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Women in politics speak

Daughters of the Vote participant says more women needed in government

April Hudson
Northern News Services
Thursday, March 2, 2017

SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE

Fifteen women from across the Northwest Territories convened in Yellowknife on Feb. 12 for an initiative aimed at getting more women into politics.



Women from across the Northwest Territories convened in Yellowknife on Feb. 12 for the Daughters of the Vote workshop. In the front, from left, are Chukita Gruben, Jacq Brasseur, Alyssa Ross, Laney Beaulieu, Coana Paulette, Nhy Ly, Range Lake MLA Caroline Cochrane, Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, Yellowknife city councillor Shauna Morgan and Fort Simpson's Reannda Cli. In the second row, from left, are Emily Smith, Jaylene Delorme-Buggins, Olivia Villebrun, Yellowknife city councillor Linda Bussey, Janelle Nitsiza and former MLA Jane Groenewegen. In the back, from left, are Raven Firth, Kiera Boulanger-Rowe, Yellowknife city councillor Rebecca Alty, Yellowknife Catholic school board vice-chair Erin Currie and former MLA Sandy Lee. - photo courtesy of the Legislative Assembly of the NWT

Titled Daughters of the Vote, the initiative brought women together to participate in workshops with current and former female politicians.

The initiative is run by Equal Voice, an organization that operates with the objective of electing more women to all political levels of government.

Women came from nine communities to take part, including Fort Simpson's Reannnda Cli.

Cli said she has always had an interest in politics, ever since her days participating in student politics. But although she follows federal politics, she says she didn't know much about territorial politics until recently.

"I really wanted to learn more about that and how it works," she said.

"It was definitely an amazing experience. I learned more than I expected. I kind of went in without knowing what to expect."

Cli said many of the workshops she participated in focused on self-development and the barriers women face when deciding to enter politics.

Participants were involved in panels with current and former MLAs and heard first-hand accounts of those struggles.

"It was really inspiring to hear about women who were mothers and were really busy, and they weren't really getting what they wanted out of their government so they just decided to go for it themselves," Cli said.

"It was really cool to hear those first-hand stories and be able to ask them questions about it."

Having the opportunity to meet other women from across the territory with similar interests was a highlight, she said, and gave her the chance to hear different opinions on the various issues facing communities in the North.

She was also surprised to learn there are only two women currently sitting as MLAs in the 19-seat legislative assembly.

"I kind of thought there would be more. I think it's definitely important to get more women in all levels of politics," she said, pointing to the example of Fort Simpson, which elected a female mayor and three female councillors during its 2015 municipal election.

"That's really great to see, to show other young women in the communities that's possible," she said.

"That equality (in government) is something I've always thought is very important."

Looking toward the future, Cli said the experience re-ignited a desire to participate in politics, as she once did on the student level.

She said her interest currently lies in territorial politics due to the wider range of issues that need to be looked at.

But she acknowledges territorial politics are more intimidating than community or school governance.

"Especially if you see you're not even really running against other women, and if you do have a family or other things you have to take care of, you look at your day

and think, 'Do I even have time for that?'" she said.

"That's probably one of the biggest barriers."



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