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Wednesday, October 18, 2006



THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

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

Prayers.

chamber has a better balance between men and women, so it can now — wisely and soberly, to be sure — address all bills that affect the lives of all Canadians, both men and women.

• (1335)

[English]

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

PERSONS CASE

Hon. Nancy Ruth: Honourable senators, today is the seventy-seventh anniversary of a decision that allowed me and my female colleagues to enter this chamber. In his appeal decision in the Supreme Court, Lord Sankey wrote, in part, as follows:

The British North America Act planted in Canada a living tree capable of growth and expansion...

The government of the day would not appoint women to the Senate, would not accept women as full players. Hence, five women took action. It is interesting is that Mackenzie King agreed that the government would pay the costs of the petition to the Supreme Court and the appeal.

It is interesting that, since 1929, from time to time, other governments have agreed — at the moment, we are in a phase where the government will not do this — to pay for women and other equality seekers to test their equality rights in the Supreme Court of Canada. Make no mistake: As women, we do continue to work to end the inequality, the violence and the poverty that keep women unequal in Canada today. As Nellie McClung said:

Never retreat, never explain, never apologize — get the thing done and let them howl.

Hey guys, we need your help: You have to move over, share power and more resources, and stop the talk and walk the walk.

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-P. Poulin: Honourable senators, as my colleague Senator Nancy Ruth stated so well, every year, on the same date, we commemorate the Persons Case, which led to acknowledgement in law that women truly are persons under section 24 of the British North America Act.

The case took place 77 years ago, which is not as long ago as some might think. Many of our mothers were young women at the time.

Nevertheless, at the time, it took five women from Alberta to take a stand. They fought for the right of women to be treated as equals.

As parliamentarians sitting in the Senate, the success of these five militant Alberta women holds special significance for us. Thanks to their action, now more than 30 per cent of the members of this chamber are women. Thanks to them, this

SMALL POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

Hon. Serge Joyal: Honourable senators, last Thursday, October 12, Justice T. Matlow of the Superior Court of Ontario declared null and void, as a contravention to sections 3 and 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, two sections of the Canada Elections Act — sections 435.01(1)(a) and (b). Those sections prohibit small political parties that have not met the 2 per cent threshold of the national vote, or 5 per cent of the vote at the riding level, from having access to the quarterly allowance of \$1.75 per vote given to a registered political party, according to Bill C-24.

When Bill C-24 was debated and studied in the Senate in June 2003, I drew the attention of honourable senators to the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Figuroa* case that struck down the obligation to run a minimum of 50 candidates to be considered a political party and to benefit from income tax receipts for donations. The Supreme Court interpreted section 3 of the Charter, the one entitled “Democratic Rights,” as having a wider scope than the mere right “to enter a voting booth and mark a ballot.”

The court concluded that section 3 of the Charter also included “the right of each citizen to play a meaningful role in the electoral process,” as well as the “right to vote in a manner that accurately reflects his or her preferences.”

When Bill C-24 was introduced by Senator Robichaud, I stated, on June 12:

[Translation]

Small parties are not represented in Parliament, but they represent the views of Canadians who are entitled, under our Constitution, to freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of association and to express their views “at the ballot box.”

[English]

When the then Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Honourable Don Boudria, testified at the committee hearing on June 17, I contended that small parties were protected by sections 3 and 15 of the Charter and that the bill was contrary to the Charter. Senator Grafstein asked if the bill was certified by the Department of Justice as complying with the Charter, and the minister confirmed that it was.

Honourable senators, the Superior Court of Ontario has declared that those sections contravene the Charter and are therefore null and void. Justice Matlow even ordered that small parties be given back access to public financing from the day Bill C-24 was enacted.

This court decision is of importance because we have before us Bill C-2, which is being studied by the Legal Committee. It also affects the status of small parties and raises a similar doubt based on the same sections of the Charter. Again, I have raised at the committee the constitutionality of the limits imposed on the donations to political parties and their particular impact on small parties.

We cannot legislate without paying close attention to the impact of those sections of Bill C-2 on the conditions of small parties and their right to be treated fairly. Those are Charter issues, and it is here in the Senate that they can be best debated. At least three times in the recent past, bills to amend the Canada Elections Act have been found by Canadian courts to be in violation of the Charter.

I draw the attention of honourable senators to this issue today so that, when we address Bill C-2, we take a leadership role in righting a wrong suffered by minorities in the electoral process in Canada.

NOVA SCOTIA

VICEREGAL EVENTS

Hon. Terry M. Mercer: Honourable senators, with the installation of our new Governor General this past year, we witnessed an historic passing of the torch from one talented and independent woman to another. Nova Scotians have recently witnessed an equally historic event with the installation of our new Lieutenant-Governor.

First, I would like to congratulate the Honourable Myra Freeman for her steadfast work on behalf of our province since her appointment in 2000 by former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. In her six years as Lieutenant-Governor, Madam Freeman's passion and experience in philanthropy and as an educator has encouraged young Nova Scotians to involve themselves more in their culture, government, volunteerism and their future. On behalf of all of us here, I offer her my sincere congratulations on a job well done.

Honourable senators, Nova Scotia's new Lieutenant-Governor, Her Honour the Honourable Mayann Francis, will build upon these themes and more. She is the first Black Canadian to serve as Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia and only the second woman in 400 years.

Born and raised in Whitney Pier, Cape Breton, Madam Francis has already shown leadership by dedicating her career to fostering tolerance and diversity through her work within government and philanthropic organizations, and most recently as Director and CEO of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission. She is a graduate of St. Mary's University, along with Senator Moore and I, and I look forward to witnessing more accomplishments from her in the years ahead.

[Senator Joyal]

Honourable senators, with the change in Lieutenant-Governor comes another change some may not be aware of. Ethel and Walter Garnier have worked and lived at Government House in Halifax for over 100 years combined. In 1947, the year I was born, Walter started by tending fireplaces, then moved on to become chauffeur and later custodian. He met Ethel in 1958 when she started her employment at Government House, which culminated in her current position as executive housekeeper. The married couple continue working to this day, but will be retiring in November.

• (1340)

Walter's sincere greeting at the door, as well as Ethel's apparent care and pride as she walks visitors through the viceregal home, will be missed. Honourable senators, please join me and all Nova Scotians in offering our sincere congratulations to this couple, not only for their length of service, but also for the quality and respect with which they served. We can only hope to honour their service with our own.

THE HONOURABLE BARBARA A. HAGERMAN

CONGRATULATIONS ON APPOINTMENT AS LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Hon. Elizabeth Hubley: Honourable senators, Canada is a great kaleidoscope of people and this diverse personality is reflected in this chamber. Indeed, I believe that one of the most distinguishing qualities of the Senate is its ability to represent not only regional and political interests, but also the very face of Canada by bringing to Parliament individuals from so many communities, backgrounds and professions.

Another office that affords the opportunity to embody our diversity is that of provincial viceregal representative. Prince Edward Island has been graced with several outstanding Lieutenant-Governors in recent years, including the Honourable Marion Reid, the Honourable Gilbert Clements, and our outgoing Lieutenant-Governor, that wonderful Acadian gentleman, the Honourable J. Léonce Bernard.

Honourable senators, I am pleased to say that Islanders have yet another exemplary citizen to serve as Her Majesty's representative in the person of our new Lieutenant-Governor, the Honourable Barbara Hagerman. I want to congratulate her and the federal government on what I believe is an excellent appointment.

As most honourable senators know, I have a great interest in the arts, and I believe that creative expression is at the heart of our society. Born in Hartland, New Brunswick, Barbara Hagerman, a talented music teacher and performer, is only the second woman to hold the position of Lieutenant-Governor in my province. After graduating from the legendary music program at Mount Allison University, specializing in voice and organ, Barbara began what has been a distinguished career as a vocal soloist with the PEI Symphony Orchestra. She also conducted the Summerside Community Choir for 17 years, during which time the choir performed throughout the Maritime region and even at Carnegie Hall.

Honourable senators, Lieutenant-Governor Hagerman also comes to Government House in Charlottetown as a dedicated community volunteer. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate her and wish her well as she and Mr. Hagerman begin what I know will be a distinguished and successful term in office.

• (1345)

MINIMUM WAGE

Hon. Jerahmiel S. Grafstein: Honourable senators, it grieved me to read in the press today that the Government of Ontario, a region that I proudly represent, has taken a position that I believe is inimical to the best interests of the people of the province of Ontario, that being their objection to raise the minimum wage to \$10. The argument made by the Minister of Finance, according to newspaper reports, is that such an increase would be uncompetitive or unproductive.

While people at the top of the wealth sphere are increasing their wealth, the number of people at the bottom is increasing as well. The working poor rely on a minimum wage.

It strikes me, honourable senators, that those who are concerned with women's rights and poverty in this country would make a concerted effort in this house to persuade not only the Province of Ontario, but also other provinces to increase the minimum wage.

While the minimum wage is a small measure, it is not uneconomic and can be productive in increasing the living wage for all working Canadians.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

BANKING, TRADE AND COMMERCE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO EXTEND DATE OF FINAL REPORT ON STUDY OF ISSUES DEALING WITH INTERPROVINCIAL BARRIERS TO TRADE

Hon. Jerahmiel S. Grafstein: Honourable senators, I give notice that at the next sitting of the Senate I will move:

That, notwithstanding the Order of the Senate adopted on Tuesday, May 2, 2006, the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce, which was authorized to examine and report on issues dealing with interprovincial barriers to trade, be empowered to extend the date of presenting its final report from October 31, 2006 to June 29, 2007; and

That the Committee retain until July 31, 2007 all powers necessary to publicize its findings.

[*Translation*]

CANADA NATIONAL VIMY MEMORIAL

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Roméo Antonius Dallaire: Honourable senators, in accordance with rules 56 and 57(2), I give notice that, on Wednesday next, October 25, 2006:

I will call the attention of the Senate to the final phase of the restoration of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial begun in 2001 under the auspices of the Canadian Battlefield Memorials Restoration Project.

[*English*]

QUESTION PERIOD

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD— MEMBER PARTICIPATION—MARKETING SYSTEM

Hon. Robert W. Peterson: Honourable senators, my question is directed to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. We are living in troubling times where opinions contrary to those of the Prime Minister are dealt with harshly. One of the leader's colleagues was expelled from caucus today for presenting views contrary to those of the Prime Minister. The democratic process appears to be in jeopardy and democracy is being crushed.

The Canadian Wheat Board was created by the federal government in 1943. The government now wants to make changes to the board without properly consulting the producers it serves. The changes the government wants to make to the Wheat Board will effectively privatize it. This will take away any leverage that the Wheat Board has in marketing wheat and barley. When will the government take responsibility, start governing, and put the question to a vote by farmers?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank Senator Peterson for that question, but I must respond to his preamble about the actions taken today by the Conservative caucus of Ontario. I am part of that caucus and took part in the decision.

• (1350)

This was not a situation of the member of Parliament in question attacking the Prime Minister. This was a decision of the Ontario caucus. Members of the caucus did not feel they had the ability to speak openly and confidentially in the confines of caucus. It was akin to having a person in the caucus who was a member of the national media. The decision was made by the Ontario caucus and simply ratified by the national caucus. It had nothing to do with Garth Turner's views of any particular person in our party.

With regard to the Wheat Board, as honourable senators know, our position in the last election campaign was for a dual marketing process. As honourable senators also know, wheat producers are preparing now for a vote on the Wheat Board directors. The process concerning the taking of that vote is about to be finalized.

Hon. Grant Mitchell: Honourable senators, despite much rhetoric by this Conservative government about restructuring relations with the U.S., their legacy of failure is as follows: no progress on BSE; complete capitulation on the softwood lumber issue; border controls that will hurt Canadian trade and commerce with the U.S.; an attack on sugar beet farmers in southern Alberta and elsewhere in this country; and now a capitulation to U.S. interests in gutting the Canadian Wheat Board.

In the interests of trying to find some silver lining in that cloud, could the Leader of the Government tell us whether her government has secured any trade concessions from the U.S. in return for this initiative to gut the Canadian Wheat Board?

Senator LeBreton: The honourable senators must get over this anti-Americanism that is permeating the Liberal Party on all fronts.

The fact is we are dealing with the United States on a professional basis. The honourable senator talks about the border. Nothing had been done about the border. Thanks to the efforts of our government, the Prime Minister, Minister Day and our ambassador in Washington, we were able to successfully convince our American trading partners that it was not in their interest, or in our interest, to cause difficulty at the border. That resulted in the vote that postponed the issue until 2009. Yesterday, there was some progress made on the type of identification that eventually will be used.

With regard to the Wheat Board, the plans for a marketing choice system were well known by the electorate. We campaigned on that issue in the last election. The Minister of Agriculture is in the process of addressing that matter.

With regard to the sugar beet industry, at the moment, as far as I know, there are no tariffs or restrictions on our sugar beet thick juice.

I simply do not accept that somehow or other we are not acting in the interests of Canadian producers in all sectors.

Senator Mitchell: Honourable senators, we are by no means opposed to or anti-American. We were thinking that, perhaps, this government could actually walk and chew gum at the same time. I am talking about dealing with the United States and thinking about creating relationships with other countries as well, countries such as China.

Once the government is finished with the Canadian Wheat Board, how long before they kill the livelihood of thousands of farmers across this country by sacrificing supply management, which, believe it or not, the Prime Minister once described as “a government sponsored price-fixing cartel”?

[Senator LeBreton]

Senator LeBreton: I do not know where the honourable senator gets some of this stuff. It is actually quite amusing.

• (1355)

I do not accept the premise of the honourable senator's question, as I said earlier. This government is working on several fronts to improve our trade relationships, not only with our neighbours to the south. Minister Emerson is working diligently on the Asia-Pacific region, and we are working with the European Union and our potential markets. I can stand here proudly and say that I have every confidence that this government is working very hard in all sectors in the interests of the Canadian public.

Hon. Daniel Hays (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question in regard to the Wheat Board. I believe this is the first time I have heard a confirmation that the government's decision is that it will respect the provisions of the existing legislation, that is, to proceed with an organized vote of wheat and barley producers in the region affected to determine the question of whether the single-desk selling function of the Wheat Board should be continued in respect of those commodities.

However, there is another matter we should raise in the context of the Wheat Board, and that is the ability for those producers to be informed about what they are voting on and the Order-in-Council requested by the Minister of Agriculture, to prevent the Wheat Board from disseminating information on what it thinks are the advantages of the single-desk selling system.

By way of further preamble, which I will attribute to Ray Martin, an Alberta MLA, the Government of Alberta has spent something like \$3 million over a fairly recent period of time in promoting a “no” vote to the single-desk selling function.

Can the minister assure us that there will be a process to take the gag off of the Wheat Board and to ensure that there is a way for information about the pros and cons of single-desk selling to be disseminated so that producers can make an informed decision?

Senator LeBreton: As the honourable senator knows, being from Western Canada, the producers are either on one side or the other of this issue. There is no gag order on directors of the Wheat Board. They may speak as individuals in defence of what they believe is the better system, in their case the single-desk system. There has never been any intention for directors not to be able to speak freely and openly.

However, I do not believe that in any situation it would be fair to both sides if the Wheat Board were to use its resources to make the point for its side of the story. Certainly, the intention was for the directors to be free to speak their minds — they would in any event — but the resources of the Wheat Board should not be used to cause an unfair imbalance in the debate.

Senator Hays: Honourable senators, the question still stands because, as I mentioned, there are heavy spenders in this area — such as the Government of Alberta at some \$3 million. The directors can speak, but in order to communicate effectively, resources are required. One way or another, I think we would all want an informed vote by the producers.

The Leader of the Government may not have an answer right now, but what are the government's plans, or what is its position on ensuring that adequate resources are available to both sides of the question so that the voters, who will decide the fate of the single-desk selling function, are informed?

Senator LeBreton: I was raised on a farm. The farmers that I know — and I am sure it is the case with wheat producers — are fully informed on both sides of the issue, and I do not believe that resources should be provided for either side. It is like any contest. One side should not have an unfair advantage over the other. I have great faith that when the wheat producers vote it will be from a position of being fully informed. I cannot imagine that anyone who has been involved in the wheat-producing industry over the last several years would not already have an opinion on one side or the other.

• (1400)

I want to reiterate that the individual members of the Canadian Wheat Board can certainly use their own personal resources or their ability to get the media to sell their side of the story. That is the way democracy works.

Senator Hays: Honourable senators, there is a vocal group that is in favour of the measures and another that is against them. That does not mean that everyone in between is well-informed and in a position to make a good judgment. The board has played differing roles over a long period of time. I submit that it is a complex question, not one that can be answered easily, unless one takes a hard ideological position one way or the other. I believe most of the producers fall between the two ends.

I will leave the question with the minister and request that she take back to the government the position that there be some means or policy to ensure that the producers who will vote on this will have an opportunity to be informed.

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, our party campaigned on giving Western farmers marketing choices in terms of their product. I do not accept the argument that Canadian citizens, and particularly people as well informed as farmers and wheat growers, expect us to provide government funding — taxpayers' dollars — for one side or the other to be able to present its position. I do not accept that premise.

[Later]

Hon. Leonard J. Gustafson: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government and is in relation to the Canadian Wheat Board. It is my understanding that the government's intention was to give the choice of either marketing or selling through the Wheat Board. There is an opportunity here for us to explore. The comment I hear coming from the other side is that it is all or nothing, which is not the case. My understanding, unless I am not hearing properly, is that it is a matter of choice — every farmer will be given a choice. Will he sell and market his own grain, or will he market his grain through the Canadian Wheat Board? Am I right in my assumption or am I wrong?

Senator LeBreton: The Honourable Senator Gustafson is absolutely right. As I mentioned to Senator Hays, we on this side have had the benefit of Senator Gustafson's particular expertise in this area. That is why I can say with great certainty

that the members of the farming community, especially the wheat growers, know where they stand on these issues. They do not need a government-funded program on one side or the other to tell them how to think.

We campaigned on this subject. People in the Western region voted for their MPs and were fully cognizant of the platform of the Conservative Party in the last election, which included the right to choose in this regard.

FINANCE HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

FUNDING FOR LITERACY PROGRAMS

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government. Yesterday, I spoke of the future of our sugar beet industry, considering the trade challenges that are coming from across the border in the United States.

Last week, during our break, an issue that was equally compelling in Lethbridge and across the country was the reality of the government's recent cutback of \$17.7 million from the literacy movement in Canada.

Does the government intend to continue annual funding for the associations that have guided this issue, specifically, the Movement for Canadian Literacy, Laubach Literacy of Canada, Frontier College, ABC CANADA, La Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation française, the National Adult Literacy Database and, finally, our newest one, the National Indigenous Literacy Association?

Some financing has popped up here and there, but these groups have been the heart and soul of the literacy movement. Those who need their help most are fearful that they will lose their base. I agree that \$81 million is a lot of money, and the Leader of the Government keeps saying that. I should like to know whether part of that \$81 million is finding its way into preserving these foundations and, if not, where this money will be spent. Could the government release a detailed breakdown on how this financing will be distributed? Nobody knows. Doors are closing; people are frightened.

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I was prepared yesterday for a literacy question. In any event I will outline — and you will pardon me for reading — where some of our spending is intended to go.

The government is proud to support literacy, which enables Canadian citizens to improve their skills and prepare for better futures. In that regard, \$28 million will be spent this year for the Enhanced Language Training Initiative, which includes the new Canada-Ontario immigration agreement; \$900,000 for the Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Initiative from the Department of Human Resources and Social Development; and \$73 million over two years for the Workplace Skills Initiative. As well, \$2.6 billion will be allocated over two years for the Aboriginal elementary and secondary education program; \$4.6 million for Industry Canada's Computers for Schools

programs; \$1.5 million for the adult education skills development in Prince Edward Island; and \$63 million a year for the Sector Council Program, which supports workplace skills and literacy programs in key economic sectors.

• (1405)

Senator Fairbairn: I appreciate the honourable senator's answer and will certainly look at those figures with great interest. I will have to look at the figures in Hansard, because I am trying to connect them with the amounts that were in the 2005 February budget that we had put forward. I am curious as to where they have gone. The figure was \$5 billion over five years to build a framework for early learning and child care initiatives in collaboration with provinces and territories. We know that is gone. However, there was an additional \$120 million over five years to improve the special education program for First Nations children living on reserves; \$398 million over the next five years to enhance immigrant settlement and integration programs and improve client services for newcomers to Canada; \$125 million over three years for the next step in the Workplace Skills Strategy; and there was \$30 million for the National Literacy Secretariat, which of course no longer exists.

There are gaps. Some of the literacy groups across the country have been in place for a long time, such as the Movement for Canadian Literacy, and some of them are quite new, such as the National Indigenous Literacy Association. The people who have produced the programs on the ground have done a great job in connecting and helping people. Will they continue to be funded by some part of the program that the honourable senator has outlined?

Senator LeBreton: We could get into a debate about one election platform versus another. The fact is that we were elected as the government on January 23 and have made it clear how we intend to govern. Some may agree and some may disagree, but we cannot respond to a platform that the honourable senator has just read from, the budget of last year, which was rejected by the Canadian voter.

As I have said to the honourable senator in response to many of her questions, some of the people who are concerned about or interested in the issue of literacy will not lose their interest simply because there has been a change in the way this government will fund literacy programs. I cannot stand here and make commitments that this group or that group will continue to be funded. I am simply outlining what we are planning to do.

As I said the other day, I believe that in six months many of these assumptions will have been proven to be incorrect. Rather than worrying about things that have not happened or may not happen, let us give our initiatives a chance, and if, in six months, what I say has not turned out to be true, then the honourable senator can come back and question me about it again.

• (1410)

Senator Fairbairn: As the Leader of the Government in the Senate noted, this was a budget, not an election program, because we already had a foundation for literacy.

Will these groups that have been formed over the years, going back in time to Mr. Mulroney's period, and rightly so, still have support from her government? They are not overnight creations, nor were they part of a government platform. They were created

by the movement with the help of government over the years. People trust them; they have been great leaders. They are helpful to any government, but they are not government creatures; they know the issue. We do not know the issue the way they do. Will they be able to continue their assistance to the government? I know they would treat such an endeavour with the same enthusiasm as they did when helping our government.

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, the idea that somehow our government is not sympathetic to issues such as this is beyond the pale. Over the years, organizations have been developed to assist one group or another. It is impossible to commit to them forever. Some go on in perpetuity and some have sunset clauses attached to them.

My honourable friend asks if our government will support these groups without being able to identify exactly what the groups do and what they deliver in terms of direct services to people who require this help. That is something that I cannot answer. All I can say is that we have committed a significant sum of money to skills training and literacy programs. That is the program of our government, which I have confidence will have great success and will reach great numbers of people.

I know that right now in Canada there is a shortage of skilled trades people. A specific part of our program targets these people. That will help our economy as well as our citizens.

I cannot make a blanket statement that we will offer support, because the word "support" connotes spending money. I will not do that. I will say that I have full confidence in the programs I have mentioned and in the amount of money that we have set aside for literacy programs and to train workers in new skills.

• (1415)

FINANCE

STATUS OF WOMEN— FUNDING FOR EQUALITY RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

Hon. Lorna Milne: My question is to the Honourable Leader of the Government in the Senate. As Senator Nancy Ruth and Senator Poulin eloquently pointed out, today marks 77 years since the Privy Council made its historic ruling in the *Persons* case.

This date has particular importance in the Senate as it serves as a milestone victory for all Canadian women in the struggle for equal rights. It is also a day for reflection, and I join the honourable senators in asking whether women's rights in Canada have eroded during the past year.

With this in mind, I want to ask the Leader of the Government as a woman, to a woman who serves in cabinet, the following question: How can the recent announcement to slash the operating budget of Status of Women by almost 40 per cent and to remove the word "equality" from the mandate of the women's program be helpful to Canadian women who are trying to make a difference in Canadian society?

[Senator LeBreton]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I am very proud of the recognition of Persons Day. As a matter of fact, it was under a Conservative government that the Persons Day awards were started, as Senator Murray will recall. It was under the Right Honourable Joe Clark, in 1979, that Persons Day came into being.

The Famous Five monument, located just outside this building, came about as a result of a motion brought in this place by Senator Fairbairn, a motion that I seconded. I have very good feelings about the whole issue.

In terms of the administrative cuts or savings in the Status of Women, there were no cuts to the programs. There was simply an administrative reallocation of funds that was duplicated between the Status of Woman and other areas in the department. I do not feel that, as a woman, I am any less equal than any other person.

Senator Milne: I thank the honourable senator opposite for her answer, but she did not really say why the word “equality” has been dropped. I am interested in what the Leader of the Government would say to organizations such as Equal Voice, Groupe Femmes Politique et Démocratie, the Canadian Health Coalition, the Canadian Federation of University Women, Egale Canada and Justice for Girls when they are told they can no longer count on Status of Women Canada for funding assistance as a result of these changes. Are the goals subscribed to by these organizations no longer worthy of pursuing? Is the Leader of the Government telling us that she and Canada’s present government do not share the interests of these organizations? Is it not time to walk the walk?

Senator LeBreton: This government supports equality in all areas, so I do not actually understand the premise of the question. We as a government, we as a population, and I as a person fully recognize all equality issues, regardless of who we are talking about. Equality rights are entrenched in our Constitution and are part of us all. I do not understand why the honourable senator would question whether we support equality rights.

• (1420)

Senator Milne: In that case, could the honourable leader indicate how she would explain to these organizations what will happen to their funding?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, the government has made some decisions on saving taxpayers’ dollars. I was part of the cabinet committee that searched for ways to save, and, in every single case, there was adequate funding. We did not cut programs. We simply found savings across a wide range of government programs. This is the decision of the government in the interests of the taxpayer. The government should continue to support worthy initiatives while bearing in mind that it is spending taxpayers’ dollars. When looking for savings, government should be cognizant of duplication and of areas that no longer require funding. In some cases, the cabinet committee found savings where the funding had not been spent. The government did not cut funding; rather, it put the amount back on the books because the money had not been spent.

The Hon. the Speaker: I regret to inform honourable senators that the time for Question Period has expired.

[*Translation*]

ANSWERS TO ORDER PAPER QUESTIONS TABLED

MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE
AND COMMUNITIES—CANADA POST CORPORATION

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government) tabled the answer to Question No. 11 on the Order Paper—by Senator Chaput.

MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT—
GOVERNANCE OF NATIONAL PARKS PROPERTIES

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government) tabled the answer to Question No. 13 on the Order Paper—by Senator Spivak.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO SIT
DURING SITTING OF THE SENATE

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs have the power to sit on Thursday, October 19, 2006, Tuesday, October 24, 2006, and Wednesday, October 25, 2006, even though the Senate may then be sitting, and that rule 95(4) be suspended in relation thereto.

Hon. Joan Fraser (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Could the Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate please explain why he is moving this motion?

Senator Comeau: Honourable senators, the committee still has a considerable amount of testimony to hear, and the usual number of committee hours will not be enough to meet with all the witnesses. I consulted the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the committee members, and everyone agreed to meet even though the Senate may be sitting.

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

Motion agreed to.

• (1425)

**FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION ACT
BANK OF CANADA ACT**

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING

On the order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Segal, seconded by the Honourable Senator Meighen, for the second reading of Bill S-217, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act and the Bank of Canada Act (quarterly financial reports).—(*Honourable Senator Comeau*)

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I want to thank the sponsor of Bill S-217, Senator Segal.

If passed, this bill would require Crown corporations and government departments and agencies to submit to Parliament quarterly financial reports prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

We would be provided every three months with very comprehensive information, including a balance sheet, comparative financial information, a cash flow statement, a statement of revenues and expenditures and a management discussion and analysis on material changes in operations.

This would mean that, instead of submitting their financial results several months after the end of the fiscal year, the departments and agencies concerned would be providing Parliament with real-time financial information, something the private sector has been doing for quite some time.

Our colleague, Senator Segal, has extensive professional experience in the area of public policy and financial administration. Until just recently, he was the President of the Institute for Research on Public Policy and taught public policy at Queen's University, in Kingston.

He also sat on numerous boards of directors in the private sector, where shareholders usually receive quarterly reports.

He knows that no director of a publicly traded company would want to make decisions based on financial data issued the previous year.

Without current information, it would be impossible for the directors to make sound management decisions in a timely manner. Fortunately, such information usually reaches shareholders and boards of directors in short order.

For example, on May 26, the largest bank in Canada, the Royal Bank, issued a report on the three-month period ended April 30. In doing so, the bank provided its shareholders and board of directors with data on its operating profit and its assets, as well as detailed information on changes in its operating environment for the quarter.

The bank prepared the report in less than a month, in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, despite the challenge of running a network of over 1,100 branches across Canada, some 273 banking centres in the United States and 42 offices in other countries.

Once they had the information showing that the bank could afford to pay quarterly dividends, the directors announced the payment. No director would want to have to approve the payment of dividends totalling half a billion dollars without knowing whether the company could afford the payments.

• (1430)

No director of a charitable organization would want to be asked to approve funding decisions based on information as vague as revenue projections prepared months earlier.

If a company's performance declines, its board has information allowing it to put off certain capital projects. If it is unhappy with the management team's action plan, the board can hire new managers quickly enough to enable them to remedy the situation in time, instead of being forced to wait for six months after the end of the company's fiscal year before asking for accounts.

Using quarterly data, current and potential shareholders can make informed decisions about buying, selling and keeping shares.

In short, honourable senators, shareholders and boards of directors can ask management for reports at any time and demand that corrective measures be taken when problems arise, because they get relevant information in a timely manner.

In the July edition of *Report on Business Magazine*, two federal government Crown corporations, namely, Canada Post and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, were named among the top 50 corporations in Canada in terms of revenue.

However, no corporation comes near the \$200 billion the federal government spends annually. Senator Segal noted in his speech at second reading stage that taxpayers deserve at least the same level of assurance and information regarding federal expenditures as is offered to the shareholders of public companies. He said that regular financial reporting would provide the much-needed alarms identifying problems and allow Parliament to step in and correct a financially difficult circumstance. He said that quarterly reports would prevent departments from attempting to manage financial information in the fashion recently criticized in the Auditor General's report on the gun registry. Senator Segal also presented convincing arguments in favour of a firm financial disclosure policy providing for frequent disclosure to Parliament, which would ensure greater openness and accountability.

He justified passing his bill by the fact that, these days, most expenditures are approved beforehand and initiated long before we receive up-to-date information on revenue and expenditure plans from the various departments. The public accounts are usually submitted six months after fiscal year end. Annual reports from Crown corporations trickle in slowly in the fall.

Senator Segal expressed his concerns in an article he wrote in the *National Post* on June 20, 2006. He said:

When you combine this huge reporting deficiency with the absence of detailed pre-consideration by Parliament of the spending estimates, it becomes clear just how far Canada's Parliament has drifted from the Magna Carta principle of prior approval and control of how the King spends your tax dollars.

The current practice of retroactive annual reporting — looking back on government departments' and Crown corporations' accountings — means that parliamentary governance no longer takes place in "real time."

Rather, this method of financial reporting only succeeds in highlighting department inadequacies and failures long after remedial action is possible.

It works well if the goal is to finger-point and lay blame, but it does nothing for actual parliamentary control. Enforced quarterly reporting would be a real time contribution to awareness of public finance before the horse has left the barn.

Honourable senators, the billion dollar gun registry scandal might not have occurred if Parliament had been informed of the changes that the department was making to its spending plans when these changes were being made.

We might have known a little sooner that the anticipated revenues from the registry existed only on paper. Alternatively, we would have found out sooner than we did that the air traveller security charge was generating revenues far in excess of what was needed to administer Canada's airport security system.

Honourable senators, the Conservative government is committed to improving accountability. If we can demonstrate that this is feasible, this bill will complement the provisions of the Federal Accountability Act, which is already before Parliament, and also other initiatives undertaken by the new Government of Canada.

[*English*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Order! Pursuant not only to a house order but also to our rules, I remind honourable senators that BlackBerries are out of order in this place. I call upon all honourable senators to respect the rules and maintain order.

[*Translation*]

Senator Comeau: For example, to bring greater transparency to the government's planning framework, and to enable Parliament to hold the government accountable for its actions, the Federal

Accountability Act provides for the establishment within the Library of Parliament of a position to be known as the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The officer will provide objective analyses to Parliament concerning the country's finances and economy, thereby giving us the objective information we need to assess the government's financial proposals. In addition, the government is committing to providing quarterly updates on its overall financial situation. Bill S-217 goes even further by requiring the departments to submit similar reports.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, Senator Segal's proposal provides that the reports shall be prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles using the accrual accounting method. This would give us a more accurate picture of the costs associated with government expenditures and revenue producing measures.

I know that, for people who have no training in accounting, the mere mention of terms such as "generally accepted accounting principles" and "accrual accounting" is likely to provoke extreme boredom. In short, they mean that expenses are accounted for at the time they are incurred, regardless of when they are paid, and that income is recorded when it is earned, regardless of when it is received. Furthermore, if you buy something that you expect to last five years, you write off the expense over five years, rather than all at once, because you have exchanged one type of asset — cash — for another — a car or a computer.

That is how the private sector keeps its books. A few years ago, the government began to keep annual public accounts according to the accrual accounting method and has since presented its federal budget estimates that way.

Henceforth, the government will also present the Departmental Performance Reports based on accrual accounting. In order to implement several elements of the accountability plan, the departments will have to significantly change how they operate. This will also be the case for the preparation of the quarterly reports mentioned in Bill S-217. Additionally, the departments will have to ensure that they factor in their quarterly expenditures and revenues based on the accrual accounting system.

• (1440)

Honourable senators, I believe that Bill S-217 represents a positive step. Amendments may be needed to improve it. If so, official representatives and other witnesses will report to us in committee. Nevertheless, since this bill is likely to enhance accountability, I believe it warrants a more detailed review. I support this bill at second reading.

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

[English]

Hon. Lowell Murray: Your Honour, the honourable senator's speech was on Bill S-217. This was Senator Segal's motion, was it not?

Senator Comeau: Yes.

Senator Murray: He is not in his place at the moment, but might he like to close the debate?

Senator Comeau: Without referring to the presence or otherwise of any senator, but given that the honourable senator is not in the chamber at this moment, I do know that Senator Segal has indicated that if I made this speech and no other senator wished to make comments, he would like the bill to be referred to committee.

Senator Murray: Fair enough. I wanted to be sure that his rights were not being abridged.

The Hon. the Speaker: Are honourable senators ready for the question?

Hon. Senators: Question!

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Motion agreed to and bill read second time.

[Translation]

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

On motion of Senator Comeau, for Senator Segal, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance.

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—
DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Grafstein, seconded by the Honourable Senator Banks, for the second reading of Bill S-206, to amend the Criminal Code (suicide bombings).—(*Honourable Senator Comeau*)

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I ask that the debate be adjourned in my name so that the item may be rolled over. The government spokesperson was hoping to attend yesterday, but was prevented by circumstances beyond his control.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is it agreed, honourable senators, that the adjournment of the debate remain in the name of Senator Comeau?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

On motion of Senator Comeau, debate adjourned.

[English]

STUDY ON NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

REPORT OF NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE
COMMITTEE—MOTION IN AMENDMENT—
DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the consideration of the fourth report, as amended, of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, entitled: *Managing Turmoil, The Need to Upgrade Canadian Foreign Aid and Military Strength to Deal with Massive Change*, tabled in the Senate on October 4, 2006.—(*Honourable Senator Fraser*)

Hon. Colin Kenny: Honourable senators, in light of yesterday's debate and the vote that took place in the chamber on the motion that passed, I should like to move, seconded by Senator Moore:

That the order for the consideration of the fourth report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, as amended, be removed from the Order Paper and that the report be referred back to the Committee with an instruction to implement the amendment in form and substance approved by the Senate on October 17, 2006; and

That the amended fourth report be tabled in the Senate no later than November 21, 2006.

Hon. Joan Fraser (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I have a question for the chair of the committee.

Would he explain what amending in "form and substance" would involve? I assume, but I should like Senator Kenny to confirm for me, that he is not just talking about a pure mechanical deletion of the words "Goose Bay" wherever they appear in the report, but that he is talking about a rewriting of the report in those sections where it would be necessary in order to reflect the spirit of the vote in this place yesterday. Is that a correct assumption?

Senator Kenny: Honourable senators, the honourable senator's assumption is correct. That is why the word "form" appears in my motion. The motion passed yesterday calls for the words "Goose Bay" to be deleted.

The reason I made the comments I did in my preamble is that I was conscious of Senator Rompkey's concern, reflected in his remarks, about some of the adjectives that were used, and words of that nature. It was intended to provide for a complete rewriting of that section of the report relating to footprint, without a specific reference to any particular location, taking into account Senator Rompkey's comments about language.

Hon. David Tkachuk: I, too, have a question for the honourable senator. Can he inform the Senate of the number of copies of this report that have been printed and distributed?

Senator Kenny: I shall have to take that question as notice and advise the honourable senator at a later time. I do not have a precise count. I shall endeavour to get that information to Senator Tkachuk.

Senator Tkachuk: With regard to the copies that were printed, was the machinery of distribution already in place and were some copies of the report mailed out?

Senator Kenny: I would have to take that question as notice, honourable senators. I can assure the honourable senator, however, that some copies were mailed out. As to whether the mailing was complete, I have no idea. I can tell honourable senators that none were mailed out since yesterday.

Senator Tkachuk: Will the copies that were mailed out have to be recalled?

Senator Kenny: No, Senator Tkachuk.

Hon. Lowell Murray: Honourable senators, I am at a disadvantage because I do not have a copy of the motion that the honourable senator has just made. However, I should like to make one or two observations.

I let it go by initially because I thought my friend was bringing in a vehicle so that he could do today what, unfortunately, was denied to him yesterday, that is, take the opportunity to adjourn the debate and make a speech. I do not get the impression that the honourable senator intends to speak to the motion he has just presented. That raises a question as to the purpose of the motion and, indeed, whether it is necessary.

The motion that was passed yesterday does not, contrary to what the honourable senator has said, simply say that "the words Goose Bay be removed". It states, "That all references to CFB Goose Bay (Labrador) be removed..." That could be read as deleting most of pages 53, 54, 55 and 56, and not that just the words "Goose Bay" be deleted.

• (1450)

Why do we need to pass a motion instructing the committee to do something in form and substance that I believe we did yesterday by motion? My friend suggests that, after they do whatever it is they will do, the committee will bring the amended report back, but the report has been amended. It is before us as amended. Therefore, the purpose of this motion is not clear to me.

That being said, I want to be clear that I thought yesterday, and continue to think, that my friend, the chairman of the committee, should have had the opportunity and should still have the

opportunity to speak to his report, at which point others may or may not want to take part in the debate.

I guess I am standing on a point of order. Is the motion that the chairman of the committee brought forward called a work of supererogation? I do not know. It is instructing the committee to do something that the Senate has already done by motion yesterday. That would be my view, without having seen the text of the motion that my friend has presented.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, if the house was to accept the motion of Senator Stratton, that would also afford time for all honourable senators to obtain a copy of the motion, which would solve many questions.

Hon. Terry Stratton: It is precisely for that reason that I adjourned the debate.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Fernand Robichaud: Honourable senators, Senator Murray rose on a point of order. Should we not deal with that before addressing the motion that Senator Stratton will be putting forward?

[*English*]

The Hon. the Speaker: The chair understood that Senator Murray said, "Maybe I am raising a point of order," and I was seizing on that "maybe." Knowing that all honourable senators are at a disadvantage in that we do not have a copy of the given motion, and given that Senator Stratton had already indicated to us and has kindly held back his motion of adjournment so that some exchange could take place, perhaps the house would be best served by recognizing Senator Stratton and hearing his motion to adjourn the debate.

On motion of Senator Stratton, debate adjourned.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Joan Fraser (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): I rise on a point of order. I use that phrase, Your Honour, because if Senator Murray resumes a discussion on a point of order, I would not like to think that we had sacrificed our right to speak to that point of order when we resume debate on this matter. If he chooses not to turn it into a point of order, we shall proceed.

STATE OF LITERACY

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Fairbairn, P.C., calling the attention of the Senate to the State of Literacy in Canada, which will give every Senator in this Chamber the opportunity to speak out on an issue in our country that is often forgotten.—(*Honourable Senator Jaffer*)

Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck: Honourable senators, this inquiry is presently adjourned in the name of Senator Jaffer, so I would like to speak and have it adjourned in her name, unless Senator Chaput wishes to speak after me.

It is a great pleasure to rise and take part in this discussion on the issue of literacy. I first want to congratulate and commend our colleague Senator Fairbairn for raising this inquiry. She has provided outstanding leadership on this vital issue over the past number of years and has been among the foremost advocates for improving literacy programs across Canada. As she has said, we need to accelerate our efforts and heighten our resolve to improve the levels of literacy in this country. For a country such as Canada, far too many people do not have the opportunity to become fuller members of our society because they lack the requisite skills so essential to their well-being and their quality of life.

It is somewhat ironic that at the same time as Senator Fairbairn was raising this issue and emphasizing the need for more support and resources for literacy initiatives, the Conservative government was in the process of cutting funds for literacy and adult learning programs. It is shocking that at a time when our economy is demanding more skilled workers and a greater investment in the development of human resources, the Conservative government is in fact dismantling programs that help promote and encourage higher participation in the work force. It is all the more shocking that these funding cuts are taking place while Canada is showing a \$13.2 billion surplus.

It is also disheartening because, just as many of these programs across the country were raising the level of literacy, those efforts are now being undermined by a government that should be increasing, not reducing, its support for those programs. In my home province, the lost federal literacy funding, by which I mean the \$17.7 million that the Conservative government has just cut, provided for numerous family literacy projects and community literacy programs across Prince Edward Island.

I believe very strongly that support for literacy and learning is an investment, not a cost. I believe that, as a society, we have a responsibility to help all citizens achieve their full potential. We must help ensure that all Canadians can gain the skills and knowledge they need to improve their standard of living and their quality of life.

It is a national tragedy that fully more than four in ten Canadians lack the skills they need to become full and productive members of our society, that many older people are at risk in dealing with some of the day-to-day tasks they face, such as following directions on a medicine bottle, and that too many people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds lack the literacy, problem solving and communication skills they need to enjoy a better quality of life.

• (1500)

Not only will Canadians enjoy a better quality of life, but the country's entire economy will benefit from their improved skills. A study completed by the C.D. Howe Institute in October of last year came to the conclusion that improving the overall levels of literacy skills has a significant impact on economic performance. Increasing literacy skills by one level, that is, taking those with a lower literacy skill and improving them to a higher level, has a direct impact on productivity and economic growth.

According to the C.D. Howe Institute, increasing the literacy skills by one level would increase Canada's productivity by 2.5 per cent and would increase the gross domestic product by a

full 1 per cent. Those gains would translate into an additional \$18 billion annually to our economy.

There is yet another dimension to the fundamental need for higher levels of skills in this country. As everyone recognizes, our country is being transformed. We are in a knowledge-based economy, which puts a premium on know-how. The number of jobs requiring post-secondary education is expanding, while the number of jobs requiring less than high school is declining. What is to become of those workers who are being displaced by technological and other changes? How will they be retrained so they can continue to be productive members of their communities? Unless and until they have the skills to undertake retraining or upgrade their qualifications, they will continue to fall behind. That is what makes basic literacy skills so critical.

In light of the increased economic and social benefits of improved literacy and learning, it is unbelievable that the Conservative government has cut \$17.7 million from literacy and essential skills training, especially when the country has a surplus of \$13.2 billion. In so doing, the government is rendering a gross disservice to those who need such training the most. This program cut will affect some of the most vulnerable people, further perpetuating the differences and the disparities between those who are disadvantaged and those who are not. This funding cut is also short-sighted. This government refuses to recognize that expenditures for literacy and learning are an investment, not a cost.

This view is shared by many Canadians across this country, Canadians who recognize and appreciate the need to improve the levels of literacy and who see the value and importance of literacy, not just to individuals or to families, but to society as a whole. I commend and congratulate the many groups and organizations that have worked hard in this field to bring about change in people's lives.

Make no mistake about it, improving literacy has real benefits to individuals and to society. Existing programs are working; success is being achieved.

In my home province of Prince Edward Island, a number of successful programs never would have happened without the federal support that has just been cut. The annual federal-provincial grants of \$325,000 have allowed the provincial government, through its Literacy Initiative Secretariat, to develop and implement the following: Workplace Education PEI, a partnership of business, labour and government which aims to ensure the availability of workplace literacy programs; the StorySacks Program, a hands-on family literacy activity to give parents with low literacy skills the confidence to enjoy books and reading with their children; Project L.O.V.E., a project in which older volunteers help struggling young readers in schools; and, the Literacy and Adult Basic Education Program at Holland College, which sees about 1,000 Islanders a year improve their literacy or finish grade 12, all at no cost.

In addition, the Prince Edward Island Literacy Alliance, with a limited budget but a great deal of commitment, has been accomplishing great things by bringing people and organizations together, creating partnerships to improve literacy and learning in the province.

[Senator Callbeck]

For example, the PEI Literacy Alliance offers bursaries and scholarships to adult learners so that they can further their education. The alliance also operates the LEARN line, a telephone number that Islanders can call for assistance and direction to literacy services. As well, the PEI Literacy Alliance sponsors a summer tutoring program for youths, a free tutoring program for students who need help maintaining or improving their literacy skills over the summer.

Without the reinstatement of that \$17.7 million that the Conservative government has just cut, the Literacy Alliance of Prince Edward Island has announced that it will close March 31, 2007.

It has been said that the Conservative government's decision to make these funding cuts is the biggest setback to literacy in the last 20 years. Since the cutting of these valuable and much needed programs, a great deal of concern has been expressed all across this country. Canadians know that by improving literacy levels we have a great opportunity to contribute to the Canadian economy and to improve everyone's quality of life. They know that improving literacy is not something that schools or governments can do alone, but only when all partners, including the federal government, work together.

Honourable senators, once again I commend and congratulate Senator Fairbairn for raising this issue, particularly at this time. The honourable senator has called for action to bring down this barrier that causes 42 per cent of adult Canadians to be at risk every day from lack of basic reading, writing and communication skills. This means that they cannot be full and productive members of our society. As the honourable senator has said, this is an issue that crosses all party lines.

I encourage all senators to join in supporting this initiative.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maria Chaput: Honourable senators, a few days ago, I condemned the current government's untoward decision to abolish the Court Challenges Program. Today, I rise again to ask the government and its representatives in the upper chamber what credible explanation they can provide to justify slashing the budget for literacy programs.

Once again, the ones being penalized by these cuts are the less fortunate, citizens who rely on us to learn to read, write and count, skills required of every citizen in order to be able to lead a happy and productive life.

What does this Conservative government do? It cuts funding for the disadvantaged, the very people we should be assisting to minimize negative impacts in the long run.

The francophone and Acadian minority communities felt this announcement from the government hit like an atomic bomb on the organizations and services that promote literacy across the country.

Budget cutbacks to the tune of nearly \$18 million hurt these agencies that already have to do so much with so little.

The Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français felt this decision would cause untold harm to Canadian society. The government's decision will shut down several programs, centres and organizations that offer literacy services to thousands of adult learners in Canada.

The disappearance of these provincial and territorial organizations will leave a void that cannot be filled by anyone else.

• (1510)

[*English*]

Until September 25, 2006, Canada had a National Literacy Secretariat that provided \$42 million a year to adult learning programs. The secretariat was set up by former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1986. It worked with the provinces, the private sector and hundreds of voluntary organizations.

Until two weeks ago, Canada had a network of non-profit literacy organizations extending into every corner of the country. Now there is nothing to connect the pieces of the network; the infrastructure is gone.

The real victims are the 9 million Canadian adults whose inability to read is holding them back. Approximately 5.8 million cannot cope with the demands of a typical workplace; the remaining 3.2 million cannot read a medicine bottle, a job application, an election ballot or their child's report card. Some are immigrants, some were born here, some made bad choices, some had no choice but to quit school.

It is too early to say which, if any, of the provinces will take over the literacy programs Ottawa is shedding. The outlook seems to be best in Ontario and Quebec, worst in Newfoundland, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the North.

It is not clear how national organizations such as the ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation will serve their clients. These national organizations depended on their provincial partners to deliver programs, provide training for volunteers, support local groups and reach out to people who need help.

When you take away the provincial coalitions, the organizations that use them no longer have a backbone. That means the learners do not receive the same quality of help, said Margaret Eaton, President of ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation. It is hard to understand why the federal government is leaving so many groups in the lurch.

[*Translation*]

In my home province of Manitoba, the impact is negative. In our province, the organization called Pluri-elles (Manitoba) Inc. helps adults and families improve their literacy skills and their knowledge of French. According to Pluri-elles' director general, Mona Audet, "This is setting us ten years back. All the efforts made by the staff and learners are going to be lost." Indeed, over the past 16 years, this organization has set up 13 small literacy centres across the province to accommodate people living in urban, rural and remote areas.

Following the Harper government's decision, Pluri-elles' board of directors made the tough decision to close nine of its centres. These closures will impact on the following communities: Laurier, Lorette, Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saint-Laurent, Saint-Lazare, Saint-Malo, Sainte-Anne and Sainte-Rose-du-Lac. These communities are the farthest ones from Winnipeg.

The situation is no better elsewhere in the country. In New Brunswick, the Harper government's decision will put an end to the activities of the Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick, which has called the decision "immoral." This is happening at a time when many studies show that the situation is alarming and worrisome in New Brunswick, where 66 per cent of francophone Acadians have serious difficulties in reading, writing and arithmetic.

At the other end of the country, in Alberta, the organization promoting literacy for adult francophones, Eduk, was also shocked by the federal government's announcement. As we know, a recent study was conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The OECD is based in Paris and has 30 member states, including Canada, cooperating with 70 other countries around the world to promote adult literacy and life skills. Its study revealed that 42 per cent of all adults in Canada do not have the basic skills required to fully participate in our economic or social life.

[English]

An article in the September 28 edition of the *Regina Leader-Post*, under Kerry Benjoe's byline, began with the following sentence:

Thanks in part to cuts in literacy funding by the federal government, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network is to close its doors after 17 years of service.

Honourable senators, the disappointment, deception and anger is nationwide. Last week's email wave of protest is a strong indication and a clear message of this.

At this point, I wish to read to honourable senators excerpts from an open letter written by Literacy Partners of Manitoba.

On September 25th the new Government of Canada announced a cut \$17.7 million to adult literacy.

In Manitoba, the amount cut is \$780,000. This money was used to support pilot projects, produce innovative materials and research, and provide training opportunities for learners and tutors....

Literacy coalitions were started by the Mulroney government to provide service to literacy programs — services not supported by provincial funding. They were to leverage resources and develop partnerships to support adult and family literacy.

Literacy Partners puts our energies and the dollars from federal, provincial and foundation grants, and from fundraising and donations, into projects that deliver real results and services for the 290,000 working aged low literate Manitobans. It works!

[Senator Chaput]

Over the past 18 months Literacy Partners has:

...partnered with CanWest's Raise-a-Reader program and distributed \$17,000 to family literacy programs;

worked with CanWest Raise-a-Reader and public libraries to collect and distribute books to local and regional literacy programs during I Love to Read month;

partnered with the Thompson Regional Library and Perimeter Airlines to distribute books at no cost to Aboriginal communities; (over 12,000 books from these two initiatives);

initiated an internationally recognized family literacy project for the immigrant population in Winnipeg;

recruited more than 100 volunteers to work in literacy programs;

provided access to over 5,000 resources, from our literacy library, with free delivery anywhere in the province.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, this cannot continue. Cuts to essential programs have created an atmosphere of uncertainty, I would say even alarm, as everyone is wondering who will be the next victim. In conclusion, I would like to quote a passage from a press release dated October 15, 2006:

The Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse is reluctant to criticize the recent budget cuts made by the Harper government, for fear of jeopardizing long-term funding for Acadian organizations. Those who attended the annual general meeting of the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse hesitated to denounce the budget cuts announced by the Harper government, cuts to more than 12 programs considered essential to their survival. They feared that any steps taken against the government would hamper negotiations underway with Ottawa concerning long-term funding for Acadian organizations.

Honourable senators, it is shameful to treat minorities in this manner.

[English]

The failure of this cabinet to fully comprehend the consequences of this decision and other cutbacks is very upsetting, and the government should be ashamed of itself.

Hon. David Tkachuk: I may not have heard properly, but I understood the honourable senator to have said that there were 9 million people who were not literate in Canada.

Senator Chaput: Nine million Canadian adults whose inability to read is holding them back.

Senator Tkachuk: Does that include people who are not able to read English because they are recent immigrants, or are those in addition to the 9 million people — which, to me, is about half the adult population of Canada?

Senator Chaput: I am sorry, I cannot answer that question because I do not know.

Senator Tkachuk: Are the 9 million people fairly evenly distributed across the country? It seems to me, as a former school teacher, a terrible indictment of our school system, more than anything else. I am just asking, are these people evenly distributed across the country?

• (1520)

[Translation]

Senator Chaput: Honourable senators, I am not sure whether my information is correct, so I will get back to you once I have checked it.

[English]

Senator Tkachuk: I would adjourn the debate.

Senator Chaput: Honourable senators, Senator Jaffer asked that the motion to adjourn the debate be in her name.

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: Honourable senators, is it agreed that debate be adjourned in the name of Senator Jaffer?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Tkachuk: I moved the adjournment of the debate.

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: It is moved by the Honourable Senator Tkachuk, seconded by the Honourable Senator Champagne, that debate be adjourned to the next sitting of the Senate. Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

On motion of Senator Tkachuk, debate adjourned.

[Translation]

THE SENATE

MOTION TO ACCOMMODATE SENATORS SPEAKING ANCESTRAL LANGUAGES—ORDER STANDS

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Corbin, seconded by the Honourable Senator Bryden:

That the Senate should recognize the inalienable right of the first inhabitants of the land now known as Canada to use their ancestral language to communicate for any purpose; and

That, to facilitate the expression of this right, the Senate should immediately take the necessary administrative and technical measures so that senators wishing to use their ancestral language in this House may do so.—(*Honourable Senator Comeau*)

Hon. Eymard G. Corbin: Honourable senators, I am not taking part in the debate, because I have already spoken, but if I may, I would like to put a question to Senator Comeau. In response to a question I asked him on June 28, 2006, Senator Comeau told the Senate, and I quote:

Honourable senators, the repercussions of adopting this motion could be very significant, which is why I intend to indicate where I stand on this issue in the fall.

Fall arrived more than 20 days ago, and everyone knows that it will end on December 20 or 21. In Canada, we generally consider that winter starts when the ground freezes and the first heavy snowfall comes. I would like to know whether Senator Comeau whether he intends to speak soon.

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, to my knowledge, the maples are still red and it is still fall. Of course, I will make my comments before the first heavy snowfall comes to Nova Scotia.

Senator Corbin: Honourable senators, I have lived in Nova Scotia and I can remember when the first heavy snowfall did not arrive until January 15.

Senator Comeau: Honourable senators, seriously, I intend to make my comments very soon.

Order stands.

The Senate adjourned until Thursday, October 19, 2006 at 1:30 p.m.

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