

FEMALE ENGINEERS IN OTTAWA AND HAMILTON LOOK AT FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL PROSPECTS

By Howard Brown and Kaitlynn Dodge

TWO FEMALE ONTARIO engineers. One already with a nomination for the legislature. Another with a try under her belt and looking at taking another shot.

Jennifer McKenzie, P.Eng., is running provincially for the New Democratic Party (NDP) in Ottawa Centre. She won the NDP nomination and is taking on Liberal MPP and recently appointed Minister of Labour Yasir Naqvi, who has held the riding since 2007. McKenzie is a graduate of Queen's University in electrical engineering. Since 2006, she has been an elected trustee on the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and has held the position of chair for the past three years.

Anne Tennier, P.Eng., ran federally for the Liberal Party in Hamilton Centre in 2011 and is looking at running again. If she does, it will be against an incumbent NDP MP, who has held the riding since 2004. Tennier holds a master's in chemical engineering from the University of New Brunswick.

While there have been other female engineer candidates in the past—recently as the 2011 provincial election, where East Toronto professional engineer Marisa Sterling, P.Eng., ran for the Liberal party—if either is elected, she will be the first female engineer in her respective legislature.

“Although it will be a challenge, I know that I have a strong chance,” said McKenzie in an interview with *Engineering Dimensions* in July.



Jennifer McKenzie, P.Eng., is running provincially for the NDP in Ottawa Centre.

Anne Tennier, P.Eng., ran federally for the Liberal Party in Hamilton Centre in 2011 and may be looking at another shot.

Today, there are three engineers in the Ontario legislature and four in the House of Commons. All are male. Each of the provincial representatives has been profiled in *Engineering Dimensions* in the past.

McKenzie says, “I think it is important for engineers to get involved in politics, as we bring an important set of skills to the political arena.” She feels those skills include strong teamwork, inclusivity, analytical skills, good decision making, and an ability to look at issues from a variety of perspectives. “I’ve taken on strong incumbents before and won... you may have another P.Eng. yet in the legislature,” she says.

“I will make a decision in the next six months,” says Tennier, who is vice president, environmental affairs, at Maple Leaf Foods. Earlier in her career, she was the first female operating superintendent in Canadian Pacific’s history.

Some people are encouraging her to run in other ridings that are perceived to be more “winnable.” But, although it’s a tough riding, she is leaning toward Hamilton Centre, where she lives. “I feel I have an affinity to the riding and I could have a greater impact on solving the issues important to the riding, like poverty, homelessness and creating job opportunities.”

When asked why more engineers should run for public office, she says: “I’ve been a registered engineer since 1982. I’ve always worked in a male-dominated environment. You do develop a bit of toughness and a thicker skin, which prepared me for the world of politics,” she said. “There is a different way in how women and women engineers look at decision making—we often incorporate the social implications of an issue.”

It looks like both McKenzie and Tennier are ready for the challenge. Σ

Howard Brown is president, and Kaitlynn Dodge is account manager, at Brown & Cohen Communications & Public Affairs.