

It is unfortunate that some misperceptions permeate not only the minds of ordinary Canadians but also of members of Parliament, like Ms Diane Ablonczy of the Reform Party. She is reported in *The Toronto Star* of February 8 as wanting to abolish the Department of Multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is not a department; it is administered within the Department of Canadian Heritage. She proposes that multiculturalism funds be used to integrate immigrants and fight racism. It would take her only a few moments to acquaint herself with the policy and the good work that is carried out, in partnership with mainstream institutions and ethnocultural communities, precisely to integrate immigrants and to fight racism.

• (1600)

Perhaps we should look outside the borders of Canada to appreciate how lucky we are in a country with a population of 27 million people made up of some 100 different ethnic groups. While nobody can deny that bigotry and discrimination do exist in Canada, they are not rampant and have not resulted in violent acts which would tear apart our society. One need only look at what is happening in Northern Ireland, in the Middle East, in the former Yugoslavia, in South Africa and in several other parts of the world to appreciate that, notwithstanding some imperfections, we live in an ideal society.

Multiculturalism has given many first-generation Canadians, as well as those who are second-, third- and fourth-generation Canadians, a feeling of really belonging to this country, a feeling of pride that they are part and parcel of this country. It is a feeling of real comfort to know that one is accepted for what one is rather than for what others would want one to be. It is obvious that we have not done a very good job of selling the concept. It is one that deserves the support of all Canadians. It is an instrument that promotes harmony and cohesion.

A policy of multiculturalism can speed the integration of first-generation Canadians into the social, cultural and economic fabric of our society. However, we cannot overlook the reality that, over the generations, the attraction of the heritage language and culture becomes weak. Language fluency, particularly fluency in the written language, begins to decline with the second generation. I can speak from experience because my two children, who are both fluently bilingual in English and French, have a somewhat limited knowledge of Italian. Nevertheless, they are aware and proud of their heritage and, at the same time, are proud to be true Canadians.

Let us support a policy that has such noble aims, a policy that can be so beneficial in promoting harmony, in promoting good will and in strengthening the sinews of our society, not only for ourselves but also for future generations.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I rise today to participate in the debate on the Speech from the Throne. Before launching my comments on Senate renewal, I should first like to congratulate His Honour the Speaker on his appointment. I should like to say about him, in his absence from the chamber at this moment, that he brings a number of important personal characteristics to this position. Not the least of these

characteristics are his sense of humour, and the even more important fact that he is from that great part of our country, Atlantic Canada.

He also brings to the Senate a knowledge of Parliament and how Parliament functions. This has developed through his time in government in the other place and through his work in the Senate. His understanding of the purpose and the work of Parliament will be very useful as our country faces some difficult times ahead.

I would also congratulate Senator Fairbairn, who is also absent from the chamber at this time, on her appointment as Leader of the Government in the Senate and upon her assuming additional cabinet responsibilities for literacy among Canadians. I have known her for only a short period of years, but I am aware that she is deeply committed to the future of Canada.

Honourable senators, I am concerned about the role the Senate has to play in the governing of Canada, both in this Parliament and in the long term. I say this because I am deeply troubled about the future of the country.

I believed that, with the signing of the Charlottetown agreement in August of 1992, we had set out on a path for renewal. As a lawyer, I certainly recognized many of the technical faults in that agreement, but I believed in the compromise, as did most of the senators in this chamber, I understand. It provided a framework for people and legislators to work within in future years. It is my belief that its defeat led directly to the rise of regional-interest political parties, one of which, the Bloc Québécois, is committed to the destruction of the country.

As a result of this rise in regionalism, the other place, demonstrated in the results of the most recent federal election, is divided as never before. The official opposition is dedicated almost exclusively to the issues of Quebec independence, while the Reform Party represents an ideology that runs contrary to the basic tenets of the caring, compassionate and open nation we believe Canada to be.

Honourable senators, I ask you: What role can the Senate play in a Parliament that has the potential to be destructive?

In the 15 minutes that I have at my disposal, I want to concentrate the rest of my comments on those parts of the Speech from the Throne that deal with parliamentary renewal and reform, which may provide an answer to my question as to the future role of the Senate.

I am in every sense of the word a new boy on the block. I have been in the Senate for barely three years. However, after being here for only one week, I quietly observed to myself that the Senate of Canada was sadly in need of a good shot of renewal. That is what the Canadian people have been saying about us as well. Now is the time to act.

It was encouraging, therefore, for me to hear our Governor General say in this chamber on January 18, "The government is committed to enhancing the credibility of Parliament." I remind honourable senators that Parliament includes *inter alia* the House of Commons and the Senate of Canada.