



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## VISIBLE MINORITIES IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Statement by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

Wednesday, September 28, 2011

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### VISIBLE MINORITIES IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

**Hon. Vivienne Poy:** Honourable senators, I rise to speak about the Second Annual Transatlantic Minority Political Leadership Conference at the European Parliament in Brussels, to which I was invited in March.

The conference brought together an exclusive group of parliamentarians from across the European Union and the United States with the purpose of calling for dialogue between governments on greater tolerance and respect for diversity. The focus was on minority political participation, especially in national parliaments. As the only Canadian parliamentarian attending the conference, I feel it is important to share the proceedings with my honourable colleagues.

The under-representation of minorities at different levels of governments, which impacts access to quality education, employment and other resources, was noted. Ms. Nura Ismailovski, of Croatia, reflected on both being the first Romani woman to graduate from university and being elected to Zagreb's city council. African-American pollster Cornell Belcher detailed the influence of minority voters on the U.S. election. Concerns were raised about the growing racist and

xenophobic political parties in Europe that were rolling back gains for minorities.

During the conference, I spoke about some of Canada's successes in valuing diversity. I noted that Canada's immigration rate on a per capita basis is nearly double that of the United States. Since most of these immigrants in the past 40 years are from Asia, Canadians of Asian origin are more than double the number in the U.S., despite our small population.

While recognizing Canada's successes because of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, I acknowledged that many challenges still remain. Visible minorities are severely under-represented in positions of leadership, in both the public and the private sectors. We lack diversity in our House of Commons, partly because of unequal seat distributions between rural ridings and urban ridings, where most visible minorities live.

I am, however, glad to say that, at present, we do have the most diverse House of Commons in the history of Canada. Almost 10 per cent of the members of Parliament elected are visible minorities, and we also see the highest representation of women. This indeed is progress, even though slow. I came away from the conference feeling that we are fortunate in Canada, but we must continue to be vigilant.

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