

September 2026 Speaker - Kathleen Wynne

Encouraging Young Women to Engage in Politics

Kathleen Wynne, to date the only female premier (2013-18) in Ontario history, got our '26-'27 season off to a rousing start. She expressed concern about a recurrence of misogyny against women in all walks of life, including politics, which she attributed largely to U.S. President Donald Trump's nasty comments, then moved on to her main theme. Using her own life story as a sample blueprint, she laid out how women can do well in politics despite prejudice. She has a strong connection to North York. She lived as a child for some years in the York Mills-Bayview area and her political career was rooted in North York, beginning as a Toronto District School Board trustee in 2000 for North York's Ward 8, then as MPP for Don Valley West from 2003 to 2022 when she retired from politics.

Based on her experiences she made these points:

- “Bring your early years with you. I was the eldest of four girls, the bossy pants. One of my sisters had a learning disability. There was no educational support; instead, she was strapped. When people express nostalgia for the good old days it angers me. It wasn't that way.” Her sister's experience spurred Wynne to be an education-for-all advocate.
- Participate in sports from earliest age. She was a champion track and field competitor. A way of learning how to work with and to compete against others. “According to statistics, 94 percent of women CEOs took part in competitive sports. Regrettably, girls are said to leave sports at a greater rate than boys. Women should continue as they age; not enough do.”
- Age isn't important. She started when older – “47 as a school trustee, 60 when I became premier.” As an aside she joked about us: “I'm 73. It's nice to see a group of younger people.” She qualified: “Some of you!”
- Lifestyle shouldn't be “a barrier.” She declared herself as lesbian ten years before she went into politics and was one of the first openly gay persons in Canadian politics. “I wasn't going to let it sideline me, to let homophobia destroy me. Politics is a microcosm of society.”
- Realize that women tend to get a chance to be a political party leader when that party is in trouble. “It's not explicitly said but it's generally so. I became Liberal Party leader largely because the then [male] leader had become very unpopular.”
- “When I'm asked is it harder for a woman, I say it's hard to compare because I've never been a man. Getting an education prepared me. Education affects everything.” Pre-politics she taught school which led to her becoming involved in the community at large.
- Start local.

In closing, she urged us all to “encourage and mentor young people, share your story as an example to connect with them. Everyone of you has the capacity to do this.”

Susan Goldenberg