

**SPEAKING NOTES**  
**The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella**  
**Speaker of the Senate**

**National Federation of Presbyteral Councils**

**Ottawa**  
**September 21, 2011**

Father O'Connor,  
Distinguished guests,  
Conference delegates,

It is a pleasure to join you this morning here in St. Theresa's Church and I want to offer a personal welcome to those of you who have travelled to Ottawa for this gathering of the National Federation of Presbyteral Councils. The general theme under discussion is leadership and what we should expect from our leaders today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. My remarks will be confined primarily to leadership in the public service, although you will find my definition to be of sufficient breadth that it will be difficult not to find yourselves encompassed by it.

Public service can readily be divided into three categories. While there is an order to this list, it is not intended to be a hierarchy. First, we have representative public service which includes those working on municipal councils, school boards, provincial and federal legislatures or as public officers including members of the judiciary. The second group are people who serve in the professional civil service of governments. Finally, there are those who have responded to the call to serve the public through participation in non-governmental organizations which make up civil society.

The reason for this broad definition is obvious. We who serve our communities are often called “leaders”, but we are not. Canada is a constitutional monarchy that has enjoyed unparalleled success in the practice of freedom. We are a work in progress that has had some problems and made some mistakes, but few countries in today’s world can boast of a record such as ours. In such a system, those of us who hold representative offices, be they elected or appointed, are trustees of your rights and freedoms. We may make decisions on your behalf to protect and promote the common good, but we are not your leaders. You are our leaders.

In the instruction *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, the Congregation for the Clergy states: “The Church relies on the daily fidelity of her priests to the pastoral ministry as they attend to their indispensable mission in the parishes entrusted to their care.” So too does the broader community require the same fidelity of her public servants in order ensure a level of order and liberty that allows its members to pursue the full development of their human person in both the material and spiritual being. This includes the good works done by those in the priestly vocation.

This is a very roundabout way of answering the question, “What should we expect from our leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?” with “exactly what you would expect from yourself.” Norman Bethune once said, “Every leader starts by leading himself.” We should hold our leaders to the same standards that we hold for ourselves.

Much of the work of public servants occurs behind the scenes, out of the public eye. While the day to day work of the elected representative, the civil

servant, or non-profit worker may go unnoticed, any shortcomings are often very public. It has been my privilege to have been a public servant in some way, shape or form since 1967 when I became the first Chair of my province's human rights commission. In the 43 years that followed, I met many public servants, whether as a federal deputy-minister or Senator, and I can say with some confidence that I have yet to meet any who wake up in the morning asking "How can I do bad today?"

Public servants are certainly not beyond reproach. There have been lapses and struggles. Gethsemane taught us about temptation. There are many temptations for public servants. There is incredible pressure to achieve a particular result or to respond to the passions of the moment. My own office has a cautionary note in Latin carved in the wood which comes from the teachings of Cicero: *Principum munus est resistere levitati multitudinis*. "It is the duty of the nobles to oppose the fickleness of the multitude" (*Pro Milone* 22). The literal translation does not do the context justice, because Cicero was essentially urging that we observe the common good and resist opinions that change from day to day, no matter who might hold them.

Public servants sometimes fall short of Cicero's maxim. While the Lord rejected Satan's temptation and sacrificed himself for us, public servants are human and, as such, may succumb to temptation. Human beings are not perfect. With that in mind, we build systems of governance to mitigate the potential for a negative influence of the few over the many, or the many over the few. As James Madison stated in his essay *Federalist Number 51*:

If men were angels, no government would be necessary.

If angels were to govern men, neither external nor

internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.

In the American experience, fear that national issues would be supplanted by local and regional concerns on the Congressional agenda led them to create a structure of government that would channel interest against interest so only the national interests could prevail. Those who watched with rapt attention this past summer the debate on extending the debt ceiling may actually be surprised to learn that such gridlock was intended by design.

When Canada was granted Dominion status by Her Majesty Queen Victoria, we essentially adopted the governance institutions of Great Britain wholesale, with a few changes to reflect a more democratic, in the sense we lacked a formal class system, society. One of the institutions we made more democratic was, believe it or not, the Senate. Although Canadians have served in the House of Lords, Canada had no Lords of its own. Therefore, we could not have a House of Lords like the parliament of Westminster. The Fathers of Confederation wanted a bicameral legislature with an upper chamber that would protect minority interests and balance regional representation against the representation by population in the lower house. The result was the Senate of Canada, over which I have the privilege of presiding as Speaker.

Save for our unique version of bicameralism, there are comparatively few checks and balances in our parliamentary system than those to our south. With few institutional measures available, the character and leadership qualities of our representatives and public servants are of paramount importance.

The public service can be understood as a deeply ethical activity, directed to maintaining the social foundations that among other things make ethical activity possible, as well as serving the more immediate objectives of public sector work.

Perhaps the first question to be canvassed is whether or not it is politically correct to be a Christian public servant.

Permit me to approach this question by the following account of the June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, session of the Senate of Canada. In the middle of the statements period, an earthquake measuring 5.0 on the Richter scale struck the National Capital Region. As the chamber shook, the Senators left the Parliament buildings and the sitting was suspended. The members gathered around the Speaker on the lawn on Parliament Hill and agreed on the procedure for adjournment and recall. The historical gathering on the green at Runnymede, England, in 1215 was not lost on all present, notwithstanding that the *Magna Carta* of Runnymede made our adjournment procedure pale in comparison.

Blessed Pope John XXIII in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* drew our attention to what has become known as the *Magna Carta of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, namely the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which was proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.

Pope Roncalli considered the *Universal Declaration* to be: “An Act of the highest importance performed by the United Nations”. The Holy Father wrote that it was his earnest wish:

“that the day may come when every human being will find therein [the UN] an effective safeguard for the rights which derive directly from his dignity as a person and which are therefore universal, inviolable and inalienable rights. This all the more to be hoped for since all human beings, as they take an even more active part in the public life of their own political communities, are showing an increasing interest in the affairs of all peoples, and are becoming more consciously aware that they are living members of a world community.”

Article 21 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* contains the right to take part in government and the right of equal access to public service. It speaks to the use of elections as an expression of the will of the people.

The *Universal Declaration* also articulates the human right of religion and the right to be free from discrimination because of religion in the exercise of human rights.

Therefore Christians have the right to participate in public service without any requirement to leave their faith at home. There is no test given by any civil service commission in Canada for secular versus religious orthodoxy. The expectation is that those who engage in public service will bring to their functions

good judgment. Such judgment will no doubt be a reflection of their moral values and conscience.

In Canada, a robust public service awareness has developed during the 143 years since Confederation. This has been achieved by Canadians playing a positive role through their engagement in public service, whether as active citizens in civil society; serving as professional public servants or as legislative representatives.

At the national level, the Public Service of Canada, which has been in existence for more than 100 years, has promoted ethical standards for public servants. An important document which sets forth in an articulate manner the values and ethics of professional Canadian public servants is entitled: “Values and Ethics Code of the Public Service.” A number of outstanding Canadian public servants and academics, such as John Tait and Professor Kenneth Kernaghan, can be mentioned for their work in the areas of public service values and ethics. One finds underscored as a mark of the good public servant such qualities as: knowledge, disciplined analysis, understanding, compassion, integrity, wisdom, prudence, perseverance, leadership and fortitude.

Before her untimely death, Monika Hellwig argued in the *Public Dimensions of a Believer's Life* that public servants needed to rediscover the cardinal theological virtues and incorporate them into the practice of their service to the public. These cardinal virtues are: faith, hope, and love or charity. Hellwig believed we have to incorporate the cardinal virtues into the decisions people make in human affairs at all levels of social organization. She thought it important to

explore the values that guide these decisions and the way those values are often apparently in conflict with one another.

While Hellwig argued that public servants should find ways to include the cardinal virtues in their decision making, she cautioned against using a narrow definition of them that could have the effect of, on the one hand, tying oneself into a theological straightjacket or, on the other, falling short of the goals' virtues. She wrote:

“In fact, faith is concerned with a constantly expanding interpretive vision of reality, which is a gift of God to those who are open to see what is divinely unfolded before them. The theological virtue of hope is the expectation, motivation, and striving that grows out of the faith vision. And charity is not love in the popular sense of attraction or emotion, but rather a total commitment of oneself, one's energies, loyalties, resources, and time.”

With clear ethics and values must come clear purpose. Representatives are chosen to put forward their vision of the public good. For this they will need a rigidity of purpose, but flexibility of means. There may be a time to when it is good to be a bull in a china shop. When you need an insurance payout to keep your business afloat comes to mind. Often, though, a more delicate touch is required.

Flexibility of means does not mean just deciding on a middle ground between the excesses of rampage or timidity. Flexibility of means is the



recognition that the way in which one achieves their purpose may require different methods depending on the milieu they are in. What worked in one area may not work in another. Leaders need the wisdom to realize this.

Much of the work of implementing the representative's agenda is done by professional civil servants. As they, themselves, move from office to office, department to department in the government, they must often change their methods to achieve the desired ends for their superiors. In their work, *Leadership and Innovation: Entrepreneurs in Government*, Jameson Doig and Erwin Hargrove *et al.* profile a number of senior leaders in the US government who had successful careers along with a few who did not. One with a varied record was James Webb who began his career in the executive branch as Director of the Budget under President Truman; a post which at the time would have been the US equivalent of our Clerk of the Privy Council Office. As such, he was in charge of the implementation of the president's agenda. He had charts and metrics measuring every outcome: an organizational chart for the presidential nominees and their confirmation status, a chart tracking progress of legislation that affected the agenda, a chart tracking executive orders, a chart tracking the status of cabinet secretaries' work.

He was so good at this, the President Truman eventually appointed him to the position of Under-Secretary of State. There, he found the methods that made him a star in his previous capacity were all but useless. With a leadership style based on formulating metrics to chart progress empirically, he found it rather harder to monitor American interests in world events in the same fashion. One colleague joked, "How many wars did you end today?" It was also the McCarthy era and Webb was tasked with tightening personnel guidelines to prevent

communists, anarchists, and homosexuals from being hired by the State Department.

While his tenure at the State Department was disappointing, his career would have a second act when John F. Kennedy appointed him Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). There he developed a “multiple teams” leadership style similar to how he organized the Bureau of the Budget. From there, he oversaw the US space program that would see man set foot on the moon.

We should also expect what I call the “three Ps”: prudence, planning, and patience. When new representatives are chosen for positions of leadership, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of decisions that need to be made very early which will affect the course of their mandate. Not the least of these decisions is cabinet formation and staffing, choosing the people who will implement the platform. Not all decisions have to be made at once; some can be delayed until favourable conditions appear. It takes prudent judgement and patience to map out the plan to properly implement the policy agenda of a government.

In politics, we are often in reaction mode. Upon entering office, there are two sets of issues: the issues campaigned on and the issues identified by the ministry as requiring attention. Rarely are the two lists alike. Some are the result of previous policies and some are precipitated by external factors. In moments of crisis, there is always the temptation to react swiftly and decisively on imperfect information. We need leaders who take the time to gather sufficient information before acting, but still bearing in mind that decisions do need to be made.

A prime example of this is John F. Kennedy's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy was faced with intelligence that Cuba had received short-range nuclear missiles and bombers from the Soviet Union. So unprepared was the military for this possibility, there was no contingency plan in place. Kennedy was given six options:

1. No action.
2. Diplomacy: Use diplomatic pressure to get the Soviet Union to remove the missiles.
3. Warning: Send a message to Castro to warn him of the grave danger he and Cuba were in.
4. Blockade: Use the U.S. Navy to block any missiles from arriving in Cuba.
5. Air strike: Use the U.S. Air Force to attack all known missile sites.
6. Invasion: Full force invasion of Cuba and overthrow of Castro.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously favoured the final option, full invasion, as the only way to ensure that Cuba's nuclear capability was dismantled. Kennedy felt he had previously allowed himself to be talked into the Bay of Pigs fiasco and was concerned that an attack on Cuba would give the Soviets cause to conquer Berlin. He took the blockade and diplomatic options, but had the military prepare options for an invasion. In the end, the settlement was reached by negotiations conducted through back channels. Had Kennedy listened only to the generals and paid no attention to his own intuition based on the available information, the result might have been horrific for all involved. What no one knew until 1992 was Cuba had not only received nuclear weapons, they were ready for use. At the sight of an invasion, Castro could have launched a nuclear counter-attack even if it meant his island's destruction. Kennedy's prudence unknowingly saved millions, maybe billions.

A final expectation we should have of our leaders is humility. As was suggested earlier, political servants must remember that we are representatives and that it is the citizenry who are the leaders. Those of us who find ourselves in positions of leadership need to be humble to that fact for many reasons.

The most important is to remind ourselves we are only placed temporarily in our positions to obtain results for those we represent. For those who are elected, another election is coming. For those who are appointed, the term in office will eventually expire. Professional public servants will be reassigned or retire. If one talks of “power”, we only have a temporary grant of power to accomplish goals towards the public good. If we do not live up to the commitments we made, replacements will be found.

This may also mean possessing the humility to understand we are not always right, to listen to those who advise us. We also require the wisdom to know when to heed advice and when to ignore it. We require the humility to understand that we may not always be the best to lead on a particular issue.

Humility is required because we need the insight to recognize that while we may have the passion to pursue an issue, we may lack the elements, such as support from our own leaders or the ability to form a coalition around an issue, required for success. Sometimes the best prospect for success is to let someone else take the lead. We live in a society where we often crave the credit for an accomplishment as much as the accomplishment itself. We often say in politics, “You can fill a room with a thousand people, but if it isn’t in the news the next morning, did it really happen?” While we should give credit when and where it is

deserved, those who receive it should share it with those who helped achieve the particular objective.

Although I hold the title of Speaker, my staff regularly remind me that this should not be taken to be a license to speak ad infinitum, so I will conclude my remarks with a an observation from our first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald followed by a brief recapitulation. Macdonald once remarked of his colleagues, “We are all but petty provincial politicians at present; perhaps, by and by and some of us will rise to the level of national statesmen.”

Canadians are blessed with an unparalleled level of freedom, a level of freedom made secure in no small part because we are our own leaders. When we choose our representatives to fill leadership positions, we expect them to apply their values and ethics; to hold their goals tightly yet exert flexibility in the means by which they will achieve them; to practice prudent judgement, planning, and patience; and, finally, to be humble in their exercise of the power they have been temporarily granted. In short, we should expect no less from our leaders than we should expect from ourselves. We should rise above the petty to the level of statesmen in our own lives and choose representatives who will do the same.