

*Supply*

Reform Party is and always has been an advocate of a reformed Senate, certainly not of its abolishment.

In large countries where the population is unevenly distributed there is a fundamental need to balance representation by population with representation by province. This is especially true in a parliamentary system like Canada's where regimented party caucuses engage in bloc voting under the direction of party leadership. In other big federations like the United States and Australia this balance has been achieved by establishing two levels of government and a bicameral legislature in which the provinces are effectively represented in the upper House and representation by population prevails in the lower House.

The Fathers of Confederation intended to provide this type of balance in the Canadian Parliament, but the Senate as currently constituted has failed to play this role and it simply needs to be reformed.

First, the Senate must be popularly elected. In a democratic age an appointed upper House will always lack legitimacy and hence political power. It is time to take democracy seriously.

Second, the Senate must be equal, in the sense that each province must have the same number of seats, such as in the Australian and United States models. In such a Senate the thinly populated areas, provinces of Canada, would have a majority of seats in the Senate, just as the heavily populated provinces hold the majority of seats in this House of Commons.

Reformers will not be misled into supporting a counterfeit regional version of equality according to which the west, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada will each have the same number of senators. This is approximately what Canada has now and it simply does not work.

Third, the Senate must be effective. It must have adequate power to balance the House of Commons. There is some room for fine tuning here. Reformers do not believe that the defeat of a government bill in the Senate should lead to the defeat of the government. However, the Senate must not be shorn of power so that it becomes unable to amend or veto regionally offensive legislation emanating from the House of Commons.

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Reformers believe that only a triple-E Senate, elected, equal, and effective, can balance the interests of less populous provinces with those of the more populous provinces in this Canadian Parliament.

When I talk about regional fairness I like to relate it to some of the things I have been involved with, one of which is my work on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food.

Certainly we live in a country with diverse interests and diverse problems and certainly agriculture is no exception to that.

Recently Reformers proposed at the committee level a 5 per cent reduction in the overhead costs of the Department of Agriculture. The reason we proposed this was that we believed there was a need for cuts in the department other than those which would come on the backs of farmers or the people who work in that area. I relate this to the regional fairness issue because with the diverse differences in this country only regional fairness and equality in an elected Senate would compensate for those differences.

The Reform Party made the first step toward a triple-E Senate when it pressured the Government of Alberta into holding properly constituted Senate elections in 1988. Most recently the Reform Party asked the Alberta government to pass a resolution which would request the current appointed senators in Alberta to resign so that sanctioned elections could be held in conjunction with the next Alberta provincial election. The Reform Party would herald the accomplishment of Senate election for all senators, both inside Alberta and throughout Canada as a significant leap toward the goal of a triple-E Senate.

There have been many reasons, many arguments, many pressures by politicians and people of all stripes for the abolition of the Senate. The Reform Party favours and has been advocating for many years now the abolition of those features of the Canadian Senate which render it useless and repugnant to voters and taxpayers, namely: Abolish the patronage appointments to the Senate. Elect all senators. Abolish exorbitant perks, pensions and privileges. Establish an independent commission to recommend a pay and pension package for senators and members of Parliament comparable to what is available in the private sector. Abolish inequitable representation in the Senate. Elect equal numbers of senators from each province.

If the Senate is abolished completely, Canada will immediately be governed by a one House Parliament in which the heavily populated centres would have an absolute majority of seats. In such a Parliament it would be virtually impossible to secure effective representation of the interests of the thinly populated parts of the country, namely the west, the north, Atlantic Canada, northern and rural Ontario, and northern and rural Quebec.

The members of the current House of Commons who are suddenly advocating Senate abolition have no interest in establishing any checks and balances on themselves, in particular the regional checks and balances which a reformed Senate would provide. They are simply seeking to consolidate power in their own hands.

If the Senate is completely abolished it is also highly unlikely it would be replaced in the foreseeable future. The premiers who are most loudly advocating Senate abolition simply want to maintain their own monopoly on representing their provincial