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GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARDS IN COMMEMORATION OF THE PERSONS CASE

Statement by:

The Honourable Diane Bellemare

Thursday, November 28, 2013

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[Translation]

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARDS IN COMMEMORATION OF THE PERSONS CASE

Hon. Diane Bellemare: Honourable senators, in 1979, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Persons Case, the Government of Canada wanted to commemorate the battle of the Famous Five by awarding five Canadian women a Governor General's Award for their extraordinary contributions to promoting gender equality in Canada.

[English]

Let us salute this year's recipients.

Professor Constance Backhouse, from the University of Ottawa, is a distinguished and brilliant scholar but also an activist, a mentor and a leader. Professor Backhouse has achieved the highest levels of academic success and received many prestigious awards.

[Translation]

Professor Backhouse has also contributed to a large number of women's organizations and projects. She has worked on legislative reform to better protect women in Canada against violence, discrimination and inequality.

Nahanni Fontaine, an Ojibway woman from Sagkeeng First Nation with a master's degree from the University of Manitoba, is a special advisor on Aboriginal women's issues for the Government of Manitoba. She is known for advocating action on the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal girls and women.

[English]

For two decades, she has attended every rally, vigil and funeral and has helped build relationships between families, government and policing agencies. In 2013, she organized the third National Aboriginal Women's Summit.

[Translation]

Susan Kathryn Shiner has always been concerned with social change. She is the family services coordinator at Daybreak Parent

Child Centre in St. John's, Newfoundland, where she has set up innovative programs to help child witnesses of violence.

[English]

For nearly three decades, she has been involved with the St. John's Status of Women Council and the St. John's Women's Centre. Ms. Shiner, an activist also involved in unions, has received many distinctions for highlighting women's inequality as a root cause of violence against women.

[Translation]

The other two recipients are young women who may have had shorter careers but who have already achieved great things.

Julie Lalonde is a Franco-Ontarian with a degree from Carleton University. Her main goal is to put an end to the sexual assault and sexual harassment of women and girls.

[English]

Ms. Lalonde co-chaired the Ottawa chapter of the Miss G Project for Equity in Education and founded the first Canadian chapter of Hollaback! She is an active volunteer with the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa and hosts a weekly feminist program on Ottawa-based community radio station CHUO.

[Translation]

Last but not least, Cherry Smiley, a young woman from Vancouver's Nlaka'pamux and Dine' nations, is an emerging leader among Aboriginal women in Canada. She is already an internationally recognized speaker on gender equality issues.

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[English]

She is also involved in many volunteer activities and groups to create awareness about violence against Aboriginal women and girls. She is doing a master's of fine arts at Simon Fraser University, where she was awarded the inaugural Graduate Aboriginal Entrance Scholarship.

[Translation]

Each of these women deserves our deep admiration.
