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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Statement by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, March 8, 2012

THE SENATE

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I would like to join my colleagues in drawing the attention of the Senate to International Women's Day.

We have been celebrating this day, which gives us an opportunity to take stock of the status of women and speak out for gender equality, for over 100 years. It goes without saying that significant progress toward equality has been achieved in that time.

The theme this year is the strength of women in Canada's rural communities. This theme strikes a chord in Alberta in particular, where over 20 per cent of women live in rural communities. I would like to highlight women's major contribution to the economic prosperity of rural, remote and northern regions.

I would also like to point out that the progress achieved to date has not been accidental. It has come about thanks to the courage and audacity of many indomitable women, women who refused to accept the status quo, such as Alberta's Famous Five who, in the Persons Case, challenged the position of women in their day. They paved the way for women, enabling them to participate fully in public life. Early pioneers included Carrie Derick, the first

woman to become a professor in a Canadian university, who completed her doctoral studies but did not receive a diploma because the university she attended did not yet award such degrees to women; Agnes Macphail, the first woman elected to the House of Commons; and Cairine Wilson, the first woman appointed to the Senate.

The pursuit of equality has featured prominently in Canada's history thanks to women like these and countless others who have achieved so many of the things we now take for granted, but who do not get the recognition they deserve.

However, the fact that some progress has been made must not distract us from the day-to-day reality that many women still face, a reality marked by inequality and injustice. Much of this reality is all too familiar: the pay inequity that still exists between men and women in Canada; the fact that every day about 3,000 Canadian women seek refuge at shelters to escape domestic violence; and, although women make up half the population, they represent only 25 percent of parliamentarians in Ottawa and only 30 percent of federal court judges. These statistics reflect the fact that gender equality is not yet a reality in Canada.

It is up to each and every one of us, men and women alike, to try to come up with concrete measures to challenge the attitudes that lead to inequality, in order to continue the progress that has characterized Canada's history.
