

# Equal Voice National Recognitions Reception

Speech presented by Hon. Pat Carney, PC  
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I am deeply honoured to be part of this company of women who are being recognized by Equal Voice for our leadership roles in Canada's political (life).

I was the first Conservative woman MP to be elected in BC and later the first Conservative Senator from BC. At the time of my first election in 1980 I was the only Mom in parliament west of the Lakehead, and there were only three women among 101 Conservative MP's. The men addressed caucus as "gentlemen."

The lesson I have learned in nearly 30 years is that we do not succeed unless and until we received credit for our achievements as politicians. The history of women in Canadian politics, from the first women cabinet minister Ellen Fairclough, reveals that we have been often under-estimated, ignored, ridiculed or usurped by male colleagues content to take credit for women's work.

It is rarely personal, but cultural. As author Sidney Sharpe wrote in her book *The Gilded Ghetto: Women in Political Power in Canada*. "We are travelers in a strange and alien culture that was created by and for men."

One example? As the Minister responsible for the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement I led the high stake negotiations in Washington on the trade elements as we out-raced the clock on deadline; my colleague Finance Minister Mike Wilson negotiated the financial aspects. Yet I was not invited to attend the McGill University conference marking the FTA's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Historian Desmond Morton explained: "Frankly no one thought of her." Instead, he invited John Crosbie to sit in my place. Crosbie, who was not Trade Minister until six months later and famously said he had never read the Agreement, had no qualms about doing so.

Women politicians should be given credit for their political accomplishments that serve the national interest. That is why this Recognition Reception by Equal Voice for the contributions by this diverse group of women politicians is so important.

Looking forward, what would I would like to see change and improve for women in politics? Obviously a more flexible system that recognizes women's critical role as mothers and (caregivers), but also I want women to recognize that politics is often a stepping stone to a broader, non political career. Men think about life beyond politics, in business, on boards of directors. Most women do not.



Yet many women build on their political experience and education to contribute to society in rich and varied ways... The indomitable Flora MacDonald, Canada's first female minister of External Affairs, now in her 80's, can be found in Afghanistan, Tibet, Africa, helping local communities.

My Conservative colleague Mary Collins, former federal Minister of Health, helped reform health care systems in Russia, serving as head of the World Health Organization (WHO) for Russia before retiring to Canada. The late NDP MP Pauline Jewett served as president of Simon Fraser University. These are not patronage positions!

Politics can be a challenging but uncertain career. Few politicians, male or female, have shared my opportunity to serve in both Houses of Parliament for 27 years. And yet few experiences can do more to broaden one's range of skills and knowledge and commitment to bringing about change, here at home or abroad. I think of former NDP leader Audrey McLaughlin who went to post war Kosovo to recruit women volunteers in a society that devalued both women and volunteer work.

There is life beyond politics, opportunities to serve our global society that political life equips us to exploit. That is a theme for a future Equal Voice Leadership conference.

My thanks to all.