

Speaking Notes
Honourable Noël A. Kinsella
Speaker of the Senate

**At a dinner in honour of a
Parliamentary Delegation from Australia**

Tuesday April 21, 2009

Mr. President,
Fellow Parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

To our Australian colleagues, I want to bid you welcome to Canada, to Ottawa and to the Senate, with a particular warm welcome to my counterpart, His Excellency, Senator the Honourable John Hogg, President of the Senate of Australia.

I would like to begin my remarks by reflecting on the tragic events that occurred recently when a series of bush fires devastated parts of Victoria. Please permit me take this opportunity to echo the sentiments expressed by Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Lawrence Cannon, who underscored the heartfelt sympathy and condolences felt by the Canadian people and Canadian parliamentarians for those who lost loved ones and saw their communities so badly affected by this disaster.

It does not require much rhetorical flourish or embellishment to state that there are few countries in this world that enjoy closer relations or such a degree of common history and culture as ours do. Even if one were to look at basic things – such as our vast and sparsely-populated geographic land masses, our agricultural roots, a shared language, our mutual love of sports, and the penchant of our young people to world travel – the commonalities are striking.

But beyond that, at our most fundamental political levels, Canada and Australia share important links, which in turn inform our national values and our international actions. Our comparable federal systems are both built on the British Westminster style of government, which assures strong democratic rights for our citizens as well as strong provinces, states, and territories in our national federations. More than just similarities in our political heritage and structures, though, we also have common systems of law.

Canada and Australia both have substantial Aboriginal populations. Last year in Sydney, experts, government officials, and members of the Sydney Aboriginal community came together for a Canada-Australia dialogue event on Aboriginal Issues. There were opportunities to share lessons and ideas around education, health, and rights issues for all who were involved.⁽¹⁾ Both of our countries have recognized the vital importance of ensuring that our Aboriginal communities, and particularly their young people, are afforded the same sense of opportunity as all people in our respective countries in order to ensure shared prosperity.

In our international relations, we are fortunate that our strong parliamentary ties allow us to discuss not only our common positions, but also our differences, so that we can increase our respective knowledge and understanding of the other's unique challenges and

⁽¹⁾ For more information on this event, please see, Government of Canada, "Canada-Australia Policy Dialogue on Aboriginal Issues," Media Release, 12 May 2008, http://geo.international.gc.ca/asia/australia/news/media_releases-en.aspx?id=12778.

circumstances. Over the years, Canadian and Australian parliamentarians have held numerous exchanges, both bilaterally and multilaterally through forums such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Parliamentary exchanges such as these are an important part of our many and varied bonds. In 2007, we were honoured to host a parliamentary delegation from your country led by the Honourable David Hawker, Speaker of the House of Representatives, who was able to not only visit Ottawa but also to travel to Whistler, Vancouver, and Victoria. I also had the privilege of hosting the Honourable Paul Calvert, President of the Australian Senate, in a visit to Fredericton in 2006.

Over the years, Canada and Australia have developed healthy economic and commercial relations, in the form of trade and investment. We have also built strong people-to-people relations through tourism and cooperation in consular affairs. Moreover, every year, post-secondary students participate in exchanges in our respective educational institutions, which only serves to strengthen our cultural ties and mutual understanding.

In closing, and on behalf of my colleagues, let me thank you for making the long voyage to come and visit us here in Canada. This exchange is an important opportunity for us to discuss views and experiences. In keeping with my earlier remarks on the long history and close connections between our countries, let me venture to assert that this visit will only be the latest chapter in the continuing story of our mutual friendship and respect.