



Speech by Rosemary Speirs.

It is a pleasure to be here today, with the dynamic members of Equal Voice's National Capital Region chapter. We're celebrating the 76th anniversary of Person's Day, when Canadian women were declared to be "persons" and therefore qualified to be appointed to the courts and Senate.

Now I don't mean to diminish that achievement—but isn't it typical that we should have made the right of Senate appointment a symbol of women's advancement in Canada?

I propose that we also start celebrating the day most Canadian women got the VOTE, or the day the first pioneering woman was elected to Parliament?

The suffragettes won what I consider the more significant battle more than a decade before the British House of Lords made us "persons". On May 24 in 1918, royal assent was given to a bill which Prime Minister Robert Borden had introduced by conceding that "women are entitled to the franchise on their merits." How about celebrating that!

Or, how about Dec. 6, the day in 1921 that Agnes Macphail, a 31-year-old school teacher from Grey County, Ontario became the first woman elected to the House of Commons.

Macphail, a superb populist speaker, was to become known for her campaigns for prison reform and old age pensions. But on the day of her entry into parliament, what did the newspapers speculate about?

Whether she'd have to wear a hat in the House of Commons!

Another day that history has forgotten is Feb. 14, 1981. That's when more than a thousand angry women descended on Ottawa after Doris Anderson resigned from the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women over the absence of explicit protection of women's rights in the proposed Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Some of the redoubtable members of that so-called Ad Hoc committee will be here in Ottawa next February 14, marking the 25th anniversary of their accomplishment-- Section 28 of the Charter, under which rights and freedoms are "guaranteed equally to male and female persons".

That includes the right to political equality, something which our political parties have been ignoring as they go about nominating slates of mainly male candidates.

Since those heady old days for the Canadian women's movement, we've seen our first female leader of a federal political party—Audrey McLaughlin of the New Democratic Party. Our first female elected premier—Liberal Catharine Callbeck in Prince Edward Island. Our first woman as prime minister—Kim Campbell, a Progressive Conservative. And our first female deputy prime minister-- Sheila Copps.

You could say, like the old Virginia Slims cigarette ad, "you've come a long way Baby."

But today, surveying the political landscape, you are more likely to wonder:

"Where Have all the Women Gone?"