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SPINAL CORD INJURY AWARENESS MONTH

Statement by:

The Honourable Larry W. Campbell

Thursday, May 7, 2009

THE SENATE

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SPINAL CORD INJURY AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Larry W. Campbell: Honourable senators, today I also rise to help recognize the month of May as Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Month.

From 8:30 this morning until 2:00 this afternoon, I learned how important cracks in sidewalks can be; what the slope from the East Block up to the Senate is really about; how to find a washroom; and how to open a door if you did not know where the button is that you have to push.

I rise with the knowledge that today alone there will be three new spinal cord injuries in Canada. There are approximately 1,100 new injuries each year. There are over 41,000 Canadians living with spinal cord injuries, the effects of which are felt by family members, friends and colleagues.

Eighty-four per cent of all spinal cord injuries occur to people under the age of 34. I am amazed that in this day and age of employment equity, the unemployment rate for people with spinal cord injuries remains at 62 per cent, well above the national average.

Honourable senators, Canadians take pride in knowing that we enjoy a high standard of living, which is the envy of many countries. However, we also know that our ranking, according to the most recent Conference Board of Canada report card, has dropped us to ninth overall.

It is no coincidence that Senator Raine and I are doing this today. We are from British Columbia and we are well educated in the ways those with spinal cord injuries can participate in society. Many honourable senators will remember former Mayor Sam

Sullivan at the Olympics in Turin, proudly waving the flag in his wheelchair. He was the Mayor of Vancouver for three years.

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Another former Mayor of Vancouver and former Premier of British Columbia, Mike Harcourt, also knows firsthand what it is like to live with a spinal cord injury. Perhaps best known is Rick Hanson, who suffered a spinal cord injury at the age of 15, from which he did not recover. Although confined to his wheelchair, he continued to participate in many sports and went on to win several international wheelchair marathons. Perhaps best of all, though, after being inspired by his friend Terry Fox, he undertook the Man in Motion World Tour, an around-the-world tour that took him 26 months to complete. He also created the Rick Hanson Foundation, which has generated incredible amounts of money to aid enhanced research and programs for victims of spinal cord injuries. Also highlighting the cause of the disabled is Stephanie Cadieux, the Liberal Party of British Columbia's candidate for the riding of Surrey-Panorama.

Honourable senators, from my experience this morning, I can tell you that my eyes have been opened to the everyday challenges faced by those confined to a wheelchair. I am much more aware and have a huge amount of appreciation for what is happening within their world and how far we must go to ensure that they are equal.

It is my hope that the disabled across Canada will be encouraged and supported by the work of Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Harcourt, Mr. Hanson, Ms. Cadieux and these incredible people here today. We know that, through their dedication and hard work, they have shown Canadians that they are capable of truly great things.