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CHINESE IMMIGRATION ACT

Sixtieth Anniversary of Repeal

Statement by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

Tuesday, May 15, 2007

THE SENATE

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CHINESE IMMIGRATION ACT

SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF REPEAL

Hon. Vivienne Poy: Honourable senators, yesterday was the sixtieth anniversary of the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act, 1923, also known as the “Chinese Exclusion Act.” This act was passed by the dominion government banning immigration to Canada with few exceptions. From then, until its repeal in 1947, only a handful of Chinese entered Canada.

Many senators may not understand why such a law was passed. I will explain. The Chinese Exclusion Act was the culmination of a series of acts focused on stopping Chinese from entering Canada. When the Canadian Pacific Railway, CPR, was completed in 1885, it was thought that Chinese labour was no longer needed. A head tax of \$50 was imposed on each person of Chinese origin entering Canada irrespective of their allegiance or citizenship. This amount was imposed because it exceeded what a Chinese labourer could save, which was \$48 in a year after living expenses.

The amount was increased to \$100 in 1900 and \$500 in 1903. This tax was still deemed to be not enough of a deterrent.

I will share one quote from the Senate debates in 1923. Senator Sanford Johnson Crowe said:

If you are going to open the door and allow wives to come in, you might as well give British Columbia to the Chinese. . . . When I say that there are 2,000 business licences taken out in the city of Vancouver alone by Orientals, you will realize that. The Chinese have gone into every business you can name.

• (1405)

Honourable senators, 60 years ago yesterday, Chinese exclusion was repealed. This year is also the fiftieth anniversary of the election of Douglas Jung, the first Chinese Canadian MP. Both events are cause for celebration.

The appointment of the Honourable David Lam as Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia in 1988 was another important turning point in the history of Canadians of Chinese heritage. He was the first Chinese-Canadian to become a Lieutenant-Governor in Canada.

Canada is definitely moving in the right direction. However, when you look around this chamber and the other place, our representation is abysmal in comparison to our numbers in the general population. There is still much work to be done in order for Parliament to reflect the population it serves.
