

Supply

more effective. The legislative process is shorter. Is it not true that the \$65 million we spend for the Senate would be a great help to create jobs? I would like to hear your views, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I thank the hon. member for Frontenac for his invitation. Time permitting, I could have accepted, but I am afraid I cannot.

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity as the member for Lévis and above all as the official opposition critic for training and youth to report on consultations I have had carried out with young Quebecers concerning the Senate. They have been most revealing.

Let me explain the context of those consultations. Last February, young Quebecers participated in a youth Parliament experiment. I noticed that one of the motions passed as a matter of priority concerned the abolition of the Senate. I found that concern interesting and, later on, asked a few young assistants to help me with a survey of young people on that issue. I feel that my findings make a suitable follow-up to remarks made by the hon. member for Frontenac on the point of view of senior citizens in his riding.

What do young people think? I asked them first of all what they thought of people in the Senate. My first finding is that they do not know what the Senate is all about. Most of them do not know what it is. Very few of them know. I will quote the answer, such as it was, that they gave: "It is a room full of older people who cost a lot of money to the taxpayers and whose work does not appear to be useful, in the eyes of young people". Who could give even an approximate number of senators without counting the empty seats in the Upper House? The vast majority of young people, almost all of them, did not know that there were 104 senators. As for determining the composition and the role of that other place, we can only get an answer by referring to the Constitution.

A second question that was raised was: "But who elects these 104 people?"

• (1810)

These young people wondered, since these are not elected people, how they can get involved in various debates, supposedly as representatives of the Canadian citizens.

In Quebec, for young people as well as older people who are familiar with the Senate and have read about it, such as young people who are studying political science or history, the Senate is the Mecca of patronage, with members from God knows where, but who surely have good friends in high places. Some young people believe that, once they have been appointed, senators are the people of Canada who benefit from the best job

security, because we all remember that the age limit in the Senate is 75.

The job situation today in Canada as well as in Quebec is a precarious one for young people. To them, job security is an unfamiliar concept. According to Statistics Canada, the unemployment rate for young people between the ages of 15 and 24 is 17.7 per cent. According to the Conseil permanent de la jeunesse in Quebec, 4 out of 10 part-time jobs in Quebec are held by young people under 25; part-time jobs represent 33 per cent of all jobs held by young people between the ages of 15 and 19; and more than two-thirds of young people under 25 who are working get minimum wages.

Therefore we should not be surprised by the perception of position of young people regarding an institution that costs almost \$1 million for every session day.

Who are they? Very few young people can identify more than five. Since I cannot give any name, I will somewhat change my speech.

Those who could identify some senators were able to do it by recalling current events. For instance, a very well-known person in Quebec has resigned because she was 75 years old. People finally realized that she was much better known for her novels and the books she had published than for her work in the Senate.

It is the same thing for a senator known for his constitutional law expertise, who had a high-profile role at the time of the Charlottetown Accord. I know that by mentioning that fact only many people in Quebec will be able to identify that person.

Besides, how can we blame young people for not being able to identify the senators? The best one of them could do was to name five out of 104. I have not put my colleagues on this side of the House through this test but I think it would be worth trying to ask new members for instance—because older members might find it easier—how many senators they can name.

An hon. member: How many senators could the Chair name?

Mr. Dubé (Lévis): I will not ask the hon. Speaker of the House to take part into this exercise because of his parliamentary responsibilities.

The young people I consulted did not know that senators represented ridings, just like MPs. They did not know that. How can we blame them since I am convinced that adults themselves would not know any better. I must admit that I myself could absolutely not say which senator is representing my riding. It is not obvious. Perhaps I should have done some research but I realize after listening to the last speaker that I cannot tell the name of the senator who, among 21 others, is representing me. I did not have to do this research but I must say that she never called or dropped by.

Nevertheless, how could we blame young people for not knowing their senators' names?