

Joly encourages public participation at International Women's Day talk



When Melanie Joly first ran for public office, she wasn't sure who her role models were.

Such historic public figures as John F. Kennedy and Charles De Gaulle influenced her decision to enter politics, but she came to the table with a very different voice.

"I couldn't show the same type of leadership. I had to create my own path," said Joly, and this is a factor many women face when considering stepping up to be the change they want to see in the world.

Joly may have come in a "close second" in Montreal's 2013 mayoral race, but hit her stride at the Federal level when she was elected as Member of Parliament two years later and has spent the last decade serving Canada in multiple cabinet posts, including the high-profile positions of Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Development, and, currently Minister of Industry.

Joly made her first visit to Aurora on Friday evening when she joined Leah Taylor Roy, former Member of Parliament for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, at Aurora Town Square for a fireside chat to mark International Women's Day.

Organized by the riding's Liberal Women's Club, the event filled Aurora Town Square's Performance Hall where the two women shared the challenges and rewards of becoming involved in politics.

"In the context of International Women's Day, we need to reflect on all those who were very strong woman trailblazers and everything that has been achieved in our country and around the world," said Joly. "At the same time, we need to think of what is happening now and what's ahead, what is the place of women now, and how can we convince our girls and the next generation that their place is also at the table?"

"We cannot let down our guard. We need to continue to fight back. We need to stand strong. We cannot take anything for granted."

We live in a "much more dangerous and complicated world," she continued, and while there are many factors beyond our control, Canadians can control what is happening within our own borders.

"We can control how we build a very strong economy and we can control how we keep our society a just society. That is supported, of course, by very strong jobs, job creation, and fighting back against these unjustified and illegal tariffs that have been plaguing so many workers. This context of talking about control comes the idea of choosing. We can choose how much we're supporting our workers, we can choose how much we're building a strong economy, but we can also choose what we do to support women and women's rights and how we bring women to the table."

One reason Canada remains able to attract investments within the country, she contended, is because Canada has the most educated workforce in the world and that, of course, includes a lot of women.

'We're a society that believes that when you come in and you invest and you look at investors, or diplomats, or foreign officials, we look at them in the eyes, we shake hands, and they'll know we will follow the contract,' she continued. 'I'm giving you this because I would not have said that to all of you in 2015 when I was first elected because these were things we were taking for granted. But, in this world now, this is not the case. We cannot take for granted women's rights.'

'My goal is to give you the energy, the spirit, the trust that we can control what is happening in our society because we have power over all of us, individually and collectively. We can do this together, we can get involved, we can trust one another, we can fight for democracy, and we can make sure that we fight for a better society, a just society, which basically is taking care of the vulnerable, but also being able to create growth that will benefit all of us.'

These sentiments were shared by Leah Taylor Roy, who stated she intends to seek re-election.

Touching upon the theme of evening 'Rights, Justice, Action for All Women and Girls' and the broader International Women's Day 2026 theme of 'Give to Gain', she said, 'I think we all know that when we give, we benefit.'

'We benefit ourselves, we benefit all society, and I know that all the people here in this room give a lot, so thank you for that,' said Taylor Roy. 'When I think about this in the context of what is happening in the world today, I believe these themes reach beyond women. We have challenges, we all know that, but we're uniting together to face those challenges.'

'Canada is strong and proud. Every person here in this room is part of the solution to what faces us. Regardless of gender identity, we're all Canadians and although this evening our focus is on women, and we as women are a critical part of the solution, we need the talents and strengths of all Canadians to protect our country and build a strong future. We cannot afford to keep any talent in this country underutilized because of barriers faced, which means those barriers that have been made must be dismantled. While the main focus of our government is to build Canada strong, and the focus is on the economy, safety, and the cost of living, the issues of equality for women in all peoples must not backslide. We cannot move forward and face the challenges ahead if we go backwards.'

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