

EQUALITY

Political boot camp aimed at recruiting more women

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We've come a long way, baby, but women still haven't laid claim to the number of legislative seats that should be rightfully theirs.

Females make up 51 per cent of the population, but account for less than 25 per cent of the elected positions in Canada.

It's an issue Richmond East Liberal MLA Linda Reid is working to rectify this weekend when she co-chairs the Women's Campaign School, a non-partisan, non-issue-based political boot camp.

It's aimed at getting women elected in all levels of government.

"There are still people today who believe politics isn't a woman's game," said Reid, who arrived in Victoria in 1991. "You'd be surprised at the number of people who have asked if I'll be resigning after I have my second child."

Although she's due Sunday, Reid doesn't intend to let baby number two derail her political career. Juggling motherhood and her duties as MLA can be tough, but it's possible.

And, she warned, any political area

occupied entirely by men wouldn't be something voters would want to see.

"Men do this job with bluster; women get down and problem solve," she said. "What you do, what you accomplish, resonates more with women than just having a great debate about it. I believe the public wants problem-solving politicians."

Campaign school teachers are experienced politicians who provide first-hand knowledge of winning campaign strategies, fundraising, harmonizing politics and family, back-room politics, and the necessity for an equal voice in government.

Reid estimated 20 per cent of the program's graduates have gone forward to launch successful election campaigns.

"It's like getting 72 hours of very extensive tutelage," Reid said.

So why aren't their more females in politics? Reid can't answer that question. If she could, a Women's Campaign School wouldn't be necessary.

And it's not that there isn't interest. Reid said female candidates abound



Bourque

and often file their election papers. But then something happens.

"The nomination process can be fierce and many don't make it past it," she said.

Veteran Richmond school trustee Sandra Bourque said women are often deterred from politics due to their role as parents.

It's that time spent in the home, caring for children, that can put women at a disadvantage when it comes to campaign time.

As political wins are weighed heavily in favour of those with a strong base of support, those who have career and contacts outside the home can then rally that support during an election.

"Women, to the same extent, are not out and about so much in the corporate and business world," Bourque said.

And while a gender imbalance may exist in city, provincial and federal politics, Bourque said the issue doesn't exist at the school-board level.

"I think women are represented by more than 50 per cent on the boards I've been on," she said.