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Assisted Human Reproduction— Appointments to Board

Statement by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

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THE SENATE

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ASSISTED HUMAN REPRODUCTION— APPOINTMENTS TO BOARD

Hon. Vivienne Poy: Honourable senators, in honour of International Women's Day, which was on March 8, I would like to speak to an issue that is of concern to women in Canada.

In December, the government announced 10 appointments to the board of Assisted Human Reproduction Canada. Last month, I received a plea from the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada that further appointments should include representation from fertility experts as well as patients, the women struggling to conceive.

In an article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* published February 27, it was noted that the government appointments went against the advice of an expert selection panel. To quote the article, the appointments led "some scientists to fear" that they were "intended to circumvent the legislation the Agency will enforce."

Health Canada already had a shortlist of prospective candidates, but of the 25 candidates recommended by the expert panel, only two are now on the board. According to the article, of the board members appointed, "four have expressed socially conservative views on issues directly related to the board's mandate."

Dr. Michael Rudnicki, Scientific Director of the Stem Cell Network, an organization that brings together more than 70 scientists, clinicians, ethicists and engineers, speculates that:

It's analogous to having a Jehovah's Witness who is totally opposed to transfusions being appointed to the board of the Canadian Blood Services.

Since it is likely that the majority of the agency's mandate will involve looking after in vitro fertilization patients and regulating clinics, organizations such as the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada and other stakeholders should be brought to the table. It is therefore important that the government consider the views expressed in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* and that of the patients in any possible future appointments in order to provide the board of Assisted Human Reproduction Canada with some balance.

Honourable senators, I will end with a quote from the editorial on this topic published by the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*:

The unmistakable signal sent is that the current government values control more than transparency in decision-making; favours ideology over scientific and clinical expertise; and believes that patient representation is altogether dispensable.

It is ironic that this government refers to accountability and then sends this signal to our medical community and to the women who only wish to have a family.
