

Servicewomen's Salute
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Over the past year there have been hundreds of celebrations to mark our 150th year as a nation. Tonight, we have a special opportunity to recognize and celebrate our servicewomen, and with them the women whose voices helped build our nation, once they gained the right to vote. I am mindful of those women who a hundred years ago contributed back-breaking work during the First World War; women like my maternal grandmother. [FULL NAME] was a highly trained British nurse who understood her duty. Even while grieving following her husband's death by a German gas attack in 1917, [FIRST NAME] spent weeks-on-end in the Maiden Head hospital outside London caring for the wounded, day and night.

As losses mounted, the need to boost the number of fighting men became urgent. In Canada, Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden passed the *Wartime Elections Act*, granting the right to vote to all the wives, widows, mothers, and sisters of soldiers serving overseas. Nurses too were enfranchised. Together, these were the first women ever to be able to vote in Canadian federal elections. While motivated in part by political need, the move took Canadian society a giant step forward.

By contrast, Britain remained mired in its conservative class system. When suffrage was first granted to women, it afforded the vote only to highborn women of means. The division between rich and poor was so engrained that, when the

two groups actually mingled outdoors during the Peace Day Parade in July of 1919, the Times ran an op-ed noting that QUOTE high-born ladies had made way for modestly dressed onlookers UNQUOTE.

“Not even a war can unite the classes for more than a day,” my grandmother said. It was her rejection of that very class system in Britain that would lead her soon after to accept the position of superintendent of a hospital far away in Alberta, where a professional woman could serve in an atmosphere of respect. She sold her wedding ring to pay for her passage. Had she not made the courageous decision to emigrate with my mother, a five-year-old at the time, I would not be speaking to you today, or certainly not with this accent.

While these events are far in the past, I understood early on the effects of war on a military family. In Canada, our modern-day military families have resources not available in times past. While my husband David served as Governor General, I had the privilege of visiting our Military Family Resource Centres from coast to coast, chatting with staff and hundreds of women clients about the challenges they faced and the incredible support they received. The stresses they suffered fell into common categories: fear for loved ones serving overseas in hostile and dangerous environments, frequent relocation, problems finding employment in one’s own discipline, and difficulty connecting with health services (particularly for autism) after each move.

When both members of a family serve in the military, the complications of juggling family life are even greater. Any of these difficulties could overwhelm a

family. When serious injury or even death occurs as well, the support of the community becomes critical. When found, it is priceless.

I was reminded of the role a family plays in overcoming injury sustained in service as we prepared to celebrated the Invictus Games in Canada this September. The competitors, coaches and organizers came to Rideau Hall as a kick off to the games. A group photo was called for. As I stood among these amazing men and women, one young man leaned over and asked, "Do you remember me?"

I smiled. "I do, Etienne. I have never forgotten you."

"I was in a bad place back then," he said.

I had first met Etienne several years earlier when David and I gone to ski with the ***Soldier On*** program that supports ill and injured veterans. Having lost a leg in Afghanistan, Etienne was trying to put on a prosthetic ski when I met him. It was not going well. He was cursing loudly as his discouraged wife and frightened kids looked on, not knowing how to fix the problem. Eventually Etienne rallied and we shared a moment. I was not ashamed of my tears when I reconnected with this very happy family in Ottawa. They had weathered the storm. With the support of a caring community, their uncertainty, frustration and even anger had turned at last into family resolve and well deserved pride. Just days after we took our group photo, Etienne won his round of golf in the Invictus tournament.

To achieve and sustain true mental health, we all need support. Especially in the military, where our well-being can be assured only through the conscious, deliberate and constant support of our individual families, our units, our institutions, and our professional and social associations such as the community of Canadian servicewomen celebrated here tonight. You have served as soldiers,

sailors, aviators and special-forces operators in a country that benefits from and respects both your contribution and your wellbeing.

Thank you for your service. We honour you.