

The line of questioning in which I was engaged with the Leader of the Government in the Senate at the time had to do with the appointment of a new ambassador in Tehran following years of non-activity arising out of the incidents, of which we all know, which took place some ten years ago. The ambassador who has been named has a background in international trade and commerce. It seems to me that in the current circumstances it would have been preferable to appoint someone to Tehran who is sensitive to and has wide experience in the field of human rights. Goodness knows what abuses have taken place in those intervening years.

All we have to do is look at the list of people who are unaccounted for—youths and whole families who literally have disappeared from civil lists. There are not only rumours but factual reports of torture, of people being put to death without a proper trial, and so on.

Even though the United Nations sent a special envoy to Iran to inquire into these matters, its report has been widely discredited by most people as being unrealistic. Abuses of human rights still go on there.

Besides questioning the fact that we are now appointing an ambassador to Iran, in my view, our first preoccupation, as a nation which believes in human rights and basic decency, would have been to appoint someone who has the expertise and the background with which to deal with those matters and to carry some weight with the extremist regime that now prevails in that country. I am amazed that that was not done. I can only conclude that Canada at this stage is more interested in rejoining the oil pipeline than it is in dealing with basic human concerns.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I can only undertake to draw to the attention of my colleague, Mr. Clark, the comments of Senator Corbin. I will ask Mr. Clark whether he has any comment to make. I simply do not agree with the honourable senator that the personal background of a particular Canadian ambassador, whether it be in the law, politics, trade, commerce or whatever, necessarily sends a message about human rights to the country to which he is accredited as ambassador. The important thing is that he represents Canada and Canada's long-standing policy and attitude on human rights matters. I am sure that the ambassador, who is not known to me personally, will be quite capable of stating our views and, indeed, of pressing them in a professional and forthright manner.

CITIZENS' FORUM

ATTITUDE OF CHAIRMAN—COMPOSITION OF COMMISSION—
GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate with respect to the Citizens' Forum announced last week. I am sure we all hope that it proceeds constructively to do the work assigned to it. On Sunday, however, during the Cross-Country Checkup program broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting

Corporation, the Chairman of the Citizens' Forum, Mr. Keith Spicer, volunteered some interesting views regarding his new mandate.

As a long-time Senate abolitionist, he reiterated his position regarding this assembly by saying that he had not changed his views at all, that he thinks the Senate should be abolished. He said, as well, that the commissioners would not be interested in speaking to members of the old-line parties. Rather, he said they would be interested in speaking to members of the Reform Party and allegedly new groups of that kind.

Are we to assume from Mr. Spicer's statements that this represents part of the mandate given to him by the Prime Minister? Most of the members of the Reform Party are disenchanted Conservatives. The question then becomes: Are disenchanted Conservatives the only ones who are going to have an opportunity to put their views before the commission that is being established?

It seems to me, and I hope that the Leader of the Government can clarify the situation that Mr. Spicer has demonstrated a disturbing naivete, to say the least. I did not think that being involved in public life for a considerable number of years and serving as a member of the Senate, as have many colleagues in all corners of this house, disqualified anyone from being able to contribute to the dialogue on the future of Canada. I want to ask the Leader of the Government whether there is going to be any opportunity at all for senators and members of the House of Commons at least to submit their views in written form to Mr. Spicer and his commissioners.

In my view, it is a healthy exercise to enable citizens from all provinces to be heard in as great a number as possible. However, I do not think it is fair and realistic to adopt the position that those who have made a lifetime vocation out of attempting to serve the people of this country in one of the assemblies, whether it be a provincial legislature, the House of Commons or the Senate, that they should thereby be disbarred from having their views considered by the commission.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I fully agree with Senator Perrault. I am sure there will be an opportunity for members of this house and of the other place to submit briefs, to express their views, and to attend public sessions—as, indeed, we are being encouraged to do—held under the auspices of the Citizens' Forum. It must not be forgotten, however, that what we are trying to encourage in the Citizens' Forum exercise is a dialogue among ordinary Canadians. Mr. Spicer would take the position, and I would agree, that most of us here in the Senate or the House of Commons—and those in the provincial legislatures—have our own platforms from which we can express our view. The time has come for us to give centre stage to ordinary Canadians to enable them to exchange views on the kind of country they want, what values they think we hold in common, what they expect of this country, this government and government institutions, including the Senate.