

80th Anniversary of the Persons Case

Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to mark an important event that occurred 80 years ago this Sunday October 18, 2009

Emily Murphy's nomination to sit in the Canadian Senate was challenged on the grounds that she was a female and therefore not a person under the British North American Act, The Constitution of Canada at the time.

"Women are persons in matters of pains and penalties, but are not persons in matters of rights and privileges" an earlier ruling had determined.

Mr. Speaker, thankfully, Emily and four other women, who together have since become known as "The Famous Five", appealed the decision to the British Privy Council, the highest level of appeal for Canada at the time.

When the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council rendered its decision it stated: *"Yes, women are persons... and eligible to be summoned and may become Members of the Senate of Canada."* It went further to say – *"that the exclusion of women from all public offices is a relic of days more barbarous than ours. And to those who would ask why the word "persons" should include females, the obvious answer is, why should it not?"*

As the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, on this 80th Anniversary of the "Persons Case", I would like to honour the work and tenacity of Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney and Irene Parlby - the Famous Five who changed the political and legal landscape of Canada.

This important action made it possible for all the Sandy's, Jane's, and Wendy's and all our sisters all across the NWT and Canada to run for Office, hold Office and represent our Communities and our great Territory.

I am happy to note that last week the Senate voted to name each of the "Famous Five" Women Honorary Senators. The first such move by the upper House of the Parliament

Thank you Mr. Speaker.