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DEAFBLIND AWARENESS MONTH

Statement by:

The Honourable Yonah Martin

Thursday, June 8, 2017

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DEAFBLIND AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to celebrate June as Deafblind Awareness Month in Canada, as adopted in our chamber in 2015.

Today I had the honour of co-hosting the third annual Deafblind Awareness Month reception on Parliament Hill with our colleague, Senator Jim Munson, who co-sponsored the Deafblind Awareness Month motion along with Senator Joan Fraser.

We met with members of the deaf-blind communities today and heard about some of the challenges they face and obstacles they have overcome to be where they are today. They are truly remarkable individuals determined not to let their disability stop them from living a productive and fulfilling life.

As honourable senators may be aware, June is also the birth month of Helen Keller, perhaps the most well-known person who was deaf-blind. She was a courageous person whose admirable resolve and leadership made a difference and inspired the whole world. June 27 is known as Helen Keller Day in the United States and is celebrated every year.

The number of people living with deaf-blind challenges in Canada is quite significant. Statistics Canada reveals that there are approximately 69,700 Canadians over the age of 12 living with the dual disability of deaf-blindness or a combination of both vision and hearing losses that limit their everyday activities. Only

3,000 of them are currently being serviced by the organizations providing intervenor services. So, honourable senators, there is much more that must be done for deaf-blind Canadians, and our annual recognition of June as Deafblind Awareness Month is one of them.

I must acknowledge our former colleague, the Honourable Vim Kochhar, who opened my eyes to the importance of these courageous Canadians who deserve our recognition. It was through him that I was inspired to work with my colleagues to move the motion that our chamber adopted unanimously.

Vim Kochhar cofounded the Canadian Helen Keller Centre and Rotary Cheshire Homes, which are two examples of excellent facilities for the deaf-blind community. In fact, Rotary Cheshire Homes is said to be the only facility in the entire world where those who are deaf-blind can live independently.

I would like to commend Jennifer Robbins, Executive Director of the Canadian Helen Keller Centre, the Rotary Cheshire Homes, and all of the organizations represented, their caregivers, members of the board, volunteers and intervenors who provide such dedicated care and service to the deaf-blind community.

Honourable senators, there are many deaf-blind persons around the world who have overcome adversity and achieved leaps and bounds like Helen Keller. We must continue to bring awareness to this important cause and recognize the strength, resilience and courage that the deaf-blind and those caring for them show every day. They that a true inspiration to us all.
