

# The disAbility Lens

A newsletter of the NDP Persons Living with disAbilities Committee  
DECEMBER 3, 2014



## The view from here

Jan Zawilski and Teresa Daw, Co-Chairs

The Persons Living With disAbilities Committee (PLWDC) of the Federal NDP is proud to launch its first newsletter on this International Day of Persons With Disabilities (December 3rd, 2014). We want to recognize the solidarity of the NDP with people living with disabilities. The NDP is the only federal political party with a standing committee that focuses on disability-related issues. The NDP is also the only party with constitutional provisions for the representation of persons with disabilities on the Federal Executive and the Federal Council. This structure ensures that the lens of disability is applied to the activities, policies and decisions of the party.

As part of our mission, the PLWDC pro-actively promotes the inclusion, equity and interests of people with visible and invisible disabilities within all aspects of the Party and Canadian society. In 2013, we completed a survey of Federal NDP members who had identified to the Party that they lived with a disability. This survey provided the basis for a comprehensive report on the characteristics, perceptions, policy priorities and political involvement of NDP members with disabilities in view of the 2015 elections. We've led productive discussions on this report with Party Leadership, MPs and senior staff, who see the work ahead.

To further sharpen the view of disability issues, we meet and



NDP Persons Living with disAbilities Committee Co-Chairs, Jan Zawilski from Drummondville, Quebec and Teresa Daw from Peterborough, Ontario

correspond regularly with the NDP Disability Issues Critic and with the Leader's Office to advise and advocate on policy and legislative issues. Recurring topics of discussion include the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, employment, income security such as CPP Disability Pensions and the Disability Tax Credit, the Canada Post and Via Rail cut backs, the challenges with the RDSP, and political participation of people living with disabilities.

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To focus our work, we adopted an ambitious Strategic Plan and have already accomplished a number of our objectives. Our new meeting guidelines improve participation in our cross-country telephone conference calls and ensure that accessibility needs are met adequately. Our advocacy for an accessibility audit of the NDP website resulted in improvements to the site. Changing the French name of the committee to “Comité des personnes en situation de handicap” (Committee of people in disabling situations) better reflects how disability is talked about in Quebec and attracts more interest.

Another part of our mission is to support the NDP’s electoral success and vision of a more just,

equal and sustainable Canada. With the 2015 election on the horizon, we successfully advocated for improved accessibility at nomination meetings (see below). The Co-Chairs also mobilised their counterparts in the other equity-seeking committees and commissions (visible minorities, LGTB, youth, aboriginal people and women) to lead a change in the proposed look of NDP candidates. In addition to the long-standing goals held for women candidates, the NDP now holds as a goal that 30% of all candidates in winnable ridings will be persons from equity-seeking groups (up from 15%).

From our perspective, one of the ways to see more people with disabilities running for office is for people with disabilities to be actively involved with candidate recruitment. The PLWDC has

a sub-committee searching for potential candidates right across the country. If you know a person with a disability who would make a good NDP MP, please send us an email.

We also believe that if we want NDP candidates who reflect us as people living with disabilities, we need to financially support the campaigns and disability-related costs of candidates with disabilities. And it is with that view to the future that the PLWDC has launched the enAble Fund to provide such support. Your donations to this initiative will make a real difference.

As New Democrats, our vision is for an accessible, inclusive Canada that offers equal opportunities to citizens of all abilities. We welcome you to join us in the view from here! ■

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# Equal participation at nomination meetings

## **Accessibility at Nomination Meetings**

Nomination meetings are to be accessible to all party members who are eligible to vote. Once your Electoral District Association (EDA) notifies you of the date, time and place of the meeting to elect the NDP candidate for your EDA, just call or email the contact person with your accessibility needs.

## **Voting at Nomination Meetings**

If you are an NDP member who is eligible to vote and you require assistance to mark your ballot at the nomination meeting, a Balloting Committee member or a person of your choice may mark your ballot in accordance with your wishes.

## **Voting if you are unable to leave your home**

If you are an NDP member who is eligible to vote and you are unable to leave your home for medical or other reasons related to a disability, contact your Electoral District Association once you receive notice of the nomination meeting. They will make provisions so that you are able to vote and so that your vote remains secret. ■



## Critic's corner

**Mike Sullivan, MP York South-Weston  
and NDP Critic for Disability Issues**

My office has been engaged in a number of initiatives in the House of Commons involving persons with disabilities – here is a brief rundown:

**1.** Earlier in May, following discussions with the Persons Living with disAbilities Committee (PLWDC), I tabled a motion (M-509) in the House of Commons to have the government review, in consultation with Elections Canada and disability groups, the U.K. Access to Elective Office Strategy, which provides assistance to persons living with disabilities seeking elective office. We hope to learn what can be done to assist persons with disabilities to participate in our democratic processes on a more equal footing.

**2.** Also in June (again at the instigation of the PLWDC) I tabled a motion (M-523) in the House of Commons to have the government work with the provinces & territories, disability organizations, human rights groups and other organizations to fully implement the United Nations Convention

on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), including (among other things) designating an independent monitoring mechanism to chart progress here.

**3.** As a follow-up to this, I will be writing to the Hon. John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to ask that he approach the United Nations to ask for the Special Rapporteur on Disability to make an official visit to Canada to assess our progress in meeting the UNCRPD.

**4.** The government's plans to halt home mail delivery by Canada Post has created a significant public backlash, particularly due to the problems that seniors citizens and persons with disabilities will face in accessing the community mailboxes. I (and other NDP MPs) have raised this issue in the House a number of times, most recently (October 21) in light of the court challenge (involving, among others, a number of disability groups) that has been made to this ill-considered government initiative.

**5.** Through the work of my colleagues at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with

Disabilities we learned of the tremendous backlog of cases (14,677!) at the Social Security Tribunal – the body that hears appeals of Canadians on matters relating to CPP, etc., many of whom are persons with disabilities who are seeking their just entitlement to benefits. On

November 19 I asked the Minister of Employment & Social Development (Hon. Jason Kenney) when this backlog would be cleared, and, while committing to no specific date, he did assure me that the government would move to reduce this backlog.

**6.** In recognition of International Day of Persons with Disabilities (on December 3rd) I will be making a Statement in the House of Commons on the progress (and lack of) regarding Canada's commitment to the UNCRPD.

I welcome any and all comments on issues facing Parliament on disability matters – please contact me at: Mike Sullivan, MP York South-Weston, House of Commons, Ottawa ON K1A 0A6 (no postage required) or by e-mail at [mike.sullivan@parl.gc.ca](mailto:mike.sullivan@parl.gc.ca) ■

# Political participation and people living with disabilities

Jan Zawilski

The fact that very few persons living with disabilities (PLWD) in Canada are elected to our country's legislatures reflects the presence of numerous barriers to their participation in this important dimension of the democratic process. For example, only 2 of the 308 members of the current Canadian Parliament are known to be living with a disability, or less than 1%. This is in sharp contrast with the number of PLWD who account for 14% of the Canadian population. The Persons Living With disAbilities Committee (PLWDC) of the Federal NDP has been looking into the various obstacles facing PLWD in this area and the solutions that should be implemented to foster greater political participation.

Deciding to run for public office requires not only a big personal time commitment but financial

resources, social networks and social capital. However, PLWD are far more likely to have lower incomes, circumscribed social networks and limited social capital. Moreover, PLWD may require specific disability-related accommodations to allow them to participate on the same basis as citizens without disabilities (for example, ASL, CART, Braille, adapted transportation, accompaniment, plain language, etc.). The cost of these accommodations can also negatively impact a decision to run for public office. Support measures are required at several stages to level the playing field and facilitate political involvement.

The obstacles are particularly acute when seeking the nomination to become a candidate for any Party in any federal electoral district. The person must gather

their own resources and supports. Under Canadian election laws, political Parties cannot provide any financial support to a nominee for candidate, not even to help the person with disability-related accommodation needs. In other words, levelling the playing field for nominees for candidate is not legally allowed.

In the United Kingdom, a special fund exists to support PLWD with accommodation needs at this stage of political involvement. Mike Sullivan, NDP Disability Issues Critic and Member of Parliament for York South-Weston, tabled a motion last May in the House of Commons asking the Government to examine this situation with reference to the UK strategy and to determine the pertinence of establishing a similar measure in Canada.

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## ENABLING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Inspired by Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Forum 29 was a non-partisan event held in Halifax in May 2014 to discuss enabling persons with disabilities to participate in public and political life in Nova Scotia and Canada. A comprehensive report can be found here:

[disability.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/Forum29%20Final%20Accessible.pdf](http://disability.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/Forum29%20Final%20Accessible.pdf)

## Political participation and people living with disAbilities

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Once a candidate is nominated by an Electoral District Association (EDA) of a Party, the EDA (and the central Party) can provide support for the election campaign and for disability-related costs. However, as discussed earlier, campaign fundraising may already be a challenge for many PLWD as it is for some EDAs. Disability-related costs can pose an additional challenge. This reality is one of the major motivations behind the creation of the enAble Fund by the PLWDC to support NDP candidates with disabilities (see below).

If the candidate wins an election, the issue of disability-related accommodation needs may persist. In this case, adequate supports and resources may be required to permit the new Member of Parliament to fulfil their responsibilities. Accommodation needs must be met. Any associated disability-related costs must be distinguished from general costs assumed by all Members of Parliament. In order to level the playing field at this stage, a Member of Parliament with a disability should never have to use

resources provided for the purpose of fulfilling their responsibilities to pay for their disability-related needs.

Of course, political participation does not limit itself to the situations described above. The PLWDC is continuing an analysis in this area and advocating for solutions. We invite you to bring your concerns and ideas to our attention. ■

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## enAble Fund

With a view to enabling more people with disabilities to engage in the electoral process and to run as candidates for the NDP, the NDP Persons Living With disAbilities Committee (PLWDC) is proud to launch the enAble fund.

This fund will provide financial support to NDP candidates living with visible and invisible disabilities.

Non-incumbent candidates with disabilities will be eligible to receive financial support toward general campaign expenses as well as disability-related costs. Incumbent candidates with disabilities will be eligible for funds to help them cover disability-related costs.

If sufficient funds are available, financial support may be made

available to any NDP candidate for campaign expenditures on activities or items which are intended to increase or enable engagement with persons living with disabilities.

Contribution to this fund can be made through the NDP website: [action.ndp.ca/page/contribute/2014-plwd-en](http://action.ndp.ca/page/contribute/2014-plwd-en) ■

Contact Us

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