



**Speaking Notes  
for  
Ms. Raylene Lang-Dion  
National Chair  
Equal Voice**

**Address to the  
Canadian Executive Service Organization**

**Ottawa, Ontario  
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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Dedicated to Doris Anderson.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today.

I must say that it has been a pleasure to work with CESO organizer Betty Bergin.

Today I will be sharing with you information about Equal Voice, women in Canadian politics, international perspectives and the realities of electing women in our great country.

Before I begin, I must thank Equal Voice's national sponsors: TELUS, TD Financial Group, Scotiabank, Janssen-Ortho, Enbridge, and Status of Women Canada. Without their support, we could not do everything we are doing.

This week, as we mark International Women's Day, it saddens me that Doris Anderson passed away on March 3. Doris, as many of you know, was one of the founders of Equal Voice and an icon of Canadian feminism.

When taking on the role of National Chair I said to myself that it would be a great gift to Doris if I could help realize her dream of electing more women to Parliament and furthering women's equality, for which she had dedicated most of her life.

Before she died, Doris knew that we were well on the way. I dedicate my speech this afternoon to this great woman. May her memory inspire us all to strive for great heights!

When I think about how hard Doris and other pioneers fought for women's equality in this country, I am saddened to see Canada slipping further and further behind in its international ranking of elected women.

Canada is doing worse than 46 other countries, including Rwanda, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

Canada has had a long history of electing 80% men to the House of Commons. With other countries actively working on ensuring their parliaments have more women elected, how long will it be before Canada gets it? If not now, when?

Another 30 years, when I'm a grandmother? or how about another 40, when my daughter will be 48?

Equal Voice was founded by people who are tired of waiting. Equal Voice was founded by people who want equality for women in politics, and they want it now.

Equal Voice is the first not-for profit, multi-partisan, volunteer organization which aims to change the face of Canadian politics by facilitating the election of more women at all levels of government.



Former journalist Rosemary Speirs and a small group of like-minded women, such as pollster Donna Dasko and Doris Anderson, formed Equal Voice in 2001.

The mission was to create an organization focused on one issue: raising awareness of the under-representation of women in Canadian politics.

It would be the first group to bring together women and men of all political stripes to pressure political parties into working to elect more women.

Equal Voice's Advisory Board includes many women who have played a prominent role on Canada's political scene such as: former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Kim Campbell, former Liberal Deputy Prime Minister Sheila Copps, and former New Democratic Party leader Alexa McDonough.

The under-representation of women in the Canadian political system has been well documented by academics, Parliament and the media.

Despite a 2004 poll stating that 90 percent of Canadians want more women elected, the representation of women in the House of Commons has reached a plateau of 20.8 percent, with only 64 women sitting as Members of Parliaments.

Similarly, the glass ceiling for women in municipal and provincial governments hovers around 21 per cent.

To address that deplorable situation, Equal Voice interacts with the public, media, political parties, Members of Parliament, and Senators (well everyone actually!) to encourage the nomination of more women candidates, and to foster the participation of women at all levels.

With over 1,200 members (and growing), Equal Voice has gone from being a small group of men and women in Ontario, to a national organization with chapters being developed in every province and territory.

In Canada, women comprise over 52 percent of the population and yet, less than 21 percent of our Members of Parliament are women. Why is this fact important and why must we elect more women in Canada?

First, the lack of significant numbers of women in positions of public authority generates a "democratic deficit", violating basic principles of fairness required for a truly representative democracy.

Secondly, Canada's international ranking in terms of women's representation, continues to slip. As a vast number of countries surpass Canada and become more successful in electing women, Canada risks falling further behind.

Finally, we all know that there are difference between men and women: different ideas, different priorities and perspectives. This is well documented.

Having more women elected means that a more representative proportion of that 52 percent of the population is bringing their ideas, issues and perspectives to the political table.

#### Canada's Democratic Deficit

The under-representation of women in Canada creates a democratic deficit leaving over half of the population without an adequate voice in political decision-making processes.

According to the United Nations, a threshold of at least 30 percent of female legislators is required to ensure that public policy reflects the needs of women.

The lack of women elected or appointed to top political jobs also serves as a visible indication of how women are undervalued in Canadian society.



Despite the low levels of women holding elected office, Statistics Canada indicates that the majority of students graduating from post-secondary institutions are women.

Given that there is no shortage of talented and educated women, why are they not represented in the House of Commons?

Canada has had two Royal Commissions over the past 4 decades which have documented the barriers women encounter in seeking public office: the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the 1992 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing.

In 1970, Royal Commission Chairperson Florence Bird found:

“a number of impediments to women seeking candidature; in particular prejudice in the constituency associations, inadequate financial resources and limited mobility...Women who have been successful at the polls confirm that winning the nomination is a more formidable hurdle than winning the election.”

Many of the hurdles identified by Bird in 1970 were still apparent in the recommendations of the 1992 Royal Commission report, suggesting that more work remains to be done to address the causes of under-representation.

Academics have identified the main causes of women's under-representation in politics as a failure on the part of political parties to “adequately bolster female candidacies; the masculine political environment; media imbalances in the treatment of women politicians; and the ‘role conflict’ that can result from juggling a political career with social and family commitments.”

Additionally, the power of incumbency can also be a barrier to women. Incumbent Members of Parliament have a better chance at seeking re-election and given that few seats change hands in any given election, the power of incumbency can serve to reinforce Parliament's current composition.

Yet, here we are 37 years after the first Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and Canada is not even half way towards achieving equal representation.

More than 30 years later, and we still haven't reached the critical 30 percent threshold needed for women to have a voice in the creation of public policy.

In fact, during the past four elections the representation of women has not experienced substantial growth, and—wait for it—in 2006 the number of women in the House of Commons actually declined.

In order to achieve equal representation, more women must run for public office. We have all heard of parties being the ‘gatekeepers’ to elected office. That's true, and that's why parties can be the catalyst of change.

During the 2006 election, Equal Voice tracked the number of women candidates nominated by each political party and we shall do so again for the next election.

The numbers indicate that the percentage of women elected by each party in the House of Commons closely reflects the number of women candidates nominated by the political parties.

This suggests that when presented with the choice, Canadians are more than willing to vote for women candidates.

This, combined with strong polling numbers indicating that Canadians want more women to hold elected positions and the large pool of accomplished women to draw from, provides the opportunity for political parties to make a difference.

All that is required is political will on the part of the leaders and their political parties to nominate more women candidates.



The political parties need to be proactive in recruiting and supporting women candidates to run in winnable ridings; all parties need to make the decision on how to address this inequality; and all parties have to identify processes that work for them.

#### Equal Voice's Programming & Initiatives:

Equal Voice offers a variety of programming and initiatives to support women involved in politics including:

- our on-line campaign school called Getting to the Gate;
- a developing national Speakers Bureau comprised of past and present parliamentarians;
- our National Awareness Campaign entitled Changing the Face of Politics, the Ontario Challenge: Getting More Women to Queen's Park; and
- our growing Youth Chapter and our efforts on electoral reform.

#### National Public Awareness Campaign

In January 2007, Equal Voice launched a national public awareness campaign, funded by Status of Women Canada, with the goal of increasing the number of women in elected office at all levels of government across Canada.

The national public awareness campaign aims to achieve the following four objectives during an eighteen-month period:

Meeting with key media outlets to increase the awareness of the lack of women in politics, and raise awareness of gender bias in the media.

Providing direct support to women interested in politics by encouraging increased participation in Equal Voice's Getting to the Gate Online Campaign School – which is free of charge and bilingual.

Assessing and monitoring the level of female participation in Canadian political parties and in political office through surveys at the federal level and in two selected provinces.

Promoting the incorporation of gender sensitive courses in high school social studies curriculums in at least two provinces.

While proceeding with the national public awareness campaign, Equal Voice chapters across Canada will focus on their own initiatives to increase women's representation in politics, including the encouragement of electoral reform.

#### The Ontario Challenge: Getting More Women to Queen's Park

Equal Voice Past-Chair Rosemary Speirs issued the Ontario Challenge in 2006 in a letter to the leaders of the Ontario Liberal, Progressive Conservative and New Democratic Parties, asking them to jointly commit to the goal of nominating more women candidates.

Equal Voice sought out assistance from women Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) from all political parties who were instrumental in getting their leaders to pledge support to the Ontario Challenge.

While Equal Voice did not ask the parties to meet specific targets, the goal is to increase the numbers of women elected to Queen's Park. The Ontario Legislature has just 25 women of its 103 MPPs.

The three leaders of Ontario's major political parties: John Tory, Dalton McGuinty and Howard Hampton all agreed to take up the Ontario Challenge and committed to nominating more women candidates.

With their statements, the leaders sent the message that they want more women in their elected ranks.

Equal Voice will be tracking the number of women candidates selected and will be reporting to the media on the progress of all three political parties prior to the 2007 Ontario provincial election.



I am pleased to announce that on International Women's Day, March 8th, Equal Voice will be launching the Canada Challenge.

It's the same concept as the Ontario Challenge, but we will be issuing the Challenge to Stéphane Dion, Stephen Harper and Jack Layton. Gilles Duceppe and Elizabeth May are in the works. We will have all the information on our website as of Thursday.

#### Equal Voice's National Youth Chapter

Equal Voice has created a National Youth Chapter, which encourages young women to get involved in politics, and raises awareness about the need for young women to vote.

We are looking to expand the number of Equal Voice University and College campus clubs in order to provide a venue for young women to get involved and stay involved in politics; as well as providing mentorship opportunities for young women and other women who have been successfully involved in all aspects of political life.

#### Electoral Reform

Equal Voice has made presentations to both the British Columbia and Ontario Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reform.

Rosemary Speirs, the Past-Chair, has lead the initiative advocating for the adoption of electoral reform models favourable to the election of more women.

Typically, countries that use some form of a list system of proportional representation (List PR) elect the most female representatives. This system pressures political parties to develop candidate lists that are more reflective of the population; inclusive of women and visible minorities.

Finland elects 38 per cent women using the "List PR" method; likewise, Sweden has achieved 47.3 per cent female representation.

Similarly, mixed member proportional systems (MMP), which combine single member plurality with a list system of proportional representation, fair well in electing more women.

New Zealand uses MMP and elects 32.3 per cent women in their national parliament; Germany also uses MMP and elects 31.6 per cent female representatives.

Regardless of the precise method, countries utilizing some form of proportional representation deliver more women representatives than those employing first past the post systems, such as Canada and the United States.

While the benefits of electoral reform are numerous, it alone is not enough to address the inequality facing women. Political will still needs to be demonstrated by all political parties and their leaders to select women for the candidate lists and to ensure the success of electing women.

With Equal Voice raising awareness with the key political decision makers, party supporters, and the general public, and assisting women who want to run for elected office, Canada has for the first time in history an advocacy group solely focused on getting more women elected.

This important fact is the catalyst for making changes. Canada is falling behind on the international stage and needs to address this democratic deficit.

Political parties need to undertake decisive action and demonstrate political will to change this inequality.

Equal Voice will be working with our committed volunteers and supporters to tackle this important goal of changing the face of Canadian politics forever. Not 30 years from now. Not 40. Now!