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BANKING, TRADE AND COMMERCE

Motion to Authorize Committee to Study Export Performance—Debate Continued

Speech by:

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Tuesday, March 22, 2016

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[Translation]

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MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY EXPORT PERFORMANCE—DEBATE CONTINUED

Hon. Diane Bellemare: Honourable senators, I want to begin by apologizing for taking so long to speak to this motion. I will be brief.

I would like to congratulate Senator Hervieux-Payette for the work she and her team did on the Canadian export file. Her office's report, *Review of Free Trade Agreements and Trade Policies of Canada 2006-2015: A Call for National Action*, sheds considerable and interesting light on Canadian exports over the past 10 years.

As the senator points out, the export file is a major one for Canada's economy. In its 2014 report on Canada, the OECD stated that Canada should do more to boost its non-commodity exports, its competitiveness and its productivity.

The senator's report indicates that the various free trade treaties signed with other countries are not a panacea to boost Canadian exports. To use the wording from the report, they are, and I quote, "at best necessary but not at all sufficient." I think you are quite right on that point, senator. Free trade agreements are necessary to export growth, but they are indeed insufficient. For example, in the 1990s, Canada's international exports jumped dramatically as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement, better known as NAFTA. The Canadian economy gained some momentum, propelled by NAFTA and global economic prosperity.

Everything changed in the 2000s. Although Canada signed a number of agreements, the sluggishness of the global economy, especially in 2008 and after, hampered the growth of Canadian exports abroad.

Senator Hervieux-Payette's report therefore focuses on the performance of the federal and provincial public services that promote exports. It concludes that we should have a single ministry of industry and trade that would be responsible for all public services to promote domestic and foreign trade. It also includes recommendations for adult education, innovation and productivity.

The senator's report, in and of itself, constitutes the centrepiece for a committee study. However, I am not convinced that grouping all public services to promote exports under a single federal ministry is the answer to the problems with Canada's export performance. I don't think that Canada's export performance is necessarily tied to the government structures related to public services in this area.

The Banking, Trade and Commerce Committee recently heard from a number of experts regarding the falling Canadian dollar and also questioned these experts about how the dollar affects our exports. What I understood is that the topic of Canadian exports to other countries is more complex than it seems. We certainly need to try to better understand how the globalization of production is affecting the value of Canadian exports, which Senator Hervieux-Payette suggests in her proposed study.

However, in spite of all these good reasons for undertaking such a study, I don't feel comfortable supporting this motion right now, since it calls on the Banking Committee to examine this issue, even though, according to our Rules, this issue falls under the purview of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade. This is the committee that examines free trade agreements and issues related to international trade.

The committee's mandate states:

The Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade has a mandate to examine legislation and matters relating to foreign and Commonwealth relations, including: treaties and international agreements; external trade; foreign aid; and territorial and offshore matters.

The mandate of the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce states:

The Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce has the mandate to examine legislation and to study issues related to banking, insurance, trust and loan companies, credit societies, caisses populaires and small loans companies. It is also responsible for considering customs and excise issues, taxation legislation, patents, royalties, corporate affairs, and bankruptcy-related issues.

The committee has conducted major studies in areas as diverse as corporate governance, financial sector reform, insolvency, Crown corporations, taxation, business and trade, productivity, financial crimes, retirement and digital currency.

Since Senator Hervieux-Payette's motion has to do with economics, one might think that the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce would be the most appropriate committee to examine the economic issues related to international trade.

However, when we read the mandates given to each committee, it is clear that the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade is the committee that is responsible for examining international trade issues, while the Banking, Trade and Commerce Committee is responsible for examining interprovincial trade issues.

Senator Hervieux-Payette's motion brings to light certain problems with how the mandates of the Senate standing committees are defined. The time has clearly come to review the committees' mandates and adapt them to meet 21st century needs. That is something that we must do one day in order to modernize our Senate committees.

Since I am not prepared to comment on this issue before I hear what my colleagues have to say about the problem with the different committee mandates, I ask that one of you move adjournment of the debate.

(On motion of Senator Ringuette, debate adjourned.)
