

SPEAKER'S RULING

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

After Question Period on Thursday, May 13, 2010, Senator Tardif rose on a point of order respecting an intervention during Senators' Statements earlier in the sitting. That statement had referred to a line of questions put to the Leader of the Government during Question Period the previous day. Senator Tardif argued that it is unfair to make statements of this type, since Senators' Statements is not a period for debate.

Senator Comeau, on the other hand, did not see that there was a valid point of order. He noted that the statement being challenged had not anticipated an Order of the Day. When Senator Cools spoke, she quoted rule 22(4), and explained that it envisions a period of time during which senators can highlight particular events, but interventions are still subject to the normal rules about the content of speeches. Statements, Senator Cools urged, should be of a positive nature.

As was noted by all three senators who spoke on this point of order, there have been several rulings in recent years dealing with Senators' Statements. I invite all honourable senators to review those decisions and to consider how we can best use this period of the sitting. Since the Senate remains a largely self-regulating chamber, each of us must assume responsibility for the maintenance of order and decorum.

Rule 22(4), requires that a matter raised during Senators' Statements must be one the senator considers should be brought to the urgent attention of the Senate. The rule also requires that the issue be one of "public consequence" that cannot be raised through other means. This gives senators considerable freedom in determining issues to raise as statements.

The rule does, however, also impose some limits on statements. First, a statement must not anticipate any Order of the Day. Second, matters raised during statements are not to be the subject of debate. Finally, statements must respect the usual rules governing the propriety of debate, which would include rule 51 prohibiting "personal, sharp or taxing speeches." When framing their statements, honourable senators should be aware of these limitations, which are built into the very structure of rule 22(4).

In practice, Senators' Statements are normally used to comment on events, accomplishments, or anniversaries that the senator giving the statement views as important. This includes, for example, paying tributes or offering congratulations to distinguished Canadians or international figures.

I again ask all honourable senators to remember that this chamber functions best when its business proceeds in a courteous and dignified manner. All honourable senators have a part to play in ensuring that this continues to be the case; they should show care in framing remarks, to

ensure a useful and respectful exchange of ideas and information, without giving offence. The possibility of using the caucuses and the usual channels for consultations to address the appropriate topics for statements has been raised in the past, and could again be used to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the purpose of Senators' Statements.