

Debates of the Senate (Hansard)

1st Session, 39th Parliament,
Volume 143, Issue 102

Thursday, May 31, 2007

The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella, Speaker

Hon. Grant Mitchell: Honourable senators, I have to begin this response and the debate of this amendment with an apology. I wish that whatever we did had not poked that hornet's nest so hard, because I feel in part responsible for honourable senators being subjected to this diatribe for the last 45 minutes.

Some Hon. Senators: Oh oh!

Senator Mitchell: It is a weak argument that resorts to two things.

Some Hon. Senators: Order!

Senator Mitchell: It is odd that they do not want to let me speak because about 90 per cent of what Senator Tkachuk said was reiterating what I had said in committee. I feel I am actually getting extra time in this debate, so I thank Senator Tkachuk very much.

The fact is the honourable senator resorts to two things: He resorts to rhetoric that amounts to little more than diatribe, little more than rant, and he resorts, as Conservatives do continuously, to blaming. What Conservatives so often do is find something they create as a problem and find someone to blame for that problem. What they do not do and what this government does not do is take responsibility for what it can do to confront problems which it, as the current government, has a responsibility to confront.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator Mitchell: After waiting 13 years — and how many times have we heard "13 years" — to finally get into government so they could set it right and they could do something, what do they spend their time and rhetoric on? They talk about something that someone else did not do. That is the essence of their environmental policy.

If there is a core argument they want to make, believe me, one would have to work hard to find the core of the inspiration of Senator Tkachuk's argument beyond the past and blaming someone else. If there is a core to the argument, it is somehow that pursuing Kyoto will hurt the economy.

The honourable senator uses three arguments to demonstrate that. First, he refers to Minister Baird's study. I will say it again, and I will say it slowly: That is perhaps the study with the least credibility of any study that I have ever seen in my entire political career. It is without foundation. It is almost incomprehensible that that study actually undermines its own conclusions definitively on the last page, where it lists seven critical things to climate change policy that it cannot consider within its study.

Seven things are listed that actually diminish the impact and the importance of that study. The study is without credibility. Senator Tkachuk also refers to Dr. Drummond. I believe Dr. Drummond is an economist. The honourable senator should dig deeper into what Dr. Drummond said because Dr. Drummond actually went out of his way several days later to distance himself from that study. What he said is what economists always say about studies. They will say that within the assumptions made upon which that study was based, of course, it has a logical consistency and it concludes within those assumptions something like that study concluded. However, the real argument and the real debate about studies of that nature hinge on the assumptions, and the assumptions of that study were profoundly weak. That is the first argument Senator Tkachuk uses to get at whatever is the economic core of his argument.

The second — and I use the term loosely — fact is the \$30-billion cost that Senator Tkachuk claims. What is revealing is that he says it is 2.5 per cent of Canada's GDP. Again, his numbers are wrong, just as they were wrong when he and his colleagues could not add the number of people they needed in their seats in order to have quorum when it came to a vote last week. It is reminiscent of what must become a tradition in the Conservative Party now when, in 1979, Joe Clark could not count, either. How many of them were Progressive Conservatives back in that day?

When one takes \$30 billion, which I agree is perhaps the cost; it may be \$30 billion. Do honourable senators know who said that? I think the \$30-billion figure is slightly high. It is probably \$20 billion to get our Kyoto levels to the level they need to be at to meet Kyoto objectives for the period from now until the end of 2012, which is five and a half years. The figure is \$20 billion to \$30 billion. Even the Chemical Producers Association, that special interest group which the government brought in to defend their side, said the figure is probably \$30 billion.

TransAlta's former employee, Bob Page, a great guy, said the same thing as the figure that they are clinging to. However, I say to the Honourable Senator Tkachuk that it is \$30 billion not over one year, which would be 2.5 per cent of Canada's GDP, but over 5.5 years, which makes it less than one half of 1 per cent of Canada's GDP.

What is deeply frightening to me is that the government has determined that it is impossible to pursue Kyoto objectives on the basis of a single incorrect and analytical mathematical calculation. Senator Tkachuk thinks that \$30 billion over five and a half years is 2.5 per cent of Canada's GDP. He is five and a half times too high. He cannot add, he cannot subtract, he cannot divide and he cannot figure out what Kyoto will

actually cost this country if we do it, let alone what Kyoto will actually cost if we do not do it.

Therefore, I cannot believe that I am left, after listening to that — although I do in fact believe it, I accept it — diatribe that all we have is reference to a study which is categorically without legitimacy and reference to a single figure which is five and a half times too high because Senator Tkachuk cannot figure out what five and a half into \$30 billion over the GDP actually is.

However, we know what comes out of all of this. What comes out of all of this so often, and what this really —

Senator Segal: Why didn't you do it? You had 15 years.

Senator Mitchell: — underlines to me is this continuous stream of criticizing — you can speak about this yourself. I am looking forward to it.

However, what comes out of this —

Senator Stratton: You didn't get it done!

Senator Cowan: That is Tory position.

Senator Mitchell: What comes out of this is a stream of argument that underlines a very powerful observation about the character — and I use that word lightly — of this government. The fact is that they continue to blame other people and they continue to fail to take any responsibility. They continue to act like the opposition party that they were for 13 years and will be again.

I know that for sure because I remember in committee, a couple of the senators on the Conservative side so often doubting and raising doubts about the tradeable permit market. I thought about that and they said, "Well, you can't trust tradeable permits. We are just buying hot air." An opposition party would continually say that.

Do you know what a governing party would say, with leadership, vision and that understands it is here to fix things and make them work? They would say, "We need a market for tradable permits. We need to do that because there are business opportunities in this country that are going to Europe and will go to the U.S. and will be lost to this country."

They would say, "If there is a problem with tradable permit markets, as a government we will fix the problem. We will figure it out, use our creativity, our resources, our minds — I use "minds" lightly — and we will fix that problem.

(1640)

Instead, they seek out problems. They are so used to seeking out problems that they do not know how to fix them and they blame, blame, blame. That is not great government. That is tired government. It is not new government. Believe it or not, after 16 months, this government is exhausted.

A second example of where they act like opposition — now I mention Senator Segal. I apologize to Senator Segal, but when he heckled me the last time I spoke, I said I would take him to task about Buzz Hargrove and I forgot. I will do it now. He said to talk to Buzz Hargrove. I say Buzz Hargrove represents a strong constituency: people who deserve good, long-term jobs, people who have helped build this country and its economy. We cannot disregard it.

People like Arnold Schwarzenegger say the cars built in Canada and sold in California will not measure up to the environmental standards required of Californian-bought autos.

Senator Angus: Hasta la vista, baby.

Senator Mitchell: Instead of saying, Mr. Hargrove you have a problem, oops, we cannot do anything about it, great government would sit down with Buzz Hargrove and all those manufacturers and ask what we can do in Canada to develop a technology that can be developed, built and made in Canada so we can build cars that will be sold everywhere in the world ahead of any other kind of car that anybody wants to sell.

However, with opposition mentality, these people are stuck where they are, mired in the past, mired in blame, mired in failure to take responsibility, mired in heckling, "Talk to Buzz Hargrove," whatever that means. It means we have a government that is not working and will not be around for long. Finally, we will get back in there and do something about this problem.

I am sorry to distract you from the real arguments by saying that.

I have observed Conservative government for a long time in the Alberta legislature. I thought that government was bad. This one has lowered the bar even further. This is one example. What does Senator Tkachuk argue about the problem with MPs holding a government responsible for taking action on something like Kyoto or Kelowna, for example? It will be the same argument. It has occurred because we have had democratic reform in that place. It is interesting that because we are not achieving democratic reform quickly enough in this place, Senator Stratton wants to blow it up.

An Hon. Senator: Shame!

Senator Mitchell: He is committed to democratic reform. Yes, shame.

An Hon. Senator: Call the RCMP!

Senator Mitchell: When we achieve democratic reform in the other place and it actually works to tell government to do something, he does not like it.

Let us analyze the history of that democratic reform. Do you know where giving MPs more power started? It started with the Reform Party, the very roots of his Conservative Party.

Senator Ringuette: It is still the Reform Party.

Senator Mitchell: It does not matter what you call it because they have tried a number of different names and it is always the same party. It was that party, under Preston Manning, who would be given credit for starting that democratic reform movement. MPs finally had the power to stand up and represent their constituents. I heard that many times in the Alberta legislature. We need to have our representatives stand up and be able to represent their constituents, and if backbench MPs do not have the vote, they do not have power and are told what to do by their leader.

Finally, backbench MPs have the power to stand up and do something without being told what to do by their leader. They stand up and say, "We had better not allow that because that would be too democratic. Would that not give an MP too much power?"

The fact is they have the power. It is democratic reform. It is real democratic reform, and they exercise it. Parliament is supreme.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear! Bravo!

Senator Mitchell: Senator Tkachuk can stand up and he can diminish the power of those MPs, but in doing so he diminishes the essence and quality and legitimacy of this institution. He should listen to what they did and stop arguing that we need to delay it further. He said it was delayed for 10 years and now he wants to delay it more. How does that work? If we delayed it too long — I accept your argument — then we had better get after it.

That brings me to the fundamental question: Why is he so intense about his argument and reduces himself to rhetoric? Honourable senators can sense the anger, because he is confronted with a government and leader who cannot lead. This issue is huge.

After 13 years of wanting to be in government, they want to be out this week and next because they do not have a legislative agenda. Barack Obama said something in an interview that was powerful to me.

The Hon. the Speaker: I regret to advise the honourable senator that his time has expired.

Some Hon. Senators: More! More!

Senator Mitchell: Barack Obama was interviewed shortly after he announced his candidacy for President of the United States. He was asked whether he was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems. He said he was not overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems, but was overwhelmed by the smallness of the politics.

I look at that Prime Minister and what they are doing — mandatory minimums, fixing a problem that is not a problem, and if it exists will make it worse. Fixed terms for senators is one of their core items because he cannot undertake real Senate reform. There is no big legislative agenda or vision for this country and no sense of social policy or economic policy: improving productivity in this country. There is no sense of developing environmental policy that will mean something for our children, our grandchildren and will take our place in the world. There is simply no sense, no vision and no leadership. That is why we need Bill C-288 and why we cannot deny or delay it. That is why I am voting against this amendment.

Some Hon. Senators: Bravo! Bravo!