

## THE SENATE

Thursday, March 23, 1995

The Senate met at 2:00 p.m., the Speaker in the Chair.

Prayers.

### SENATORS' STATEMENTS

#### FORUM FOR YOUNG CANADIANS

**Hon. Consiglio Di Nino:** Honourable senators, only a couple of hours ago I once again had the honour and pleasure of enjoying the company of approximately 125 young men and women from across our country at the senators' lunch for the Forum for Young Canadians. The dozen or so of them with whom I was able to chat during the limited time available impressed me as intelligent, concerned and committed Canadians with open and inquiring minds, without the cynicism to which we are often witness.

Unfortunately, one of the most often asked questions was, "Why are there so few senators in attendance?" I believe there were five members of this chamber present at the event.

During four different weeks throughout the year, the Forum for Young Canadians brings together approximately 500 Canadian youth from across the country to learn firsthand how government works. The participants look forward to meeting members of Parliament, particularly those from their own regions. There are two further sessions scheduled for this year, during the weeks of April 24 and May 1.

I urge all senators to make a special effort to attend the senators' luncheons scheduled for April 27 and May 4. You will be rewarded and entertained by the bright, enthusiastic and grateful young constituents you will meet. You will be impressed by their interest and wisdom and you will be enriched by the experience, as I was.

#### CANADA'S ARMED FORCES

**Hon. J. Michael Forrestall:** Honourable senators, I note with some alarm the plans in the budget to carve another \$2.8 billion from the budget of the Department of National Defence. That, in addition to the \$7 billion taken out last year, totals approximately \$10 billion in overall reductions in defence expenditures. I leave it to others to decide whether that was required or necessary. I am not so much concerned about the question of military spending as I am about the more fundamental issues of vision and a basic attitude.

As honourable senators are well aware, the glorious Liberal Party in this country has been somewhat ambivalent in recent years with respect to the Canadian Armed Forces. I invite you to cast your mind back to 1964 and the white paper on national defence, which led to the ill-considered unification of the Armed Forces over the protests of those concerned and, indeed, a large portion of the general public. We were told that it was in the interests of economy and efficiency. There were, of course, the Trudeau years of wandering in the wilderness with respect to national defence, years of neglect and indecision.

Between 1970 and 1982, there were seven different ministers of national defence. Since I came to Parliament in 1965, I think there have been 12 or 14 ministers of that department. As the government played a game of musical chairs, our defence policy floundered, rudderless in a sea of Liberal rhetoric and indecision.

• (1410)

We come now to the present government and to the events of the past year involving the dissolving of the Canadian Airborne Regiment. The Prime Minister told us that the prestige of Canada was at stake. He called the first-ever disbanding of a regiment in Canada a difficult decision, but one that had to be taken. Why did it have to be taken? Was the security of Canada at risk? Was the integrity of our Armed Forces in question? Rather, was it a shameless question of polls and popularity?

Honourable senators, I come back to the notion of vision. What is the role of Canada's military? Are these people diplomats, aid workers or policemen, or are they soldiers, sailors and air personnel? That is the question the Liberal government should be asking itself these days.

I need not remind you that the men and women of our Armed Forces are a very important part of our society. They are not, as many on the other side of this house would apparently prefer, media-savvy, politically correct social scientists, committed to solving the problems of humanity for the greater glory of the Canadian government.

To the contrary, they are dedicated people who, to paraphrase one member of the Armed Forces, have chosen to enter into a contract of unlimited liability with their nation. They are people trained in the values of loyalty, integrity, dedication, self-discipline, and tradition. They are people who believe that living in society involves responsibilities, not just rights. They are people worthy of our respect for the job they do; the job they have chosen to do. I suggest we should spend a little more time recognizing that.