



CANADA

# Debates of the Senate

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1st SESSION

• 39th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 143

• NUMBER 72

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**LABOUR**

**Canadian National Strike**

**Question by:**

**The Honourable Larry W. Campbell**

**Tuesday, February 20, 2007**

## THE SENATE

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### LABOUR

#### CANADIAN NATIONAL STRIKE

**Hon. Larry W. Campbell:** Honourable senators, Canadians in remote areas are without food, fuel and vital supplies, and all the Conservative government can come up with is a mediator in the ongoing dispute with Canadian National. Labour Minister Blackburn's statement about how he wants the dispute ended in hours and not days lacks the required action, as usual, to resolve this issue.

• (1420)

It is just like this government to make commitments without a clue about how to follow through on them. How many hours will this take? Thousands? Hundreds of thousands? When will we see an end? I am reminded of health care wait time guarantees and promises of increased child care spaces.

My question to the government leader is as follows: What will the government do to alleviate the economic repercussions associated with the ongoing CN strike?

**Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)):** I thank the honourable senator for the question. There is no question that the government is seized with the issue of the CN strike and its impact on the Canadian economy. Last evening, Minister Blackburn called upon CN and the United Transportation Union to get back to dealing with this issue. All courses of action will be considered, the minister said; we cannot allow this strike to do great harm.

The honourable senator is correct in saying that the strike is having a great impact in Western Canada vis-à-vis the forestry industry and grain producers. The strike is also negatively affecting northern communities that need the CN to assure their supply of diesel and heating fuel. As Minister Blackburn and the

government have indicated, we will take every action necessary, including tabling back-to-work legislation.

**Senator Campbell:** I thank the leader for her comments. I am not suggesting that we should be looking at ordering the CN workers back to work, but I would ask two questions: First, is a 90-day cooling-off period being considered? Second, what is the time frame for mediation? As we know, mediation can go on forever and ever. In the meantime, the trains are backing up, the Port of Vancouver is full of ships waiting to take on cargo and the northern communities are experiencing difficulty getting fuel and supplies. The railway is a lifeline for these communities. Is there a timeline, and is a 90-day cooling-off period being considered?

**Senator LeBreton:** As Minister Blackburn said, both parties have hours, not days, to resolve this. I could not agree more with the honourable senator. The CN strike has a detrimental impact on our economy. The country and government cannot allow this situation to continue. As I said, the parties have hours, not days, failing which the government will be prepared to legislate the CN workers back to work.

**Senator Campbell:** I certainly would not want to put words into the leader's mouth, but if we are talking about a time frame in days, could we expect perhaps a 90-day cooling-off period — which the leader did not answer — by the end of this week, so that the parties can sit down with a time frame in mind and in a situation that will not lead them to fight with each other but to try to come to a resolution? I am not much in favour of ordering them back to work.

**Senator LeBreton:** The 90-day cooling-off period was not an option that I was aware of. I know the government is concerned about this and is prepared to take immediate action. If there were such a matter under consideration, I am personally not aware of it. I shall take that portion of the honourable senator's question as notice.