

[English]

• (1500)

For one, Dr. Desmarais was actively involved in furthering the objectives of Laurentian University as Chairman of its Board of Governors between 1973 and 1978. In 1990, the university recognized his many achievements with an honorary Doctorate of Science.

If it is true that you really get to know someone when you work with them, then I can say, too, that I knew him well. Indeed, we sat on several boards together; we shared ideas and beliefs; we made things happen in our community.

On a more personal note, he was a neighbour and a friend to my family, the Charettes of Sudbury, for many years. Above all, he was an exemplary family man, a caring father of seven, a loving husband and a beloved brother.

However, for me, one detail stands out among many. Less than two weeks before Senator Desmarais passed away, I received a very kind note from him, perhaps one of his last. In that note, he congratulated me for also obtaining an honorary doctorate from Laurentian University. These are written words that I will always cherish in a very special way.

As I and countless others remember him for the gentleman and, yes, the gentle man, that he was, I am sure all honourable senators would want me to extend our renewed sympathy to the Desmarais family members, some of whom are present here today. I feel privileged to have known him, and truly honoured that I can pay this tribute to his memory as the representative of Northern Ontario in the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Hon. Marcel Prud'homme: Honourable senators, last summer I attended the funeral of our colleague and friend, Senator Desmarais. I did so as a friend and out of respect for the Senate.

I realized I had much in common with the Desmarais family. I went to university with Robert Desmarais, who became a judge of the Ontario Supreme Court. I sat in the House of Commons with Louis Desmarais, his brother, who was a member of Parliament for Dollard in Montreal, next door to my riding.

I had the honour of being appointed a member of the Privy Council by Her Majesty Elizabeth II on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of Canada, this country we must save, preserve and modernize.

Suddenly, I am in the Senate with Jean Noël. It is too bad we are so often afraid of expressing our emotions in public and speaking with compassion about these matters that bring us together from time to time.

I want to thank Colette Michaud-Desmarais who did me the great honour of writing me a letter, to say what Senator Desmarais may have wanted to say when he was no longer able to do so.

His children, Jocelyne, Michèle, Jean, Joanne, Guy, Suzanne and Marie, had an extraordinary father. His goodness was felt by everyone around him. His patience, candour, goodness and humanity made a lasting impression on those who knew him.

I know that in heaven, where a man as good as he was — and I realize this sounds odd but I have no hesitation. I am not ashamed. He was a good man; he was a practising Catholic; he was a believer. I had the privilege of conversing with him because I was always more enthusiastic than he was, and he often said to me: "Marcel, you seem a bit agitated." I see my good friend Senator Bacon nodding agreement. Then he would say: "Come along, we will go for a walk. You will get me going, and I will get you to calm down."

What a good man! I know that up there where he belongs, he is delighted to see that Senator Marie-Paule Poulin is now in the Senate.

[English]

THE LATE HONOURABLE DAVID JAMES WALKER, P.C.

TRIBUTES

Hon. Lowell Murray: Honourable senators, it is with sadness, but much pride in his service to public life, that I record the death on Friday, September 22, of our former colleague the Honourable David James Walker.

David Walker had already distinguished himself in the practice of law when he entered Parliament in 1957 as the member of the House of Commons for Rosedale. He was immediately appointed Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Justice, and two years later joined Prime Minister Diefenbaker's cabinet as Minister of Public Works with added responsibility for Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and for the National Capital Commission.

His three years in those portfolios were marked by a significant expansion of the federal government's activity as a builder, developer, lender and landowner. The Trans-Canada Highway, which had been lagging because of a variety of financial and interprovincial obstacles, was pushed through to completion. Thirty thousand acres of land were acquired for the Ottawa greenbelt. An agreement was reached with Ontario and Quebec to build the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge. Federal assistance under the National Housing Act was extended to municipalities for sewage disposal plants. The National Library and Public Archives on Wellington Street were begun, and the reconstruction of the West Block on Parliament Hill was undertaken.

As a minister, David Walker was no chairman of the board. He involved himself directly in the decisions and in their implementations. In Canada's present straitened financial circumstances, it is unlikely that, in the near future, today's parliamentarians will see a surge of public investment on similar projects to match that of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

David Walker lost his seat in the House of Commons in the 1962 general election and, within a few months, was appointed to the Senate by Prime Minister Diefenbaker. Here he began an active career that ended only with his retirement more than 26 years later on September 30, 1989.