



NEWS RELEASE

Ontario parties have uphill battle to meet Equal Voice's Ontario Challenge With the departure of high profile women MPPS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TORONTO - Concerned about the announced departures of high-profile women Members of the Ontario Legislature, Equal Voice is asking the Premier and the Opposition leaders to ensure the departing MPPs are replaced by women.

"We are deeply concerned that the departures of at least three high-profile sitting women MPPs could reduce women's representation at Queen's Park," said Rosemary Speirs, Founding chair of Equal Voice.

The influential advocacy organization for the election of more women is tracking the nominations of women by each party for the provincial election in October. Premier Dalton McGuinty, Progressive Conservative leader John Tory, and NDP leader Howard Hampton have all taken the Equal Voice pledge to run many more women in the coming election, but at this point the results are not ensured.

"To make real gains, we need to build upon the seats now held by women, and elect more women," Speirs said. "We are suggesting the parties should all nominate women candidates in the three ridings being vacated by women."

New Democrat Shelley Martel has announced she will not run again in Nickel Belt riding.. Liberal, Jennifer Mossop (Stoney Creek) cited family reasons last week when she announced she will not seek re-election. So did Marie Bountrogianni, Minister for Democratic Renewal and Liberal MPP for Hamilton Mountain. Bountrogianni, a longtime member of Equal Voice, is a particular loss for the organization's mission of creating a climate in which more women will be elected.

Since formally taking Equal Voice's pledge a year ago, the three leaders and their parties have put electing women higher on their agendas. As a result, recent by-elections have raised the number of women MPPs to 26, or 25 per cent of the 103-seat Legislature. This is an historic high in the province, and a good beginning, Speirs said.

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"But we know from experience elsewhere that we need a critical mass of women—a third or more of Legislature members—to ensure women's interests are heeded by our lawmakers."

Equal Voice's Lesley Byrne, who is tracking the nominations of women for the provincial election, said all three major parties appear to be making real efforts to fulfill their leader's pledges to run more women.

McGuinty has also explicitly pledged in a letter to Equal Voice that half the seats that his party does not already hold at this time will go to women candidates. So far, the Liberals have nominated 14 women, among the nominations in seats the party does not already hold. It appears the party is first fulfilling the pledge and then moving to nominate in remaining seats. As well, the Liberals have nominated 15 sitting women MPPs in held seats.

Conservative Leader John Tory has said a third of his candidates will be women. So far his party has nominated 18 women. There are 22 nominations left to go and in order to meet the one-third mark of 35 women candidates, 17 of the remaining nominations will have to go to women.

" Mr. Tory will have to intervene strongly to ensure most of the remaining nominations go to women if he is to live up to his pledge to Equal Voice. We are hopeful he will do that, to ensure his party has strong representation from women," said Speirs..

The New Democrats have nominated 17 women of 41 nominations held so far, in their effort to fulfill Hampton's declaration half his candidates will be female.

Equal Voice is an influential national volunteer organization dedicated to the election of more women. It is multi-partisan, and its membership includes elected MPPs from every party in the Legislature.

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