

“OUR MEMBERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT...”



Betty Anne Brown
National Chairperson of Resolutions

With these words, the national delegation to federal government, comprised of National President Lorette Noble, National Chairperson of Legislation Mary Nordick and myself, presented the 2006 resolutions in early November.

All appointments and accommodations were arranged ahead of time, thanks to the diligent efforts of life members Anida Simurda and Diane Curley, who live near the nation's capital. This made sense because they knew where the various government buildings were as well as the time it would take to get from one place to another.

Over the course of three days, the delegation met with the prime minister's office and senior policy advisors from the departments of health, environment, justice, foreign affairs and international trade and, human resources and social development. My own member of parliament (MP), Daryl Kramp, met with us and arranged for us to attend Question Period one afternoon.

At Health Canada, the delegation met with three senior aides. We discussed: Resolution 2006.06 Labelling and Disposal of Pest Control Products; Resolution 2001.01 Quality End of Life Care; Resolution 1991.03 Euthanasia; and, Resolution 1992.02 Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) which emphasized the need to place warning labels on bottles of alcohol. Our most fruitful encounter evolved from this meeting, when we were invited to the Pest Management Regulatory Agency for an introduction to the computer resources available to Canadians regarding the safe use of pesticides, herbicides, insecticides and fungicides.

Resolution 2006.04 Renewable Energy, as well as Resolution 2006.06 Labelling and Disposal of Pest Control Products, were the topics of conversation with one senior policy advisor at Environment Canada. We also mentioned the League's recommendation for action to members to reduce the use of plastic bags and disposable Styrofoam cups and plates.

Bill C-22 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (age of protection) and to make consequential amendments to the Criminal Records Act*, which would raise the age of protection for sexual consent, had just passed second reading and was sent to committee on the day that we met with two senior policy advisors in the Department of Justice Canada. We were assured that a vote to revisit Bill C-38 *An Act respecting certain aspects of legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes*, which redefined marriage in Canada, would be introduced in Parliament before Christmas. This did not mean

the issue would be debated then, just that it would be revisited in the near future. Realizing that it is a provincial/territorial matter, we spoke of the importance of Resolution 2006.02 Legal Protection for Those Who Object to the Solemnization of Civil Marriage for Same-sex Partners.

We were told that the federal government had no intention of addressing the euthanasia and assisted suicide matter at this time. We mentioned our concern for the lack of refugee appeal processes (Resolution 2005.05 Appeal Provision for Refused Refugee Claimants) and were told this was a matter for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, a department with which no meeting was scheduled.

Resolution 2006.01 Religious Freedom, Resolution 2004.05 End Trafficking of Children, Resolution 2006.04 Renewable



Pictured are National Chairperson of Resolutions Betty Anne Brown, Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper, National President Lorette Noble and National Chairperson of Legislation Mary Nordick.

Energy, and Resolution 2005.06 Developing Countries and Water, which recommended the tying of human rights to international trade agreements, were discussed with a senior policy advisor at Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada.

Question Period in the House of Commons was relatively calm that day, although it was most interesting to hear the variety of topics and the support they garnered among the different political party members.

The prime minister warmly welcomed us into his office for an official photograph. He noticed that the delegation was smaller this time (only three) than it had been in the spring (five then), and we teased him about his recent comedic appearance

on television. We then met in the prime minister's boardroom with his parliamentary secretary and his senior advisor.

Human rights and the lack of religious freedom in some foreign countries were high on the agenda. The parliamentary secretary noted the prime minister's recent welcome to the Dalai Lama and his upcoming trip to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference in Vietnam, at which he intended to raise the topic of human rights with China, especially. As a caution, this federal government has serious concerns that freedom of religion is at stake in the future, even in Canada, and has asked League members to monitor this very carefully.

We extended thanks to Canada Post for this year's religious Christmas stamp (Resolution 2005.01 Christmas Postage Stamps). When asked if a government protocol had been established on having Christian prayer at certain national ceremonies (Resolution 2002.01 Christian Prayer at National Ceremonies), it was explained that this is still handled on a case by case basis.

We mentioned our hopes to have the Goods and Services Tax removed from funeral expenses (Resolution 2006.05 GST Exemption on Funeral Services) since the respectful disposal of a body should be considered an essential service. Nothing to this effect is being planned in the near future.

Later, we met with MP The Hon. Maria Minna, opposition critic for women's issues, who expressed her views on the same-sex union issue. We agreed to disagree and moved on to the pressing subjects of seniors' issues, literacy, refugee claims, human trafficking, the working poor and child care.

Human Resources and Social Development Canada is huge; it now combines five former government agencies. After the delegation suggested that seniors could be assisted in their struggle against poverty by increasing Old Age Security (Resolution 2006.03 Increase Old Age Security), the senior policy advisor explained that the federal government thought that the age credit pension splitting plan for seniors may help.

Child poverty and child care were discussed, as well as learning, literacy and programs for youth.

Finally, we met with the chief of staff to the minister of foreign affairs and two other policy advisors, who expressed the minister's sincere regret for not being able to attend the League's annual national convention in Halifax.

We spoke of members' concern for the safety of missionaries and religious people in some foreign countries (Resolution 2006.01 Religious Freedom). As a model of courage, we were advised that former MP Flora MacDonald, aged 80, was presently in Afghanistan, living and working with villagers.

The annual Foreign Affairs Canada NGO Human Rights Consultations were mentioned and we noted the League's attendance at these consultations in recent years. Human trafficking and the lack of a refugee appeal process were also discussed.

Having only six current resolutions, we were also able to express members' continuing concerns about

- euthanasia and assisted suicide
- palliative care
- literacy cutbacks
- FAS labelling
- human trafficking
- refugee appeal process
- Christian prayer at national ceremonies
- religious Christmas postage stamps
- MaterCare International

With Parliament in session at the time of the visit, late-breaking news made things very exciting! We felt we were listened to and our opinions respected. Only a week later, the prime minister's office invited the League to nominate a representative to the National Council on Seniors and Aging.

Over and over, we heard the importance of resolutions and members' letters and communications with their elected officials. All in all, the visit to Parliament Hill was a busy, yet fruitful experience. †

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

On July 21, 2006, a delegation from Prince Edward Island Provincial Council met with the premier and other government officials.

The delegation presented two resolutions and one letter of petition approved by at least 180 members at the annual provincial convention. The resolutions presented were Smoking in Cars – Transporting Children and Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault. The letter of petition was about graduated driver licensing.

As usual in its presentation to government, the delegation was well received. The provincial council felt it was a productive meeting.

