

OFFICE OF THE SENATE ETHICS OFFICER

News Release

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STRENGTHENED SENATE CODE WELCOMED BY SENATE ETHICS OFFICER

Ottawa, June 11, 2008 – In his third Annual Report, the Senate Ethics Officer, Jean T. Fournier, welcomed the changes to the *Conflict of Interest Code for Senators* which were adopted by the Senate on May 29, 2008 following a comprehensive review by the Standing Committee on Conflict of Interest for Senators, the first such review since the adoption of the Code in May 2005. The Annual Report covers the period from April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008 and details the activities of the office for the year.

“I began my appointment in 2005 amid questions about the Senate Code,” said Mr. Fournier. “I firmly believe that the changes will strengthen the Code, and thereby enhance confidence among the public that expected standards are being upheld effectively, and confidence among Senators that they are being treated fairly and reasonably. As Canadians expect a rising standard of ethical conduct from their parliamentarians, there will always be more to do. But the new measures represent real progress. With these changes, the Senate ethics regime bears favourable comparison with those in many other jurisdictions.”

The key amendments recommended by the Committee and approved by the Senate include:

- the formal recognition under the Code of the independent status of the Senate Ethics Officer in the interpretation and application of the Code as it relates to individual senators;
- requiring senators to abstain from debate in the Senate or in a committee of the Senate when they or their family members have a private interest that might be affected by a matter that is before the Senate or a committee of the Senate;

- the requirement that senators meet with the Senate Ethics Officer when he advises such a meeting is necessary to carry out his duties and functions under the Code, as part of the annual disclosure process.

“I have appreciated the interest of the Committee in the views of my office, and I am pleased that the Committee saw fit to accept many of my recommendations,” said Mr. Fournier.

The Annual Report reveals that, over the last year, the Senate Ethics Officer provided some 250 opinions and advice to senators, both formal and informal, of varying degree of complexity. Speaking of his report, Mr. Fournier said: “My approach, since my appointment, has been to encourage senators to request my advice as often as possible, especially in cases of doubt, prior to taking action. I believe that this results in prevention – and prevention is not only in the interest of senators, but it is also in the public interest. When it concerns conflicts of interest, prevention is indeed the best medicine.”

The Senate Ethics Officer is an independent Officer of the Senate whose primary responsibility is to administer, interpret and apply the *Conflict of Interest Code for Senators*.

For more information about the Annual Report, please visit the Senate Ethics Office website: www.parl.gc.ca/seo-cse

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