

# Fight for equality not over, women told

## Everyone loses when women aren't represented in government, activist says

By JOHANNA WEIDNER  
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Anyone who doubts what a difference a few people can make should

take note of five names: Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlyb and Nellie McClung.

These five women from Alberta won the right for all Canadian women to be recognized as persons under the law. Their great achievement on Oct. 18, 1929, was celebrated on Friday in Kitchener during the annual Zonta Person's Day Breakfast.

But the fight for equality is far from over, especially in the realm of Canadian politics, warned speaker Kiloran German. She's a founding member of Equal Voice, a multi-partisan action committee dedicated to the idea that more women must be in every level of government in Canada.

More than 75 years after the landmark Person's Day ruling — sparked by Murphy's personal battle to serve as an elected official — only 21 per cent of the House of Commons are women.

"It matters that women aren't represented," German told the audience at the Pennsylvania Club. "It becomes more important all the time."

Earlier this month, the federal Conservative government cut funding to women's groups that do advocacy, lobbying or general research.

Canada ranks below more than 40 democratic countries for the number of women elected nationally. The United States lags even behind Canada's 21 per cent at about 14 per cent.

"It's not just fairness at stake. It's not just about us," said German, who heads a Toronto communications company and works as a campaign strategist and speech-writer for women candidates.

Everyone is losing out by women's poor representation in government where our country's laws and policies are made.

"Something tells me the guys aren't

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KILORAN GERMAN  
EQUAL VOICE

doing so great," said German. "Would women do better? Well, I don't know how we could actually do worse."

Countries with a high percentage of women in legislature, including some northern European countries that hit 50 per cent, enjoy huge benefits in their cultural fabric.

There's more support for environmental policies and social programs, including child care, education, health, pension and seniors care, German said. On the flip side, there's less support for defence and military activities and lower levels of violent crime, as well as business and political corruption.

"It's not just our wishful thinking" that women would do better, German said.

Unfortunately, there simply aren't enough successful and visible female role models in politics, she said. There are not even enough failures.

"There's sort of the attitude out there, 'We tried a woman and that didn't work.'"

Women have made a lot of gains since the Famous Five won their battle for women's rights, but big strides must still be made in the country's government.

German had a simple message for women on the anniversary of Person's Day: "Remember to do whatever you can to advance your rights as a person and the rights of all other persons."

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