



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 48

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 7, 2012

The Honourable NOËL A. KINSELLA
Speaker

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

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Publications Centre: David Reeves, National Press Building, Room 926, Tel. 613-947-0609

Published by the Senate
Available from PWGSC – Publishing and Depository Services, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5.
Also available on the Internet: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

THE SENATE

Tuesday, February 7, 2012

The Senate met at 2:20 p.m., the Speaker in the chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

DIAMOND JUBILEE

Hon. James S. Cowan (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, yesterday marked a special anniversary in the history of our nation. In all parts of the country, Canadians have begun celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as Queen of Canada, a role she took over 60 years ago when she ascended to the Throne. Millions around the world will be joining in these celebrations.

Throughout her life, the Queen has been a model of public service and dedication to the world. Her sense of duty, commitment and service to others has been an inspiration to citizens of the world to give back to those around them and to work towards a better society. She has brought stability in turbulent times, not only in the countries of the Commonwealth but throughout the broader international community.

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee is more than an occasion to mark the many years of service by Her Majesty. These celebrations also give us an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of Canada and of Canadians over the last 60 years. Diamond Jubilee medals will be presented to 60,000 Canadians to recognize the contributions they have made to their communities and their tireless efforts in making Canada a better place here at home or by bringing credit to our country abroad. To these distinguished Canadians, I offer a heartfelt "thank you" and congratulations.

This morning, in the presence of the Governor General, we dedicated the magnificent Diamond Jubilee stained glass window over the entrance to this building. During her 2002 Golden Jubilee Tour of Canada, Her Majesty said this:

It is a privilege to serve you as Queen of Canada to the best of my ability, to play my part in the Canadian identity, to uphold Canadian traditions and heritage, to recognize Canadian excellence and achievement, and to seek to give a sense of continuity in these exciting, ever-changing times in which we are fortunate enough to live.

As the year progresses, honourable senators, Canadians from coast to coast to coast will mark in their own way this important milestone in Her Majesty's public life. I look forward to celebrating

with them Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's 60 years as Queen of Canada and to congratulate her and to thank her for her dedication and service to Canada. Vive la Reine!

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Honourable senators, I rise today to recognize the Golden Jubilee of the Canadian Coast Guard as we marked this past month the fiftieth anniversary of this historic institution.

The Canadian Coast Guard is playing an integral role in safeguarding our Canadian waters. Operating within Canada's waterways and oceans, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and north to the frozen waters of our Arctic, the Coast Guard remains a true symbol of our nation's security and sovereignty.

Created on January 26, 1962, by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, the Canadian Coast Guard has grown into an organization that now employs roughly 4,500 Canadians and operates a fleet of 116 vessels and 22 helicopters.

We have asked the men and women, both past and present, of the Canadian Coast Guard to safeguard Canada's oceans and waterways. Given the immensity of our coastline, this task is a challenging mandate. It is, however, a challenge that these men and women have executed with impeccable skill and integrity for 50 years, including people such as my own brother Allister, who served for many years, and my late Uncle Sam and late Uncle Charlie, both of whom were captains in the Coast Guard.

With the celebration of the Golden Jubilee, it is essential not only to commemorate and honour the past but also to consider the future. The Government of Canada has, since 2005, committed \$1.4 billion to the Canadian Coast Guard — funds that will ensure the Coast Guard fleet is adequately outfitted with new and highly capable vessels, such as the new Hero-class mid-shore patrol vessels currently being built in Halifax, and the construction of the polar icebreaker *CCGS John G. Diefenbaker*, set to become the new flagship of the Canadian Coast Guard.

It is with this funding that our government has and will continue to invest in the future of this distinguished organization. Certainly, with the celebration of our Coast Guard's historic anniversary, there is perhaps no better time to set the stage for the future.

Honourable senators, we, as Canadians, take great pride in this land we call home, and we take great pride in the safety and security that we are so fortunate to have. It is for this reason that I rise today to recognize the Golden Jubilee of our Canadian Coast Guard and to thank the men and women who have served and who continue to serve in safeguarding our waters.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

CULINARY INDUSTRY

Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck: Honourable senators, I am pleased to rise today to share with you some exceptional news from my home province of Prince Edward Island. Last week, one of the most well-known restaurant review websites, Zagat, named Prince Edward Island on a list of the top eight food getaways in the world.

The article states:

Prince Edward Island is a shellfish junkie's dream. Just imagine . . . lobsters caught a few miles from your table, PEI oysters shucked within arm's reach of their beds, instead of being trucked down in the bed of an eight-wheeler. For the more adventurous foodie, go clam-digging or learn to shuck oysters, then sit back and sip on some local vino.

This is proud news for Islanders, who have always known that we are fortunate to live in such a wonderful place. We are truly blessed with seafood beyond compare and agricultural products that are known far and wide. We have world class chefs and fantastic restaurants. Visitors and Islanders alike can indulge in great-tasting meals served by friendly staff in a great location — all part of the unique experience that Prince Edward Island has to offer.

I encourage everyone to visit our Island and to share in the experience for themselves.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Don Meredith: Honourable senators, Black History Month provides Canadians and African-Canadians with an opportunity to explore the historical contributions that Black people have made to Canadian society.

On February 14, 2008, our colleague Senator Donald Oliver introduced a motion to have the Senate recognize February as Black History Month. This motion was carried unanimously and was adopted on March 4, 2008. At second reading, Senator Oliver said:

. . . this month-long celebration encourages us to honour the significant role that Black people, both past and present, have played in shaping the mosaic of Canada and its values.

• (1430)

Prior to this, in December 1995, the House of Commons officially recognized February as Black History Month, following a motion introduced by the first black Canadian woman elected to Parliament, the Honourable Jean Augustine. The motion was also carried unanimously by the House of Commons.

While in Parliament, Jean Augustine served as parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister from 1994 to 1996, and also served as the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, as well as for the Status of Women.

Jean Augustine not only serves as an example of a woman of colour, but also, as an immigrant from the island of Grenada, she serves as an example to immigrants of all ethnicities that with hard work and dedication you can achieve great success in this country.

I would also like to remember the contributions of the Honourable Lincoln Alexander, the first black man to be elected to Parliament. Mr. Alexander also served as the twenty-fourth lieutenant governor of my home province, Ontario, from 1985 to 1991. He became only the second black person to serve in this vice-regal position in Canada. In this capacity he was a strong advocate on youth issues and education.

Jean Augustine and Lincoln Alexander are examples of outstanding African-Canadians and trailblazers who have inspired Black people at all levels of government, including myself, to serve their city, their province and their country.

This Black History Month is especially dear to me as I was asked to emcee the national launch of Black History Month on February 1 at the Canadian War Museum. I would like to thank Minister Jason Kenney and his team at the Department of Citizenship and Immigration for hosting a highly educational and impactful event, which used drama and music to tell our story.

Deepak Chopra, CEO of Canada Post, unveiled this year's official Black History Month stamps telling the stories of Ms. Viola Desmond, who was wrongfully jailed for sitting in the Whites-only section of the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, in 1946, and Mr. John Ware, a cowboy and rancher, who would help to establish the ranching industry in what would eventually become Alberta.

That night impacted me personally, as it also marked the one-year anniversary of my swearing in to this place. As you know, I am only the fourth African-Canadian and the first Jamaican to have this honour.

As our government celebrates the 200-year anniversary of the War of 1812 this year, Black History Month has a particular focus on Black people like former American slave Richard Pierpoint and his fellow soldiers in the all-Black company who helped to defend this country on the battlefield.

Please join me, honourable senators, in celebrating the contributions of the Honourable Jean Augustine and the Honourable Lincoln Alexander and in thanking all government departments, agencies and Crown corporations, including the Canadian War Museum, Canada Post, and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, for helping to tell this important part of Canada's history.

[*Translation*]

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL THOMAS MCGRATH

CONGRATULATIONS ON GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARD OF MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL

Hon. George Furey: Honourable senators, today I rise to salute Thomas McGrath, who was awarded the Governor General's Meritorious Service Medal.

[English]

Honourable senators, I wish to express my gratitude to Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas McGrath for his countless hours of service to the Armed Forces, to the young men and women of Newfoundland and Labrador and to his community.

A vice-principal at Gonzaga High School in St. John's, Lieutenant-Colonel McGrath is a national award winning educator and a recipient of the National Hilroy Fellowship, which recognizes exceptional curriculum and teaching innovation. As well, experiential learning programs he designed have twice won national awards from the Conference Board of Canada.

Lieutenant-Colonel McGrath began his career as a cadet instructor in 1977. Since that time, thousands of young men and women and officers have benefited from his dedication and service. He has championed many initiatives for cadets and officers, including cadet involvement in biathlon and the Duke of Edinburgh Award program. He is also a founding member of Cadets Caring For Canada, which encourages cadets to help their communities.

Over his career, Lieutenant-Colonel McGrath has received numerous other distinctions, including being appointed an officer of the Order of Military Merit and being awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, the 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada Medal, the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal, the Canadian Forces' Decoration, a Maritime Commanders' Commendation and a Commander, Maritime Forces Atlantic Commendation.

This current honour, bestowed by the Governor General, recognizes a military deed or activity performed in a highly professional manner and according to a very high standard that brings benefit and honour to the Canadian Forces. As such, it is only individuals of the highest calibre who receive this honour, and Lieutenant-Colonel McGrath is such an individual. I ask all honourable senators to join me in congratulating Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas McGrath and his wife, Keli Jo, on this well deserved honour.

THE LATE CLAUDE EMERY

Hon. Elizabeth Hubley: Honourable senators, in early January, the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans lost its long time Library of Parliament analyst, Claude Emery. His sudden death at age 53 was a shock to us all. We will miss Claude's deep knowledge, insightful analysis and friendly demeanour. He was not only an incredibly talented and dedicated researcher and writer, but also a genuine gentleman.

It was an absolute pleasure working with Claude. I think he exemplified the best of the Library of Parliament Research Branch. He was professional, non-partisan, passionate about his work and committed to his job. He knew his material inside and out and could recall, with detail and precision, facts from committee studies decades earlier. He was a valued asset to the

[Senator Furey]

Fisheries and Oceans Committee and will be greatly missed by all of us. To his friends, family and co-workers, I offer my heartfelt condolences.

HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

DIAMOND JUBILEE

Hon. David P. Smith: Honourable senators, I rise to pay tribute to Queen Elizabeth on the sixtieth anniversary of her reign. I actually recall that day very well. I was 10 years old, and our family was driving from Toronto to Montreal to visit relatives. We had the CBC on the entire time. It was on the old Highway 2, and there were many live reports from London. There was funeral music as well as great classical music and different tributes. I remember working hard when we got out of the range of the Toronto CBC station to find the Montreal one, but I did. I listened to every minute of it, and I will never forget it.

I recall the year before that, when she came on her first official visit as Princess Elizabeth with Prince Phillip. The Leafs, who were still in training, put on a special game for her at Maple Leaf Gardens. It was just a 20-minute show with the Chicago Blackhawks, but my Uncle Alex, who had been a major in the First World War, in the British Army, took me. I will never forget it.

Then, when they were driving past Cobourg, where we had a summer place for many years, they were in a convertible. There were about 50 people out at the road, at the intersection that went down to the lake. Although they were all looking and waving at her, I knew she was waving at me. I knew. I was 10. I will never forget that.

I have been so lucky over the years, on at least half a dozen occasions, to sit at her table at dinners and lunches in both Canada and London. She was always so hospitable and so warm. I will not start in on the stories, but there are many.

Your Majesty, you have served Canada well for 60 years. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESIDENT OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

CERTIFICATE OF NOMINATION TABLED

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the certificate of nomination of Anne-Marie Robinson as President of the Public Service Commission.

[Translation]

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO RESOLVE INTO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE TO RECEIVE ANNE-MARIE ROBINSON, PRESIDENT OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION, AND THAT THE COMMITTEE REPORT TO THE SENATE NO LATER THAN ONE HOUR AFTER IT BEGINS

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

That, at the end of Question Period and Delayed Answers on Tuesday, February 14, 2012, the Senate resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole in order to receive Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson respecting her appointment as President of the Public Service Commission; and

That the Committee of the Whole report to the Senate no later than one hour after it begins.

• (1440)

[English]

PRESIDENT OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

NOTICE OF MOTION TO APPROVE APPOINTMENT

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

That, in accordance with Subsection 4.(5) of the *Public Service Employment Act*, S.C. 2003, c. 22, ss. 12, 13, the Senate approve the appointment of Anne-Marie Robinson as President of the Public Service Commission.

OVERSEAS TAX EVASION

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Honourable senators, I give notice that, two days hence:

I will call the attention of the Senate to:

- (a) the problem of Canadians evading taxes by hiding assets in overseas tax havens;
- (b) the harm this does to Canada, both in terms of lost revenue and its effect on those Canadians who obey the law and pay their fair share of taxes;

- (c) the pathetic efforts of the Canada Revenue Agency to discover, halt and defer overseas tax evasion, and how, in comparison to those similar agencies in other countries, CRA falls short;
- (d) the fact that this, plus recent scandals involving the CRA could lead one to conclude that there are serious problems at the Agency; and
- (e) concerns that this situation amounts to a lack of leadership on the part of the Government of Canada.

QUESTION PERIOD

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

ACCESS TO SERVICE CANADA

Hon. Elizabeth Hubley: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Last fall, the government announced that it was closing the only Employment Insurance processing facility on Prince Edward Island, eliminating 30 jobs there. According to the latest figures released by Statistics Canada, P.E.I. has the highest unemployment to job vacancy rate in Canada. This means that P.E.I. has the toughest job market in the country. Why, at a time when Islanders are finding it so difficult to find work, would the government choose to eliminate 30 well paying jobs?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank the honourable senator for the question. I have answered similar questions before. As the honourable senator knows, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada is modernizing its outdated paper-based systems of Employment Insurance accessibility and service to deliver EI properly to all Canadians. The government realizes that there is some work still to be done but the object of the exercise is to modernize the EI system so that it is electronically driven rather than paper-based.

Senator Hubley: Why would the government close the Montague processing centre when there is a backlog of EI claims in P.E.I. and in Atlantic Canada? Following the difficult and unacceptable delays experienced by Islanders over the Christmas holidays, I heard a couple of weeks ago that the P.E.I. processing centre was so busy that employees were working unpaid overtime hours and new employees had to be hired just to cope.

How can the government guarantee residents of P.E.I. that they will still receive their Employment Insurance benefits on time when it is planning to close such a busy processing centre?

Senator LeBreton: I thank the honourable senator for the question. The government wants to streamline the process and move away from a paper-based system. It is interesting that the honourable senator should ask this question because, if my memory serves me correctly, a detailed answer was tabled last fall in respect of the closure in Montague.

INDUSTRY

CLOSURE OF ELECTRO-MOTIVE CANADA FACTORY

Hon. Art Eggleton: Honourable senators, last week we learned that Caterpillar Inc. had ceased operations at its Electro-Motive Canada plant in London, Ontario, eliminating the jobs of about 450 people and affecting some 1,700 people in spinoff jobs or local community service jobs.

Tammy, the spouse of an employee who worked at the plant for seven years, said:

The last five weeks have been extremely stressful to our family. We are a family of five and adjusting to \$200 a week is not easy. That won't even pay our rent for one month. Luckily, we have been able to put a few bills on hold for a month and try to pay what we can on the remainder. My heart goes out to all the families that will lose their jobs at the closure of the plant. It is sad to see a company that has been in Canada for 63 years go down because the government would not step in and say enough is enough.

Honourable senators, this same factory served as a site for the Prime Minister in a photo-op to tout a \$5-million federal tax break for buyers of locomotive products in the 2008 federal budget. However, look where it is now. Given that investment, why did the government not obtain assurances that the company and the jobs would stay in Canada after it provided that financial incentive?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): As has been reported and as the honourable senator knows well, the Prime Minister's appearance was not in respect of that particular manufacturing site but in respect of the tax incentives for Canadian-built locomotives.

We are disappointed by the decision to close Electro-Motive Canada in London. In answer to the honourable senator's question about Canadian interests, I point out that Caterpillar Inc. is an American company that was sold to Americans, so it falls beyond the purview of Canadian foreign protection.

We are very concerned about the job losses in London, Ontario. Any manufacturing facility that closes is not good news. However, we will continue to work hard as a government to create jobs and opportunities across the country. That is why we announced recently a contract with General Dynamics Canada that protected 2,200 jobs in the London, Ontario area.

Senator Eggleton: I hope that the next time the government provides incentives for a company it will take into account that the taxpayers' investment and intellectual property of that company should be protected so we can keep the jobs and the intellectual property in Canada.

Honourable senators, in the last year over 60 per cent of the jobs created in Canada have been in one province, Alberta. However, in many other parts of the country, the economic recovery is stalled. Last year, Montreal lost 36,000 jobs and Toronto lost 45,000 jobs, which pushed the unemployment rate in

those cities to over 9 per cent. In rural areas, such as the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, and in smaller cities like London, Ontario, people are losing jobs. Why is there not a more balanced pan-Canadian approach to saving and creating jobs?

Senator LeBreton: I thank the honourable senator for the question. The honourable senator talked about an American-owned company in London, Ontario, that has always been an American-owned company; and an American-owned company purchased it. With regard to the unemployment situation, anyone who loses their job is of great concern to the government. As the honourable senator correctly points out, many places across the country, not just Alberta, fall well below the average unemployment rate. Some areas have above average rates of unemployment but I can tell the honourable senator only that the government continues to focus on jobs and the economy.

• (1450)

All of us are working very hard. The Minister of Finance is consulting Canadians from all walks of life, in all industries, with regard to measures he can take in the budget in order to promote our agenda of jobs and the economy.

I can only suggest to the honourable senator that rather than my answering today, which I am not in a position to do, he simply wait for the budget.

[Translation]

FINANCE

CANADA'S ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN

Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. For the past few months, both English and French television stations have been airing recurrent ads for Canada's Economic Action Plan. These ads do not actually say anything; they just advertise the plan over and over.

Can the minister tell us exactly how much was budgeted for and spent on advertising Canada's Economic Action Plan?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, that is on the public record, but I will take the question as notice.

Senator Hervieux-Payette: Perhaps that money could be spent to create jobs.

An Hon. Senator: Hear, hear.

INDUSTRY

SUPPORT FOR CANADIAN COMPANIES

Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette: I have another question that relates to the economic situation of our companies. As the leader knows, Research In Motion is a strategic asset for Canada in the field of telecommunications. Currently, the company is going

through a rough time and its stock value has dramatically decreased in the past year. This situation has put the company at risk for a hostile takeover, with the potential consequence of losing thousands of high-paying jobs and millions worth of intellectual property, which happened in the case of Nortel. If we remember how much money Canadians spent on innovation with Nortel and other companies, nothing came back to the Canadian taxpayer.

What concrete measures will the government take to prevent the loss and destruction of a strategic Canadian asset by foreign acquisition?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, if the honourable senator had been paying attention, she would know that the Prime Minister actually made reference to RIM in the last few days with regard to ongoing efforts of the government. I will take the question as notice.

[Translation]

DELAYED ANSWERS TO ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table the answer to a question raised by the Honourable Senator Eggleton on December 14, 2011, concerning awareness and education regarding sodium.

[English]

Honourable senators, I have the honour to table the answer to the oral questions asked by the Honourable Senator Jaffer on November 2, 2011, and December 16, 2011, concerning missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, I also have the honour to table the answer to the oral question raised by the Honourable Senator Dallaire on September 28, 2011, concerning international war criminals.

HEALTH

SODIUM LEVELS IN FOOD

(Response to question raised by Hon. Art Eggleton on December 14, 2011)

Health Canada supports Canadians in making healthy food choices and adopting a balanced diet.

The Canadian health ministers met on November 24-25, 2011 to discuss various public health files, including sodium reduction. Ministers expressed their continued commitment to working together towards the goal of reducing the average Canadian sodium intake to 2300 mg/day by 2016. Work is underway in the federal Health Portfolio with provinces, territories, non-government organizations, and industry, in the following areas:

Awareness and Education - Health Canada is working with partners on a Healthy Eating Awareness and Education Campaign that will help Canadians understand the importance of reducing their intake of sodium within the context of healthy eating.

- Launched by Health Canada in October 2010, phase I focussed on the Nutrition Facts Education Campaign (NFEC). The campaign is a collaboration between Health Canada and Food & Consumer Products of Canada (FCPC).
- Phase II focuses on Healthy Eating Awareness and Education and will promote healthy eating messages together with those specific to sodium reduction. Messages and tips for sodium reduction are already available on the Healthy Canadians website (www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/index-eng.php). This phase will also build on the Food Guide's principles of healthy eating and will include awareness and education activities to encourage consumer behaviour change.
- Phase III of the Campaign, planned for 2013-2014, will focus on healthy eating and healthy weights.

Research - There are research funding initiatives underway. Canadian Institutes of Health Research hosted a workshop in January 2010 on research priorities related to sodium reduction. Subsequently, they funded three projects through a first call for proposals and launched a second funding opportunity on sodium and health in June 2011.

Food Supply / Monitoring - Health Canada continues to work with industry to develop guidance on reducing sodium in processed foods so that a variety of choices are available to Canadians. The guidance will be based on a gradual and phased reduction approach which will help contribute to bringing sodium intakes closer to the goal of 2300 mg/day. Health Canada is working with its provincial partners and the foodservice industry to develop guidance for best practices in restaurants and foodservice establishments. Health Canada is also facilitating the exploration of options for a collaborative incentive-type program with industry and health NGOs.

In addition, Health Canada will be monitoring and reporting on the dietary sodium intakes of Canadians as a measure of progress towards the 2016 intake goal of 2300 mg/day. This will assist industry in using the guidance as a benchmark for sodium reduction, provide technical advice as needed, and provide links to research.

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

MISSING AND MURDERED ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

(Response to questions raised by Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer on November 2 and December 16, 2011)

The British Columbia Missing Women Commission of Inquiry is a provincial inquiry struck under provincial legislation. As a result, decisions regarding funding for

participants fall under the jurisdiction of the Government of British Columbia.

The Government of Canada takes the issue of violence against women and girls very seriously. Aboriginal women and girls remain particularly vulnerable to violence and can face challenges in accessing the justice system. The Government of Canada will continue to work in partnership with provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal people, and other stakeholders to develop more effective, appropriate, and collaborative solutions and responses to help ensure the safety of women in Canada. These solutions cut across many different sectors, including the justice system, public safety, policing, gender issues, women's rights and Aboriginal affairs.

As one example, on October 29, 2010, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, announced seven concrete steps the Government of Canada is taking to address the disturbingly high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and to make our communities safer - http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/news-nouv/nr-cp/2010/doc_32560.html. The specifics of the seven concrete steps are set out in the Backgrounder to that announcement - http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/news-nouv/nr-cp/2010/doc_32564.html, and related federal spending with regard to some of the root causes of higher risks of violence is canvassed in a second Backgrounder - http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/news-nouv/nr-cp/2010/doc_32565.html. As the news release and backgrounder indicate, four of the seven steps involve additional program funding, which is available to Aboriginal groups and communities through application to either the Department of Justice - <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/pb-dgp/fund-fina/index.html> - or the Department of Public Safety <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cor/ac/index-eng.aspx>.

The Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women Canada also announced at the same time a \$500,000 investment to the Native Women's Association of Canada's "From Evidence to Action" program. On February 25, 2011, the Minister made a further announcement of \$1,890,844 over three years to support NWAC's "From Evidence to Action II" program - <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/med/news-nouvelles/2011/0225-2-eng.html>.

[Translation]

JUSTICE

INTERNATIONAL WAR CRIMINALS

(Response to question raised by Hon. Roméo Antonius Dallaire on September 28, 2011)

The Government of Canada created the War Crimes Program in 1998. The Program is a partnership between the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Department of Justice Canada (Justice). The partners work together to provide a range of

complementary remedies to ensure that Canada is not a safe haven for perpetrators of human and international rights violations.

The Government of Canada funded the War Crimes Program on a permanent basis in the 2011 federal budget. The permanency of the Program demonstrates Canada's commitment to fighting impunity for war criminals and to keep them from seeking safe haven in its territory. All allegations of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity are investigated no matter from where the individuals hail. Remedies for implementing Canada's "no safe haven" policy depend on the facts of the individual case. Our investigations may lead to criminal proceedings under the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act or administrative proceedings under the Citizenship Act or the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

Criminal investigations and prosecution, widely seen as essential to international justice, are the most expensive and resource intensive options. Nevertheless, the ability to conduct criminal investigation and to prosecute is indeed still an important element of the War Crimes Program. In some cases, a criminal justice response is the most appropriate action and sends a strong message to Canadians and the international community that the Government of Canada does not tolerate impunity for war criminals or for persons who have committed war crimes, genocide or crimes against humanity. In other cases, it may be more appropriate to initiate civil or immigration proceedings such as an action to revoke an individual's citizenship or refugee status which was fraudulently obtained. Therefore partners diligently seek the most timely and cost-effective remedies such as early detection and denial of entry into Canada.

There has been no change to Canada's policy in respect of non-refoulement. The Supreme Court of Canada has established the principle that, save in exceptional circumstances, individuals may not be removed or extradited to a substantial risk of torture or to face the death penalty. In this regard, prior to extradition, the Government of Canada regularly seeks assurances that the death penalty will not be imposed. Before deportation from Canada, persons who are not Canadian citizens can request a pre-removal risk assessment to examine the risk of returning to their home country based on new evidence not available at the Immigration and Refugee Board hearing. A pre-removal risk assessment is a thorough process that evaluates whether a person would face persecution, torture, risk to life or risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, if returned to his or her country of origin.

ANSWERS TO ORDER PAPER QUESTIONS TABLED

ENVIRONMENT—GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government) tabled the response to Question No. 27 on the Order Paper by the Honourable Senator Mitchell.

ENVIRONMENT—LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government) tabled the response to Question No. 29 on the Order Paper—by Senator Mitchell.

ENVIRONMENT—SCIENTIFIC STUDIES
OF HYDRAULIC FRACTURING

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government) tabled the response to Question No. 30 on the Order Paper—by Senator Mitchell.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE—
RECRUITMENT OF AUDITORS GENERAL

Hon. Claude Carignan (Deputy Leader of the Government) tabled the response to Question No. 33 on the Order Paper—by Senator Downe.

- (c) eliminating non-tariff measures that are not found in the international standard that may be used as a barrier to trade such as container sizes and shapes;
- (d) modernizing and standardizing the grading and classification system for pure maple syrup sold in domestic, import and export markets and through interprovincial trade, thereby eliminating the current patchwork system of grades that is confusing and fails to explain to consumers in meaningful terms important differences between grades and colour classes;
- (e) benefiting both marketing and sales for an industry that is mature, highly organized and well positioned for growth;
- (f) enhancing Canadian production and sales, which annually constitutes in excess of 80% of the world's annual maple products output; and
- (g) upholding and enhancing quality and safety standards as they pertain to maple products.

Hon. Pierre Claude Nolin: Honourable senators, before I begin, I would like to move two amendments. Will I have another 15 minutes or do I have to stick to the time I have remaining?

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Nolin has 10 minutes.

MOTION IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Pierre Claude Nolin: Honourable senators, I move that the motion be amended as follows:

1. By replacing the words “which is poised for market growth” by the words “which wants to pursue its dynamic development”; and
2. By replacing paragraph (d) in the motion by the following:

“Modernizing and standardizing the grading of pure Maple syrup sold in domestic, import and export markets and through interprovincial trade which would explain more clearly to the consumer the classification and the grading system;”.

[English]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, Senator Nolin will continue in his time and we will anticipate an explication of his amendments.

[Translation]

Senator Nolin: Honourable senators, I would like to speak about the two amendments, which both consist of clarifications. I consulted with Senator Raine and she agrees with these two amendments.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THE SENATE

MOTION TO URGE THE GOVERNMENT
TO MODERNIZE AND STANDARDIZE THE LAWS
THAT REGULATE THE MAPLE SYRUP INDUSTRY—
DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Raine, seconded by the Honourable Senator Andreychuk:

That the Senate call upon the Government of Canada to modernize and standardize the laws that regulate Canada's maple syrup industry, which is poised for market growth in North America and overseas, and which provides consumers with a natural and nutritious agricultural product that has become a symbol of Canada;

That the Government of Canada should do this by amending the Maple Products Regulations, in accordance with the September 2011 recommendations of the International Maple Syrup Institute in its document entitled “Regulatory Proposal to Standardize the Grades and Nomenclature for Pure Maple Syrup in the North American and World Marketplace”, for the purpose of

- (a) adopting a uniform definition as to what constitutes pure maple syrup;
- (b) contributing toward the development of an international standard for maple syrup, as it has become very apparent that the timing for the introduction of such a standard is ideal;

First, rather than initiating the export phase, we want to maintain the export effort. Second, the original wording of the motion was much more negative while producers want a much more positive motion.

These consultations revealed a mixture of grading systems for maple syrup that is confusing and even sometimes misleading. The Institute is proposing a single grade with four classes that would simplify life for both consumers and government regulators.

What is more, standardization would help distinguish pure maple syrup from other products on the market, and thus boost the industry's visibility. Our country has been producing maple syrup for years, decades or centuries, and the industry is well-organized and ideally positioned for growth. After all, pure maple syrup represents less than one percent of the market share of common sweetener sales in North America.

- (1500)

Honourable senators, the proposed changes would create a single grade for pure maple syrup and a separate grade for off-flavoured or otherwise defective syrups.

Only pure maple syrup would be sold in retail markets, while defective syrups would be used by the food processing industry. In this way, the new standards would protect the integrity of the industry.

Government regulators would focus on keeping inferior syrups out of retail markets. To that end, they would ensure that "Grade A" maple syrup does not contain off-flavours and meets all food quality and safety requirements.

Regulators would ensure that pure maple syrup is labelled properly. The Institute is aware of the gap between the good intentions of the industry and the realities on the ground.

To meet the higher expectations of the new standards, producers and packers would need training on how to avoid off-flavours and other common defects.

Fortunately, the institute has been sponsoring a maple syrup grading school at the University of Maine for some years now. It expects to build on the school's success and offer additional training at provincial, state and federal levels.

I am proud to note that one of the institute's Quebec members, Centre ACER, may also be able to help in this regard. As honourable senators may know, Centre ACER is responsible for

grading all bulk syrup produced in Quebec. The centre's specialists classify syrup by colour and identify off-flavours and defects. As the new standards are implemented, the centre's grading expertise could be transferred to the broader maple industry throughout Canada and the United States.

Centre ACER is currently conducting research that may lead to the creation of affordable and practical tools for identifying off-flavours in syrup at the field level. Over the past few years, the institute has been raising awareness within the industry about the proposed changes. These efforts have clearly shown that the vast majority of producers and packers are supportive once they understand the rationale for the changes.

Even so, the institute recognizes the need for a transition period between the existing and the proposed grading systems. This would allow producers and packers to use labels in their inventory, to become familiar with the new syrup classification equipment, and to introduce their customers to the new maple grading system. As the industry moves toward standardized grading, there will be a learning curve.

Some Canadian and American producers may resist the proposals due to short-term costs. However, the short-term costs would not be exorbitant and would pale in comparison to the potential long-term benefits of standardization. These benefits promise to be substantial for consumers, industry and government alike.

For consumers, the changes would end the current confusion over Grades A and B, or numbers 1, 2 and 3. As maple syrup lovers here know, the grade is secondary, but it can be cumbersome and confusing. All pure maple syrup would become Grade A.

Furthermore, the introduction of four distinct classes of Grade A syrup with descriptive names would help consumers choose their preferred taste. New labels would also indicate the origin of the product.

For industry, standardized grades and nomenclature would not only mean improving service to clients, but these standards could also help expand market share.

A uniform definition of pure maple syrup would help distinguish it from table syrups and other sweeteners.

With effective marketing focused on the purity of its product, the industry could attract new customers, both in North America and abroad, which would reduce technical barriers to expanding trade.

Finally, for government, modernizing and standardizing maple regulations would reduce duplication among federal, provincial and state regulatory bodies. Standard grades and classes would, in effect, allow all parties to speak the same language. This would simplify the job of regulators, and ultimately improve the coordination of standards both in Canada and the U.S.

Honourable senators, developing and improving standards across many jurisdictions in North America requires a great deal of good will and cooperation. The maple industry has

[Senator Nolin]

worked hard to reach this point in the process. It is up to all governments now to play their part by considering the proposals carefully, weighing the pros and cons, and then acting in the best interests of all concerned.

For this to happen, the first step is for the Government of Canada to launch an informed debate on the subject. I believe the Senate should call upon the government to amend the Maple Products Regulations in accordance with recommendations from the International Maple Syrup Institute.

I urge you, honourable senators, to join me in supporting the motion as amended.

Hon. Pierrette Ringuette: Honourable senators, I listened with great interest to the speeches and comments about the motion. New Brunswick is certainly a small maple syrup producer compared to our neighbour, Quebec.

The intent of the motion is definitely valid. As Senator Nolin mentioned, the industry did not originate in Europe as our population did, and there has been ongoing evolution.

Canadians who do some travelling abroad will come to realize that people around the world appreciate this product that is unique to North America, and especially to Canada.

This motion will allow the industry to standardize the labelling and the quality of the product. This will probably remove from the market some products that call themselves maple syrup but are not considered the real thing by connoisseurs.

I believe that good Canadian maple syrup is just as world-renowned as good Canadian ice wine. I support the motion and the proposed amendment without hesitation.

(On motion of Senator Runciman, debate adjourned.)

• (1510)

[*English*]

POVERTY

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Robichaud, P.C., calling the attention of the Senate to the issue of poverty in Canada—an issue that is always current and continues to have devastating effects.

Hon. Art Eggleton: Honourable senators, this inquiry initiated by Senator Robichaud deals with the issue of poverty in Canada, something that this Senate knows a fair bit about having a report before it from the Social Affairs, Science and Technology Committee just a couple of years ago on the matter after an extensive study of some two years. What that report found and what is still a reality to this day is that 10 per cent of Canada's population — more than all of the people in Newfoundland and

Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, P.E.I. and Manitoba combined — remain in poverty. Among those people are hundreds of thousands of children, perhaps up to a million children, who are still living in poverty in this country. That is in spite of the fact that in 1989 the House of Commons said it wanted to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. We have double-digit child poverty in most parts of this country to this day. This is a disgraceful situation for a country this rich, honourable senators, and there is more that needs to be done on this.

The inquiry brings this matter to our attention and I would like to speak to it further on another occasion. Therefore I ask that this could now be adjourned for the balance of my time in my name.

(On motion of Senator Eggleton, debate adjourned.)

OLD AGE SECURITY

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck rose pursuant to notice of November 22, 2011:

That she will call the attention of the Senate to the inequities of the Old Age Security Allowance for unattached, low-income seniors aged 60-64 years.

She said: Honourable senators, I introduced this inquiry to make senators aware of a very unfair situation that exists in the old age pension program.

The subject matter of this inquiry came to my attention by a 62-year-old woman living in my province who had to stop working for health reasons. Her employer did not have a pension plan. She was finding it very difficult to exist on the savings she had been able to accumulate plus the small cheque she was getting from CPP.

The question that she asked me was why her next door neighbour could receive the OAS allowance and she could not. The neighbour was also 62 and had a similar income that was very low. However, the neighbour happened to be married.

When I looked into this situation, I discovered there is a very unfair aspect to this allowance. I found that a person who is married or in a common law relationship can receive the OAS Allowance if they are 60 to 64, if they pass a low-income test, and if their spouse is getting Old Age pension as well as the supplement. Furthermore, if their spouse has passed away, the other partner, aged 60 to 64, can get the OAS Allowance for the Survivor.

The unfair part is that single, legally separated or divorced people of the same age are not eligible for this allowance.

The Old Age Security Allowance was introduced in 1975. In order to be eligible, a senior must be 60 to 64 and the spouse must receive the OAS pension and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. Together they must be considered low income. The OAS Allowance can be worth up to a maximum of \$1,021.65 per month. More than 60,000 low-income seniors receive this benefit.

The other allowance is called the Allowance for the Survivor and it was introduced in 1985. It is designed to help widows and widowers aged 60 to 64 who have a low income. The current maximum Allowance for the Survivor monthly benefit is \$1,143.78 per month. Almost 30,000 surviving spouses receive this benefit.

I am happy that those two allowances are there because it means that many seniors can live in a more comfortable fashion. However, I am concerned that some seniors are left out, and they are the low-income, unmarried, divorced people, aged 60 to 64, who are not eligible to apply for the allowance.

Seniors often face serious hardships. In my home province, there are about 21,000 seniors over the age of 65. The Prince Edward Island Senior Citizens' Federation says that almost 40 per cent of them, more than 8,000 people, live on less than \$20,000 a year. In fact, the average income of these seniors is \$16,608.

Many studies show that unattached seniors, especially women, are the most likely to be poor. Yet, these people are not eligible for the OAS Allowance.

A national advocacy group for seniors, CARP, stated in its pre-budget submission last year that older women can and do face retirement with less income. The advocacy organization noted a number of reasons why this might be so. Their wages may be lower; women live longer than men and therefore may outlive their financial savings; and many women spend some of their working years providing informal caregiving services and are unable to build up adequate retirement income.

CARP recognizes the problem of poverty among senior women is greater because the OAS Allowance for people age 60 to 64 does not include individuals who are single, divorced or separated.

Other national organizations, including the Canadian Association of Social Workers, have advocated for expanding the OAS Allowance. They want it to go to all low-income persons age 60 to 64, and I agree with these organizations. This allowance should be equally distributed among Canadians.

Therefore, as I said, I agree with these organizations and I would urge the federal government to expand the criteria so that all low-income people aged 60 to 64 are treated fairly and that they can apply for the OAS Allowance.

(On motion of Senator Carignan, debate adjourned.)

LITERACY

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Catherine S. Callbeck rose pursuant to notice of November 23, 2011:

That she will call the attention of the Senate to the importance of literacy, given that more than ever Canada requires increased knowledge and skills in order to maintain its global competitiveness and to increase its ability to respond to changing labour markets.

[Senator Callbeck]

She said: Honourable senators, I see that Inquiry No. 22 is now at day 13. I certainly want to speak on this inquiry, but am still waiting for some up-to-date statistics. Therefore, I would like to adjourn this inquiry for the remainder of my time.

(On motion of Senator Callbeck, debate adjourned.)

• (1520)

HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Linda Frum rose pursuant to notice of December 7, 2011:

That she will call the attention of the Senate to egregious human rights abuses in Iran, particularly the use of torture and the cruel and inhuman treatment of unlawfully incarcerated political prisoners.

She said: Honourable senators, I rise today to condemn the Iranian regime's appalling abuse of human rights and to call for the immediate release of all of Iran's unlawfully held political prisoners.

There are currently three Canadians being held in Iran's notorious Evin Prison, a grotesquely cruel and inhumane chamber of horrors. Like so many other innocent victims of the Iranian regime, these men have been subjected to beatings, physical and psychological torture and the denial of medical treatment in jail. They have been denied the right to a free and fair trial, and their lives are in grave danger.

Of greatest urgency among them is Saeed Malekpour, a web expert who was arrested in 2008 shortly after his arrival from Canada to visit his terminally ill father. Mr. Malekpour, who developed a software program that allows users to upload photographs, was sentenced to death in October 2010 after being found guilty of desecrating and assaulting Islam. His death sentence was reinstated in November 2011, and he lives each day with the prospect of imminent execution.

There is also the case of Hossein Derakhshan, an Iranian Canadian blogger and journalist, who was arrested and transferred to Evin Prison in 2008. Mr. Derakhshan is credited with initiating Iran's blogging revolution. In 2010, he was sentenced to 19-and-a-half years in prison for exercising his right to free expression online. He has endured 10 months of solitary confinement and was beaten into making false confessions about ties to U.S. and Israeli intelligence services.

There is also the case of Hamid Ghassemi-Shall, an Iranian and Canadian citizen, who was arrested while visiting his dying mother in Iran in 2008. In 2009, the Iranian judiciary sentenced Mr. Ghassemi-Shall to death in a trial that lasted only a few minutes. He has endured 18 months of solitary confinement and has been subjected to physical and psychological torture on charges of alleged espionage.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has the distinction of holding the world's highest record for public hangings and executions, and they are second only to China in the total number of political

executions. These executions are typically carried out in an especially cruel and sadistic manner. Systematic arrests, lengthy imprisonments and torture are regular occurrences in Iran. Human rights activists and members of ethnic minority groups are among the regime's favourite targets.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn in the strongest of terms the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights, and I call for the immediate release of the unlawfully held Canadian political prisoners Saeed Malekpour, Hossein Derakhshan and Hamid Ghassemi-Shall.

Hon. Nicole Eaton: Honourable senators, today I stand to bring to your attention the prominent lawyer and human rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh.

Nasrin Sotoudeh was born in 1963 to a middle-class Iranian family. She studied international law and passed the bar examination in 1995. Nasrin is married to Reza Khandan, to whom she refers as a "truly modern man." They have two young children.

In her career, Nasrin represented imprisoned Iranian opposition activists and politicians following the disputed June 2009 Iranian presidential elections, as well as prisoners who had been sentenced to death. Her clients have included noted journalist and head of Iran's banned opposition group, the Democratic Front.

Nasrin Sotoudeh was arrested in September 2010 on charges of spreading propaganda and conspiring to harm state security. Since then, she has spent long periods in solitary confinement in the notorious Evin Prison.

In January 2011, Iranian authorities sentenced Sotoudeh to 11 years in prison and barred her from practising law and from leaving the country for 20 years. Six months later, a branch of the Tehran Appeals Court reduced her sentence to 6 years in prison and the ban from practising law to 10 years. Despite never having committed a justifiable crime, Nasrin is still in prison. To make matters worse, Nasrin Sotoudeh has been denied visitors. Why? Because she refuses to wear the chador, stating that it is a violation of her rights. The chador, as you will probably know, is the long open cloak worn by Iranian women on top of their hijab. Even though last month the Iranian judiciary announced it is no longer mandatory to wear a chador, Nasrin is still not allowed to see her husband or her two young children.

She is a very accomplished woman. In 2008, she was awarded the Human Rights Prize by the International Committee for Human Rights. More recently, she was awarded the 2011 PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award. This award honours writers who have fought courageously in the face of adversity for the right of freedom of expression.

Last October, Nasrin Sotoudeh became the recipient of PEN Canada's Empty Chair Award for the 32nd International Festival of Authors. The Empty Chair Award is presented to writers not permitted to travel freely or to appear at literary festivals around the world.

She also received PEN Canada's One Humanity Award, given to a writer whose work transcends the boundaries of national divides and inspires connections across cultures. These are well-deserved awards to a truly inspirational woman.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of unlawfully held prisoner Nasrin Sotoudeh. I hope someday to be able to meet her in person.

Hon. A. Raynell Andreychuk: Honourable senators, I too rise to draw to your attention the plight of award-winning Iranian journalist Dr. Ahmad Zeid-Abadi.

In June 2009, Dr. Zeid-Abadi was among dozens of journalists arrested after Iran's disputed presidential elections. That December, he was sentenced in camera to six years in prison, five years internal exile and a "lifetime deprivation of any political activity [including] interviews, speech, and analysis of events."

His offence? Well, the Iranians say "propagating against the regime," "collusion to organize riots" and "insulting the Supreme Leader." Such are the charges brought against journalists in Iran, which this year ranked 175 out of 179 countries in Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index.

Dr. Zeid-Abadi is best known for his articles defending the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, encouraging political reform in Iran and supporting the Middle East peace process. Domestically, his work has earned him solitary confinement, torture and humiliation.

Internationally, he has been awarded the 2010 Golden Pen of Freedom Award from the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers and UNESCO's 2011 Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has pledged under international law to uphold the freedom of thought, conscience and expression, and to relinquish torture and degrading punishment. Why do these not apply in the case of Dr. Zeid-Abadi and countless other political prisoners?

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the Iranian regime's violations of international human rights commitments to which it is a party and call for the immediate release of the unlawfully held political prisoner Dr. Ahmad Zeid-Abadi.

[Translation]

Hon. Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis: Honourable senators, today I wish to share with you my deep concern over the eroding human rights situation in Iran. I am particularly concerned about the growing number of political prisoners, the ever high number of executions, including of minors, the widespread use of torture, unfair trials and the exorbitant sums required for posting bail, and the severe restrictions on the freedom of information, expression, association, beliefs, academic freedom and the freedom of movement.

• (1530)

Take the case of Mahdieh Golroo, a young, female, Iranian student activist who was prevented from pursuing her post-secondary education. Before being imprisoned, she was actively involved in the campaign process for the Iranian election on June 12, 2009.

At 7 a.m., on December 2, 2009, Iranian security forces officers arrested Mahdieh Golroo and her husband, Vahid Lalipour, at their home. The couple was transferred to block 209 of the Evin prison. The arrest of her husband, who had never been involved in political activities, was used during the interrogation of Mahdieh Golroo to force her to collaborate with the Iranian regime. Her husband's arrest was designed to force Golroo into accepting the charge of collaboration with the PMOI or the MKO, the People's Mujahedin of Iran, a militant opposition group, a charge that Golroo has always rejected.

Vahid Lalipour was released on bail on February 21. His hearing took months. On August 23, 2011, on his wedding anniversary, Vahid Lalipour was arrested again and transferred to Evin to serve a one-year prison sentence. Mahdieh Golroo's case was under the jurisdiction of the 26th Branch of the Revolutionary Court presided by Judge Pir Abassi. She was charged with propaganda against the regime, colluding against public safety and collaborating with the People's Mujahedin of Iran.

On April 11, 2010, branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced Mahdieh Golroo to two years and four months in prison. Her lawyer, Amir Raissian, was unable to review her case file because of the security restrictions imposed by judicial authorities. On the day of her trial, Mahdieh Golroo defended herself in court without her lawyer. On July 7, 2010, branch 54 of the Tehran appeals court set Ms. Golroo's final sentence at two years in prison.

Mahdieh Golroo has suffered from numerous physical ailments during her incarceration. On May 2, 2010, she was refused medical care despite her physical condition. On June 9, 2010, she was reportedly transferred to the infirmary as a result of a severe intestinal illness. Prison officials once again denied her access to a physician.

During an interview on July 22, 2010, Mahdieh Golroo's husband stated that during a recent visit, she had again complained of numerous physical ailments. Since the medication she required to treat the illness is manufactured in the west, prison officials denied her access to it.

Like many other political prisoners, Ms. Golroo has been denied visitation rights with her family and husband.

On November 7, 2010, Mahdieh Golroo and other political prisoners were transferred to Evin prison's methadone block, which consists of a small enclosed room that houses dangerous criminals and drug addicts. Prisoners held in the methadone ward are given access to fresh air for only one hour a day. They also do not have access to the prison library or the telephone.

[Senator Fortin-Duplessis]

On December 21, 2010, Mahdieh Golroo began a hunger strike. Branch 4 of Evin Court charged her with negatively influencing public opinion.

Two weeks later, on January 5, 2011, she was allowed to visit with her family. However, one week after that, she was once again deprived of visitation rights. Mahdieh Golroo is currently being held at Evin prison. She was supposed to be released at the end of October; however, a new trial was held and she will now be released only in April or May 2012.

Honourable senators, I would like to take this opportunity to strongly condemn the use of the death penalty in Iran and call on the Iranian authorities to institute a moratorium on executions, pending the abolition of the death penalty.

I deeply deplore the lack of fairness and transparency of the judicial process and of appropriate professional training for those involved therein. I call on the Iranian authorities to release all political prisoners, as well as all of the individuals named in the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmed Shaheed.

In conclusion, I urge the Iranian government immediately to allow United Nations Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed to enter Iran to address the country's ongoing human rights crisis. The government's complete lack of cooperation with the Special Rapporteur and its continued refusal to allow him access to the country are an indication that it has no intention of taking meaningful steps to improve the human rights situation.

I believe that it is also very important for Canadian companies to live up to their responsibility to society by abstaining from supplying Iran with goods, technology or services that could be used to control and censor the flow of information and communication or to track individuals, including human rights activists.

As a member of the Canadian Senate, I condemn the deplorable human rights abuses that the Iranian regime is perpetrating, and I demand the immediate liberation of all of these illegally held prisoners.

[English]

Hon. Jacques Demers: Honourable senators, I rise today to express my horror of the treatment of Abdollah Momeni, a student activist who was detained and taken to Evin prison within days of the June 2009 presidential election.

He has been sentenced to four years and eleven months in prison. Mr. Momeni is currently being held in ward 350 of Evin, a ward maintained for political prisoners. His wife Fatima told the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran in October that her husband is under interrogation in prison and he is not in good spirits. Currently, he is taking medication for his ear, which was torn due to the beatings he received in jail. Fatima and her children have been prevented from visiting him in prison. She said:

My children are young and are forbidden from seeing their father, as am I. How I would love to embrace my husband. I don't know what grudge they hold against Abdollah that no matter what do, they are not satisfied. They don't grant us visits or phone calls.

Honourable senators, today I join my colleagues in expressing my disgust and outrage over the systematic suspension of basic human rights in Iran. I call for the immediate release of Abdollah Momeni, a prisoner of conscience.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the Iran regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of the unlawfully held prisoner, Abdollah Momeni.

Hon. Consiglio Di Nino: Today, I am happy to join many colleagues and indeed many thousands of others around the world, who, like Canadians, live in countries where fundamental rights and freedoms are protected and guaranteed by laws, in raising our voices in appeal for the release of political prisoners in Iran. Let us be these prisoners' voices which are denied them by a country where political dissenters are routinely imprisoned and inhumanely treated.

• (1540)

One such dissenter is Heshmatollah Tabarzadi who has been a prisoner since 2009. He is held in exile in Rajai Shahr Gohardasht prison and endures daily harsh conditions. He is the Secretary-General of the National Democratic Front of Iran. In October 2010, branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced him to nine years in prison and 74 lashes.

Honourable senators, let us send a strong message of hope to all Iranians who courageously struggle every day against the tyranny of the Iranian regime and all those who languish in Iranian jails.

Let us jointly condemn the Iranian regime for its deplorable human rights abuses and plead with the authorities to release all political prisoners including Heshmatollah Tabarzadi.

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan: Honourable senators, I rise today to draw your attention to the plight of Mr. Behrouz Tavakkoli, a member of the Baha'i community in Iran. He was arrested in 2008. In 2010, the Iranian judiciary sentenced him and six of his colleagues each to 20 years in prison, but their only crime was caring for the spiritual and social needs of the Baha'i community.

Mr. Tavakkoli was a social worker who lost his government job in the early 1980s because of his Baha'i beliefs. Three years ago he was held for four months in prison without charge, and most of this time was spent in solitary confinement where he developed serious health problems.

He and his wife Tahereh Tuski have two sons, one of whom lives in Ottawa. As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the deplorable abuse of human rights of the Iranian regime and call for the immediate release of unlawfully held prisoner Behrouz Tavakkoli.

Hon. Doug Finley: Abdolfattah Soltani, a prominent lawyer and human rights activist, was arrested and transferred to Evin Prison in 2011. Mr. Soltani's current situation is in a state of limbo because he has not yet been issued a prison sentence.

His only crime is being a lawyer and peacefully defending human rights.

Mr. Soltani is the co-founder of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders, a reputable organization in Iran forcibly shut down by Iranian authorities in 2008.

He was arrested on two other occasions and endured a total of nine months in prison.

Mr. Soltani is a lawyer for numerous imprisoned members of the Baha'i faith. He has been described by his followers as one of the bravest human rights defenders in Iran.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the deplorable abuse of human rights of the Iranian regime and call for the immediate release of the unlawfully held prisoner Abdolfattah Soltani.

Hon. Janis G. Johnson: Honourable senators, Bahareh Hedayat was a student activist at Tehran University's School of Economics, an active member of the woman's movement and the Campaign for One Million Signatures to Change Discriminatory Laws Against Women.

On December 31, 2009, security forces raided her home and placed her in solitary confinement at Evin Prison. She was charged with 16 counts including propaganda against the regime, active participation in post-election demonstrations, interviews with foreign media insulting the supreme leader, insulting the president, gathering against the regime, and on May 19 was sentenced to nine and a half years in prison. Like the millions of young women of her generation, Bahareh desires rights, dignity, equality, prosperity and freedom and she is one of these young passionate souls who fights to live in a just world.

However, in a country where rights to freedom, liberty and equality are violated daily, in a country where human rights advocates are persecuted for speaking out, in a country that has the highest per capita death penalty and the second highest number of executions after China, in a country where simply demanding the end of discriminatory laws against women and girls is considered a threat to national security, she and other young, free minds are risking their lives for their beliefs and rights.

I will finish by reading a passage Bahareh wrote to her husband:

I miss everything . . . every single thing . . . every cell in my body is in pain as a result of my longing . . . I am tired of the small dreams that are draining me of air . . . Envy . . . envy . . . You don't know what it feels like to be held in this damned cage and watch three people buried in front of your eyes; two of whom, particularly the last, were angels with exemplary characters . . . You can't imagine what it feels like . . . and I hope you never have to experience it.

Honourable senators, as a member of the Senate of Canada I condemn the deplorable abuse of human rights of the Iranian regime and call for the immediate release of the prisoner Bahareh Hedayat.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Percy Mockler: Honourable senators, first of all, I would be remiss if I did not congratulate Senator Frum on the leadership she has shown in openly condemning, in this august Chamber, the serious human rights abuses taking place at the hands of a deplorable regime, the Iranian government.

As Canadians, we cannot tolerate the inhumane cruelty the Iranian dictatorship is inflicting on its people.

Honourable senators, no one has the right to use their power and that of their country to torture their people.

I join Senator Frum in saying:

[*English*]

Honourable senators, Mahvash Sabet, a member of the Baha'i community in Iran, was arrested in 2008. In 2010 the Iranian judiciary sentenced Ms. Sabet and six of her colleagues each to 20 years of prison. Their only crime was caring for the spiritual and social needs of her Baha'i community.

Before the 1979 revolution, Ms. Sabet was working as an educator at several schools and she also collaborated with the National Literacy Committee of Iran. After the Islamic revolution, she was fired from her job and blocked from working in public education.

Prior to her arrest, she served as a director of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education where she also has taught psychology and management.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the deplorable abuse of human rights of the Iranian regime and call for the immediate release of unlawfully held prisoner Mahvash Sabet.

Hon. Leo Housakos: Honourable senators, I rise to speak on behalf of Habib Latifi. Mr. Latifi is a young Kurdish civil rights activist and a high achieving student who was arrested by numerous Iranian intelligence agents during an anti-government protest and transferred to Sanandaj Prison in 2007.

In 2008, the Iranian judiciary sentenced Mr. Latifi to death in a trial that lasted a few minutes, but his only crime was peacefully defending human rights. On the ninth day of his detention he was transferred to a hospital after suffering from a kidney hemorrhage. It was later discovered that Mr. Latifi almost died as a result of the brutal torture he had endured in solitary confinement.

He eventually filed a formal complaint against prison authorities but he was accused of lying.

Mr. Latifi is in danger of imminent execution.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the deplorable abuse of human rights of the Iranian regime and call for the immediate release of unlawfully held prisoner Habib Latifi.

Hon. Daniel Lang: Honourable senators, I rise today to recognize the bravery of a fellow human being. Her name is Atefeh Nabavi; 30 years of age, a student activist and graduate student who was banned from continuing her education. She was arrested on June 15, 2009, during the mass arrests that ensued the presidential elections.

• (1550)

Atefeh was arrested, along with her cousin and six of their other friends, at her residence. She was transferred to ward 209 at Evin prison, where she spent 95 days under severe physical and psychological pressure in solitary confinement.

In December 2009, Branch 12 of Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced her to four years in prison on the charges of "contact with the Mojahedine Khalgh Organization," and the other crime was "participation in the protests of June 15, 2009."

The activities of her relatives abroad were the cause of the charges that were brought against her. Nabavi's lawyer made the following statement regarding this matter:

In Atefeh's case, it is apparent that the interrogation she endured and the charges filed against her were mainly due to her family associations. Most of the questions she was asked during her interrogation were regarding her uncle's activities abroad. In addition, there are no confessions in Atefeh's case files. Trying and charging a person based on family relations is in contradiction to the principle of "crime and punishment" present in international laws. . . .

Her lawyer said:

The only charge based on which my client can be taken to court is participating in the June 15 demonstrations in which nearly four million other people came out and protested. . . . It was not an illegal assembly by any means.

It is important to also note that her husband Ali is also in prison in Semnan since February 13, 2011, serving a one-year prison term, which will be followed with one year in exile on similar charges.

Like all honourable senators, I condemn this breach of human rights by this current regime in Iran.

Atefeh Nabavi, the Senate of Canada salutes you and prays for your immediate release. I join all senators in demanding your freedom from this unlawful confinement.

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Honourable senators, I bring to your attention the unfair treatment of Iranian citizen Rozita Vaseghi. Rozita Vaseghi, a member of the Baha'i community in Iran, was arrested in 2010. She is currently held in Vakilabad prison in Mashad. The Iranian judiciary sentenced Ms. Vaseghi to five years in prison and also banned her from leaving the country for 10 years. This sentence was increased by two years on appeal.

Ms. Vaseghi has endured months in solitary confinement and was issued new charges while imprisoned. In July 2011, she was sentenced to an additional five years in prison. Ms. Vaseghi was included by Amnesty International in its 2011 submission to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women drawing attention to prisoners of conscience.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of the unlawfully held prisoner Rozita Vaseghi.

Hon. Elizabeth (Beth) Marshall: Honourable senators, I rise today to draw attention to human rights violations and abuses in Iran, in particular, the treatment of an Iranian university student by the name of Majid Dorri.

Iran's Ministry of Advanced Education has developed a system of issuing stars against students who have disciplinary action against them. After a student collects a certain number of stars, he or she is banned from education. The system is primarily used against student activists.

Majid Dorri was a starred student banned from continuing his education and was imprisoned on July 9, 2009. He was sentenced to 11 years in prison for "waging war against God," "acting against national security," and "disturbing public order." Majid's sentence was reduced to six years in prison by the appeals court and his exile sentence remains.

He was recently transferred from Evin prison to Behbahan prison, a location that is 1,000 kilometres away from the residence of his parents. Majid will now have to complete the remaining years of his six-year prison sentence in Behbahan, a prison where there are no political prisoners and where most have committed crimes such as murder, drug trafficking and theft.

Majid has submitted, through his family, numerous letters and requests to judicial officials. To date he has not received any response from authorities.

Majid was suspended for a few terms from university before being completely banned from continuing his education in 2007, after protesting against the mismanagement and tight security at Tehran's Allameh Tabatabai University.

Majid's mother has spoken publicly about her son's prison exile, saying that "He suffers from migraines, is anemic and can't stand up for days." The Behbahan prison lacks medical and cultural facilities. Majid recently fractured his ribs. The conditions at the prison are tragic. At the time of his arrival the water supply was cut off so Majid, who had arrived in shackles and had travelled many kilometers from Tehran, was unable to wash his hands and face. There was no access to water and, as such, hygiene is non-existent.

Majid Dorri was not permitted to contact his family prior to his departure to Behbahan prison. Now that he is 1,000 kilometres away, it is even more difficult for his family to visit.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of unlawfully held prisoner Majid Dorri.

Hon. Yonah Martin: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak of Youcef Nadarkhani, an Iranian Christian. Mr. Nadarkhani has lived a humble life as a pastor for a network of Christian house churches. He is an active member of the Protestant Evangelical Church of Iran. He is a devoted husband and father of two young boys ages 9 and 7. This biography would be unremarkable in a country such as Canada; however, in Tehran Mr. Nadarkhani has been sentenced to death. The charge, you ask? Apostasy and renouncing the Islamic faith.

Mr. Nadarkhani is being persecuted for his faith. Though the Iranian constitution states that it safeguards the freedom of religion, Mr. Nadarkhani's long history of enduring coercive tactics by police evidences that this safeguard is solely in name, not in action.

Mr. Nadarkhani was first imprisoned, charged with apostasy and then released in 2006. Later in 2009, an educational policy required all children to read from the Quran in school, including his two boys. When Mr. Nadarkhani objected to this indoctrination, he was reported and then again charged and imprisoned. The justice system is far from just, and Mr. Nadarkhani's lawyer noted several procedural errors ultimately culminating in his sentence — execution by hanging.

Honourable senators, I condemn the religious persecution of Mr. Youcef Nadarkhani. In today's 21st century, individuals should be free to practise their faith and answer the call from their "God," regardless of where they call home.

I join my honourable colleagues in condemning the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of unlawfully held prisoner Youcef Nadarkhani.

Hon. Michael Duffy: Honourable senators, it saddens me to think that the great people of Iran, a country that in the past has contributed so much to the world, are now subjected to the tyranny of the fanatical regime.

Hamed Rouhinejad's prison sentence and so-called crime goes a long way to show just how backwards, cowardly and absurd Iranian justice is.

For the backwards part, we need only look at Mr. Rouhinejad's crime: He was found guilty of being a monarchist. In other words, his crime was having a political opinion that differed from the severe orthodoxy of the Iranian regime. In Iran, having political opinions that are different from what the regime is offering can land you in prison. How can we call the Iranian justice system anything less than backwards?

• (1600)

Now, let us use Mr. Rouhinejad's case to see how cowardly the pitiful Iranian regime is.

Mr. Rouhinejad suffers from multiple sclerosis. He is a sick young man. He is physically weak. He currently sits in prison without access to medical care, and, according to his father, his condition is deteriorating.

This is the true face of the Iranian regime — so paranoid, so afraid of dissent that they will go so far as to imprison a sick and diseased young man because of his political beliefs.

In Iran, everyone is seen as a threat, even people who would never have the physical strength to affect the regime. How can we call the Iranian justice system anything less than cowardly?

In all of this mess, it is easy to see how absurd the justice system is, but to quantify the absurdity, let us see the sentence Mr. Rouhinejad received for his crime. For associating with monarchists, this university student received a death sentence. It truly boggles the mind. Luckily, Mr. Rouhinejad's sentence has been reduced to 10 years. What a joke. In Iran, you can be sentenced to death for the smallest of reasons. How can we call the Iranian justice system anything less than cruel and absurd?

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights, and I call for the immediate release of the unlawfully held prisoner, Hamed Rouhinejad.

Hon. Kelvin Kenneth Ogilvie: Honourable senators, based on information provided to me, I would like to describe the following situation. Arash Sadeghi is an imprisoned student activist, currently held in Evin Prison in Tehran, Iran.

He was first arrested in July of 2009, and he has endured much physical and psychological torture in prison.

Sadeghi described the torture he endured at the hands of his interrogators, and it included the following: He was hung from the ceiling from one leg and left hanging for long periods of time. He was slapped for two to three hours, causing damage to his eye and optic nerves and causing his eardrum to tear. The interrogators urinated on his face while holding his mouth open.

He was pushed down from a height of two to three metres, causing damage to the tendons in his legs. He was dragged on scorching hot asphalt, resulting in severe damage to his skin. He was beaten repeatedly in the neck with a baton, resulting in damage to the vertebrae in his neck.

Sadeghi has been released and rearrested on several occasions. He has never received treatment for his many and serious health issues arising from his treatment in prison.

Honourable senators, I condemn this inhuman treatment of any individual in today's world and call for the immediate release of prisoner Sadeghi.

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Honourable senators, Saeed Matinpour, an Azerbaijani journalist and civil rights activist, was arrested in 2008 and transferred to the notorious Evin Prison. In the same year, the Iranian judiciary sentenced Mr. Matinpour to eight years in prison, but his only crime is peacefully defending free expression and minority rights. His crimes, according to the Revolutionary Court, were contact with foreigners and propagating against the regime, but, according to his wife, he annoyed the Revolutionary Court by requesting that Iranian

Turkish children be taught in their mother tongue in school and by advocating for them to speak and write in their own tongue. He also participated in a seminar in defence of Turkish-speaking citizens, with 10 other people, in 2007. All the others were acquitted, but he alone was harshly sentenced. His wife believes this happened because he annoyed his interrogator by refusing repeated requests to say that he had received money from the U.S.

His eight-year sentence, his wife said, is a result of his interrogator's wrath, a personal vendetta.

Mr. Matinpour has endured extreme torture by prison authorities and, although previously healthy, has suffered heart attacks, has severe back pain and has a lung infection as a result.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of the unlawfully held prisoner Saeed Matinpour.

Hon. Rose-May Poirier: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak on behalf of Mehdi Khodaei, an Iranian student and human rights activist, who is currently serving a seven-year prison sentence in Iran. Mehdi Khodaei has been detained since February of last year. According to the Human Rights House of Iran, he is confined in ward 350 of Evin Prison, which is run by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. He has also had to endure months of detention in solitary confinement and is deprived of communication with his family.

Khodaei was found guilty of "propaganda against the regime" and "acting against national security by organizing gatherings." In other words, he is being persecuted for having exercised his rights to freedom of expression and freedom of movement.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I also condemn the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of the unlawfully held prisoner Mehdi Khodaei.

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: Honourable senators, sponsored by the Government of Canada and 41 other states, on October 27, 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on Iran to release all arbitrarily detained individuals held for exercising their right to peaceful assembly and expression. The resolution drew the highest number of votes since 1992, with 86 countries in favour, 32 against and 59 abstentions.

Honourable senators, Mr. Kouhyar Goudarzi is yet another human rights activist being held as a political prisoner in Iran.

Mr. Goudarzi was arrested on July 31, 2011, in Tehran, along with two of his friends, including his roommate Behnam Ganji, who was held in prison for eight days and committed suicide shortly after his release.

In September, Nahal Sahabi, Behnam Ganji's girlfriend, also committed suicide. According to unofficial reports, she was suffering from depression after Behnam's death. Both suicides have raised serious concerns regarding Kouhyar Goudarzi's safety.

Kouhyar Goudarzi's mother, Parvin Mokhtare, was also arrested at her home in Kerman. His mother is held in the general ward of Kerman prison. Recently, she was tried in court, then transferred back to prison. She was sentenced to 23 months in prison by the Kerman Revolutionary Court. She was deprived of a lawyer during her trial. According to human rights groups, Mr. Goudarzi's mother was told by security officials that she has no need for legal counsel or a defence team.

Mr. Goudarzi was first arrested in December of 2009, during a protest against the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He was charged with "propaganda activities against the regime through collaboration with the Human Rights Reporters Committee" and "transmitting news and information to terrorist organizations outside Iran and giving interviews and publishing articles in foreign media." Mr. Goudarzi was sentenced to a year in jail and released in December 2010.

Honourable senators, it took three months following Mr. Goudarzi's second arrest, at the end of last July, for supporters to find out that he is being held in solitary confinement in ward 209 of Evin Prison. The Iranian judiciary has charged him with "gathering and colluding against national security through membership in the Committee of Human Rights Reporters" and "propaganda against the regime through giving an interview to the Spiegel publication." However, Iranian authorities have remained silent on his condition.

• (1610)

According to Iran's civil rights regulations, a person arrested has the right to immediately notify their family on the location of their detention. Telephone calls and visitation rights with the family are also legal rights in Iran. Clearly, these have all been denied.

In the past four months, various international human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders, have issued statements expressing concern over Kouhyar Goudarzi's situation. The continued silence by the Iranian regime on his current condition is inhumane.

Honourable senators, like many of us here, I too am very concerned about the situation of political prisoners in Iran. We believe these people are in danger. We call on the Government of Iran to respect fully its human rights obligations in law and practice. Tell the world what has happened to Kouhyar Goudarzi and his mother Parvin Mokhtare.

Hon. Bob Runciman: Honourable senators, I rise today to support this motion and to speak about Majid Tavakoli, a student leader in Iran who was sentenced to more than eight years in prison for the simple act of speaking out against the illegitimate presidential election in 2009. Participating in an illegal gathering, propaganda against the system, and insulting officials were the trumped up charges on which Majid Tavakoli, a student of shipbuilding at Tehran's Amirkabir University of Technology, was tried and sentenced to eight and a half years in prison. It was a trial that even his lawyer was not allowed to attend. His most recent arrest was the third time he was jailed for standing up for human rights and democracy.

It is strongly suspected that he has been tortured, both physically and psychologically, and that he has spent months in solitary confinement. His family has been denied access to him for months at a time. Majid is being held in the feared Rajai Shahr Prison, a hellish place in which political prisoners are housed alongside the most dangerous men in the country in unimaginably harsh conditions. This is a place that could exist only in a country that has no regard for human rights and no respect for human dignity. It is a place designed to break the bodies and the spirits of those imprisoned within its walls. However, Majid is not a man whose spirit is broken easily. When given the opportunity, he continues to urge his fellow students to continue the struggle for freedom.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of unlawfully held prisoner Majid Tavakoli.

Hon. David P. Smith: Honourable senators, I rise to indicate my support for the motion that has been presented today and the facts set out. I have had close friends from Iran for over 40 years, such as the late Fred Kasravi, whose father was a great agricultural professor and gardener for the former shah, and Toni Mehraïn and other close friends since the 1960s. I have heard so many stories. On several occasions I have gone to Paris in June of each year when they hold the annual rally for democracy in Iran. I have seen 70,000 Iranians there from all over Europe and around the world, and I have stood and bonded with them. I feel bad that I was not aware that this was occurring today, but we have to be in support of these people being held.

I fly to India frequently for personal reasons and was there two or three weeks ago. I usually fly over Iran, and each time I do, I look down and think about them. I just wanted to rise and indicate my support.

Hon. Judith Seidman: Honourable senators, Hossein Ronaghi Maleki, blogger, human rights activist and an advocate against cyber censorship, was arrested and transferred to Evin Prison in 2009. In 2010, the Iranian judiciary sentenced Mr. Maleki to 15 years in prison, but his only crime is peacefully defending human rights.

Unsanitary and inhumane prison conditions and multiple protest hunger strikes have cost Mr. Maleki one kidney, and he just received his fourth operation on the other. Given this dangerous kidney condition, Mr. Maleki's health is at serious risk.

Mr. Maleki has endured many months in solitary confinement and has been subjected to serious physical and psychological pressure. Mr. Maleki is among Iran's intellectuals. He should be treated as an outstanding individual rather than locked up and tortured.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn every abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of unlawfully held prisoner Hossein Ronaghi Maleki.

Hon. Carolyn Stewart Olsen: Honourable senators, on February 19, 2009, Shabnam Madadzadeh, a 24-year-old Iranian student, was arrested on her way to school. I want honourable senators to imagine for a moment how they would feel as parents if that happened to their child.

Shabnam was arrested for supposedly attending a party the night before that she says she did not attend. She was imprisoned for a year, during which time she was subjected to untold abuse and months of solitary confinement. Finally she was sentenced to five years in prison for heresy and anti-government activities. Shabnam is being held in the infamous Evin House of Detention, referred to as the country's Bastille.

Heartbreakingly, in April 2009, the Iranian courts issued an agreement to release Shabnam on bail, but an Iranian judge personally blocked her freedom, saying that he needed to discipline her. People are routinely tortured and killed in this prison. I want honourable senators to remember our Canadian journalist, Zahra Kazemi, who died of blunt trauma after being arrested for taking pictures in front of the prison. In other words, she was beaten to death. An autopsy revealed signs of extreme torture.

Honourable senators, as a member of the Senate of Canada, I condemn the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for Shabnam Madadzadeh's immediate release.

Hon. John D. Wallace: Honourable senators, I rise to express my profound concern, sadness and dismay at the severe human rights abuses being suffered by Seyed Zia Nabavi, an Iranian student who was arrested in Iran on June 15, 2009, after participating in a peaceful post-election protest. Zia graduated from the Babol Noshirvani University of Technology with a chemical engineering degree. However, he was prevented by Iran's Ministry of Advanced Education from completing his master's degree in sociology after he was labelled a starred or banned student.

Following his arrest, Zia was sentenced to serve 10 years in the Karoun Prison in Ahvaz. After being transferred there, he was severely beaten and sent to solitary confinement for 48 hours.

In an open letter recently written to the head of human rights for Iran's judiciary, Zia describes the horrific and inhuman conditions in the Karoun Prison. The following are excerpts from his letter:

Based on the number of beds available, this ward has a maximum capacity of 110 prisoners, but, on average, it holds more than 300 prisoners at a time. . . . we experience difficulties fitting in the rooms, even when standing, which has forced many to sleep on the floors (I slept without a bed for six months). A third of the prisoners sleep outside in the courtyard. . . . a large number of prisoners are forced to spend day and night outdoors, regardless of the weather conditions . . . living with mice and cockroaches has become common.

. . . the sewage system clogs once in a while, pours into the courtyard, and covers the area where prisoners sleep. The smell fills the entire outside area and lingers for hours. Although breathing the same cigarette smoke filled air in a confined area with many other prisoners is torture in itself, when mixed with the stench of sewage, it becomes even more unbearable; particularly if it begins to rain heavily because the courtyard turns into a swimming pool and it becomes impossible to move back and forth to the bathrooms and

toilets. . . . What is even more heartbreaking is that, despite the sewage covering the entire outside area, the prisoners are forced to lay out their belongings and sleep and eat in the same area.

• (1620)

Honourable senators, Seyed Zia Nabavi is not simply a name, or words, or just another picture that appears in a newscast. He is a real, live human being. He is a son, he is a grandson, he is a brother, he is a cousin, and he is a cherished friend to his schoolmates. He is to each of them what our children and friends are to each of us. They are part of us.

Seyed Zia Nabavi is the future of the Iranian community.

The anguish, sorrow and torment suffered by Zia's family as a result of his inhumane and unjust imprisonment is painfully evident from his father's recent plea to the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran:

Zia is my only son. He is my right hand. We are worried about him so much. I pray and hope that the Lord will help us and bring him back home to his family. . . . It is very difficult to feel that there are no possibilities to explore to do anything for him.

. . . I have tried many times and I did not get anywhere. It is so difficult to bear this. If anybody could help Zia's release or at least help him be transferred to a closer area, those authorities who could help in any shape and form, please help so we don't suffer as much. My only wish is the release of all of sons and my own son. Zia was an honor student in university.

Honourable senators, as a member of the Senate of Canada, I make this my personal request and plea to the Iranian authorities to demonstrate compassion, understanding and respect for the strength, freedom and dignity of the Iranian human spirit, by immediately releasing Seyed Zia Nabavi from his captivity in the Karoun Prison and allow him to return home to his family and to his Iranian community.

Hon. Pamela Wallin: Honourable senators, I, too, rise today in support of Senator Frum's motion.

I just want to say a thank you to Senator Smith for his heartfelt comments on this. I think that is why we are all part of this today; we know we have a responsibility to stand here and shine a light.

Today it is my responsibility to point out the plight of Isa Saharkhiz. He, too, is a real person, with a real family and with sons. Mr. Saharkhiz and I were born in the same year and, like me, he is a long-time journalist, but he is the proof that journalism can be a dangerous craft in a tyrannical and vicious regime such as Iran's.

For years Mr. Saharkhiz worked for the Iranian regime as a journalist, even heading up its news agency in New York before returning home to run domestic publications. This was during a time of comparative press freedom in Iran, if we can use that phrase, and he was one of its architects.

When the political climate grew even more restrictive, Isa left government service and then was banned for life from returning. He therefore founded a reformist newspaper and magazine, criticizing the regime's running of the economy and so, too, those publications were banned.

In 2009 he was sentenced to three years in prison for "insulting Iran's supreme leader" and that sentence was later increased to five years. When he gets out, he will be banned from journalism and political activity for a further five years.

His son says that in jail Isa Saharkhiz has been subjected to inhumane and violent treatment, and that his health has now deteriorated. Last month it was reported that he was chained to a hospital bed in Tehran, supposedly for medical treatment.

As a member of the Senate of Canada, I join with my colleagues today to condemn the Iranian regime's deplorable abuse of human rights and call for the immediate release of all unlawfully held prisoners, including Isa Saharkhiz.

Hon. Jim Munson: Honourable senators, first I want to applaud Senator Frum for her initiative.

As I move the adjournment of this important inquiry, I think back to 1987 when I was a reporter and stood outside the walls of the notorious Evin Prison for a few days. A Canadian engineer was being held there and it was a pretty scary time, but at least he was freed. I then spent four more days on the Iran-Iraq war front: four days I would not recommend to anyone in this room. I can hardly believe 25 years have gone by.

With those memories and with the heartfelt comments of fellow senators I, too, would like to speak to this important issue. We know we can never look the other way when it comes to human rights, particularly in Iran, and especially today in Syria.

I therefore move the adjournment of the debate for the balance of my time.

(On motion of Senator Munson, debate adjourned.)

[*Translation*]

POVERTY IN NEW BRUNSWICK

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Fernand Robichaud rose pursuant to notice of December 7, 2011:

That he will call the attention of the Senate to the 2009 poverty reduction strategy of New Brunswick.

He said: Honourable senators, today I would like to talk about poverty and the strategy adopted to eliminate it in my province of New Brunswick.

Very eloquent statistics were recently presented by Campaign 2000 and the Saint John Human Development Council in New Brunswick.

We learned that, in 2009, there were still 14,000 poor children in New Brunswick and 41,000 people receiving social assistance. This is still unacceptable. It is one of the reasons why the province developed a poverty reduction strategy. NGOs in New Brunswick are deeply committed to fighting poverty.

Many volunteers are working tirelessly to promote social justice, fight poverty, eliminate food insecurity and improve the distribution of collective wealth. Their efforts are very commendable and, above all, necessary.

People like Sister Auréa Cormier and other volunteers have been and continue to be committed to the fight against poverty. Many of them helped develop the New Brunswick poverty reduction strategy.

In 2009, the province adopted a comprehensive strategy to reduce poverty and make major reforms to its social assistance program. A formula that would discourage dependency and encourage self-sufficiency among the poor was needed. The ultimate goal is to tear down the welfare wall that keeps people on social assistance. The poor are sometimes better off remaining on welfare than trying to get off it.

New Brunswick's new strategy was developed in three phases and I believe it to be realistic, innovative and inclusive.

In early 2009, no less than 2,500 people were consulted about how they thought poverty could be eliminated. Not only were government and community stakeholders consulted, but poor and previously poor people were asked for their opinions about how to change the welfare system.

Next, round tables were organized and about 30 representatives of the public, private and community sectors identified ways of reducing poverty and reforming the system.

• (1630)

The last phase involved gathering some 50 provincial officials, business people, representatives from NGOs and, of course, representatives from all the political parties. Together, in November 2009, they adopted a five-year action plan called *Overcoming Poverty Together*. All the participants reached a consensus and signed a common document with a common goal. All the leaders of the provincial political parties signed this New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan. For two years now, the people committed to the fight against poverty have been keeping an eye on the governments and writing progress reports on the implementation of this action plan.

Among others, Sister Auréa Cormier, who was also involved in the Common Front for Social Justice, has just prepared her progress report. Only one of the three actions to be taken immediately has been taken, namely to eliminate the Interim Assistance Program rate that provided \$294 a month to an employable single person. The extension of health card coverage has not yet been completed and neither have the changes to the policy on household incomes.

Of the ten initiatives to be achieved over the next five years, action has been taken on three of them. Among the seven initiatives remaining, there is the increase to minimum wage, which is currently \$9.50 an hour and should be increased to \$10. This increase was put off until April 1, 2012.

With regard to the measures related to continuing education, skills acquisition for life and community involvement, progress is slow.

Honourable senators, I think it would inspire governments across the country if they looked at the National Council of Welfare's studies and documents that present poverty-fighting expenses as an investment.

Another recent document from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimates that the direct cost of poverty to the Government of New Brunswick is close to half a billion dollars; that represents 6.5 per cent of the 2009-2010 provincial budget.

What is more, the entire cost to New Brunswick society is nearly \$2 billion. These numbers include the supplementary costs of poverty, including health care, fighting crime and the shortfall in taxes due to the loss of economic activity. Honourable senators will agree that \$2 billion a year is quite significant.

Federal transfer payments and tax credits are extremely important in preventing poverty in New Brunswick. Without those programs, the poverty rate in New Brunswick, which is currently 9.7 per cent, would be 24.8 per cent.

To fight poverty is to invest in the future. That is true for all levels of government, and governments can do more. Our society must rediscover sharing and compassion. We can fight poverty by promoting education and health and by supporting one another.

If we invest in fighting poverty today, we will lower health care costs and other social costs in the future. Eliminating poverty nationwide is an investment in our future and that of our children and grandchildren.

(On motion of Senator Chaput, debate adjourned.)

ORDERS OF REFERENCE OF SENATE COMMITTEE

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Gerald J. Comeau rose pursuant to notice of January 31, 2012:

That he will call the attention of the Senate to the content of committee orders of reference.

He said: Honourable senators, I am pleased to have this opportunity to talk about a subject that has interested me for some time. Since my appointment to the Senate, I have had the honour of sitting on many of the 19 standing committees, including those on aboriginal peoples, official languages and national finance, and the Committee on Rules, Procedures and

the Rights of Parliament. I also chaired the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans from 1996 to 2005. I have participated in studies of bills and estimates and in special studies.

Recently, as a member of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration, I chaired the Subcommittee on the Review of Committee Budgets and International Travel. Those who have had the pleasure of sitting on this subcommittee know that the process can be both fascinating and very complex. And that is putting it nicely.

It is my belief that committees are at the core of the Senate's work. They are recognized for their important contributions to legislation and public policy. Committees were called "the heart and soul of the Senate" by Senator Muriel McQueen Fergusson, the first woman Speaker of the Senate, because of their focus on social, economic and political issues.

In the course of their work in examining bills or policy issues, Senate committees sometimes travel to gather testimony at the local and regional levels. Committees may hold formal public hearings in locations throughout Canada, and undertake more informal fact-finding trips both within Canada and abroad.

Committee travel enables senators to better familiarize themselves with and get a first-hand grasp on the issues they are studying and to obtain evidence and information that could not otherwise be easily obtained in Ottawa. On average, committees conduct about 18 trips per year.

The Senate's budget for committee work in 2011-2012 is \$3.75 million. Of this, \$500,000 is set aside for the expenses related to witnesses, videoconferencing and working meals in Ottawa for all committees.

The Subcommittee on the Review of Committee Budgets is tasked with recommending the allocation of the remaining funds, which requires a careful review of the budget submissions of committees that wish to incur other expenses — in general, those relating to the hiring of professional services and travel.

We must, of course, take into account the cap of \$1.25 million that the Internal Economy Committee has imposed on domestic and international committee travel in making our recommendations.

Before a committee can adopt a budget, it must first seek the authority of the Senate for an order of reference. Indeed, Rule 90 states that "A standing committee shall be empowered to inquire into and report upon such matters as are referred to it from time to time by the Senate." With the exception of the Rules Committee, Internal Economy and the Committee on the Conflict of Interest for Senators, committees have no "standing" mandates and are not empowered on their own accord to study matters. In other words, our committees are creatures of the Senate and it is the Senate that must approve what a committee may study.

Sometimes, it is a bill that is referred to a committee after second reading, or in the case of the Standing Committee on National Finance, it is the main or supplementary estimates. However, in many cases, it is a special study.

Committee members normally meet at the beginning of a session to discuss what they would like to study. Some committees are very specific in their studies and develop detailed, focused orders of reference that explain exactly what they would like to study and indicate clear reporting dates.

• (1640)

For example, for the recent studies by the Social Affairs Committee on Canada's health care system, on mental health and population health, very detailed orders of reference were developed, which included the main themes that the committee wished to examine.

As another example, the Foreign Affairs Committee studied "the rise of Russia, India and China in the global economy and the implications for Canadian policy" using a very short but specific order of reference. The committee followed this example when it agreed to a similar study on Canada's relations with Brazil.

These two committees eventually asked the Senate for budgets to permit them to travel within and outside Canada for public hearings and fact finding activities. With clear orders of references and objectives, I am sure it was easy for the Committee on Internal Economy and the Subcommittee on the Review of Committee Budgets to grasp why funds for these activities were being requested.

Still other committees choose broad orders of reference to allow them a level of flexibility in examining subjects that fall within their general areas of expertise as set by the *Rules of the Senate*. Broad, open-ended orders of reference can be a useful tool for committee members to keep themselves informed on emerging issues related to their subject areas. That is quite understandable. For example, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade has used its order of reference to examine such issues as may arise from time to time relating to foreign relations generally to hear from international officials from the United Nations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Similarly, the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce is using its study on the present state of the domestic and international financial system to hear from the Governor of the Bank of Canada and the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, and to learn about financing growth capital for small and medium-sized enterprises. The Banking Committee has heard over 15 witnesses since the beginning of the session.

However, in the case of these two studies, the committees asked for very minimal budgets from Internal Economy to accomplish this work — mostly for small items such as subscriptions to specialized publications and miscellaneous expenses — since the bulk of their work, such as hearing witnesses in Ottawa, requires no budget application to the Internal Economy Committee.

[English]

At a minimum, it is my belief that orders of reference should include a general idea of a committee's objectives and a time frame for the study, including a reporting date. Committees

should have an idea of what outcomes they wish to achieve, and the study should have some focus and direction. Members of the committee should know where they are going and how they will get there. They may not always need a GPS, but at least a plan.

I also believe that, because all orders of reference must be adopted by the Senate, the Senate itself should be aware of a committee's objectives. Regrettably, however, many orders of reference are adopted by the Senate with little or no debate. I do understand that it may be because our fellow colleagues have a respect for the work of committees and recognize that committees are generally masters of their own destiny in choosing which topics they wish to examine. Nonetheless, all senators have a duty to make themselves aware of the orders of reference they are approving to enable Senate committees to do their work.

I make this point because of some of the challenges that I perceived as chair of the subcommittee on the review of committee budgets. This fall our committee examined budget applications for the current fiscal year of 2011-12. Some committees came before us with broad orders of reference. Some had well-developed work plans, which imposed self-discipline and focus on their studies as well as on their budgets. Others did not.

In my view, it is not for our committee to question the parameters of an order of reference that the Senate has already adopted; nor do we feel that the subcommittee can or should micromanage a committee's work plan. Our role is to consider the budgets as they are presented to us. The role of the subcommittee is not to judge what the Senate has authorized the committees to do. The Senate has already made that judgment.

By the time our subcommittee examines a budget, a committee's study is well under way. The Senate has adopted the order of reference, and the committee has adopted a work plan or witness list and has begun to hear witnesses in Ottawa.

It should be noted that in chapter 3:06, section 2(2) of our Senate Administrative Rules — what we call SARS — requires committees to present a budget containing a general estimate of the total cost of a special study. It states:

A budget prepared for the purposes of subsection (1) shall contain a general estimate of the total cost of a special study and a detailed estimate of the special expenses of the committee for the study for the fiscal year.

In our first report to the Internal Economy Committee, the subcommittee alerted committees that we will be looking for such general estimates in future budget applications, recognizing that this requirement may force committees to seek tighter orders of reference with firm reporting deadlines.

With \$500,000 already set aside for all committees to hear witnesses in Ottawa, hold videoconferences and have working meals, committees can hold extensive hearings in Ottawa to accomplish their work and may not need to incur other expenses. As a consequence, some committees do not even have to submit budget applications to the Internal Economy Committee.

However, if committees do want to go beyond these expenses, usually either by travelling or hiring personnel, they should have either a focused order of reference or a clear and coherent work plan. For example, if a committee wishes to travel to Washington for its work, then the order of reference of the committee's work plan should include a reference to the need to learn about Canada's bilateral relations with the United States.

Committees should also be prepared to defend the elements of their budgets, not just to the subcommittee but to the Senate and to Canadians. We are spending public funds and must do so in a responsible and transparent manner. At all times, but especially in this period of economic restraint, we must be prepared to demonstrate fiscal prudence.

Given the cap imposed on committee travel, never has it been more important to question the value of trips. I recognize that senators place an immense value on committee travel and I share that view. Whether for public hearings or fact-finding, committee travel permits committee members to connect and engage with people on matters of national importance all across Canada. As one senator put it, nothing can replace face-to-face contact.

However, when committees develop their orders of reference and budgets and are contemplating travel, members must ask themselves — and must be prepared to answer — these types of questions: Why do we need to go there? Of what value is this trip to our study? What do we hope to learn? How will travelling there contribute to our report to the Senate? Will this trip enhance our study?

Indeed, when orders of reference come before this chamber, as senators, we should be questioning the mover of the motion or committee chairs about how much a study might cost and whether the committee has set parameters on its proposed study.

Honourable senators, I must draw your attention to the fact that our committee used a new process to examine committee budgets in the past year. We invited committee chairs to present their budget applications to the subcommittee in the company of all chairs whose budgets included funds for hiring contracts or travel. In the past, we met strictly with individual chairs one at a time. This time, we had all chairs in the same room at the same time. In my opinion, this was an excellent format as it allowed all chairs to hear what their colleagues were requesting. It helped to put their demands into perspective.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all those chairs and, in some cases, the deputy chairs when the chairs could not be there, who appeared before our committee. I commend them for respecting their speaking times and the limits imposed. The members of our subcommittee learned a great deal from their presentations, and the information gathered helped us to make informed decisions on budget allocations.

To conclude, the objective of my inquiry was to share my views on what should be included in committee orders of reference and on the connection between committee studies and the budget process. I hope that other honourable senators will also share their opinions and insights on this topic, which relates to work that I know honourable senators take seriously.

[Senator Comeau]

• (1650)

I contend that committees should be clear about what they intend to accomplish when they agree to take on a study and develop an order of reference. If committee orders of reference are drafted as broad and open ended, committees should still determine a study's parameter, desired outcomes and results. This can be done by developing a work plan together and by speaking to the order of reference when its adoption is sought in the Senate. The work plan does not have to be extremely detailed; committees need some flexibility and may indeed need the flexibility to adjust their studies depending on the evidence they gather.

To help us develop these plans, as committee members we have access to the research and subject matter expertise from the analysts provided by the Library of Parliament and by the procedure and logistics expertise of our committee clerks. We do have excellent people from the Library of Parliament and excellent committee clerks. However, there must be certain coherence in the work undertaken by a committee. It is imperative to the other members of the Senate and to the Canadians that we serve. Senators, as well as members of the public, including the various interest groups who follow our work, need to understand in some detail where a committee is going, how it will get there, how long it will take and how much it will cost.

I thank honourable senators for listening, and I would invite and encourage others to join in this important debate.

Hon. Jane Cordy: Honourable senators, I want to thank Senator Comeau for his comments. As a member of the subcommittee dealing with the budgets for committee, I thank him very much because it is challenging when you get a reference from a committee that is pretty vague. We are trying to make a judgment on how to spend taxpayers' money.

Like Senator Comeau, I believe that the value of Senate committees travelling outside of Ottawa is extremely important. It is wonderful to sit in a small community and listen to the interests of its citizens on whatever committee it happens to be. There is no better value than meeting face to face with Canadians and explaining and getting their viewpoints on issues related to a committee.

As the honourable senator said in his comments, it is neither the job of the subcommittee nor of the Internal Economy Committee to judge what we think of the terms of the order of reference because they have been passed by the Senate.

The honourable senator spoke of the responsibility of the committee to have a clear reference and work plan. Our job as a subcommittee was made easier by the committees that came before us with a clear reference. However, when a term of reference comes before us, is it also not the responsibility of senators to look at it and before passing it, which we sometimes do routinely, ensure that in fact it is a clear term of reference for that committee? If it is not, is it not our responsibility to stand up and ask questions so that it is further clarified?

Senator Comeau: May I request five minutes?

The Hon. the Speaker: Is it agreed?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Comeau: I do thank Senator Cordy for those comments. While I am on my feet, I would like to thank both Senator Cordy and Senator Larry Smith for the excellent work they did last year for the committee. It was a joy to be able to work with people who do take the work of committees very seriously. I know both Senators Smith and Cordy committed a lot of time to and placed a lot of value on the work that committees do.

I appreciate the comment that the honourable senator has made, namely that it should be incumbent on all senators, when an order of reference is placed before this chamber, to spend a lot of time on it and to question it. We are not questioning our colleagues' desire to look at a certain subject but whether we might be able to improve upon the order of reference. By asking such questions in the chamber, we are doing our job. This is our job. It is our job to question. We should be placing a heck of a lot more time on that than what we are doing now. Often, we are presented with an order of reference and it goes through so quickly that it is almost an afterthought.

I am inviting all senators to do that, including if, by any chance, our subcommittee does ask for money. As a subcommittee, we do not seek an order of reference from the chamber, but, by all means, let us question. We are doing it for the right reasons. It will help us, as a subcommittee, if those questions are asked in this chamber as well. We will be able to go back to this exchange that happened on the floor of the Senate.

I thank the honourable senator for the question.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is there further debate before we take the adjournment motion? It is moved by Honourable Senator Fraser?

Hon. Joan Fraser: As soon as she congratulates and thanks Senator Comeau for raising this topic. He has reason to know that it has been a bug bear of mine for a long time and I do wish to speak to it.

(On motion of Senator Fraser, debate adjourned.)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO STUDY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A "CHARTER OF THE COMMONWEALTH"

Hon. A. Raynell Andreychuk, pursuant to notice of February 2, 2012, moved:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade be authorized to study and report on the establishment of a "Charter of the Commonwealth" as agreed to by the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Perth, Australia, in October 2011 and its implications for Canada; and

That the committee submit its final report to the Senate no later than April 13, 2012 and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until April 30, 2012.

The Hon. the Speaker: It was moved by the Honourable Senator Andreychuk, seconded by the Honourable Senator Neufeld, that the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade be authorized to study —

An Hon. Senator: Dispense.

Hon. Joan Fraser: Honourable senators, pursuant to the immediately preceding discussion, I wonder whether Senator Andreychuk can give more detail on this motion. It sounds like an important and timely study, but, for example, is the honourable senator planning to travel? If so, where? How does she plan to do this work and can she give us a little more idea of what is involved?

Senator Andreychuk: Honourable senators, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the motion. Thank you to Senator Comeau for putting out issues that we have worked on here. We have not reached the point of having committees uniformly bring their concerns and budgets at the same time, but we are working on it. I think his reflections on how the committee worked this year are helpful.

Minister Baird has asked our committee to conduct this study. The Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group included Senator Segal from our chamber in a study on how to revitalize the Commonwealth. They put together an exhaustive report which was filed to the heads of governments in Perth, Australia. One of the recommendations was that there was to be a charter of the Commonwealth. It is not a human rights charter, although it does include some human rights aspects. It is really a revitalizing of the Commonwealth, a charter that brings together the commonality of the Commonwealth as opposed to what might divide the Commonwealth, since Commonwealth members are small country states and large countries and are variously situated around the world. It became timely to look at the Commonwealth. They have recommended a charter of the Commonwealth. It is embedded in the aforementioned report, but it is not the definitive word. There is a possible charter in there.

The heads of government met in Perth, Australia, in October and agreed that they should look into the feasibility of this charter. The ministers of foreign affairs of the various Commonwealth countries were tasked to look into the feasibility. Minister Baird has contacted our committee to look into the feasibility of having an association. There was to be a national consultation in the eminent persons process. The heads of government then transferred that responsibility to the ministers of foreign affairs.

The minister, because there is a time frame of April 13, has asked us to look at it to the best of our ability and to study the feasibility of a charter of the Commonwealth from a Canadian perspective.

• (1700)

Bearing in mind it is a very short time, we will not travel and we will not need any extra funds. We do have the opportunity within our committee to study this possibility, and to give advice to the

minister. I do not know what that advice will be. It will be up to the members. Whether we will approve the charter concept or whether we approve it with provisos, I have no idea, but we will do what we can in a short time. It works in with our study quite nicely because we are trying to finish up our Brazil study. Our researchers need to do more writing and drafting. We have a window of opportunity to shed light on the Commonwealth, this idea of a charter, and to bring forward people who are interested in the Commonwealth — such as the Royal Commonwealth Society — and perhaps some NGOs that are looking into the subject. We will make some comparisons with other regional groupings. Do they have this kind of charter? I know the Francophonie has an actual Charter of Rights. Should they be leaning towards that or embracing this charter? Of course, we will hear from the minister and representatives from the department.

Senator Fraser: Will you hear from representatives from the Commonwealth?

Senator Andreychuk: Yes, through the Commonwealth Society. We are soliciting interest in the study that the Eminent Persons did. They contacted Canadian representatives and we hope to have them appear before our committee.

In conclusion, our goal is to assist the minister in giving advice to the heads of government in the Commonwealth. We will do the best we can in the short time, and we do not contemplate any additional resources.

Senator Fraser: I gather the committee will be consulting an array of people in Canada. Will the committee also be hearing from people elsewhere, which can be done without travel? Will the committee hear from people in the Commonwealth Secretariat, from other representative members of the Commonwealth, or will this just be what Canadians think?

Senator Andreychuk: This is to be a national consultation, not an international consultation. That may be the next step that the foreign ministers take, but the heads of government indicated they wanted to consult in a national way. There are no rules as to how the consultation should take place. That is for each country to determine its capability. This is the mechanism in the short time that the minister has chosen.

We wish to invite the Commonwealth Secretariat, that has stood shoulder to shoulder with the Eminent Persons working on this matter. What was their idea? What was their thinking? What was the outcome they wanted from a charter?

From my own personal point of view, the proposed charter talks about the existing mechanisms within the Commonwealth — such as the Harare Declaration, the Latimer House Principles, et cetera — so we will review existing mechanisms. However, we may wish to challenge them and ask about implementation strategies. It is nice to have a charter but these days when we examine these matters we want to know how to implement them. I think in our organizations we are beyond addressing principles alone; we want to examine principles and action. Perhaps that will be the advice, but I would be guided by the members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Fernand Robichaud: Honourable senators, could the chair tell us whether the minister has asked the House of Commons committee to conduct a study, as he asked us to do, or whether it is depending entirely on the Senate committee to provide him with advice?

[*English*]

Senator Andreychuk: I would like them to rely on us. As one member said in our committee deliberations, it is to the credit of our committee that we have been asked.

The other place is currently undertaking studies, so I am the not fully aware of why we were asked to do so. However, if I were to posit my own reason, it is that Senator Segal was on the Eminent Persons. Some of us have been very involved with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Senator Johnson is on the executive committee. Committee members have some experience with the Commonwealth and maybe they are starting to think of using the Senate standing committee, with our long-term view, our knowledge and our expertise, in a way that is timely.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is there further debate? Are honourable senators ready for the question?

Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

(The Senate adjourned until Wednesday, February 8, 2012, at 1:30 p.m.)

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