



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 150 • NUMBER 306

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## TRIBUTES

THE HONOURABLE JACQUES DEMERS

Statement by:

The Honourable Diane Bellemare

Wednesday, June 19, 2019

## THE SENATE

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[Translation]

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THE HONOURABLE JACQUES DEMERS

**Hon. Diane Bellemare (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate):** 'Senator Jacques Demers was my neighbour on the eighth floor of the Victoria Building too. I feel very privileged to pay tribute to Senator Demers today.

His rise to fame and his National Hockey League career were certainly remarkable, but Jacques Demers is also a senator with exceptional human qualities. Many adjectives come to mind: he is a good man, enthusiastic, fiery at times, a team player and, without a doubt, a courageous man. He has proven that over and over throughout his lifetime, and he continues to do so now.

Born into a poor and disadvantaged community, illiterate for much of his life, he made up his mind to learn how to read and understand more than just letters. Having served as a role model to hockey fans everywhere, he turned his attention to supporting literacy. His courage in telling his own story so candidly helped many Quebecers in the same situation understand that they are not alone and that learning is worth it. I'm convinced that his contribution to the cause changed lives.

Then he became a senator, with all that entails with regard to literacy. What a hat trick, Senator Demers!

I was struck once again by his courage during the shooting of October 22, 2014. There was a meeting of the Conservative group that morning. We heard shots ring out but didn't know what was happening in the parliamentary precinct. We were all very scared. My instinct was to hide under the chairs, but that wouldn't have offered much protection. Everyone ran toward the doors, but they were locked.

Then, Senator Demers took me by the arm and reassured me by saying that everything would be all right. He was exceptionally calm and demonstrated a great deal of self-control. He then told me, with that smile of his, "Don't worry, Madame Bellemare, I'll protect you." I will never forget that for the rest of my life.

I share this anecdote with you because it paints a picture of who Senator Demers is in my eyes: a brave and courageous man. Jacques Demers showed courage when he decided to become a non-affiliated senator in January 2016. The following spring, Senators Demers, McCoy, Wallace, Ringuette, Rivard, and I formed the Independent Senators Group. Our goal was to promote an independent, non-partisan, and effective Senate, one that ensured the right to equality of all senators, no matter what group they belong to, and a Senate of which Canadians would be proud. I thank him for believing in this grand plan to modernize the Senate.

Hockey coaches have to show courage and leadership. Coach Demers: mission accomplished. The time has come, Senator Demers, for you to hang up your skates. I wish you a happy retirement; you've earned it.

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