

### **Virtual President's Plus New Year's Party (January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025)**

The Presidents Plus New Year's Party proved to be an engaging and well attended event with Club members having the opportunity to meet each other (albeit in small groups) and to discuss the contents of Senator McPhedran's address which opened the party following Ontario Council's toast to the leadership and members of OC's Clubs. Almost all (if not all) Ontario Council Clubs were represented, from Thunder Bay (our most northern and most western Club) to Windsor (farthest west in the south of the province) to Cornwall (farthest east).

Club members were asked, after introductions, if they had encountered any difficulties with respect and civility amongst members in their respective Clubs. Fortunately, few reported problems of this nature (or at least knowledge of it). However, amongst the Clubs whose members had met with incivility or whose Clubs were affected by disrespectful behaviour, examples ranged from racist remarks to 'difficult personalities' which caused great stress for other members and for Club board members to deal with.

Several Clubs had formed specific ad hoc committees to tackle internal challenges with uncivil or disrespectful behaviour and/or referred to the National or Ontario Council Code of Conduct for guidance. Only a couple of Clubs perceived this behaviour as seriously problematic such that it could not be handled within the Club.

Instead, most conversations centred on pervasive political incivility and noted its existence at the highest level of our governments down to municipal governments. Not only was the behaviour problematic, but the perpetrators most often attacked opposing members personally, not just their policies or views, and offered no concrete solutions to associated topics of attack. Combative language and disrespectful behaviours are not models for Canadians to emulate according to one of the groups.

This latter discussion raised the issue of the call to action by Senator McPhedran for CFUW to promote, amongst sitting MPs and Senators as well as candidates in the federal election soon to be called, the pledge of civility, specifically to end the harassment of women politicians, but also more broadly to commit to stopping the 'incredible colonialism, racism, misogyny, and discrimination' present in our Parliament, the Senate and all associated committees.

Some participants were unsure if CFUW had the right to ask this of government officials. Others felt that a good place to start was in their own Club, asking members to sign something similar. Post presentation by the Senator, several Clubs have indicated that they have already started or are planning to start a campaign amongst their provincial and federal elected officials to gain signatures, and some will contact their local federal government officials to see if they have signed the pledge already. Some Clubs felt that all candidates for federal and provincial ridings be approached to sign. Notably, several of OC Clubs straddle more than one riding both federally and provincially so work will be greater for these Clubs.

Another suggestion for Senator McPhedran's call to action was to resurrect the Better Ballot Campaign (BBC) launched by CFUW Guelph in 2019. Note: Ontario Council is exploring this option and will advise Clubs as soon as possible.

Op-Eds to local print newspapers/electronic versions regarding inappropriate behaviour by politicians was also raised as a tactic to encourage more civil behaviour. One Club had already used this approach successfully. A novel suggestion in another group was that all 'put downs' be countered with 'put ups'.

An exploration of the genesis of the federal pledge identifies that it was inspired by H.E.R. Halton in 2024 (<https://mariannemeedward.ca/halton-elected-representatives-h-e-r-release-statement-on-creating-safe-supportive-environment-for-women-elected-officials/>). The parliamentary pledge, authored by the Canadian Association of Feminist Parliamentarians, has been included in this newsletter, separately.

If time permitted, participants were asked 'If you could wave a magic wand and make one thing better in your Club, what would that be?' Member recruitment emerged as the number one issue: many responses related to: finding ways to recruit younger members into Clubs; recruiting recently retired members through targeted campaigns; recruiting more members; recruiting more diverse members; more interest groups (or at least not closing the numbers eligible to participate but rather opening additional groups); a category of 'members at large' so those who move away from their Clubs can somehow still participate in CFUW. Other topics included raising Club profiles in the community; encouraging more members to step into leadership positions or have other governance models available for consideration; access to 'technical' people; encourage more members to participate in advocacy; and, improve communication of information (it is not enough so say it is on the website).

Thanks to all who attended. Your participation in and support for Ontario Council events is a testament to the value you place on your membership, your commitment to life-long learning and your desire to always improve.

Wishing you a healthy, successful and meaningful 2025,  
CFUW Ontario Council

### **Sandra Shaw's letter of gratitude to Senator McPhedran**

Dear Senator McPhedran,

Ontario Council, its member Clubs and I can't thank you enough for speaking to us at our Presidents Plus Virtual New Year's Party on Monday. Your words were stirring. The Clubs and the Council have been energised to pick up the Better Ballot Campaign (2019) which CFUW ran with its members for the 2020 federal election. This will be combined with Marianne Meed Ward's municipally led campaign and the Canadian Association of Feminist Parliamentarians pledge for political civility and cessation of harassment. What a call to action for us!

Thank you too for recognising the work that CFUW does in the area of human rights, particularly for women and girls, not only here in Ontario but across the country and the globe. As I mentioned, we are often referred to as Canada's best kept (advocacy) secret. While we would like that to change, your praise goes a long way to pointing out that the actions of CFUW are noticed and appreciated. Your comments helped to increase the pride our members have in the organisation and gives them strength to continue their advocacy efforts.

Lastly, we are grateful for your time. In this age of tremendous work loads for those who are dedicated to their causes, time is the most precious commodity. That you could give so freely of yours is a gift that we will not forget.

I hope that your trek on Monday was free of the hassles that so often accompany air travel and that you and your luggage both arrived (at the same time) at your destination. Again, CFUW Ontario Council wishes you a safe and healthy 2025 and that all your efforts on behalf of women, justice and all Canadians be fruitful.

I will see you at the UNCSW in March.

Kindest regards,

***Sandra Shaw***

President (2024-2026), CFUW Ontario Council

