

This charge of patronage also explains why some people claim that the Senate is not truly representative. In addition, while close to 20 per cent of senators are female, almost all members of the Senate come from middle or upper levels of society. Some people feel that senators represent their party rather than their province or region.

Provinces and territories believe they should have a greater say in who represents their concerns in the Senate. Therefore, in 1987, an amendment to the Constitution was passed to allow recommendations for senators to come from the provinces. However, these changes to the selection of Senate members were not significant enough for many Canadians.

ACTIVITIES

1. Draw three diagrams to illustrate executive powers, legislative powers, and judicial powers in Canadian government. Compare your understanding with two other students. What ideas do you share? What ideas are unique to your summary?
2. Explain the role of the following in our representative democracy:
 - a) caucus
 - b) the opposition.
3. What qualities does the speaker of the House need to do the job well? Watch a session of question period on the cable Parliamentary channel to see the speaker at work.



counterpoints

Is the Senate Worth Keeping?

Patronage is not the only criticism that is levelled against the Senate. Dissatisfaction with its present structure takes several forms, from calls for its complete abolition to various proposals designed to increase its role in the operations of government.

Option 1: Abolish the Senate

Some people feel that the Senate should simply be abolished. They feel it is outdated, unnecessary, and undemocratic. They argue that patronage has effectively destroyed any role the Senate may have had as a representative of the regions, and that it is too costly to justify keeping—in any form. Instead, more power should be vested in elected members of the House of Commons:

...[T]he Senate can never be reformed. The Reform Party members have said that the Senate costs us

\$60 million and that they want to reform it. They want an elected Senate which will cost Canadians \$120 million or more every year to operate. If we put this question to a referendum and asked Canadians if the Senate should be abolished, my sense is that they, in a unanimous way—probably around 80% to 90%—would support the abolition if the alternative, as the Reform has said, will cost twice as much money.

...[W]e are already overgoverned in this country. We have municipal governments, urban hamlets, towns and villages, rural municipalities, counties, school boards, hospital boards, provincial governments, the federal House of Commons, and the Senate. We have more governments than people want to pay for. They are asking us to downsize the number of politicians, not to increase the number of politicians.

Source: Hon. John Solomon, NDP member for Regina-Lumsden-Lake Centre, *Debates of the House of Commons*, February 24, 2000.

Option 2: Reform the Senate

Others, however, feel that the Upper House has some value, but needs renewal. Support for reforming the Senate is strongest in Alberta, where many people feel

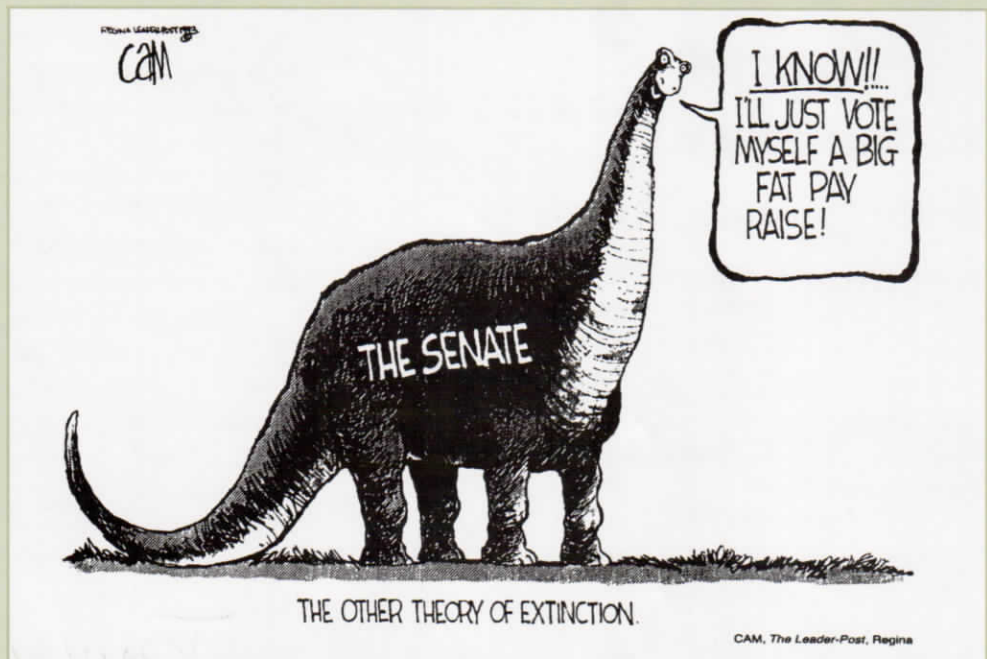
Okay, now let's all think **asymmetrical** Triple-E ...

Everything Ontario wants they get,
Everything Quebec wants they get,
Everyone else gets whatever is left over ...



Figure 9-13

Interpreting a cartoon What view of the Senate does each of these cartoonists hold? Do you agree with either of their views? Explain your reasons.



that the number of seats held by Ontario and Quebec gives the central provinces too much power at the expense of smaller provinces.

Some seeking major revisions to the Senate and its role in the legislative branch advocate the creation of a “triple-E” senate (elected, equal, and effective).

This proposal was originally put forward by Preston Manning, leader of the former Reform Party:

Many people have approached me and said the Senate should simply be abolished—that it is a waste of money. I agree that the current Senate

arrangement is not serving Canadians. But, if we abolish the Senate, Canadians outside of Ontario and Quebec will continue to be at the mercy of Central Canadian influence. The Senate has the potential to provide a more balanced regional representation to protect less populous areas of the country. In addition, the Senate should act as a chamber of sober second thought on government legislation. While an elected Senate is the first step to achieving true representation, it is only one-third of what is needed to ensure Canadians are truly equal. The answer is a "triple-E" Senate:

Effective: Under current legislation the Senate has the power to be effective in representing regional interests and sober second thought. However, because the Senate is not elected and represents the worst of partisan, political patronage, it lacks all legitimacy. It is unaccountable to Canadian taxpayers.

Equal: Although Senators frequently say that they will take on regional interests, when push comes to shove they invariably vote along party lines. If they were elected they would be accountable to the regions they represent.

Elected: The starting point of Senate reform so that Canadians will have a lawmaking system that reflects the needs of this great country is with the election of Senators. The Senate and its important functions will never be a legitimate part of the lawmaking body, unless its members are accountable to the people of Canada through a democratic election process.

Option 3: Keep the Senate As Is

But others feel that we should not rush to move from the present model. They note the benefits of having a body that is not subject to the whims of the public, and point to the unnoticed contributions and vast experience of Senate members:

An elected Upper House would naturally end up challenging the House of Commons. In our system, it is the Commons that determines key elements of government and social policy. The present Senate regularly improves legislation so that it does what it was meant to do, to safeguard minority or general human rights. However, although it has wide powers under the Constitution, the Senate

rarely defeats a basic policy the government has approved. Australia's experience suggests that an elected Senate holding these same powers might not be so scrupulous.

Source: Adapted from Senator Joan Fraser, "Senator Fraser Defends the Red Chamber," *National Post*, February 29, 2000, A19.

...The Senate is truly a chamber of sober second thought. To perform that role properly, this chamber should be above the partisan factions of the day. This chamber is supposed to be above the day's fads and fantasies, and it is supposed to be independent....

I venture to say that the experience accumulated in this chamber exceeds that of any task force, commission, or advisory group ever established by a government. It would cost substantially more than the cost of operating this place if this group charged the government for its services and advice at rates available to them in the private sector.

Source: Senator William M. Kelly, *Senate Debates*, December 15, 1997.

Analysing the Issue

1. In your own words, explain the main arguments in each of the quotations above.
2. Which provinces stand to gain the most from the "triple-E" proposal? Which stand to lose? Prepare an advertising campaign that provinces in favour of the triple-E senate might use to convince voters in other provinces to support a triple-E proposal.
3. Some groups feel that the Senate should be made more representative of women and minorities. Brainstorm ideas for reform that would help to meet this criterion.
4. Present your own view of what should (or should not) happen to the Senate. You may choose one of the options discussed above, or another idea of your own. You may want to do some more research before you present your proposal.