

Minister for Women and Equalities Liz Truss speech at The House magazine's Women in Westminster: The 100 event

Thank you very much, it's fantastic to be here this afternoon with so many brilliant women, from politics, from the lobby, and from Whitehall, who we are celebrating today.

And congratulations to everybody who's made it onto the list, and I think there's loads of brilliant people who aren't on the list who ought to be as well. Not least our brilliant special advisers, working across the system.

Now I first got the urge for politics when I was quite young and my mother dragged me on a CND march, and we shouted about banning the bomb before I was quite old enough to understand what it meant.

And what it showed me, is that anybody, wherever you live, whoever you are, you can have an impact on the future of the world, and that was a really, really exciting idea. So although I moved to the right, politically, I've never lost that sense of activism and that sense of the ability to shape the future, which is what I think drives so many of us into politics.

Now the first female MP I ever met was Teresa Gorman, who you will recall was one of the Maastricht rebels, and she came to my university to do a seminar, and she started off the seminar by saying "politics is better than sex". And you can imagine all of the male tutors kind of crossing their legs and just looking completely horrified at this woman and her bold statement. And she proceeded to spend the next hour telling us about how dreadful the European Unions was, how great Hormone Replacement Therapy was, I see some friends of Teresa here today, and also the advantages of modern Tudor properties. But I've never forgotten that. And I think the women in politics that stick with me most are the people who were prepared to be different and say things that were different.

Whether that was Barbara Castle, a great Labour politician who fought against the status quo, or indeed Mrs Thatcher. And I do want to celebrate the difficult women, the battle axes and the rebels, that we have seen over the previous generation. But of course, when Teresa Gorman was in the House of Commons there were only 60 women MPs, and now there are 220, and it's been absolutely brilliant to have been joined by all these reinforcements, and it's no little thanks to people like Baroness Jenkin, who is a force of nature, and those women who were not prepared to stand for Parliament, she forced them to stand! It wasn't 'ask them to stand' it was 'tell them to stand'!

It's brilliant to be joined by all these reinforcements, and so many women of character, who I am sure we will remember in years to come, as making a massive impact on our politics.

There is of course one issue now in Westminster though, which is because all of these new female MPs, the facilities are now rather limited. Any parliamentarians will know you have to go searching around for a loo that isn't occupied, the female loos, so I think a key thing we have to do for Parliament is make sure the facilities for women actually match the number of women we now have in politics.

And it's not just about women on the front line, it's about women in the backroom. It's about making sure we've got more female special advisers, making sure we have more female journalists reporting on politics in the lobby, making sure we have more females in Whitehall as well. I'm very proud that at the Department for International Trade, that we have a female Permanent Secretary, and a female Secretary of State, and I'd like to see more departments like that in the future, setting an example but also unleashing all the talent, because what we know, is that when women aren't allowed to participate in society, when they're not able to put forward their ideas, when they're not able to make change, we're just missing out on an incredible amount of talent and opportunity. And I see talent and opportunity in this room.

I hope this award goes from strength to strength, it's fantastic to be here today, thank you to the House magazine for organising it, and maybe we should expand the number next year, so we can get even more brilliant women on the list. Thank you.