the greatest of respect, there was a problem in the NDP caucus because of the West/East split. Bill Blaikie [NDP member for Souris River] is a close good friend of mine. I was heckling him one day in the House, and he came over to say, "Stop heckling me." I said, "Change your vote and I will stop heckling you." The point is that these issues are very, very difficult. While NGOs can have terrific influence, you've got to pass the legislation in the House of Commons to make it work and you've got to do it with the support of backbench MPs. For all my great respect for Judy Rebick, and for all my understanding that people are turned off the parliamentary process, they have to learn that if you do not have the process, we have anarchy.

I don't think there is a woman here that has not met the "old guard." I have been through several revolutions in politics and there is still an onus on women to organise, to get in there and oust some of the "old guard." We are going in a circle because it requires confidence; it requires knowledge; and it requires guts. But sometimes the mountain looks a little too high at times. Alexa [McDonough] came up through the ranks; I came up through the ranks; there are all kinds of women who have come up through the ranks. It ain't easy, but it is possible. Many men do not come up through the ranks either. But I do know that there are a number of men, certainly at the federal level, who don't have much party background. I personally think it is a detriment not to have some party background because if you don't have a party background you don't know where the sharks are in the water. I don't think it is a bad thing to recruit out [of the Party]; I don't think it is a bad thing to recruit in. There are certain pockets [of resistance] where we can't come through the ranks, but that is not to say that [those pockets] are all pervasive because there are areas where you can. All you need is the hide of a rhinoceros and the patience of Job. I don't think there is a person who is a card-carrying member of a political party that has not heard complaints about people feeling sidelined within their riding associations, and only being called when the party needs help during an election campaign. But if you really want to get involved and you really want to make a difference, you

cannot wait to be asked. If you wait to be asked, you'll linger on the vines until you fall off and rot. Do not - I repeat, do not - wait to be asked.

Certainly in my riding association, we always had a search committee. The Leader signs the nomination papers, and the Leader has a right to decide whether or not he wants a certain person on his team. But, in general, unless the riding nominates someone whose views are offensive to party policy (and some of them are), the Leader is not going to give you a problem.

Let me give you an example of the problems that can arise. In Nova Scotia in 1993, Roseanne Skoke was elected on the Liberal ticket in Central Nova. She got elected because we had not elected a Liberal in Central Nova since Confederation and none of us on the central campaign committee thought we had a chance of winning that riding. We were not paying a whole lot of attention; I still blame myself for not paying a whole lot of attention. [In 1997], Roseanne Skoke was challenged and defeated at the nomination, and I was very happy. We can't say that all women are going to think the same way and still be feminist. There are sometimes people who deserve to be challenged. Skoke got challenged; men get challenged too. It's part of the democratic process and this is why I am not in favour of certain protections for women candidates. I didn't even like appointments [of women candidates without a nomination vote] as much as it did get us Jean Augustine and a number of other very good MPs. I am not in favour of it because, over the long haul, it creates a riding that is considered, by some, to be second-class. And that is a battle you fight through the whole four or five years of the mandate.

It has been suggested that if you are not bringing something different, as a woman, to the table, why are you there? While I agree with that [point of view] to a great degree, we have to be very careful. I am no fan of Margaret Thatcher or Elizabeth Dole or Condoleezza Rice, but I think there is an inherent difference in each of them that they bring to the table. We have to be very careful not to say to women with whom we disagree on a policy level: "You are not bringing something different to the table." The whole essence of democracy is the right to disagree. Now I disagree with [some of] you profoundly on the question of whether or not we would be at war [in Afghanistan] if women were in charge. If I were in charge, we probably would be at war. I believe what happened at the World Trade Center deserved a response and I know many women that agree with that. We have to be very careful not to de-feminize each other because of opinions. We have to be very careful not to diminish the person with whom we profoundly disagree.