

**SPEAKING NOTES  
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA  
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF A RECEPTION HOSTED BY  
THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION  
TO CELEBRATE COMMONWEALTH DAY**

**WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THE SENATE**

**READING ROOM (237-C)  
OTTAWA**

**MARCH 9, 2011**

Speaker Milliken,

Your Excellency Mr. Browne,

Your Excellencies, the Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Honourable Senators and Members of the House of Commons,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us this evening as we gather to celebrate the Commonwealth and all that it represents in the modern world. This is an opportunity to reflect upon the many advantages which our nations enjoy from this close association and the commonalities of our histories. The goal is first and foremost to improve the lives of all our citizens.

Commonwealth Day officially falls on Monday next week, with the theme this year being *Women as Agents of Change*. Investing in women and girls, fully half of our population, enables us to accelerate progress in all areas. Our diverse nations recognize the impressive contributions that women have made, and continue to make, to our economies, to our societies and to our political structures.

Having women at all levels of decision-making has been an important and valuable development over the course of the last century, with everyone benefitting from new perspectives being brought to the discussion.

As recently as 1928, women in Canada were not even eligible to become Senators. This was the result of a Supreme Court of Canada decision that women were not eligible to become Senators because they were not “persons” within the meaning of the section of the *British North America Act* governing Senate appointments.

It was the perseverance of five Canadian women, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Emily Murphy and Irene Parlby, now called the “Famous Five,” that brought about change. They were able to convince the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council of the United Kingdom, which was Canada’s final appellate court at the time, to overturn the decision. A monument commemorating these women now stands on Parliament Hill.

Canada’s first woman Senator, Cairine Wilson, was appointed in 1930. Since then, many have become Senators and have at various times held all of the top positions in the Senate, from leaders of parties in the Senate to Committee Chairs. Muriel McQueen Fergusson, from my own province of New Brunswick, was appointed to the Senate and later became the first woman Speaker in the history of Canada’s Parliament. In 1974, Renaude Lapointe became the first francophone woman to be named Speaker of the Senate and also the first of that category to hold the office of Speaker in Parliament.

Canadian women appointed to the Senate often come from a background as leaders in their professional fields. They bring a wide range of knowledge and experience to their work as Senators, and continue to act as agents of change.

Across the Commonwealth, women are serving as agents of change in many different ways. The participation of women in the workforce is at an all time high in a large number of countries. Women's educational attainment continues to reach impressive levels. Women are starting their own businesses and taking charge of their futures. Young girls are attending school in increasing numbers and are showing their potential to bring real positive change to the world.

I would be remiss if I failed to note that the head of the Commonwealth for the last 60 years has been a woman. Her Majesty has provided a remarkable example for all and has been an inspiration.

This year's Commonwealth Day theme of "women as agents of change" provides an opportunity to reflect upon the challenges facing girls and women in our Commonwealth countries and around the globe. It is also an opportunity to consider ways in which to ensure that progress continues to be made.

In closing, I would like to thank all of you once again for joining us as we celebrate the work of the Commonwealth.