

Daughters of the Vote

On March 8, 2017, coinciding with International Women’s Day, 338 young women between 18 and 23 filled every seat in the House of Commons. Marking the 100th anniversary of some women receiving the right to vote in federal elections, Equal Voice’s highly successful Daughters of the Vote (DOTV) program drew positive attention from media around Canada and the world. As DOTV delegates reveal in this illuminating roundtable discussion, the inspiration they drew from each other and the women parliamentarians they met on the journey to Ottawa and during their week in the capital will have far-reaching effects as they share what they’ve learned with their communities and apply it in their own future endeavours.

Brielle Beardy, Justice Betty, Srosh Hassan, Jacqueline Keena, (Takudzwa) Lavin Mapinge and Alana Robert

CPR: What have you taken away from this experience as young women who may have had an interest in politics but perhaps had little or no experience with parliamentary politics or partisan politics?

Brielle Beardy: I took away the amazingly positive feeling of support among the delegates. We know that’s not really the state of things currently in parliament where there is a lot of heckling, talking over one another and undermining each other. Also, as someone who is both transgender and Indigenous and just fighting for

basic human rights, I went in thinking I would have to be very forward in order to be heard, but Equal Voice really helped to create an environment where I felt comfortable and respected. As young women spoke in the house and brought forward issues that were important in our communities, we listened to each other and supported one another. To me it just

Brielle Beardy was the DOTV delegate for Churchill-Keewatinook Aski. A young transgender Indigenous activist who grew up in northern Manitoba, she strives to educate others about LGBTTTQ rights, women’s rights and Indigenous rights. Justice Betty was the DOTV delegate for Willowdale. She studies political science in the Dual Degree Program between Columbia University and Sciences Po Paris. She frequently travels between New York and Canada speaking on issues related to the involvement of women, youth and people of colour in politics. Srosh Hassan was the DOTV delegate for Sherwood Park - Fort Saskatchewan. She studies sociology and political science at the University of Alberta and serves as a content editor for the Edmonton-based online publication, The Wanderer. Jacqueline Keena was the DOTV delegate for Winnipeg South Centre. Holding a BSc in Agribusiness from the University of Manitoba, she was active in student government and served on the board of directors for Be The Vote, a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization with the goal of increasing youth voter participation. (Takudzwa) Lavin Mapinge was the DOTV delegate for Grande Prairie – Mackenzie. Prior to immigrating to Canada to study social work and community development at MacEwan University, she worked with vulnerable communities in Zimbabwe. Alana Robert was the DOTV delegate for Charleswood - St. James - Assiniboia - Headingley. An Osgoode Hall Law School student, she hopes to pursue a career in Human Rights law and is the founder and president of the Justice For Women student group.

A Message To My Younger Self

Bernadette Jordan
MP for South Shore - St. Margaret’s (Nova Scotia)

Hey Bern; Time for some advice from your older (wiser?) self. If I can tell you one thing, it’s “don’t be a spectator in your own life!” If you want to travel, do it; if you want to study, do it; if you want to zip line – well, you may want to rethink that one; and if you want to run for public office, do it.” You only get one shot, so make the best of it. Sometimes people may think you are out of your league or out of your depth – don’t listen. You’re capable, smart, and fearless – don’t let anyone tell you any different. At the end of your time on this earth don’t look back and think, “I wish I would have...”





Brielle Beardy

reinforced that we need to bring more women, more marginalized voices, into parliament because politics needs to be more inclusive. We need to reclaim that space.

Justice Betty: I'd like to echo Brielle's point. The 338 young women who came together in Ottawa were some of the most positive, inspiring, and accomplished young women I have ever met. Although, the support we showed each other may not be reflective of what currently happens in parliament, I think having all these young women full of idealism together in one place can actually create an environment where we can plan to make the changes we want to see. Hopefully, after this planning stage, we can go out into the world and try to implement these ideas together.

Alana Robert: I think my biggest takeaway was seeing and speaking to such strong, intelligent, independent women already representing us in parliament, I was able to visualize myself in the future taking a similar position. That's one of the most important and inspiring things we can have as young women – these role models. Seeing them holding these positions allows us to see ourselves, hopefully not that far into the future, sitting at the decision-making table ourselves.

Lavin Mappinge: I took away the importance of working as a team and listening to other people's voices, and also, the need to create those spaces in our own communities. I also took away the idea that we need to carry on the light and to continue to build on the foundation that has been paved for us by the



Justice Betty

generation of women that has come before us. We need to lay down a brick to keep paving the way for those behind us. We need to be accountable for this great experience that has been put on our shoulders.

Srosh Hassan: I'll take away the messages we heard from women parliamentarians regarding what they said they wished they could tell their younger selves. We heard from women parliamentarians about what it took to campaign, how long it took some of them to realize that other people wanted to support them, and how long it took them to say yes to the idea of running. That stuck with me. A lot of times you think you have to get a degree first, or you have to be older to serve in parliament. Seeing these young women who are doing so much already shows that you can be passionate about issues, do work in your community to foster change, and that change is possible at any age. You don't need to be significantly older or have professional experience to see that there's something wrong and that you want to do something about it.

Jacqueline Keena: I'd like to echo what my fellow Daughters have said, and add that I was impressed to see the support for encouraging more women to become involved in politics across the political spectrum. There wasn't a person who was against it although there may be different ideas of how to go about it.

CPR: Within your age group, is parliament (federal, provincial, territorial) thought about or discussed much? Or is this something very much removed from your day to day lived experience?



Srosh Hassan

JB: I think it has been interesting to see what has happened among my peer group since November 2016. Prior to the last American election, many people my age seemed to be more focused on American politics and there was an impression that Canadian politics was a bit boring. But what we've seen as Canadians is that while American politics may be very entertaining, what's happened in the past few months has caused many people my age to be more self-reflective and as a result have a greater interest in how the Canadian political system works. And, specifically, there is a growing idea of Canada being a world leader or a greater leader on the international stage – that this period is a unique opportunity for Canada to step forward.

BB: Speaking on lived experience, I grew up in a First Nations community and there was a disconnect between how everything worked and which level of government was responsible. I come from an underprivileged background, and among my peers there is a huge amount of misunderstanding about how government works. I feel as though people who live on First Nations communities are just made to accept the status quo. That needs to change and I'm personally using my experience with Daughters of the Vote to help change that and educate people. I want to see more people like myself and the people I grew up around being engaged more in politics. The best way to target inequality is by knowing and by voting and being involved in every level of government.

LM: In the communities I've been in, I would say many young people feel rather neglected by the



Jacqueline Keena

leadership, whatever level of state. But when I was in school, it was a very different lived experience. Everyone was interested in politics. And they were learning how to express their opinions, even if these opinions were different from what they were taught growing up.

JK: In my experience, I think my friends fall into two groups of people. One group is very political, they seem to know everything that's going on, and you can have very in-depth conversations with them. The other group – maybe it's apathy or maybe it's just that politics isn't a hobby for them – but they aren't as well informed about the political system. But if you have a one-minute conversation with them about the issues they face as students, or nurses, or teachers, or tradespeople, they then realize that government does matter to them and they do want to know about the decisions being made on their behalf. But, there is an educational component missing, because if they're not taking politics specifically in school they may be missing some of the tools needed to find out this information or to understand what they're hearing on the news.

SH: I have friends that are very interested in parliament and we can meet up and talk about these things at length; and then there's a larger majority of people who have a sense of what's going on – especially American politics because that's what's coming into their feed. But many people my age feel rather cynical about politics in this country and they may have a very superficial understanding of it. You receive so much news at once that it's sometimes hard to keep track



Lavin Mapinge

of what's going on. Sometimes people don't have a handle on all the information, and others that do know what's going on aren't necessarily sure what they can do about it.

AR: I think young people are genuinely interested in what's happening in politics in Canada, and especially as they see more politicians coming from diverse backgrounds who resemble them making up parliament, that can be quite powerful and trigger an interest.

CPR: Many Daughters of the Vote delegates had the opportunity to meet with provincial or territorial parliamentarians in addition to federal parliamentarians. Was there any advice they offered or experience you had in speaking with them that you'd like to share?

BB: I had a chance to really get to know (Manitoba MLA) Nahanni Fontaine. I relocated from up north to Winnipeg and now live in her riding. In speaking to her and hearing from others on the panels, I really took away that we should be unapologetic about our politics. As young women, we're fighting our way to the top. To hear from someone of her calibre and to learn about what she went through, it really reflected some of my struggle. Growing up in poverty, being around drug abuse, being close to people who are involved in sex work... that's the kind of life I had and it's similar to what other Indigenous people have experienced. She talked about choosing to take those kinds of burdens and using them to shape you into



Alana Robert

a stronger person. That's what I'm carrying forward with me.

JB: Interestingly, last week I sat on a panel last week with Minister Chrystia Freeland, Minister Carolyn Bennett and Minister Helena Jaczek. All encouraged young women to become involved in politics in whatever way they choose; but one of the things they all stressed was the need to develop a specialty when it comes to running for office and honing one's skills before they enter political office. I thought that was quite interesting, because as women entering politics we are going to have to prove ourselves and justify ourselves in these positions more than our male counterparts. So, to have a specialty or expertise can really help to establish a form of armour. But, at the same time, while I value that advice, as the other Daughters said when thinking back to all of us sitting in the House of Commons, there is something to be said for early involvement. I think we are seeing a trend with some recent by-elections of young women getting their foot in the door earlier on. It is a question of balance – yes, hone that specialty to justify yourself and establish yourself in a field, but do not wait forever. Politics is demanding the voices of young people.

AR: One of the compelling pieces of advice we heard was from Celina Caesar-Chavannes. She said that if you've thought about something more than once, then you should go for it. She really encouraged us not to hesitate and to follow our passions and dreams.

LM: Most of the women on the panels stressed that you have to believe in yourself and the things you are passionate about because that's the first step in convincing someone to believe in your vision. But if you're doubting what you have in your hands, no one will be willing to take it. Also, they told us about the importance of knowing when to take a break and taking care of yourself, because you cannot keep giving from an empty well.

CPR: What has your experience been like since the event? Are you still hearing from other Daughters of the Vote? Have you maintained the enthusiasm you had?

JK: I think the magnitude of the event, the sheer number of us there, really struck a chord with current parliamentarians. It was a clear reminder that when 338 of us were in the House of Commons, that was more women than have been elected federally in the entire history of Canada. Since the event, we've all gone back to our ridings. People want to hear about the event itself, but they also want to hear about women in politics generally – what we think, what other people think. It's created 338 small conversations across the country that need to happen to keep moving forward.

BB: Since the event there have been many opportunities for me to keep engaging people about women in politics. I was the single female transgender at the event, so I did garner quite a bit of attention and I've been quite humbled by it. And I'm still riding a wave of positivity from the event. It's been so uplifting to develop a genuine sisterhood across the country with so many beautiful, intelligent young women who want to look out for each other. I've remained in contact with so many of them. What I set out to do with Daughters of the Vote was to develop skills I need to use to advocate for the issues I'm passionate about, and it has been a huge help with that.

JB: I think the work that Equal Voice did in bringing 338 like-minded, yet exceptionally different, young women together was incredible. We've formed a very powerful network that has continued through our Facebook group, individual connections, etc. Interestingly, earlier this week Minister Bennett invited me to the permanent mission here in New York, and I ran into a sister from Daughters of the Vote who was there to attend the UN's forum on Indigenous issues. You don't just expect to run into people like that, but there we were attending this meaningful event together. Daughters of the Vote represents a unique and

A Message To My Younger Self



Filomena Tassi
MP for Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas (Ontario)

Believe in yourself. Read and reflect on the words of Marianne Williamson, words which Nelson Mandela used in an inaugural address: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God."

Never see any obstacle as insurmountable. Take the long view. What one day may seem an impossible situation, with time, wisdom, patience and good guidance can and will be overcome.

Keep intentions that are genuine and work towards the promotion of justice, fairness and goodness. This will help you to feel peace and fulfillment at the end of your career.

Stay humble and treat everyone with respect. Serving as a Member of Parliament is a blessing, an honour and a gift. Never forget those who entrusted you to serve. Remember you are fortunate.

Include exercise and meditation/mindfulness in your daily practice. It is very important to take care of yourself. You must stay healthy to serve most effectively. Make time for this in your life.

powerful group that will continue to have a positive impact within our own communities and more broadly speaking throughout Canadian society. As we embark on our individual missions, I am confident that we will be able to leverage the support of one another.

SH: I'd just like to echo what my fellow delegates have said. The solidarity really stuck with me. The fact that we were able to make such meaningful connections with so many like-minded, yet unique people was amazing. And, the individual conversations we're able to bring back to our communities will really have a lasting impact. It's been so touching to have people come up to me telling me they heard my statement in the House or asking me about my time in Ottawa.

CPR: Is there anything we haven't covered in this discussion that you'd like to mention before we conclude? Or, knowing that many parliamentarians will be reading this, is there anything you'd like to say to our current parliamentary representatives?

JB: The treatment many female parliamentarians have to endure is shameful and really discouraging for young women. The 338 of us within our communities have an obligation and duty to encourage other young women to realize that while opposition is going to be a part of being a woman in power, it is the first step towards something better. There is a tendency to normalize bullying against women – especially women in politics – and one day I would like it to be that women in leadership positions is the new status quo. I'd like to thank the many women parliamentarians who have served our country and who have been trailblazers. Moving forward, the 338 of us really have to step up and set an example for those of us in the next generation considering politics. But also, we have to step up for young women who are not considering entering politics because they think their voice isn't worth hearing. We need to remember them when advocating for change.

BB: I'd like to second that. When I came into this program, I wanted to represent other young women coming from challenging socio-economic circumstances, and particularly women on reserves. We need to make our politics more accessible and to use terms that more people can understand. And I just want to state again, to my fellow Daughters on this call, how much this experience has changed my life. I feel empowered, humbled, gracious and awed by the work these young women are doing. I can't wait to see a future with more feminist voices and a more inclusive future. I am so much more hopeful because I've had the chance to meet you.

SH: I got chills hearing that. Thank you for putting into words everything that I've been thinking about. As someone who fits into many intersections of society, I wish our parliamentarians - acknowledging that we are multi-partisan and may have different ideas about how to go about doing this - would find ways to be more inclusive and representative of us – of women of color, of queer women, of Indigenous women, of disabled women, of immigrant women. I think we often see politicians pick and choose issues that matter to them, but people are complex human beings and they have many life experiences that help shape the way they see the world. I love seeing some of this intersectionality reflected in the advocacy among the young women of my generation, but I think we're still a good distance away from seeing that fully reflected in parliament.

CPR: Thank you all so much again. You are all wonderful representatives of your fellow Daughters of the Vote delegates, and members of your generation generally.



A Message To My Younger Self

Irene Mathysen
MP for London-Fanshawe
(Ontario)

The opportunity to serve as a Canadian parliamentarian should always fill you with a sense of wonder at the incredible privilege the work affords. Despite your youth, challenges and yes—barriers, never count yourself out. In the course of whatever service you are fortunate enough to undertake on behalf of the many and diverse communities of Canada, remember that true service requires humility and the measured conduct of one who understands the role of the servant leader. And while you should respond to those who depend on you with grace, commitment and kindness also remember to never be afraid to shake up the status quo. Well-behaved women rarely make history; so make history.