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## IMPORTANCE OF ASIA TO CANADA'S FUTURE PROSPERITY

Inquiry—Debate Continued

Speech by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Friday, June 29, 2012

## THE SENATE

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### IMPORTANCE OF ASIA TO CANADA'S FUTURE PROSPERITY

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Poy, calling the attention of the Senate to the importance of Asia to Canada's future prosperity.

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today to speak to Senator Poy's inquiry on the importance of Asia to Canada's future prosperity. I thank the Honourable Senator Vivienne Poy for bringing this important matter to the attention of the Senate of Canada.

Canada and Asia have developed strong, interdependent relations based on trade, culture, development, immigration and other vital areas of international cooperation. Asian culture is deeply woven into the fabric of Canadian society and history. It is imperative that we understand, communicate and reiterate the extent to which Asia matters to Canada.

Before beginning my remarks, I would like to take a few moments to recognize Senator Poy's many contributions to Canada and to the institution that we serve. Senator Poy is a remarkable woman who has made significant contributions to the fields of commerce, education, philanthropy and public service in Canada. In her time here at the Senate, Senator Poy has shown dedication to gender issues, immigration, multiculturalism and human rights. Her public policy and legislative roles have directly and positively impacted the lives of Canadians, as evidenced most notably by her leadership role in having the month of May recognized as Asian Heritage Month across Canada. Thus, it gives me great pleasure to contribute today to her inquiry.

[*Translation*]

As Senator Poy clearly pointed out, we know that Asia will become the world centre for innovation and technology in the next decade. As the global leader in the manufacturing of goods for mass consumption, Asia needs not just our natural resources, but also our technologies and know-how in the areas of education and governance.

Thus, Canada's long-term prosperity will depend on the ability of our Canadian decision-makers to understand and seize economic opportunities in this region of the world and to benefit from them. Some businesses, post-secondary institutions, non-governmental organizations and provincial governments already have close ties with Asia.

• (1430)

[*English*]

Canada has a rich history of engaging with Asia, from early Canadian missionaries of the 19th century to the sale of wheat in the 1960s. China is of particular significance to Canada and

to my home province of Alberta. The long-standing relationship established between the two, in my view, is an example of effective, cross-cultural dialogue, partnership and cooperation.

Approximately 137,000 Albertans are of Chinese descent. Alberta's Chinese-English bilingual program is the first such program in the world. In total, 14 Albertan schools offer such programs. China is also Alberta's second highest source country for foreign students and is an emerging science and technology market for the province, with several agreements designed to enhance research and development cooperation in the areas of information and communications technology, life sciences, environmental technologies, advanced materials, energy-related technologies and high-tech agriculture.

I am also proud to say that the University of Alberta boasts the China Institute, a research centre dedicated to enriching the dialogue and reinforcing understanding between Canada and China. The institute was founded in 2005 to foster and support new teaching activities between Canada and China, and to promote strong, academic linkages between the University of Alberta and Chinese universities.

The institute focuses on the study of contemporary China, including cutting edge and policy-relevant research on Chinese energy policy, politics, economy, social issues, culture and Canada-China relations. The China Institute thus serves as a hub, connecting the University of Alberta, the city of Edmonton, the province of Alberta and Canada with Chinese universities, institutions and other local communities. Since the founding of the institute in 2005, the University of Alberta has cultivated a large network with local government, research institutions and funding agencies.

I would also like to add that the University of Alberta's Mactaggart Art Collection, composed of more than 1,000 rare works of Chinese art, plays a significant role in furthering our knowledge of East Asian cultures, traditions and practices in the province of Alberta. It has been certified by the federal government as Canadian cultural property and has met the standards of national importance. This direct contact with objects of cultural and artistic significance promotes Asian heritage through visibility and accessibility, and contributes to intercultural relationship building and understanding.

Honourable senators, China is the fastest growing major economy of the 21st century and is Alberta's second largest trading partner. With one fifth of the world's population and an annual growth of nearly 10 per cent, the Chinese economy has doubled every seven to eight years since the late 1970s. This trend has created the longest continuous economic expansion for the largest proportion of the world's population in human history. In a matter of decades, China has moved several hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, another unprecedented record in history.

The country is moving on its modernization path with full speed. Today, China is the fourth largest economy after the United States, Japan and Germany. In recent years, economic ties

between Canadian and Chinese markets have been expanding at rapid rates, as China increasingly relies on Canada's natural resources and, particularly, Alberta's energy sector to continue to grow.

Chinese investments are flowing in Alberta at unprecedented rates and will play an important role in defining the future of the energy industry. With this in mind, we need to play a more significant role in encouraging a wider range of economic ties, investments and tourism from this part of the world.

Senator Poy called upon our government to strengthen our relationship with a region that will undoubtedly grow in importance for Canada's future prosperity. I have tried to highlight but a small number of cross-cultural initiatives, partnerships and agreements that are taking place in my home province and that are of enormous benefit to Canadian society.

I thank the honourable senator for giving me the opportunity to speak on this matter, and I wish her a very happy and fulfilling retirement from the Senate.

**Hon. Hugh Segal:** Would the Honourable Senator Tardif accept a question?

**Senator Tardif:** Certainly.

**Senator Segal:** I think all honourable senators would want to be associated with her accurate, reflective and constructive comments on Senator Poy. She really has been a tremendous

leader in this place and elsewhere on the issue of our relationship in constructive trade with Asia.

I would be interested in Senator Tardif's advice on how we balance the remarkable opportunities for trade and commerce, the tremendous economic success that the Chinese have shown, and the liberation of so many from poverty because of their very hard work and intense commitment to building a broader and open economy, with some of the compelling human rights issues that continue to be part of the dialogue between Canada and China, and the growth of Chinese investment in her province in a way that is probably inherently constructive between our two societies. How do we avoid the context where we use constructive trade as a way of avoiding the more unpleasant discussion about human rights? Or, is there a way, in the honourable senator's judgment, to make use of those trade relationships in a fashion that respects Chinese history but does not desert the commitment to human rights, democracy, minority rights and freedom of expression which we share with so many of our trading partners around the world?

**Senator Tardif:** I thank the senator for the question. I am sure that Senator Segal could answer that question much more eloquently than I could.

Therefore, I will go no further than to say that we have had a similar discussion this morning with regard to Canada-Jordan Free Trade Agreement. As Senator Di Nino so aptly said, let us move toward the invitation of dialogue, rather than to closure of dialogue.

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