



Feminists Deliver's statement on MLA Melanie Mark's Resignation from the BC Legislature

Feminists Deliver is extremely saddened to know that Melanie Mark, the first First Nations woman to serve in the British Columbia Legislature and as a cabinet minister, has resigned.

We would like to thank and congratulate her for her years of dedication, hard work, and the passion with which she worked for her constituents, which includes people - like her own mother - in the Downtown Eastside. Although Mark was in office for seven years, her work precedes that. She is a courageous advocate for women, children, Indigenous Peoples, and those who are systemically excluded from society and face marginalization.

Mark, MLA for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant, described her experiences in provincial politics, saying that "institutions fundamentally resist change ... particularly colonial institutions like this Legislative Assembly and government at large."

"This place felt like a torture chamber," she said. "I will not miss the character assassination."

Mark — of Nisga'a, Gitksan, Cree and Ojibway ancestry — was first elected in 2016 and served as minister of advanced education, skills, and training and then tourism minister. In September 2022, she stepped down from the portfolio for medical leave "to focus on pressing and urgent personal matters."

As a coalition that always centres the voices and experiences of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people, this news is devastating. Indigenous women face violence in various shapes and forms. Mark's experiences speak to that history that is rooted in white supremacy, colonialism, racism, sexism, and misogyny.

We are disappointed and frustrated that in the last few years, Legislatures and Parliament have lost several powerful Indigenous women in politics because the governments are based on colonial concepts and operate from that concept. Melanie Mark, Mumilaaq Qaqqaq, Jody Wilson-Raybould, and Jessica McCallum-Miller are some of these voices who no longer represent Indigenous Peoples in politics because the racism, white supremacy, toxic masculinity, misogyny, sexism, and all the other intersecting and overlapping systems of oppression continue to silence their voices.

That such powerful Indigenous female politicians are being forced to leave politics and advocating for their communities is a symbol of the frustration they feel as they attempt to create systemic change from within institutions rife with ingrained racism.

In 2021, Qaqqaq chose not to seek re-election and called the Canadian Parliament a “colonial house on fire I am willingly walking into,” in her farewell speech¹ in the House of Commons.

Earlier that year, McCallum-Miller, of Gitksan, Wet’suwet’en and Nisga’a descent, quit as Terrace’s youngest and first Indigenous councillor after two-and-a-half years on the job.

“It is my personal belief that systemic and internalized racism as well as sexism had played a role in the inability of my colleagues to respect and understand my personal and diverse perspectives.

“I can no longer endure the mental and spiritual hardships of explaining this and ultimately being unsupported by those I work with,” McCallum-Miller wrote in her resignation letter²

It is unfortunate that when these Indigenous women are forced to give up their political work because of racism, members of the public demand to see the proof of the racism.

Racism is insidious and often shows up in covert ways, especially in colonial and white supremacist halls of power.

Canada’s political landscape, that is often toxic, desperately needs Indigenous representation that can advocate for the issues that Indigenous Peoples, communities, and Nations face from unmarked graves, to access to clean drinking water, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, forced sterilization, lack of access to affordable housing, theft and murder of Indigenous children in the name of the foster care system.

It is troubling to see that those who have been systematically removed and silenced choose to run for office in an attempt to effect radical change, they are faced with such violence in the name of keeping the status quo.

We must stop gaslighting Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour when they talk about experiencing racism and facing systemic oppression.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mqJGG7yUGw>

² <https://www.facebook.com/JessicaMcCallumMillerIndigenouadvocate/posts/745672762747218>

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's 94 Calls to Action number 57 speaks to the need for educating public servants, and their role in gaining intercultural competency:

"We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism."

From 1876 to 1960, Canada disenfranchised Indigenous Peoples. In the last 63 years, though all Indigenous Peoples may have been enfranchised, that does not necessarily mean they have been given a seat at the table and served respect. Indigenous voices, especially those that seek systemic change, continue to be repressed, gagged, and excluded at alarming rates.

Feminists Deliver stands with Melanie Mark in solidarity and celebrates her speaking truth to power. She, and other Indigenous women politicians, are paving the way for more powerful and courageous Indigenous women to run for office.