



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## THE SENATE

Motion to Recognize June as  
Deaf-Blind Awareness Month—Debate Adjourned

Speech by:

The Honourable Yonah Martin

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

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#### MOTION TO RECOGNIZE JUNE AS DEAF-BLIND AWARENESS MONTH—DEBATE ADJOURNED

**Hon. Yonah Martin**, pursuant to notice of June 12, 2013, moved:

That the Senate take notice of the month of June as the birth month of Helen Keller, who is renowned around the world for her perseverance and achievements and who, as a person who was deaf-blind, is an inspiration to us all and, in particular, to members of the deaf-blind community; and

That the Senate recognize the month of June as “Deaf-Blind Awareness Month”, to promote public awareness of deaf-blind issues and to recognize the contributions of Canadians who are deaf-blind.

She said: Honourable senators, I would like to speak for five minutes on this motion to recognize June as Deaf-Blind Awareness Month.

June is the birth month of Helen Keller, the most well-known deaf-blind person. She was a gracious and heroic person whose determination and leadership made a difference in the world, and inspired others to follow in her footsteps. June 27 is known as Helen Keller Day in the United States and is celebrated every year.

Helen Keller Day was enacted by President Jimmy Carter in 1980. Since then, much progress has been made, and in 2000, the Province of Ontario recognized deaf-blind awareness in an act of the Ontario legislature.

Honourable senators, I hope you agree that it is time that we recognize deaf-blind awareness at the federal level in Canada.

It is with honour that I stand today to speak to the motion to have June recognized as Deaf-Blind Awareness Month in Canada from coast to coast to coast. I quote former Ontario MPP David Young, whose private member’s bill created Deaf-Blind Awareness Month in Ontario, to explain why a month like this is so important.

... I believe this legislation is a step in the right direction to further improve the lives of deaf-blind Ontarians. With June declared Deaf-Blind Awareness Month, it will appear on every politician’s calendar and many will make that extra effort to promote this cause in their communities. Why? Because it is the right thing to do.

Honourable senators, it is the right thing to do. By passing this motion, we are taking an important step in raising awareness among Canadians. In passing this motion, we also recognize the strength, courage and dedication that deaf-blind people show every day in living their lives and facing their daily challenges. A month to honour them will mean so much to them, to their families and to those who work closely with them.

A recent Statistics Canada report says 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 these have been identified by the organizations providing intervenor services.

There are three important terms that I would like to define at this time to better understand the deaf-blind community, which this motion supports.

The first is a person with deaf-blindness. A person living with this disability is an individual with a substantial degree of loss of both sight and hearing, the combination of which results in significant difficulties in assessing information and in pursuing educational, vocational, recreational and social goals. Deaf-blindness is a unique and separate disability from deafness or blindness. An individual with the combined losses of hearing and vision requires specialized services including adapted communication methods.

The second term is “intervenor.” An intervenor provides a professional service, paid or voluntary, to facilitate the interaction of a person who is deaf-blind with other people and the environment. The intervenor’s job can include providing access to information — auditory, visual, tactile — by means of a variety of communication methods acting as a sighted guide. These services are provided in the deaf-blind person’s preferred method of communication, which can include tactile signing systems, Braille, large print, communication boards, or any other method required.

The third term is “intervenor service,” the provision of a professional service, paid or voluntary, that facilitates interaction of persons who are deaf-blind with other people, places and the environment.

• (1840)

For example, the Canadian Helen Keller Centre and Rotary Cheshire Homes, co-founded by our former colleague Vim Kochhar, are two examples of excellent facilities. Rotary Cheshire Homes is the only facility in the world where those who are deaf-blind can live independently.

I also wish to recognize the tireless work of Senator Asha Seth who is a champion of the blind and partially sighted community. She and Senator Jim Munson are graciously co-sponsoring this motion.

Last, honourable senators, I am inspired by people living with deaf-blindness and all those people who have dedicated their time and hard work to helping them. It is my hope that we can unanimously pass this motion to endorse June as deaf-blind awareness month, and I urge all honourable senators to support this motion.

(On motion of Senator Hubley, debate adjourned.)