

Welcome to the Anniversary Celebration of the Canadian Women Voters Congress.

I'm Jennifer Sweeney, the current President of the Congress. In her biography, "The Stream Runs Fast", Nellie McClung said,

*Canada is destined to be one of the great nations of the world and Canadian women must be ready for citizenship.*

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In the mid-90s, a group of visionary women in Vancouver started discussion groups on various issues, called the Circles of Influence.

These Circles brought together a member of the media, a politician, and a "person of influence", such as a representative from the police, to discuss important issues. These discussions were held every 3 months.

The Circles of Influence laid the foundation of the Canadian Women Voters Congress and was founded by Audrey Paterson on July 1, 1996.

Through the network developed in the Circles of Influence, a founding board of directors was established.

On April 8, 1998, the registrar of companies certified the Canadian Women Voters Congress as a non-profit society in the province of British Columbia.

Audrey Paterson is the Founding President and is often referred to as the "visionary" of the Congress.

The founders of the Congress are on record as Audrey Paterson, Kathy Sainty and Helen Wilkes. Other founding board members are Bernice Davidson, Kit Davison and Lois Brassart.

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With the organizational structure of the Congress in place, work began in earnest to establish the Women's Campaign School.

In 1998 Charlene Brisson was sponsored by the Congress to attend the Women's Campaign School at Yale University.

When she returned, the basic outline of the Yale school was used as a model for our Women's Campaign School.

With Joanne Silver's extensive political experience, and with input from the Honourary Co-Chairs, Mary Collins and Darlene Marzari, the first Women's Campaign School was held in 1999.

At that time, Bernice Davidson was President of the Congress, Audrey Paterson spoke at the Opening Reception as Founding President, and Senator Pat Carney was the keynote speaker.

In 2004 the Women's Campaign School at Yale invited us to send a representative to speak at their summer session. Bernice Davidson, as Past President, was chosen and gave the keynote speech at their opening banquet.

In 2006 the Congress was successful in being registered as a federal charitable organization, allowing us to issue receipts for donations.

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For over 10 years, the Circles of Influence, the Congress and the Women's Campaign School have educated, encouraged and inspired women to enter political life.

Keynote speakers have included:

Senator Pat Carney – 1999  
Dr. Carolyn Bennett – 2002  
Alexa McDonough – 2003  
Senator Sharon Carstairs – 2004  
Belinda Stronach – 2005  
Sheila Copps – 2006

We've had students from all over Canada as well as international students from Serbia, Ukraine, and India.

All of our instructors are women who have been successful in their political careers, either being elected to office or working on successful campaigns.

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Today, in Women's History Month, we are celebrating the 1918 Canada Elections Act -- 90 years ago -- that gave all Canadian women 21 years of age and over the right to vote in federal elections.

We are celebrating the anniversary of Person's Day, October 18, 1929, a 10-year struggle led by the Famous Five to have women declared "persons" under the law.

And we are celebrating:

10 years of the official incorporation of the Canadian Women Voters Congress  
10 successful Women's Campaign Schools  
382 graduates of the school, many of whom currently hold elected office

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Today we acknowledge the work of the founders of the Congress:

Audrey Paterson  
Kathy Sainty  
and Helen Wilkes.

Today, we acknowledge the other founding board members:

Bernice Davidson  
Lois Brassart  
And Kit Davison, who died in 2003

Today we acknowledge the work of the founding members of the Women's Campaign School:

Joanne Silver  
Charlene Brisson

Today we acknowledge the Founding Honourary Co-chairs of the Women's Campaign School:

Mary Collins  
Darlene Marzari

Today we acknowledge the 5 honorary members of the Canadian Women Voters Congress:

Charlene Brisson  
Audrey Paterson  
Penny Priddy  
Linda Reid  
Joanne Silver

And today we acknowledge our current and long-time Women's Campaign School co-chairs, Penny Priddy and Linda Reid.

Before I turn the floor over to our current Campaign School chairs, I'd like to end my remarks with a quote from another member of the Famous Five, Louise McKinney:

*The purpose of a woman's life is just the same as the purpose of a man's life—that she may make the best possible contribution to the generation in which she is living.*

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Jennifer Sweeney, President  
Canadian Women Voters Congress  
October 16, 2008