



**Most women ever will take seats in Ontario legislature;**

**30 MPPs in new gov't will be female**

**By Allison Jones, Canadian Press**

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More women than ever were elected to Ontario's legislature Wednesday, but female politicians and advocates say there are still plenty of obstacles left to equality of the sexes in politics.

In the last legislative session, 26 of the 103 seats were held by women, but after Wednesday's vote, at least three more females will be headed for the legislature - putting the total at 30 of 107 seats.

"I think it's just wonderful," said Rosemary Speirs, past chairwoman of Equal Voice, a lobby group dedicated to expanding the number of women in politics.

"I think it means that our challenge to the party leaders to nominate more women seems to have worked."

Each of the three major parties ran more female candidates during this campaign, with the Liberal party registering the largest increase - 38 compared to 23 in 2003.

The Progressive Conservatives ran 24 female candidates this year, three more than it did in 2003, while 42 women ran for the NDP compared with 34 in the previous election campaign.

There is now at least 28 per cent female representation in the legislature, however that percentage is lower than the national parliaments of Rwanda, Peru and Macedonia, but higher than Canada's federal Parliament.

"I'd like to see one-third as a starting point," Speirs said.

"One-third is generally considered the critical mass, where women's voices really have to be heard and headed. We were hoping to reach that this time."

Women in politics admit their jobs are demanding, but insist a few tweaks to the traditional domestic lifestyle make it possible to balance the job they love with family life.

"It is really fulfilling," said Andrea Horwath, the NDP candidate for Hamilton Centre who has represented her riding since her byelection win in 2004.



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"My three years at the legislature have really shown me that it's extremely important to have the voices of the women there.

"I'm not saying we're better than our male counterparts but we certainly bring a perspective and a way of doing things that's different."

Horwath, whose spent the last 10 years in politics, said it's all about adapting to the circumstances of the job. The mother of a 14-year-old son said she spends most of her weekdays in Toronto while the legislature is sitting because the commute to Hamilton can be unbearable during rush hour.

"I might as well live in Timbuktu," she said, adding she uses Internet chat programs and a webcam to stay in touch with her son and help with homework.

"There are sacrifices, there's no doubt about it, but when you think of anyone who reaches the pinnacle of their career or reaches into areas that are non-traditional . . . the barriers become more extreme because women are still considered to be the backbone of the family," Horwath said.

Fellow New Democrat Shelley Martel, wife of party leader Howard Hampton, announced her retirement in May after 20 years in politics to spend more time with her family, including the couple's two children. However, she was replaced by NDP candidate France Gelinas, who won the Nickel Belt riding Wednesday.

Economic Development and Trade Minister Sandra Pupatello said the sheer distance to get to work is what makes it harder to attract women to provincial and federal politics.

"As long as Queen's Park and Parliament Hill are far away and you can't come home every night, it will always be harder for women in this business," Pupatello said.

"That will change if we build up more support for women who do have to travel, do have to leave their families for four or five days a week."

Pupatello, who holds a cabinet post not typically handled by females, said it works to her advantage. Because she stands out, people listen, she said.



"So that we truly can be seen as equal we don't just have to talk about daycare," Pupatello said.

"We don't just have to talk about education. We should be talking about the economy, about finance, about tax policy."