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Thursday, September 29, 2011

The Honourable NOËL A. KINSELLA
Speaker

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(Daily index of proceedings appears at back of this issue).

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THE SENATE

Thursday, September 29, 2011

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

Prayers.

[Translation]

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

NATIONAL SENIORS DAY

Hon. Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis: Honourable senators, I rise today in this chamber to pay tribute to Canadian seniors.

Seniors play a vital role in our society. They have made great contributions to building our country and they play a key role in our communities. They are important to both our country's history and its future. They have made huge contributions to our families, communities and workplaces by sharing their experience, knowledge and know-how.

Today, they continue to make important contributions and to improve the quality of life of our communities. That is why, on November 16, 2010, Bill C-40, which celebrates Canadian seniors and implements a series of measures to improve their quality of life, received Royal Assent. As a result of this legislation, October 1 is now known as National Seniors Day, which coincides with the International Day of Older Persons.

Canada has never had so many seniors. Nearly 75 per cent of those aged 90 and up are women.

As a nation, we must ensure that we meet the many needs of our seniors and that they have access to adequate care. Our government is proud to implement effective and accessible programs, services and measures to improve their quality of life.

Unlike what some people may believe, Canadian seniors are in good health, are very much involved and are very productive. They are recognized as active members within our community organizations, churches and social clubs.

I have the privilege and honour of knowing a community organization in my region, the Maison des grands-parents de Sainte-Foy, which has become famous for its groundbreaking initiatives and whose positive repercussions have been felt throughout the entire community. The centre is dedicated to establishing intergenerational ties and its basic mission is to get seniors involved in helping families through their vast life experience.

Seniors are the pillars of our society. They open a window onto our past and guide us towards our future. That is why, in celebration of National Seniors Day, I would like to express my

deepest gratitude to and my unwavering support of this engaged group of individuals who act with so much determination in order to improve the quality of life of their community.

[English]

Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck: Honourable senators, I am pleased to rise today in celebration of the very first National Seniors Day, which will be held on October 1. Canada's commemorative day coincides with the United Nations International Day of Older Persons.

This day is a great opportunity for everyone to pay tribute to the many contributions seniors have made, and continue to make, in communities across our country. Older Canadians built the society we know today. Veterans risked life and limb to ensure our freedom. Grandmothers joined together to help fight poverty and disease in Africa. Older workers share their vast experience and skills to help improve our schools, our workplaces and the whole country.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Prince Edward Island Senior Citizens' Federation, a grassroots advocacy organization that works hard to improve the quality of life for Island seniors. The federation consists of over 50 clubs and seniors' organizations located in communities across the province. They publish monthly *The Voice for Island Seniors*, as well as a quarterly newsletter called *The Federation Voice*. They offer a variety of programs, including the Learning Elders Art Program, Computing for Seniors and The Island Family Trees Program.

The federation is not the only way seniors are making their presence felt in my province. Senators may remember that last year I spoke about the East Prince Seniors Initiative, which is a partnership among community, business and government that works together to improve the lives of Islanders aged 50 plus. The University of Prince Edward Island has established a Seniors College that provides learning opportunities in a wide range of interesting courses in three regions of Prince Edward Island. Members pay an annual fee, which allows them to take as many courses as they want.

All across the province, Island seniors are participating in their communities, improving the well-being of Islanders and making a difference in the lives of others.

Honourable senators, seniors built this country. It is only fitting that their contributions be recognized. October 1 is a chance for all of us to celebrate these contributions and to show our appreciation for all that our seniors have done and continue to do.

OIL SANDS INDUSTRY

Hon. Nicole Eaton: Honourable senators, I rise to shine attention on the Keystone XL pipeline. This important project has attracted persistent resistance from the expected suspects. The likes of numerous environmental extremists, backed by big unions

and the NDP, are firmly against developing our ethical oil and willing to abandon Canada's interests by killing jobs and growth. They also seem content to continue buying OPEC oil to meet a demand that is not going to disappear overnight. However, there is more to these protests.

Our domestic industries have come repeatedly under attack, both directly and indirectly, by non-Canadian interests. These interests I speak of are deep pocketed, left-wing U.S. foundations, who fund numerous Canadian charities and non-charitable organizations alike to fight the development of the oil sands.

In fact, two of the three main sponsors of the recent Ottawa protest, Greenpeace Canada and the Council of Canadians, are heavily funded by these very foundations. However, it is not merely our oil sands that have been targeted by foreign interests, but our forests, our fish and our seals to name but a few examples.

Canadians must be wary of their message, suspicious of their intentions and careful to discern whose interests such protests support. Canada is a world leader in sustainable and responsible extraction of oil, and all other resources for that matter.

Dr. Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace, though no longer a member of that organization, points out that these environmentalists are misleading the public. He commends the quality of work that goes into oil sands reclamation efforts and stresses they are unlike any other he has seen at other operations for oil, coal and other resources. He argues that these operations often leave the production sites in better environmental shape than they were before oil was taken. The hypocrisy of these critics for continuing to support oil-producing countries that show little regard for the environment or sustainability is obvious.

• (1410)

However, in Canada this is not how we do things. We strive to be the best. Canada has thrived through innovation, and we will continue to do so. The oil sands are no different. This, honourable senators, is the future.

The Keystone XL project is expected to generate 140,000 Canadian jobs and \$600 billion in economic activity over the next 25 years. The oil sands offer countless economic opportunities and jobs, and a secure, stable, respectful and environmentally responsible source to meet the ever-growing demand for oil. These benefits are in Canadians' interests, not those of foreign foundations and the groups they support.

I hope you will join me in continuing to support this specific project and the industry as it moves forward.

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

Hon. Grant Mitchell: Honourable senators, I am pleased to speak today about the Canadian Foundation for Women's Health, whose mission is to promote the health of women in Canada and around the world through research, education and advocacy in obstetrics and gynecology.

The Foundation is a national non-profit organization that raises funds in support of women's sexual and reproductive health. It is the charitable arm of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. With the support of individuals, corporations and medical organizations, the foundation supports the society's programs and funds research projects to improve women's health at all stages of life. These areas of research include preterm labour; safe pregnancies; postpartum depression; gestational diabetes; infertility; hysterectomy; safe delivery and newborn health; and treatment of breast, ovarian, cervical and uterine cancer.

The foundation supports international women's health programs by funding training programs for health professionals in developing countries to improve maternal and newborn health and reduce the incidence of cervical cancer.

Support for the foundation means support for mothers and newborns, and helps ensure that women have access to comprehensive care and information.

This fall, the foundation will hold its first walk. "Bumps on the Road — a 9K Walk for Pregnancy" will take place on October 23. I invite Canadians to visit the foundation's website at www.cfwh.org.

[*English*]

THE LATE HONOURABLE JULIUS ALEXANDER ISAAC, O.C.

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I rise today to pay tribute to one of our country's finest jurists, the Honourable Julius Alexander Isaac, who passed away on July 16 at the age of 82.

Julius Alexander Isaac was born in Grenada in 1928. He later moved to Canada and in 1956 he graduated from the University of Toronto with a law degree. He was then called to the bars of not one but four different bar societies: Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Grenada.

His legal career is an impressive one. For 18 years, Justice Isaac was employed by the Federal Department of Justice. He served as Crown prosecutor and Assistant Deputy Attorney General of Canada in the 1980s. In 1989, he was appointed to the bench of the Supreme Court of Ontario. In 1991, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney appointed him Chief Justice of the Federal Court of Canada, and Julius Alexander Isaac became the first Black Canadian to serve in this capacity. At the time of his appointment, it was said that Prime Minister Mulroney considered Justice Isaac's appointment to the Federal Court as one of his most significant appointments.

Justice Isaac's lifetime of public service went beyond the judicial system. He was also committed to serving his community. He was the former president of the Grenada Association of Toronto; former director and treasurer of the Caribbean Cultural Committee; and co-chair of the Endowment Committee for Dalhousie University's James Robinson Johnston Chair in Black Canadian Studies, where I had the privilege of working with him.

In recognition of his lasting influence, a scholarship was created in 2004 in his name at the University of Windsor and the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers, which is awarded to a deserving first-year Black law student.

Over the years, Justice Isaac's achievements and countless contributions to our Canadian legal system and to the advancement of Blacks were recognized. He was awarded the 1992 Commemorative Medal of Canada, the Silver Jubilee Award of Grenada, the Jackie Robinson Distinguished Achievement Award, and a number of honorary degrees. In 2006, he was awarded the Order of Canada in recognition of his brilliant career as a respected jurist and for being an esteemed role model within the African-Canadian community.

Edward Greenspan, a friend and colleague of Justice Isaac's, delivered a passionate eulogy at his funeral service in Regina on July 22. He described Justice Isaac as a "genuine leader who earned a reputation for fairness and integrity and always projected an aura of great competence and prestige. He possessed instinctive qualities of leadership . . . Justice Isaac was a man of unquestionable sincerity and honesty of purpose and of great ability."

Honourable senators, Honourable Justice Julius Alexander Isaac was a Canadian trailblazer. In many ways, he paved the way for other Black Canadians to practise law and pursue a legal career. He was a role model. He was someone upon whom countless Canadians could rely for his leadership and commitment to equality, fairness and justice. He will be deeply missed.

Please join me, honourable senators, in extending our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends and in paying tribute to a remarkable Canadian.

SAUDI ARABIA

Hon. Doug Finley: Honourable senators, I rise today to condemn a despicable attempt at censorship that was recently revealed to Canadians.

The Government of Saudi Arabia attempted to prevent Canadian broadcasters from airing a Canadian advertisement from a Canadian non-governmental organization because they did not like what this advertisement had to say. If Saudi Arabia is so offended by the contents of this advertisement, they might look at fixing their human rights record and not at trying to impose their censorship in Canada.

While this attempt at censorship was more refined than how it is exercised within their own country, I think most Canadians would agree that they have absolutely no right to try to censor Canadians within Canada. Freedom of speech is one of our core values and I am outraged that Saudi Arabia would have the unmitigated gall to try to prevent Canadians from exercising this undeniable right within our own country.

What could this advertisement possibly have said that so greatly offended the Saudi dictators? Since we are protected by parliamentary immunity in this chamber — thus the Saudis

cannot censor me — I will read the script of the advertisement into the record, where it will be for the rest of time, so that my fellow senators and all Canadians can determine for themselves if they consider these facts to be either wrong or offensive:

Fact: Last year we bought over 400 million barrels of oil from Saudi Arabia. We bankrolled a state that doesn't allow women to drive, doesn't allow them to leave their homes or work without their male guardian's permission, and a state where a women's testimony only counts for a half of a man's. Why are we paying their bills and funding their oppression? Today, there's a better way: Ethical oil from Canada's oil sands. Ethical oil — a choice we have to make.

There is nothing slanderous about this ad; it is entirely factual.

• (1420)

To give some credit where credit is due, the Saudis recently made a decision to allow women to vote, but after hearing about a woman being sentenced to a barbaric 10 lashes for driving an automobile, I believe we will have to see if it passes the test of time.

I applaud Alykhan Velshi and Kathryn Marshall of EthicalOil.org for airing this advertisement and giving Canadians and Americans the truth about Canadian ethical oil. Their efforts, along with those of Ezra Levant, Senator Eaton and many others, should be applauded.

I urge all senators to stand up against Saudi oppression and censorship and to take a stand in favour of Canadian ethical oil.

[Translation]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

FEDERAL LAW—CIVIL LAW HARMONIZATION BILL, NO. 3.

FIRST READING

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government) presented Bill S-3, A third Act to harmonize federal law with the civil law of Quebec and to amend certain Acts in order to ensure that each language version takes into account the common law and the civil law.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

INCOME TAX ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Grant Mitchell presented Bill S-205, 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.)

[English]

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE
TO STUDY PROVISIONS AND OPERATION OF THE ACT
TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE (PRODUCTION
OF RECORDS IN SEXUAL OFFENCE PROCEEDINGS)
AND REFER PAPERS AND EVIDENCE
FROM PREVIOUS SESSION

Hon. John D. Wallace: Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs be authorized to examine and report on the provisions and operation of the *Act to amend the Criminal Code (production of records in sexual offence proceedings)*, S.C. 1997, c. 30;

That the papers and evidence received and taken and work accomplished by the committee on this subject since the beginning of the Third Session of the Fortieth Parliament be referred to the committee; and

That the committee report to the Senate no later than June 30, 2012 and retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until 90 days after the tabling of the final report.

THE HONOURABLE LOWELL MURRAY

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. James S. Cowan (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 56, I give notice that two days hence:

I will call the attention of the Senate to the remarkable record of public service of our former colleague, the Honourable Lowell Murray, P.C., who served with us in this chamber for 32 years before his retirement on September 26, 2011.

QUESTION PERIOD

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Robert W. Peterson: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. If the Canadian Wheat Board is dismantled as the government seems so intent on doing, who are the winners and the losers?

In the winner's column, there are not too many: the multi-national grain companies who have been angling for years to have the Canadian Wheat Board dismantled so they can control 100 per cent of the world grain trade.

Who are the losers? A much larger group: farmers. Since 1985, the Canadian Wheat Board has delivered to Western Canadian farmers an extra \$34 to \$41 per ton as a premium for quality grain. For a producer with 1,000 acres of wheat, that can mean as much as an extra \$41,000 per year. This will be gone.

All peer-reviewed studies show \$500 million to \$1.5 billion of purely net value to farmers annually through the Canadian Wheat Board. This will be gone.

Through the Canadian Wheat Board, farmers have been able to self load hopper cars at a saving of \$1,200 per car. In the last crop year, 12,000 hopper cars were loaded at a saving to farmers of \$14.4 million. This will be gone.

Because the Wheat Board can provide quality control and quality assurance, it is able to obtain premium prices — as much as \$1 per bushel over world prices. This is because buyers will pay more for the Canadian brand. You can be sure that the multi-nationals will not be supporting the quality control and assurance programs because their business is largely based on volume with the goal of maximizing shareholder value, not obtaining the best price for Canadian farmers. This will be gone.

The Canadian Wheat Board accounts for 95 per cent of shipments through the Port of Churchill. Since the private grain companies have all their facilities on the West Coast, Thunder Bay and along the St. Lawrence, they have no incentive to use the Port of Churchill. This will be gone.

Now there is another report today from a group appointed by the government recommending that the Canadian Wheat Board not be provided regulated access to handling facilities. Should this recommendation be accepted — and I am sure there is every indication it will — then the Canadian Wheat Board is finished and will not be able to viably operate.

The initiative has been described by various stakeholders as the biggest change to agriculture on the Prairies in over 100 years. It will have a significant lasting impact on the transportation of grain from Saskatchewan.

This being the case, does the leader agree that the government's plan to shut down the Canadian Wheat Board requires further economic and operational analysis prior to implementation?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): The premise of the honourable senator's question and the long preamble are entirely false. We are not advocating shutting down the Canadian Wheat Board. The Wheat Board can continue to operate. What we will simply be doing is giving Western grain producers marketing choice. If they want to continue using the Wheat Board, they are free to do so.

Again, I refer the honourable senator to the example of Australia, which instituted the procedure that we are advocating prior to us, which procedure has resulted in a great many more markets and profit for their grain producers.

As I have said many times in this chamber, through four separate federal election campaigns, it was a crucial part of our campaign platform to give Western grain producers marketing choice. We are committed to doing that. We overwhelmingly received the support of the Western farmers through their votes in the last election.

• (1430)

As a matter of fact, I was told earlier today that the lone Liberal member of Parliament from Saskatchewan, the Honourable Ralph Goodale, who of course represents a primarily urban seat — lost all the rural polls in the election. I believe there are either nine or eleven rural polls in his constituency.

Senator Peterson: I think my facts are mainly correct, honourable senators. In the matter of Australia, which the leader so glowingly referred to, three years after they were privatized they collapsed and are now privately held, so that did not go anywhere.

An Hon. Senator: Oh, oh!

Senator Peterson: There is one other thing, honourable senators, I would like clarity on. I am not clear on these matters, but when Minister Ritz made his statement on March 28, 2011, which I referred to yesterday, he was still a minister of the Crown. Would he not be speaking on behalf of the government?

Senator LeBreton: Of course, he was speaking on behalf of the government. He continues to speak on behalf of the government and he continues to be the excellent representative of Canadian farmers that he is.

In my last answer, I also meant to mention the Port of Churchill. Being a party that is committed to northern development and our northern communities, we well understand the importance of the Port of Churchill as an extremely valuable asset. The port will maintain its present facility as an Arctic gateway. We have put significant funds into the Port of Churchill, and we will continue to promote the Port of Churchill for use by all businesses in the Prairies.

Senator Peterson: Honourable senators, if the minister was speaking on behalf of the government, then why is the leader not supporting the statement he made on March 28, two months before the election, that the Wheat Board would not be dismantled without a vote by the producers? Why is the government not following that procedure?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, the Wheat Board is not being dismantled. As I commented earlier, we committed to marketing choice for our Western grain producers. If they choose to market their grain through the Wheat Board, that is their choice, but other Western grain producers would prefer to market their product through other resources. All we are saying is that, in a free country like Canada, surely to goodness our Western grain producers should be given the same marketing choice that the grain producers have in Ontario, for instance.

Hon. Grant Mitchell: Honourable senators, when I hear the leader of the Conservatives in the Senate say that the Canadian Wheat Board will not die, I am reminded of the Monty Python skit where the client brings back the dead parrot and says, "This parrot is dead," and the clerk keeps saying, "That parrot is not dead. That parrot is not dead." That is exactly what the leader over there sounds like. "The Canadian Wheat Board is not going to die. The Canadian Wheat Board is not going to die."

The Canadian Wheat Board is going to be dead, dead, dead, once the government institutes its policy. We are not going to lose just the Canadian Wheat Board; we are also going to lose all kinds of transportation advantages for farmers.

Could the leader please tell us what steps — if they have thought this far ahead — the government has taken to protect shortline railroads and special sidings for farmers to deliver their grain, because those shortline railroads and sidings have been sustained by Canadian Wheat Board grain shipments, and nothing else?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, I was rather amused when the senator brought up Monty Python because many times in the past I have thought that Senator Mitchell was straight out of Monty Python.

In any event, my answer is the same, honourable senators. We are giving Canadian grain producers what we promised to give them through four elections. It is no secret. It is on the record. They understood totally what the government's intentions were. We put it front and centre of our agricultural policy for four elections, and in the last election farmers in Western Canada responded overwhelmingly by supporting our government's policies. Now we are going to deliver exactly what we promised.

Senator Mitchell: Actually, farmers made the mistake of believing one of your ministers. They will never do that again in a couple of months, I will tell you that.

The government says it really wants competition, but in this mix is a duopoly of two mega-railroads in Canada that do not want competition and do not provide competition. In fact, after the Canadian Wheat Board dies, the farmers will be even more vulnerable to that lack of competition.

What steps has the government got in place to protect the farmers when car allocation issues arise, as they will inevitably? The only entity that has been advocating for farmers on car allocation and producer-pay car usage has been the Canadian Wheat Board.

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, obviously we have the support of the farmers, as we have in many other areas. Obviously, we will proceed with legislation. Farmers will have the option of marketing grain through the Wheat Board or other means. We will continue, in all sectors of the economy — and the agricultural sector of course is a very important one — to work with the industry to take positive steps to make sure that all aspects are handled and dealt with properly so that they can look forward to a bright future in which they can make their own choice as to how they want to market their products.

Senator Mitchell: In a couple of months they will be wondering what would have happened if they had been working against us? Thankfully, they were not doing that.

One of the big things in this whole issue is — and I remember the Conservatives saying this over and over at the WTO negotiations — if we only gave up the Canadian Wheat Board, if we only gave up that kind of monopoly, then we would win something in international negotiations on the Doha round of agricultural negotiations.

In fact, the Americans have said the single-most significant advantage they could gain over Canada in wheat and agricultural trade would be to do away with the Canadian Wheat Board. They are laughing and laughing and laughing at this government because they have handed them that advantage.

Were the negotiators sufficiently good to have gained something in return? Could the leader tell us what we got in return for giving up this important advantage to the United States of America in our trade negotiations?

Senator LeBreton: I am wondering if there is something wrong with the sound system in here that senators opposite cannot hear my answer. My answer is that we are not getting rid of the Wheat Board. We are simply providing marketing choice.

An Hon. Senator: It's dead.

Senator LeBreton: Oh, it is dead like the Liberal Party of Canada, is it?

We are simply providing marketing choice. It is clear, honourable senators, that the government is listening to Western farmers. They voted for us. They have voted for us, for a long time in fact. Finally, we will be able to live up to a commitment we have made for some time to Western farmers and provide them with marketing choice for their own products.

Hon. Terry M. Mercer: Honourable senators, it is quite a feat to say in one sentence that we respect farmers and then, in another, to ignore their wishes. The simple math is that 62 per cent of farmers supported staying with the Wheat Board. What does the government not understand about this?

My question now is: What is next? In June I asked the Honourable Leader of the Government about the government's plan for supply management. It seems we are seeing some of that plan now. By contributing to the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board they are handing control of Canada's wheat supply to multinational companies. What sector is next?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, it is obvious that senators opposite did not read our election platform, but why would they? It might have been a good idea if they had. They might have had better results. It was also in our election platform, as the honourable senator knows full well, that we are committed to our present supply management system.

• (1440)

Senator Mercer: Honourable senators, it makes me very nervous. Senator Peterson told us yesterday and reiterated today what Minister Ritz stated at a public meeting in March of this year. He said that his party respects the vote of farmers who back the single desk and that there would be no attempt to impose dual marketing on the Canadian Wheat Board unless a majority of producers voted for it. That is a pretty clear statement. I do not always agree with Minister Ritz, but that was a pretty clear statement. The minister said it, and now the government is doing the opposite.

In my discussion with farmers, I have heard that they are becoming very nervous because, if ministers go around saying one thing and then the government does another, then who are they to believe? Just this morning, the minister waxed eloquent at a meeting of Canadian egg farmers about next year celebrating 40 years of good supply management in this country. He said it.

If the leader's government is starting on the path of contributing to the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board, what are Canada's egg, chicken and dairy farmers to think about our system of supply management? Who is this government protecting: our farmers or multi-national corporations?

Senator LeBreton: Minister Ritz said that the government would respect farmers and we have done that because they voted overwhelmingly in the last election to support our members of Parliament who stood for election on our principal Western agricultural platform, which was marketing choice for our grains.

At the same time, the platform was clear about supply management. The so-called plebiscite conducted by the Canadian Wheat Board contained a very loaded question. It was akin to the Liberal Party conducting their own survey as to why they thought Michael Ignatieff should be leader.

Senator Mercer: The leader should be careful about referring to people conducting their own surveys. The member of the other place from Peterborough, Ontario, has been chastised publicly for conducting a poll and interfering in the proceedings of the provincial election in Ontario.

Is there a plan to dismantle supply management in this country somewhere on a desk or a shelf in the Conservative Party war room?

Senator LeBreton: In case the honourable senator did not notice, there was an election that his people caused; and I thank him very much for it. There is no shelf and there is no Conservative war room.

Hon. Joan Fraser (Acting Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is directed to the Leader of the Government in the Senate who has said repeatedly that prairie wheat farmers voted for this government. How does she know that? We know that this government received a spectacular result on the Prairies, but not everyone on the Prairies is a wheat farmer. Was the honourable leader counting the ballots?

Senator LeBreton: No, I am not a Liberal. The voters of Western Canada, whether they lived in rural areas, smaller centres or cities, voted for Conservatives in overwhelming numbers. It is simple: We ran on our platform, and now that we have won the election with a majority government, surely to goodness we have the right to implement that platform.

[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Hon. Maria Chaput: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate and concerns the Prime Minister's new director of communications. The gentleman in question wrote an incendiary column about Quebec and Canada's two official languages.

This summer, columnist Angelo Persichilli spoke about Canadian bilingualism as an enormous waste defended by crusaders for French. Yet he was hired by the Prime Minister to be his director of communications. Does the government understand the message it is sending to Canadians who support bilingualism and to francophone communities across the country in hiring this man as the Prime Minister's main spokesperson?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank the honourable senator for the question. I look at Senator Munson and am reminded that he once was a journalist and reported on air. In the context of his position as former director of communications for Mr. Chrétien, he could have been called up on a few things, as well. I can think of a few.

In any event, I want to assure Senator Chaput that Mr. Persichilli wrote the column when he was a columnist with the *Toronto Star*, I believe. The views and comments expressed in that article do not reflect the Prime Minister's opinion or, for that matter, the government's opinion. We have a stellar record in terms of the implementation of the Official Languages Act and absolute linguistic duality in this country.

Mr. Persichilli is an outstanding Canadian with a long history of service in the ethnocultural media. He is an outstanding individual. Other hires in the Prime Minister's Office will acquit themselves extremely well and represent the views of francophones across the country, in particular in the province of Quebec.

Hon. Jim Munson: Does the honourable leader have any examples? I would never say anything bad about a French Canadian because I married one. Thank you.

Senator LeBreton: No, no, no. The honourable senator misunderstood me. I was saying that generally, when journalists are on air or writing columns, they make comments and participate in discussions that they might not have made or participated in had they known that one day they might become a director of communications in a prime minister's office. That is all I was saying.

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

SUPPORT FOR WAPIKONI MOBILE

Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette: Honourable senators, my question is directed to the Leader of the Government in the Senate and it will be easy for her to answer since surely she will agree with me.

A group of Aboriginal people and parliamentarians held a press conference this morning in support of Wapikoni Mobile. Wapikoni is an Aboriginal word meaning "flower" and mobile refers to the fact that the project involves a trailer that travels across Quebec. The trailer is a mobile audiovisual and music training and production studio that has been travelling to First Nations communities throughout Quebec for seven years. In fact, there are three trailers. The project now also includes exchanges with other countries.

Wapikoni Mobile is a modern training initiative that Aboriginal people themselves say has literally saved lives in some cases. The project gives First Nations people a voice, one that is not heard often enough. The project awakens artistic talent, creates local jobs and provides contract opportunities — sometimes the only contract work available in the community all year. It is a true training ground where a new generation of Aboriginal youth are gradually being discovered. Take, for example, Quebec singer Samian who was discovered as a direct result of this project and then went on to create other employment himself.

In addition to helping young people to develop skills in the arts and multimedia production, Wapikoni Mobile facilitates exchanges and communication among youth and helps them to be more open to the world. It gives them the opportunity to learn about themselves, experience a change from their usual way of life and make a name for themselves in their community and in the world. This is the background for my question.

It will not have escaped the leader's notice that First Nations communities are among the most vulnerable in our society. Yet, her government recently decided to cut Wapikoni Mobile's funding in order to save \$490,000 — the leader can surely help the Prime Minister find this money — 50 per cent of the organization's total budget. The leader's government has decided to kill this original and extremely useful initiative because, now that 50 per cent of its budget has been cut, the project cannot continue.

Why did the leader's government decide to cut this unique project — that provided training to Quebec's Aboriginal youth in their communities, on their reserves — thus taking away what little hope they had left?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, that is a very specific question about a very specific program, and I will take the question as notice.

[Translation]

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Honourable senators, I would like to add, just to help you find the information, that this training project affects seven Aboriginal nations. Some 19 Aboriginal communities in Quebec have been visited and 2,000 participants have taken part since the beginning. Some 350 musical creations have been recorded and distributed, and nearly 450 short films have been created, some of which have been translated into French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and even Mandarin, since the videos were broadcast at Expo 2010 in Shanghai.

Several hundred broadcast activities have taken place at prestigious national and international festivals, and the project has received 40 awards. Furthermore, all Aboriginal chiefs in Quebec, as well as the Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, support this project.

Madam Leader, I am asking you — I nearly said “I implore you” — to please speak with those who are responsible and ensure that this project continues. I think that young Aboriginals in Quebec need you and that you can help them by restoring the funding for this project, which has been so meaningful for the past seven years.

[English]

Senator LeBreton: I will seek to get some information and provide an answer by written response.

JUSTICE

ABORTION

Hon. Jim Munson: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. In light of the recent comments by a Conservative MP dealing with abortion, I would like to have the government’s or the minister’s viewpoint on a woman’s right to choose.

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, obviously this is an issue that evokes passionate debate on both sides of the issue. There are people in all political parties that share views on both sides of the issue and, of course, that is their right. I happen to have a very strong view; others have another view. That is our right, but the fact of the matter is this is a debate that the government will not reopen.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Joan Fraser (Acting Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise on a modest point of order, and it has to do with Senator Finley’s statement earlier today.

I want to begin by stressing that I entirely agree that the ad to which he referred was well within the limits of acceptable free comment in this country, and I thank him for reading it into the record. I want to stress also that I share his distress, not to use a much stronger word, about the condition of women in Saudi Arabia. I have been to Saudi Arabia and found it very difficult indeed to realize that some of the absolutely extraordinary women whom I met, women with doctoral and post-doctoral qualifications from the best universities in the world, could not vote or drive or do many other things.

I think, in fairness, the record should show that, as I understand it, His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia has overturned the sentence of 10 lashes for the brave woman who was driving.

[Translation]

THE SENATE

MOTION TO CALL UPON THE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT TO RELEASE ASIA BIBI FROM PRISON—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette, pursuant to notice of September 28, 2011, moved:

That,

Whereas, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations:

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of Person” (Article 3);

“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment” (Article 5);

“Everyone charged with a crime is presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which all the guarantees necessary for his defense have been provided” (Article 11, paragraph 1) and

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (Article 18);

Whereas Pakistan is an active member of the United Nations since 1947;

Whereas, the international community has demonstrated its compassion and solidarity with the Pakistani people when it is faced with suffering, as was the case during the devastating floods during the summer of 2010;

Whereas Ms. Asia Bibi has been detained since June 2009 in conditions unworthy of human beings without a fair trial and that her health has been compromised,

That, the Senate of Canada calls on the Government of Pakistan to immediately release Ms. Asia Bibi, to ensure her safety and wellbeing, to hear the outcry of the international community and to respect the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human rights; and

That a message be sent to the House of Commons requesting that House to unite with the Senate for the above purpose.

She said: Honourable senators, I would like to provide some additional information about yesterday's motion, which was rather condensed. I simply want to say that I got my information about Asia Bibi from a book that came out in France this summer. This book contains Asia Bibi's account of the incident that led her to be sentenced to death for blasphemy. The book is called *Blasphème*.

I think this is in the same vein as the statement by my colleague earlier regarding the treatment of women in Saudi Arabia.

The book is called *J'ai besoin de vous*, and in the beginning it is Ms. Bibi who said:

... woman whose story has touched the lives of millions and has renewed the debate on religious freedom and human rights from Pakistan all the way to up to the United Nations.

I am aware that the government has intervened, but I do not think that the Canadian public is very familiar with the current situation.

As practising Catholics, Ms. Bibi and her family are a minority in Ittan Wali, a small village composed entirely of Muslims. In fact, there are 150 Muslim families and two Christian families. This situation led to growing tensions between her and the other women in her village.

On June 14, 2009, she was accused of blasphemy by her neighbour for offering a glass of water to a woman who appeared to be troubled as they were working in the fields in 45-degree heat. At that moment, her neighbour shouted that the woman should not accept the glass since Ms. Bibi had apparently contaminated the well's water by being Christian.

For her "crime" that day, she was severely beaten and brought to the police station where the village mullah gave her two choices: convert to Islam or die.

The next day, her trial before the regional court of Nankana was short and swift. And to the great pleasure of the three mullahs present when the sentence was handed down, Asia Bibi became the first woman in Pakistan to be sentenced to death for blasphemy in the last century.

Religious tension in Pakistan continued with the assassination of Punjab's Muslim governor, Salmaan Taseer, and the religious minorities minister, Shahbaz Bhatti, both of whom fought to

amend Pakistan's blasphemy law. To this day, publicly criticizing the blasphemy law or defending Ms. Bibi carries a real risk of death.

• (1500)

Any internal reform of Pakistan's legal system is unthinkable because the threats of violence are too serious, which leaves the international community as the only voice capable of putting pressure on Pakistani society.

Asia Bibi's story touched me deeply and I first became aware of it during a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, an association I belong to, which recently became ParlAmericas.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee recently adopted Comment No. 34 which is based on the recommendations of the European Centre for Law and Justice. I quote:

... since any restriction on freedom of expression constitutes a serious curtailment of human rights, it is not compatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights for a restriction to be enshrined in traditional, religious or other such customary law.

Ms. Bibi's case illustrates the dangers of religious extremism and how the international community can combat terrorism and intolerance by putting pressure on countries that flout human rights and freedom of religion.

As Human Rights Watch points out, Pakistan's institutions lack independence and their legal framework favours religious extremism rather than human rights. If Pakistan is to become a free and open democracy, it must immediately begin reforming its judicial and legal system. The judicial system in Pakistan must achieve an arm's-length distance from religious leaders, the military and the political elite. Furthermore, better training must be given to all security forces to protect rather than persecute religious freedoms and human rights.

Second, the Pakistani government must immediately repeal the blasphemy law and stand up to religious extremists who constantly defy the principles of human rights and democracy by threatening Pakistan with fear and repression. The Pakistani government has an obligation to the international community as a member of the United Nations and a responsibility to its citizens to implement the social and economic development of Pakistan in the 21st century.

Third, terrorism, extremism and poverty can all be combatted with a serious and substantial investment in education in Pakistan. Pakistan's literacy rate is 58 per cent and dips below 20 per cent in rural communities. Illiteracy contributes to discrimination and facilitates the propagation of extremism. Pakistan needs to increase its supervision of its educational institutions and monitor the curriculum to ensure that it is free of content that is contrary to international law and human rights.

Finally, religious minorities need to have increased participation in Pakistani society with their inclusion in government, civil service, industry and civil society.

As the international community increases its pressure on Pakistan we can only hope that they choose to open themselves to the outside rather than close themselves off from the world. The fate of Pakistan's evolution as a modern society rests entirely on its ability to reform and spare the life of a poor, uneducated, farm girl named Asia Bibi.

I would add that the Pope has intervened in this matter and more than 700 parliamentarians from the European Parliament voted in favour of a similar motion. Why? Because anyone willing to defend Asia Bibi in public receives death threats.

I am asking my colleagues in the House of Commons to follow suit and for the Parliament of Canada to support this woman, to support freedom of religion and the Charter of Rights, knowing that when Pakistan endured flooding and other natural disasters, Canada intervened. It was through the generosity of Canadians that we were able to help the Pakistani people.

We are entitled to ask the Pakistanis to respect their fellow citizens, in particular a woman languishing in a cell, who has been cut off from the world for over two years and deserves our support.

(On motion of Senator Ataullahjan, debate adjourned.)

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION ADOPTED

Leave having been given to revert to Government Notices of Motions:

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 58(1)(h), I move:

That when the Senate adjourns today, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, October 4, 2011, at 2 p.m.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

(The Senate adjourned until Tuesday, October 4, 2011, at 2 p.m.)

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