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Wednesday, June 11, 2008



THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, June 11, 2008

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

[*English*]

Prayers.

[*Translation*]

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

APOLOGY TO STUDENTS OF INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Hon. Aurélien Gill: Honourable senators, more than 100 years after passing a law aimed at assimilating Aboriginal children, our government will finally make a formal apology for the harm done by forced attendance at residential schools.

For 50 years, many children were humiliated, uprooted and abused in a system funded by the federal government. The suffering inflicted on students was felt by generation after generation. Even our youngest children are affected today.

The gesture the Prime Minister is going to make is appreciable and appreciated. I hope that today's apology will allow the victims to heal and to regain their dignity and pride. Obviously, it is up to them alone to judge the sincerity of the apology and accept it or not.

I congratulate all those who had the courage and determination to bring the truth about this dark chapter in Canada's history into the light of day.

Yes, this formal apology is necessary, and I support it completely. But it must not cause us to lose sight of the fact that Canada's Aboriginal peoples are still second-class citizens in this country.

Socio-economic statistics regularly prove this. If you have any doubt, just visit a reserve or talk to people who have. There are still places in Canada where 23 people live in a three-bedroom house and share one bathroom. Senator Keon, who visited Kashechewan on Monday, knows something about this.

We must do more than pay lip service to the abject poverty in which our Aboriginal peoples are living. Something concrete and something different and must be done and done quickly.

This is the second time the Government of Canada has made such an apology. Because this is just a first step, I urge the government to proceed immediately with the next steps so that Aboriginal Canadians can finally become full citizens of this country.

THE LATE JACK BYRNE

Hon. Ethel Cochrane: Honourable senators, late last week, as the people of my province started celebrating the historic Stanley Cup win of Danny Cleary and the Detroit Red Wings, we received sad news. Jack Byrne, a long serving member of the House of Assembly in Newfoundland and Labrador, our Deputy Speaker and former minister, had died at the much too early age of 57.

Jack was a seasoned politician who first entered municipal politics back in 1986 as Mayor of Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove. Seven years later, he made a virtually seamless transition into provincial politics, continuing to represent the people of his St. John's area community.

• (1335)

He brought his straight-talking, down-to-earth and hard-working style to the House of Assembly. His constituents responded by electing him at every opportunity. In the most recent election last fall, he won a resounding 78 per cent of the vote in his riding.

In 2003, he was appointed Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs. It was the perfect fit for a constituency man with so much local experience. It was here that he left a truly indelible mark.

Last week, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador President Graham Letto called Mr. Byrne a dedicated leader whose commitment to municipal government shaped the future of local government in our province.

In recent years, Mr. Byrne faced serious health issues and he was forced to take a leave of absence to have open-heart surgery in 2006. However, in an interview upon his return to work the following January, his motivation was clear. This is what he said: "I enjoy politics. . . I really enjoy helping people in my district."

Honourable senators, the people of Cape St. Francis have lost a tireless advocate but, across the province and, indeed, the country, we have all lost a truly exceptional public servant. I invite all senators to join with me in offering condolences to his wife, Bridget, and his son, Matthew.

THE LATE COLLEEN THERESE ELLIOTT

Hon. David P. Smith: Honourable senators, I rise today to pay tribute to the late Colleen Therese Elliott of Truro, Nova Scotia, who passed away in May and who made an outstanding national contribution to the Canadian Cancer Society, as well as numerous other health-related organizations in Nova Scotia and throughout Canada.

Colleen was a nurse by profession but her commitment to the causes of the Canadian Cancer Society became a second career, in addition to being a wife and mother. Her positions and duties are too numerous to mention but I will highlight a few.

Colleen joined the Truro unit of the Canadian Cancer Society in 1977 and became the education chair. She subsequently served as Chair of the Well Women's Clinic project, Chair of the Healthy Choices Women's Workshop, Chair of the Committee for Smoke Free Youth, the President of the Nova Scotia division of the Canadian Cancer Society and she was the Chair of the Nova Scotia Tobacco Advisory Committee. She was also a member of the Canadian Cancer Society's National Board of Directors, she was the lay person representative on the National Cancer Institute of Canada Scientific Peer Review Panels and she was the National Public Education Chair of the Canadian Cancer Society.

I have a list of 10 different awards she received for work relating primarily to the cause of fighting cancer, such as volunteer of the year and numerous other medals and awards. Colleen was also an active and loyal member of the Immaculate Conception Church.

Sometimes, circumstances arise that remind us that life can seem unfair, but who really knows? After all these years of volunteering service to the Canadian Cancer Society, Colleen was diagnosed in February with two rare and aggressive forms of kidney cancer. Regrettably, they were detected too late and Colleen passed away three months later at the age of 65.

I rarely rise on these occasions, but I felt motivated to do so today for the reasons I have outlined. To her husband, John Elliott, who was a friend and classmate of mine in high school 50 years ago, and her son, Brendan, and daughter, Theresa Ferris, I send my sympathies and condolences. However, I know they can take comfort from the heritage and legacy Colleen left as a role model for volunteers working tirelessly for such a worthy cause as the Canadian Cancer Society.

May Colleen rest in peace.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE BRIAN MULRONEY

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF ELECTION TO LEAD PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Hon. David Tkachuk: Honourable senators, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak in honour of the Right Honourable Martin Brian Mulroney, who, 25 years ago today, was elected Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, a job he held for 10 important years in Conservative and Canadian history.

• (1340)

I would like to read you his own words from a speech he gave in May 2001 about leadership in the 21st century, Conservative leadership in Canada and the importance of vision — a commitment to Canadians with a dash of political strategy:

Since the death of Sir John A., every successful Conservative leader who has brought the party from opposition to government has had to overcome some powerful challenges of history, including regional indifference, French Canadian scepticism and, sometimes, media, academic and bureaucratic hostility.

[Senator Smith]

Canada is not a big Lethbridge or a big Baie-Comeau. It is a sprawling, pluralistic expanse of dreams and contradictions; of promise and challenge; of instinct and ambition — 30 million strong. The nature of Canada defies regional bromides and simplistic solutions.

Accordingly, the leader must have a firm vision of Canada, a deep knowledge of its people, a familiarity with its languages, an understanding of its soul and an unshakeable resolve to lead his party to victory. . . .

Honourable senators, leadership comes in many forms and sometimes people do not recognize its greatness until it has passed. When I reflect on the words of our former Prime Minister, I cannot help but think about all of our nation's prime ministers, guided by democracy and courage and, even more importantly, driven by a belief that making a positive contribution to the lives of Canadians is not even a choice, but rather a duty. For that, I am thankful. I congratulate Brian Mulroney on this twenty-fifth anniversary, and I congratulate all leaders on their belief in our Canadian society.

INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL INCIDENT

Hon. Lorna Milne: Honourable senators, just last week I heard another tale of horror. When the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources traveled north to Tuktoyaktuk last Wednesday, we were toured around the town by Roger Gruben. He told us movingly of the difference between his treatment in a residential school and that of many of his friends.

He was in the Anglican dormitory and his best friends were boarded in the Roman Catholic dormitory right across the street. They shared desks in the common school. When the person who was in charge of his dormitory came through the room late at night, the "squeak, squeak" of his shoes on the tiled floor was a signal that all was well and they were safe. Across the street, the same "squeak, squeak" of shoes late at night meant the man they called the "Red Beast" was on the prowl and Mr. Gruben's friends would hide trembling under their blankets and pray they were not selected that night.

When they went home at Christmas or for the summer, they were afraid to tell their devout Roman Catholic parents what was happening to them at the school. Mr. Gruben's best friend was sexually abused and he later committed suicide.

We all know some very fine people who were victims of this appalling abuse. I sincerely hope that the government's apology today for this dreadful chapter in Canada's history will both begin and help the healing process that is so badly needed.

IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE NORTH

Hon. Grant Mitchell: Honourable senators, last week, I too, along with Senator Milne and others on the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources, had a tour. It was a tour of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, specifically to study the effects of climate change.

It was a very powerful experience. For anyone who still denies climate change or feels no sense of urgency about it, I would recommend a week, or a day or even several hours in the North speaking to people — particularly Aboriginal people — who can see it, who feel it and who are living with its impacts right now. These impacts are particularly hard on Aboriginal people of the North — where they live, the communities in which they live and the way they live.

I am struck today that as we are apologizing for one unspeakable tragedy that we have visited upon the Aboriginal people, they may well be confronting another one in the form of what climate change — that we have contributed to and they, in reality, have not — will do to their lives in the not-too-distant future.

• (1345)

The tremendous impacts include: a two to three degree rise in temperature at Inuvik over 20 years; a precipitous drop in the Bluenose Caribou herd from 160,000 to 40,000 over 5 years; the pine beetle and the spruce budworm killing northern forests and raising the spectre of more forest fire destruction; the level of the ocean rising and eroding the shoreline, threatening homes in places like Tuktoyaktuk along the Mackenzie River Delta; changing migration patterns of certain species such that animals never seen before are inhabiting the North — for example, mule/whitetail deer are appearing further north, potentially bringing viruses and parasites that could kill indigenous species, and polar bears are seen where they would not normally be and appear disoriented; changes in weather patterns including thunder, lightning and rain in December in Tuktoyaktuk; melting icecaps; and ice roads being available for a much shorter period of time. Most disturbing is the melting of the permafrost, which releases heavy metals that affect the water tables and releases enormous amounts of greenhouse gas.

Many indigenous communities in the North are experiencing this first before the rest of us in Canada do. Clearly, they did not create this problem and they can do little to fix it without the rest of Canada and Canadian leadership in the world along with them to fix it. All Canadians must embrace this challenge and begin to do whatever it takes to fix climate change.

There are many reasons why we must fix this problem but, in the context of today's apology to the Aboriginal people of Canada, one of the most poignant reasons is that we are apologizing for one unspeakable tragedy we visited upon the Aboriginal people of our country. I hope, and I know that we all hope, we can take the action required so that we never have to apologize for another tragedy again.

[Translation]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

SENATE ETHICS OFFICER

2007-08 ANNUAL REPORT TABLED

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2007-08 annual report of the Senate Ethics Officer, pursuant to section 20.7 of the Parliament of Canada Act.

CANADA'S ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

DOCUMENT TABLED

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a report entitled *Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan—Setting a Course to 2011*, dated June 28.

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

NISGA'A FINAL AGREEMENT—
2005-06 ANNUAL REPORT TABLED

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2005-06 annual report of the Nisga'a Final Agreement.

WESTBANK FIRST NATION SELF-GOVERNMENT
AGREEMENT—2005-06 ANNUAL REPORT TABLED

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2005-06 annual report of the Westbank First Nation Self-Government Agreement.

[English]

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I call your attention to the presence in the gallery of the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine.

Welcome to the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

THE ESTIMATES, 2008-09

REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE
ON MAIN ESTIMATES PRESENTED

Hon. Joseph A. Day, Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, presented the following report:

Wednesday, June 11, 2008 [English]

The Standing Senate Committee on National Finance has the honour to present its

SIXTEENTH REPORT

Your Committee, to which were referred the 2008-2009 Estimates, has, in obedience to the Order of Reference of Thursday, February 28, 2008, examined the said Estimates and herewith presents its report on *Infrastructure Programs and Regional Development Agencies*.

Respectfully submitted,

JOSEPH A. DAY
Chair

(For text of report, see today's Journals of the Senate, Appendix, p. 1272.)

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this report be taken into consideration?

On motion of Senator Day, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

• (1350)

STUDY ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

REPORT OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Maria Chaput: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages entitled *Reflecting Canada's Linguistic Duality at the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games*.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this report be taken into consideration?

On motion of Senator Chaput, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

MEETING OF POLITICAL COMMITTEE— APRIL 10-11, 2008—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Andrée Champagne: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 23(6), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation to the meeting of the Political Committee of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie held in Strasbourg, France, on April 10 and 11, 2008.

[Senator Day]

CANADA-UNITED STATES INTER-PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

CONGRESSIONAL VISIT, APRIL 22-25, 2008— REPORT TABLED

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation to the congressional visit by members of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group, held in Washington, D.C., United States of America, from April 22 to 25, 2008.

CANADIAN/AMERICAN BORDER TRADE ALLIANCE, APRIL 27-29, 2008—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation to the Canadian/American Border Trade Alliance: The Canadian/US Border — A Unified Focus of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group, held in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, from April 27 to 29, 2008.

STUDY ON ISSUES RELATED TO MANDATE

REPORT OF ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE TABLED

Leave having been given to revert to Presentation of Reports from Standing or Special Committees:

Hon. Tommy Banks: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources entitled *Sustainable Development: A Report Card*.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this report be taken into consideration?

On motion of Senator Banks, with leave of the Senate, and notwithstanding rule 58(1)(g), report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

• (1355)

THE SENATE

MOTION TO RESOLVE INTO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE TO HEAR RESPONSES TO APOLOGY TO FORMER STUDENTS OF INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS ADOPTED

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 58(1)(j), I move:

That, at 3 o'clock p.m. on Thursday, June 12, 2008, the Senate resolve itself into a committee of the whole in order to hear from Phil Fontaine, National Chief Assembly of First Nations, Mary Simon, President of the Inuit Tapiriit

Kanatami, and Clem Chartier, President of the Metis National Council, respecting the government's statement of apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, is leave granted?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, prior to giving leave, I wish the record to show that we are supportive of this notice of motion because our leader had been talking to Aboriginal representatives before the notice was given. In fact, this approach will work well with what we were proposing on this side and, as such, if honourable senators on the other side are agreeable, we will have other names to add to the list of witnesses that the honourable senator has noted. Leave is granted.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the leave that was requested pursuant to rule 58(1)(j) has been granted.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO DEPOSIT REPORT CLERK DURING ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. Ethel Cochrane: Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit with the Clerk of the Senate a report relating to its study of the federal government's current and evolving policy framework for managing Canada's fisheries and oceans by June 30, 2008, if the Senate is then adjourned for a period exceeding one week; and that the report be deemed to have been tabled in the chamber.

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO DEPOSIT REPORT WITH CLERK DURING ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn: Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry be permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit its final report on rural poverty in Canada by June 30, 2008, in accordance with the order of reference adopted by the Senate on November 20, 2007, with the

Clerk of the Senate if the Senate is then adjourned for a period exceeding one week; and that the report be deemed to have been tabled in the chamber.

STUDY ON FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND MATTERS GENERALLY RELATING TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

NOTICE OF MOTION TO REQUEST GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO INTERIM REPORT

Hon. Gerry St. Germain: Honourable senators, I give notice that, two days hence, I will move:

That, pursuant to rule 131(2), the Senate request a complete and detailed response from the government to the fifth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, entitled *Honouring the Spirit of Modern Treaties: Closing the Loopholes*, tabled in the Senate on May 15, 2008 and adopted by the Senate on May 27, 2008, with the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians, and the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada being identified as Ministers responsible for responding.

• (1400)

[Translation]

QUESTION PERIOD

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

RESIGNATION OF SENIOR POLITICAL ADVISER BERNARD CÔTÉ

Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. It seems that every day we learn more about the Bernier-Couillard affair and now we can add the name Fortier to the story.

Despite the latest developments and the fact that this matter raises serious concerns about national security, this government categorically refuses to proceed with an effective and transparent investigation into this affair.

It falls on the media to shed light on this affair and reveal new facts on a daily basis. The latest revelation comes from Mr. Bellavance of *La Presse* today and involves the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. Apparently the minister was forced to ask Bernard Côté, his senior political adviser, to step down because of possible influence peddling stemming from his intimate relationship with Julie Couillard.

Does the minister intend to ask the appropriate authorities to investigate in order to determine whether there was indeed influence peddling within his office?

Hon. Michael Fortier (Minister of Public Works and Government Services): Honourable senators, I believe that in this situation, the words I used are more appropriate; namely, “conflict of interest” or “apparent conflict of interest.” Mr. Côté tendered his resignation and I accepted it.

Yesterday, I met with my deputy minister and I asked him to confirm — which he did — that the call for tender process at issue was treated the same way as all the other calls for tender for real property or any other asset we try to acquire, which it was. Moreover, I asked the equity manager in this case to draft an interim report rather than wait until the end of the call for tender process. We will have an interim report. My deputy minister tells me that the process was free of any interference by anyone.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: I thank the minister for his diligence in this matter. However, I must point out that we have known for several weeks that Ms. Couillard had a business relationship with Kevlar, as an affiliated agent. The company had planned on bidding on a 200,000 square foot building in Quebec City that would house 700 federal public servants. This is not a minor contract here; it is something significant that the people of Quebec City seem to be in favour of.

I understand that the honourable senator will present an interim report. I doubt it is possible to learn all the ins and outs of the relationship between Mr. Côté and Ms. Couillard in less than 24 hours. Could the minister assure us that all the ins and outs will be examined in this inquiry? It can be determined whether other contracts were potentially compromised. The deadline for awarding this contract is June 20, so the call for tender is still in progress.

Can the minister assure us that the process will be reviewed and that Mr. Côté will be able to testify on this issue, which we find very worrisome? Right now, we are wondering how it took so long to uncover the relationship between Mr. Côté and Ms. Couillard.

Senator Fortier: It sounds as though the honourable senator seeking further reassurance about the supervisor’s review process. He will submit an interim report to the deputy minister. I am sure Senator Hervieux-Payette will agree that the deputy minister will report that the process was conducted with utmost transparency and at arm’s length from the minister’s office. I find that very comforting. This goes beyond partisanship. I know that she can be partisan, but she has also shown that she can be non-partisan. The important thing here is to make sure taxpayers and suppliers know that the Government of Canada’s procurement system is fair. That has been my primary concern since becoming Minister of Public Works and Government Services. In saying that, I am being completely non-partisan.

What happened is truly unfortunate. Mr. Côté was negligent in failing to inform his immediate superior, my chief of staff, that he had a relationship with a person connected to a company that could have bid on this contract.

• (1405)

[English]

Hon. Sharon Carstairs: Honourable senators, my question is to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. Can the minister tell the house if Mr. Bernard Côté had top security clearance, which is the normal practice for a senior political staff

person, and therefore, did he have access to secure and/or secret documents of the cabinet and/or secret or secure documents of the Department of Public Works?

Senator Fortier: In terms of his clearance, Mr. Côté was responsible for the Montreal office, pursuant to my responsibilities for Greater Montreal. I am situating Mr. Côté with respect to me before I answer the question. His position in my office was really to be responsible for that aspect of my job, which is to look after Greater Montreal.

Mr. Côté had very few dealings with the department in terms of Public Works matters, per se. I will need to check on his level of clearance. I do not know the answer, and I will respond to the honourable senator on this issue promptly tomorrow, if the honourable senator will be in the chamber.

Senator Carstairs: I can assure the minister I will be here. I usually am.

However, in terms of the matter of secure documents, many of those documents might indeed involve his responsibilities as the minister with responsibilities for the Montreal area. Those documents do go to cabinet, and one would presume, therefore, that the honourable senator’s staff person would have the security clearance to allow him to brief the honourable senator on the impact of such material on the area of Montreal.

My next logical question is: Can the minister assure this house that Ms. Couillard had no access to those documents?

Senator Fortier: Logically, as the honourable senator suggests, we should determine what level of security clearance Mr. Côté had, and that will indicate the basket of documents to which he had access. Then I will be able to answer the honourable senator in a more concise, precise and respectful way tomorrow.

Senator Carstairs: I suggest to the honourable minister that senior staff, no matter whether they function out of Ottawa or in a ministerial office located somewhere in Canada, do have the type of security clearance that I have inquired of regarding Mr. Côté.

I would like to know, in light of the incident of security documents being left for five weeks unnoticed by this government, if the honourable senator is conducting an investigation to ensure that none of his documents have gone astray.

Senator Fortier: I do not need to conduct an inquiry. My documents do not go astray. The answer to that question is no.

Hon. Terry M. Mercer: Could the minister help us here? We want to ensure that the Canadian public understands what has happened. Could the minister perhaps tell us precisely when he was made aware of the situation? We are aware of his action. Then what did he do? Did he inform his superiors or the Prime Minister’s Office and others who needed to be informed about this situation to protect the security of the government and the integrity of the Department of Public Works and Government Services?

Senator Fortier: Honourable senators, I was informed of this matter yesterday morning. Mr. Côté submitted his resignation, which was accepted. The Prime Minister was informed. That is the sequence of events.

[Later]

Honourable senators, I wish to clarify an offer I made to Senator Carstairs to provide her with an answer tomorrow. I have just been reminded that I will be missing Question Period tomorrow. If I may, I will pass the answer through the leader, if that is acceptable to the senator and the Senate. I would appreciate that indulgence; otherwise, we will have to wait until next week.

THE ENVIRONMENT

MEASURES TO FIGHT AIR POLLUTION

Hon. Grant Mitchell: Honourable senators, the Conservatives, as hard as it is to believe, have actually found a new mouthpiece for their environmental policy. Get this — it is a grease spot. There is something to be said about a grease spot as one of the most perfectly and specifically well-chosen symbols to capture the dubious environmental policy of this particular government. It makes you think that maybe even the Conservatives have become so tired of that snarling, sneering Mr. Baird that they think these silly ads are an improvement.

• (1410)

My question is to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Why does this Conservative government continue to argue against that tired, old, outmoded, 20th century, oh-so-yesterday form of taxation on good things like income and profit, and give pollution, on the other hand, a free ride?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)): I thank the honourable senator for his question. Being the wife of an auto mechanic, I can tell him a few things about grease spots. Grease spots are very honourable things in this society. Many people work at jobs where they get quite greasy.

The fact is the government has taken many actions on the environmental front. There is no way to put a tax on carbon and not have it directly impact consumers. Our plan, more correctly, goes after the polluters. The interesting thing for Senator Mitchell is that his leader ran for the leadership of his party by explicitly saying he was against carbon tax. He won the leadership of the Liberal Party on the understanding that there would be no carbon tax. Now he supports the carbon tax, at a time when the price of gas is going up before our very eyes. People on fixed incomes, people who do not pay income tax, many low-income earners and seniors, do not believe — nor should they — that a direct attack on consumers, somehow or other, will be revenue neutral or that they will have, at the end, tax relief.

The fact is, we took some action ourselves on tax relief by reducing the GST, and this is of direct assistance to consumers. Over the past few months, Senator Mitchell's leader has made billions of dollars in promises, if ever elected, and I think consumers can figure out relatively quickly that this tax is a means to pay for those promises.

Senator Mitchell: Speaking of campaign promises that leaders renege on, the honourable senator's leader ran for leadership of this country saying he would not change the tax on income trusts and would not renege on the accords in the Atlantic provinces.

What is appallingly naive about the leader's answer is that she actually thinks somehow that a cap-and-trade system will not increase the cost of goods to consumers. Does the leader not realize that it will increase the cost to consumers? Does the leader not realize that, unlike the green shift, her government will have no money to offset those costs to consumers? That consumer, that senior the leader refers to, that farmer who perhaps does not pay taxes, that person in the Maritimes who has to pay for fuel oil, will have no hope of compensation for having that offset by another source of revenue.

• (1415)

Senator LeBreton: First, the honourable senator is asking me to respond to something we have not seen. In terms of the honourable senator's own policy, we are left to rely on what his leader has said and the various conflicting views that the honourable senator and his party have taken over the past few months. However, his leader has said a carbon tax, and a tax is a tax is a tax. It is a consumer tax.

In our platform and policy, we simply say that we will go after the polluters and make the polluters pay, not the seniors and not the families struggling to keep gas in their tanks, food on their tables and their mortgages paid. These consumers are the last people that we should be going after.

I suspect the honourable senator has noticed, because he seems to keep up on issues of the environment, what has happened in Europe. All the European countries that have followed this plan of action that the honourable senator is proposing to take are now drastically trying to figure out a way to back away from it.

Senator Tkachuk: Exactly. They are rioting in the streets.

Senator Mitchell: Does the Leader of the Government not understand that unlike the Prime Minister, Jack Mintz, a real economist of C.D. Howe Institute fame, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers based in Alberta, Thomas d'Aquino of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives and many other prominent economists and businesspeople are demanding a carbon tax because they understand its economic, business and environmental advantages?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, he was the same person who called for a tax on income trusts. The fact is that everyone has opinions and views, to which they are entitled. These are the very same people who still think that we should not have cut, as we had promised, the GST from 7 per cent to 6 per cent to 5 per cent. I would not have a hard time finding thousands of people in this country who are very happy that the government reduced the GST, a consumer tax.

Senator Mitchell: Who brought that tax in and where was the honourable senator when it was brought in?

Senator LeBreton: I witnessed all the people in the Senate fighting against the GST, blowing kazoos and trying to stop it. Then I witnessed Mr. Chrétien as he tried to take credit for bringing in the GST. I was here then in the Red Chamber.

We still have the GST, but instead of 7 per cent, it is now 5 per cent. We had the honourable senator's former leader, Mr. Chrétien, going around in the 1993 election promising to "axe the tax," the GST.

If the honourable senator wants to get into that debate, I am well equipped to take him on.

HEALTH

PROPOSED NEW REGULATIONS ON GENERIC DRUGS

Hon. Marilyn Trenholme Counsell: My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. I must say that on this historic day, I would have liked to ask, on behalf of all First Nations children, a question about Aboriginal Head Start, but I am still waiting for a delayed answer. I simply want to remind the honourable leader that this is a very important issue. I do not think it is adequate to have a goal that 25 per cent of these children have access to Head Start within five years. I hope the honourable leader is using her influence to raise that figure much higher.

Honourable senators, today, I will wear my doctor's hat. I want to ask this question in relation to a report and several things I have read. From coast to coast, provinces are lashing back at proposed federal regulations that would extend the patent life of a number of popular medications and postpone the introduction of generic copies, a move that could cost drug plans hundreds of millions of dollars and have a direct cost impact on patients who pay for their own drugs.

When the proposed new rules were introduced last month, the federal government acknowledged that they could result in delayed savings to consumers and provincial drug plans. According to at least two provinces, Ottawa did not consult the provinces and territories adequately, giving those jurisdictions only 15 days to respond to the proposed new regulations.

• (1420)

According to the B.C. Minister of Health, we do not even know at this point the number of drugs that will be affected. We do know that Lipitor, for cholesterol and lipids, Norvasc, for blood pressure, and Celebrex, for arthritis, are included. No generic forms for these three and others exist.

Why has the federal government put large pharmaceutical companies ahead of Canadians who desperately need these medications for their health, many of whom cannot pay the full price? For example, for one of these drugs, the difference between the patent and generic price would be \$50 to \$75 per month.

Why has the government failed to put patients first?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)): I thank the honourable senator for her question. I am quite surprised at the line of questioning on such an historic day, when the country as a whole and the government on behalf of our citizens is making an apology to the victims of residential schools. I thought Senator Milne's statement was particularly moving. I thought, perhaps, that would be the tone today instead of questions about Julie Couillard and grease spots.

[Senator LeBreton]

Today, I spoke to Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine around lunchtime. It was interesting because one of the proposals I had made to him has taken the exact form of the opposition's motion. I am surprised that, on an important day like today, this is the tone of Question Period.

With regard to the honourable senator's question about Aboriginal children, she knows that I have undertaken to obtain information on that subject.

The issue of generics and patent drugs has been the subject of debate before in Parliament. Various governments — the former Mulroney government, the Conservative government and the Liberal governments of Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Martin — have wrestled with the issue of generics and the protection of patents. It is a difficult debate, with strong arguments on both sides. I am well aware of the concerns. I hear a great deal about it due to my seniors' portfolio, especially regarding the cost of named drugs for which there are no generics.

With regard to the honourable senator's specific questions as to what Health Canada is planning to do in terms of availability of much less expensive generics, I will attempt to obtain an answer.

REPORT OF ADVISOR ON HEALTHY CHILDREN AND YOUTH—ABORIGINAL HEAD START PROGRAMS—EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Marilyn Trenholme Counsell: I know it would have been great if all of our questions had been on the First Nations and Aboriginal issues. It would have been a perfect day to have the honourable leader or the deputy leader address the issue of the Aboriginal Head Start program.

As a result of my question some weeks ago concerning this program, and in keeping with my great concern that Canada is moving very slowly and inadequately on the question of Aboriginal Head Start for children, has the leader taken this issue to the cabinet level? Has the leader exerted her enormous influence at that level to see that more is done for Aboriginal children in this country?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)): First, I am not in a position to share with the honourable senator my comments in the confidences of cabinet. I do believe there has been a lot of coverage in the last few days about the great steps that this government has taken in many areas including land claims, safe drinking water, health and education.

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development told us this morning that when he was at an event last night with Aboriginal leaders, the Aboriginal community extolled the great work of the government. Instead of just talking about these things, the government is doing something about them.

• (1425)

With regard to Head Start, I think the honourable senator has asked me about this subject on a previous occasion. I would be happy to provide her with an answer at a later date.

THE SENATE

TRIBUTE TO DEPARTING PAGES

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, before proceeding to the next item, I would like us to say farewell to two of our departing pages.

[*Translation*]

Having spent a very rewarding year as a Senate page, Marie-Pierre Daigle will be dedicating herself to one of her passions, the discovery of other cultures. She will be going to Mexico on an exchange in January 2009 to pursue international studies in Spanish, her third language. When she returns to Canada, she plans to move to Vancouver and stay there one year in order to volunteer at the Winter Olympic Games in February 2010. She would like to thank everyone who made this an unforgettable year.

[*English*]

Honourable senators, our page Steve Lichti is very grateful to have had the opportunity to work in the Senate as a page. It was truly an extraordinary learning experience this past year. Steve will be studying on exchange at the Universidad de Granada in Spain next year, where he hopes to discover Spanish music, movies, cuisine and, in his spare time, study at school.

On behalf of all honourable senators, thank you for your service at the Senate.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CANADA MARINE ACT CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT PILOTAGE ACT

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Oliver, seconded by the Honourable Senator Segal, for the third reading of Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Marine Act, the Canada Transportation Act, the Pilotage Act and other Acts in consequence.

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?

Motion agreed to, and bill read third time and passed.

The Senate adjourned until Thursday, June 12, 2008, at 1:30 p.m.

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