

More women need to get into public life, says MP at International Women's Day event



Aurora-Oak-Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy has been a long-time advocate for gender parity in politics.

It's a principle, she says, that has served many countries well, but achieving that goal is easier said than done in countries like Canada.

Taylor Roy encouraged women to get more involved in politics, regardless of what party they might align with, on Friday morning as she provided the keynote address at the annual International Women's Day event hosted by the Canadian Federation of University Women ? Aurora/Newmarket.

Held at Newmarket's Trinity United Church, the MP was joined by her mother, Kate Taylor, who encouraged all of her children, including Newmarket Mayor John Taylor, to serve ? as well as by Newmarket-Aurora Federal Liberal candidate Jennifer McLachlan.

She didn't mince words when it came to the particular challenges women in politics face, but said, ?Don't let the bastards get you down.?

Taylor Roy, who was first elected in 2021, paid tribute to several historic trailblazers in her remarks ? including Canada's first female MP Agnes McPhail and Jeanne Sauve, who has the distinction of being Canada's first female Speaker of the House of Commons and first female Governor General ? as well as her trailblazing colleagues like MPs Chrystia Freeland and Karina Gould, both of whom were in the final days of vying for Liberal Party leadership at the time of the speech.

Despite the work that they have done, women in politics are regular targets of misogyny, she said.

?I receive emails, texts and comments on social media constantly,? she said. ?I wouldn't repeat them here, but they are misogynistic, the worst ones. This kind of toxicity and the threat of violence which has increased has meant that a lot of women don't want to run anymore.?

Female Cabinet Ministers such as Melanie Joly, who has become a key figure in fighting Trump Tariffs, now enjoy the same kind of security as the Prime Minister due to regular threats, but this can't get in the way of stepping up to serve.

Noting the presence of McLachlan in the room, as well as acknowledging her Conservative challenger Sandra Cobena, she said it's great that women continue to 'step up.'

'Social media is anonymous and it can be very scary when somebody says on social media that they know where you live or they know who your kids are - this, I think, is really hampering a lot of women. [For me], it's either fight or flight. I am a fighter and [when I was first elected in 2021] I said, 'I can't back down.' I had a lot of really bad things happen when I had been targeted by opposition parties and had a lot of people [go] onto my social media to criticize, harass and threaten. I look at it and think, 'If fighters step down what does it mean for our Parliament? What does it mean for our world?'

'Whenever I get there, I think, 'Don't let the bastards get you down. Keep going.' We have to protect ourselves. We need to put more things in place to protect us, protect all parliamentarians. It's not just an issue for women right now.'

The theme for this year's International Women's Day on March 8 was amplifying the voices of all women and those who have barriers to success.

The MP said that women in politics within our borders have been steadily rising but there's much more work to be done in breaking down existing barriers.

'If we keep going at this rate of increase, it is going to take another 200 years to get to equality,' she said, noting that the rate of parity in Parliament stood at 20.6 per cent in 1997 and now stands at 30 per cent more than a quarter-century on. 'Women are over 50 per cent of our population.'

People sometimes say jokingly to her, 'Do you want all women?' and she jokes back, 'Well, for 50 years it was all men, so maybe if you have 50 years of all women maybe we'll go back to parity.'

'I don't want all women, quite seriously,' she said. 'I want equal representation and I think democracy works best when all people across Canada are represented in our highest house, our body of making laws, and being the representatives of all Canadians.'

By Brock Weir