



My name is **Jessica Wiens** and I graduated from homeschooling in 2006. I am the eldest of four girls. Since graduating, I have been teaching music lessons and continuing to study at home. Over the last couple of years I have enjoyed following politics more closely than ever before. We have enjoyed attending debates as a family, watching elections results come in, volunteering and I have even written articles for our local homeschool newspaper. In the fall of 2007 I became a member of the Conservative Party of Canada. I live in Alberta in the riding of Wild Rose (Didsbury). I would like to share with my fellow-homeschoolers what I have learned through my experience this past year.

The reason I first got involved in politics was that our long time Member of Parliament (MP), Myron Thompson, was planning to retire and there was a nomination race to vote on who would replace him. Only Party members can vote so I bought my \$10 membership, chose my candidate and volunteered to sell memberships. Through this process I discovered that anyone who is fourteen-years-old or older may become a party member and vote for candidate nominees, so even though a fourteen-year-old can't vote in a federal or provincial election, they have an opportunity to cast what can be a very influential vote. (Your candidate will also have to be elected in a Federal election in order to become MP.)

In my riding, where over 100,000 people live, just under 2,200 Conservative Party members showed up at the polls to cast their vote. When the votes were tallied, the count was very close (there were only thirty-four votes that separated the top two candidates). Blake Richards won the nomination with 50.9% of the vote and went on to become our next MP. If you want to maximize the influence of your vote, this is the level you want to get involved in.

Shortly following these events there was an Annual General Meeting (AGM) for Wild Rose, which I attended with my parents. Another homeschool parent suggested to me that I let my name stand for the Wild Rose Federal Conservative Board, something that had not even crossed my mind before. I have to say I was a little uncertain about the whole idea, but after some encouragement from my dad, I decided to go for it.

The party really encourages youth to get involved and I was elected, along with a handful of other young people from ages 18 to their mid-20s. I have to say I have felt very welcome by my fellow-board members (thirty in all). I look forward to our monthly board

meetings and I have had numerous opportunities to be involved and to volunteer. The AGM is also a wonderful opportunity to hear firsthand updates of what's happening in Ottawa. This past year, cabinet minister Stockwell Day, Blake Richards and Myron Thompson all spoke following the banquet.

One other area that members have an opportunity to give input is the area of policy. The Conservative Party's process for forming policy has three stages to it: local Electoral District Association (EDA) policy recommendations, a provincial/territorial vote, and the National Convention. Each local EDA can submit policy recommendations: either minor editing, deletion of selected portions of individual policies, or they may write new policy. All policy recommendations are submitted to the National Council for review. The National Council has a big job to sort through hundreds of policy proposals from across the country. The policies may be edited as necessary and will go through a selection process. Provinces and territories then have the opportunity to present the recommended policy changes to their Conservative members and each EDA has the chance to vote on which policies they would like to see implemented. The policy resolutions that receive the most support will go on to the National Convention, where delegates from each province and territory will come together to give the final vote on what will become the new policies of the Conservative Party of Canada.

I attended both the Alberta congress and the National Policy Convention this year. This process happens every two to three years. Delegates for the National Convention are elected by the membership to represent them at the policy convention—10 elected delegates attend from every EDA across the country and one of those ten has to be a youth delegate under age of twenty-three. We sent three youth delegates from our riding. I am the Youth Coordinator for our riding and I write an email newsletter geared for youth to help inform them on how they can make a difference. I have posted my newsletters on my Facebook group, Youth Politics; please check it out if you are interested in reading more on my experience at the National Policy Convention. I hope this gives you a sense of how many opportunities there are for members to be involved in and make a difference in the decisions the Party makes. I have really learned a lot this year and I wanted to pass on that knowledge. I hope you found this interesting and informative. If you have any questions or comments, my email is youthpolitics@shaw.ca