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THE HONOURABLE DIANE BELLEMARE

Change in Political Affiliation

Speech by:

The Honourable Diane Bellemare

Tuesday, March 8, 2016

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[Translation]

### THE HONOURABLE DIANE BELLEMARE

#### CHANGE IN POLITICAL AFFILIATION

**Hon. Diane Bellemare:** Honourable senators, on this International Women's Day, I would like to pay tribute to some of my colleagues, namely Senators Ruth, Dyck and McCoy, by acknowledging their contributions to the cause of women.

However, I recently completed my examination of my role in the Senate. Consequently, I have chosen to take the opportunity provided today to share my thoughts with you.

On Tuesday, September 25, 2012, I was sworn in as a Senator in this chamber. I would like to thank the Right Honourable Stephen Harper for choosing me for this position. I remember with emotion the summons read by the Clerk during the oath of allegiance. The texts states and I quote:

Know you, that as well for the especial trust and confidence We have manifested in you, as for the purpose of obtaining your advice and assistance in all weighty and arduous affairs which may the State and Defence of Canada concern, We have thought fit to summon you to the Senate of Canada and We do appoint you for the Division of Alma in Our Province of Quebec. And We do command you, that all difficulties and excuses whatsoever laying aside, you be and appear, for the purposes aforesaid, in the Senate of Canada at all times whensoever and wheresoever Our Parliament may be in Canada convoked and holden, and this you are in no wise to omit.

I can tell you that, at that moment, this solemn text evoked in me the sense of constitutional duty that was already at odds with the party line.

I understood later, when I read the Honourable Serge Joyal's book, *Protecting Canadian Democracy*, that this summons is in fact a constitutional document, which, in his words, is "of the utmost importance from a legal standpoint." A senator receives

the order from the Crown to provide advice on all affairs of the state and to represent a particular region.

Senators are therefore different from members of Parliament entering the House of Commons, because members of Parliament have received a mandate from voters under the banner of a political party.

The Senate is currently in the midst of a critical phase in its evolution, and we cannot take this lightly. Canadians have lost their trust in this institution. In spite of the criticism, many people agree that a bicameral system is important to Canada's political stability, which means that we have a House of Commons and a complementary upper house. As is the case in many federations around the world, this upper house may — and must — improve legislation, and also represent the provinces, territories and the vastly diverse groups that make up this country.

I will soon celebrate my fourth anniversary in the Senate. I have experienced many emotions here, and I will experience many more. As I have watched the Senate going through this crisis, and as I have read the words of experts, I have determined that the Senate must be more independent and less partisan in order to fulfill its role and regain the public's trust. I am firmly convinced of this.

That is why I'm announcing today that I will now be sitting as an independent senator. I believe that this will help me better represent the interests of my province and of Canada as a whole. I will be able to work on making this institution less partisan, to make it a true chamber of sober second thought.

In a few weeks, we will be joined by several new independent senators. We must welcome them and include them. I believe that we need to make some major structural changes to formally recognize an organized group of independent senators. The creation of a third recognized group or caucus will help establish the institutional conditions required to promote independence and non-partisanship in the Senate. I therefore hope to fully participate while maintaining the friendly relationships I have developed with many of you.