

SPEAKER'S RULING
POINT OF ORDER
SENATORS' STATEMENTS

Honourable Senators,

On May 6, at the end of Question Period, Senator Poulin rose on a point of order respecting a senator's statement made earlier in the sitting. She felt that it had been excessively partisan. While recognizing that senators have party affiliations, Senator Poulin referred to rule 22(4) in urging that Senators' Statements be used to raise issues of general public interest, including outstanding accomplishments by Canadians.

In response, Senator Comeau suggested that the statement had been broadly in line with others made recently, reflecting the undeniable fact that the Senate is a political forum. Several other senators then spoke on both sides of the matter before the Chair took the issue under advisement.

Honourable senators, the conduct and the substance of Senators' Statements have been explored in several recent rulings. The issue of order and decorum during Question Period, which is also relevant to this subject, has also been addressed on a number of occasions.

Under rule 22(4) senators can, "without notice, raise matters they consider need to be brought to the urgent attention of the Senate ... which are of public consequence and for which the rules and practices of the Senate provide no immediate means of bringing ... to the attention of the Senate." The rule makes clear that, in making a statement, "a Senator shall not anticipate consideration of any Order of the Day and shall be bound by the usual rules governing the propriety of debate. Matters raised during this period shall not be subject to debate."

Since Senators' Statements is a time-limited portion of the sitting, practice has been to avoid points of order at this stage. Therefore, as noted in a ruling of May 7, 2008, "Senators must, usually, rely on their own understanding of the appropriate matters for statements. This is evident from the rule itself, which states that Senators may raise matters that 'they consider' to be urgent."

While honourable senators have considerable freedom in framing their statements, they should always be guided by the customs and the practices that we value and that contribute to the distinctive atmosphere of this house. The tradition here is that senators themselves are to a great extent responsible for maintaining order. In practice, the Senate is largely self-regulating, and Speakers have been careful not to be too interventionist.

Precisely because the Senate operates in this way, it functions best when business proceeds in a courteous and dignified manner appropriate to the chamber of sober second thought. I again emphasize this point, and again urge all honourable senators to reflect on the manner in which we conduct ourselves. Let us preserve the useful exchange of ideas that has

been the tradition and indeed distinguishing feature of this institution. We can contribute to this goal by avoiding deliberately provocative remarks, thus better serving all honourables senators.