

## Liberals work for support of women

### Female vote not a sure thing, they say Event raises cash to help send delegates

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OTTAWA—Federal Liberals, on the verge of choosing a new leader, say they have to re-earn the women's vote and can't simply assume the "gender gap" will keep working in their favour at the ballot box.

At a gathering in Ottawa last night to help finance women delegates, who will make up 50 per cent of the Liberal representatives choosing a leader in Montreal on the first weekend in December, leadership hopefuls Martha Hall Findlay and Gerard Kennedy said the party can't take for granted its traditional support from women.

"We want to go to Canadians and say, 'We want you to vote for us because we re-earned the right to govern,'" said Hall Findlay, the sole woman remaining in the contest, "because we, male and female, all of us together, in a united way, will be able to take this country into the future, not like this current government we have now."

Former Ontario education minister Kennedy, also at the meeting at an Ottawa restaurant last night, told reporters that Liberals can't take the women's vote for granted.

"I think, like a number of things that have traditionally been in our favour, we're on the cusp of losing unless we produce. Unless we produce an environment that women as a whole want to participate in and lead, I think we're going to have difficulty."

There is some belief in Liberal circles that the current Tory slide in the polls can be attributed to the loss of support among Quebecers and women, who are more uncomfortable with the hard line being shown on issues like the military and the environment.

In fact, polling by SES Research over the past few months shows that it's men, far more than women, who have been deserting the Conservatives as Tory numbers fell this fall. Most polls are showing the Liberals and Tories basically equal in public-opinion standings.

"I've taken a look at the ballot by gender and it looks like the Conservatives lost most of their support over the past 90 days among men," SES president Nik Nanos says in a new posting on his website. "Back in August the Conservatives had a 13-point advantage over the Liberals among men. ... that advantage has been cut in half to about six points."

Belinda Stronach, the Aurora MP and former Tory who's been the butt of some sexist remarks this fall by members of her old party, also spoke to the gathering. She says there's been an upside to all the controversies, from Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay referring to her as a dog in the Commons, to Alberta Premier Ralph Klein using Stronach's sex life as the punchline in an off-colour joke.

"When I wake up in the morning, I say, 'Oh my goodness, what next?'" Stronach said. "But, if there is a silver lining, it's that it gives us a chance to talk about how we can get more women involved in the political process, to run or to be involved."

Last night's gathering was put together by Liberals, mainly from leadership contender Bob Rae's camp, to help defray some of the costs for women who might have difficulty getting to the Montreal convention. The delegate fee is \$995

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and that doesn't cover the cost of travel or accommodation.

Meanwhile, commissions and provincial wings of the party have proposed 135 policy resolutions to debate at the convention, Canadian Press reports. They range from proposals to resurrect previous Liberal plans to more controversial proposals to legalize marijuana and lower the age of consent for consensual anal sex.

Not all the resolutions will get a full airing, and only those approved by the full convention will become party policy.



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