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THE LATE MARIE-CLAIRE KIRKLAND, C.M., C.Q.

Statement by:

The Honourable Diane Bellemare

Wednesday, April 13, 2016

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[Translation]

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Hon. Diane Bellemare: Honourable senators, the past few weeks have been difficult for Quebec, which lost four well-known public figures. The Honourable Jean Lapierre died tragically in a plane crash. Mr. Lapierre was part of the family in most Quebec households. He leaves a great void in Quebec media.

Actress Rita Lafontaine, another prominent Quebecer, passed away too soon. She touched us all with her portrayals of Michel Tremblay's characters.

Writer and playwright Marcel Dubé lived a very full life and guided many young Quebecers of my generation through their teen years.

We also lost the Honourable Marie-Claire Kirkland, better known as Claire Kirkland-Casgrain, on March 24. She lived a very active life. I would like to take a few minutes to pay tribute to Marie-Claire Kirkland, a pioneer for women's rights.

I could talk about the fact that she was the first woman to be elected as a member of the Quebec National Assembly, the first woman to be appointed to cabinet, the first woman to be appointed acting premier, and the first female judge in the Court of Quebec. All of this would be enough on its own.

However, her achievements went far beyond these firsts. She opened the door to economic independence for a whole

generation of Quebec women when, on July 1, 1964, she helped pass Bill 16, a bill that was close to her heart.

This bill made major changes to the Quebec Civil Code regarding a married woman's legal capacity to have a career and manage her own property. The bill put an end to the legal incapacity of married women by giving them the right to sign leases and open bank accounts without their husband's written permission.

In 1969, she was responsible for the passage of a bill on matrimonial property rights and the establishment of the partnership of acquests, the equal division of property between spouses upon divorce.

There can be no doubt that these two laws went a long way toward eradicating the notion that a married woman is bound to obey her husband. Today, we can hardly imagine the impact that these laws had on the lives of Quebec women, whom the Church and the law sought to confine to the home.

The new legislation helped give many married women the courage to enter the labour market and find paid employment. It changed the lives of many couples and helped set the stage for egalitarian relationships between two people bound by marriage.

Marie-Claire Kirkland's political activity resulted in a more just and equitable society. I will close by saying that Marie-Claire Kirkland is truly a trailblazer, even in death: she was the first Quebec woman to be given a national funeral.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!
