

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

**Parliamentary Internship Program**  
**Brown Bag Lunch**

**June 17, 2009**

Parliamentary Interns,

I am delighted to welcome you to the Senate and to participate once again in the brown bag luncheon series.

You have been on Parliament Hill now for almost 10 months and are nearing the end of your internships. I hope the program has met your expectations and that it has fostered your interest in political systems and perhaps also in politics.

The program offers young leaders, like you, an opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding of our Parliament and how it works, not just in theory, but in practice. From the perspective of parliamentarians, it is a wonderful experience to have post-graduate students working on Parliament Hill alongside policy makers and significant Canadian political figures.

The Parliament buildings remind us of our rich and vibrant history, sources of pride and wonder for all who enter their walls. Just a few rooms down the hall, in the Senate Speaker's Suite, there is found a table at which Queen Elizabeth II sat and signed the Proclamation of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Once Queen Elizabeth II sat at the table and signed the Proclamation

on its surface, this otherwise ordinary piece of furniture gained new significance and became a part of our history. This is but one example of living history, the story of one piece of furniture in the evolution of this nation.

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 diverse 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 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 questions.

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.

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.

Since my appointment as Speaker of the Senate of Canada in 2006 I have had many opportunities to meet with members of the diplomatic community, foreign dignitaries, and with my counterparts from many countries around the world.

From these encounters, I believe that post-secondary education, particularly international post-secondary education, is a vital component of building our international relations. Further, I believe that international post-secondary education is a vital component of Canadian students' education and a key to the nurturing of bright and talented minds.

I have a keen awareness of the benefits of an international education. As an educator, I have arranged exchanges for many students and faculty members over the last 42 years to ensure that others enjoy the opportunity to study abroad.

Through international education, students and faculty are exposed to different ideas, values and even expertise in niche areas that may not be readily available or even offered in Canada. Binding relationships between Canadians and citizens of other countries endure and promote greater harmony and understanding among our nations. These benefits, and many others, stem directly from an international educational experience.

It is through programs such as the Parliamentary Internship Program that you will gain hands-on experience with those people at the heart of decision-making in Canada, and through this involvement, you will develop

a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Canadian parliamentary system.

The knowledge and exposure gained from the Parliamentary Internship programme encourages a better understanding and appreciation of 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.

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 young Canadians to learn about the democratic traditions of our country in order that they may mature into responsible citizens.

The interactions you have had and will have on Parliament Hill will ensure the seeds are planted for continued cultural understanding and harmony in Canada. Please accept our best wishes to all the participants, past, present, and future and our congratulations on their involvement in the Parliamentary Internship Program.