

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF
THE SWEARING-IN OF THE SENATE PAGES**

February 26, 2009

Honourable Senators,
Pages,
Honoured guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Each year it is both a solemn duty and a great pleasure to participate in this ceremony in which students, some new and some returning, are sworn into their offices as Senate pages.

Pages have been a component of Canadian parliamentary operations, both in the Senate and the House of Commons, since Confederation. The selection methods and criteria have certainly evolved in significant ways over the years. I don't think any of the students here today would have qualified in 1867, when pages were selected on the basis of size, age, sex and, sometimes, income.

Basic requirements were that pages had to be small in stature so as not to block the sound of the honourable senator's voices as they carried on debate and so as not to block the view of senators. Microphones and the sound system have obviated the former, but pages still must be careful not to get between the Speaker and the senator speaking.

They had to be boys because, well, because they had to be boys. This is a concept which seems ridiculous by today's standards. It is well to remember that at Confederation and in Canada's early years, there were no female Parliamentarians and there were practical consequences. Even today, a common complaint is that there are insufficient washroom facilities for women. While none of our pages today will have personal recollection of this, those of us who have been around a bit longer may remember that it was in 1971 that the first female pages arrived in the Senate.

There was also another practical consideration, or what passed for a practical consideration in the late 1800's, namely that the uniforms worn by pages came in only one size. Retirement as a page might consequently come with unexpected swiftness and there were almost no pages over the age of 17. You'll all be pleased to hear that the one-size-fits-all policy has also been left in the historical dust-bin.

Senate sittings were much more limited in bygone years and did not conflict with school hours. There was a period of time following the First World War when the Senate,

as a matter of policy, selected children from needy families, where the modest income attached could and did make a significant difference. As the Senate began sitting more frequently and with longer hours, and as Senate committees took on a greater range of activities, the Senate could no longer accept pages of school age.

Today, the Senate welcomes talented individuals who are studying at universities. The diminutive size requirement is gone. Both sexes are represented. Family income is not a consideration.

It is a great privilege and an honour to serve as a Senator, but I think the young people who will be joining the Senate as pages should bear in mind that they, too, are being accorded a privilege and an honour. Over the years, there have been a total of 893 Senators, and the total number of pages to serve in the Senate has been similarly small. There were just 6 for many years, and still only 15 today.

As a practical matter, the duties of the pages are not generally arduous, but they are many and diverse. That is my official position, although it may come as a surprise to those who are entering a second year with us. Those days on which the Senate sits right through to midnight, but rarely beyond thanks to a change in the Rules, are no doubt the ones which will be recalled in this context. Fortunately, it is my understanding that most young people like to stay up late. I don't promise anyone an early bedtime, but we do try to be reasonable.

In the end, the function of the pages is to help ensure that the Senate operates smoothly. That is also one of my principal functions as Speaker and you can be assured that I am most appreciative of the work of the pages. The individual assistance they provide may not seem like much at the time, but it all adds up to making the Senate a better place.

The youthful enthusiasm and joie-de-vivre brought to the Chamber by the pages helps keep us on track. On the flip side of the coin, Senators are generally happy to spend a few moments with the pages and I hope that you will take advantage of the unique combination of expertise and collected wisdom which are gathered in the Senate.

In addition to the Senators, the pages themselves constitute a unique resource. There are lasting friendships to be made and lasting network connections to be made during the course of your time in parliament. You will former pages in many areas and you will share with them the bond of common experience. Always keep in mind that there will be opportunities which arise from working in parliament.

Turning briefly to a favourite subject of mine, I hope you will come to truly appreciate the surroundings in which you work every day. The parliament buildings are magnificent architectural works of art. The buildings and this Chamber are gothic in style. The carvings in wood and stone are both ornamental and symbolic. The eight paintings on the walls are scenes from World War I and were commissioned by Lord

Beaverbrook. You'll note that there is a frieze carved in the panelling of Canadian white oak beneath the paintings showing Canada's flora and fauna.

The ceiling is gilded with the crests of the founding peoples and the chandeliers above are of brass and weigh two tons each. They have yet to fall, but I recommend that you try not to be underneath should that happen.

You will also note the red leather of the seats, the red carpet, the red thrones. Red is the colour of royalty and this is the Upper Chamber to which her Majesty the Queen or her representative the Governor General comes when her parliamentary duties require her presence. This Chamber is the only place where the three components of our democratic government gather to transact business: the Queen, the House of Commons and the Senate in Parliament assembled.

Our heritage lives in these walls. As you take the oath to become or to remain Senate pages, as you embark on your duties, and as you work throughout the year, please remember that we are here for a short time only, that those who came before us left magnificence in their wake and that we should do no less.