

Change electoral system to get more female MPs, speaker says

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An electoral system of proportional representation would increase the number of women in Parliament, says a spokesperson for Fair Vote Canada, a citizens' group.

"This is a critical time for Canadians, particularly women, to become aware of this important change that has the potential to revitalize our country and make us feel the government we voted for gets elected," June MacDonald said.

The Toronto woman was in Kitchener yesterday for the fifth annual Zonta Person's Day Breakfast and spoke to about 150 women at Kitchener's City Hall.

MacDonald is chair of the Women for Fair Voting committee, which is part of Fair Vote Canada.

Zonta is a service organization of executives in business and professions working to advance the status of women. Zonta International was founded in 1919 and has clubs in more than 70 countries.

Money raised yesterday will go to LEAF — Legal Education and Action Fund, which monitors court cases affecting women's and children's rights.

Women represent only about 20 per cent of the members of legislatures



June MacDonald of Fair Vote Canada speaks yesterday at the annual Zonta Person's Day Breakfast in Kitchener.

across this country, MacDonald said. The United Nations suggests 33 per cent is needed to ensure women's voices are heard.

Many European countries use proportional representation and elect up to 45 per cent women, she said. Germany and New Zealand have 32 per cent women in their governments; Scotland, 45 per cent, and Wales, 50 per cent.

"It's not a panacea . . . but it can't help but not make it better," she said in an interview after her talk.

In Canada, laws are being made on behalf of women by a group that is 80 per cent men, she said. In Canada's first-past-the-post electoral system, she said, the winner takes all, sometimes with as little as 30 per cent of the vote.

If things carry on as they do now, it could take four generations for women to achieve equality in the House of Commons.

Under a system based on propor-

tional representation, if a party wins 40 per cent of the vote, it gets 40 per cent of the seats.

Under this system, lists of candidates are created by parties and made public. The parties' most favoured candidates are put at the top of the list, which would include men and women, MacDonald said. Some European lists are "zippered," meaning male and female names alternate on the list.

Some European countries have eliminated local riding representatives altogether, she said, adding that that might be too drastic. Instead, Fair Vote Canada suggests mixed-member proportional, which is also being recommended by the Law Commission of Canada, an independent agency of Parliament.

In the mixed-member scenario, the voter gets two votes — one for the riding and the second for the party.

Whoever gets more votes in the riding goes to Parliament, just as occurs now. The second vote is used to compensate for the disproportionality.

MacDonald said the federal government appears to be headed towards proportional representation.

Currently, five provinces, Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, are in various stages of changing their voting system.

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