



January 12, 2016

Message from Opposition Leader Brian Pallister

This month, Manitoba marks the 100th anniversary of a milestone in human rights. On January 28, 1916, most women in this province became the first in Canada to be granted the right to vote.

That historic achievement was the culmination of the tireless efforts of the Famous Five, whose social justice message is as relevant today as it was a century ago. Led by Nellie McClung, this group of women took on a struggle of suffrage that ultimately led to Manitoba setting a standard of equality for all other provinces to follow. However, the struggle continued throughout the twentieth century. It wasn't until decades later that Aboriginal and Indigenous women were granted the same voting right as every other person in Manitoba.

Amidst this long struggle, an important story took place that is only now being told: Twenty-six years before securing the right to vote, women in Manitoba became eligible to serve as school trustees. For the first time in our province's history, following the most recent municipal elections, women now hold the majority in Manitoba's trusteeship.

This trajectory, from 1890 through to the first recorded convention of the Manitoba Educational Association's Department of School Administration in 1907 (forerunner to the Manitoba School Boards Association) which featured only five women delegates, and now to the current situation in which women have become the majority more than 100 years later, is significant and worthy of commemoration.

Over the years, our women trustees have represented many cultural groups and public interests, and have held various political and partisan affiliations. What they have all shared, however, is a genuine desire to promote the cause of education in Manitoba. These women were champions for social justice and equality, while effecting positive change and making a difference for the benefit of all Manitobans. This is certainly an achievement we can all join in celebrating.

It's said by many that education is a right, but it is also a gift - one we must appreciate as individuals, and as a community strive to nurture. To teachers and to trustees, we express gratitude for all you do to ensure our children strive to reach their potential - so they too can help to shape the fabric of our society, and can walk in Nellie's footsteps to ensure a better life for all.