

[English]

The Senate

Motion to Urge Government to Promote Smoke-Free Workplaces and Public Areas—Debate Adjourned

Hon. Mac Harb, pursuant to notice of May 16, 2006, moved:

That the Senate takes note that tobacco smoking continues to cause an estimated 45,000 Canadian deaths and to cost our economy up to \$15 billion each year;

That the Senate notes that current federal legislation allows for ventilation options and smoking rooms in workplaces under federal jurisdiction even though they do not provide full protection from second-hand smoke and that full protection from second-hand smoke can only be achieved through the creation of workplaces and public places that are completely free of tobacco smoke;

That the Senate urges the Government of Canada to pass legislation to ensure that all enclosed workplaces and public places under its jurisdiction are smoke-free;

That the Senate ask the Government of Canada to call upon each province and territory that has not yet done so to enact comprehensive smoke-free legislation; and

That a message be sent to the House of Commons requesting that House to unite with the Senate for the above purpose.

He said: Honourable senators, I am honoured to rise today to ask for your support for a motion that will update legislation protecting Canadians from the dangers of second-hand smoke. I thank Senator Keon for seconding this motion.

Specifically, we ask the federal government to put in place an effective, nation-wide prohibition on the use of ignited tobacco products in enclosed places and workplaces under its jurisdiction.

In Canada, public health and occupational health and safety are shared responsibilities between federal and provincial and territorial governments, with some of these responsibilities passed down to the municipalities. For this reason, the motion also calls on provincial and territorial governments who have not yet provided adequate protection for their citizens to do so.

Honourable senators, I ask you to imagine with me for a moment that the year is 1985, and we are here in the Senate chamber preparing to participate in the business of the day. In these historic chambers, not much has changed since 1985. Other than the width of the ties and the length of the skirts, much is the same. Certainly, the predominance of Liberal senators is the same. What is not the same is the air that you are breathing. As some

esteemed colleagues will remember, until the late 1980s, smoking was commonplace in the offices, hallways and meeting rooms here on Parliament Hill.

[Translation]

There is no doubt in my mind that making the Parliamentary Precinct smoke-free was the right thing to do. Indeed, I think most of us would agree that making all of Canada's enclosed workplaces and public places smoke-free is the right thing to do.

Currently, Canada's federal Non-smokers' Health Act controls the use of tobacco in federal buildings and on federal property or federally managed lands. This includes places of work and business such as financial institutions, airports, airplanes, interprovincial trains, and telecommunications facilities.

[English]

Unfortunately, honourable senators, this 20-year-old occupational health and safety legislation, and its regulations, still permits designated smoking rooms or smoking areas in many of these federally regulated workplaces and public places. This outdated legislation puts Canadians and their health at risk.

(1530)

Let us consider for a moment that smoking is the single most serious public health problem in Canada, killing more Canadians than car accidents, murders, suicide and alcohol combined. Smoking results in 45,000 deaths every year in Canada. Tragically, thousands of those deaths are non-smokers who die from smoke-related lung cancer or heart disease.

The evidence about the risk of passive smoking is too compelling to ignore. Honourable senators may be surprised to learn that second-hand smoke is even more toxic than smoke inhaled directly because it is completely unfiltered. Second-hand smoke contains 4,000 chemical compounds, at least 50 of which cause or promote cancer. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has declared second-hand smoke a Class A carcinogen. "Class A" means there is literally no known safe level of exposure.

Highly respected organizations such as Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Coalition for Action on Tobacco, and the Canadian Global Forum on Tobacco Control, are calling for a nation-wide ban on second-hand smoke.

In 2004, Ireland became the first country in the world to go smoke-free. Ireland was followed by Norway, New Zealand, Bhutan and Scotland. As many as 20 countries are currently working towards smoke-free enclosed workplaces and public places.

[Translation]

Protecting people who are involuntarily exposed to environmental tobacco smoke in enclosed workplaces and public places must be a number one priority for every government in every jurisdiction in Canada.

Federal, provincial and territorial Ministers of Health are committed to working together to reduce tobacco consumption in Canada. Smoke-free work and public places are necessary elements of that commitment.

Many of you will know that Canada was one of the early ratifiers of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which we passed in November 2004. As Party to this Convention, we agreed to abide by Article 8 which states:

Each Party shall adopt and implement in areas of existing national jurisdiction as determined by national law and actively promote at other jurisdictional levels, the adoption and implementation or effective legislative, executive, administrative and/or other measures, providing for protection from exposure to tobacco smoke in indoor workplaces, public transport, indoor public places and, as appropriate, other public places.

[English]

For the most part, honourable senators, Canada is well on its way to meeting these requirements. To quote the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control monitoring report, published in February 2006:

All levels of government in Canada have given political and financial support to tobacco control initiatives. These strategies have led to significant reduction in tobacco use in recent years.

Smoking rates in Canada are dropping, down to 20 per cent in 2005, and the number of young people starting to smoke, while still high, is decreasing as well. We must take our tobacco control strategy to the next level, to build on these successes.

Honourable senators, the city we call home, at least part-time these days, is smoke-free. Ottawa banned smoking in all enclosed workplaces or public places almost five years ago. Many come from cities or towns that have taken similar actions to prevent the dangers of second-hand smoke from affecting workers and innocent Canadians.

It is important to note that smoke-free policies do more than protect workers. These policies help to reduce overall smoking behaviour. They generate increased awareness about tobacco issues and they change the way people think about smoking.

There is a momentum building now in jurisdictions across Canada to create and maintain smoke-free spaces. Currently, 27 per cent of Canadians are living in communities where

provincial, territorial or municipal law protects the public from second-hand smoke exposures in public places, including bars and restaurants.

By January 1, 2007, 80 per cent of Canadians will have this level of protection, but unfortunately 20 per cent will not, and an unacceptable number of these unprotected workers fall under federal jurisdiction.

While most federal workers are protected from second-hand smoke through Treasury Board policies, or because their employers respect existing provincial or municipal bans on smoking at work, others are not so lucky. There is less protection in some federally-regulated facilities, such as airports, than in municipalities in which they are located.

Honourable senators, one need go no further than the Ottawa International Airport. As I stated earlier, Ottawa has been completely smoke-free since 2001. A glaring exception is the airport, because it is under federal jurisdiction for matters of occupational health and safety. There are two smoking rooms at the Ottawa airport. Even when the new Ontario law comes into force on May 31, 2006, there will still be smoking rooms at the airport and other airports across Canada. They are all under federal jurisdiction. We need legislative action to ban smoking in airports and all other locations under federal jurisdiction.

The federal government must bring its own legislation up to the higher standards being set by other jurisdictions. It will be necessary to revise the Non-smokers' Health Act and/or the Canada Labour Code to prohibit smoking in all federally-regulated indoor workplaces and public places.

[Translation]

The Yukon, Alberta, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan also need to increase the level of protection from second-hand smoke to prohibit smoking in all workplaces and public places under their jurisdiction. We should encourage them to do so.

I would like to add, honourable senators, that legislative change, when it comes, must take into consideration the cultural significance of tobacco in the lives of Aboriginal Canadians and its ceremonial role in cultural and spiritual practices.

Health Canada has done a first-rate job providing resources and information on smoke free work and public spaces. It has also been diligently spreading the word about the dangers of tobacco products and second-hand smoke in our society.

[English]

Most honourable senators will be familiar with the courageous champion of the Smoke-Free Canada campaign, Heather Crowe. Her face has been on television advertisements

and her story written about in the newspapers. She is a life-long non-smoker who is dying from lung cancer after a career spent working as a waitress in smoke-filled restaurants.

When I mentioned to Ms. Crowe that we would be discussing this motion in the Senate, she responded by saying:

It gave me a big lift to know that you will table a motion in the Senate to make all workplaces and public places smoke-free. A lot of progress has been made but many Canadians are still not protected from second-hand smoke at work. I want to be the last person to die from second-hand smoke at work. Your motion will help make my wish come true.

Honourable senators, individuals such as Ms. Heather Crowe, groups such as Physicians for a Smoke-free Canada and international organizations such as the World Health Organization are calling on us to close the loopholes and to clear the air for non-smokers in our country.

I ask honourable senators to support this motion to ensure that the necessary steps are taken to obtain federal smoke-free legislation in Canada. There is no reason not to proceed with this initiative and more than 32 million good reasons why we should. Believe me, we will all breathe easier when this motion passes.

Honourable senators, I put this motion before you with the support of my esteemed colleague, Senator Keon, in the hope we can concur with it quickly and thereby send a message to the other place asking them to unite with us to ensure that Canada's workplaces and public places are truly smoke-free.

On motion of Senator Tkachuk, debate adjourned.

The Senate adjourned until Thursday, May 18, 2006, at 1:30 p.m.