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Tuesday, January 27, 2009



THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER

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THE SENATE

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

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

Prayers.

AFGHANISTAN—FALLEN SOLDIERS

SILENT TRIBUTE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, before we proceed, I would invite senators to rise and observe one minute of silence in memory of Warrant Officer Robert John Wilson, Corporal Mark Robert McLaren, Private Demetrios Diplaros, Corporal Thomas James Hamilton, Private John Michael Roy Curwin, Private Justin Peter Jones, Private Michael Freeman, Warrant Officer Gaetan Maxime Roberge, Sergeant Gregory John Kruse and Trooper Brian Richard Good whose tragic deaths occurred over the last few months while serving their country in Afghanistan.

Honourable senators then stood in silent tribute.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, tears of joy filled my eyes one week ago as I witnessed Barack Obama sworn in as the forty-fourth President of the United States of America.

No election in the western world in my lifetime has had as profound an impact on the globe as this one. From places as far away as Mexico City, Kenya, and London, millions watched the inaugural address on television screens in public squares, bars and living rooms, hanging on Obama's every word.

• (1405)

A 47-year-old American lawyer of mixed race is impacting the globe. In Paris, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said, "We are eager for him to get to work so that with him we can change the world."

In his letter of congratulations to the new president, Nelson Mandela wrote, "You, Mister President, have brought a new voice of hope that these problems can be addressed and that we can in fact change the world and make of it a better place." Mr. Mandela added that, "Your Presidency brings hope of new beginnings in the relations between nations, and that the challenges we all face . . . will be addressed with a new spirit of openness and accommodation."

Nearly two thirds of African-Americans now believe that Martin Luther King's dream has been fulfilled; namely that people ". . . will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character." President Obama is the

personification of this dream. Barack Obama is the first African-American President of the United States, a ground-breaking event with symbolic significance. An article in *The Economist* commented that, "In his speech, Mr. Obama did not mention his colour. He did not need to. The whole world could see his face."

I was inspired when he said, "This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed . . . and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath." I was deeply moved when he said that because of my personal experience of not being served in certain restaurants in Canada.

Honourable senators, we do not yet know how, but the Obama presidency will impact Canada in major ways in relation to things such as trade, environmental policies and maybe — just maybe — our awareness of the business case for diversity.

President Obama's victory offers hope to Canadians that the leaders in our country will address some of the discrimination Black Canadians and other visible minorities are subject to, such as a lack of visible minorities in the executive ranks of the public service of Canada.

In any event, we are blessed that President Obama will be making his first official visit to Ottawa in the coming weeks.

President Obama is truly a role model for millions of people and a source of inspiration around the globe. He is more than just a Black president. As one person said, he is a politically educated man who has touched the imagination of people all around the world.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I would like to begin by congratulating and extending a warm welcome to our 18 new senators.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the Official Languages Act. The year 1969 was a historic moment in the advancement of language rights in Canada. The recommendations that appeared in the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism led to the first Official Languages Act, which officially recognized French and English as the official languages of all federal institutions in Canada.

In 1988, the act was amended, first to ensure respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada and ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions; second, to support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities; and third, to set out the powers, duties and functions of federal institutions with respect to the official languages of Canada.

In 2005, thanks to the work of Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier, the act was amended once again to ensure that federal institutions would take positive measures to support the development of official language communities and to foster the full recognition and use of both English and French nationwide.

For the past 40 years, linguistic minority communities have been fighting for access to services, health care and good quality education in the official language of their choice. These communities are still working hard because, despite the government's announcement of a roadmap for linguistic duality, the actual implementation of the roadmap remains abstract.

In recent years, the government has taken a minimalist approach toward enforcement of the Official Languages Act, and language rights have been eroded. It is unfortunate that the government has been so reluctant to enforce the regulations and slow to implement amendments to the Official Languages Act.

• (1410)

There is an obvious lack of coordination in the machinery of government when it comes to official languages. After 40 years, a great deal of work still needs to be done. Positive steps need to be defined, community consultations are greatly needed and anticipated, and an overall vision must be established.

I sincerely hope that we will see this legislation fully enforced in 2009. I hope the roadmap for linguistic duality will be implemented and increase in scope. The lack of commitment and political will should, I hope, be a thing of the past.

[English]

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

RESOLUTION ON CONFLICT IN GAZA

Hon. David Tkachuk: Honourable senators, on January 12, 2009, the 47-member United Nations Human Rights Council passed a resolution on the conflict in Gaza by a vote of 33 to 1. There were 13 abstentions.

The resolution, which was drafted by some Arab, Asian and African countries, strongly condemned Israel for its military operations in Gaza, but it failed to adequately acknowledge the rocket attacks on Israel that precipitated the conflict — rocket attacks by Hamas and its allies that have been taking place there daily since 2001. These rocket attacks against Israeli civilians over the last eight years are estimated by some to exceed 10,000.

How unbalanced was the resolution? In a United Nations press release, the resolution:

... demanded the occupying power, Israel, to immediately withdraw its military forces from Gaza. The Council also decided to dispatch an urgent independent fact-finding mission to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the occupying power against the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

[Senator Tardif]

... the Council called for the immediate cessation of Israeli military attacks throughout the Palestinian Occupied Territory and called upon the occupying power to end its occupation to all Palestinian lands occupied since 1967, and to respect its commitment within the peace process towards the establishment of the independent sovereign Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital. The Council also demanded that the occupying power stop the targeting of civilians and medical facilities and staff as well as the systematic destruction of cultural heritage. It demanded further that the occupying power lift the siege and open all borders.

Honourable senators, the only member of the UN Human Rights Council to vote against this one-sided resolution was Canada. The European members abstained; and not only did Canada vote no, it asked that the vote be recorded to ensure that there was no mistaking its opposition.

I congratulate the Canadian government and, in particular, the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Minister Lawrence Cannon for taking such a courageous and just stand by voting against this resolution.

YOUTH JUSTICE INITIATIVES

Hon. Grant Mitchell: Honourable senators, the Prime Minister announced in the fall his intention to put certain 14-year-old children in jail for the rest of their lives, and ultimately to place these children amongst some of the toughest, most hardened criminals, and in some of the most frightening institutions in our society, as if that approach would make Canadians safer.

As I thought about that intention, I could hardly believe that anyone in a just and compassionate society would be so angry at a 14-year-old that they would contemplate a sentence of such magnitude and futility.

Has the government considered even for a moment whether a 14-year-old child who is sufficiently disturbed to commit a violent crime would be deterred for an instant by this particular sentence? More to the point, I wonder if a 14-year-old child who is sufficiently disturbed to commit such a crime would even know about this sentence.

It is instructive to note that last year, this Canadian government, on the one hand, raised the age of sexual consent from age 14 to age 16 because apparently 14-year-olds are unable to make that kind of decision maturely. On the other hand, it lowered to 14 the age at which a child can be treated like an adult in the adult court system as though that same child can somehow maturely think through a violent crime.

• (1415)

I know in my heart of hearts that this initiative does not reflect in any way the core values that I grew up believing and still believe, values that made this country great and made our people special. I also know that it does not capture the deeply held core Canadian values of compassion, justice and fairness. People across the world fight for such justice and liberty. They look to us as a beacon of hope because they want so desperately to emulate those values in their lives.

Why is this government so locked in the past and stuck on the idea that harsher criminal sentences, combined with little else, will solve this problem? All of the evidence is to the contrary. If we want to get tough on crime, then let us get tough on the causes of crime. Let us attack child poverty, violence against women and child abuse. Let us give police forces the resources they need to deal with gang violence and Internet crime. Let us talk about how to build the facilities and the programs to deal with mental health.

Honourable senators know that there are no simple solutions to complex problems. Canadians know this, and I know as sure as I stand here today that there are no solutions to any problems when government reduces its policy initiatives to nothing more than hot-button politics.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PAGES OF REFLECTION: A JOURNAL OF ESSAYS BY SENATE PAGES, VOLUME 2, FALL 2008

DOCUMENT TABLED

Hon. Sharon Carstairs: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 28(4), it is with great pleasure that I request leave to table a document entitled *Pages of Reflection: A Journal of Essays by Senate Pages, Volume 2, Fall 2008*.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

[Translation]

PROPERTY QUALIFICATIONS OF SENATORS

MOTION ADOPTED

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 58(1), I move:

That, during the first twelve sitting days following the adoption of this motion, any Senator at the time of prorogation of the first session of the fortieth Parliament who had not yet made and filed the renewed Declaration of Property required under Rule 135 shall do so; and

That immediately after the expiration of this period, the Clerk of the Senate shall lay upon the Table a list of those Senators who have made and filed the renewed Declaration during the first or second sessions of the fortieth Parliament.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO CHANGE COMMENCEMENT TIME ON WEDNESDAYS AND THURSDAYS AND TO EFFECT WEDNESDAY ADJOURNMENTS

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

That, for the remainder of the current session,

- (a) when the Senate sits on a Wednesday or a Thursday, it shall sit at 1:30 p.m. notwithstanding rule 5(1)(a);
- (b) when the Senate sits on a Wednesday, it stand adjourned at 4 p.m., unless it has been suspended for the purpose of taking a deferred vote or has earlier adjourned; and
- (c) when a vote is deferred until 5:30 p.m. on a Wednesday, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings, immediately prior to any adjournment but no later than 4 p.m., to suspend the sitting until 5:30 p.m. for the taking of the deferred vote, and that committees be authorized to meet during the period that the sitting is suspended.

• (1420)

[English]

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF CANADA ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein presented Bill S-201, An Act to amend the Library and Archives of Canada Act (National Portrait Gallery).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Lowell Murray presented Bill S-202, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (repeal of fixed election dates).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK OF CANADA ACT

• (1425)

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein presented Bill S-203, An Act to amend the Business Development Bank of Canada Act (municipal infrastructure bonds) and to make consequential amendments to another Act.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

NATIONAL CAPITAL ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Mira Spivak presented Bill S-204, An Act to amend the National Capital Act (establishment and protection of Gatineau Park).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein presented Bill S-205, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (suicide bombings).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

COMMISSIONER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Elaine McCoy presented Bill S-206, An Act respecting the office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Sharon Carstairs presented Bill S-207, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (foreign postings).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein presented Bill S-208, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (clean drinking water).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette presented Bill S-209, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of children).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

[*English*]

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Jim Munson presented Bill S-210, An Act respecting World Autism Awareness Day.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

DRINKING WATER SOURCES BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein presented Bill S-211, An Act to require the Minister of the Environment to establish, in co-operation with the provinces, an agency with the power to identify and protect Canada's watersheds that will constitute sources of drinking water in the future.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT, 1999

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Tommy Banks presented Bill S-212, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Grant Mitchell presented Bill S-213, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (carbon offset tax credit).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

• (1430)

[English]

CANADA SECURITIES BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein presented Bill S-214, An Act to regulate securities and to provide for a single securities commission for Canada.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

CONSTITUTION ACT, 1867

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Tommy Banks presented Bill S-215, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Property qualifications of Senators).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

FEDERAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACT AND THE AUDITOR GENERAL ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Tommy Banks presented Bill S-216, An Act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act and the Auditor General Act (involvement of Parliament).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

NATIONAL PHILANTHROPY DAY BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein presented Bill S-217, An Act respecting a National Philanthropy Day.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO STRIKE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING AND TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO PERMIT ELECTRONIC COVERAGE, MEET DURING ADJOURNMENTS OF THE SENATE AND REFER PAPERS AND EVIDENCE FROM PREVIOUS PARLIAMENT

Hon. Sharon Carstairs: Honourable senators, I give notice that, two days hence, I will move:

That a Special Committee of the Senate be appointed to examine and report upon the implications of an aging society in Canada;

That, notwithstanding rule 85(1)(b), the committee be comprised of seven members, namely the Honourable Senators Carstairs, P.C., Chaput, Cools, Cordy, Keon, Mercer, and Stratton, and that three members constitute a quorum;

That the committee examine the issue of aging in our society in relation to, but not limited to:

[Translation]

- promoting active living and well being;
- housing and transportation needs;
- financial security and retirement;
- abuse and neglect;
- health promotion and prevention; and
- health care needs, including chronic diseases, medication use, mental health, palliative care, home care and caregiving;

● (1435)

[English]

That the committee review public programs and services for seniors, the gaps that exist in meeting the needs of seniors, and the implications for future service delivery as the population ages;

That the committee review strategies on aging implemented in other countries;

That the committee review Canada's role and obligations in light of the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging;

That the committee consider the appropriate role of the federal government in helping Canadians age well;

That the committee have power to send for persons, papers and records; to examine witnesses; to report from time to time and to print such papers and evidence from day to day as may be ordered by the committee;

That the committee be authorized to permit coverage by electronic media of its public proceedings with the least possible disruption of its hearings;

That, pursuant to rule 95(3)(a), the committee be authorized to meet during periods that the Senate stands adjourned for a period exceeding one week;

[Translation]

That the papers and evidence received and taken and work accomplished by the committee on this subject during the First and Second Session of the Thirty-ninth Parliament be referred to the committee; and

That the committee submit its final report no later than April 30, 2009, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until 90 days after the tabling of the final report.

BANKING, TRADE AND COMMERCE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY CREDIT AND DEBIT CARD SYSTEMS

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

That the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce be authorized to examine and report on the credit and debit card systems in Canada and their relative rates and fees, in particular for businesses and consumers; and

That the Committee report to the Senate no later than June 30, 2009, and that the Committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until 90 days after the tabling of the final report.

[English]

CONSTITUTION ACT, 1867

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AMEND REAL PROPERTY PROVISIONS FOR SENATORS

Hon. Tommy Banks: Honourable senators, I give notice that, on Thursday, January 29, 2009, I will move that:

Whereas, in the 2nd Session of the 40th Parliament, a bill has been introduced in the Senate to amend the Constitution of Canada by repealing the provision that requires that a person, in order to qualify for appointment to the Senate and to maintain their place in the Senate after being appointed, own land with a net worth of at least four thousand dollars within the province for which he or she is appointed;

Whereas a related provision of the Constitution makes reference, in respect of the province of Quebec, to the real property qualification that is proposed to be repealed;

Whereas, in respect of a Senator who represents Quebec, the real property qualification must be had in the electoral division for which the Senator is appointed or the Senator must be resident in that division;

Whereas the division of Quebec into 24 electoral districts, corresponding to the 24 seats in the former Legislative Council of Quebec, reflects the historic boundaries of Lower Canada and no longer reflects the full territorial limits of the province of Quebec; and Whereas section 43 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* provides that an amendment to the Constitution of Canada may be made by proclamation issued by the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada where so authorized by resolutions of the Senate and House of Commons and of the legislative assembly of each province to which the amendment applies;

Now, therefore, the Senate resolves that an amendment to the Constitution of Canada be authorized to be made by proclamation issued by Her Excellency the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada in accordance with the schedule hereto.

SCHEDULE

AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF CANADA

1. Section 22 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* is amended by striking out the second paragraph of that section, beginning with "In the Case of Quebec" and ending with "the Consolidated Statutes of Canada."

2. (1) Paragraph (5) of section 23 of the Act is replaced by the following:

(5) He shall be resident in the Province for which he is appointed.

(2) Paragraph (6) of section 23 of the Act is repealed.

Citation

3. This Amendment may be cited as the *Constitution Amendment, [year of proclamation] (Quebec: electoral divisions and real property qualifications of Senators)*.

• (1440)

IRANIAN NUCLEAR CAPACITY AND PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Hugh Segal: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 56, I give notice that, two days hence:

I will call the attention of the Senate to the government of Iran's imminent nuclear war capacity and its preparation for war in the Middle East, and to the commitment of Canada and its allies, including the U.S.A., Russia, Turkey, the Gulf States, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and others, to diplomatic and strategic initiatives that exclude first-use

nuclear attack, the ability of Canada to engage with its allies in order to understand, measure and contain this threat, and the capacity of Canada to support allied efforts to prevent a thermonuclear exchange in the Middle East.

TREATY ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

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

I will call the attention of the Senate to the Treaty on Cluster Munitions.

QUESTION PERIOD

FINANCE

STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Hon. James S. Cowan (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, Canadians across the country are increasingly worried about losing their jobs, their pensions and their savings, yet all they have seen and heard from this government so far is inaction and political gamesmanship. Why should Canadians trust a prime minister who has repeatedly manipulated the truth? Why should Canadians trust a prime minister who has repeatedly chosen partisanship over statesmanship? Why should Canadians trust a prime minister who has broken promise after promise to suit his short-term political agenda?

My question to the Leader of the Government in the Senate is simple: Why should Canadians trust this prime minister now?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Minister of State (Seniors)): Honourable senators, before I answer the question, may I congratulate Senator Cowan and his party on the change of leadership, as well as the wisdom of the new leadership in leaving him in his present capacity as Leader of the Opposition.

With regard to the honourable senator's question, the Canadian public clearly trusts the Prime Minister to steer the government through this difficult economic time. The Prime Minister and all members of the government, especially ministers responsible for economic portfolios, have worked hard over the last two months to broadly consult all levels of government, governments of various political stripes, and Canadians from all walks of life.

The budget that will be presented an hour and a quarter from now will address many of the concerns that were expressed. I believe that the Prime Minister, with his background as an economist and as a strong leader, along with the very good work that was done by the Minister of Finance and others, will provide the necessary leadership. The budget will address the concerns that Canadians face in light of the worldwide economic crisis.

When the Prime Minister attended the G20 meeting in Washington last November 15, he made a commitment to those other nations that Canada would do its part in dealing with the worldwide economic slowdown.

Senator Cowan: Honourable senators, does the leader not understand how seriously the actions of the Prime Minister since the October election have eroded the trust that must exist between the Prime Minister and the people of Canada?

• (1445)

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, I do not know to what the honourable senator is referring specifically. The November update was an explanation of the situation at that time. The government was not in a deficit situation then; it was dealing with a surplus. Many measures were taken in that economic update with regard to seniors and others, including trying to deal with the lack of available credit.

The public let all politicians know how they felt about the update and how they felt about the then proposed coalition. It is erroneous to say that the public has lost confidence either in the government or in the Prime Minister as a result of the events of last fall.

[Translation]

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Over the past few days, the government has been leaking key budget points before the official introduction, which is to take place today. When ministers make such announcements during press conferences or to the media, they demonstrate disdain for the role of Parliament and undermine the credibility of the budget and the Department of Finance.

When will this government stop courting public opinion and playing politics at the expense of our parliamentary system and start caring about the interests and needs of Canadians, particularly in times of economic crisis?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: That question is interesting, honourable senators, because the government was urged to consult widely with the Canadian public and with all the stakeholders in our economy, from small businesses to large corporations, provinces and municipalities. All ministers of the government have worked diligently, except for the brief period of time between Christmas and New Year's. I believe this consultation was the broadest, largest and most extensive ever undertaken by a government — all conducted in an open and transparent manner with public meetings.

Honourable senators, the ministers who travelled around the country in the last week, dealing specifically with their portfolios, were simply carrying forward on this requirement to be honest and transparent about their plans for their departments. They scheduled public meetings that were open to anyone who wished to attend — and, of course, the meetings were well attended — to report to various groups, for example, the mining,

[Senator LeBreton]

forestry, cultural and tourism industries — on what they could expect in the budget as a result of their consultations.

Senator Comeau: A breath of fresh air.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: I have a related question. Consultation is all well and good, but those statements went beyond consultation. Those were official announcements made by ministers. In the past, such actions would surely have been censured.

It seems that the government is more interested in managing the media than in managing the economy.

Just eight short weeks ago, the government announced that there was no recession and that there would be no deficit. Now that we are in the middle of an economic crisis and the government is announcing that we can expect a \$34 billion deficit this year and a \$30 billion deficit next year.

This government has a habit of saying one thing and doing another. How can we possibly have confidence in it?

• (1450)

[English]

Senator LeBreton: I thank the honourable senator for her question, but the fact remains that we are speaking about an economic update and I cannot be responsible for people's expectations of what they thought would be in the economic update. The government has been projecting a surplus for this current fiscal year, not a deficit. That is the situation.

Regarding the announcements made by various ministers, there is ample proof that no details were revealed that would affect the markets. There is nothing untoward or unlawful about cabinet ministers making announcements that affect their departments, especially when the announcements are the direct result of consultations they have had with people regarding matters concerning their own portfolios.

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

APPOINTMENT PROCESS

Hon. Jim Munson: My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Yesterday's note from the throne offered a new glimpse on the Conservative government. Yesterday, we heard words we have never heard before: working together, solidarity, reaching out, listening, unity — and my favourite — non-partisan cooperation.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Munson: Honourable senators, it sounded more like a New Year's resolution than a Speech from the Throne. However, we do not have to look too far to see that words and reality with this Conservative government do not always coincide. Remember the promise of no Senate appointments? Today, we have 18 new colleagues. Remember fixed election

dates? The Prime Minister went ahead and called an election anyway. Remember parliamentary involvement in government appointments? Remember the call for transparency? Honourable senators, without a parliamentary hearing process we have a new Supreme Court judge.

Would the leader tell us: Why should we believe the lovely words in the note from the throne when experience tells us to expect the opposite?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Minister of State (Seniors)): Honourable senators, I never cease to be amazed by the chutzpah of the honourable senator. Senator Munson is the former director of communications to the Prime Minister who said he would axe the tax — no GST. Senator Munson is the former director of communications to the Prime Minister who said he would scrap NAFTA.

In answer to the honourable senator's question regarding the Throne Speech, I think everyone will acknowledge that the worldwide economic situation has changed drastically and continues to do so almost on a weekly basis.

The Canadian public wants parliamentarians to deal with the economic situation and to put aside their partisan beliefs. We have been listening to the public.

The honourable senator specifically mentioned the Supreme Court. Senator Munson knows that one Supreme Court judge went through the parliamentary process. The events of the fall hampered the parliamentary procedure for the new Supreme Court judge. As honourable senators know, the Chief Justice made a specific request to the Prime Minister to appoint this highly qualified person as the court could not go on much longer with one judge less than required.

Before agreeing to the Chief Justice's request, the Prime Minister consulted with the Leader of the Opposition, and Mr. Ignatieff gave his blessing that, in this particular case, we should proceed. It was also made very clear that appointment of future judges will go back to the parliamentary process.

Senator Segal: That is the spirit of cooperation.

• (1455)

Senator Munson: With respect to the comment about chutzpah, these answers are beginning to sound like David Letterman's "Great Moments in Presidential History."

I will leave it at that because I want my colleagues who work as a team here to ask other questions.

Hon. Norman K. Atkins: Honourable senators, I congratulate all our new senators and welcome them to Ottawa and to this house.

My question is to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Can we now assume that the Prime Minister and some of the ministers of this government will refrain from referring to senators as "political hacks"?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, I have not seen any references to senators being "political hacks," but I will take the honourable senator's word for it.

We swore in 18 outstanding Canadian citizens who bring a great deal to the Senate in terms of their personal qualifications. However, that initiative does not take away from the fact that the government still believes what we ran on in the last election; namely, that Senate reform is necessary and required in the year 2009. At some point, we will craft legislation to bring before Parliament a Senate selection process and a bill that has an eight-year term for senators. I will work with the Honourable Steven Fletcher, the Minister of State responsible for Democratic Reform.

In the meantime, as the Prime Minister has said, we need senators in this place to deal with government legislation, and we want to obtain support from both sides for the legislation when it is introduced into Parliament.

Hon. Joan Fraser: Honourable senators, that response from the Leader of the Government was fascinating. I add my voice to those who have been congratulating our new colleagues, not only for their quantity but also for their quality. It is an impressive bunch, and we all look forward to working with them.

However, there are interesting things about this list. As I read it, under the terms of the Constitution, four of our new colleagues will be with us for less than the Prime Minister's previously preferred term of eight years. Six of them will be here for more than even the 15 years that many senators have recommended as an appropriate term.

Does this situation mean the Prime Minister has changed his mind about the desirability of eight-year terms, or does it mean, once again, that we cannot know which of his many declarations to believe in?

• (1500)

Senator LeBreton: As the honourable senator said, it is "fascinating" that the honourable senator has done the arithmetic on the ages and potential tenure of our new senators. All of that information is interesting, but it does not detract from the fact that the government intends to bring in legislation that will provide for Senate selection and will recommend a term of eight years. I hope that is what the government legislation, when tabled, will indicate. Our hope is that honourable senators on both sides will support that legislation. It is nothing more and nothing less than that.

The particular age of each senator appointed yesterday does not detract from the intent of the legislation. There is nothing fascinating about that. It is a simple reality.

Senator Fraser: Why did the Prime Minister not put his money where his mouth was? He could have done so. We have precedents, familiar to many members of this chamber, of prime ministers appointing large numbers of senators who have less than eight years to serve. He could have done the same thing. He could have appointed 18 people who had eight years or less to serve, which is presumably what he believed in.

I hear an honourable senator talking about age. Some of our most effective senators are over 68 years old, as are some of the hecklers.

It is a serious question, honourable senators, because there seems to be a disconnect between what the Prime Minister says and what he does. Why does he not do what he says?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, the senators who were appointed were summoned to the Senate on the basis of what they could contribute. It is ludicrous for my honourable friend to suggest that the Prime Minister or anyone would go through a census list to find only people who are 67 years old.

The Prime Minister asked the Governor General to summon the senators based on existing rules, and he hopes now to introduce legislation that will be supported by all honourable senators. How my honourable friend can relate legislation that has not yet been tabled in Parliament to Senate appointments that are currently made is a stretch that even I do not want to make.

FINANCE

STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Hon. Lorna Milne: Honourable senators, this Conservative government is so eager to help Canadians spend their way into a deficit that yesterday — one day before the budget was to be tabled — Transport Minister John Baird called a news conference to unveil \$7 billion in infrastructure spending. We will have time in the next while to discuss this infrastructure spending. However, my question is about last year's budget. How much money was there in last year's budget for infrastructure spending and how much of that has actually gone out the door?

Senator Munson: Zero.

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Minister of State (Seniors)): Honourable senators, I do not have the exact figures and would be happy to take that question as notice.

As the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and all ministers, including Minister Baird, have gone through the consultation process, one of the frustrations for municipal, provincial and federal governments has been the excessive amount of red tape. A great deal of the infrastructure money has been held up by red tape. This concern was expressed two weeks ago by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Red tape was cited as the primary reason much of the infrastructure money did not flow as quickly as it should have. It made no sense to the municipal and provincial leaders that the same three levels of government go through the same process in order to approve the same funding.

As to last year's budget and the exact amount of money that was sent to the various municipalities and provinces for infrastructure projects, I will take the question as notice.

• (1505)

Senator Milne: I thank the Leader of the Government in the Senate for her usual thoughtful and composed answer; this time composed about red tape.

I see we actually have red coats on the other side.

Senator Fraser: Yes, look at that.

Senator Munson: Nancy Ruth.

Senator Milne: The only reason I ask is that the Conservative government has created a trend of promising funds, making big announcements and generating press about a project only to see it shelved a few weeks or months later. One need look no further than the Joint Support Ship Project or the proposal to build 12 inshore patrol boats for the Canadian Coast Guard to see that the Conservative government was less than fully committed to the infrastructure that Canadians were told was so vital.

Senator Segal: One cannot live in the past.

Senator Milne: I ask the Leader of the Government in the Senate, is her Conservative government, is Senator Segal, committed to fulfilling the infrastructure spending that will be announced by Minister Flaherty later this afternoon?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, many projects that the government announced are under way and being implemented. I believe that the honourable senator should await the budget that will be delivered in 55 minutes. Obviously, it is important — and all levels of government have indicated its importance — for the government to provide funds for these projects quickly. The government will make every effort to do that and I am sure we will be successful. However, I ask the honourable senator to await the budget for details on how the government plans to do that.

Senator Milne: Honourable senators, I hope what the leader says is right, but I strongly suspect that this government will be committed only until the stage lights go down and the microphones are turned off.

Senator Tkachuk: In the spirit of bipartisanship — those are nasty people.

Senator LeBreton: Canadians are witnessing this unprecedented worldwide economic downturn.

Senator Milne: Exactly.

Senator LeBreton: As a result of paying down the debt and putting money back into taxpayers' pockets, we are better positioned and farther ahead of the curve than other countries in the G8. This position has been acknowledged by many organizations. However, I think Canadians will want to see less of that kind of talk and more action. They want all of us to work in the best interests of the country, to work through these economic difficulties and arrive at a position where, if we handle it properly, Canada should come out of these difficulties quite well.

Senator Tardif: No more attacks.

Senator Munson: Let us all sing "Kumbaya."

[Senator Fraser]

Hon. Terry M. Mercer: I have a supplementary question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate because I think she failed to understand Senator Milne's question. The question was pointed and talked about announcements made in the past by this government. Some announcements — honourable senators will hear it for the first time from me — were good announcements.

Regarding the announcements that we all waited for — the joint support ships that Senator Milne talked about and the Atlantic Gateway that has been announced, announced and re-announced — at a meeting of the Transport Committee when it went to Halifax, as a member of the Transport Committee, I posed a question to the vice-president of Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, ACOA, the agency responsible for distributing the funds for the Atlantic Gateway. The question was how much money had been distributed.

The answer to the question was “zero dollars.” When I asked a supplementary question as to how one would apply, I was told there was no application process. I asked: If there were an application process and a good application came in, how quickly could the money flow? The answer was that it could not flow. I then asked: Why? The response was that it had not been approved by Treasury Board.

• (1510)

Senator Milne and many senators ask why these projects are announced, many of which are good, when the money does not flow out the door to support them. Canadians need to see the money flow so that the work can happen. At such a rate, five years down the road, people will still not be working on the projects for which the infrastructure money will be announced later today.

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators will be surprised to hear me say this and will be glad to know that I agree with my honourable friend; and that is part of the problem. Various agencies have had great difficulty obtaining access to funds as quickly as they should. I suggest that the honourable senator will be happy if he waits to hear the government's plans in the budget to free up this money more quickly.

[Translation]

BUDGET SPEECH

ACCOMMODATION FOR SENATORS IN COMMONS GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Before proceeding with the Orders of the Day, I remind honourable senators that the budget speech will be delivered in the other place at 4 p.m. today, Tuesday, January 27, 2009. As in the past, senators must take their seats in the section of the gallery reserved for the Senate in the House of Commons. Seating will be first come, first served. As space is limited, it is the only way we can ensure that those senators who wish to attend can do so.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY— DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of Her Excellency the Governor General's Speech from the Throne at the opening of the Second Session of the Fortieth Parliament.

Hon. Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, seconded by the Honourable Senator Gerstein, moved:

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

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

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

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

She said: Honourable senators, it is a great honour for me to rise and give my first speech in this historic chamber, moving the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Her Excellency's speech illustrates just how serious our Conservative government is about dealing with the challenges we face. Before I begin, I would like to welcome our esteemed Speaker, Senator Kinsella, a man I know to be wise and impartial. The role of the Speaker is never easy, and I wish him good luck as this session begins.

On this side of the chamber, I am pleased to see a very hardworking and devoted woman whom I greatly admire, my colleague Senator LeBreton, the Leader of the Government in the Senate. I would like to thank her for her efforts on behalf of Canada's seniors, and I look forward to working with her in this new session.

I acknowledge the deputy leader, Senator Comeau, and the whip, Senator Stratton. I am pleased to be again working with Senator Comeau, a former colleague in the House of Commons. I hope that the increase in our numbers will not in any way complicate Senator Stratton's job, which is already a very difficult one. I know that both these honourable senators have served Conservative senators very effectively in recent years, and I am convinced that they will perform their duties with the same diligence in the new session.

On the other side, I salute Senator Cowan, Leader of the Opposition, who helped found the Landmark East School for children with learning disabilities in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, his home province.

I am eager to work with Senator Claudette Tardif, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, a fellow teacher.

I offer my best wishes to Senator Jim Munson, who is returning as whip, and my congratulations for his efforts to promote the interests of Canadians with developmental delays.

And to all the people in the senatorial district of Rougemont, I give the assurance that I am here in the Senate to make your needs known and defend the issues that are important to you, and I will carry out my duties to the best of my ability. I learned one thing from all my years in the other place: in the work of a parliamentarian, the people and their interests are paramount. We are here to serve our fellow citizens.

Honourable senators, I am grateful for the opportunity to sit in Parliament once again among my political colleagues. I have known some of them for years, and I am anxious to get to know the rest. I know I speak for all the new senators in the class of 2009 when I say that we are ready to work, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate them on their appointment.

In closing, I would like to thank Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, for approving and signing my writ of summons, and the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, who caught me completely by surprise when he called me. I can assure you that if I had not been sitting down, I think I would have fallen over when he gave me the opportunity to once again serve Canada, Canadians, my province and my region. I accepted immediately. What a marvellous Christmas present.

Thank you to my sponsor, the Honourable Marcel Prud'homme, for agreeing to sponsor me. We have been good friends since 1984 because we are both involved in the Inter-Parliamentary Union. I salute you, Marcel.

To all honourable senators, regardless of your political stripe, I extend my sincere thanks for your warm welcome, your letters and your congratulations. I am deeply touched.

Thank you to my spouse, Maurice, and to my sons, Jean-Maurice and Claude, and their families for their unwavering support, to the Fortin and Duplessis families and to everyone who in some way has supported me in my life, especially the volunteers who worked tirelessly for my election as the Member of Parliament for Louis-Hébert. I believe that families of all types are the heart and soul of society, and I am very proud of my seven grandchildren.

Our family went through a very difficult time in January 2003, when our son Claude, who was working on contract in Algeria, stepped on a land mine.

• (1520)

He had one leg amputated and he almost lost the other. Hence, I am extremely sensitive to the grief felt by the families of soldiers who have died or been injured in Afghanistan, as well as the courage and determination it takes to get through such adversities. Claude was 39 when it happened. He was married, with three children, including a nine-month-old baby.

I would like to pay tribute to our troops who are deployed in Afghanistan, helping the Afghan people to bring peace and democracy back to their country and to allow young Afghan girls to go to school.

In my role, I will defend the government's position while remaining respectful toward and working positively with my honourable senatorial colleagues who have different political allegiances, all in a spirit of collaboration.

My father and mother often told me that we were a family and a family could not keep only to itself. We live in a society and we must work to make it better. My parents volunteered constantly. That is what I have done my whole life. The values that my parents instilled in me are still very important to me today.

In coming to the Senate, I am bringing not only my personal experience, but also my experience as a municipal councillor in Sainte-Foy, my parliamentary experience in the other place from 1984 to 1993, and my experience as a parliamentary secretary in foreign relations and in science and technology. I continue to believe that it is through high-tech research, through implementation of the results of this research and through development that all young Canadians will find their future jobs.

Honourable senators, in October, Canadians gave Stephen Harper's Conservative government a strengthened mandate because they see us as the best choice to guide our country, which is confronted by the challenges of a slower global economy. We understand that a number of people in our communities are worried about their jobs, their savings and their retirement. Although the crisis started outside our borders, Canadians expect their federal government to support the workers and communities that are at risk because of the recession, and they expect the provincial governments to do their part.

I would like to congratulate Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the provincial premiers who agreed, earlier this month, to work together to support and strengthen the economy.

Among other things, they agreed on the importance of ensuring access to credit, protecting pension plans, making it easier for skilled workers to find work in other provinces, and eliminating obstacles to interprovincial trade.

Our government has also doubled spending on infrastructure. Together with the provinces, we have taken immediate steps to begin work on and accelerate funding for infrastructure projects for the 2009-10 construction season.

Even though we have not been spared the effects of the global economic slowdown, we are still in a better position than many other countries thanks to the decisions our government has made over the past three years. Having paid off a considerable portion of the national debt, we are in a much better position to take necessary actions. We have strengthened Canada's ability to compete on the international stage, and we have left more money in the taxpayers' pockets by significantly reducing personal and business income tax as well as sales taxes. The tax cuts we have introduced since coming to power will amount to \$31 billion this year alone and have already begun to stimulate our economy. We have made more funding available to post-secondary students and

apprentices. Our financial institutions are among the most stable in the world. Together with the Bank of Canada, we will ensure that Canadians have access to credit, that the real estate and banking sectors remain relatively stable, and that savings and retirement income will not be threatened.

We have also helped seniors with registered retirement income funds by relaxing the rules on withdrawals for 2008.

However, even more must be done in these difficult times. We did not cause this economic crisis, but we will take action to protect jobs now and ensure that our economy can create jobs for the future.

Honourable senators, the men and women in my community expect their government to provide stable leadership. They expect parliamentarians to cooperate and avoid conflicts. Their message is clear: it is time to take action and to show some solidarity.

The speech given by Her Excellency yesterday represents a new step in Canada's economic action plan. It was an unprecedented Speech from the Throne, appropriate for these unprecedented times. It was a speech that shows that this government, like the people, sees the economy as a priority. Our government has clearly said: Canada, like other countries around the globe, must take serious, significant and multi-year measures to protect workers, businesses and families in this time of global economic downturn. People who have lost their jobs or who risk losing them want their government to work for them. They deserve to know that the government is on their side.

Our government has conducted extensive consultations in recent weeks. It heard from Canadians from all regions, communities and social backgrounds. In a spirit of open and non-partisan cooperation, we listened to those who work, those who invest, those who create jobs, those who build infrastructure and those who provide non-profit services.

We listened to representatives of communities, municipal, provincial and territorial governments, and Aboriginal leaders. We consulted the leaders of the other parties. As Her Excellency pointed out yesterday, there is no monopoly on good ideas because we face this crisis together.

Our action plan provides for immediate measures to build roads and bridges and carry out other major infrastructure projects. It stimulates the economy through direct government action and by encouraging the private sector. It provides assistance for the people hit hardest by the recession, including the unemployed and low-income workers, seniors and Aboriginal people. Our action plan will support industries in difficulty, such as forestry, manufacturing, the automotive industry, tourism and agriculture, and will protect the families and communities that depend on those industries. It preserves the stability of the financial system and gives businesses and consumers access to credit. The measures to be announced later today in the budget will be targeted and will take the form of an immediate stimulus. We will have a deficit, but these measures will prevent the return to a permanent deficit, and the Minister of Finance will present a plan that will enable us to restore a budget surplus.

Honourable senators, Canadians want their elected representatives to focus on the economy and the concerns of ordinary people. They want us to set aside our quarrels and our partisan interests.

The Hon. the Speaker: I regret to inform Senator Fortin-Duplessis that her time has expired.

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, would it be possible to give Senator Fortin-Duplessis five more minutes?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

• (1530)

Senator Fortin-Duplessis: Our government has prepared a clear and focused plan to help us get through this difficult period that may perhaps last for several years. We will spend what we must to stimulate the economy, and we will make the investments needed to maintain our prosperity.

We will do everything necessary to help Canadians get through this period of economic turbulence. It is vital that parliamentarians on both sides work in concert on this common cause.

Allow me, honourable senators, to quote Her Excellency the Governor General, who stated yesterday, and I quote:

The present crisis is new, but the imperative of concerted action is a challenge to which Parliament has risen many times in our history. What will sustain us today will be the same strengths of character that have pulled Canada through critical times before: unity, determination and constancy of purpose.

Together, acting in concert, we will rise to the challenge and come out of this serious economic crisis even stronger.

In closing, honourable senators, I once again thank the Prime Minister from the bottom of my heart for allowing me, to the best of my ability, to continue to work on behalf of my country, Canada.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[English]

Hon. Irving Gerstein: Honourable senators, being a member of the Senate for all of one day, I feel especially humbled and privileged to stand before you to second the motion to adopt the Speech from the Throne put forth so ably by my colleague, Senator Fortin-Duplessis.

I am grateful that so many of you, from both sides of the chamber, have made me feel so welcome, and I hope that my contribution to the work of the Senate will be worthy of your expectations.

Every one of you knows why you are here. I would ask if you might indulge me and let me tell you why I am here. I am one of the 18 new senators appointed by the Prime Minister in December, and it is fair to say that those appointments were greeted — certainly by many in the media — with less than lavish praise. Some commentators even waded in with comments about “bagmen.”

Well, I want to tell you that I do not admit to being a bagman; I proclaim it.

I believe that the job of raising funds for the Conservative Party or, for that matter, any party, is both necessary and honourable. Parties require money to operate.

Remember, the financial side of any political party is unique in politics in that it is the only area in the political spectrum where you do not have to take a poll or feel the wind to know where you stand; you just have to look at the party's balance sheet and income statement.

Political fundraising today is a business characterized by extreme focus, attention to detail, and constant innovation. Most of it involves highly skilled people using very smart computers. Just look to the south, where many believe President Barack Obama would still be a U.S. senator if his campaign had not revolutionized campaign funding through the sophisticated use of the Internet.

There may have been a day when political fundraising was about access and attitude; today, it is all about creativity and skill.

The success of the Conservative Party's fundraising activity is the result of years of investing in the development of integrated giving programs. We have created complex, leading-edge fundraising techniques such as data mining, segmentation, targeted marketing and relationship management, all in an effort to move our pool of identified supporters up the support pyramid, from supporters, to members, to donors.

Honourable senators, for all practical purposes, notwithstanding my great friend and mentor Senator Angus, the day of the bagman in Canadian federal politics is over. Today, federal political fundraising, as I said earlier, is all about running a business.

Here in Canada, the myth of the smoke-filled back room is just that: in 2003, then Prime Minister Chrétien brought in Bill C-24 effective January 1, 2004, which basically eliminated corporate and union donations to political parties and limited individual donations to \$5,000 a year. Commencing January 1, 2007, individual donations were reduced to \$1,100 a year. In fact, as you know, many of the funds given to Canada's political parties today come from taxpayers, through a per capita allotment by Ottawa matching the number of votes that the party received in the last federal election.

The reality is that Canada has some of the most democratic and transparent political fundraising rules of any nation — far more open than the United States. It is a tribute to the members on both sides of this chamber that those rules are in place and working. However, to suggest that political parties can just sit back and wait for their government grant is equally wrong-headed. If your party's fundraising falters, it is hard to build momentum, and even harder to deliver your message. There is an old saying that all fund raisers, whether political or charitable, know by heart: Message creates momentum creates money.

Honourable senators, I know what happens when a political party does not have money. A decade ago I returned as chair of the PC Canada Fund when the Progressive Conservative Party

was more than \$10 million in debt. At the top of our monthly bank statement was a debit of \$70,000 of interest every month. It is hard to "send a message," let alone win an election when you can barely pay the interest on what you owe.

There are thousands of Canadians from all leanings who raise money for their parties, and millions of Canadians who contribute to their candidates. I am proud to be a member of both groups.

I have been a volunteer for the Conservative Party for over 43 years. I love politics, but never had the time to become a candidate, so I went where my skills took me. Since 1965, when I raised my first dollar for John Diefenbaker, I have had the best seat in the house — centre reds right behind the players' bench. I do not have to tell you that if you are looking for something that mirrors life — its triumphs, tragedies, and utter unpredictability — nothing beats Canadian politics.

Honourable senators, I have been a Conservative and consumed with politics since I was 13 years old. My history teacher at Malvern Collegiate in the east end of Toronto, Mr. Gilmour, was an unabashed fan of John George Diefenbaker. Like many teachers of that era, he had returned from fighting in the Second World War convinced that democracy was something precious that needed constant nurturing to keep it alive. His commitment and passion rubbed off on me.

After a lifetime in business and fundraising for many different causes, I have been appointed to the Senate. Did I seek this seat? As honourable senators know all too well, if you get into politics in order to get into the Senate, your life will be filled with disappointment.

Do I want to be in the Senate? Of course I do. I would like to think that I bring some business skills, political skills and — I must say with pride — some fundraising skills to my party and to this chamber. I am here to work alongside all of you.

• (1540)

Fellow senators, Canadians are facing the most calamitous financial challenges since the Great Depression, but I believe we cannot wring our hands and roll up our sleeves at the same time. I am here to learn, as well as to work.

As others have noted, this is an unprecedented Throne Speech for an unprecedented time. It demonstrated that, like all Canadians, the government is focused on the economy. As the Governor General said yesterday in the Throne Speech, "The nations of the world are grappling with challenges that Canada can address but not avoid."

In the face of these exceptional global challenges, the government has reached out to Canadians in all regions and communities and has listened to Canadians from all walks of life. Minister Flaherty and others have travelled throughout the country and have engaged in an open and non-partisan dialogue. The Throne Speech clearly reflects the government's concern to help every Canadian in these troubled times.

In seconding the motion to adopt the Throne Speech, I confirm this government's commitment to serious, substantial and multi-year action in protecting today's jobs while readying our economy to create tomorrow's jobs. In many ways, Canada is like all developed nations in having to protect its economy, but relative to many nations, we are in a uniquely strong position.

At the same time as we can take immediate action to build roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure, we can also provide tax relief to stimulate the economy and help protect those Canadians in the lower and middle income groups who are hardest hit by the recession.

This government is not only ready to do whatever it takes to help Canadians weather this economic storm; it is able to do what it takes.

Accordingly, I am pleased to support the motion by Senator Fortin-Duplessis that this house adopt the Speech from the Throne.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

(On motion of Senator Tardif, debate adjourned.)

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

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