



YWCA Toronto Woman of Distinction 2006 Award: Civic Engagement

Rosemary Speirs' cause is electing more women.



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She is a journalist by profession, a former syndicated national affairs columnist, Ottawa Bureau Chief, and Political Columnist at Queens Park for the Toronto Star. She is also a leader in the women's movement in Canada, and recognized for her work in 2004 as a recipient of the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Person's Case. Ms. Speirs has worked tirelessly as a volunteer and advocate to ensure the participation of girls and women in Canadian politics.

She has demonstrated her conviction that changes to promote women in politics will improve the opportunities of other underrepresented Canadians and create a healthier, more democratic political system. Rosemary Speirs is the 2006 Woman of Distinction for Civic Engagement.

Ms. Speirs' volunteer commitment to the cause of women's equality goes back to well before her industrious post-retirement activity of the last three years.

She was an active member of the Committee for '94, an hoc women in politics group that aimed to see women fill half the seats in the House of Commons by the 1994 election, and wrote an influential brief about the money barrier to women's candidacies, "Let Women Play Too" to the 1990 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform.

Since early 2001, Ms. Speirs has dedicated her time and efforts to help create a climate in which more women will be elected to help govern Canada. To that end, she has founded an action group, Equal Voice/A Voix Egales, dedicated to raising publicly the issue of under representation of women in Parliament, provincial legislatures and on municipal councils.

Ms. Speirs' passion stems from the fact that women are more than half the population, but only a fifth, at best, of its politicians. To right the balance, Ms. Speirs seeks to reform an outmoded electoral system that, by its very nature, disadvantages women. Her brainchild, Equal Voice, asks Canadians to reconsider the winner-takes-all electoral system, and instead embrace a system of proportional representation that would give women a fairer chance at political success. Equal Voice presses political leaders to give women their fair share of nominations in winnable ridings, and seeks to level the political playing field by lowering the financial requirements that now work to exclude women and others who don't have Bay Street's backing.

Equal Voice/A Voix Egales has members from every province – women and some men – and from most groups in society. Many are elected representatives at the federal, provincial or municipal levels, and some are cabinet ministers.

As the leader of this national group of more than 700 women and men who are deeply concerned about Canadian politics, Ms. Speirs has emerged as a trusted voice in the consideration of gender, power and politics. Under her leadership, this multi-partisan action committee devoted to the bold idea that more women must be elected to every level of government in Canada has established itself as a legitimate critic of the current electoral system.



Full of fresh ideas and skilled after years of working in the industry as a respected commentator, Ms. Speirs has been able to grab media attention and embarrass the existing political parties into fairer treatment of half of the population.

Along the way, Equal Voice/A Voix Egales has become recognized as an innovative model for multi-partisan and bilingual political action.

The author of several briefs, a historian with a Doctorate from the University of Toronto, the mother of a son, Murray Deverell, a political science student at Carleton, and the spark behind Equal Voice, Ms. Speirs is an exceptional woman with leadership skills and a talent for inspiring other women.