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The Honourable GEORGE J. FUREY,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, May 2, 2018

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

Prayers.

THE LATE GORDON “GORD” BROWN, M.P.

SILENT TRIBUTE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, we were deeply saddened today to hear of the sudden passing of Mr. Gordon Brown, the Member of Parliament representing Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. I extend deepest sympathies, on behalf of all senators and the entire Senate family, to his wife, Claudine Courtois, his children, and all those close to his family and his friends.

Out of respect for our deceased colleague, I would ask all senators to please rise and join with me in a minute of silence.

(Honourable senators then stood in silent tribute.)

SENATORS’ STATEMENTS

TRIBUTES

THE LATE GORDON “GORD” BROWN, M.P.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, after consultations, it has been agreed that we will now proceed to tributes to our colleague, after which the Senate will adjourn.

Hon. Larry W. Smith (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable Senators, today we have experienced a terrible loss within our parliamentary family. Gord Brown, Member of Parliament for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, passed away suddenly this morning. Gord was only 57 years old.

Gord had a cheerful, energetic and optimistic personality with a warm and friendly smile. He was a true team player, whether in politics or in sports, especially his love of hockey. His loss today is shocking and deeply felt amongst our Conservative caucus.

In 2000, Gord Brown ran for a seat in the House of Commons and lost by only 55 votes. Four years later, he won his election, and Gord has served ever since as a strong voice for eastern Ontario in the House of Commons.

This was no surprise, as he came to Parliament Hill with a long history of advocating for the citizens of his community as a town councillor in Gananoque, as president of the local Chamber of Commerce, and as chair of the St. Lawrence Parks Commission.

[Translation]

Gord served in a variety of important roles over the course of 14-odd years in the House of Commons. He served as the opposition whip in the other place, chair of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group for the House of Commons, chair of the special committee for the review of the Anti-terrorism Act and chair of the Conservative caucus of Ontario.

[English]

Gord said that he was proudest of his work with one of his constituents to extend Employment Insurance benefits to the parents of critically ill children. He had introduced a private member’s bill calling for more compassionate care benefits in every Parliament following his election in 2004. In 2013, Gord’s private member’s bill on this issue was taken on by the Conservative government, and it has helped an estimated 6,000 families per year ever since. Talk about fortitude.

Gord’s work on this issue is a profound reminder of the ability of each member of Parliament and each senator to provide positive change for his or her fellow Canadians, and today it stands as a tribute to Gord’s perseverance and dedication.

At this most difficult time, on behalf of all honourable senators, I extend heartfelt condolences to Gord’s wife Claudine, his sons Chance and Tristan and all of Gord’s family and friends. I know the thoughts of all honourable senators will be with them in the days ahead.

Gord Brown will be truly missed and will be fondly remembered by all those who were lucky enough to know him.

If I could make a personal comment, I got to know Gord in the last three years. What a great guy, and someone you could really relate to. I guess if there’s any message for all of us, it’s a time when we can reflect on our own lives and really make sure that we think of the things that are important to us, and really, what’s important is family and friends. In this time, I really feel so bad for Claudine and his family, because there’s a young family there that will not have a father.

For all of us it gives us a chance for real reflection and, hopefully, to take care of ourselves because we have a great family in here, and we’re all doing it for one reason: to make Canada a better place.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Peter Harder (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, it is with deep sadness that I rise today to mark the passing of our colleague and fellow parliamentarian, Gord Brown. At moments like this, we come together as a family on Parliament Hill. Let me start by extending our heartfelt condolences to his wife Claudine, who, as people will know, is part of the Senate family herself, working so closely with Senator Wells.

We mourn together the loss of a colleague and a friend who was kind and giving and who was taken from us much too soon. As a family, we come together to offer solace to his wife and children as they cope with this shocking and unimaginable tragedy.

[Translation]

Gord was dedicated to the well-being of his home region, especially when it came to economic issues. There is no question that the beautiful town of Gananoque and the Thousand Islands region have lost a champion of creativity and innovation, someone who worked hard to bring new industries and jobs to the area.

In addition to owning a family business, he has also served as the president of the local Chamber of Commerce. Gord made every effort to promote the historical and natural heritage of his region.

He was also active in charity work. He served as director of the United Way of Leeds & Grenville, and also found time to help seniors and youth. Let me remind honourable senators of the private member's bill he introduced to help parents of critically ill children.

[English]

As Senator Smith has already noted, Gord's work to ensure federal financial support for working families of critically ill children is much heralded by all.

Gord was a passionate sportsman, whether it was kayaking through the beautiful Thousand Islands, playing hockey or hitting the links for a round of golf.

I know he will be missed within the Conservative family, where he has been a tireless defender of Conservative unity and strength and always interested in the positive side of political engagement.

He will be missed by all who appreciated his honesty, his work ethic and devotion on behalf of his constituents and, indeed, all Canadians on Parliament Hill.

I would be remiss if I didn't also acknowledge his work as one of the parliamentarians on the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. His intelligence and judgment will be missed. Common sense is not always common, but Gord had it. I had the pleasure of working with him on the trilateral commission, where I always appreciated his comments. He led by example, and may his memory always inspire us and have us come together at moments like this.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

• (1410)

Hon. Yuen Pau Woo: Honourable colleagues, today began as most days do, rushing to meetings, preparing for committees and the chamber, bracing ourselves for the unexpected, and then the most unexpected of unexpecteds happens. We hear the news of the passing of a fellow parliamentarian, the MP Gord Brown.

[Senator Harder]

As it turns out, only an hour and a half ago, there was a meeting of the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group, of which Mr. Brown served as co-chair for a number of years. He was much respected and much loved on that committee. I knew Mr. Brown a little from that work and quickly came to learn of the respect that he commanded, not only from colleagues on this side of the committee but also from our American counterparts.

On behalf of the Independent Senators Group, I convey our deepest condolences to Claudine, his children and his many friends and constituents and I wish the family well.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Joseph A. Day (Leader of the Senate Liberals): Honourable senators, I would also like to express my shock and sadness at the sudden passing of Gord Brown, Member of Parliament for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

It is difficult to comprehend the death of such a young and vigorous parliamentarian. Gord Brown served his constituents for nearly 14 years and did so ably and energetically. By all accounts, he was a dedicated public servant, decent and committed to improving the lives of those in his home community and across Canada.

Gord represented a beautiful part of our country, one for which I have a personal affinity, and it gave us a point of common interest whenever we met. We had many great discussions over the years about the Blinkbonnie Inn in Gananoque.

Our paths also crossed regularly through his work on parliamentary associations and interparliamentary groups. He served as vice-chair of the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group, and on the executive of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU. He was a member of the Canada-China Legislative Association and the Canadian section of ParAmericas.

On behalf of the Independent Senate Liberals, I offer my sincere condolences to his beloved wife, Claudine. As has been said, she is a member of our Senate family, and I know that all senators and staff will support her in the days and weeks to come. I also offer condolences to Gord's two sons, Chance and Tristan, and to all of his extended family and friends. I am certain that he will be sorely missed by all who had the good fortune to have met and known him.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Donald Neil Plett: Colleagues, I find that we are doing this far too often. This is the third time in less than four or five months that I have stood here to pay tribute to one of our colleagues and friends. Senator Enverga only a few months ago, Donna Richardson a week ago, and now our good friend Gord Brown.

I was a little closer to Gord than I am to many members of the House of Commons, for a few reasons. One of them was that Gord was the whip in the other place for the Conservative Party for quite some time. So we would share ideas, and we would share stories. Gord had been the whip before I was, and he would

give me some instructions. Claudine works in Senator Wells's office. Their son Tristan regularly came into my office for a piece of chocolate, and, if I wasn't there, he knew where the chocolate was. I would come in there, and he would be in there by himself having a piece of chocolate.

Gord and I shared many of the same likes away from here. One of them certainly was having a good glass of wine, and another one was our love of sports. Gord was much more avid about sports than I was. I haven't skated for quite some time. But we certainly had an equal love for hockey, and Gord played up until the very end.

We will certainly miss Gord. I'm hoping that those of us on our side and even others who see Claudine and Tristan will give them support. Chance isn't here that often, but certainly Tristan is. And Claudine will continue to be. She still hasn't come back. She is tending to very difficult matters right now, and our prayers are with Claudine and the entire family.

On behalf of our Conservative caucus, thank you very much for your warm wishes and your prayers. We will continue to need them, as Claudine will continue to need them. Thank you very much.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Jim Munson: Honourable senators, Gord Brown was such a good guy that even the opponents on the other hockey team loved him. He was so gentle and kind.

I got to know Gord when I first came here 14 and a half years ago. We didn't meet here; we met on the hockey rink. We actually played together a number of times. We played against Queen's Park and actually Conservatives and Liberals from the Hill here playing hockey. Gord was always the guy trying to make sure everybody was getting along. One hockey game between the Liberals, when I was part of that national caucus, and Conservatives, and with Prime Minister Harper behind the bench for the Conservatives, was a very — put it this way — “crusty” hockey game, with a lot of hard edges. You could see Gord in his manner. His manner was always, “Come on boys; let's just keep it all together. We're doing this because it's about charity,” and so on and so forth. I also played hockey against Gord, but, if he ever hit you, it would be a very gentle, kind hit.

I also travelled with him with Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group. He built great relationships there.

But I want to tell you a story, honourable senators, that you may not know about Gord Brown. He and I worked together on a number of autism files. Can you imagine, going back to 2014, four years ago? There's a little group near Gananoque, in a place called Maitland, and they had an autism awareness afternoon. I was surrounded by all kinds of Conservatives. I thought I would be nervous, but, with Gord in the room, you're not nervous. You're welcomed. It's a comforting, family place to be. They were raising awareness for children with autism. There was a woman there by the name of Dee Gordon who had planned, in two months, in the month of January, to walk from Toronto to Ottawa, middle of winter, on behalf of her son Jacob. Gord recognized her right away and asked, “Where are you going to stay?” She said, “I'll find a place to stay along the way or I'll

sleep in my truck.” Well, you know what Gord did, of course. Quietly and without telling anybody, he made sure that she had accommodation in every spot as she walked to Ottawa. That kind of quiet, gentle compassion was Gord Brown.

• (1420)

At that particular gathering that afternoon, we talked about the challenges of autism. Here's what he said:

So many things had been happening, and so many things had been done, in dealing with autism and the challenges that these people face. We all hear about how negative things are in Ottawa, but this is an issue that parliamentarians of all stripes have come together for the good of the people facing these challenges.

He assured everyone that afternoon — I have a picture — that there's a lot more to do, so we're going to continue working on that. That afternoon, as we continued working with the Conservative government of the day and had a Canadian autism partnership built, Gord Brown was part of the work to make sure it worked with the autism community across the country.

Those lights went on those little trees that afternoon to raise awareness, and I don't want the lights to turn off because of his passing. He wouldn't want that.

I know he was still playing hockey. I'm still playing hockey. Sometimes I have a tendency to ask, “Should I stop?” I don't think we should stop. I think we should keep on living for Gord Brown, his wife and his dear children.

In his memory, I want to say that he said, “There's a lot more to do,” so we're going to continue working on that. To Gord Brown, yes, we're going to continue to work on that, and “that” is autism and any other compassionate group that is doing something good in this country.

Your Honour, I listened more than ever to your prayer this afternoon. There are words in that prayer that sum up who Gord Brown is. Thank you very much.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Frances Lankin: Since 2004, Gord has lived a very large life on the Hill, and others have spoken to that aspect of it. Gord was active in Ontario politics for many years, but I never knew him. The first time I recall seeing him was on the six o'clock news one evening when, as chief opposition whip, he was surrounded by a group of MPs blocking his passage on the floor of the House of Commons. I remember this because I was really impressed by the calm and restrained manner in which he handled himself in that situation. It stuck with me.

MP Nathan Cullen tweeted this morning that Gord was an incredibly decent man, and I agree with that.

If I fast-forward a bit, I was also honoured to be appointed to serve on the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. Gord and I very quickly established a great working relationship. During the coffee breaks or on travel to and from meetings, we shared many stories about people we knew in common and traded in great political gossip.

He always had a smile, a joke and a light heart. He was fun. He was knowledgeable, and he quickly gained my trust as a committee colleague.

But Parliament Hill is only one part of Gord's life, as you've heard. We connected around our mutual involvement in the United Way for many years, as well as around the people we knew and had worked with in common. There are also other people we found out and discovered are mutual friends of ours. We both now suspect their politics. I was a New Democrat, he was a Conservative, so our friends who like both of us might have been Liberals. I'm not sure. Something for us to discuss in the future.

Two weeks ago, Senator White and I accompanied a small group of MPs on a session visit respecting committee work. We had time to talk while we were travelling, and he spoke so passionately about family and community. It impressed me greatly.

I had that time to spend with him and to laugh a lot, and I'm glad I had that time. My memories will be aided by a great picture that comes from that day, where MP Tony Clement from Parry Sound—Muskoka and Gord from Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes are sitting on adjoining deck chairs and arm-wrestling over whether they're called Muskoka chairs or Thousand Island-Adirondack chairs. It's a great picture — a fun memory — and I will hold on to it.

This shock leaves all of us reeling, there's no doubt about it. Senator Smith, thank you for all of your comments about how each of us comes to personal reflections when we experience this kind of sudden loss of colleagues or friends.

To my Conservative colleagues and the Conservative family on Parliament Hill and beyond, I extend my sincerest sympathies. And to Gord's family, to Claudine, Chance and Tristan, and Gord's extended family, no words make this easier, but please know from all of us that our hearts and prayers are with you. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Leo Housakos: Thank you, honourable colleagues. I too want to add my voice of sorrow to today's loss of one who is genuinely a great Canadian. When you look up in the dictionary the words "decent and good man," a picture of Gord Brown pops up. In this business of politics, in which we all know we hit sometimes in the corners, are not always that gentle — right, Senator Munson — sometimes we can be more aggressive. To find people who are able in the most difficult of circumstances to be decent and kind, those are people to whom we always have to pay tribute and honour.

Gord was a great parliamentarian. He was a great MP for his riding. He loved his constituents, because he loved all people. Gord Brown epitomized the notion that people in politics have to be in politics for people. Gord loved his constituency and his region of the country. He thought the Thousand Islands was the most beautiful place on Earth. He beamed when he talked about the constituency in the part of the country he represents.

Gord represented his district with honour and dignity in the House of Commons. It also struck me when I came to the Hill how much honour and dignity he brought to everything he did. He was the whip for a number of years for us at national caucus, and everybody who has done that job knows it's a difficult job. Gord always did it with a smile, and he always made whomever he was calling in line feel good about themselves and good about their relationship with Gord. That was a special gift he had. He was so talented when it came to dealing with people. He was a great parliamentarian, like I said.

He was a great hockey player; he was a super hockey player and passionate about our sport. We shared that passion. We had a number of drinks together throughout the last few years, and he was just as passionate about hockey as he was about politics. He played the sport with reckless abandon, but as Senator Munson and others who have played with and against him know, he always played with respect. He always won; he was a winner. There were many games where Gord would score the winning goal for his team. That's who he was and that's how I will always remember him.

Gord was also a very special human being, and he played a special role over the last few years. We know that the Senate went through some difficult times a few years ago. There was a lot of tension, as there is from time to time between the parliamentary bodies in this place. He served as a great bridge between our Senate caucus and the caucus in the other place. He was fantastic in helping us come together whenever there were difficult issues. Again, that speaks highly about the quality of the man. Whenever there was a difficult and tough moment, he's the guy you wanted to be driving the bus. He was calm, cool and collected. Senator Harder, you're absolutely right: He had a lot of common sense, a lot of intelligence and he had a lot of compassion. He rolled all of that into a fine human being.

I want to add my voice of tribute to his life, and I want to send my condolences to his family. God rest his soul and God bless his family.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Colleagues, deep sadness fell on Parliament Hill today when we heard the news of Gord Brown's passing. Gord served on the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, and I can tell you he made a real contribution, without any partisan tensions. Gord cared deeply about the safety and security of Canadians, and he was a very good and decent man who actually earned the title of honourable member of Parliament.

My condolences to his wife, his children, his extended family and, knowing Gord, his many friends.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. David M. Wells: I knew Gord better than I know any other member of the House of Commons, and I've known Gord for a long time.

• (1430)

Gord was not just a member of the Conservative family or the parliamentary family, but he was a member of my office family, as you all know.

I saw Gord for the last time at about 20 past 9 this morning as I was driving in on the way to caucus. He was crossing at the crosswalk and we had a quick wave. We knew we would see each other very shortly.

This morning I came in late, but I was at the hospital all morning with Claudine and the rest of Gord's family. Obviously, it's very difficult for them and very difficult for all of us.

Gord welcomed me when I was called to the Senate. Gord was the first parliamentarian to welcome me. He has welcomed me into his home in Ottawa and his home in Gananoque. Obviously, many of you know already that Claudine is a good friend and a key member of my staff, and I've known her for a long time.

When Tristan, their youngest son, comes into the office, he always says, "Hi, Senator Dave." And as he does with Senator Plett's office, he raids my secret drawer as well.

Gord and I played hockey a lot. We used to have a regular Tuesday game with our colleagues. We did two tours of Europe playing parliamentarian tournaments on behalf of Canada, Germany, Slovakia, Czech Republic. We played a tournament in Poland. On one of those tours, we were fortunate enough to have a side trip to Stuttgart. We toured the Porsche facility and got to ride on the Porsche test track. We were finished the tournament, but it was really the highlight of our visit.

He got out and said, "David, don't ever tell our colleagues we did this." So I'm reading it into the record, Gord, if you're listening, that we did that. It's okay for me; I don't have to be elected. That was top of mind for him.

We played for a number of years. Gord always held a charity hockey tournament in support of the United Way and a number of other charities. I was fortunate enough to be invited a number of times to play on that.

He always used to comment that he had visited St. John's back in 1977 for the Canada Summer Games, where he was a kayaker, and he always let me know that he was a high-calibre athlete. Of course, he was a high-calibre person as well.

Gord served his Conservative caucus with great leadership and dignity. He served the Parliament of Canada like a true parliamentarian should, and he served his country with distinction and honour.

Of course, we'll all be a great support to Claudine in the coming weeks and months, and Tristan as well, Gord's other son Chance, who I just spent two hours with, and Gord's brother Jeff and his sons Colin and Graham, who I spent a couple of hours consoling and trying to bring comfort.

Colleagues, we bring partisanship sometimes to this place, but in the end, we're all family.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

(At 2:34 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.)

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