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# OPINION: It's about time

*Biggar*  
*2.5.18*  
*EM*

The Guardian  
 Published: Apr 06 at 9:24 a.m.

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Dawn Wilson is executive director of the P.E.I. Coalition for Women in Government Guardian File photo

## Changes to support the full participation of women and underrepresented groups in legislature

BY DAWN WILSON

GUEST OPINION

As the spring session of the Legislative Assembly of P.E.I. begins, the Coalition for Women in Government is looking forward to increased action in the area of equity and inclusion for women and diverse groups in P.E.I. Too often, efforts to increase the number of women and underrepresented groups in elected office falls to individuals, but the reality is the legislature and MLAs have an important role to play in ensuring the Legislative Assembly of P.E.I. is accessible and welcoming to people of all genders and backgrounds.

Looking ahead to the spring sitting, the coalition is hopeful that MLAs will use the opportunity to support policies and practices that create environments where women are better able to make their voices heard.

Of course, women are already using their voices through movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp, which have shed light on the realities women face in everyday life, particularly in the workplace. Women are bravely coming forward to share their experiences of sexual harassment within male-dominated spaces, which includes parliaments across the country. All women deserve to work in safe and respectful workplaces, and that includes Legislatures. In the spring sitting of the P.E.I. legislature, the coalition calls on MLAs to adopt clear sexual harassment policies that contribute to safer environments for elected and unelected women.

Adopting family-friendly practices is another way legislatures can better meet the needs of women and MLAs of all genders. The current evening hours of the legislature are an example of a practice that requires modernization. Evening hours of the legislature were originally designed to accommodate the passenger-train schedule. Despite the elimination of passenger trains in the 1960s, the evening hours have barely been tweaked since then.

Although gender roles are changing, a recent survey by the coalition found that women continue to disproportionately bear the responsibility for child and elder care in Island homes. As a result, many women wait until their children are grown before running for office. Many levels of elected office in P.E.I. and beyond are missing the voices and experiences of people with young children, especially women.

How can MLAs better support young parents' participation? They can start by supporting Motion 32, put forward by Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, Paula Biggar, which proposes to restructure the sitting times to better accommodate women, men and people of all genders with young children - and not to mention MLAs who travel from rural communities.

To bring P.E.I. in line with other jurisdictions across Canada and to accommodate daycare centre hours, the coalition recommends retaining the same total number of sitting hours, but with all sitting times ending at 5:00 p.m. This is not a radical change. It will not decrease the number of hours MLAs work, but it will help encourage a greater diversity of candidates.

Legislatures were created at a time when women didn't have the right to vote and were not even considered persons under the law. It's not surprising then that some of the features of the institution need to be updated to attract more diverse people. It's time for changes that

support the full participation of women and underrepresented groups. The coalition looks forward to collaborating with MLAs during this sitting to take action on equity and inclusion.

***Dawn Wilson is executive director P.E.I. Coalition for Women in Government***

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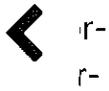
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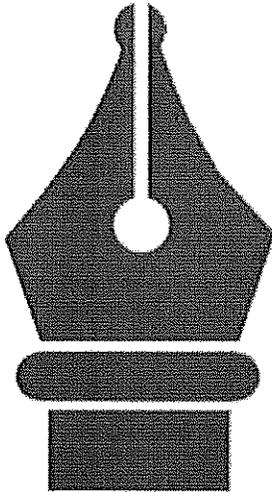
The Guardian's Quick Question for April 26, 2018 (/opinion/tl-quick-ques-26-2018-15)



# LETTER: Time to update legislature hours

The Guardian

Published: Apr 10 at 9:29 a.m.



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**EDITOR:**

It is time for the Legislative Assembly to modernize its sitting hours as a means to increase accessibility to and diversity within the House. The hours of the legislature were originally created to accommodate rural MLA's travel by train. Since then the train has become obsolete on P.E.I. and MLAs have transportation allowances.

It was surprising to discover that the sitting hours of the legislature have only been changed slightly since passenger train service ended in 1964. Because of this I applaud Minister Paula Biggar for submitting Motion 32, which moves to shift the sitting hours of the Legislature to day time hours only.

This is a motion that seems like a win-win for everyone. The motion is clear that no hours will be lost in this shift, and that the change in sitting hours will remove a key barrier to women's participation in provincial politics. The motion also mentions that if legislative sessions were held during the day, complete sessions could be broadcast across P.E.I. rather than only half of the sessions due to competing broadcast need in the evening.

With all of this considered, I feel we can all agree it is time for the Legislative Assembly to modernize its operating hours. Not only will open doors it will provide opportunity for engagement from a diversity of people, which is what democracy is about.

**Becka Viau,  
Charlottetown**

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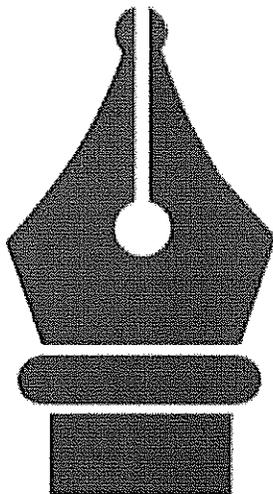
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# LETTER: Family friendly sitting hours

The Guardian

**Published:** Apr 19 at 8:54 a.m.



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**EDITOR:**

From my home in Miminegash in rural P.E.I., I have been reading letters to the editor about changing the legislature's sitting hours with interest. I agree with Paula Biggar, the minister responsible for the Status of Women, that it is past time for family friendly sitting hours in the legislature.

Adjusting which hours the legislature sits will be good for people with young families, and especially for women. It will also good for rural Islanders.

During evening sittings, we aren't making the most of our smallness – you can drive to the legislature and get home the same day. When the legislature sits, MLAs from my region have to decide between driving home late in the dark or staying in Charlottetown. If the sitting hours changed, they would work just as many hours but during the daytime, so they wouldn't have to make this decision.

I want rural Islanders, especially women with young families, to look at an MLA's 24-7 schedule and know they can both serve the public and take care of a home and family.

Even when the legislature is open, I want my MLA to be able to tuck their children or grandchildren in at night and to see them onto the school bus in the morning. I want my MLA to be able to attend an evening meeting or community fundraiser, or to go to an evening wake for a neighbour.

Evening sittings keep MLAs away from their families and their constituents more nights than is necessary.

***Yvonne Deagle,***

***Chairperson,***

***P.E.I. Advisory Council on the Status of Women***

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# OPINION: Cultivating diversity in P.E.I. legislature

The Guardian

**Published:** Apr 19 at 9:10 a.m.

**Updated:** Apr 19 at 9:27 a.m.



Maintenance worker Eelke Wolters gets one of the desks ready in the Coles Building ahead of MLAs returning to the legislative assembly on April 5. Ryan Ross/The Guardian

# Assembly must be a place where all members of society can be represented

BY MARCIA CARROLL

## GUEST OPINION

Diversity doesn't just happen – it must be encouraged, supported and fostered in order to be achieved. We often hear MLA's say they believe our Legislature should be more diverse, so we will be watching with interest if they vote in favor of Motion 32.

Minister Paula Biggar brought forth Motion 32 and it is expected to be debated in the spring sitting. Motion 32 proposes to restructure the sitting times of the Legislative Assembly of P.E.I. to encourage more diversity and work/life balance for MLAs. When first proposed, Motion 32 also received strong support from Green MLA, Hannah Bell.

The benefits of Motion 32 include:

Promotes people friendly practices and encourages those with caregiving responsibilities/needs to be able to participate;

Better work/life balance for MLAs of all genders and MLA's experience disability;

MLAs will have the flexibility to spend time at home or attend evening events in their community;

MLAs from rural communities will have more time to travel home;

Will bring P.E.I. in line with other provinces that have moved away from evening hours;

Benefits staff of the Legislative Assembly of P.E.I.

Myth 1: Motion 32 will decrease accessibility/transparency of the Legislative Assembly of P.E.I. to the public. In reality:

Technology has made the House more accessible than ever;

All proceedings of the House are now webcast and streamed on social media. A full Hansard of proceedings is available online;

Daytime sitting times will increase transparency and accountability because all sessions will be broadcast live;

We understand that there may be a desire on occasion to accommodate community members in attending a session of the House. We suggest that for those rare occasions that community organizations or individuals cannot be accommodated during daytime sessions, that a special provision for exceptions be included in the rules.

Myth 2: Motion 32 means MLAs will work shorter hours. In reality:

Motion 32 proposes restructuring the sitting times to start earlier and end earlier. The number of hours will not be reduced – only restructured;

Islanders have incredible access to elected officials in comparison to other jurisdictions in Canada;

Restructuring would allow MLA's living with disabilities to have their disability related needs met in the evening, such as personal care and would allow them to access specialized transportation when required.

It is important to recognize that politicians have diverse and complex lives like all other members of society. Therefore, it is extremely important that the Legislative Assembly be a place where all members of society can be represented. Motion 32 could be a significant factor when Islanders living with disabilities make the important decision to enter into political life. Managing one's disability related needs in a comprehensive, holistic approach is fundamental to that decision. So, if Motion 32 is passed, it will assist in moving us toward a more diverse Legislative Assembly on P.E.I.

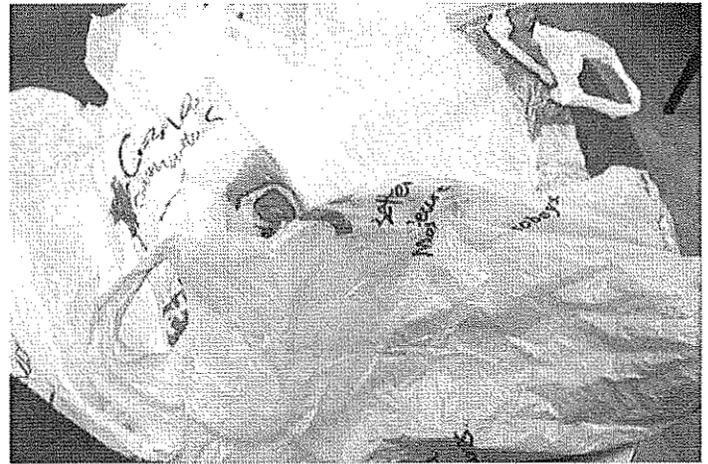
**- Marcia Carroll, executive Director, P.E.I. Council of People with Disabilities**

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