

Barbara Kay: Exploding the myth of cure-all female corporate boards

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The Liberals are looking at an amendment to diversity-themed Bill C-25 that would force businesses to open their diversity policies to shareholders or explain why they don't ("comply or explain"). At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said, "Companies should have a formal policy on gender diversity and make the recruitment of women candidates a priority."

Earnest leftie that he is, Trudeau attributes women's imbalance on business boards — at present they are at 14 per cent, up from 11 per cent in 2015 — to bias alone, therefore a problem requiring state intervention to redress.

Trudeau should watch the now infamous interview (more than six million views at last count, three of them mine) between Jordan Peterson and BBC's Channel 4 reporter Cathy Newman, another earnest leftie, who can't get her head around the notion that bias isn't tenable as a unitary explanation for gender disparity at corporate summits.

Men, Peterson argued, are in general more competitive and assertive than women, more willing to trade corporate success for work-life balance, and generally less "agreeable" than women (a competitive disadvantage). He might have added that when a company's or an organization's "product" is one that disproportionately interests women, they achieve their goals without chivalrous Justin Trudeau by their side.

Take, for example, the field of animal welfare. In veterinary science, once a male bastion, and as demanding as regular medicine (with fewer schools, therefore harder to get into), only about eight per cent of students in the 1960s were female, but about 80 per cent are today, this remarkable transformation having come about completely organically, and with no affirmative action whatsoever.

Furthermore, motivated by their passion for animals' rights, women are well represented at the higher echelons of, for instance, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), a substantial organization with annual revenues of about \$220 million. According to Merritt Clifton, publisher of *ANIMALS 24-7*, women account for 80 per cent of the HSUS donor base, and 12 of 19 senior staff positions. Nine of 14 current HSUS corporate officers are women, as are 14 of 20 members of the HSUS National Council Advisory Board. Currently, 11 of 23 members of the HSUS board of directors are women, four others having resigned over a sexual misconduct imbroglio that last week forced HSUS president Wayne Pacelle to resign.

And thereby hangs another myth about women in high places.

The Liberals justify their affirmative-action position on the grounds that gender diversity is good for the companies.

Hmm. Let's look more closely at the HSUS sex scandal. Pacelle was at the helm of HSUS for 13 years. Sexual harassment complaints against him, after years of rumours and open rumbling, have been under investigation since December. The multiple complaints were credible, according to Clifton. Nicole Brodeur, an Oregon investor who with her husband donated \$100,000 to HSUS, told Washington Post reporter Danielle Paquette, "I spoke with somebody (at HSUS) who had seen incidents of sexual harassment. I followed up with contacts I had and was horrified." Clifton himself received a 14-page dossier from a young female HSUS employee, alleging that two senior HSUS women to whom she took complaints of sexual harassment were "useless" in response to them.

Multiple media reports (the most detailed of which can be found in *Animals 24-7* where a three-part investigative series unearths particularly sleazy background truffles) brought the crisis to international attention. But Pacelle refused to resign in spite of increasing big-donor pressure, encouraged by a (remember, female-dominated) divided board.

One particularly outspoken female ally, longtime board member Erika Brunson, who herself resigned immediately after Pacelle's resignation, defended Pacelle in media statements that will send #MeToo activists to their fainting couches: she called the allegations against him "ridiculous," claiming Pacelle had "done nothing wrong." She told fellow board member "We didn't hire him to be a choir boy." Most horripilating for our era, "Which red-blooded male hasn't sexually harassed somebody?" There is more in that vein, but you get the gist.

The threefold moral of the HSUS story for those who reflexively favour board-imposed gender quotas is that: women self-select for the career roles they want; they get them when they apply best efforts; and gender-equality or even female dominance on corporate boards is no guarantee that companies will perform better or more wisely, or that vulnerable women's interests will be better served on that account.