

Supply

18. No Member shall speak disrespectfully of the Sovereign, nor of any of the Royal Family, nor of the Governor General or the person administering the Government of Canada; nor use offensive words against either House, or against any Member thereof.

That is the rule under the Standing Orders. This is very important, and I hope the hon. member will speak respectfully of the Senate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I would like to thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands for his comments. In fact, I have the text of Standing Order 18, from *Standing Annotated Orders* right here, because I want to be vigilant at all times.

• (1710)

However, I must admit I was taking some notes in the chair, so I cannot comment on what was said by the hon. member for Joliette, who nevertheless caused the hon. member on the government side to raise his point of order.

I do want to make it clear to hon. members that I will remain in the House until the end of the debate. And I want to thank the hon. member for his remarks, because members must behave in a parliamentary fashion, as has always been the tradition in this House, and I am confident that we will continue to do so.

Resuming debate.

Mr. Laurin: Mr. Speaker, I promise to show respect in my choice of words, but I must admit that it is sometimes frustrating to hear people speak against things you hold true and which are dear to you. If I talk about these institutions, it is not because I do not appreciate them, but rather because I believe that they should be modified, if not abolished.

I was going to say that the government claims that it wants to take steps to save money. Allow me to suggest an excellent way to do just that. As I said a moment ago, cancel the estimates for the Canadian Senate.

The men and women who are in the Senate, the other House, or more respectfully, the other place, were not sent there by the people; they are not accountable to the people for their decisions, therefore they are not democratic representatives of the people.

I will admit that they are people of considerable merit—as you can see, Mr. Speaker, I have the greatest respect for them—but no matter how much merit they have, the Senate is still a very costly institution for Canadians and Quebecers, especially given our present economic situation.

One must ask what was the reason for giving Parliament two houses back in 1867? And why today, more than 125 years later, we still have this non-elected House called the Senate?

Since 1960, 52 different bills have been introduced in this House with a view to changing either its role or its operations, or even questioning its very existence. This proves that the Commons had realized that the Senate urgently needed to be

updated. In 34 years, there has been 52 attempts, some successful, some not, to change the way the Senate operates.

At the time the Senate was created, it was meant to be a House of sober second thought. Its members were to serenely review legislation, free from popular pressure. That could be justified in 1867, but nowadays, the Senate's role has changed drastically due to the practical limitation of its authority.

In those days, the Senate used to be a place where the members of the Federation could be heard. It allowed for the protection, at the federal level, of provincial and regional interests. In today's context, the only link between senators and their province is the fact that they own property and reside there.

Nowadays, the Senate remains an institution without a basis, which derives its authority solely from the merits of its members.

• (1715)

Above all, the Senate provides a legal framework for political rewards. In fact, I believe that, in its present form, the Canadian Senate is an anachronism as a legislative body, a mistake that costs millions of dollars in public funds.

Communications being what they were in 1867, the public was informed of decisions taken by the legislator long after the fact. In such a context, one could understand the existence of a Senate comprising people having reached the age of wisdom, having acquired an experience recognized by everyone; one could understand the usefulness of such an Upper House in protecting the taxpayers, the voters, against sometimes emotional or hasty decisions by legislators. Since the taxpayers were sometimes informed 30, 60 or even 90 days after the decisions were made, it was difficult for them to react and exert pressure on their member of Parliament.

But with our modern satellite communications, with the advent of television, people can exert pressure every day on their legislator, on their member of Parliament, and can tell them that they think he or she is making a mistake by supporting one bill or another, with the opportunity for all the wise people from each of our ridings—I think that there are 104 members in the Senate—in each of our ridings I can find at least a hundred or so wise men and wise women who can very ably advise each member of this House on the relevance of supporting one bill or voting against another one.

That safeguard is already guaranteed by our modern means of communication. We no longer need this Upper House to protect taxpayers from the mistakes that a single House, voting too emotionally or too hastily, could make.

Of course, some still think that this group of non-elected people must have a permanent right to veto decisions made by elected representatives of the House of Commons, that senators are here to restrain members of Parliament in their decisions and to correct their errors. It is true that members of Parliament can make mistakes. However, we are accountable to our constituents and they are the ones who will judge us. Not six months later. They have an opportunity to judge us every week when we go back to our riding and even before because, when an error is