

SPEAKING NOTES
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ON THE OCCASION OF A RECEPTION FOR U.S. INTERNS

SENATE FOYER
JUNE 9, 2010

Honourable Senators,
Mr. Breese,
Dr. Baker,
Interns,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Welcome to the Senate and to the Senate foyer. I would like to give a warm welcome to Mr. Terry Breese, Deputy Chief of Mission for the United States Embassy, to Dr. James Baker, the man who has almost single-handedly run the Canadian Parliamentary Internship Program at the University of Western Kentucky for many years, and a particularly warm welcome to the interns.

You chose to participate in the Internship Program for a range of reasons, including a strong interest in politics, an eagerness to view a slightly different system of governance from the inside, and perhaps just a simple desire to experience Canadian culture. I hope your expectations will be met. The 2010 interns come from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds, including 12 different states and 6 other countries.

Parliamentary internship programs are of great importance and great assistance to international relations. They promote better communications and better understanding. They create networks of people with personal connections.

On a related note, I would like you to consider the similar benefits provided by international post-secondary education, which I regard as a vital component of both graduate and undergraduate education, as well as a key to the nurturing of bright and talented minds.

Having experienced the benefits myself as a student during my studies in Ireland and Rome, it was my privilege and pleasure as a professor at St. Thomas University for some 41 years to arrange opportunities for many students and faculty members to enjoy studying abroad.

Through international education, students are exposed to different ideas and values, and are given an experience that lasts a lifetime. Many exchange students who come to Canada become unofficial ambassadors for Canadian ideals when they return to their homelands. Strong personal relationships between Canadians and citizens of other countries endure and promote greater harmony and understanding among our nations. These benefits, and many others, stem directly from an international educational experience.

Canadian parliamentarians also support international youth and their interest in our political system through Internship programs such as this one. In comparing the political system of Canada with the United States, significant differences are readily identified. One such difference is the separation of powers. In the United States, the President and Cabinet cannot be members of either House of Congress. However, in Canada, the Prime Minister and members of Cabinet are usually Members of the House of Commons and sometimes of the Senate. They traditionally represent the party with the largest number of seats in the House. Another difference is that, though both the United States and Canada have bicameral legislatures, our Senators are currently appointed and not elected. Canada also has a multi-party rather than a two-party system, reflecting our country's many regional, as well as ideological differences.

Parliamentary interns have the opportunity to observe such aspects of the Canadian political system first hand. In working in the offices of MPs and Senators, they gain insight into the Canadian public policy making process, the functioning of our political parties, and our electoral system. Those interns who are directly involved in constituency work will also gain a greater appreciation of the cultural and regional diversity of Canada.

Throughout the time you spend here in Ottawa and in Canada, I encourage you to ask questions, not only to learn about our system, but to challenge us to explain and defend our views and ideas. At the heart of any democratic system is the exchange of ideas.

It is my hope and expectation that you will enjoy your time in Ottawa, and that you will be enriched by this Parliamentary Internship Program both now and in your future careers. In turn, parliamentarians will benefit from your hard work, your growing expertise, your dedication to your continuing education, and from the personal friendships and relationships which you will form and likely continue for many years to come.

It may not always be apparent, but the exchange is not one-way and we also learn from you. I want to thank you now for taking on the challenges and for participating in this excellent program.