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THE HONOURABLE CHARLIE WATT AND THE HONOURABLE ANNE C. COOLS

Thirtieth Anniversary of Appointment to Senate—
Inquiry—Debate Adjourned

Speech by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Wednesday, February 12, 2014

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THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF APPOINTMENT TO
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Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourable senators, I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my best wishes to Senator Watt and Senator Cools on their thirtieth anniversary in the Senate.

Senator Cowan has already presented a good summary of Senator Watt's achievements before and while in the Senate, notably his role as the chief negotiator for the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975.

The agreement represents the culmination of many years of struggle and advocacy by Cree and Inuit leaders to have their rights recognized by the Crown. It is also significant because it is considered to be the first modern land claim agreement in Canada. The agreement has served as a guide for the many agreements that have been made since that time and gained constitutional protection, along with all existing Aboriginal and treaty rights, in 1982.

Honourable senators, this is no small feat. Very few among us can say that they have contributed in such a direct way to our constitutional documents.

The Charlie Watt I have come to know over the last nine years is certainly not one to rest on his laurels. As a senator, he has continued to advocate for the recognition of the rights of Aboriginal peoples and on behalf of Northern communities.

Over the past 30 years, he has frequently drawn attention to the particular challenges of Northern communities and the need to take concrete action to address their problems. One of his latest efforts was, of course, Bill S-207, which aimed to offer better protection for the Aboriginal and treaty rights recognized by section 35 of the Constitution. It was adopted at second reading, but it died on the Order Paper. Hopefully, we will see it again, senator.

In addition, he has also highlighted the vital role that Northern communities continue to play today, not only in being the home

of many Inuit and other Aboriginal peoples but also for our heritage and our national identity, for the understanding and knowledge of the North that they preserve and for the Canadian sovereignty that they assert on our behalf.

Senator Watt has also brought to the attention of the Senate the need to preserve Inuit culture and to better share our historical collection of artifacts. Along with Senator Adams, he has led efforts to introduce Inuktitut to this chamber.

Honourable colleagues, Senator Watt is a pioneer and a leader who cares deeply for his people.

Thank you for sharing that love of your people with us, Senator Watt. It has always been an inspiration to all of us and to me.

- (1550)

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator Tardif: With each passing year, he brings integrity, wisdom and an independent spirit to our institution. I consider it a privilege to have Senator Watt as a colleague.

Without a doubt, another senator truly embodying the spirit of this chamber as the place for independence of thought and action is Senator Anne Cools. From my first day in the Senate a mere nine years ago, I have always been impressed by Senator Cools' deep knowledge of our parliamentary traditions. Her strong understanding of and respect for the parliamentary system help us — all of us — hold in mind the principles and values that have shaped and still govern our institution. These values have guided her actions throughout her time in the Senate and have made this chamber a better place.

Honourable senators, the Senate is extremely fortunate to have Senator Watt and Senator Cools as two of its members.

I wish to express my sincere thanks for your ongoing contributions to the Senate and congratulations on your thirtieth anniversary in this place.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!