

# Editorial

*The Opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect those of the staff of this production, or of the Student Union.*

If you've been conscious of the world around you for the past few months you know that Canada is once again preoccupied with its constitution. A while back the Prime Minister, his sidekick Joe Clark, and a plethora of provincial politicians finally came to some kind of agreement on the fabled document. With much fanfare the deal was trumpeted as a breakthrough and the "New Fathers of Confederation" dropped by our fair province to dot the "i"'s and cross the "t"'s on the paper, christening the agreement "The Charlottetown Accord" in reverent memory of the founding of Canada. The whole spectacle may be either inspiring or nauseating to you depending on your point of view, but the deal itself is not what I had in mind for dissecting this week (there's still weeks before we vote on it); what interests me at this exact moment is the new Senate proposed in the "Charlottetown Accord," and more specifically how P.E.I. and other provinces are considering the selection of their senators.

The new Senate has been heralded as a victory for the western provinces and the other have-nots of the provincial power sharing structure, since in the Senate each province will be given six senators, but it's not quite the "Triple-E" (equal, elected and effective) senate dreamt of by the departing Don Getty and his cohorts. It is equal in numbers among the provinces, but it's effectiveness is debatable (it'd need a joint majority with the House of Commons to ultimately defeat a bill) and the elected aspect of the deal didn't quite happen. Largely as yet another concession to Quebec the deal allows provinces to appoint their own senators if they wish, and therein lies the rub of recent discussions on P.E.I.: whether or not we should guarantee half our senate seats for women. Some provinces have already resolved to set aside half the new positions for women, and other provinces, including P.E.I., are debating whether or not to follow suit. Premier Joe Ghiz, the Artful Dodger himself, has yet again avoided taking a stand in public and has left the decision to be debated by our M.L.A.'s (let them suffer the slings and arrows of outraged voters). That lets Golly-Gee-Ghiz off the hook, but the question remains: should we set aside half the senate seats for women?

Heck, no! No one can deny that there's a staggering gap between male and female representation in Parliament, a tiny female membership in marked contrast to the fact that women make up the majority of our population, but quota systems aren't the way to make up for that. However well-intentioned they may be, "equal opportunity" moves such as this only limit the opportunities of qualified candidates by reserving positions for certain types of individuals regardless of their qualifications. It's actually condescending to women and to politicians of all gender making the assump-

tion that one only has the knowledge to speak for constituents of his or her own gender, presuming a gender bias in all men and women. It risks the view of women's role in parliament being restricted to "women's issues," like childcare and abortion, and to remember the people for a moment it decrees that some constituents are only allowed to choose their representatives from a select group. Quota systems limit everyone's opportunities by setting limits, and only a limited thinker would suppose otherwise.

Even female senator Pat Carney herself recently denounced the "gender parity" idea as impractical, saying that she would want herself and other elected officials to be elected on their own merits; if not, how could such officials be taken seriously even if they are deserving of their positions? A wiser strategy would be to work to include women in the recruitment and sponsorship of candidates, so as to allow a greater number of women entry into politics rather than forcing the existing female politicians into positions of authority that they may or may not deserve. Our new senators have the potential to be a voice in Ottawa, however small, but if we send a handful of tokens we won't get anywhere but the subway.

Sean McQuaid  
Editor for all

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