

SPEAKING NOTES  
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA  
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

ON THE OCCASION OF THE RETIREMENT OF  
THE HONOURABLE GERALD J. COMEAU, P.C.

SPEAKER'S CHAMBERS  
NOVEMBER 27, 2013

Senator Comeau,  
Honourable Senators,  
Friends and Family,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

This gathering in the historic chambers of the Speaker of the Senate is to mark the impending departure from the Senate of the Honourable Gerald J. Comeau. The tributes in the Chamber earlier today gave a good sense of his lengthy and distinguished career in the Senate and the House of Commons, spanning more than 10,000 days combined, or almost 27.5 years.

Longevity alone is not the measure of his success in Parliament, but it does provide an indicative framework. Senator Comeau served on the Fisheries and Oceans Committee in the House of Commons, finishing as Chair of that Committee. Upon joining the Senate, he expanded that interest and experience first in our Fisheries Committee and then in the renamed Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, of which he was the Chair for more than a decade.

You might think that this background would lead him to take up a fishing rod when in western Canada, but I have it on good authority that he and his wife Aurore chose to go horse-back riding instead. This may be due to his affinity for languages and an effort to improve his whispering skills.

In any case, his interests brought him to the Joint Committee on Official Languages both as a Member of the House of Commons and later as a Senator, this time as co-Chair. When the two houses decided on separate committees rather than a single joint committee, Senator Comeau signed up again and continued to be a strong contributor to strengthening the place of both official languages in our nation.

His term as Deputy Leader for 5 years from 2006 to 2011 brought with it considerable additional burdens, not aided by the fact that he was on the government side but in a minority during the first few years. Negotiation and diplomacy were the order of the day, which he took to heart – most of the time.

The Standing Senate Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration also benefited from his regular presence almost from the beginning of his time in the Senate. Senator Comeau has been a member of the committee for the last 7 years and is presently the Chair. This is another committee which will definitely miss his skills and talent.

Although 1990 did not set a new record for number of Senate appointments in a single year, those of us who arrived that year remember it well. Senator Comeau was appointed to the Senate less than 2 weeks before me, and we all had plenty of time to get to know one another while the bells rang and while the debate on the GST took everyone into overtime in a big way.

It was readily apparent that Senator Comeau brought with him a keen intellect, a ready wit, an academic frame of mind and a strong desire to help improve our nation. All of this will be missed here in the Senate and in its committees, but there is no doubt in my mind that his service to the nation will continue in one form or another.

Even though we have had Senator Comeau on an extended loan of more than 27 years, we are still disappointed to see his early departure from the Senate. The silver lining is that there is at least one group of people who will be pleased with his decision, notably the members of his family. They deserve our thanks.

With that, I would ask the Honourable Gerald J. Comeau, Senator and member of the Privy Council, to join me at the podium.