

Increasing Women's Participation in Politics

Mr. Speaker today is International Women's Day, a day recognized throughout the world as a chance to celebrate women's progress towards achieving gender equality while identifying the challenges that still remain. In this spirit, I am pleased to discuss the Government of the Northwest Territories mandate commitment to support the delivery of workshops that help to get women into politics. In the Northwest Territories, women have largely been underrepresented in elected positions at all levels of government.

Mr. Speaker, we have made some progress in the Northwest Territories. I am pleased to report that the rate of women serving on Territorial boards has increased from 43% to 50% between February 1, 2016 and January 31, 2017.

In reviewing current community government councils across our territory, 36% of the seats are occupied by women. The rate of women's representation on these councils goes from a low of 0% to a high of 88%. In 2016, ten municipal elections were held. A total of 80 candidates ran, 28 of which were women. Of the 40 seats that were available, 15 women now fill those seats.

Mr. Speaker, these numbers are very encouraging, but we have more work to do. In our own Legislative Assembly, of 19 Members, only two are women and this was also true of the 17th Assembly. Recognizing that women make up 50% of our population, our lack of representation in the Legislative Assembly is concerning.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to update Members today on the work our government is doing to encourage more women to run for political office.

During this past year, the first of two Campaign Schools for Women was delivered in Hay River by the Northwest Territories Status of Women Council. Participants gained

knowledge of some of the obstacles specific to women running for election, and equip them for campaigning. I would like to thank the Honourable Member from Hay River North and Minister Schumann for their contributions during this event. I would also like to offer a special acknowledgement to the Honourable Member for Yellowknife Center who joined me for the two-day workshop and provided invaluable advice and tips to the participants. A second Campaign School is scheduled for the middle of March in Inuvik. I am looking forward to meeting potential female leaders from the Beaufort Delta Region.

Mr. Speaker, the territorial government is working in partnership with the Status of Women Council to develop an action plan that would support women entering politics at all levels. The action plan will build on the current Campaign School for Women, and include the delivery of a series of workshops over the next couple of years leading up to the next territorial election.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to highlight the Daughters of the Vote event hosted by you and facilitated by MLA Green as another proactive initiative. This event brought young women between the ages of 18 to 23 to Yellowknife, where they were introduced to the political processes and the Legislative Assembly.

As well, the Government of the Northwest Territories is supporting the participation of Indigenous women in the National Indigenous Women's Summit in Toronto. Delegates were nominated by Aboriginal government partners and the Native Women's Association. This Summit is a forum for Indigenous women and governments to share knowledge and expertise, with the aim of building a better future for Indigenous women and their communities. This summit provides an opportunity for Indigenous women to express their priorities and to hear, learn from, and speak to Indigenous women leaders from across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, increasing the number of women in leadership also requires role models. I would like acknowledge a few Northern women who have received national recognition.

I will start by recognizing Dr. Erin Kelly who was recently recognized by the Women's Executive Network as one of Canada's 100 Most Powerful Women of 2016. The network celebrates the contributions of women in Canada's private and public sectors and I am pleased they have named Dr. Kelly, who has distinguished herself in a leadership role with our Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

During her six years with the Government of the Northwest Territories, she has led the implementation of the Northwest Territories Water Stewardship Strategy, served as a lead negotiator on transboundary water management agreements and, as Assistant Deputy Minister and Acting Deputy Minister of the Department, led the development and implementation of the Environment and Natural Resources Strategic Plan.

Dr. Kelly is passionate about working collaboratively with Aboriginal governments and organizations and acts as an advocate for environmental education, stewardship and the use of local, traditional and scientific knowledge in decisions affecting our environment. Dr. Kelly's work encourages young women, particularly indigenous young women, to consider educational opportunities in the environmental sciences with a focus on linking western science and traditional knowledge.

I would also like to mention Chief Frieda Martselos who recently received the 2017 Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada, Excellence in Aboriginal Leadership award in the national category. Chief Martselos was recognized for her work as Chief of the Salt River First Nation.

Congratulations also go out to Ms. Cece Hodgson-McCauley, the first female Chief in the Northwest Territories. On March 24th in Ottawa, she will be receiving the 2017 Inspire Award for her work in politics. Ms. Hodgson-McCauley is an Honorary Chief for Life and is also known as a business woman, newspaper columnist, an activist, and the founder of the Women Warriors.

Finally, I would like to recognize Ms. Heather Fikowski, a long-time Northern social worker who was one of the 2016 National Social Work Month Distinguished Service Awards recipients. Ms. Fikowski is recognized for her five-year research project titled “Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence” which is assisting in breaking the silence on intimate partner violence in our Northern communities.

Mr. Speaker, I have named a few women who are role models, however, the Northwest Territories has no shortage of strong women who are working to create positive change for the North. I am proud to recognize all these leaders for, not only their work, but for the example they provide to other women who may be encouraged to pursue their own leadership roles.

Mr. Speaker, as I stated before, women make-up half of our population in the Northwest Territories and as such, we need to continue our work to increase our representation in elected seats. Only when women occupy half of all governing positions will our governments truly be representative of the populations we serve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.