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CANADIAN WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS

Statement by:

The Honourable Bev Busson

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

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[*Translation*]

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Hon. Bev Busson: Honourable colleagues, I rise today to speak to you about a far too often forgotten chapter in the evolution of the role of women in this great country.

[*English*]

As 338 young women, the Daughters of the Vote, are due to attend in this place tomorrow and will again sharpen the focus on women and their search for full participation and leadership in Canadian society, I wish to pay tribute to a group of young women who got us to where we are today. I'm speaking of the Canadian Women's Army Corps. The CWAC was formed near the beginning of the Second World War as a response to the need to have every able-bodied man available for combat. The women were permitted into the army as non-combatants. This decision was not universally well received. The "petticoat army" was one of the more polite terms used to describe the corps.

[*Translation*]

Despite this, young women from across Canada stepped forward to serve their country. Women acted in many capacities, from working in the canteen, to driving supply trucks, to working as mechanics on transport equipment.

[*English*]

One young woman from a small settlement in Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia heard the call. She was born into a family of 13 children during a time when there were no extras to go around.

At age 14, she went to work for a doctor and his wife as a housekeeper and a nanny for their four children. At age 16, World War II started and the CWAC was formed soon after.

She discreetly reinvented herself as a young woman of 18 years and enlisted. For a girl from a place where, in her words, "You had to come to town to go hunting," her life would change forever. When the war ended and the CWAC was disbanded, she was able to finish her education, later married my father and started a family.

Honourable senators, I want not only to recognize my mother but all the women who were perhaps born too soon, who, through no fault of their own, had to forgo their true potential due to the times and the role of women in those times. Most of us have been nurtured, supported, motivated and inspired by such women. They found meaning in their lives through their genuine sacrifice in helping to create a better world for their children and for all of us.

I recall at an earlier time in my life, when I was being honoured as the incoming Commissioner of the RCMP, and my mother, who was sitting beside me, leaned over and said to me, as only a mother could say, "You know, darling, I never thought you'd get this far." This continues to remind me that it is always important to remember where you came from, to have the courage of those who have sacrificed themselves for a better life and to never waste the opportunity to pay it forward.

[*Translation*]

This is sincerely dedicated to the memory of the brave women who paved the way for all of us. Thank you. *Meegwetch.*