

THE SENATE

Thursday, July 13, 1995

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m., the Speaker in the Chair.

Prayers.

VISITORS IN GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, before I call for statements, I should like to draw your attention to some distinguished visitors in the gallery.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, it is our privilege to welcome to the Senate gallery Senator Maganga, the First Secretary of the Senate of Congo, and Mr. Sziengue, the Executive Secretary of the Speaker. We are happy to greet them.

[English]

THE HONOURABLE JOAN NEIMAN

TRIBUTES ON RETIREMENT

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I take this opportunity today to say goodbye to our dear friend and colleague Senator Neiman. I do so with great reluctance and sadness. Though it is difficult to imagine, Senator Neiman retires from this place on September 9, and I bid her farewell today in case we are not assembled together before that time.

I do this obviously with mixed feelings. While I welcome an occasion to honour Joan, I also know that her presence in the Senate will be greatly missed by both sides, and particularly by myself.

Hard working, dedicated, sensitive, tough, with a great sense of humour, Senator Neiman has been a true credit to this institution. She has been a champion of the Senate and the importance of its place in our democratic system. She has led always by example within and outside this institution in the work she has done throughout this country and internationally, particularly in her leadership role over the years in the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

It is quite fitting, and in no small measure indicative of Senator Neiman's character, that her service in this chamber should culminate in the tabling of a thorough, reasoned, and well-received report on the daunting question of euthanasia, literally life and death. Senator Neiman has never shied away from tackling some of the more difficult issues which we as Parliamentarians are required to debate and legislate. Indeed, the very first speech she made in this chamber was on the subject of capital punishment. In rising, she said:

I listened to the many eloquent and informed speeches which have been made on a wide range of topics and became convinced that I should not speak until I had something worthwhile to say. That criterion might have sentenced me to a life of silence.

Might I say, honourable senators, that we are glad she tossed aside such inhibitions and forged her own directions in this place.

Senator Neiman's energy and determination were clearly evident throughout her life. Early on, after finishing high school in Winnipeg and studying English at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, she joined the Women's Royal Canadian Reserves. She served with them for four years, retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Commander. She then attended law school at Osgoode Hall in Toronto, married Clem, and had three children: Dallis, Patricia, and David.

Before her appointment to the Senate, Senator Neiman practised law and kept involved politically, including running in the Ontario general legislations of 1963 and 1967. She has served the Liberal Party and the values and traditions it represents with vigour and commitment.

When Senator Neiman was appointed to the Senate in 1972, I believe there was a total, including herself, of eight women in this chamber. Now there are 20. That is a long road to have blazed a trail on, Senator Neiman. Since those days in 1972, this woman has been a full-time senator in this chamber and its committees. Her assignments have included the Senate committees on National Finance, Aboriginal Peoples, Foreign Affairs, Social Affairs, Science and Technology, and a Special Joint Committee on the Constitution of Canada.

• (1040)

However, her participation in the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee has been her central commitment for many years as a member from 1972 to 1995, as chair from 1980 to 1986 and 1986 to 1988. It was there that I, as a new senator, came to know her best and to record her exhaustive commitment to very difficult issues with admiration and tremendous respect.

Honourable senators, this committee has embraced not only technical, legal and constitutional legislation, it has been at the heart of sensitive social issues from child abuse to the rights of Indian women, aboriginal women, divorce laws, correctional justice and immigration. It led Senator Neiman to what has been a truly passionate concern as co-chair of the Special Senate Committee on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide.

This week, honourable senators, she spoke with wisdom, candour and emotion in moving adoption of that report. It is a landmark document for this Parliament and for the country in providing a solid foundation for the further exploration and decisions that this subject will demand.