

Queen's Park marks 100th anniversary of women's right to vote



With a lot of fanfare being given to the significant anniversaries of the national and provincial sesquicentennial, I wanted to highlight a program that is helping to celebrate the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in Ontario.

The right to vote was a cause that took many years to achieve and, in its movement, created a groundswell of issues of women's suffrage that included the right to vote in political elections, the right to run for public office, as well as numerous improvements in education, health care and social issues affecting women and children.

The Province of Ontario granted the right to vote to women April 12, 1917, following the provinces of Manitoba (Jan. 28, 1916), Saskatchewan (May 14, 1916), Alberta (April 19, 1916) and British Columbia (April 5, 1917). It took another 25 years for Ontario to elect its first woman to the legislature. Agnes Campbell Mcphail was sworn in as a provincial MPP in 1943. This was a second milestone for MPP Mcphail, who also served as an elected official in the House of Commons in 1921. Even with these milestones, voting rights for all Canadians, in all provinces, as envisioned by the earlier suffrage movement wasn't achieved until 1960.

By then, women had made significant inroads in the political arena municipally, provincially and federally and many firsts were being achieved. Ontario's first female Lieutenant Governor was Pauline McGibbon, who served from 1974 to 1980. Our first female Deputy Premier was Bette Stephenson in 1985. In 1992, Lyn McLeod served as the first Leader of the Official Opposition and of course in 2013 Ontario elected Kathleen Wynne as the first female Premier.

For the past century, our province has been shaped by the suffrage movement that began the drive toward equality and inclusion for all and the legacy of inspiring women voters for many generations. The UN reports that in the last 20 years, the number of women in parliament has nearly doubled, which translates into 22 per cent of women in parliament around the world. Suffrages of yesteryear would say that there is more to be done.

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario, in celebration of its anniversary of 100 years of women's right to vote, is inviting 107 young Ontario women aged 18 to 23 (one from each riding) to experience a one-day inspirational program to gain a behind-the-scenes perspective of parliament and meet with current parliamentarians. I invite Dufferin-Caledon women aged 18 to 23 to apply for this unique experience that will take place on the anniversary April 12, 2017. Applications can be completed on line and the deadline is Feb 28th. You can find the link on my website www.sylviajonesmpp.ca. If you have any questions about this program, please contact me at my constituency office 1-800-265-1603 or email me at sylvia.jonesco@pc.ola.org