

tighten their belts. It is not the Senate, in its wisdom, which understood it had gone too far, it is public opinion alerted by the media. The House of Commons told the Senate to show more wisdom. All this goes to prove that our democracy is well protected, even without a Senate which costs \$54 million a year.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, I think it is absolutely essential that this House question the relevance of the Senate. This Upper House made up of members who are nominated and not elected—it bears repeating—goes against our democratic system in which we take so much pride. In fact, it is against any form of democracy to give important decision-making powers to a nominated House. That is why I rise today against this fossilized institution that costs taxpayers millions of dollars.

I want to remind my colleagues opposite and the House that, on January 28, 1957—a long time ago—a member, I think he was a Liberal, suggested the following—and I quote in view of my colleagues' lack of memory: "We will call a meeting between the federal and provincial governments and, taking their recommendations as a starting point, we will make the Senate into an efficient instrument for Parliamentary governance". Liberals are probably still studying the issue, which is probably still a priority for them, 37 years later.

The federal Senate is the only non-elected House still in existence in Canada. Having understood what a nonsense it was, provincial legislatures abolished theirs. Unfortunately, on the threshold of the 21st century, we are still debating the issue in this House.

The Senate was created in 1867 to quietly review legislation, free from the glare of public pressure. However, over time, practical limitations were imposed on its powers. The Upper House long ago abandoned its practice of introducing bills. Furthermore, it can, even if it only rarely does so, block bills that the people's elected representatives have democratically brought in. Such an opportunity arose in 1961 in connection with a bill respecting the dismissal of the Governor of the Bank of Canada, and again in 1964 over the bail-out of the unemployment insurance fund. More recently, we saw the Senate block bills concerning the GST and the NAFTA. Rarely does the Senate invoke this power akin to the sword of Damocles dangling over the House's head to block government bills, the reason being that Senate appointments are basically partisan in nature.

Appointments are handed out to acknowledge services to the party in power. That is an undeniable fact. The Senate legitimizes the practice of doling out political rewards. This is an aberration of the federal system which purports to be democratic. The appointment process is the reason for the passive role now played by the Senate. It also explains why a party newly in

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power like the Liberals is in such a hurry to gain a majority in the Senate.

One patently obvious example of the kind of partisanship which prevents the Senate from making objective decisions is the speed with which Senator Jacques Hébert, without mentioning any names, opposed unemployment insurance reform during the Conservative reign. So concerned was he for the unemployed that he had gone on a hunger strike four years earlier to show his support for young people and the jobless. Well, Senator Hébert does not seem to be quite as perturbed this time around by the Liberal reform which reduces unemployment insurance benefits. At least he has not shown any signs yet of being perturbed. Surely his lack of passion has nothing to do with partisanship. Or does it?

• (1730)

Getting back to the role of senators, each one is appointed to represent a region of Canada. One of the objectives in creating the Senate was to ensure regional representation. However, we would be deluding ourselves if we believed that today's Senate provided real regional representation. Speaking about regional representation, how can we forget the passion with which Senator Gigantes who represents the senatorial division of Delorimier in Quebec cautioned Quebecers—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I will take the time to check but, as far as I know, the members of this House should not refer to other members or to senators by their names but by the names of their ridings. I will check but I would still ask the hon. member to keep this in mind in his comments as much as possible. I will come back to this if necessary.

The hon. member for Terrebonne.

Mr. Sauvageau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this clarification. I checked and I thought we could use names but I will refrain from doing so.

The senator I just mentioned, who represents Delorimier, in Quebec, warned Quebecers against the possible failure of the Charlottetown Accord. He even predicted such a failure would lead to a crisis similar to what happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Do you see tanks in Quebec, senator? Who did the Delorimier people vote for in the last election, senator? We wonder who you represent today, senator.

This senator recently did it again, predicting a civil war—what a wise man he is—in Quebec if that province ever becomes independent. This senator represents Quebec. Is this wise senator acting like a good regional representative when he accuses Bloc members democratically elected by the Quebec people of being traitors. I doubt that this senator really represents his region. As I said earlier, the fact that he represents Delorimier, which was named after a Quebec patriot, is one of the system's