



Stuart Benson  
**Party Central**

# NAWL celebrates 50 years of feminist law reform

The National Association of Women and the Law celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Feb. 29 in the Wellington Building with an awards reception and a giant red-velvet cake.

Parliamentarians, Senators, and feminist and social justice leaders gathered on Parliament Hill on Feb. 29 to celebrate five decades of feminist advocacy and reform of both the Canadian legal system and profession for the National Association of Women and the Law's 50th anniversary reception and awards ceremony.

As **Party Central** arrived on the third floor of the Wellington Building just after 5 p.m., the party was in full swing as guests took turns at the camera booths before making their way either to the cash bar or for a plate of plant-based hors d'oeuvres. And while **Party Central** prefers a more carnivorous platter, it probably didn't matter as most of the curried chickpea casserole and penne alfredo had been nearly entirely devoured by the power-suited lawyers and activists already queued for the buffet before any photographic evidence of its existence could be obtained.

After settling for some sliced fruit and a brownie—exquisitely paired with a \$6 bottle of Moosehead Lager—**Party Central** got to socializing while leaving the task of snapping photos in the capable hands of the Hill Times' photographer **Cynthia Münster**. Thankfully, to make both of our jobs easier, most of the night's guests had been given the green precinct visitors' passes, making the people-watching and cutline gathering a breeze.

Amongst the crowd, **Party Central** spotted author and lawyer **Maureen McTeer** and her husband, former prime minister **Joe Clark**; Immigration Minister **Marc Miller**; Liberal parliamentary secretaries **Pam Damoff** and **Lisa Hefner**; NDP MP **Lori Idlout**; Bloc Québécois MP **Andréanne Larouche**; Senators **Kim Pate** and **Marilou McPhedran**; **Anne McGrath**, principal secretary to NDP leader **Jagmeet Singh**; Earncliffe Strategies' **Mary Anne Carter**, Momentum Canada's **Fae Johnstone**, and **PolySeSouvient's Heidi Rathjen**, who would later in the night receive NAWL's inaugural Shirley Greenberg Award for Outstanding Leadership in Feminist Law Reform. Rathjen also accepted the award on behalf of **Nathalie Provost**, who was unable to attend.

After a brief period of mingling, with musical accompaniment provided by the Harea String Quartet, guests were invited to their seats—at least those lucky enough to find one in the packed room—for a welcome message from **Amanda Therrien**,

NAWL national steering committee co-chair, and **Tiffany Butler**, NAWL's executive director, with a land acknowledgement by Algonquin Elder **Annie St-Georges**.

Attendees were also treated to a premiere screening of *Rightfully Hers*, an archival documentary that tells the story of NAWL from its inception to today with the help of the University of Ottawa's Archives and Special Collections. Featuring interviews with founding and current members of NAWL's steering committee and volunteers, combined with archival images and film, the documentary covers the organization's work, from its origins at a University of Windsor Law School conference in 1974 and the fight to grant gender equality rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to its continuing work today to ensure those rights are upheld.

Unfortunately, due to some technical difficulties, some of the women literally had their voices silenced by a loose, possibly misogynistic, audio cable that kept shorting. Fortunately, by the time you're done reading this, the film will be uploaded with the uninterrupted audio to NAWL's website: [nawl.ca/50years/](http://nawl.ca/50years/).

After the film, Justice Minister **Arif Virani** gave some short remarks, touting his government's feminist credentials, pointing to the fact that, for the first time in history, a majority of Canada's Supreme Court Justices are women and the recently announced pharmacare legislation that would provide free contraceptives and birth control. However, Virani did omit that the money to pay for those medications won't appear until Budget 2025.

Following Virani's speech, Manitoba Court of King's Bench and Court of Appeal Justice **Freda M. Steel** took to the podium to deliver the keynote address. However, **Party Central** must offer Steel my most sincere apology, as almost as soon as she began speaking, there was a news alert announcing the death of former prime minister **Brian Mulroney** at the age of 84.

While **Party Central** will leave the eulogies to those who weren't an infant when #18 left office, one testament to the man's cultural impact is the fact that, as a child, this reporter was convinced Mulroney was the actor playing the villain in *Superman III*. However, you may need to squint and be five years old to see the resemblance.

Once the speeches were completed, Rathjen accepted her award alongside the winners of NAWL's 50<sup>th</sup>-anniversary essay contest, **Tess Moffat**, **Veronica Kiang**, and **Marina Bredin**.

To cap off the night, guests were treated to a final music performance of The Cranberries Dream by the all-woman choir In Harmony and a slice of NAWL's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday red velvet cake.

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The Hill Times



PolySeSouvient's Heidi Rathjen, left, and Parliamentary Secretary Pam Damoff at the NAWL 50th anniversary reception on Feb. 29, where Rathjen was awarded the inaugural Shirley Greenberg Award for Outstanding Leadership in Feminist Law Reform.



NAWL's Tiffany Butler, left, Liberal MP Lisa Hefner, and NAWL's Suzanne Zaccour.



Zaccour, left, Rathjen, Justice Minister Arif Virani, and Pam Damoff.



Senator Marilou McPhedran, left, and Elder Annie St-Georges.



Essay contest winners Veronica Kiang, left, and Tess Moffat with Zaccour.



Rideau Institute President Peggie Mason, left, lawyer and author Maureen McTeer, and Damoff.



Andrea Prajerova, left, Meseret Haileyesus, Jasmine Hamilton and Michaela Mayer.



NAWL's Christine Blain, left, NDP top strategist Anne McGrath, McPhedran, and NAWL's Tamra Thomson.



Justice Minister Arif Virani.

The Hill Times photographs by Cynthia Münster



Manitoba Justice Freda M. Steel.



NAWL's Tiffany Butler, Suki Beavers, and Martha Jackman cut the cake.