



Defeat of Electoral Reform a Crushing Blow to those working for the Election of More Women

TORONTO: The defeat of electoral reform in Ontario is a crushing blow to the hopes of all working for the election of more women to political office in Canada, say leaders of the Equal Voice campaign for Electoral Reform for Women.

“This is just heart wrenching,” said Equal Voice Founding Chair Rosemary Speirs. “The election produced three more women who will sit as MPPs in the enlarged Legislature, and we congratulate them on their victories. But this is slow progress, and it proves the need for changes to our electoral system so that more women will be nominated and elected.”

Electoral Reform for Women believes much of the loss is a result of Elections Ontario’s inadequate efforts in educating the public about the referendum. Elinor Caplan, former Liberal MP and cabinet minister, claims that: “if the public had been better informed about MMP the Referendum results would have been different”.

Marilyn Churley, former NDP MPP, also noted that: “the minimal educational campaign did not allow for this important political decision to get the oomph it needed for people to understand what was at stake.”

Public ignorance concerning MMP also allowed anti-MMP group to create fear around the proposal by taking advantage of the fact that it was not properly explained or understood. The media pandered to these sources of misinformation and Rosemary Speirs note that: “In the absence of authoritative information, the media fell prey to scare stories being spread by those who had most to lose, and voters were bombarded with negatives”. She hopes that, “...if electoral reform ever comes back on the ballot, it must be accompanied by a strong public education campaign.”

This defeat is particularly upsetting for all Ontarians hoping to see more women in the legislature because MMP has proven empirically around the world to be an electoral system that does elect more women. Scotland, New Zealand and Germany have all adopted MMP and have all seen an increase in the number of women in the legislature.

Canada has been using first-past-the-post as an electoral system since Confederation and we still hover around the 20% mark of elected female politicians, which is well below the United Nation’s “critical mass” percentage. Critical Mass is defined as 33% and is the percentage needed for there to be a noticeable change in gender representation in politics. Also, Canada is ranked 48th in the world when it comes to women elected in the legislature.



The referendum results are also discouraging because Equal Voice has done research to see how long it will take for Canada to reach gender parity in the federal legislature under our current system. The results of the study show that it will take 100 years for parity to occur.

With only 37% in support of MMP, it is doubtful if electoral reform will surface again in Ontario. Elinor Caplan is adamant that: “our democracy can and must be improve and part of this improvement involves getting more women elected; it is a shame to watch this historic referendum – this step towards electing more women – to be so blatantly misguided through poor education.” Equal Voice hopes that Ontario will not turn its back on such an important part of getting better gender representation in politics.

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For more information, please contact:

Madeleine White, media relations, Equal Voice, 647-222-6527,
madeleinejane.white@gmail.com

Rosemary Speirs, founding member, Equal Voice, 416-577-2777, rspeirs@equalvoice.ca