

Women encouraged to run for office

By Krista Conrad

Staff Reporter

Female elected officials in the Foothills say the Province is on-track with a program aimed to encourage more women to run for office.

The second #ReadyForHer tour is getting underway in Alberta, with how-to videos to inspire women to run for municipal councils and school boards. According to the ministry of status of women, there are a number of reasons women shy away from running for office: childcare or household responsibilities, feeling they lack the skills or education, fear of sexism in politics, and the expense of campaigning.

Okotoks Coun. Carrie Fischer said that may be true in a lot of cases, though she never faced the same barriers when she decided to run for council.

"I actually never have hesitated," she said. "It's always been something I'm interested in. It's a different way to build community and I've always been interested in politics and the



BRENT CALVER/OWW

Okotoks Coun. Carrie Fischer says she'd love to see more women run for positions on council or school boards and would be willing to chat with anyone considering putting their name forward.

political process and being at the table."

Fischer said there are some challenges faced by women in office that make it difficult to inspire some to run, including a lack of childcare and compensation for councillors, but it's important to bring their voices to the table.

She said women make up between 50 and 52 per cent of the population in Alberta, but only about 30 per cent of municipal government representatives are

female.

Some studies indicate having females on councils or at board tables increases the quality of decisions made, she said.

"There's lot of recent evidence that's come out that females at the board table of large companies actually increase profits by a huge amount," said Fischer. "We see similar results, obviously not in profits, but we see similar results at council and in committees when they're at the table."

She said some women are concerned with possible disparity between men and women on councils and boards. Meanwhile, others such as MLA Sandra Jensen and MP Michelle Rempel have been vocal on their social media and Twitter feeds, and are attacked more viciously online than their male counterparts, said Fischer. It's not something Fischer has had to deal with personally.

"I know some of my female colleagues have

been diminished or their opinions have been minimized, or they've had different encounters with sexism through their process, and I can't say that I've ever experienced that here," said Fischer.

She said she'd be happy to sit down with any women in the community who are considering throwing their hat in the ring in the 2017 municipal election to talk about being on council.

MD of Foothills Coun. Suzanne Oel said she also hasn't experienced sexism within her own council, but she said she has noticed the underrepresentation of women at many committee and board tables.

"I'm one of very few it seems," said Oel. "When I sit on council stuff for the whole of southern Alberta there's only a couple of women. I'm very often the only woman in the room."

She said she'd like to see a stronger female representation in elected positions because it brings a wider range of perspectives, ideas, talents and backgrounds to discussions and decision-making processes.

This is not to belittle the

work of her male counterparts, she said.

"I'm with men who work really hard on behalf of their communities," said Oel. "I'm not saying anything pro or con about them being there, but I just wonder how we might see more women involved."

The importance of diversifying representation extends to school boards as well. Foothills School Division trustee Christine Pretty said the government is taking some good steps to inform and encourage more women to run for positions.

Though she never felt at a disadvantage because of her gender, she said she understands how the negativity surrounding politicians in general could discourage anyone from running for office.

"I think it's a great idea always to encourage women to be more involved in politics," said Pretty. "I think it's amazing to have women role models for our female students. I think that's very important for them."

For more information about #ReadyForHer visit www.alberta.ca.

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