

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

**ON THE OCCASION OF A LUNCHEON IN HONOUR OF
THE SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SWITZERLAND**

**SPEAKER'S DINING ROOM
NOVEMBER 1, 2012**

Your Excellency Speaker Walter,

Your Excellency Ambassador Lehner,

Honourable Senators,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Parliament of Canada and to Ottawa. I would like to begin with a special word of thanks to the Speaker of the Swiss National Council, Mr. Hansjörg Walter for taking the time to join us.

This visit by Speaker Walter and the delegation from the National Council of Switzerland provides an opportunity to reaffirm the many cultural, political, and economic bonds between the Swiss and Canadians. In a rapidly changing world, it is important to strengthen ties between friends.

Canadian-Swiss connections are long-standing, with contact reaching back to the earliest years of European settlement when Swiss soldiers accompanied the early French explorers. Later, Swiss pioneers settled in Ontario and in Manitoba. Mountaineers from Switzerland helped explore the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Today, there are some 140,000 plus people of Swiss origin living in Canada.

Our two nations enjoy a strong and diverse commercial relationship that covers the full spectrum of trade, investment and innovation, with a strong focus

on the latter two areas. Beginning in the 1930s, Swiss banking, insurance, and pharmaceutical companies established themselves in Canada. Today, Switzerland is one of the largest foreign investors in Canada. At the same time, there are dozens of Canadian companies in Switzerland, including Bombardier, Nortel Networks, Alcan, and Nova Chemicals. In 2011, Switzerland was Canada's 17th-largest merchandise trading partner with two-way trade totalling \$4.3 billion.

Tourism is also important to Canada-Switzerland relations and Canada receives more than 100,000 Swiss tourists each year.

It is important for Canadian parliamentarians to recognize that our two countries share much in common. Both have more than one official language – two in Canada, three in Switzerland. Switzerland also has a Romansh-speaking minority, whereas in Canada there are over 50 Aboriginal minorities with their own language.

As with Canada, Switzerland is a federal state, dividing powers between the federal and cantonal levels of government. Speaker Walter, we look forward to hearing about your views and experiences with federalism. As you have been a member of both the National legislature and a cantonal legislature, you are able to share perspectives from both sides.

There are also important differences between our nations. The Swiss political system has a number of features that make it an interesting contrast for Canadian parliamentarians. One of them is the rotating terms of office for positions such as the Speaker of the Council of States, the Speaker of the National Council, and the President of the Confederation. We are also intrigued by the Swiss use of referendums and initiatives.

Speaker Walter, it is a pleasure to meet with you and your delegation. Your interest in Canada's parliamentary system is welcomed. This is an important

opportunity to learn about recent developments in your legislature, to gain new perspectives and insights on policies and practices, and – perhaps most importantly – to build lasting relationships.

In closing, I wish to propose a toast in honour of our visitors. May our discussions bear fruit in the coming months and years, and may the friendship and mutual understanding between our two countries continue to evolve.

Thank you.