

certainly be one way of improving the reputation of the Senate, since Canadians do not know enough about the Senate or its very important work. Unfortunately, the Canadian press has often been unfair to the Senate and the senators, and this has caused among our young people and the general public an unjustifiable lack of respect towards our political system, and especially the Senate, which helps to perpetuate the myth that senators do not contribute to the welfare of the population.

Moreover, the Senate could immediately use its committee system to examine the regional effects of certain federal statutes or of some policies which can have a considerable impact on federal-provincial relations.

Having reflected on the matter, and following the decision of the Supreme Court, I now believe that we must consider reforming the existing Senate rather than replacing it by a second chamber with a federal function but which would still be controlled by the provinces. I therefore believe that we would be wise to base our reform on the proposals contained in the report of the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution published in 1972, as well as the reform proposals suggested by the other senators and agencies mentioned earlier, and wait for the final report of the Special Senate Committee on the Constitution, because it seems to me, without of course anticipating the contents of this report, that there will be a consensus on the following points: a redistribution of seats in the upper chamber to ensure better representation for the western provinces; a new method of appointment to the Senate, which would enable the provincial governments to propose to the federal government a certain number of candidates for appointment to the Senate; and also a suspensive veto for the Senate which would clearly provide that the decision of the House of Commons would prevail after a suggested delay of six months.

In support of my comments concerning reform of the Senate rather than its abolition, I would like to quote from a study prepared for the business council on matters of national interest in May 1979. On page 105 of this report entitled "Parliamentary Government in Canada: A Critical Evaluation and Proposals for Change", we can read the following:

The Role of the Senate in the Legislative Process

In our interviews with parliamentarians, it was obvious that the legislative role of the Senate is highly regarded by nearly all members of Parliament even though it does not receive much publicity.

One cabinet member stated that, and I quote:

The Senate includes some of the best intellects in the country who work at polishing up legislation, and their work in this regard is excellent.

That is all from the cabinet member in question, but the report goes on to say:

Our interviews also showed clearly that the Senate is still not playing fully its extended legislative role for reasons which go from simple negligence on the part of the government and the House of Commons to the attitude of the elected members who reject the idea that their non-

[Senator Leblanc.]

elected colleagues can have a considerable influence on legislative matters.

The report goes on as follows:

We think the legislative potential of the Senate should be developed by the government and the House of Commons. The excellent performance of the Senate in analysing and improving government bills should encourage more referrals to its standing committees. In addition, its impressive record in the presentation of useful recommendations on the matter of the government proposals in the white paper also suggests it should be given a more important role in this process.

We must recognize above all that the House of Commons can turn some of its heavy responsibilities over to the second House. In particular, it can take advantage of the Senate's experience and time and, in the case of committees, benefit from a non-partisan approach to bring about solutions to the problems and the issues that are raised.

I, for one, have the impression that abolitionists could concentrate on improving the structure of the House of Commons, particularly the representation of the people there. I think at this time the first priority should be to put forward the idea of setting up a system of proportional representation in this country to reflect the will expressed by Canadian voters during the federal general elections. If it is true the Senate should be reformed in the not too distant future, it is even truer, I think, that the House of Commons should undergo drastic changes in the immediate future.

Honourable senators, I thank you very much for your indulgence. In concluding, I want to say that one should not infer from my position on the future of the Senate that I am opposed to all aspects of a constitutional reform. On the contrary, I think it is urgent that the federal government and the provinces find areas of agreement to actually bring about concrete improvements in a renewed federalism. Many studies made in the past half century can be used as a basis for that renewal, as they contain all the necessary elements to continue to guarantee this country's unity in diversity.

● (1550)

[English]

On motion of Senator Macdonald, for Senator Sherwood, debate adjourned.

RETIREMENT AGE POLICIES

REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming the debate on the consideration of the Report of the Special Committee of the Senate on Retirement Age Policies, entitled: "Retirement Without Tears", tabled in the Senate on 15th April, 1980—(Honourable Senator Deschatelets, P.C.).

Hon. Jean-Paul Deschatelets: Honourable senators, as the Honourable Senator Bird is prepared to speak to this order