



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## POINT OF ORDER

Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative—  
Speaker's Ruling Reserved

Statement by:

The Honourable Diane Bellemare

Tuesday, May 3, 2016

## THE SENATE

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[*Translation*]

### POINT OF ORDER

#### SPEAKER'S RULING RESERVED

**Hon. Diane Bellemare (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate):** Honourable senators, I would like to participate in this debate by adding that we find ourselves with the chicken and egg conundrum. Many of us want change. Canadians are asking the Senate to change. They, too, are convinced that amending the Constitution is not the right way to make short-term changes. If we want to change, we have to start somewhere. A change in titles or styles may signal that things will be done differently by an independent and non-partisan Senate, in other words, a Senate that has political duties to perform, but that is a chamber of sober second thought and legislative review, and that must undertake this review in an impartial manner.

• (1500)

In the past — and this is obvious from the number of amendments to government bills that were proposed during the 41st Parliament — there was only one: Bill C-10. Are we going to continue to act merely as rubber stamps? Is that what Canadians expect of us? No. We need to improve our legislative work, and one possible solution to accelerate the change — because change must come from a host of rules, procedures and conventions — is to have some sort of signal indicating what direction this change will take.

I would like to conclude my remarks with a quotation from Andrew Heard, a professor of political science. It might seem academic, but I can assure you that what he has to say is very timely. Here is what he said:

As an appointed body in the modern democratic era, the Senate must work hard to claim and sustain public confidence. The public has faith in appointed judges but principally because of the belief that judges interpret and enforce established legal rules, principles and rights.

Thus the long-term prospect for public support for the appointed Senate's role in Parliament must rely on how constructive its role is seen to be. The Senate must provide clear and visible suggestions to improve legislation and a large enough number of bills to justify its value in the system. It must not be seen as an unaccountable entity, obstructing or vetoing choices endorsed by the people's elected representatives. Neither should the Senate be seen principally as a forum for some interesting committee discussions over bills that seldom get improved through amendments.

In other words, if the Senate is to become the independent, non-partisan chamber that Canadians want, we have to start somewhere. Often, stylistic designations can help us see a little further ahead than today's debates.

Thank you.

**Some Hon Senators:** Hear, hear!

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