



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION



41st PARLIAMENT



VOLUME 148



NUMBER 3

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

The Honourable NOËL A. KINSELLA
Speaker

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(Daily index of proceedings appears at back of this issue).

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Publications Centre: David Reeves, National Press Building, Room 926, Tel. 613-947-0609

Published by the Senate
Available from PWGSC – Publishing and Depository Services, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5.
Also available on the Internet: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

THE SENATE

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

The Senate met at 2 p.m., the Speaker in the chair.

Prayers.

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, there have been consultations among the parties, and it has been agreed that photographers may be allowed on the floor of the Senate for this afternoon's meeting, so that they may photograph the swearing-in of the new senator with as little disruption as possible.

[*English*]

NEW SENATOR

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that the Clerk has received a certificate from the Registrar General of Canada showing that Fabian Manning has been summoned to the Senate:

INTRODUCTION

The Hon. the Speaker having informed the Senate that there was a senator without, waiting to be introduced:

The following honourable senator was introduced; presented Her Majesty's writ of summons; took the oath prescribed by law, which was administered by the Clerk; and was seated:

Hon. Fabian Manning, of St. Bride's, Newfoundland and Labrador, introduced between Hon. Marjory LeBreton, P.C., and Hon. Elizabeth (Beth) Marshall.

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that the honourable senator named above had made and subscribed the declaration of qualification required by the Constitution Act, 1867, in the presence of the Clerk of the Senate, the Commissioner appointed to receive and witness the said declaration.

• (1410)

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

AUDITOR GENERAL SHEILA FRASER

CONGRATULATIONS ON RETIREMENT

Hon. Gerry St. Germain: Honourable senators, Auditor General of Canada Sheila Fraser retired from 10 years of service on May 30, 2011. She leaves behind a long record of

accomplishment, one that is hallmarked by her dedication to public service.

The Office of the Auditor General was established in 1878 to "free the auditing of the public accounts from any interference on the part of the administration." While many auditors general came before Ms. Fraser's tenure, few can compare with the legacy of her work. I believe her record is a direct reflection of her genuine interest in serving Canadians and their government above all else. Ms. Fraser conducted her work with diligence and was never afraid to exercise independence should a problem area be found, which was often the case.

As Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, I had the opportunity to work with Ms. Fraser and engage her directly during her numerous appearances before the committee. Her advice was always given serious consideration by the committee, often impacting outcomes of our studies.

On a personal level, I found her to have great empathy toward the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and the litany of issues that continue to affect them. Never too busy to pick up the phone, Ms. Fraser brought a very human face to her office, which is a refreshing find in this often partisan environment.

Honourable senators, an organization the size of our federal government must have a mechanism to watch for waste and to identify inefficiencies and shortcomings. The Office of the Auditor General has proven itself invaluable to doing exactly that. The frankness of Ms. Fraser's reports and recommendations has been a sobering reality for all governments.

There are some critics in the academic world who have from time to time questioned the mandate of the Auditor General with regard to performance audits. However, I believe that past actions of the Office of the Auditor General are rightly in line with the protection of the public interest, and Ms. Fraser's replacement will be well served to note the past when planning the future.

Honourable senators, Sheila Fraser has served the high Office of the Auditor General of Canada with distinction. In closing, I would ask all senators to join me in thanking her for her years of service to Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

SENATE SECURITY

Hon. David Tkachuk: Honourable senators:

I do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors. So help me God.

This is the oath of a Senate page.

A regrettable incident took place on Friday during the Throne Speech. A Senate page, Brigitte DePape, chose to disrupt the proceedings. She broke her oath to the Queen and her signed contract with Parliament not to behave in a way that brings her impartiality into question.

We were all surprised by what she did. Being a familiar face, it struck few of us as odd when she made her way from her place into the middle of the chamber. Some of us thought that she was there to assist someone, not to protest. She walked back and forth with her “Stop Harper” sign until the Sergeant-at-Arms from the house acted to remove her.

Her action was a clear contempt for the Parliament she had sworn to serve, taking place as it did in the middle of one of the most democratic acts in the world, a post-election address from the Queen’s representative, flanked by a newly elected Prime Minister and the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Onlookers were MPs, led by a Speaker who won a seat in this great institution at the age of 25, only a few years older than the protesting page.

Brigitte dishonoured her fellow pages, sullied the Senate Page Program, betrayed those who put their trust in her and insulted this institution of Parliament.

There are those who have characterized what she did as heroic. No. Heroic are the men and women, many of whom are her age or younger, who serve in Afghanistan defending the principles and practices of democracy that resulted, most recently, in the election we just had. What she did was not heroic. She was surrounded not by enemies but by people she could trust not to harm her, people, unlike her, who believe in and adhere to a code of civil behaviour.

All of us should be offended by what she did. We expect — in fact demand — that our pages behave in a neutral fashion. That is the only way the program can work. They are allowed to have political opinions. In fact, I hope they all do. However, for the duration of their time as pages, those opinions, those leanings, are to be left outside this chamber.

Honourable senators, we are taking this incident very seriously. The page was dismissed immediately. She has been banned from the Senate, the House of Commons and the Library of Parliament buildings.

The Security Subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration met this morning, and the steering committee will meet this afternoon to discuss what the implications are for security in the Senate and for the conduct of the page program itself. We will be looking into the hiring practices for pages, including the background checks that are conducted in relation to those positions. I pray that no one else here assisted her in this stunt.

Honourable senators, I can assure you that, after due consideration, we will take all the appropriate measures that the circumstances dictate. I do not have to tell you what would have

happened if she had something else inside her jacket instead of a sign.

I will keep honourable senators informed of developments.

SENATE PAGE PROGRAM

Hon. Jim Munson: Honourable senators, I stand today to praise the pages of the Senate. I feel it is important to tell Canadians just how special these young men and women are. They come from every corner of this country — Victoria; Iqaluit; Beresford, New Brunswick; Rimouski, Québec — and are true ambassadors of their provinces and territories. What is more, they are full-time university students in Ottawa and, at a minimum, work 500 hours a year in the Senate. Their work is more than just getting us a glass of water. There are files, bills, journals, orders and debates to follow. They are front row participants in the legislative process and in our committee studies.

How many times have we seen a page compliment our work in their university studies? I was interviewed by one page recently who was doing a paper on autism, and that pleased me very much. I am sure that many senators have had the same experience.

They know how to give back. Just yesterday, five pages from the Senate Page Program sang at the Memorial Service for Former Parliamentarians. That is a good thing, but it does not end there. These pages are also involved in charitable work. The Terry Fox Run is one example which occurs annually. They are constantly volunteering. Speaking on behalf of Senators Cochrane and Mercer, I can tell honourable senators how much we appreciate what the pages do for our National Child Day program in November.

Yes, there was an incident that occurred on Friday during the Speech from the Throne. That was unfortunate. However, I would not want one incident to reflect on the dedication of these young pages.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator Munson: This is my eighth year in the Senate, and what I have seen is a diverse, dedicated and determined group of young Canadians engaged in the democratic process. Some pages like it so much here that they have ended up working for senators. Christian Dicks is working in my office and Chris Reed is working in Senator Comeau’s office — one Liberal, one Conservative at a time.

To the pages: This is only one step on your life’s journey. I know I speak on behalf of all senators in telling you that you have our support.

• (1420)

As for the Senate of Canada, this is an institution where there is plenty of room for debate — not to demonstrate, but to debate the issues of the day. The pages play important roles both inside and outside this chamber.

I believe I am reflecting the feelings of all senators when I say to the pages that we value your presence, we value your work and we value your friendship. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD

Hon. Michael Duffy: Honourable senators, I rise to bring to the attention of the chamber that June 6 was the anniversary of the death of our first Prime Minister — the Grand Old Man — Sir John A. Macdonald.

During campaign appearances while on his way to winning his sixth Tory majority government back in 1891 — I do not think anyone here remembers that — crowds shouted, “Sir John A. — you’ll never die!”

Honourable senators, I am proud to report that this prophecy continues to be accurate, particularly in Kingston, Ontario, the Canadian community Sir John A. Macdonald called home. Yesterday, a large crowd gathered, as they do every year, at the quiet Kingston grave of Canada’s Father of Confederation. The annual ceremony, organized faithfully each year by the Kingston Historical Society, is both fitting and dignified.

Members of the society, including the Honourable Hugh Segal, my colleague, are to be commended for their work in hosting and organizing this annual memorial service to Sir John A.

As honourable senators are aware, the bicentennial of the birth of this Father of Confederation is fast approaching, and I am pleased to report today that a non-profit, non-partisan Sir John A. Macdonald Bicentennial Commission has been established in Kingston. The aim of the commission is to ensure that over the next four years, and continuing through 2015, as many Canadians as possible, particularly students, are reacquainted with Sir John A.’s inspirational story and legacy. The commission is led by Arthur Milnes, a journalist and a political history researcher at Queen’s University, who is familiar to most honourable senators. He is also a columnist for *The Hill Times* and was the assistant to Brian Mulroney on the latter’s best-selling memoirs.

I call on all honourable senators to emulate the example of my colleague and friend Senator Linda Frum, who will be travelling to Kingston on June 18 to serve as guest leader of the Sir John A. Macdonald-themed walking tour of that historic city, which Commissioner Milnes wrote and researched himself. The event, the first of many, is a fundraiser for the Sir John A. Macdonald Bicentennial Commission, which is worthy of the support of all Canadians.

I ask honourable senators to mark the date, and that of 2015, on their calendars. There may be some present who believe that because Sir John A. is, in effect, “the patron saint” of Conservatives they would not be welcome to join celebration. On the contrary, the man who many consider to be the greatest Liberal ever, Sir Wilfrid Laurier — my own father was named after him — had this to say on Parliament Hill, in the other place, on June 8, 1891, the first sitting day following Sir John A. Macdonald’s death:

The place of Sir John Macdonald in this country was so large and so absorbing, that it is almost impossible to conceive that the politics of this country, the fate of this

country, can continue without him. His loss overwhelms us. For my part, I say, with all truth, his loss overwhelms me, and it also overwhelms this Parliament, as if indeed one of the institutions of the land had given way. Sir John Macdonald now belongs to the ages, and it can be said with certainty, that the career which has just been closed is one of the most remarkable careers of this century.

All members of this chamber, regardless of party, are encouraged to join the Sir John A. Macdonald Bicentennial Commission, as I have, to raise awareness about this important upcoming anniversary on the national calendar.

Not only do Commissioner Milnes and his volunteer colleagues deserve our congratulations, they deserve our thanks. Without their tireless volunteer efforts, there might have been a danger that Macdonald’s bicentennial would have gone unnoticed.

It is true that Canadians do not do as much as we should to honour our history and our past leaders. Thanks to groups like the Sir John A. Macdonald Bicentennial Commission of Kingston, those days are coming to an end.

WOMEN AND MEN OF ZIMBABWE ARISE!

ROLE OF MS. JENNI WILLIAMS

Hon. Mobina S.B. Jaffer: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak about a remarkable woman who is dedicated to protecting human rights for the people of Zimbabwe.

Jenni Williams is a civil rights activist and founder of Women of Zimbabwe Arise!, also known as WOZA, which is an organization that helps both men and women in Zimbabwe mobilize in defence of their human rights.

I had the privilege to welcome Jenni into my office, where she spoke to me about her successes as well as the obstacles with which she is continuously confronted. She informed me that over the past nine years WOZA has mobilized over 80,000 men and women in Zimbabwe, peacefully sparking dignity, protest and bravery in the name of human rights.

Later that evening I attended a lecture that Jenni delivered at Carleton University. She explained to the audience that the Government of Zimbabwe was primarily concerned with obtaining perpetual power and as a result chooses to ignore issues such as unaffordable tuition fees, sewage backups and water shortages.

Jenni, who was well aware that anyone who did speak out on these issues would be considered an enemy of the state, decided that WOZA would go into the streets, as the mothers and women of the nation, and demand social justice.

After recognizing that the people of Zimbabwe were refugees in their own nation, they decided that this was simply unacceptable. The question they continue to ask themselves is why are so many Zimbabweans living in the diaspora? Why are the policemen, teachers and doctors leaving Zimbabwe?

Through strategic non-violent demonstrations, members of WOZA found ways to empower themselves, and they continue to go out into the streets and tell people to choose love over hate.

Honourable senators, I strongly believe that I am a better person for having met Jenni. Upon departing, she presented me with a scarf that matches the one she so proudly wears. She explained that the scarf, which features a striking rose, symbolizes what WOZA stands for, stating, “The people in Zimbabwe want bread and roses because we deserve the beautiful things, too.”

I am truly touched by Jenni’s thoughtful gift and wear it with pride not only for the women of Zimbabwe but for women all around the world whose lives are plagued with violence and injustice.

Honourable senators, before Jenni left, she informed me that she had been in jail 38 times and had many scars on her body from the beatings she received. I looked at her with sadness and fear in my eyes, but she responded to my concern defiantly by stating, “When you hit a woman, you hit a rock; they will never break me.”

SAINT JOHN SEA DOGS

CONGRATULATIONS ON WINNING 2011 MEMORIAL CUP

Hon. John D. Wallace: Honourable senators, Sunday, May 29, 2011, is a day that will long be remembered with a tremendous sense of joy, satisfaction and pride in Saint John, New Brunswick.

On that memorable day, the Saint John Sea Dogs, champions of the Quebec Junior “A” Hockey League, defeated the Mississauga St. Mike’s Majors of the Ontario Junior “A” Hockey League, 3 to 1, to win one of Canada’s most heralded and cherished hockey championships, the Memorial Cup.

What a tremendous and momentous victory this was by our Saint John Sea Dogs. This marked the first time in the Memorial Cup’s 92-year history that Canada’s junior “A” hockey championship team came from the Maritime provinces — and to think that this was accomplished by the youngest team in this four-team national tournament and in only the Sea Dog’s sixth year of existence.

As we are well aware, all successful teams must have great leadership. In the case of the Saint John Sea Dogs, we have without doubt the very best in two Prince Edward Island natives, Head Coach and former Detroit Red Wings star Gerard Gallant, and General Manager Mike Kelly. It is obvious that Coach Gallant listened closely and learned very well from his mentor and Red Wings coach at the time, our very own present day Conservative Senate caucus coach, Senator Jacques Demers.

This Memorial Cup victory by the Sea Dogs is truly wonderful not only for the City of Saint John but also for our entire province. We are particularly proud of the fact that 10 of the team’s players were born and raised in the Maritimes: from New Brunswick — team captain Mike Thomas, Zack Phillips, Pierre Durepos, Kevin Gagné and Saint John’s very own Aiden Kelly

and Ryan Tesink; from Nova Scotia — Stephen MacAulay, Mike Kirkpatrick and Steven Anthony; and from Prince Edward Island — Jason Cameron. Of course, for all Sea Dogs fans and those who watched the nationally televised coverage of the Memorial Cup, the tremendous talent and skill of the tournament’s Most Valuable Player and the pride and joy of St-Jérôme, Quebec, Jonathan Huberdeau, will not be forgotten.

• (1430)

All Saint Johners are so very proud and appreciative of having our city and province represented by such an outstanding group of young men and coaches. Huge congratulations and a sincere thank you as well go out to Sea Dogs President Wayne Long, majority team owner Scott McCain and all other members of the Sea Dogs local ownership group. What a truly amazing job you have done!

THE LATE PETER BURNS

Hon. Art Eggleton: Honourable senators, I rise to pay tribute to Ottawa resident and former Nortel employee Peter Burns. Peter died suddenly on May 14 due to respiratory issues.

Peter was a man of immense talents and compassion. He was an engineer, father of three, and was a passionate advocate for Nortel employees on the long-term disability issue.

While at Nortel, Peter developed intellectual property that became a Nortel patent that saved the company close to \$1 billion.

There are times, honourable senators, when people rise through immense challenges to speak for those who have no voice, to help the powerless, who stand up for people because of the rightness of their cause and the unfairness of our laws. Peter did just that.

Since the start of Nortel’s bankruptcy proceedings in 2009, and through immense pain because of health issues due to cancer, Peter struggled for fairness and justice for people who needed help. He envisioned a world where people who played by the rules got what they rightly deserved, where people in significant need would not be shunted aside.

Unfortunately, Peter was not able to see the fruits of his labour, but I want this chamber and his family to know that his efforts will not be forgotten.

Honourable senators, the last few months of Peter’s life were a struggle. He was worried about how he would survive financially and emotionally. His disability payments from Nortel were cut off, as they were with many others, on December 31, 2010, which meant that his medications, his income — things he needed to survive — were now gone. Some of his friends say this contributed to his death.

Honourable senators, I feel very fortunate to have known Peter and spent some time with him during the deliberations on Bill S-216. I salute his courage and his determination and will ensure that what he fought for will not just fade away.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, before calling for the tabling of documents, I would like to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of two very distinguished Newfoundland and Labradorians in the person of our former colleague Senator Joan Cook and Bernice Petten, wife of our late colleague Senator Bill Petten.

On behalf of all honourable senators, I welcome you back to the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

BUDGET 2011

DOCUMENT TABLED

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, Budget 2011, entitled *A Low-Tax Plan for Jobs and Growth*.

[English]

THE ESTIMATES, 2011-12

PARTS I AND II TABLED

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, Parts I and II of the Main Estimates for 2011-12.

[Translation]

SPECIAL ECONOMIC MEASURES ACT

DOCUMENTS TABLED

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, pursuant to section 7 of the Special Economic Measures Act, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, copies of the Special Economic Measures (Syria) Regulations and the Special Economic Measures (Syria) Permit Authorization Order, officially announced by the Prime Minister on May 24, 2011.

[English]

LABRADOR INUIT LAND CLAIMS AGREEMENT

2008-09 ANNUAL REPORT TABLED

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2008-09 Annual Report of the Labrador Inuit

Land Claims Agreement Implementation Coordinating Committee.

[Translation]

THE ESTIMATES, 2011-12

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE TO STUDY MAIN ESTIMATES

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I give notice that at the next sitting of the Senate I will move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance be authorized to examine and report upon the expenditures set out in the Main Estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012.

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE TWELVE PLUS GROUP, SEPTEMBER 25, 2009—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union respecting its participation at the meeting of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group, held on September 25, 2009, in London, United Kingdom.

ANNUAL PARLIAMENTARY HEARING AT THE UNITED NATIONS, NOVEMBER 19-20, 2009—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, held on November 19 and 20, 2009, in New York, United States of America.

MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE TWELVE PLUS GROUP, MARCH 1, 2010—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group, held on March 1, 2010, in London, United Kingdom.

MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE TWELVE PLUS GROUP, SEPTEMBER 3, 2010—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group, held on September 3, 2010, in Paris, France.

ANNUAL PARLIAMENTARY HEARING
AT THE UNITED NATIONS,
DECEMBER 2-3, 2010—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, held on December 2 and 3, 2010, in New York, United States of America.

[English]

MEETING ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH
SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN,
FEBRUARY 23, 2011—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the Meeting on the Occasion of the Fifty-fifth Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women: the Role of Parliaments in Promoting Access and Participation of Women and Girls to Education, Training, Science and Technology, held in New York, New York, United States of America on February 23, 2011.

MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE
OF THE TWELVE PLUS GROUP,
MARCH 14, 2011—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group, held in Paris, France on March 14, 2011.

NATIONAL PHILANTHROPY DAY BILL

FIRST READING

Leave having been given to revert to Introduction and First Reading of Senate Public Bills:

Hon. Terry M. Mercer presented Bill S-201, An Act respecting a National Philanthropy Day.

(Bill read first time.)

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the second time?

(On motion of Senator Mercer, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading two days hence.)

OLD AGE SECURITY ALLOWANCE

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 57(2), I give notice that, two days hence:

I will call the attention of the Senate to the inequities of the Old Age Security Allowance for unattached, low-income seniors aged 60-64 years.

[Translation]

BUDGET 2011

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, on behalf of the government, I give notice that, two days hence:

I will call the attention of the Senate to the budget entitled, *A Low-Tax Plan for Jobs and Growth*, tabled in the House of Commons on June 6, 2011, by the Minister of Finance, the Honourable James M. Flaherty, P.C., M.P., and in the Senate on June 7, 2011.

LIBYA

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, on behalf of the government, I give notice that, two days hence:

I will call the attention of the Senate to the deplorable use of violence by the Libyan regime against the Libyan people as well as the actions the Canadian Government is undertaking alongside our allies, partners and the United Nations, in order to promote and support United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973.

• (1440)

[English]

CHINESE CANADIAN HISTORY

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Vivienne Poy: Honourable senators, I give notice that on Wednesday, June 15, 2011:

I will call the attention of the Senate to a multicultural educational resource for all Canadians entitled “A Brief Chronology of Chinese Canadian History: From Segregation to Integration”, spanning the period from 1788 to 2010, which is a collaborative project by British Columbia scholars involving the Universities of British Columbia, Victoria and Simon Fraser.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY AT KINGSTON

PRIVATE BILL TO AMEND CONSTITUTION OF
CORPORATION—PRESENTATION OF PETITION

Hon. Lowell Murray: Honourable senators, I have the honour to present a petition from the Board of Trustees of Queen's University at Kingston, in the province of Ontario; praying for the passage of an Act to amend the constitution of the

corporation of the University in order to effect certain changes in the composition and powers of the Board of Trustees and of the University Council and the mode of election of their respective members, and to effect other technical or incidental changes as may be appropriate.

QUESTION PERIOD

THE SENATE

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

Hon. James S. Cowan (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. I welcome her back to her new old position. I look forward to dealing with her here in the Senate.

Last Friday's Throne Speech stated:

Reform of the Senate remains a priority for our Government. Our Government will reintroduce legislation to limit term lengths and to encourage provinces and territories to hold elections for Senate nominees.

In other words, it is the same legislation that the government has been proposing since 2006.

Senate reform has been in the headlines for weeks, with many provinces expressing serious concerns regarding the government's unilateral approach to these constitutional changes. The Province of Quebec issued a clear warning to the Harper government that it would challenge the constitutionality and the legitimacy of any such changes before the courts at the earliest opportunity. Despite the concerns expressed by the provinces, our constitutional partners, the leader's government has not agreed to refer this important constitutional matter to the Supreme Court of Canada.

On the issue of the national securities regulator, when a number of provinces raised similar concerns regarding the constitutionality of the proposal, her government did refer the matter to the Supreme Court. As I said at the time, that was the right approach. Why not do the same for this important matter of Senate reform so that we all may know once and for all if this government can proceed unilaterally with these constitutional changes?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I wish to thank Senator Cowan for the question and for his good wishes on my new old position.

With regard to his question on Senate reform, I think the operative word in the question was "constitutional." We will have to await the government's proposed legislation on Senate reform. However, it is clear — and we have had advice from constitutional experts on this — that what the government proposed to do in the last Parliament did not require the opening of the Constitution.

Concerning the various views of the provinces with respect to Senate selection, as Senator Cowan will well recall, the bill was in this very chamber. It was a simple bill that provided a voluntary road map for provinces to select senators, if that was their choice. That would not require opening the Constitution. Therefore, the argument that it should be referred to the Supreme Court on its constitutionality does not, in my view, hold sway.

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

LINGUISTIC DUALITY

Hon. Maria Chaput: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. In 2010, the Conservatives' Speech from the Throne praised the fact that we have two official languages. It stated, and I quote:

Canada's two official languages are an integral part of our history and position us uniquely in the world.

It continued, and I quote:

... our Government will take steps to strengthen further Canada's francophone identity.

Unfortunately, in the 2011 Throne Speech, delivered last Friday, this very government made no mention of the importance of Canada's linguistic duality, which is nevertheless a fundamental characteristic of our country. There was no mention of the unique advantage afforded by our two official languages, or the role that our federal government intends to play in this area.

Will the Leader of the Government in the Senate explain this silence? How is it that, in 2010, our federal government stated that our official languages position us uniquely in the world, and today, in 2011, the same government seems to have forgotten all about them?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I thank Senator Chaput for her question. The answer is clear. At the moment, we are in year three of a five-year commitment that we made through our Roadmap. Our government strongly supports Canada's linguistic duality and we have delivered on our commitments made in previous Throne Speeches. We are providing \$1.1 billion in our Roadmap for Linguistic Duality, the largest amount ever invested by any federal government.

As I have pointed out, we are in year three of an unprecedented five-year commitment. I am happy to report to Senator Chaput that today over 71 per cent of the commitments that we made in that road map have been confirmed and fully funded to the tune of over \$795 million.

[Translation]

THE SENATE

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

Hon. Maria Chaput: Honourable senators, I noted the following statement among others from Friday's Speech from the Throne, and I quote:

Reform of the Senate remains a priority for our Government.

Regional and minority representation is at the very heart of this chamber's mandate. In my opinion, it would be unacceptable for the representation of these minorities to become part of the election game.

With regard to the proposal for Senate elections, how does the leader's government intend to ensure that minorities have guaranteed representation in the Senate? Does the leader not believe that a reformed Senate must respect the place of two founding peoples of the Canadian federation? And is the government prepared to commit to preserving these historic rights in the Senate?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, my answer is similar to the one that I gave to Senator Cowan. Obviously the government has yet to table its Senate reform legislation. I urge Senator Chaput to wait for the tabling of that legislation before drawing any conclusions.

With regard to the need to have this chamber reflect the regional and linguistic duality and the protection of minorities in this chamber, if we are successful in convincing provinces to participate in a voluntary Senate selection process, given the makeup of the country and the changing demographics, I would dare say, honourable senators, that we would be very happy with the results, particularly if they were to reflect the new demographics.

One need only look at the members of the other place who were elected on May 2 to have proof positive that the voting public can be trusted to ensure that all those who make up our wonderful country are represented. I have no reason to believe that would not also be reflected in a senatorial selection or elections to this place.

• (1450)

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

POVERTY, HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Hon. Art Eggleton: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Last year, as honourable senators know, the Senate unanimously passed the Social Affairs Committee's report entitled *In From the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*. The report pointed out that over three million Canadians, or one in

ten, live in poverty, with approximately 800,000 of those living in poverty being children.

Other than a modest increase in the GIS for seniors, poverty was not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. It was not mentioned in the budget yesterday. When will the government make the necessary changes outlined in our Senate committee's report on poverty, housing and homelessness to break the back of poverty in Canada?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I thank Senator Eggleton. Again, like other matters that I have referred to in other responses, we are already committed to helping vulnerable Canadians to become self-sufficient and to fully participate in our economy. We have made major investments in affordable housing toward this goal, which have created thousands of jobs and improved the quality of life of Canadians. Over 14,000 projects are completed or under way, with 2,500 in the province of Quebec alone, for example. We are very proud of this record.

The fact is, honourable senators, that the programs that the government was participating in and that were well under way in terms of implementation before the combined opposition decided to defeat the government are continuing. We are now simply picking up from where we left off, thanks to the mandate from the Canadian public.

We are further improving funding by providing the provinces and territories with greater flexibility — this is something they asked for — as we recognize that each one of them faces different challenges when it comes to housing and homelessness. They are closer to the ground. I have said this before in this place. They are in a better position to have greater knowledge as to how to effect more positive changes.

As honourable senators know, we have increased our accountability measures to ensure that the monies that are passed on to the provinces and territories are used to their maximum value and that taxpayers are getting maximum value for their investment.

Senator Eggleton: I asked the leader not about the past; I asked her about the future. In spite of these measures she talks about in the past, we still have record levels of poverty in this country. In fact, the figures I cited were pre-recession numbers and the estimates are higher now. There is still a major problem, and it is a growing problem that needs further action. I hope the leader does, in fact, address this issue more fully in the coming months in this mandate that her government has.

SUPPORT FOR SENIORS

Hon. Art Eggleton: Honourable senators, let me ask more specifically about seniors, since I mentioned them. The amount that is being allocated is simply not enough to make a real difference in the lives of those who need our help. The plan would help only 600,000 of the approximately 1.6 million seniors who receive GIS. These are the poor ones. Will this government commit to doing more? Will the government help all seniors to live out of poverty and to live in dignity?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): In my answer to the previous question, when Senator Eggleton said he did not want to talk about the past but about the future, the point I was making with regard to the homelessness problem is that it is part of a five-year commitment that we are in the midst of. It is a five-year commitment that does not end until 2014.

With regard to seniors, I was watching the response to the budget last night on television. I saw many organizations lauding the government for the increase in the GIS, including Susan Eng from CARP, an organization which represents our seniors.

I have put this on the record here many times, honourable senators, and I will do it again. Since coming into office in 2006, there are many programs that the government has implemented in an effort to make lives easier for our seniors, including taking thousands of seniors off the tax rolls. I would be happy to recite all of that again, honourable senators, but the fact is that the increase to the GIS for single seniors, and also for married couples, is a very helpful step in the right direction. I am happy that this was acknowledged by seniors' organizations.

I might add, honourable senators, that this was definitely part of our election platform and, if one looks at the demographics, it was overwhelmingly supported by the seniors in this country.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Hon. Art Eggleton: Honourable senators, other than seniors, I did not see any mention of poverty at all in the government's platform. However, I want to focus on the way forward again. The leader mentioned housing, so let me ask about housing.

There were two housing programs — the portable housing initiative and the renovation program on housing — that expired at the end of the fiscal year and were not renewed. We have no indication of what the way forward is in terms of housing, and yet millions of people in this country need affordable housing. They are paying too much or do not have decent accommodation. Yes, the government is taking action on the homelessness file, but there is more to it than that.

What is the way forward here? We keep getting an indication that perhaps the government will get out of the housing business altogether. Will there be housing programs to replace the ones that expired at the end of the fiscal year?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): As I just mentioned, honourable senators, we are working with the provinces and territories on housing. We have expended considerable funds in order to provide affordable housing for Canadians.

In answer to Senator Eggleton's question about poverty, clearly the best way to lift a person out of poverty is to provide meaningful jobs. The government has a stellar record in providing work sharing for seniors and work sharing to keep people in jobs throughout the economic downturn. We have also expended incredible sums of money in post-secondary education and not just in university education which is important but, more importantly, in the trades.

To suggest, honourable senators, that there is one specific portal into which one can put all the problems of poverty and homelessness is not the proper way to proceed. The policies of the government, whether in terms of creating jobs, ensuring that people are trained and retrained, providing affordable housing, or working with new Canadians to learn a second language, these are all issues that will lift people out of low income and out of poverty. In fact, one of the commitments of the government, as honourable senators know, is keeping the tax rate low so that these people are not affected by adverse taxes.

The government is implementing many initiatives. I again point out to Senator Eggleton that when he looks at the support the government received from the Canadian electorate across the country in the last election, whether people are of a low, modest or higher income, they all had great confidence in the ability of the Prime Minister and our government to steer the economy in the right direction so that there will be jobs for as many people as want to work.

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

FLOODING IN SAINT-JEAN-SUR-RICHELIEU

Hon. Roméo Antonius Dallaire: Honourable senators, I would like to welcome the minister back. This is an interesting atmosphere for our return to school.

Today, I am wearing a blue suit and a blue tie — it is a UNICEF tie — and I notice that the minister is wearing red. This shows that reconciliation may be possible in an environment where we are not always focused on politics.

During this session, I am going to attempt to ask much briefer questions, and I hope that the minister will provide equally brief responses, so that we can make the most of the time available.

My question is about the Prime Minister's attitude to the flooding that has occurred in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

• (1500)

I went to visit the troops and the armed forces headquarters three weeks after the flooding began. I even met with seniors who had been displaced so that the headquarters could operate. I was thus able to see the extent of the damage.

This region has been receiving visits from ministers left and right; however, when such a crisis occurs, the people do not only want to see second- or third-rank officials. They also want to see their leader so that he can encourage them and the troops in the field.

I am once again wondering why the Prime Minister took so long to make a whirlwind visit — so fast he did not even get his feet wet — to assess the magnitude of the crisis and the associated health risks. A state of emergency has been declared and the presence of the Armed Forces is still required in the cleanup process.

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank Senator Dallaire for his question. With regard to the serious issue of flooding in Quebec, obviously this has been a difficult and trying time for those families affected by the flooding. As honourable senators know, Minister Peter MacKay, the Minister of National Defence, was in the region quickly, as were our Armed Forces personnel, as well as other ministers from Quebec.

It is absolutely the case that every time the Prime Minister was able to go, he would get the news that the situation was starting to correct itself and that the floods were receding. As Senator Dallaire knows, the Prime Minister did have obligations to the G8 and he also went to Afghanistan. However, he did go to see the area and his obligations did not in any way diminish his concern or the concern of the government. His visit was just based on when he was able to go and was prepared to go, and then he would get the word that the situation was improving. Nothing sinister was intended. He did go and he has made some commitments on behalf of the government.

I am happy to say that the Armed Forces were very helpful in sandbagging and keeping the floodwaters back. It looks like the waters are finally starting to recede and people can start to try to get their lives back to normal.

Senator Dallaire: Honourable senators, I had no intention of bringing forward a comment of any ulterior motive on the part of our Prime Minister. On the contrary, I am trying to indicate that when one is in command, one is in command. When one is the leader, one is the leader. If people are in dire straits, I do not care if it is the G20 or the G150, there is always a moment that a leader could go for even just 15 minutes, if he has to. He has every helicopter and aircraft available to him from the Armed Forces. He could go in to say hi and to ask if they have any specific problems, such as the Employment Insurance issue that was resolved by his visit.

I was concerned when members of this chamber were responding for the Prime Minister and saying he did not go because he was not invited. I have commanded that area, and I know that the Prime Minister does not have to be invited into a province. By protocol, he can indicate to the premier of a province that he is going in, particularly if there is a difficult situation. He needs no permission to visit his troops and certainly to visit the area. A sort of uncertainty has been established around why he did not go earlier, and it has been nurtured through responses so far.

I would bring forward the specific point that the troops are now being harassed in the streets. The people want them to assist in cleaning up, because they have been living in cesspools for six weeks and it is now a medical problem. It is an emergency. Yes, the troops should remain to assist in that clean-up because of the emergency nature of it, and the decision of our Prime Minister should come forthwith or he should pull the troops out so they are not harassed by the civilian population asking them what they are doing there in the first place.

Senator LeBreton: From what I have heard, honourable senators, the population affected by the floods has been

thankful to the Canadian Armed Forces for their Herculean efforts. I will not respond to the question directly but would simply inform the honourable senator that his contentions are wrong.

Senator Dallaire: My only supplemental comment is that I have two sons who are deployed in the region. Whenever they go to the corner store to get something, they are harassed. I am not talking through my hat. I am talking about the leader being on the ground when troops are deployed, when people are suffering, and being there in his leadership role to show empathy and to say that they are going to sort it out, and then to send his minions in after to work out the detail. That is what I would like to bring to the attention of the government and the Prime Minister.

Senator LeBreton: The Prime Minister has shown great concern for all Canadians who have been in similar stressful situations, and I would hardly call the Minister of National Defence a minion.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

LIGHTHOUSES

Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Last year, the federal government indicated its intention to divest itself of almost 1,000 surplus lighthouses. Under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act, these properties can be transferred to new owners, such as community organizations. There is a lot of interest in my province, and I assume that there is interest in other provinces, in taking over some of these surplus lighthouses. However, there are concerns about the cost of repairing and maintaining these lighthouses. I have attempted several times to find out if there is any funding available. My question is: Is there any funding available to assist community groups that are interested in repairing and preserving these heritage lighthouses?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank the senator for the question. As honourable senators are aware, a Senate committee report was prepared under the chairmanship of Senator Rompkey. Recommendations were made to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. There was an acceptance of those recommendations.

With regard to the process to be followed from this point on, honourable senators, I will take the question as notice and provide the information for Senator Callbeck.

Senator Callbeck: I thank the leader for taking the question as notice. Many Canadians recognize that lighthouses are an integral part of our maritime culture. Many lighthouses are historically significant and have tremendous economic and sentimental value to the communities around them. However, it is difficult for these groups to raise money and gather the funds necessary to repair and maintain them.

If the leader finds that there is no funding specifically designated for heritage lighthouses, would she also determine if the federal government will consider providing funding to help these community organizations take advantage of the heritage lighthouse designation?

• (1510)

Senator LeBreton: The issue of heritage lighthouses is not unique to the eastern coastline. It also has a great deal of support in the West.

I will take the question as notice. I have no knowledge whatsoever on the matter, honourable senators, so I will be as interested as the honourable senator will be in the answer.

[Translation]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of His Excellency the Governor General's Speech from the Throne at the opening of the First Session of the Forty-first Parliament.

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau, seconded by the Honourable Senator Di Nino, moved:

That the following Address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General of Canada:

To His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Chancellor and Principal Companion of the Order of Canada, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Military Merit, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, Her Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the Senate of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious Speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

He said: Honourable senators, it is a great honour to rise today to move adoption of the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston's speech delivered last week marks a turning point in Canada's history. It not only marks the opening of the 41st Parliament, but it also marks the beginning of a majority government, mandated by the Canadian public to govern the country and pursue its program of stability, security and prosperity for the benefit of all Canadians.

I am pleased to know that we will be able to fulfill our mandate this session without the fear of the opposition forcing another premature election. It has been seven years since there was a

majority government in Canada and the Conservative Party managed the affairs of the nation for five of those years.

We were able to govern with a minority by making smart decisions.

Despite the opposition parties' daily threats to make the government fall, we were able to govern Canada for five years. However, there was always a threat that the opposition would trigger an unwanted election.

I was pleased to see that the Conservative Party of Canada, under the strong leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, was so successful, in its five years of minority government, in gaining the confidence of Canadian voters that they did not hesitate to give him a majority and to give him the power to make the decisions he finds necessary and appropriate.

I would like to welcome my honourable colleagues on both sides to this new session beginning in the Senate. We come together in this chamber to serve Canada to the best of our abilities and in the best interests of Canadians.

We must always recognize that our responsibilities and the actions we take in the Senate affect the future of our country.

We must be worthy of the respect given to this chamber, where we provide sober second thought as we examine the bills sent to us by the other chamber.

The government, including the Senate, is a living organization that must adapt to the will of the population. It selects the best ideas and implements them to benefit society. We fully understand and appreciate the value of the democratic tradition, but we remain open to the desire for change in favour of democratic reform. We are focused on the future; we adapt our approaches and we continue to evolve in order to improve the well-being of our country.

I would like to congratulate my colleagues: Senator Marjory LeBreton, who will continue as Leader of the Government in the Senate; the Honourable Claude Carignan, the new Deputy Leader of the Government; as well as the Honourable Elizabeth Marshall, who was appointed as government whip in the Senate.

I also offer congratulations to our honourable colleagues on the other side: Senator James Cowan, who continues to represent the opposition as Leader of the Opposition in the Senate; Senator Claudette Tardif, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, with whom we have had a great relationship over the last four years and with whom I have had the great pleasure of working; and Senator Jim Munson as whip. I believe that this new session will be very interesting.

I listened carefully to His Excellency's Speech from the Throne and I was impressed by the detailed plan that he set out for this Parliament. Whether we look ahead to Canada's future or look back on its past, whether we help our local economies to become stronger or expand our share of world markets, we are here to make Canada a resolute, determined and productive country.

Creating jobs remains Canada's top priority. In the next phase of the economic action plan, which will be implemented together with tax reductions and support for innovation and new technologies, we believe that our expectations for the Canadian economy will be exceeded. In order to maintain a pool of stable jobs, we need highly skilled workers.

The best way to ensure the renewal of skilled human resources is to support the teaching of skills to those who wish to seize the opportunities they are presented with.

This may be achieved by teaching new skills to older workers who have a great deal of knowledge and experience, but who wish to familiarize themselves with new technology. This is possible through innovation and training provided by our education systems and the private sector.

It may also be achieved by continuing to implement programs to help new Canadians integrate into the labour market and build a prosperous future in their new country.

Canada's future will be prosperous due to the many efforts made to ensure economic growth. Although weakened a few years ago due to the global recession, the Canadian economy emerged relatively intact from the downturn, owing to quick and well-considered decision making by the Conservative government.

Our country will continue to play an important role on the world stage because of the economic potential of its natural resources. As we develop the mineral riches of the North and implement clean energy technologies throughout the country, we will be shaping a sustainable and responsible country for future generations.

[English]

The security and safety of Canadian citizens both at home and abroad must be one of our core principles. People living in our community should not be afraid of criminals and crime. That is why the government will strengthen laws on self-defence, defence of property and citizen's arrests. I was happy to hear in His Excellency's speech last week of the speedy reintroduction of comprehensive law and order legislation to combat crime and terrorism.

Tougher laws will be introduced to protect the most vulnerable in society and ensure that criminals are dealt with accordingly. Criminals will be given harsher sentences, and Canadians who are threatened by crime will have the right to defend themselves and their property when police are not there to help them.

• (1520)

The future of our country lies in its people. People that have been here for generations, new Canadians that have just arrived and immigrants who are making their way here are what Canada's fabric will be. I am pleased to see that our immigration system will be further strengthened to protect people from immigration abuse, including marriage fraud, human smuggling and other forms of undermining Canada's generosity to newcomers.

With regard to our military, I see potential for our men and women to be better able to protect the less fortunate in countries

that are struggling with their freedoms. A new office of religious freedom will be formed to promote the rights of people in developing societies.

There is no question that there are very strong beliefs on Senate reform and strong opinions on how to accomplish meaningful reform. We have recently heard that in the not-so-distant future the House of Commons will be expanded. They will be there to stand for their constituents' beliefs and to voice their concerns. This democratic reform will create a more approachable and fair representation in the House of Commons.

I am pleased to have also heard in the Throne Speech that steps will be taken to phase out direct taxpayer subsidies to federal political parties over the coming years. This means that taxpayers' hard-earned money will not be going into political funding.

Regarding Senate reform, many proposals will be made in the coming days that will undoubtedly alter our political landscape as we know it. With a focused approach to changing the Senate to meet today's demands and expectations, our hope is to make the Senate a more responsive and responsible chamber.

The proposals that will be set forward will undeniably improve the Senate. The people of Canada will be able to give advice to the Prime Minister on candidates for Senate seats rather than the Prime Minister having to rely on his top advisors in the PMO. The Senate will evolve into a place where new blood is welcomed, with reasonable limits on serving terms for senators. This means that fresh ideas will be complemented with knowledgeable advice offered by a dynamic senatorial team.

After all these conventional years, there must be an improvement, or better yet, an upgrade, put into practice in the Senate to allow the Chamber to be more relevant, more adaptive and more responsive to the will of the Canadian people.

This is the time that strong and decisive leadership can be shown by our Prime Minister, cabinet members, caucus members and government.

In this majority government, we will see a renewal of government in action working with people and working with a public service with improved access. It was best said in the Throne Speech that the government will be improved through "open data, open information and open dialogue."

We will finally deliver our promise to get rid of the long-gun registry once and for all. Canadians in the rural areas of our country work hard and respect the law. We will introduce legislation that will be successfully passed this time around. Millions of dollars will be put back into the pockets of hard-working taxpayers when this wasteful initiative is done away with.

The Conservative government has lowered the taxes for hard-working Canadians over the years and we have decided not to stop there. We have now made it easier to receive tax credits for people in need. Whether it is through the newly introduced family caregiver tax credit, the removal of the cap on the medical tax credit, or the children's arts tax credit giving families a chance to help their children to grow creatively, our government continues to care for the citizens of this country.

[Senator Comeau]

As our country's population is aging, we must look after the less fortunate people in Canada as well. That is why the Conservative government will boost the Guaranteed Income Supplement for almost 700,000 of the most vulnerable seniors in our communities. We will also continue to work closely with our provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure that we correctly implement the pooled registered pension plan.

One of Canada's more defining attributes is its wealth of natural resources. As there are struggles around the world to harness new and clean power sources, I am proud to say that the planned Lower Churchill hydroelectric project, otherwise known as the Muskrat Falls Generating Facility, will finally be on its way to creating clean and efficient energy. This is a tremendously important project for Atlantic Canada as well as being tremendously important for all of Canada.

I believe that His Excellency, the Right Honourable David Johnston, said it most succinctly in the Throne Speech:

... let the work of our great democracy support Canadians as they go about fashioning a twenty-first century destiny limited only by their ambition and imagination.

Why are we here other than to make a difference and improve our lives? Whether we live through the good times or through more challenging periods, we are all here to help each other and to live life to its fullest.

The Throne Speech outlines part of the government's agenda to ensure that Canadians live in a free and fair democracy fused with the security, stability and prosperity that all of us deserve.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

Hon. Consiglio Di Nino: Honourable senators, unless there are questions, I would like to continue the debate.

It is a pleasure to support the motion to adopt the Speech from the Throne put forth by my colleague Senator Comeau.

[*Translation*]

I completely agree with Senator Comeau's remarks regarding the Speech from the Throne. It sets out a number of economic measures that will have a considerable impact on our country and refers to other issues that are of concern to all Canadians.

The phrase "implement the next phase of Canada's Economic Action Plan" shows that, despite having been in a minority situation for the past few years, the government managed to exceed its targets for our economic recovery. We are now entering into the maintenance phase of the recovery.

From now on, the government will no longer run into any obstacles as it implements its program, which aims to help citizens work together for a better future. We will wipe out our deficit and balance the budget in just a few short years.

In order to do so, we will reduce the cost of government. A strategic, operational review of government spending will be conducted, and this will yield savings that can be passed on directly to Canadian taxpayers.

In addition, a new cabinet subcommittee, which will report to Treasury Board, will be tasked with balancing the budget one year earlier than planned.

[*English*]

We are not only looking inwards at our economic future, I am happy to see that we are also looking at global expanding markets. Particular mention in the speech was given to the United States and its perimeter security and economic competitiveness negotiations and the free trade agreements with both the European Union and India in the near future. I believe this will lead to many prosperous years for both Canada and its partners.

Prosperity and health go hand in hand, and the quality of life that Canadians deserve will be improved with various tax incentives such as the family caregiver tax credit, changes to the medical tax credit, and even the children's arts tax credit to allow the future of our country, the children, to have opportunities to follow their creative hearts.

The health care system, honourable senators, is another aspect that will need some serious revamping. The federal government will continue to maintain the 6 per cent escalating budget for the Canada Health Transfer and continue working closely with its provincial partners to improve the accountability and reduce wait times.

The Province of Quebec will have its own separate agreement regarding implementing the renewed health accord.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Canada's priorities are not limited to the economy. We know that a great deal of work has been done in the area of security. Tougher sentences will be imposed on those who attack the most vulnerable, whether seniors, women or young people, and victims will be better protected under new comprehensive legislation.

The government will support and protect communities by giving law-abiding Canadians the right to take reasonable measures to defend themselves. A new bill will strengthen the law on self-defence, defence of property and citizen's arrest.

We still want justice to be served and our government will continue to implement its response to the Air India affair.

In addition to remembering our past, we know we must contribute to creating a better future for people around the world. That is why the Canadian Forces will continue to play a role in countries that need our support. As part of our efforts to promote human rights, we will create an Office of Religious Freedom to help protect religious minorities and to defend pluralism.

[English]

The Conservative government is also there for the Aboriginal communities. Not only will the government enhance the education programs at the elementary and secondary levels, thus building the future for First Nations children, it will also boost the adult basic education program to allow Aboriginal Canadians to get on with their lives and increase their employment levels.

Quality of life should also apply to everyone in Canada. There are new investments under way to ensure that clean water and clean energy technology are provided to all Aboriginal and northern communities. For Aboriginal women living on reserves, we will introduce legislation that will offer the same matrimonial real property rights and protections as all Canadian women have. We believe in fairness, equality and accountability.

Our dream of improved transportation, enhanced energy sources and improved green space will mean that we will continue to support the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project in Newfoundland and Labrador, and we will be committed to completing the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk highway that will be known as the Dempster Highway.

To celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the national parks system, the Conservative government will create an urban national park in the Rouge Valley, just east of Toronto, for all to enjoy. I would like to add here a comment of praise for the Honourable Pauline Browes, a former colleague, who has been fighting for this since she was Minister of the Environment. I am not sure how many years ago that was, but it certainly is more than a few. To her and her team we should say, "Well done."

Coming back to our economy, we see that the digital age continues to move in leaps and bounds. This is why the government will pass copyright legislation to protect the industry. We look forward to the implementation of the digital economy strategy that will enhance the business infrastructure surrounding everything digital.

Last, but not least, there is the business of democratic reform about which my colleague Senator Comeau also spoke. This will definitely be a hot topic that must be dealt with. Whether it deals with restructuring the Senate, changing the rules as we know them, or increasing the number of seats in the House of Commons, we must adjust and adapt to the times.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, I am pleased to support the motion put forward by Senator Comeau and I ask this chamber to adopt the Speech from the Throne.

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I would like to move the adjournment of the debate. However, while I am on my feet, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate my counterpart, Senator Carignan, for his appointment as Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate. I would also like to congratulate Senator Marshall for her appointment as Government Whip. I wish them the very best in their new positions.

I would like to thank Senator Comeau and Senator Di Nino for their work in the Senate and their leadership in serving Canadians.

Senator Comeau, I will miss the meetings we had every morning to discuss the orders of the day. We did not always agree but I learned a lot from you and I appreciated the opportunity to work with you. Thank you.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(On motion of Senator Tardif, debate adjourned.)

(The Senate adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.)

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