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# Family law reform 'desperately needed'

Story by Ann Hauprich-Nielsen  
Photos by Rod Jerred  
Canada's most famous university law student took time off from classes Thursday to speak before 400 people at Oakville's Sheridan College on two of her favorite subjects: Family Law and her politician husband from Rocky Mountain, Alberta.



turn up somewhere in The Globe and Mail.

Advocates change  
Then—trying to ignore the swarm of press photographers clicking all around her—Ms. McTeer began to read from a prepared text relating her views on the relationship between the family unit and the laws governing families in our society.

"Change is natural in the evolution of any society, and we are in desperate need of revised laws which reflect the realities of Canadian families in the 1970s," Ms. McTeer told the largely female audience crammed inside the small auditorium and those watching her on closed circuit TV in the corridor.

She pointed out that "dramatic changes" have taken place in the family unit in this country during the past few years.

Smaller families  
For example, she noted, the size of the unit has decreased while divorcees in Ontario have tripled since 1967. Common-law relationships are becoming increasingly accepted and more than 40 per cent of the work force is now female.

"These changes require comparable changes in the law," Ms. McTeer asserted. "Women are no longer economic appendages to men and laws which promote the idea that they are do injustice to men as well as to women." Working women are not new, she added.

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"Joe's mother worked as a school teacher in High River (Alberta) for 20 years and my own mother had to work to help support her six children," Ms. McTeer said. "Women have been equal in responsibility—if not in pay—for a long time."

Defends name  
During her speech, Ms. McTeer also defended her decision to retain her maiden name after marrying Joe Clark in 1973.

"A lot of people consider this action as a rejection of one of our oldest customs," Ms. McTeer said. "But the decision to keep my own name was not meant as a rejection of tradition. It was just another choice."

"Who am I to say that one way is better than the other?" she asked. "I just think the option should be there if it's right for the couple. I don't think they should be subjected to a lot of administrative problems because the wife's OHIP number or passport is in a name which is different from the husband's."

Thank Hollywood  
"Professional women have long used their own names in their work, but used their husband's name socially," she pointed out.

"And at the risk of sounding flippant, I think we can thank Hollywood for being among the first to promote a woman's right to use her own name."

"In fact," she quipped, "think of how confusing it would have been if Elizabeth Taylor had changed her name each time she married."

Questions  
A question and answer period followed Ms. McTeer's formal speech, during which she was asked her views on a variety of topics ranging



from the rights of children and her opinion of Laura Sabia, to how she feels about salaries for housewives.

In response to these



MAUREEN McTEER, wife of national Progressive Conservative leader Joe Clark, responds to a question from the audience following her lecture on Family Law at Sheridan College in Oakville last week.

questions, Ms. McTeer said "children are often at the mercy of their parents who are not always happy, stable individuals."

"There should be laws guaranteeing them proper nutrition and the right not to be physically or emotionally abused," she said.

Need the Sabia  
She termed Laura Sabia "an asset to the whole country—not just women", but added that not everyone can afford to be as outspoken as the former Ontario Status of Women Chairman.

Ms. McTeer said she thinks there should be some compensation to homemakers, but that the tax people have told her paying salaries to Canada's homemakers would be "impossible."

"I like the suggestion that women be allowed to contribute to the Canada Pension Plan so they will at least be able to recover a pension in their later years," she said.

Press often inaccurate  
When asked "Do you think the press is fair to your husband?" Ms. McTeer took a long, sweeping look at the media people surrounding

her, then laughed: "You want me to answer that here?"

Then, pausing a moment for thought, she replied: "I think a free and unfettered press is essential, but the one



we have (in Canada) now does not often reflect the entire country."

She cited the 1976 leadership convention as "a prime example of how a strong, central media" can create a false picture of what is going on.

"As you'll recall, Joe was virtually written off by the media at large—yet he emerged the winner."

"Herd mentality"  
"I hate to say it, but I think we have a herd mentality here in Canada," she said. "One story is told and continually repeated until it becomes fact. I think it would be good if the press saw regional difficulties and regional realities."

She also said she thought the comparison of herself to "another person in a similar position" (an obvious reference to Margaret Trudeau) was "very unfair."

"You have to look at a person's whole background or a comparison can't possibly be accurate," she said.

Politics  
Asked how she sees her role as wife of Canada's possible next prime minister, Ms. McTeer replied: "If and when Joe is elected Prime Minister, I see myself as a responsible activist—someone who is aware of a very important segment of the nation's problems."

"I would be vocal where it's worthwhile being vocal," she said. "But I don't want to become a cause celebre or a symbol of feminism."

She admitted having "political ambitions" at one time, but is now more concerned with her husband's rise to the top than her own.

"Let's face it," Ms. McTeer said. "Joe has to deal with the caucus. If I were an MP and was appointed cabinet minister, people would think it was because I was nagging

him at home and he HAD to make me a minister."

Law studies  
Likewise, she said, her law studies will never bring her to the ranks of Federal Judge.

"I don't think I'll ever be able to do anything full-time," she explained, looking down into the microphones. "Federal judges are appointed by the prime minister and because of all the travel involved in Joe's job, I'd only be able to work part-time at a law firm. And who would want to hire a lawyer for a few months at a time?"

"But luckily," she perked up, "there are lots of other things you can do with a law degree besides becoming an attorney."

"And, anyway, by the time Joe's finished in politics I think I'll be ready to retire, too."



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