

**Speaking Notes**  
**The Hon. Noël A. Kinsella**  
**Speaker of the Senate of Canada**

**Speaking Notes for Forum for Young Canadians**  
**Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

Honourable Senators,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome all of you to this magnificent chamber, which is a source of great pride for all Canadians. Before beginning my remarks, I invite you to contemplate the splendor of this place, to appreciate it as it rightly deserves to be.

Inside this superb cathedral chamber, your eye is drawn up by immense black-bronze chandeliers weighing two tons each – reminding us of the weight and moment of what is transacted here: the nation’s business. Your gaze then sweeps across the coffered ceiling lined with gold and bearing symbols representing Canada, France, England, Scotland, Ireland and Whales.

All around the room, countless carvings can be seen: griffons, lions, otters and unicorns – a fabled bestiary impressed into oak panels and limestone friezes.

Though contemplation of such carvings is a treat to the senses and an invitation to the imagination, the eight paintings hanging on the walls summon us back to reality. Commissioned by a fellow New Brunswicker, Lord Beaverbrook, they depict scenes of the First World War and serve as reminders to lawmakers of the importance of wise government.

I’d like to take a few minutes and tell you what it is we, as Senators, do here. But first, a little history about this place.

At the Quebec Conference of 1864, the Fathers of Confederation designed what would become, many years later, the Parliament of Canada. Inspired by the British model they adapted it to the Canadian context, and gave it the power to make laws for “Peace, Order and Good Government.”

Our Parliament consists of 3 elements: 1) the Sovereign 2) the Senate, whose members are appointed; and 3) the House of Commons, whose members are elected.

Today, the Senate has 105 members from various backgrounds who represent all provinces and territories.

The primary role of the Senate is to provide a balancing mechanism for the governing of our federation.

This balancing reflects everything senators do. It can be seen in each of our institution's three primary roles, which are: representation, investigation and legislation.

In its representative role, the Senate reflects the regional and cultural makeup of Canada. In fact, senators represent all regions and provinces of the country, with over half of the Senate seats representing the less populated regions of our land. Canada's three founding peoples – Aboriginal, British and French – are represented in the Senate, along with many of our nation's ethnic communities.

As well, over 30% of senators are women, giving our Senate one of the World's highest representation records in this area. Representation, however, isn't strictly limited to such formal constituencies: some senators help give a voice to other groups such as veterans, seniors, youth, prisoners, etc.

The Senate's second role is that of investigation. Many senators are selected for having demonstrated leadership in their communities. They bring vast knowledge and experience as they explore, promote awareness and seek Canadian views on a wide range of issues. Much of their investigative work takes place in committees held outside the Senate chamber.

Often described as the heart and soul of the Senate, committees turn the spotlight on social, political and economic issues of importance to Canada and its citizens.

They do this by holding hearings to gather all facts related to an issue, and by arranging for ministers, government officials, experts, organizations and individuals to testify and answer often pretty tough questions. Moreover, with respect to some issues, such as euthanasia and assisted suicide, the appointed Senate has greater freedom than the elected lower house to investigate all aspects and points of view.

This brings the Senate to its third role: legislation.

Recognizing that every system needs checks and balances, Canada's Constitution states that both the Senate and the House of Commons must approve legislation separately. This dual-chamber structure ensures that laws are not passed too quickly and that all interested parties have a chance to express their views. As a result, the laws passed are usually more effective and longer-lasting. Such work is possible because the Senate is able to accommodate longer periods of study, since Senators are often less involved in party politics than their Commons counterparts.

In practice, the Senate often corrects and refines measures put forward by the Commons, thereby playing its role as "house of sober second thought," as Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first Prime Minister, referred to it.

And, where it sees the need for a law, the Senate may also initiate a bill (except money bills that collect or distribute public funds), which is then sent to the House of Commons for approval.

So where does the Senate Speaker fit into all this?

The Senate Speaker is responsible for ensuring fair play according to the rules. And the Speaker's function, according to Senate rules, is to "preserve order and decorum and to decide points of order subject to an appeal to the Senate."

The office of the Speaker is also called upon to perform countless diplomatic duties at home and abroad. Receiving visiting dignitaries, officially welcoming groups and associations, attending government-sponsored meetings and embassy receptions are all part of the Senate Speaker's day. Additional responsibilities come with invitations abroad.

The Senate brings together a talented and diverse group of men and women who have excelled in countless disciplines through talent, foresight and hard work.

I can't think of any political institution more representative of our nation's fabric, one that welcomes as many women, aboriginals, and cultural minorities. An institution whose careful analysis, informed debate and reasoned commentary underpin the Canadian body politic. We senators are by tradition very often the final gatekeepers in the legislative process.

Our duty is to ensure that the laws we pass serve the public interest, that they be submitted to the most exacting analysis, and that they be of the highest quality possible.

For my part, I am extremely proud to belong to a legislative assembly possessed of a long and noble tradition of representation and investigation.

I hope that my remarks have helped you appreciate better the work of the Senate, as well as understand the role of the Speaker.

Good government allows a society to harness its strengths for the common good. For this reason, it is very important for Canadian youth to learn about the democratic traditions of our country in order that they may mature into responsible citizens. The knowledge and exposure gained from the Forum for Young Canadians programme encourages a better understanding and appreciation for the high quality of life we share in Canada, and why it is admired internationally. It also encourages greater community involvement, leadership, citizenship, and, ultimately, a more dynamic and healthy democracy.

This is why the Forum for Young Canadians programme is so important. Through it, participants gain hands on experience with people at the heart of our country. Through this involvement, they develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for their history,

culture, and democratic institutions. This experience better enables them to contribute to, and participate in, our democracy as informed citizens. While developing a sense of pride in their system of government, the participants interact with each other, become exposed to the values of their fellow participants and build ties that will last a lifetime. These interactions plant the seeds for another generation of understanding and harmony in Canada.

The Senate and the House of Commons take great pride in supporting this valuable programme. We applaud the organizers for making it such a resounding and enduring success. Please accept our best wishes to all the participants, past, present, and future and our congratulations on their involvement in the Forum for Young Canadians.