

NEWS LOCAL

Hilltop teacher earns award nomination for promoting democracy

By Peter Shokeir

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Hilltop teacher Jennifer Keay sits in MP Catherine McKenna's seat while visiting the House of Commons chamber in Ottawa last month (Submitted).

Hilltop High School teacher Jennifer Keay recently earned a nomination for the 2017 Everyday Political Citizen (EPC) Award by helping students become more engaged in Canada's political system.

Hosted by the charitable organization Samsara, the EPC contest profiles ordinary people who make Canadian democracy stronger. Keay said this is her first time receiving a nomination for this award and that she is "humbled and honoured."

"Protecting democracy is a passion of mine and the nomination recognizes the work I do to help the younger generations become comfortable and engaged with Canada's democracy," Keay said.

Using her opportunity as a social studies teacher, Keay described how she teaches her students about electoral issues and the voting process. She also helped organize mock elections for students during municipal, provincial and federal elections.

"The premise behind this is that students will leave high school with the tools they need to be active, informed citizens," Keay said.

During the 2017 summer, Keay said she also helped the charity CIMX develop its Alberta Teacher Resource Manual to be used by educators in the province during the Municipal elections.

"I am very passionate about democracy and preventing apathy," Keay said. "My classroom (also) runs like a democratic country and my students often vote on important issues facing 'KeayNation' using the secret ballot process. The more we practice, the more likely we are to vote in future elections."

Keay said she took it upon herself to try addressing the lack of citizen engagement.

"I will never stop fighting for Democracy," Keay said. "I will continue to find ways to help my students recognize their responsibilities and rights in democratic nation

with the end goal of having them become more involved in society.”

Some jury members for the EPC Award include author Margaret Atwood, political satirist Rick Mercer and two Canadian senators. Keay said she did not anticipate winning this award, given the stiff competition in her age category, but added that the recognition was enough for her.

“As a teacher, it is my job to help kids become the best citizens they can. This is what I do,” she said.

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