

In my opinion, a nine-year non-renewable senatorial term would provide the turnover dynamics which would tend to reduce regional and federal-provincial tensions. Co-operative federalism would be advanced and national unity would be enhanced.

This simply must be the first act on Senate reform. The other recommendations may bog down in federal-provincial wrangling. Let us do it as a House of Commons. We must effect Senate structural reform a step at a time. During the last 18 years, two minor Senate reform proposals were passed. In 1965, the senatorial tenure was limited to forced retirement at age 75. However, 16 senators still have lifetime tenure. Canadians do not accept the continuation of this anachronism of the past, and neither does Bill C-231. All present Senators above 75 years of age should retire or be retired. The Senate should establish a senior advisory council of retired Senators which would meet periodically and provide advice to Parliament. Former Senator Forsey is performing a useful and similar advisory role now. The Senate should implement an appropriate pension plan. In 1975, another minor change was passed which added two additional Senators to give both the Yukon and the Northwest Territories representation.

But why has there been no meaningful structural Senate reform in the last dozen years in light of the ten proposals put forth? I believe it is because the size of the package has always been too large and too complex for the Canadian federation to swallow in one gulp. A more step-wise process is advisable. Was not the pursuit of too large a package the prime reason for decades of failure in constitutional reform and patriation itself?

Of course it was. The Prime Minister in his March 30 speech at Laval University effectively acknowledged this realization. A two or three stage or step-wise process for reform of the Senate is also necessary and workable.

I simply do not agree with the contention that if Parliament acts to effect Senate reform, where it can do so without the agreement of the provinces, it may jeopardize the achievement of reform where approval of at least seven provinces having 50 per cent of the Canadian population is necessary. In fact, I believe the converse to be more accurate. Indeed, if Parliament acted to incorporate the nine-year non-renewable term on its own, this would signify the beginning of reform, and the Canadian people would then put significant pressure on the provincial Governments to go all the way with the joint committee's recent recommendations. Certainly such action would whet the public appetite for Senate reform.

I agree fully with the statement in the special joint committee's report which stated:

We were told frequently that, after so many abortive attempts at Senate reform, the time has come for vigorous action—for fundamental change in the Senate—and that it would be a mistake to adopt inconsequential reforms.

Well, Bill C-231 is a giant step and the first step in fundamental reform of the Senate. And it can be done by Parliament. So let us do it. And as we do it, let us continue negotiations with the provinces to entrench constitutionally the remaining recommendations of the special joint committee. I

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believe that the provinces will accept some of the recommendations, such as increasing the size, perhaps even to 144, to provide more equitable regional representation. However, in my view, many moons will set before the provinces accept an elected Senate. The people of Canada will have to push the provinces into accepting a fully elected Senate. The provinces will continue to demand direct or indirect provincial appointment of Senators as was proposed in all nine proposals prior to the present joint committee report. But in time either a fully elected Senate will be a Canadian reality or else the Senate will disappear. Only then will a Senator have legitimacy, accountability, and independence.

Since coming to this House in 1979, and even as a provincial Member, I have worked increasingly on federal institutional reform. Senate reform has been one of my top priorities, as was patriation of the Canadian Constitution. In the last five years, I have issued many letters and reports, and I have taken several initiatives through private Member's Bills and resolutions in this assembly on Senate reform. I am convinced that we are now on the threshold of reform of this institution, mainly because the people demand it. Reform of the Senate should be a major plank in the election platform of each political Party in the next election. Those politicians and would-be politicians with an eye focused on the future will make it an issue.

I trust that the people will respond to their cries for Senate reform and that the next House of Commons will be filled with elected Members in all Parties demanding Senate reform. I think that Senate reform will come to pass during the four to five-year tenure of the next Parliament of Canada. It is interesting to recall that the Prime Minister in 1968, when he was seeking to become Leader of his Party, had Senate reform as one of his top planks in his platform. What are the views on Senate reform of today's would-be Prime Ministers who roam the country? Why do they not speak with conviction? Some have, but not all.

But let us approve second reading of Bill C-231 today and let us send it to committee for additional consideration.

Hon. Roger Simmons (Burin-St. George's): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to commend the Hon. Member for Edmonton East (Mr. Yurko) on his continuing campaign to encourage parliamentary and public debate on Senate reform. Indeed, some of us will recall that just over a year ago, in April 1983, we discussed another Bill proposed by the Hon. Member for Edmonton East, Bill C-640. It dealt with structural reform of the Senate. It was a detailed and comprehensive proposal, and a number of Members recognized then, as they do now, that it was a good and thorough piece of work on the part of the hon. gentleman.

The Hon. Member for Edmonton East later appeared as a witness before the Special Joint Committee on Senate Reform. He modified his proposal somewhat on that occasion, but I know his ideas and strong belief in Senate reform caught the attention of the members of that committee at that time.