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PREMIER OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

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Women in Leadership

Mr. Speaker, March 8th is International Women's Day, a global celebration of the women and girls in our lives who have made immeasurable contributions to making the Northwest Territories, Canada, and the world, a better place for everyone.

A little over a century ago, women were fighting for the right to vote, and the right to stand for office. Demanding better pay, and voting rights, 15,000 women marched through the streets of New York City in 1908. By 1911, the first International Women's Day was honoured by several European nations, with more than one million women and men attending rallies in support of women's rights to work, vote, hold public office and end discrimination.

Fast forward to 2019 Mr. Speaker, and Northwest Territories residents voted in the first gender-balanced Legislature in Canadian history. This would not have been possible if it was not for trailblazing Canadian feminists and activists who fought for what they believed in and challenged the status quo of a system that was created with a significant gender imbalance.

We have made great strides as a society to advance gender equality, but we still have a lot of work to do. Women continue to face gender-based barriers and discrimination, and these obstacles make it difficult for women to get an equal footing.

The world has been accustomed to male politicians, and there is a certain societal expectation that says female politicians should play nice. If we are seen as aggressive or having too strong a voice, it is easy to characterize us using negative and misogynist stereotypes. In many places, women are still seen as incapable of taking on responsibility in what are perceived as male-oriented areas, such as finance, energy, economic development, climate change, foreign affairs, defense, trade and infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, this is often the case in parliaments where women are given 'women's only' portfolios or only allowed to sit in women committees and are being pushed away from the other committees because of their gender. At times, it is a tougher environment for female politicians, Mr. Speaker. We have a microscope pointed on our activities all the time. The detractors just waiting for us to fail so they can say "I told you so".

I remember when I was elected Premier, people were saying things like I could not lead, that the economy was going to fail. The sky has not fallen with my election as Premier and I would argue that we have weathered the past year well.

Mr. Speaker, the impact of representation is critical to the younger generations. It is about being a role model and paving the way for young women to aspire to do great things, to be doctors, teachers, CEOs, and political leaders. The more women that get elected into any kind leadership position, the more it shows younger women and the women around us that they can do it too.

I remember hearing a story about Norway's Defense Minister. Important context, between 2001 and 2017, six of the seven Defense Ministers in Norway were female. A young boy was talking to the then Defense Minister and asked, "can boys be Defense Minister?" It is a good reminder that we all look for what we see, to understand what can be. Representation is key.

It is important to me that the next generation of women take up this fight as well, Mr. Speaker. I am glad that there are greater resources and role models to not only show that it is possible, but to provide the "know-how" to do it.

We must continue to work together to develop and implement strategies to eliminate these barriers, prevent violence against women and girls, update policies and programs to promote the development of women in leadership positions and continue the momentum as we strive to achieve gender equality.

Mr. Speaker, the full participation and leadership of women in all aspects of society enriches the lives of us all, and supports a kinder, more progressive world. However, women remain underrepresented in public life, and decision-making, Mr. Speaker.

Some of the best responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have been led by women, not only as politically-elected leaders, but at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. They include health care professionals, from cleaning staff to doctors, who continue to put their lives at risk every day to help people. They are scientists who have helped develop vaccines to protect residents and communities from the virus. They are the educators who have adapted and have continued to educate the future generation of leaders.

Mr. Speaker, International Women's Day was established 110 years ago to promote equal rights. These efforts laid the foundation for women to continue the fight against gender-based discrimination, patriarchal values, and systemic gender oppression that has held women back from being equal participants in our society.

As we celebrate the creativity, solidarity, and resilience of the women and girls all around us, it is important we remain committed to a world where women have a meaningful seat at the decision-making table.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.