

Tenure of Senators

think, to begin to involve provincial governments in planning the way for that reform.

With that bit of background on the Government's discussion paper, the recommendations of the special joint committee and the Government's response to those recommendations, I will return to Bill C-231. It seems to me that the Hon. Member's proposal is inspired by a recommendation in chapter 7 of the committee's report. That chapter is entitled "Reforms that should be made now", and in it the committee proposed that all future Senate appointments should be made for a nine-year non-renewable term.

The Hon. Member's Bill points out, quite correctly, that if that recommendation were implemented, three "classes" of Senators would result: those appointed for nine years, those who would retain their seats until age 75, and those others, not very numerous, who would keep their seats for life. Therefore, he has proposed in Bill C-231 that those now holding Senate seats should be obliged to give them up after they have served nine years or reached the age of 75, whichever occurs first, and that all new appointments be made for nine years.

I think the Bill before us is a useful contribution to the ongoing debate on Senate reform. However, I do not think that, on its own, its acceptance will bring about the degree of change the joint committee had in mind and which many Canadians expect. I do not think we should take one small part of the committee's report, separate it from its context and act on it at this time. The Government has stated its intention to pursue the issue actively, particularly with provincial Governments. When we have a better idea of the general reaction to the committee's proposals as a whole, we might be better equipped to decide whether action on all or on any part of it should be undertaken.

Hon. Bill Jarvis (Perth): Mr. Speaker, I join with the Hon. Member who just spoke in extending my sincere thanks to our colleague from Edmonton East (Mr. Yurko) on bringing the matter before the House for debate. As he likely knows, I was a member of the Special Joint Committee on Senate Reform since its inception until its report. I hasten to point out that I do not pretend to speak on behalf of that committee, nor do I speak necessarily on behalf of my Party, I speak, rather, as an interested Member of Parliament during Private Members' hour.

As I said, I compliment the Hon. Member for Edmonton East. I deplore the fact that more initiative in terms of this type of debate has not been taken in the Senate. If the Hon. Member has been following the proceedings of that Chamber, he will know that little of substance has been said, not just with respect to the committee's report but to the broader subject of reform which the Senators are quite capable of initiating in any number of matters. Frankly, to their discredit, they have not sought that initiative. That is not to cast aspersions broadly, because I believe there are a good number in the other place who are generally concerned with the status quo and generally interested in seeing some reforms initiated.

● (1740)

I believe that the Hon. Member for Edmonton East quoted the exact sentence from the report. An appointment for a nine-year term was recommended almost as a last resort. I believe that that is what our general thinking was at the time. The Hon. Member has put that in a much different context. I believe I heard him say a few moments ago that if a nine-year term for an elected Senate is important, it is even more important for an appointed Senate. I might get into a debate with him on that point. I do not think I will, but it seems to me that the thinking of the committee was not necessarily along the same lines as his in terms of those priorities for the nine-year term.

I would like to deal with the explanatory note. I hope that I am not doing the sponsor of the Bill an injustice. He indicated that his Bill may have an advantage over the committee's report in that the committee's report could result in more than one class of Senator. That is absolutely true. He says that his Bill will eliminate that possibility. Something about that, however, does cause me grave concern. I am not sure that it is a good analogy, but the Hon. Member will recall the Government's six and five program. At that time, a number of us thought that that program was in part a moral breach of contract if not a legal breach of contract. Its effect on some of those in the Public Service troubled me deeply.

I do not know why I should be the spokesman or defender for those in the other place who are well able to speak for themselves, but it would trouble me somewhat to think that a person who had been appointed either for life or until age 75, despite having been given that rather enviable appointment, now finds that the rules have been changed. I would be less than frank if I did not say to my colleague that that causes me some concern. I am not so concerned that it would cause me to react totally negatively to this Bill, but it would be something that I would want to think about and explore very deeply in committee before saying amen to that particular proposal.

I absolutely agree with the sponsor of the Bill when he says that, because of economic priorities, little or no attention has been paid to this issue either by leadership candidates, leaders of Parties, or the public in general. I think his timing is dreadful. I thought that the timing of the special joint committee was dreadful, coming as it did in the penultimate year of a Parliament when our Party had just chosen a new Leader and an election was being expected, and now that we have a leadership contest in the Government Party. Despite all that, what is really wrong with the timing is the natural preoccupation of the electorate with economic matters. I would think that we would really be living in a fool's paradise were we to say to ourselves that a leadership candidate or the leader of a Party could make this a burning issue across the country in a general election.

Frankly, I did agree with the Hon. Member for Edmonton East when he said that the leadership candidates and leaders of Parties should be put on the spot. They should be asked how they feel about Senate reform. There is nothing wrong with that, but to think that this issue will be a major vehicle with