

their new and very important responsibilities. We wish them luck. Not too much luck in terms of the time the party which they represent bears the responsibility of government in this land, but enough good fortune, enough wisdom and common sense to help guide this nation successfully through its many challenges during the months to come.

Our new friends in government—old friends, but new in government—have waited a long time for an opportunity to implement their ideas, to put to practical tests some of the concepts they have spoken about with such fervor in this chamber for such a long time. I think they will discover, if they have not discovered already, that at times it is much easier to be an opposition critic than to bear the responsibility of government—bearing in mind the hard logic of economics and the deadly accurate statistics which come before cabinet. The fact is that what can be achieved does not always match up with the best hopes of any of us.

The Leader of the Government here, who has been vested, as well, with the portfolio of Minister of Justice, must feel a special sense of gratification that after many years of loyal service to his party and good service in the Senate he has been called upon by the Prime Minister for senior responsibilities.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Perrault: It has been said that good things come to all those who wait. Many of our friends in the Conservative Party have waited for a long time. To be ushered from outer darkness into the brilliant sunshine of governmental responsibility must be a heady experience. We hope that it does not overwhelm them.

We on the opposition side are also pleased that our good friend and colleague Martial Asselin has been given ministerial responsibilities. We know that he will undertake those responsibilities in his usual conscientious and able fashion.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Perrault: I want to assure him, on behalf of the Liberals in this chamber, that while we intend to criticize him from time to time, that criticism, of course, will be only valid criticism, in the spirit of our party's usual unflagging zeal and quest for the truth.

Some Hon. Senators: Oh, oh.

Senator Perrault: The minister responsible for Canada's economic planning, Senator de Cotret, has proven once again that there can be ministerial life after electoral death.

Some Hon. Senators: Oh, oh.

Senator Perrault: We welcome him here. He will continue to inspire lively interest from our benches. The first two days of questioning indicate that there will be many questions directed towards this important minister.

● (1530)

He, together with the other members of cabinet in this chamber, have a major responsibility to the nation and to Parliament. We in opposition have a responsibility to make certain that all the proposals offered by this new government

are subjected to rigorous but fair scrutiny. I think I can give a commitment on behalf of the majority opposition in this chamber: we want to be fair and we want Parliament to work. We want this country to prosper just as do members on the other side of this chamber.

Those of us in opposition have been asked about the role of the Senate opposition in this new Parliament. With a Conservative plurality in the Commons and the Liberal majority in the Senate, concern has been raised with regard to whether this government can operate and whether there is going to be continued frustration as a result of the efforts made by the opposition in this place. The fact is that Parliament and the government will operate. There is no member of the opposition—indeed, no member of the Senate—who would put his or her partisan interest ahead of the interest of this nation.

On May 22 a mandate to govern was accorded the Progressive Conservative Party. That party earned the right to govern. Paradoxically to some, the Senate of Canada, with a preponderant Liberal majority, will be called upon to approve a legislative program prepared by the new Conservative government. I do not suggest for a moment that the Senate, under these conditions, will be a supine rubber stamp, with opposition senators walking in lock step with the new government. Senators have never done that in the past and will not do it now. I know that I can promise this government and the Canadian people a strong, diligent and positive opposition striving to make Parliament work more effectively and in the Canadian people's best interest. I know I can promise a Senate opposition dedicated to the improvement of legislation and to the introduction here of positive measures, rather than a Senate opposition obsessed with the notion of obstruction and delay for the sake of political advantage. The times are too important and the welfare of this nation so vital that only the best that parliamentarians are able to offer is good enough. Although the opposition can give no total commitment that all measures will be passed easily or will be passed at all, every effort will be made to be scrupulously fair.

In any case, the walls of this place rebound still with the echoes of past speeches delivered by the new Leader of the Government, delivered with gusto and fervor and proclaiming the inalienable rights of the loyal opposition. He has emphasized many times why we need a strong opposition. Well, Mr. Leader, you have that strong opposition. If at times you or your ministerial colleagues and Senate colleagues become impatient with some of our efforts, remember the words of the late great, revered Tory, Sir John A. Macdonald in 1869, when he said that given a government with a weak opposition you could debauch a committee of archangels. We are anticipating no parliamentary debauchery at this point, nor would you wish otherwise.

I know that the new government will expect suggestions for amendment to continue to emanate from the Senate, both from the opposition side and the government ranks. I remind honourable senators that during the last session of Parliament alone, when there was a Liberal government, the Senate proposed over 200 amendments. To my knowledge, most of

[Senator Perrault.]