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ROBERTA BONDAR

Statement by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Tuesday, January 31, 2017

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, I rise today to join all parliamentarians, Canadians from coast to coast to coast and people around the world to pay tribute to Dr. Roberta Bondar who is on Parliament Hill today. Twenty-five years ago, on January 22, 1992, she lifted off in the Space Shuttle Discovery, becoming the first Canadian woman and the first neuro-physician to go into space. She was there for eight days, working in the precursor of the International Space Station. She returned to earth 25 years ago yesterday.

Roberta Bondar has been and is an inspiration to many of all ages and all backgrounds. Space called to her even as a young child, her innate curiosity inspiring her to learn more, to experiment and question, to seek understanding, and to encourage others to do so with her. This Sault Ste. Marie native was encouraged by her parents to get a university degree, “You need that piece of paper.” She got many, including a science degree, an MA in experimental pathology, a doctorate in neurobiology, a medical degree, a pilot’s licence and scuba diving and parachuting credentials.

Much of her life has been focused on the way our brains see and perceive things. As if that is not enough, Dr. Bondar is a former Chancellor of Trent University. She is an environmentalist who continues to champion endangered species around the world. Since 2009, The Roberta Bondar Foundation has been opening

the minds and visions of children across Canada fusing art, science and the environment. More than half a dozen schools are named after her.

On top of all of that, Roberta Bondar is an artist, her chosen medium being photography. Her work demonstrates her unbounded passion for this country, weaving her many talents, interests and professions together in a truly accessible way. To get the right shot, she has hung from planes, off branches and climbed heights few would dare to do. She has given us images of places and flora and fauna we are unlikely to see in person. She has brought all of Canada’s national parks and many provincial parks to our attention.

Roberta Bondar’s insights into both the micro and macro give us pause to look and see what is really around us. Beauty and majesty imbue every work — colour, texture, depth and light — whether she is looking into space, back to earth, into the tiny bud of an alpine flower, or portraying a herd of buffalo in the Salt Flats, Hoodoo Gorge or a Long Beach sunset. Dr. Bondar has had exhibitions across this country and abroad, and as a curator and writer for one of those, I can attest to her professionalism, her curiosity, her sense of humour and her joy in engaging with all audiences, especially children.

Honours accorded her — the Order of Canada, Order of Ontario, lifetime awards, and 27 honorary degrees — have been well deserved, and it is a privilege to honour her here today. We are indeed fortunate for all the accomplishments of this inspiring Canadian pioneer. Thank you, Roberta.
