

SPEAKING NOTES
Honourable Noël A. Kinsella
Speaker of the Senate

On the occasion of the retirement of
The Hon. Len Gustafson, P.C.
February 26, 2009

The Honourable Len Gustafson,
Honourable Senators,
Mesdames et Messieurs,

We are gathered here this afternoon to celebrate the distinguished parliamentary career to date of our guest and recent colleague, the honourable Len Gustafson. You'll notice that I said "to date" and said nothing about retirement. There are two reasons for this. First, there are moves afoot to change the Constitution with regard to the selection of future Senators and, possibly, the removal of mandatory retirement. Second, there is no upper age limit for our colleagues in the other place. Taken together, it is easy to see that further chapters might yet be written.

Most of you will know that it was in 1979 in the House of Commons that Senator Gustafson began his first round as a Parliamentarian, and that he continued on with victories in the elections of 1980, 1984 and 1988. It was only in 1993 that he joined us in the upper Chamber, thanks to the perspicacity of the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney and His Excellency Governor General Ramon Hnatyshyn.

Of course, I suspect that Senator Gustafson regarded Parliament both then and now as a place in which to earn some extra money to help keep his farming operations going. Even back then, many small family farms were finding it difficult to make ends meet. To hear Senator Gustafson tell it, his idea of a small family farm is about half of the province of Saskatchewan.

And make no mistake about it. His parliamentary career had a strong focus on the agricultural community right from the outset. He started off in the other place on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and started off in the Senate on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. At different times, he served as both Chair and Deputy-Chair of the Senate Committee. An actor might say that he had been typecast, but I think all here would agree that he had in fact simply found and continued his calling.

I doubt that any previous group of Senators has been as well informed about the weather in Saskatchewan as it pertains to farmers. The people promoting tourism may not have been as pleased, because it seems to me that the conditions in Saskatchewan ranged from too hot to too cold and from drought to drowning. There was hardly a moment when there wasn't a problem somewhere in Saskatchewan for the beleaguered farmer.

Even so, Senator Gustafson seemed to spend a lot of time during the course of the year either planting or harvesting. Given the vast tracts of land apparently involved, it is surprising that bulk carriers and ports around the world had space for anything else.

I don't want to leave the impression that his devotion to agriculture was single-minded to the exclusion of everything else. A career that spans 29 years, 5 months, 22 days saw him sitting on a wide range of committees in both Houses. He served our parliament and our country with exemplary diligence throughout, something which was further recognized by his appointment to the Privy Council last year.

And throughout it all, his wife Alice has never been far from his thoughts. I think we all owe her a heartfelt thanks for sharing him with us, because I have no doubt that he would have tossed his parliamentary career aside in a heartbeat had she not supported him in this endeavour.

In closing, and without wishing to anticipate future events, I want to offer congratulations to our friend and colleague, Senator Gustafson, on his career in parliament and invite him to say a few words.