Playing Hooky!

Read the following article about Senator Andrew Thompson, then answer the questions that follow.

The Senate began tracking the monthly attendance of its members in 1990. From February 1996 to September 1997, 28 senators had an attendance rate lower than 60 per cent. Senator Andrew Thompson had the lowest rate at 2.2 per cent. Although the Senate fines its members for absenteeism, none of Thompson’s salary was withheld because he had cited his ill health as the reason for non-attendance. However, media reports disclosed that Thompson had been residing in Mexico for much of the time.

The former Ontario Liberal leader, who has earned $500 000 for eight days’ work over the past seven years, said in a published report from Mexico that he didn’t care what Canadians say about him back home.

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien has thrown Thompson out of the Liberal caucus, citing his poor attendance record... The law gives Thompson his job [as senator] until he turns 75... [Deputy Prime Minister] Herb Gray said... “There’s nothing in the Constitution that gives the government power to fire any senator. You’d have to amend the Constitution.”

Thompson’s pay can be docked by the Senate’s Board of Internal Economy. A subcommittee is to study whether to crack down on him and other delinquents.

Senators may keep their jobs until they are 75, unless they are convicted of a crime, declare bankruptcy, or fail to show up for two consecutive sessions of Parliament (about two years) without any excuse. In December 1997 the Senate announced that Thompson’s salary would be withheld, and in February 1998 it suspended Thompson without pay. Thompson resigned in March 1998.


1. If you were a member of the Senate’s Board of Internal Economy, how would you have dealt with Thompson’s absenteeism?

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2. Do you think the Constitution should or should not be amended to give the government power to fire senators? Why?

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3. What is the role of the Senate in the Canadian federal system?

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4. Besides the proposal of a Triple E Senate, suggest ways that the Senate can reform its role.

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