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Wednesday, February 9, 2005



THE HONOURABLE SHIRLEY MAHEU
SPEAKER *PRO TEMPORE*

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, February 9, 2005

The Senate met at 1:30 p.m., the Speaker *pro tempore* in the chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

THE LATE HONOURABLE STANLEY RONALD BASFORD, P.C., Q.C.

Hon. Jack Austin (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I rise to say a few words about my former colleague the Honourable Ron Basford, who died two weeks ago in British Columbia.

The Honourable Ron Basford served in the House of Commons from 1963 to 1978 as the member for a riding first called Vancouver—Burrard and then Vancouver Centre. He served in four cabinet posts during that time. He was Minister of State for Urban Affairs, Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Minister of National Revenue and Minister of Justice.

He was a most diligent and hard-working colleague and a leader in issues relating particularly to his riding. He was an excellent constituency representative and the testimony to that today is Granville Island. I hope many honourable senators have visited the farmers' and cultural markets at Granville Island.

When Mr. Basford took responsibility for urban affairs, Granville Island was a polluted industrial site and quite a disgrace to Vancouver. He and his team had the vision, and he was capable of not only developing the vision, but of actually putting Granville Island together and into operation. Today, it is a great feature of Vancouver.

I should like to mention two or three other accomplishments during Mr. Basford's career. He was the first Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to deal with drug prices and he succeeded in putting into place a legislative regime controlling drug prices. He also put into place legislation with respect to hazardous products, something very new at the time. As well, he led the government's policy of the day with respect to the introduction of the metric system.

I attended a meeting on the metric system with Mr. Basford at Sechelt, where he retired in 1990. A great statement was made by one of the members of the audience who said, "Mr. Basford, you are dead wrong. The tide rises in feet, it never rises in metres." I thought that was a very impressive argument.

In the justice portfolio, Mr. Basford is best known for leading the policy of the government to eliminate capital punishment in Canada. He should also be known for furthering the appointment of Bertha Wilson to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Finally, I remember an issue relating to a member of Parliament, Tom Cossitt, who some here will remember, and the Official Secrets Act. Mr. Basford took a strong position, refusing to prosecute a member of Parliament under that legislation. He will be missed.

POLICY ON BANK MERGERS

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, last Thursday, the federal government's policy paper on bank mergers was delayed yet again. Canada's largest financial institutions currently lack a critical business option; that is, the ability to merge or not to merge when they see fit. Our largest banks have been waiting since 1998 for the government to move ahead with a comprehensive policy on bank mergers. So far it has not happened and we need to get on with it.

In December 2003, the Minister of Finance promised Canadians that bank merger guidelines would be released by June 2004. In June, he said the paper would be completed by September. In September, he delayed the process further, announcing to the CBC that "the federal bureaucracy was too busy with other tasks."

Now the Minister of Finance announced in an interview with the *Toronto Star* last Thursday that the federal government's position would be further delayed and that "there would be no timeline for the delivery" of this policy paper.

Honourable senators, this is unacceptable. The Royal Bank, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, the Bank of Nova Scotia, the Toronto Dominion Bank and the Bank of Montreal have been waiting since 1998 for our government to release its policy paper that would set the guidelines for allowing banks to merge. After seven years in waiting, the heads of our largest banks are not optimistic that the government will take action any time soon.

Gordon Nixon, CEO of the Royal Bank of Canada, says he "does not expect any federal government policy on bank mergers to be released for at least three years." Ed Clark, CEO of the TD Bank, said that he "didn't have any expectations of clarity on the issue."

By not introducing a clear, comprehensive financial sector consolidation policy, our banks simply cannot respond to the massive changes affecting our international banking industry.

Honourable senators, a bank's basic role to act as an intermediary between lenders and borrowers is changing in fundamental ways. Canada's banks must be able to adapt to evolving international and domestic competition. The government's inaction is doing irreparable damage to our economy. We must take the necessary steps to ensure that our banking industry remains vibrant. A policy on bank mergers would be a good start.

MR. JAMES BEAUMONT

CONGRATULATIONS ON WINNING U.S. SILVER MEDAL PÌOBAIREACHD

Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck: Honourable senators, today I rise to recognize James Beaumont, an international student from Scotland who studies and teaches at the College of Piping and Celtic Performing Arts of Canada in Summerside, Prince Edward Island.

• (1340)

On January 14, 2005, James competed against 31 other pipers and won the prestigious U.S. Silver Medal Pìobaireachd at the Midwest Highland Arts Fund and Midwest Pipe Band Association contest held in Kansas City, Missouri. This is the biggest piping and drumming competition in North America. This victory is an outstanding achievement for James, as this contest was his first attempt at competing in North America.

Another one of James' successes is his band, "Shott's and Dykehead," who are 14-time world champions and have played for the Queen and the Pope.

The College of Piping and Celtic Performing Arts of Canada was established in 1991 and has been actively promoting and preserving Celtic culture and heritage by offering instructions in highland bagpiping, drumming and dancing. The college is the only year-round institution of its kind in North America and is affiliated with the world-renowned College of Piping in Glasgow, Scotland.

It is most appropriate that the college be located in Prince Edward Island, where some 70 per cent of the Island's population is composed of Scottish or Irish descendance, making it the most Celtic province in Canada.

The college is under the outstanding leadership and direction of Scott MacAulay, a world champion highland piper. He and his enthusiastic and talented staff offer an internationally recognized program of study that attracts students from around the world to develop their skills.

Honourable senators, the College of Piping and Celtic Performing Arts of Canada began as a dream among a small group of volunteers in Prince Edward Island who wanted to preserve and promote their culture. Today, it stands as a tribute to bold dreams and a strong vision that have been firmly rooted and carefully grown and nurtured.

I wish to extend my congratulations and best wishes to James Beaumont and all the staff and students at the college for their continued success in the future.

[*Translation*]

QUALITY END-OF-LIFE CARE

Hon. Lucie Pépin: Honourable senators, the debate on euthanasia and assisted suicide has been revived as a result of Marcel Tremblay's recent suicide. No longer able to go on, this

septuagenarian decided to end his life after being diagnosed with a fatal disease. Thanks to my experience as a nurse, I have the greatest respect for people who have had enough and decide to end their lives.

In doing what he did, Mr. Tremblay wanted not only to end his suffering but also to tell us that the dying should have the right to end their lives, surrounded by family, without worrying about the consequences. This is a reasonable request that deserves our full attention.

Our recent past is filled with numerous other cases that lend a sense of urgency to this matter. It is already difficult for a mother to help her son take his life and even worse for her to have to face the justice system for doing so. This is the situation currently facing Marie Houle of Montreal. It is not right that Manon Brunelle had to move to Switzerland to be able to die with dignity. We can still remember the suicide of Sue Rodriguez in 1994.

Obviously there are other cases besides the ones that have received media coverage where Canadians have less openly taken it into their own hands to end their suffering and, in some cases ended up having to live with the consequences of a failed attempt.

A 1974 amendment to the Criminal Code decriminalized suicide while leaving assisting a suicide untouched. We cannot help but wonder whether it is fair to recognize this right for those capable of legally taking their own lives, while others cannot do the same because they are no longer physically capable of carrying out their wishes by themselves.

It has, moreover, been proven that the knowledge that one is able to take leave of life with peace and dignity when no longer able to endure provides psychological reassurance and thus reduces the need to bid farewell to life prematurely.

I would strongly suggest that we have a close look at what is done in Belgium and the Netherlands. In these two countries, when patients themselves make a voluntary and repeated request and meet the set criteria, a physician is allowed to help them end their lives using the method of their choice.

Nevertheless, legalized and decriminalized assisted suicide must be the last resort. We must continue to give medical science the chance to treat depression and control pain. I am sure that improved access to quality palliative care would also help improve terminally ill patients' will to live.

I agree that we need to be cautious. Legislation on assisted suicide must not under any circumstances turn into the ideal excuse for getting rid of people considered a burden.

I refer you to an excellent report produced in 1995 by the Senate and sponsored by the Honourable Senator Carstairs, *Quality End-of-Life Care: the Right of Every Canadian*.

I would encourage all of you, as parliamentarians, to review this topic so that we may continue our reflections.

[English]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer: Honourable senators, there is no doubt in my mind that without the contribution of each and every one of our communities, Canada would not be the great country that it is today. We all recognize the contributions that Canadians of all backgrounds make to the rich multicultural fabric of our country. For the past 10 years, we have taken the month of February as a time to recognize the contributions of Black Canadians to our history and heritage.

Yesterday, Jean Augustine, the MP who introduced a motion to make February Canada's Black History Month, introduced the Prime Minister of Canada to a group that consisted mostly of young Black Canadians here on Parliament Hill. The Prime Minister talked to the group about the importance of history and how all Canadians are enriched by the contributions of Black people in Canada. He said that whether they trace their roots back to the Underground Railroad, the Caribbean or to Africa, their history is something that all Canadians can draw on for support and inspiration.

As a person originally from Africa, it was my pleasure to be part of this group. Attending with me were Senators Mercer, Oliver, Poy and Cools.

Although Black History Month puts an emphasis on the contributions of past Black leaders, Prime Minister Martin also looked to the future. The Prime Minister told the young people assembled that what Black History Month was really about was the history that they would make as they took the reins of this great country over the next 50 years and how the history they would make would inspire future generations of Black Canadians to reach for even greater heights. To quote the Prime Minister:

I really hope that sometime 25, 30, 50 years from now there is a group of young people like yourselves who are here in this room, and what they are celebrating is a brilliant history of the 50-year period that you are going to be leaders of this country. That is what this is all about.

This, I believe, is the future to which we can all look forward.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO MEET DURING SITTING OF THE SENATE

Hon. Bill Rompkey (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 Security and Defence have power to sit at 3:15 p.m. on Tuesday, February 15, 2005, even though the Senate may then be sitting, and that rule 95(4) be suspended in relation thereto.

[Translation]

L'ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

TENTH SUMMIT, NOVEMBER 23-27, 2004—
REPORT TABLED

Hon. Rose-Marie Losier-Cool: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 23(6) of the Senate, I have the honour to present to the Senate, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie on its participation in the 10th Summit of La Francophonie, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from November 23 to 27, 2004.

• (1350)

[English]

QUESTION PERIOD

TRANSPORT

BRITISH COLUMBIA—EFFECT OF CONGESTED COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

Hon. Noël A. Kinsella (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is directed to the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

The minister and all honourable senators recognize that our economic forecast is being downgraded. One reason for that is the challenge to the economy caused by the congestion in our transportation system. As was discussed in the last couple of days here in the Senate, it is occurring in British Columbia, but other transportation corridors face similar problems. Windsor-Detroit comes to mind as an example. This highlights the need for governments to be proactive in meeting the challenges we face in our transportation infrastructure.

With respect to British Columbia, suggestions have emerged that the amalgamation of Lower Mainland ports with Prince Rupert would lower the cost of infrastructure and facilitate better planning for the best use of existing infrastructure. This is mentioned in a recent transportation paper authored by Professor Michael Goldberg of the University of British Columbia. However, the legislation that defines the structure of port authorities would have to be examined, if not changed, at the federal level.

Is the government able to provide us with some background on this matter? Is the government actively examining how to ensure that federal red tape will not be a roadblock and, indeed, federal partnership will be there to enhance the resolution of our transportation challenges?

Hon. Jack Austin (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I welcome the question by Senator Kinsella as "chapter two" of a discussion we began in Question Period a few days ago.

The Government of Canada is not considering an amalgamation of the Port of Vancouver and the Port of Prince Rupert. They are stand-alone ports and are sufficiently different in the way they operate that no advantage would be gained by an amalgamation.

There are, in fact, four ports on the B.C. coast: The Port of Prince Rupert; the Port of Vancouver; the Fraser River Port Authority, which controls shipping on the Fraser River up to and beyond New Westminster; and Delta Port, which is a huge bulk loading facility.

As we noted a few days ago, container congestion is particularly severe, and that is due to an enormous growth in Chinese exports seeking North American markets, and the value of the Port of Vancouver in being able to move those containers from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan to, particularly, central United States markets, more quickly than any U.S. port can do it.

The unexpected demand has put pressure on ports, the rail system and truck transport, which is also involved, and authorities are doing a good job of coping with the situation.

The same congestion exists in the Port of San Diego, the Port of Los Angeles and the Port of Seattle-Tacoma, so our problem is not unique, and I would argue that we are handling it better than are the U.S. ports.

The Port Authority of Prince Rupert is seeking financial support to build a container facility. It does not now handle containers. If it had a container facility, that would take two days off the shipping time from Hong Kong or Shanghai, for example, to the U.S. Midwest.

A number of efforts are being made. The Province of British Columbia has undertaken to commit provincial funds to assist the Port of Prince Rupert in its development. A New Jersey company, which operates the ports of New Jersey, has proposed that it become the operator of the container port in Prince Rupert and has said that it will invest \$60 million. CN has also agreed to invest funds and to prepare the facility.

The Government of Canada is now in the difficult position, as I think Senator Kinsella must know, of facing the provisions of the Canada Marine Act, which do not permit parliamentary appropriations to be transferred to Canadian ports except under a policy of general application. The Government of Canada is looking for ways to assist the Port of Prince Rupert.

With respect to the Windsor-Detroit corridor, again as members of the Senate know, this is one of the most egregious transportation problems we have. That port carries a vast amount of economic traffic both ways, and concerns have been raised both as to its capacity and as to the security issues that relate to that transportation artery. The government is giving the most expeditious consideration to the issue and is in talks with U.S. authorities to see whether there can be a joint development plan.

[Senator Austin]

Speaking geographically, there are also discussions between the Province of New Brunswick and the State of Maine with respect to a joint investment in improving transportation arteries there.

I do not identify with Senator Kinsella's topic sentence, that is, that the economy is being downgraded by these issues. However, we must pay attention to them or they can have a serious impact on our GDP growth.

EFFECT OF CONGESTED COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS— REVITALIZATION OF EASTERN SEABOARD PORTS

Hon. Noël A. Kinsella (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I thank the minister for that response, in the course of which he drew our attention to the Province of New Brunswick. The federal government must look at this as a national grid issue. The Port of Saint John, which I think is our deepest seaport and can accommodate deep-draft container ships, is underutilized, as we speak.

I am certain that the honourable member in the other place from Saint John would be supportive of a government initiative to examine the Port of Saint John, which is currently operating under capacity. I am sure that all honourable senators will have read in various publications that serious examination is being given to Asian shippers using Panama and coming up the Eastern Seaboard.

Senator Mercer: They are coming up to Halifax where there is lots of available docking space.

Senator Kinsella: The honourable senator, who is from Halifax, is familiar with the situation there.

Can the Leader of the Government in the Senate tell us what the government's plans are for the revitalization of ports on the Eastern Seaboard, such as Saint John, to deal with congestion?

Congestion is a good sign, but if we do not solve this issue, it could lead to a great national malady.

Hon. Jack Austin (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I agree with Senator Kinsella that congestion indicates full capacity use, which is good, but our inability to grow the business is not something that we want to experience, so we do want to develop infrastructure and capacity.

• (1400)

Some Asian shippers are moving their cargo through the Panama Canal to reach Halifax. That method adds substantially to their shipping time, but if their cargos are incapable of being unloaded and transferred from Vancouver, it may be the best of two options. I would suggest that these questions be put to a number of West Coast shipping interests whose businesses are headquartered along the Asian Coast in Singapore, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong and Shanghai when they appear as witnesses before the committee studying Bill C-15, in respect of migratory birds. They are concerned about yet another issue, that is, what they believe to be excess penalties proposed in Bill C-15.

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

NATIONAL UNITY RESERVE FUND

Hon. David Tkachuk: Honourable senators, yesterday in the chamber, the Leader of the Government in the Senate was much more aware of the national unity fund than he was in March 2004. The leader alleges that this fund had been in existence since the Trudeau administration. Could the honourable leader inform this chamber as to when, precisely, the current Prime Minister became aware of its existence?

Hon. Jack Austin (Leader of the Government): This is an old topic, honourable senators, on which Senator Tkachuk and I have had some exchanges in months past. We should await the appearance of the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Paul Martin, before the Gomery commission, which will occur tomorrow. Perhaps much of what is unclear today will be clarified then.

Senator Tkachuk: We will try to clarify not what the present Prime Minister said but perhaps what the previous Prime Minister said, and what the honourable leader says. After the Leader of the Government in the Senate made his comment yesterday, we heard the former Prime Minister say that the fund was established in 1996 and that the cabinet agreed to it unanimously, including the Minister of Finance, and that a cabinet committee was to oversee it. Could the honourable leader explain to what fund he referred and to what the previous Prime Minister was referring?

Senator Austin: Honourable senators, the name of the fund may have changed from time to time but always, back to Mr. Trudeau's time, funds were set aside by Treasury Board to deal with national unity issues, particularly pertaining to Quebec. I learned after I gave the answer yesterday that while the fund existed under Prime Minister Mulroney, he caused it to be cancelled, I suppose on the basis that no further efforts to protect national unity in Quebec were required.

Senator Stratton: Is the honourable leader presuming that or does he know that as fact?

Senator Tkachuk: The leader knew that the fund was in place under the Trudeau administration, and he also knew full well that Senator LeBreton was not asking the question about the fund because her question was in respect of the sponsorship fund. I do not want to say that he is misinforming the house, but he certainly seems confused, and perhaps purposely so. I do not think that Senator LeBreton deserved that kind of answer. If the current fund is the one that was established in 1996 by the Liberal cabinet, which three ministers oversaw, then perhaps the honourable leader could explain to the house what those three ministers were doing in that capacity, given that the activity has resulted in the Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities. To whom were those three ministers to report?

Senator Austin: Honourable senators, Senator Tkachuk is 30,000 feet above the facts. I addressed a question with respect to a fund that existed to deal with national unity issues. As to how that fund might have been employed by any particular Prime Minister, and for what purposes, I gave no answer whatsoever. I have no information to give this chamber with respect to the

sponsorship fund, if Senator Tkachuk wants to use that appellation. Those matters are before the Gomery commission, where they will stay until we receive a report from the commissioner.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Claude Rivest: Honourable senators, I presume the national unity fund still exists?

[*English*]

Senator Austin: Honourable senators, I will have to make an inquiry to that effect because I have not seen any signs of such a fund.

[*Translation*]

Senator Rivest: Honourable senators, I do not know if the Leader of the Government in the Senate is aware of it, but 54 sovereigntist members of Parliament were elected in the last election.

[*English*]

Senator Austin: Certainly, I am aware of that.

FINANCE

BANK OF CANADA—VALUATION OF DOLLAR—
MONETARY POLICY

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. The Bank of Canada recently changed its position on interest rate hikes stating that while it still plans to raise rates, the rise will be slower than previously thought. Higher interest rates raise the value of the dollar, at least in the short run, as cash flows from one country to another in search of higher yields. The Minister of Finance now says that he is concerned about the recent rise in the dollar and the Bank of Canada says the higher dollar is hurting economic growth.

What precisely is the government's policy as it relates to the recent rise of the dollar? Reading the comments of both the Governor of the Bank of Canada and the Minister of Finance, I am prompted to ask the leader as well what he can tell us about this new relationship between the Governor of the Bank of Canada and the Minister of Finance in respect of the setting of monetary policy.

Hon. Jack Austin (Leader of the Government): Honourable senator, there is no new relationship between the Governor of the Bank of Canada and the Minister of Finance with respect to monetary policy. The subject of monetary policy is the responsibility of the Bank of Canada.

However, the Minister of Finance will have views from time to time and will want to communicate to the public his views with respect to the Canadian economy. Interest rates are the responsibility of the Bank of Canada, which acts independently of the Government of Canada. Macro and micro economies are the responsibility of the Minister of Finance, and I suppose all honourable senators are interested in what he will have to say on February 23.

PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: The Minister of Finance was reported in *The Toronto Star* on January 27 as saying that in the face of a rising dollar, “productivity and competitiveness will be major items on the government’s agenda.” The Minister also said that we had benefitted in an artificial way because of the low value of the dollar and that this “made certain economic achievement, especially in export markets, appear to be fairly easy, fairly automatic, and that might have camouflaged some other challenges we need to deal with.”

Honourable senators, this government has talked the talk about innovation as far back as the original 1993 Red Book. It has put out countless discussion papers such as the agenda, jobs and growth papers, which accompanied the October 1994 economic and fiscal update one decade ago; and it has consolidated and put out background papers.

Can the Leader of the Government advise the Senate why more than one decade after the government identified it as a problem, productivity growth in Canada continues to lag behind the United States and why the Minister of Finance is getting around to making it a priority only now, in 2005?

Hon. Jack Austin (Leader of the Government): It is totally erroneous to assert that only now the Minister of Finance is dealing with the question of productivity. As far back as 1993, the government has given the matter of productivity and Canada’s economic competitiveness top priority, and it continues to pursue the matter.

• (1410)

I suppose that the government deserves, for example, some recognition for the creation of the Canadian Fund for Innovation, which has put more than \$3 billion into research in Canadian universities to further the cause of productivity.

This is a contribution that has created various Canadian universities as recognized leading research centres. The universities then take the research that is done and seek patents and commercialization, recruiting private entrepreneurs to use the benefits of that research in the commercial world. This is just one of the typical programs to further Canada’s competitiveness and productivity.

As Senator Oliver notes, we have had an economic shelter for a period of time because of the exchange value of the Canadian dollar with the United States dollar. However, the world trading system is changing. The increase in the value of the Canadian dollar against the U.S. dollar is largely, in my view personally — I am not the Minister of Finance — the result of U.S. fiscal policy, particularly deficits on the government and trade account that are worrying to some economists. These have caused the selling of the U.S. dollar, which has caused the rise in the Canadian dollar. This in turn, as Senator Oliver has said, challenges Canadian productive capacity.

How do we deal with this situation? It is very difficult to answer this question because the solution is in the efforts of a multiplicity of players — governments, the private sector, the educational

sector and the voluntary sector. How do we all become efficient, more productive? We have to do it together. I believe the government is leading very effectively in this area.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

REPLACEMENT OF SEA KING HELICOPTERS—
CHOICE OF CORMORANT EH-101 OVER SIKORSKY H-92
AS UNITED STATES PRESIDENTIAL HELICOPTER

Hon. J. Michael Forrestall: I have a couple of questions. Might I ask the Leader of the Government in the Senate if he would allow me to associate myself with his remarks with respect to the late Ron Basford with whom I had the pleasure of serving in the other place for a number of years?

A week ago last Friday, the U.S. government picked the EH-101 over Sikorsky’s H-92 as the new U.S. presidential helicopter. I would like to ask the minister how many times he and his predecessors who sit in their place over there have said that if it is good enough for the President of the United States, it is good enough for us. Now the navy has rejected it as not good enough.

John Young, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisitions said:

This decision truly reflects the best value and capability for the American taxpayer who is funding it, the Marines who will operate it and future presidents who will fly in it.

Can the Leader of the Government in the Senate tell us how it is that the United States purchased the EH-101 over Sikorsky’s H-92 helicopter because it reflects “best value and capability,” while Canada remains somewhat committed to the H-92, the paper helicopter that is to replace the Sea King?

Hon. Jack Austin (Leader of the Government): Frankly, Senator Forrestall, I have been expecting your question and waiting for you to return to this chamber to ask it.

I suppose the summary of my answer would be that different tasks make for different choices.

Senator Forrestall: That is not a bad line.

Senator Austin: I am in the position of looking at a comment by Canadian defence expert Martin Shadwick with respect to this contract. He said:

The selection of the EH-101 as a presidential helicopter does not mean that the H-92 is an inferior chopper. In fact, for Canadian naval purposes, it is probably a better choice since it is smaller than the EH-101 and better able to fly off the back of the navy’s frigates.

REPLACEMENT OF SEA KING HELICOPTERS—
COST OF SIKORSKY H-92

Hon. J. Michael Forrestall: With all due respect to Mr. Shadwick, balderdash; it is damn nonsense and everybody associated with it knows that.

Even the United States' taxpayer watchdog group, Citizens Against Government Waste, lauded the navy decision, taking a swipe at United Technologies' Sikorsky, which built the current fleet and was involved in the now-defunct Comanche attack helicopter program, when it said:

Today taxpayers avoided what could have been another helicopter sinkhole.

A potential follow-on order with respect to this decision regarding the EH-101, of which Canada could have been a very significant player, could reduce the cost of that Sea King replacement to very manageable proportions for Defence officials.

The Minister of Public Works and Government Services has now held up the Sea King replacement process before the Federal Court as a model. What assurances do we have from the government that the H-92 will not become a sinkhole of taxpayers' money?

Hon. Jack Austin (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I will not comment on a number of Senator Forrestall's assertions. We will just leave them as such.

Let me go through it this way: The previous 1993 contract for \$4.8 billion, which was cancelled, only included the costs for the actual helicopters. The contract for the H-92 includes all the associated costs for 20 years of in-service support. Even where the cost of contract cancellation and the upgrading of the existing fleets are concerned, the government has acquired new search and rescue and new maritime helicopters for the Canadian Forces at a price that is over \$1 billion less than would have been spent under the cancelled contract.

Senator Forrestall: I have a final question. I would leave him with an inquiry if he could shed a word on the misfortune that occurred in the North Atlantic with the loss of somebody overboard.

I conclude by asking whether or not the government could reconsider, should a case be made either through the courts or as a result of court activities or of proposals put forward, with respect to the H-92 recalling that most important bid, because it has to last us 30 or 40 years. There is a body of opinion out there that says that we are not at that crunch stage yet. There are still a lot of satisfactory reports to be dealt with before we arrive at that state.

Senator Austin: Honourable senators, on the second part of Senator Forrestall's question, I hope the government's attitude would be that it will respect the facts; and if the facts call on us for a reassessment, then we should make it. However, I do not believe there are any such facts before us at the moment.

I appreciate the honourable senator's reference to the tragic incident that occurred on HMCS *Montreal* in the Baltic Sea yesterday. HMCS *Montreal* was conducting exercises with the NATO fleet and Leading Seaman Robert Leblanc was found to be missing at sea.

While I am mentioning this item, we have had extraordinary cooperation from our allies in searching for Leading Seaman Leblanc. Of course, all of us here must recognize that this is a tragedy as well for his family and his colleagues in the navy.

HMCS *MONTREAL*—LOSS OF SAILOR AT SEA

Hon. Noel A. Kinsella (Leader of the Opposition): Could I ask the minister if the HMCS *Montreal* had on board its flight deck a helicopter, and was that helicopter deployed in the search when they discovered that the seaman may have gone overboard?

Hon. Jack Austin (Leader of the Government): I will obtain the answer and respond tomorrow, Senator Kinsella.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: I would draw the attention of senators to the presence in our gallery of a former colleague, the Honourable Lois Wilson.

Welcome back.

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

DELAYED ANSWERS TO ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Bill Rompkey (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have the honour to present three delayed answers in response to oral questions posed in the Senate. The first is in response to an oral question raised on November 30 by Senator Keon regarding the elimination of child poverty.

[*English*]

I have a second delayed answer to an oral question raised in the Senate on the November 23 by Senator Tkachuk regarding port authorities' involvement with companies owned by the Prime Minister's family.

The third delayed answer is to an oral question raised in the Senate on November 23 by Senator Tkachuk regarding Canada Post's involvement with companies owned by the Prime Minister's family.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

ELIMINATION OF CHILD POVERTY

(*Response to question raised by Hon. Wilbert J. Keon on November 30, 2005*)

Canada's response to Child Poverty within Canada

In 2002, the low-income rate for children (using post-tax Low Income Cut Offs (LICOs)) was at an all-time low of 10.2 per cent, down from 15.7 percent in 1993.

This government has already taken steps.

This government supports low-income families with children through investments in both income and programs and services.

- In 2002-03 the Government of Canada provided \$7.7 billion in income support to low-and middle-income families with children through the Canada Child Tax Benefit
- This includes \$2.4 billion of targeted benefits for low-income families provided through the National Child Benefit (NCB) Supplement.
- By 2007-2008, benefits delivered through the Canada Child Tax Benefit will reach \$10 billion a year.

We are also taking action to improve important services for children through:

- A commitment to \$5 billion over the next five years to build a national early learning and child care system
- \$500 million each year to improve early childhood development through ECD Agreements with Provinces and Territories.
- \$1.05 billion over five years to increase the availability of affordable, quality early learning and child care.

This is in addition to programs and services across the government that support families with children such as:

- The Child Disability Benefit (delivered by CRA) and the Canada Pension Plan (SDC program) which provide more targeted income support for low-income families and those supporting children with disabilities.
- The GST Credit/Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) Credit (CRA program), a tax-free payment to help low- and modest- income individuals and families.
- The Eligible Dependant Amount for single, divorced, separated or widowed parents supporting children (delivered by CRA).
- A federal strategy on early childhood development for Aboriginal children, which includes improvement and expansion of existing ECD programs (Aboriginal Head Start, First Nations and Inuit Child Care Program, and intensification of efforts to address Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects.

We know that challenges remain and we will continue to work closely with our partners to further address the issues of child poverty.

Canada's Response to Child Poverty in Developing Countries

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) mandate is to promote sustainable development in order to reduce poverty and to contribute to a more secure, equitable and prosperous world. As part of its commitment to fulfilling this mandate, CIDA has supported international development assistance efforts for children and, in fact, is a leader in this area.

CIDA works with a variety of partners in achieving results for children. For example, CIDA contributes \$13.5 million per year to support UNICEF's core work. In addition, CIDA provides other funding to support UNICEF's development projects at the country level which also includes emergency response. CIDA's funding to UNICEF in total was \$104 million in 2003 and \$88 million in 2002.

Children are an important focus of all of CIDA's social development priorities: health and nutrition, basic education, HIV/AIDS and child protection. Programming targeted at communities, families and individuals in each of these areas have a positive impact on child poverty. And the importance of gender analysis is reflected in all of CIDA's work.

Here is in greater detail some of the work CIDA has done in these four priority areas and specifically, how this work has helped children.

1. Health and Nutrition

Canada has been playing a major role in the fight against malnutrition, especially in combatting micronutrient deficiencies of key vitamins and minerals. UNICEF credits Canada as being a leader in vitamin A programs that have reached an estimated 1.5 million children, and has estimated that more than 7 million children have been born free of mental impairment associated with iodine deficiency largely because of Canada's contribution.

Canada plays a major role in the immunization of children from preventable diseases such as polio, measles and others. The Canadian International Immunization Initiative is CIDA's flagship program and currently \$80 million over five years of grant funds will be utilized by UNICEF, the World Health Organization, PAHO and the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA).

This year, CIDA contributed \$4.3 million through the Canadian Red Cross to provide 740,000 bednets for distribution to all young children and pregnant mothers in Togo. As a result, Togo will be the first country in Africa to meet its target of having 60 percent or more of all children under five years of age sleeping under insecticide-treated bed nets.

CIDA is a key player in an effort that has reduced child mortality from measles. Since 2002, CIDA has contributed over \$47 million through UNICEF to help finance vaccination campaigns in more than 16 countries, reaching 100 million children and saving 180,000 lives. Canada has long been a champion of polio eradication. Since 1999, CIDA has committed a total of \$154 million towards the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. In addition, over the past two years CIDA has provided over \$30 million to help finance 12 emergency measles immunization campaigns in 10 countries. As of today, results have been reported for seven of these campaigns.

2. Education

CIDA's programming in education has been aimed at enhancing the access of good quality primary education for all children by 2015 and eliminating gender disparity and promoting gender equality at all levels of education by 2015. To do this, CIDA is doubling its investment in basic education in Africa to \$100 million a year by 2005 in addition to its commitment to quadruple investment in basic education globally from 2000 to 2005 for a total of \$555 million.

School feeding programs attract children to school in the first place, help keep them there and improve their learning outcomes as better nutrition reduces learning problems. In 2003, Canada contributed \$75 million through the World Food Program (WFP) for school feeding programs in five African countries (Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Mali, and Senegal).

3. HIV/AIDS

CIDA takes a balanced and strategic approach to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, focusing on care, treatment and support, prevention, research, advocacy and leadership. CIDA recognizes that the estimated 12 million children orphaned due to the death of a parent from HIV/AIDS become more vulnerable themselves. This is why children are a priority consideration in CIDA HIV/AIDS programming.

Over the last five years, CIDA's coordinated comprehensive approach in the global fight against AIDS reached a total of \$600 million.

On May 10, 2004, Prime Minister Paul Martin announced a \$100 million contribution to the World Health Organization (WHO) Initiative to treat 3 million people with AIDS by 2005, making Canada the leading donor in this initiative against the pandemic. CIDA strongly encourages the WHO to ensure children are included in treatment programs.

Canada has long been a champion in the global effort to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Funding WHO's "3 by 5" Initiative demonstrates further our deep commitment to tackle this epidemic from all angles and to address the whole continuum of the epidemic.

4. Child Protection

In June 2001 CIDA launched its Action Plan on Child Protection which promotes the rights of children who need special protection from exploitation, abuse and discrimination.

CIDA is on track to meeting the Plan's target of quadrupling funding for Child Protection to a total of \$122 million between 2000 and 2005.

CIDA programming in support of war-affected children includes the provision of basic education for refugee children, conflict resolution training, psycho-social rehabilitation, and family reunification.

For example, in Darfur children have been severely impacted by conflict — as witnesses of atrocities in their villages of origin and when displaced, experiencing drastic changes in lifestyle in coping with extreme conditions. Through a grant from CIDA, World Vision is creating child-friendly spaces for children to play and talk and return to some sense of routine and normalcy. These environments mean children in Darfur will soon be able to participate in structured educational activities and receive essential emotional support.

CIDA's \$2 million Child Protection Research Fund (over 5 years) is helping to gather information to help ensure that development interventions are grounded in the realities of children's lives. The first of the 13 projects is a study on girls in fighting forces, and has yielded groundbreaking results and influenced the policy and programming of CIDA and other donors including the World Bank and several UN agencies.

CIDA is proud to have Lieutenant-General (Ret.) Roméo Dallaire as a Special Advisor on War-Affected Children. In addition to providing policy and programming advice, he promotes Canadian public engagement on the issue through public talks across the country.

TRANSPORT

PORT AUTHORITIES—INVOLVEMENT WITH COMPANIES OWNED BY PRIME MINISTER'S FAMILY

(Response to question raised by Hon. David Tkachuk on November 23, 2004)

The Government released its response to Q 37 in February 2004. The Government asked the Auditor General to review the response to Q 37 and to assess reforms to the process for Order Paper Questions. In her report, the Auditor General said that the Government's answer was "reasonably complete." She noted that "the Government of Canada is a large and complex organization that faces a significant number of challenges in responding to order paper questions. These include: changes in the structure of government departments over time, changes to government information systems and the introduction of new systems, the government's policy of retaining records for the current year and the previous six years, and departmental information systems designed to meet management's needs and not necessarily structured in a way that supports responses to order paper questions." In her press conference, the Auditor General noted, "taking all that into account, I think that response is about as good as it can be," and she "recognize(d) that the government had taken positive steps to strengthen the process for preparing responses to Order Paper Questions."

On the treatment of Shared Governance Organizations, as the Auditor General report clearly notes, there is a difference of legal opinion on whether "shared governance corporations" such as Port Authorities are "agencies of the government." The Government's view is that they are not

because they do not carry out the policy and objectives of government, and therefore should not be included in the response to Order Paper questions. Moreover, the 18 Port Authorities do not depend on taxes for revenue. As such the Port Authorities were not asked to respond to Q 37.

It is important to note that a shared governance corporation is simply a corporation with respect to which the government has the right to appoint one or more directors to the corporations governing body. Therefore, being a shared governance corporation does not necessarily mean that an entity is under the control of the government, or that the government is in a position to force it to produce information. In fact, there are some 138 shared governance corporations in Canada, and many of them do not have a reporting relationship to Parliament at all.

There is not a specific recommendation on the treatment of shared governance corporations in the Auditor General's Report. However, the Government has indicated it will discuss this issue with the Clerk of the House as part of its response to Recommendation 1 in the Auditor General Report (which suggests the Clerk of the House and the PCO Clerk develop a "glossary of terms" for use by Members of Parliament in writing their Order Paper questions).

CANADA POST

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Looking forward, the Government has accepted all 8 of the Auditor General's recommendations and will fully implement them. On the treatment of Crown Corporations, the authority to protect commercially sensitive information is provided in the Financial Administration Act (FAA). That said, the Government agrees with the Auditor General's recommendation that the Privy Council Office should clarify the circumstances for

which the Government would compel Crown Corporations to provide relevant information in its responses to Order Paper questions. This is a significant undertaking that will involve several departments and Ministers, and of course, the Crown Corporations. Officials have been directed to address this particular recommendation on a priority basis.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING— DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Mac Harb moved the second reading of Bill S-22, to amend the Canada Elections Act (mandatory voting).

He said: Honourable senators, it is a pleasure and honour for me to speak at second reading of Bill S-22, to amend the Canada Election Act to make voting mandatory in Canada.

We in this chamber are very privileged to work on behalf of Canadians. What we cannot forget, and what some people from certain regions of Canada are keen to remind us of, is the importance of elections and voting to the ongoing stability and success of our parliamentary democracy. Our democracy depends upon the active participation of its citizens, and, while voting is only one element of political engagement, it remains the very foundation of our democracy. Reinforcing this foundation is the goal of Bill S-22, which will establish mandatory voting in Canada.

This legislation is a direct response to a rising electoral crisis. Voter turnout has been on the decline in Canada since the 1960s, reaching a record low of just 60.9 per cent in the 2004 election. Other Western democracies are also experiencing the same dramatic drop. Only 55.3 per cent of Americans voted in the 2004 presidential election, and the 2001 British general election recorded a turnout of just 57.6 per cent.

As you may be aware, honourable senators, only one in four Canadians under the age of 25 bothered to vote in the last election. Research shows that these young people, as they age, may not re-engage in the system as their parents and grandparents did. Canadian researchers tell us that this generational shift represents a cultural change that could shake the very foundation of our democratic institutions.

Research gathered by the Association for Canadian Studies also indicates that the low turnout rate effectively disenfranchises a large number of Canadians. A study done after the last election found voter turnout ranged from 62.7 per cent to 75.4 per cent in the nine ridings with the highest average income in the country. The nine ridings with the lowest average income experienced a turnout rate from 45.1 per cent to 61.5 per cent. Whose voices are being heard? Perhaps, more importantly, whose voices are not being heard?

Renowned political scientist Arend Lijphart in the United States put it this way:

A political system with the universal right to vote but with only a tiny fraction of citizens exercising this right should be regarded as a democracy in merely a... hollow sense of the term.

While analysts cite a variety of reasons for the voting decline including, sadly, disdain for politicians, apathy about the issues and the hectic demand of modern life, I believe that the most important factor is a fading sense of civic duty when it comes to voting participation in our democratic institutions.

In preparing for this legislation, I have met and corresponded with a great number of Canadians. A great many have said it is about time and that we need this kind of signal from the government that voting is still an important element of our system. Of those opposed to the concept of mandatory voting, the most common criticism is that the bill will restrict an individual's freedom to choose whether or not to vote.

Perhaps, honourable senators, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Canada's own Chief Electoral Officer, answered this criticism best when he said, "The right to vote is only meaningful when you use it."

Honourable senators, in Canada all citizens who are at least 18 years of age on election day have the right to vote in a general election, with the exception of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. We fought long and hard for this right, overcoming gender, racial, religious and administrative obstacles to ensure women, judges, persons with disabilities and prisoners in correctional facilities were given the right to vote. After years of battling for the right to vote, we have lost sight of the associated duty that goes along with this right, and that is the inherent responsibility to vote.

Voting is a positive duty owed by citizens to the rest of our society, much like paying taxes, reporting for jury duty, wearing a seat belt or attending school until the age of 16. These duties are reasonable limits we put on our freedom to ensure the success of our society.

This obligation to vote must be accepted as one of the necessary duties citizens carry out to maintain our system of democracy and the benefits that goes with it. Other proposals for electoral reform, including lowering the voting age, proportional representation and online e-voting, are all worthy of investigation, but they will not work alone.

• (1430)

We must change acquired attitudes and habits of Canadians when it comes to voting. Few methods work better than legislation when it comes to modifying behaviour for the common good. Seatbelt laws and drunk driving legislation are excellent examples.

Despite the common perception that compulsory voting is rare, it has been used with much success. In fact, 30 democracies around the world claim to have compulsory voting, although a smaller number, 16 democracies, use it with the level of support and enforcement we are envisioning here in Canada. These

nations include Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Fiji, Greece, Luxembourg, Peru, Nauru, Singapore, Switzerland and Uruguay. Of these, the older and more developed democracies, such as Australia, Belgium, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg, have maintained a serious commitment to institutionalize the compulsory voting law.

Compulsory voting was introduced in Australia in 1924 by an appointed senator by the name of Alfred Deakin. His private member's bill was in response to the declining voter turnout of 57.9 per cent in 1922. Now, Australia has consistently boasted a turnout of over 90 per cent. Compulsory voting in Belgium dates back to 1893. Currently, voter turnout in Belgium is over 90 per cent. The most recent election in the European Union revealed the tremendous power of mandatory voting legislation and the pro-voting culture it brings along. Member states with mandatory voting during the last European Union elections had remarkable turnouts, with 90.8 per cent in Belgium, 89 per cent in Luxembourg, and 71 per cent in Cyprus, as compared with countries with no compulsory voting. Voter turnout was only 42.7 per cent in France, 45.1 per cent in Spain and a mere 38.8 per cent in the United Kingdom.

These mandatory voting laws are not the hardship some might claim. Australians do not feel coerced. In fact, polls in Australia show that 70 to 80 per cent of Australians support the mandatory system. There is little debate in Australia about whether compulsory voting infringes on rights. Voting is simply seen as a relatively undemanding civic duty.

Finally, honourable senators, a mandatory voting law would demonstrate to individual Canadians that the government believes voting is important and each vote has value. Nothing is more basic, but we have come to a time in our history when it must be re-emphasized.

Honourable senators, the proposed legislation is designed to re-establish electoral participation as a civic duty in our society in much the same way legislation mandating jury duty or wearing a seatbelt has ensured that our judicial system functions fairly and our personal safety is protected.

[*Translation*]

In fact, mandatory voting is not very well named since the only mandatory provision in the bill is the obligation to go to a polling place. Once the voter has received the ballot, he or she may mark the circle corresponding to the name of a candidate or to the words "none of the above," or simply place an unmarked ballot in the ballot box. Those who want to express their dissatisfaction with politicians or with the system by not voting will do so much more clearly by cancelling their ballot or putting an X beside "none of the candidates." Protesting by staying home can be mistakenly interpreted as being in favour of the status quo. A small fine is proposed for those electors who do not go to vote. It will simply be used to recover some of the expenses for the acquisition of supplies and facilities needed to hold an election. Obviously, no fine would be levied against those with a valid reason not to go to vote.

[English]

Studies show repeatedly that mandatory voting systems without a penalty simply are not as effective as those with an even minor fee for non-voting. This system does not have to be complicated. It will not cost a great deal to administer. The Australian system has shown us that small fines are sufficient to influence a change in voting patterns. In that country, if you fail to show up on voting day, you will receive a form letter in the mail requesting that you pay a fine of approximately AUS\$20 or provide a reason such as travel, illness, religious objections, et cetera. This takes care of about 95 per cent of the no-show cases. Only about 5 per cent of those who do not show up to vote in Australia pay a fine.

In the various stages of preparation for this proposed legislation, I have encountered some concern about the perceived contradiction with liberal democratic principles. I have mentioned already, honourable senators, many other examples of mandatory tasks that we must carry out in this country. There is no denying that we have rights and that we have the associated responsibilities to go with them. We have the right to universal health care, and we have the responsibility to pay taxes to pay for that service. We have a right to a fair trial and we have a responsibility to serve on juries to protect that right. We have a right to live in a democratic society and we have the responsibility to vote to support the very foundation of that democracy.

Canadians will still have the right to abstain. As I explained, only registered voters will be required to present themselves at the polling stations and, once there, they have the option of selecting a candidate or choosing “none of the above.” They can even drop a blank ballot into the box should they choose to do so. The point is that all opinions matter and are counted, whether they are in support of a specific candidate or a rejection of the choices offered. If they are unable to vote, they need only to provide a reasonable explanation and the matter is closed.

I have also been asked about the possibility of more spoiled ballots and uninformed votes if mandatory voting were put in place. Let me assure honourable senators that spoiled ballots and uninformed votes have and always will be part of our democratic system. In the last federal election, about 120,000 rejected ballots were collected, almost 1 per cent of the total vote.

Once again, let us refer to the Australian example where 4 per cent of the Australian votes were rejected; not a significant number given the much larger percentage of valid ballots cast. Some argue that it does not make sense to compel uninformed people to vote. Colleagues, such exposure to the voting system may actually help them to become more informed.

As one journalist pointed out, those same “uninformed citizens” are compelled to serve on juries with potentially more serious consequences. Elections Canada has worked diligently to inform and educate voters, and these efforts will continue as an important element in a mandatory voting system.

[Senator Harb]

[Translation]

Finally, mandatory voting would mean that voting will again become a civic duty in Canada, but not a very demanding one. Thanks to safeguards to ensure voter awareness, equality of access and the possibility of exercising one’s right to vote, the bill will establish not only our right, but also our civic obligation to take part in the democratic process.

[English]

Hon. Noël A. Kinsella (Leader of the Opposition): Will the honourable senator entertain a question?

The honourable senator will know that only three of the rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are specific to Canadian citizenship, one of which is under the Democratic Rights section, the right to vote. Does he agree or disagree with the proposition that the right to vote is inclusive of the right not to vote?

Senator Harb: I thank the honourable senator for his important question. My response will demonstrate how much detail has been gone into in the preparation of this bill to specifically address this very point. I have struggled most with this particular point, that is, whether we are infringing on the Charter or infringing on the right of the citizen to vote or not to vote.

This bill specifically deals with that in allowing the citizen who does not want to vote, not to vote. All the citizen has to do is call the returns officer or Elections Canada before voting day and he or she will not have to vote.

• (1440)

The most important thing here is to make sure that their name is not on the voters’ list. Once their name is on the voters’ list, they have a responsibility to vote. Should they choose to remove their name from that list, their name would be removed and would not be reinstated until they go back to Elections Canada and tell them that they want to put their name back on the list.

During the committee hearings we asked the Chief Electoral Officer a question on this specific point. He indicated that not only does Elections Canada have a list of those who are registered and able to vote, but they also have a list of those who do not want to be on the voters’ list. They have an unofficial list of those who do not want to participate in the process, specifically to deal with this point.

Senator Kinsella: I thank the honourable senator for his view. It is a view that I do not share. It seems that this mechanism is interfering with the right to vote which, in my view, is inclusive of the right not to vote. It is similar to the Charter right of section 2(a) which speaks to more than citizens. Everyone has freedom of conscience and religion.

I recall participating in the United Nations examination of the possibility of elaborating a convention on freedom of religion. The argument being made by representatives from around the world was that inclusive of their right of freedom of religion was the freedom to have no religion. I have a difficult time to see why that is not analogous to the democratic right to vote.

Once the right is admitted or is recognized in law, in this instance by constitutional law, when we begin to fetter it, to interfere with it, we leave ourselves open to at least the question of whether that fettering — no matter what the loophole would be — interferes with that right.

Senator Harb: Honourable senators, a provision of the bill specifically deals with that point. If you have a reason that you did not want to vote, and you provide that reason, it is all fine. It is not a problem. It is when you say, “Look, my name is on the voters’ list but I do not want to vote because I do not want to vote.” I believe rights were given to citizens but along with those rights come responsibilities. Any right without a responsibility is a right that is not worth exercising.

Senator Kinsella: I thank the honourable senator for that. In his speech he drew our attention to issues of rights and responsibilities. I would like to have his reaction to a proposition that speaks of rights and responsibility and trying to set up what is really a false dichotomy, that is, that rights in contradiction to responsibility is a false dichotomy. To say rights and responsibility, in a sense is tautologous. Would he not agree that the notion of right is a social notion; therefore it involves others and, because it involves others, it therefore, by definition, involves responsibility? The concept of right is inclusive as a constituent element of the very notion of right responsibility.

Senator Harb: Honourable senators, we have a right to drive, but we do not have a right to exceed the speed limit. We have a responsibility to adhere to a certain limit when exercising our right to drive. If we go above that limit, we infringe on the safety of others.

We used to have a right not to wear a seat belt. Before seat belts were introduced as mandatory mechanisms, the usage rate was quite low. After the law was introduced making the wearing of seat belts mandatory, the compliance rate was over 95 per cent.

Senator Stratton: Not in the West.

Senator Harb: Therefore, I would suggest that while I have a right to sit in my car and drive it wherever I want, there are responsibilities that go along with that right.

I would tell my colleagues that this particular legislation is not any different from any other legislation. It takes into consideration what we as citizens are enjoying as rights, as well as what we as citizens have as a responsibility.

Senator Kinsella: Perhaps the honourable senator would reflect on this example: If someone was living on an island and was the only person on the island and stood up and declared, “This is my pen. I have a right to this pen,” would that proposition make any sense? There is nobody else around. The right to that property is only meaningful when there are others around.

In other words, the whole notion of right is a social notion. It is necessary to at least have a dyad, at least two people involved. My point is that to speak of rights on the one hand and responsibility on the other, as if they are in a dichotomous relationship, is not

conceptualizing of right because right itself is inclusive of the notion of responsibility. We do harm to the integrity of the notion of right by speaking of it as if it is somehow on one side of the ledger and is matched by responsibility on the other.

Senator Harb: Inclusiveness does not negate or make exclusive responsibility. The two go hand in hand in everything we do in life. Wherever we have a right to something, we have a responsibility to something else. As my colleague said, we do not live on an island by ourselves. That is the whole notion. We built a society with strong foundations, democratic foundations.

When a society comes to a point where only a fraction of it is participating in the decision-making process, only a fraction of it decides who will rule them, who will make regulations, who will decide their future, it is quite alarming to the collective interest of the society. Therefore, the democratic institution that is at the time in charge of the affairs of that society has a responsibility to take action. I would say, colleagues, there is no one more equipped than this house, this chamber, to look at this issue objectively.

If we look at the trend from the 1950s until now, we see that voter turnout has consistently declined, election after election. It does not matter who you talk to. If anyone with any sense of imagination or logic looks to the next 15 to 20 years, they will see that we have a democracy in crisis. We are not alone, colleagues. France has the same problem. Britain has the same problem. Our colleagues to the south have the same problem, and other democracies are faced with the same situation.

• (1450)

We cannot talk about democratic deficit, which is nothing more than shirking our responsibilities, without including the notion that we as citizens have a responsibility to fully participate in society when it comes to electing our officials. Reducing the voting age to 16; what is the point? If only one in four of those youth participate in the democratic process, it will not change a lot. That does not answer the question. It is almost like a bird ducking its head in the sand, thinking everything is fine. In the end, honourable senators, we must give it a chance. Bring in the experts. Let us see what has happened elsewhere, what others have learned from experimenting with this notion. I would suggest that it has been most successful. Let us bring in experts to answer the honourable senator’s question about whether or not this infringes on the Charter of Rights. He is quite right in raising the point. Others have also raised it. I take the position, honourable senators, that it does not. In the proposed legislation, a voter still has a right not to vote. This would not take away that right. That person may have to pay a fine, or have to provide an explanation, but at the end of the day, that right remains in tact.

[Translation]

Hon. Madeleine Plamondon: Honourable senators, was consideration given to providing those who do vote with some kind of benefit? For instance, individuals who support a political party financially get tax deductions. Instead of approaching the problem of very low voter turnout with a penalty, which people find repulsive, we could give a tax deduction for voting, could we not?

Senator Harb: That is an excellent question. Frankly, I thought about it. Unfortunately, as you know, bills cannot be initiated in the Senate which would impose a financial obligation on the government. We cannot introduce such bills.

Going that route would cost the treasury too much money. The issue of a group participating in the democratic process is interesting to us, especially where young people are concerned. If a voting incentive is offered, everyone will want to take advantage of that, but this is not the matter at hand. We want to resolve a problem.

Senator Plamondon: How can it be democratic to grant a tax deduction to a political party and undemocratic to request the same for voting? Essentially, the idea is to get the vote out. There is this concern that if we give voters a tax deduction, they will all turn out and we will not have enough money. What is it we want, turnout or money? We need to find a means of achieving the objective. That is the purpose of the tax deduction. It would apply both to the less well off as well as to the more well off who support political parties.

Senator Harb: I would very much like this bill to be referred to a committee, if the Senate deems it feasible. I have no objection. My primary concern is that we have a democratic deficit in our society that needs to be addressed. As far as young people are concerned, as I said earlier, only about one in four vote. That is all.

[English]

Hon. Anne C. Cools: Honourable senators, I do agree with the honourable senator that there is a problem in our country. I would describe the problem as the alienation of voters and the diminution of electoral input.

However, when I consider the problem, I conclude that the democratic deficit is actually the failure of political leaders and their inability to address the citizens of this country. It is a failure of politics, it is a failure of political parties, but it is mostly a failure of leaders and leadership. I come to an opposite conclusion from that of the Honourable Senator Harb.

I have two questions. First, what studies has the honourable senator performed or what evidence has the honourable senator gathered in respect of ascertaining the causes of this voter alienation? I should like to know what method and what evidence the honourable senator has used.

Second, in assessing that evidence, why was the conclusion of the honourable senator to resort to a coercive process against electors and why did he not come up with the alternative of perhaps coercing our political leaders for not having either the strength of moral conviction or the force of intelligence —

Senator Mercer: It is not just our leadership.

Senator Cools: — to be able to speak to the public? I have a big problem with that. Leadership today is all about show business. They don costumes and go on stage. Any day of the week, you can point to many individuals who are merely actors impersonating ministers of the Crown.

Why did the honourable senator come to the conclusion that those to be targeted are the ordinary, poor citizens? Why did he not look at a scheme that called upon political leadership to address these problems? I want to know this because this is a problem everywhere in this country. Everywhere in this town, some people consider others to be too ignorant, too boorish or too backward.

Some Hon. Senators: Oh, oh.

Senator Cools: They have to be fixed to be corrected, and the way to fix them is to pass another law.

Senator Mercer: Come on.

Senator Cools: Every day there is another law. Come on nothing, Senator Mercer. If you have something to say, get on your feet and say it. Every single day —

Senator Mercer: You really have become a Conservative.

Senator Cools: Every day you pass another law to fix and correct the people of Canada. I want to know the basis for that; I know politics in this country. I challenge those in politics to face the issues and face the public.

Could the honourable senator give me a response? Why does he want to punish poor people of Canada?

Senator Harb: Underlying all of this is a certain attitude which is, "I don't want to vote because nobody cares about my opinion. Why should I vote? My vote doesn't count." In fact, some would say that not voting gives the opposite message. By not voting, you may be giving the false impression that you are satisfied.

A lot of research indicates that people are not voting because everything is fine, everything is going well. As my colleague just outlined, there is something else to it. There is voter apathy. People are upset with politicians because of a lack of responsiveness, because there is no accountability, because there is lack of leadership, et cetera.

Honourable senators, those points are impressive, but I am reminded of the question about the chicken and the egg. Which should come first? Should we ask citizens to come en masse and vote and make a decision about whether they want to throw out all the leaders they do not like, or should we leave them alone? If we choose the latter, my fear is that at some point in time we will have the special interest groups, a small minority in our society, deciding who will govern our society between elections.

I would add that I did entertain the idea of having a sunset clause in the legislation. We could propose it for one election and conduct a review after that. After five years, we could have a review of the legislation to find out whether or not it is meeting its objectives. If not, we can kill it. If it meets its objectives, then that is great.

The second part of the question dealt with what sorts of studies have been done. I will be happy to provide the honourable senator with a number of studies on both sides of the matter. Some will espouse the position that the honourable senator has taken, which is that there is voter apathy because of lack of leadership. Others find that there is a lack of voter turnout because voters think the status quo is fine. In the end, we all know that there is absolutely something wrong with the system as it is now.

As senators, we have a responsibility. We are supposed to be the chamber of sober second thought, and we have a responsibility and a civic duty that this country has probably never seen before. We have to examine the low turnout and the low participation in our democratic institutions. If, at the end of our examination, we come to the conclusion that everything is fine and we need do nothing, I will not shed a tear if this legislation does not see the light of day.

• (1500)

Senator Cools: I find it very interesting that the honourable senator has admitted that our democratic institutions have a democratic deficit. Therefore, it seems to me that a consequence of that deficit is voter apathy. You really have the situation reversed.

If you are going to make laws to coerce or punish people who do not vote, do you also intend to make a law for this place, to coerce members of Parliament who do not wish to vote or who wish to abstain? If you can bring a law for one, you can bring a law for all. Once you start to move into those vital areas of life — and this government has gone into every other vital area of life — where do you stop? Do you intend to bring an amendment to your bill that will influence apathetic members of Parliament, like all the members who quite often vote as the government tells them to vote without even knowing what they are voting on?

I have served in this place for 20 years; I know this game very well. I want to know if the senator's bill contains a clause to treat members of Parliament as he is proposing to treat the citizens of Canada.

Senator Harb: There is no such intention.

Senator Cools: Nonsense.

On motion of Senator Stratton, debate adjourned.

STUDY ON DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING OF VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURAL, AGRI-FOOD AND FOREST PRODUCTS

REPORT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY
COMMITTEE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the second report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, entitled: *Value-added and Agriculture in Canada*, tabled in the Senate on December 14, 2004.—(Honourable Senator Fairbairn, P.C.).

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I thank Senator Fairbairn for yielding to me that I may speak on this report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry.

I am certain that you are aware that farmers across this country are facing unrelenting difficulties in forging a living from the land and from their livestock. In my capacity as a member and former chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, I witnessed the deep commitment of farmers to carry on despite these difficulties which, as you know, are often a result of circumstances beyond their capacity to control.

I am further encouraged by the opportunities and renewed optimism of new initiatives in agriculture. I am referring to value-added agriculture, a subject on which the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry heard testimony during the second and third sessions of the Thirty-seventh Parliament.

I would like to share with you today my views on some of the valuable input the committee received on this issue from farm groups, agri-food trade representatives, farmer-owned cooperatives, cottage industry producers, the internal trade secretariat and government officials from various federal agencies and departments.

First, I must admit that adding value to agriculture is not a new idea, but its importance is new and so are the opportunities. Value added is the source of a new growth in agriculture. It provides a means to help farmers adapt to the sweeping changes facing agriculture in Canada and around the world. I want to address these changes, but first I would like to describe what I mean by value-added agriculture.

Value-added agriculture covers a wide range of business strategies and activities that extend beyond conventional farming and marketing of bulk commodities. It is organic vegetables; it is corn-produced ethanol fuel; it is agri-tourism; it is candied apples, ready-made cereals and, of course, quality wine.

In a broad sense, value added is anything that enhances the dimensions of a farming business. It is the innovation that modifies, improves or introduces new products, new product uses and new production methods that add value, in the opinion of the consumer, to a product.

Value added on the farm is a result of the necessity to adapt to a changing environment. The Canadian agriculture and agri-food system has transformed significantly over the last two decades. This transformation was spurred by changing consumer preferences, advances in science and technology, and by multinational agreements such as the World Trade Organization agreement on agriculture that put agriculture at the forefront of international trade negotiations.

Increased trade leads to increased competition and, as a result, farms are growing in size to survive, but they are also diversifying and specializing in premium markets.

In 2002, Canada was the fourth-largest agriculture and agri-food exporter in the world and the fifth-largest exporter. Over the last 15 years, the value of exports of consumer-oriented products has more than quadrupled while the export value of bulk commodities has roughly stayed the same. Market power over these years has increasingly shifted to the retail end of the food chain. When I was chair of the Agriculture Committee, I heard that the top five retail companies in Canada represented 60 per cent of the market and that still further concentration in the marketplace was a possibility.

Consumer preferences are also changing. Canada's aging population and the slower growth of disposable incomes are contributing to a slowdown in the growth of food spending as a percentage of total expenditures. This makes the food industry very competitive. Not only is the food industry highly competitive, but it is also increasingly segmented. Many consumers want ready-made convenience foods, which means that the distance between the farmer and the consumer may even increase. On the other hand, new food value chains are creating opportunities for farmers. There is a growing demand by consumers for specialty products, notably those that appeal to health conscious, the lifestyle conscious and the non-traditional ethnic consumer.

Further, consumers are becoming more aware of the production process that goes into their food. More and more consumers are influenced by the origination of their food — how it is grown, how it is processed and how it is prepared. It is clear the agriculture industry is changing and value-added strategies are responding to this change.

I would now like to talk about the different themes that were raised during the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry hearings. The core attribute of the agriculture and agri-food industry is food safety. In many ways, value added begins with food health and safety. In an environment where consumers are more knowledgeable and more discerning about their food purchases, on-farm safety systems and informing consumers about these systems can serve as the first step in increasing value for the farmer and for the industry.

The public sector plays an essential role in initiating and enforcing a regulatory environment and officially recognizing standards that safeguard and promote trust in the agri-food system, keeping in mind the concerns of industry and consumers on issues related to the harmonization of regulatory regimes within our trading partners.

Canadians have trust in the health and safety of their food. One of the lessons of the BSE crisis was that Canadian consumers continued to regard Canadian beef as a safe and high quality product. This was in evidence when Canadians increased their consumption of domestic beef during the summer months that followed the BSE announcement in May of 2003. Domestic confidence in the food system is highly important, particularly if access to export markets becomes restricted. However, the government must ensure that this trust is maintained. There is a concern that the costs of meeting regulatory health and safety obligations make it prohibitive for many new smaller-scale

entrepreneurs to earn income from small value-added niche markets or farmers expanding into food processing. The federal government should consider increasing its funding and efforts to help small-scale food processors reach and maintain high health and safety standards.

• (1510)

Many honourable senators are certainly aware of the remarkable success story of the Canadian wine industry. In less than two decades, Canadian wines emerged from a stigma of lesser quality to being highly acclaimed and sought after premium wines, winning awards and competing side by side with the more traditional wine producing countries. This was accomplished through the concerted effort of the domestic wine industry to reposition Canadian wines as a premium product through a quality certification process called the Vintners Quality Alliance, VQA, which imposed stringent production labelling and taste quality standards on the product. The lesson here is quality certification. The adoption of quality standards can help farmers move beyond the homogenous nature of primary agricultural products so that it is not simply a matter of growing grapes. Quality standards are important in developing premium categories in food products and it helps to position Canadian products in elite markets. It serves to enhance Canada's reputation in export markets where benefits spill across the Canadian agri-food sector. It also develops a sense of national pride in the purchase of domestic products.

Quality standards are usually grounded under provincial or federal legislation, which provides protection from false quantity claims and labelling misuses. Appropriate national standards and the development of national regulation are imperative in maintaining and increasing export markets.

I would like to say a word about organic agriculture. A case in point is the organic agricultural sector, which is a driver in new growth in value-added agriculture. However, this growth is slowing. The number of new certified organic farms in Canada has flattened. This is not due to a lack of demand, since annual growth in the consumption of organic products is in double digits now. This growth is being met by imports mainly from the United States. Some have attributed the slowdown in the growth of Canadian organic farms to the lack of national regulation. To clarify, there is a national standard but there are no national regulations.

The system is voluntary, which means that it is not mandatory for a product to be certified to be sold as an organic product. The situation creates problems for exporters. In the absence of a Canadian regulatory system that would be recognized by importing countries, Canadian exporters have been accredited by regulatory authorities in the importing countries. Canada must not lag behind its trading partners, so we urge the federal government to provide leadership and to work with the provinces and with the organic industry to put in place national organic regulation standards.

I want to share with honourable senators a story of Atlantic cattlemen working together to move up the food value chain. The committee heard encouraging testimony from the Atlantic Beef

Producers Cooperative — a new generation cooperative owned and controlled by independent maritime cattle producers. I know that a number of senators in this chamber are unaware of cattle production in Atlantic Canada, but it exists.

The cooperative is establishing a kill-cut plant in Prince Edward Island in partnership with Co-op Atlantic, a maritime retailer. Both cooperatives are working together with the three Maritime provinces to supply branded beef, which is already established as “Atlantic tender beef classic” in grocery stores. This is an excellent example of value added where regional producers work together to move up the value chain.

Moreover, Atlantic Beef Producers Cooperative can take advantage of their size and unique circumstance to establish a branded plant that is flexible to consumer needs by offering full traceability or by specifying specific feed requirements to member producers so that the product is of a consistent quality.

New generation cooperatives, such as the one I have described, are exciting arrangements that add value by forward linking and providing farmers a take in the processing and manufacturing of farm commodities. However, there is a concern that the United States offers more financial incentives for creating new generation cooperatives than are available to Canadian producers. It is important that we fully endorse new generation cooperatives. Therefore, I urge the federal government to investigate options such as loan guarantees and other measures that increase access to capital for farmers considering the purchase of new generation cooperative shares.

It is also necessary for us to look at the concept of supply management. As you are aware, poultry, egg and dairy industries operate under a national supply management system in Canada. Supply management enables farmers, through regulation, to capture greater value from the food value chain. It provides farmers with a larger portion of the consumer dollar. Farmers operating under a supply management system receive protected returns for their product and, therefore, there is a concern that it creates less incentive to seek value-added ventures. To its credit, the supply management system has adopted more flexible policies and has fostered dialogue with stakeholders with respect to value-added strategies, particularly for producer-owned cooperatives, in some cases within the organic sector.

However, more can always be done. I am concerned about the small niche market operations that have low revenues and simply cannot survive at their current scales of operation if they are required to purchase expensive quotas.

Value added is market driven. It is born out of a necessity to adapt. Farmers are adjusting the way they do business by adapting to changing consumer preferences. Consumers in increasing numbers are looking for authentic farm and food experiences. More and more consumers are planning their leisure activities around agri-tourism attractions. This may consist of pick-your-own products on farms, bed and breakfast farm accommodations, farmers markets, fairs, festivals, roadside

markets, maple sugar shacks, and wine tours and seminars. Agri-tourism is an expansion of the food experience. A visiting consumer is often looking for diversion, education or active involvement in the activities of the farm. Agri-tourism also serves to link urban consumers to our rural communities, which are rich in heritage and central to our nation’s identity.

I am excited about the opportunities that regional branding offers the farming industry. Regional product branding can highlight distinctive taste and quality of a particular food product by linking it to unique attributes of a region. This may include its cultural heritage or its landscape. Regional branding gives an added identity to the product which farmers can utilize to differentiate from competitors.

Attributes such as food health and safety, quality standards and environmentally sustainable production methods are an important component of a national or regional branding formula. The reality is that it takes persistent marketing to attract “Made in Canada” premium label recognition outside our borders. Even within our borders, many Canadian consumers are often unaware of the origins of the food products that they purchase. More and more effort must be undertaken and funds must be devoted to marketing Canadian premium products domestically and abroad.

The importance of research and innovation in fuelling and expanding the sphere of value-added opportunities should be of no surprise to this chamber. The emergence of new commodities and new applications of existing commodities is made possible through product innovation. It is at the forefront of efforts to initiate new crops of livestock systems.

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore* : I regret to inform the honourable senator that his time has expired. Is he seeking leave to continue?

Senator Oliver: Honourable senators, I request leave to continue for five to seven minutes.

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Oliver: The advances in science and technology are occurring at a rapid pace. There is an increasing level of convergence among disciplines within the life sciences and other fields related to agriculture and the agri-food sector. We must ensure that proper links and coordination occur among government research centres, colleges and universities, and private sector laboratories to help minimize duplication and to foster knowledge and technological transfers.

• (1520)

It is a fact that, as a resource rich country, the trading of primary resources in bulk commodities has been an historic part of the growth of the Canadian economy. The trade of bulk commodities will continue to make up an important part of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food economy. However, the competition for primary commodities sold in bulk with lower value added promises to be fierce in future years. Recent trade

negotiations and agreements, such as those of the WTO, have increased international agricultural trade, and many emerging economies have the capacity for high yields at low production costs, while other countries still maintain the capacity to subsidize their farming sector. This is having a profound impact on agriculture in Canada.

Canada must be ready for the new agriculture. We are well positioned to be a leader in value added. We have a well-educated workforce, research and technology facilities, food distribution infrastructure, respected health, safety and quality enforcement and regulatory systems, a competent public sector and a strong, stable economy. We must foster a culture of innovation.

We must also work to address the trade impediments that serve to reduce the trade in value-added products. The use of tariff rate escalation by our trading partners must be reduced.

I am particularly concerned with the impediments to internal trade within this country. In 1994, first ministers signed the Agreement on Interprovincial Trade. The agreement helped to reduce internal trade barriers for issues related to labour mobility and government procurement. It also served to raise the profile of internal trade barriers.

However, I am concerned that certain articles related to internal trade within the agriculture chapter of the agreement have not been carried out. I am referring to article 902.4 of Chapter 9 that directs the ministers to complete a review of the scope and coverage of, and any recommendation for changes to, this chapter with the objective of achieving the broadest possible coverage and further liberalizing internal trade in agricultural and food products. Also article 903.2a of Chapter 9, which directs the ministers to undertake a comprehensive review of the framework governing supply managed commodities and implement an action plan towards the development of sustainable orderly marketing systems, has not been carried out. It is important to minimize unnecessary barriers to trade. The country benefits if producers and processors have fair and free access throughout the domestic market.

In conclusion, I would stress the strong social and economic ties that farming activities have with the rural economy. This, for me, increases the import of value-added agriculture initiatives where the benefits spill over beyond the farm. Value-added agriculture is seen as a way to increase employment and revitalize rural communities; reduce economic risks associated with trade action; diversify the economic base for rural communities; increase financial stability; promote a culture of research and innovation; reduce dependency on the world price of commodities; increase opportunities for smaller farms and companies through niche markets; increase quality and brand recognition of regional and Canadian products; promote collective solutions and partnerships among the food value chain; and help retain young farmers.

Honourable senators, value added is a good news story for a sector that is in need of good news stories. Canada is well positioned to be a world leader in value-added agriculture. We must ensure, for the future of our rural communities, that these new opportunities are fully captured by the farming sector.

[Senator Oliver]

On motion of Senator Fairbairn, debate adjourned.

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE PROGRAM

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Rose-Marie Losier-Cool rose pursuant to notice of February 3, 2005:

That she will call the attention of the Senate to the future national early learning and child care program, and in particular to the staff that will provide the services offered under this program.

She said: Honourable senators, I am taking the liberty today to draw your attention to a topic of current interest, namely the brand new national early learning and child care program that our government promised last fall.

As was announced, a second conference will be held in Vancouver, on February 11, and will be attended by the federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for this issue. The conference will provide more details about the new program. Also, some of the financing for this initiative could be announced in the federal budget that should be tabled on February 23.

[*English*]

The program as a whole should be launched officially during the next fiscal year, 2005-06. This program speaks to me because I have raised children, because I have grandchildren and because I have seen how much society has changed over the past 20 or 30 years.

Thanks to the incredible amount of information that is available today, and thanks to the unbelievable technology that exists to mine this information, today's youth should be much better prepared to tackle society and the workplace than we were in my own youth. This program could help ensure that this will indeed be the case.

[*Translation*]

I am taking an interest in this issue as a former educator. We used to think that the formation of the adult began in elementary school. Now, we know that it begins at a very early stage in life, in the first year, long before a child begins to attend school.

The progress made in the medical and psychosocial fields shows how important early childhood is in the long-term development of a person's emotional, behavioural and intellectual well-being.

Child care services have been available in Canada for a number of years, but some mentalities have not yet completely changed. Some still believe that a daycare centre is like a parking lot. However, an increasing number of people are now talking about preschool educational care, which is my favourite expression.

Preschool educational care is the first stage of a child's structured learning. In fact, the federal government has recognized and legitimized this change of mentality in its new national program. The notion of learning has taken precedence over the mere notion of care. Learning is an essential added value without which child care would merely be a service provided to parents, instead of being a developmental tool for children and society. Preschool learning has a huge impact on a child's development and success in elementary school.

Today I want to focus on two aspects of the future national program announced by the federal government; the skills of preschool educators and access for minority francophones to preschool educational services. I am not the only one who wants our young children to be entrusted only to skilled educators.

This issue came up frequently during the child care services conference I attended in Winnipeg in November. I am not the only one who wants our young francophone children to benefit from preschool educational services in their mother tongue, regardless of where they live in this country. It is what all organizations advocating the rights of francophones in minority situations want as well.

In my opinion, the success of a preschool educator hinges on five key conditions: proper recruitment, proper training, proper placement, proper professional development and proper working conditions.

All five of these conditions combined will allow preschool educators to provide our young children with a valuable and enriching learning experience. What do I mean by proper recruitment? There must be enough employees to satisfy demand while respecting the maximum number of children per employee.

• (1530)

There must always be enough employees when preschools need them. This means constant recruiting with an eye on future needs. Educators must be familiar with the living conditions of the young children in their care, which may mean local or regional recruiting. The same holds true for francophone preschools in minority communities.

During the initial stage of recruiting and before specialized training, each candidate must meet minimum and ideally standardized national requirements in terms of education and psychological profile. In my opinion, a high school diploma is an acceptable minimum level of education. We must avoid recruiting pedophiles, aggressive or asocial people, or individuals whose personal values go against accepted social norms. Naturally, the quality of French of candidates hired to work in francophone preschools must be up to par.

What do I mean by "proper training"? Once recruited, these candidates must receive specialized training to teach them how to educate young children while ensuring their mental and physical well-being. This training, which should be standardized across Canada, should be sufficiently long and serious enough to

reassure parents, adequately prepare young children for elementary school and enhance the skills of preschool educators.

We want happy children, parents and staff. In my opinion, a preschool educator should receive training that is as long and as rigorous as that for many professions taught in community and technical colleges. Consequently, this structured training should last at least 12 to 18 months, and perhaps even 24 months. The accreditation bestowed as a result of such a diploma should also be recognized from one province and territory to another. This training should cover all of the most current pedagogical, medical, psychosocial and socio-economic knowledge available.

[*English*]

The need for specialized, structured and thorough training is unmistakable. A recent report by the OECD on child care in Canada reveals that existing caregivers are too often insufficiently and improperly trained and some caregivers are university graduates.

Four years ago in my home province of New Brunswick, less than 20 per cent of the regulated childcare givers had a degree in child education and 61 per cent of all caregivers had no specialized training in early childhood care. Honourable senators, you see how much work needs to be done.

[*Translation*]

Let us move now to the third condition; proper placement. Once they have been recruited and trained, preschool educators play an invaluable role in the development of our children.

Again it is essential that these educators be in the right place at the right time. After graduation, a new employee should be put into the workplace as quickly as possible, not only to maintain motivation and make use of new knowledge, but also to avoid disenchantment or a loss of professional commitment due to a long period waiting for work.

Ideally, as well, a new employee should be given work in the region, city or care centre of his or her choice. This is not only a matter of keeping the worker happy, but also of making best use of an affinity for and knowledge of the children or the community in which he or she will be working. A new francophone employee should be placed on a priority basis in a francophone child care centre.

Each region should be properly served by an appropriate number of early childhood educators so that parents are not forced to send their children elsewhere or to do without child care services.

An early childhood educator is a little bit like a car, if I may use an analogy. Regular maintenance is important to long and useful service. That leads me to my fourth condition; proper professional development.

The initial 12, 18 or 24 months of specialized training is not enough. Like any worker who has to keep abreast of changing techniques, new discoveries, the latest trends and new methods, early childhood educators must be able to benefit from continuing

professional training. When they begin their careers they should be assigned to mentors: experienced workers who will help them to find their rightful place. These employees also need to be able to take part in upgrading workshops and regional or national conferences. They should be provided with printed, electronic or telephone-accessible bulletins on the latest findings.

Obviously, these documents, workshops and other resources that I am talking about must be available in French when they are intended for francophone workers because people learn best in their own language, and the right to work in French in regions where numbers warrant is a recognized right. For the same reasons, a new francophone employee should be assigned to a francophone mentor.

Let me turn now to the last of my five conditions, which is proper working conditions. To make a useful contribution, an early childhood educator must be well trained, properly assigned, and kept up to date professionally; however, the most important condition is that he or she should be happy on the job. Professional satisfaction comes from good working conditions, a good salary and employee benefits, the opportunity for promotion and pride in one's work. A happy worker will want to stay on the job and an experienced worker is even more useful and valuable in the medium and long term.

The OECD report that I referred to earlier shows that too often the staff of Canadian child care centres are underpaid and subject to frequent turnover. At the request of the federal government, on November 9, 2004, an organization representing the interest of these workers published an update on its 1998 study. The update confirmed the low salaries and poor working conditions of the staff, including a ratio of children to workers that is much too high. In New Brunswick, the average salary for a daycare worker in 2001 was less than 7\$ dollars an hour. You have all heard the comparison: that is less than a zoo guard is paid.

No money, no respect, too much work, often too many related duties such as cleaning, administration and all the other things that take the workers away from devoting time to their main concern, our children — all these problems make the work less interesting and undervalued. Yet, the role of an early childhood educator is just as important, perhaps more important, than elementary and secondary school teachers. Does it not make sense that we should make their working conditions as satisfying as those of teachers?

[English]

Of course, talking about working conditions means talking about big bucks. Our government has indicated it would invest quite a bit of money in its upcoming national child care program. This is a great start indeed. I congratulate our government for biting the bullet, but I can assure honourable senators that the program will require more than \$5 billion over the next five years to secure and retain qualified early childhood educators.

Moreover, beyond the actual dollar amount, we will want the monies to be evenly shared between the infrastructure — which means facilities and supplies — the oversight framework — which means the national standards — and the staff macro managing the actual child care educators. There should be

[Senator Losier-Cool]

enough money set aside on an ongoing basis for recruiting, training, paying and keeping these educators. I do not think that \$5 billion is enough.

[Translation]

Should the funds come from the federal government? No, the provincial governments ought to contribute as well, along with the municipal level and even the private sector. After all, parents who are satisfied because they have access to good early childhood services are going to be more likely to keep working for a given employer in a given city or a given region.

It was totally logical from the economic point of view to invest in quality early childhood education, because young children who benefit from it will grow up into more cost-effective adults, if I may put it that way.

• (1540)

I will now conclude by emphasizing that in establishing the qualifications of our future early childhood educators we cannot forget that French is one of Canada's two official languages. As I was saying, ideally francophone children will have access to early childhood education in French, no matter where they live in our great country.

In its position statement published on November 25, 2004, the Commission nationale des parents francophones, or CNPF, emphasized that the various stakeholders and levels of government involved in developing the national program should recognize the needs and priorities of francophone communities in terms of language, culture and identity. This recognition could be funded by bilateral framework agreements such as the current Canada-community agreements. The CNPF recommended that in addition to hiring francophone staff, the francophone early childhood education centres should be managed by francophones as well.

Honourable senators, I want to end on that note. I encourage you to support the development of a national early childhood education network which has qualified staff and where French has its place.

[English]

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: The speaking time for the honourable senator has expired.

Hon. Joan Fraser: Is there permission to accept one question?

Hon. Bill Rompkey (Deputy Leader of the Government): We would agree to a five-minute extension.

Senator Fraser: Thank you, colleagues. I do not think this will take five minutes.

[Translation]

I congratulate Senator Losier-Cool; this was extremely interesting. I would like to ask the honourable senator if she is as attentive, and I do hope so, to the situation of anglophone minorities in Quebec as she is to the needs of francophone minority communities.

Senator Losier-Cool: I thank you for your question and, as you know, the early childhood services in Quebec are a model. I am not familiar with the situation of early childhood daycare for anglophone minorities. I can tell you, though, that Senator P  pin will be discussing the situation in Quebec, and I will let her know that I would like that point to be addressed.

Being part of a minority makes you understand minorities better, and anglophone minorities in Quebec will certainly be brought to my attention.

Hon. Eymard G. Corbin: I would like to take advantage of the five-minute question period to inform honourable senators of and invite them to attend the meetings of the Standing Senate

Committee on Official Languages scheduled for February 14 and March 7 and 21, to consider the education of the francophone minority across the country, from early childhood to university. We have decided to limit our study to one area at a time in order not to confuse things. You are all invited to our meetings.

Senator Losier-Cool: I will do my best to attend.

On motion of Senator LeBreton, for Senator Cochrane, debate adjourned.

The Senate adjourned until Thursday, February 10, 2005, at 1:30 p.m.

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