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The Honourable GEORGE J. FUREY,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Tuesday, June 7, 2022

The Senate met at 2 p.m., the Speaker in the chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Bev Busson: Honourable senators, I rise today to note that May 23, 2023, will mark the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It is a significant moment, as the story of our nation cannot be told without the contribution of its national police force.

Spoiler alert: I was a member of the first class of female constables to be sworn in to the RCMP in 1974 and became the RCMP's first female commissioner in 2006. The RCMP now includes specialized teams investigating everything from child sexual exploitation and international organized crime to threats to our national security.

Recently, at the request of the International Criminal Court, the RCMP deployed 10 officers to investigate crimes against humanity wherever and whenever needed. Additionally, the RCMP is actively investigating allegations of war crimes committed against Ukrainians with the goal of securing statements and evidence from Ukrainians fleeing the war.

From a human resources perspective, the RCMP is now approximately 25% female. The leadership cadre has recently reached gender parity.

Last year, 22% of the promotions were women. Indigenous regular members and public service employees exceed the Canadian standard workforce rates, and new hires from visible minority groups are increasing.

The profession of policing is difficult, increasingly complicated and exponentially challenging. In our streets, life-changing decisions are often made at a moment's notice. We need to support them.

The trajectory of any 150-year-long story is not going to be a straight line. It comes with chapters that reflect many accomplishments, as well as chapters that need to be acknowledged and actively learned from. Last September, I witnessed an event that reflected both.

At Daajing Giids, formerly Queen Charlotte RCMP Detachment on Haida Gwaii, I saw reconciliation in action. At the detachment there, a traditional potlatch was held — in combination with about 400 community members — culminating in the raising of the Haida flag and a traditional Haida pole, created by a local master carver. It features a Haida guardian, graced with beautiful traditional Haida iconography, but also including pink fingernails to embody diversity and a stetson to represent the RCMP. It is a powerful symbol of the strength and possibilities of true reconciliation to everyone who has seen it.

The one hundred fiftieth anniversary in 2023 is an opportunity to celebrate the tangible action being taken on the path to becoming a more modern, diverse, inclusive and trusted policing organization. I encourage my honourable colleagues to seek out and support these positive efforts of the RCMP in communities across this land.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the approximately 300 RCMP members who have lost their lives in the line of duty. We thank them and their families for their sacrifice and service to the people of Canada.

Thank you, *háv'aa*.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Enes Kanter Freedom and Orkesh Davlet. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Housakos.

On behalf of all honourable senators, I welcome you to the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

CHINA—HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Leo Housakos: Honourable senators, I have the pleasure to welcome and pay tribute to two very special individuals who are guests in this chamber today.

I will begin with Mr. Enes Kanter Freedom, a professional NBA basketball player, activist and Nobel Peace Prize nominee. In the last few years, Mr. Freedom has received international attention for using his platform as an NBA star to bring attention to the human rights abuses being committed in China.

That said, his activism predates his career in the NBA, as he has previously been targeted for speaking out against President Erdoğan's human rights violations in Turkey where he was raised. It was his outspoken criticism of the Chinese Communist regime and the Western companies that continue to aid and enable China's genocidal practices that caught the attention of millions of people around the world.

Mr. Freedom has been a leading voice for the rights of Uighurs, in particular, and also for those of Tibetans, Hong Kongers and others. Despite the unfair targeting and treatment he has been subjected to by the NBA and others as a result, Mr. Freedom continues to push forward with integrity in his fight for what is right.

In response to his well-deserved nomination for the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, Mr. Freedom stated, "Sometimes taking a stand is more important than your next paycheck."

It is fair to say while his on-court talents are noteworthy, his off-court talents are even more so.

I would also like to pay tribute to Mr. Orkesh Davlet, who is also here today. Mr. Davlet played an instrumental role in the organization of the student uprising in the Tiananmen protests of 1989, having founded an independent students' association at Beijing Normal University and emerging as one of the most outspoken student leaders. Following the protests, Mr. Davlet was placed on the number 2 spot of China's most wanted student leaders list.

Facing arrest by the Chinese government, he fled to France under the Hong Kong-based operation known as "Operation Yellow Bird." He later made his way to the United States where he studied, and eventually emigrated to Taiwan where he built his life and family and where he currently sits as chair on the Human Rights Commission in the Taiwanese parliament.

• (1410)

Mr. Davlet continues to devote his life to his activism and remains a defender of Taiwan's growing democracy and a promoter of civil society.

Colleagues, these are two remarkable individuals, and it is my hope that their presence in this chamber today acts as a reminder of our responsibility to do what is right when it comes to defending and upholding our principles here at home and around the world. As parliamentarians, we have the tools needed to stand up to malign regimes like the CCP, and we must do more to exercise our role and responsibility as defenders of democracy, freedom and human rights.

Everyone has an example to draw from Mr. Freedom and Mr. Davlet, and it is an honour to welcome them here today and thank them for their outspoken courage and activism. Thank you.

PROTEIN INDUSTRIES CANADA

Hon. Marty Klyne: Honourable senators, I rise today to celebrate an incredible investment in Canadian farmers for the benefit of all Canadians.

Recently, Protein Industries Canada, or PIC — one of the five Innovation Superclusters sponsored by the Government of Canada in a consortium of private-sector companies — announced a \$19 million investment deal that will help reduce carbon emissions and improve environmental sustainability, all through the commercialization of Soileos, a new micronutrient fertilizer.

If you haven't heard of it before, Soileos is an environmentally friendly fertilizer created from the upcycling of pea, lentil and oat hulls. It is sustainable, non-polluting and can help increase crop yields. It is an innovative new product, and according to Protein Industries Canada, initial field trials led to improved protein content in soil health, increased returns for farmers and reduced environmental damage.

Companies who are part of this investment include AGT Food and Ingredients Inc., Lucent Biosciences, NuWave Research, IN10T and Aberhart Ag Solutions. These are private-sector companies both large and small, working together with a federal supercluster to make good things happen for Canadians. As a result of this investment, a new manufacturing plant will be built in Rosetown, Saskatchewan. When completed, this facility will produce up to 6,500 tonnes per year of micronutrient fertilizer and create 25 new jobs for the community. That is incredible.

Honourable senators, this is great news for the agricultural sector. It is an important investment in our farmers and in the people of Saskatchewan and of Western Canada. At a time when food security is top of mind for all Canadians and supply chains are being threatened, we need to do everything we can to support our agricultural sector here at home. This investment does exactly that, and I wish Protein Industries Canada and its industry and academic partners every success as they embark on this and many more new innovative solutions.

I encourage Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada to continue to support PIC's continued evolution and progress. I hope Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada take stock and promote this innovation with great pride. Thank you.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of our former colleague the Honourable Asha Seth, accompanied by her husband, Dr. Arun Seth.

On behalf of all honourable senators, I welcome you back to the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

ANTI-MUSLIM EXTREMISM

Hon. Salma Atallahjan: Honourable senators, I stand today to speak on the anniversary of the London attack to remember the beautiful Afzaal family in London, Ontario, a grandmother, mother, father and a 15-year-old girl who were murdered simply because they were Muslim. A 9-year-old boy was hospitalized in serious condition and now finds himself orphaned, his whole family — three generations — having been stolen from him by hate.

The nature of the attack is shocking, but unfortunately it is not surprising. This is not the first time I have spoken about the rise of Islamophobia, and I fear it will not be the last. As government leaders, we regularly condemn Islamophobia, but this alone is not enough. It is time for concrete action rather than empty apologies or thoughts and prayers.

After the attack, many expressed their horror and outrage. A National Summit on Islamophobia was held the following month, where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reiterated the government's solidarity with Muslim communities across Canada and its commitment to combat and denounce Islamophobia and all forms of racism and discrimination.

Sadly, I worry that this must have been an electoral ploy. Let's not forget that a year later, the promise of a special envoy for Islamophobia has not been fulfilled, and yet I'm sure there is a suitable candidate among the 1.5 million Muslim Canadians across the country. Two months ago, five men were attacked in a drive-by shooting in Scarborough while leaving Ramadan prayers at their local mosque. And only a few weeks ago, two teenage girls were verbally and physically assaulted in St. John's outside their place of work. These were high school students — really young girls.

Sadly, these events are not isolated as there has been a steady increase in Islamophobia since the beginning of the pandemic. Sobia Shaikh, chair of the Anti-Racism Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador, shared that she hears about similar incidents every six weeks or so.

Honourable colleagues, xenophobic views have gone beyond online threats and abuse and have translated into hate-motivated physical harm. We need to act now before such Islamophobic attacks become normalized. We owe it to the Afzaal family and Muslim Canadians who continue to live in fear every time they leave their homes. Thank you.

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Dr. Muhammad Munshi. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator Ravalia.

On behalf of all honourable senators, I welcome you to the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

THE LATE STEPHANIE LEIGH PRYSNUK

Hon. Marty Deacon: Honourable senators, one of the greatest honours of our job is paying tribute to individuals who have contributed deeply to our country, globally and to the communities we represent. Today it is a privilege to celebrate the life of Stephanie Leigh Prysnuik, an incredible young woman who was a shining light for so many in her Waterloo community.

In her 32 years of life, Stephanie proved time and again that there was no obstacle she couldn't overcome. Born with a congenital heart disease and several other conditions, Stephanie was only able to go home after several procedures, and even then, she required specialized equipment and care. She had a childhood of trips to and from the hospital and a loving family, and her father Wayne, a special dad and champion, passed away when she was only 8 years old.

[Senator Ataullahjan]

Despite these challenges, Stephanie worked hard to live life to the fullest with a stoic ability to accept the challenges life threw her way and just get on with it to try new things. Her courage, resilience, honesty, feistiness and smile were contagious.

Stephanie found a great deal of strength through her participation at Knox Waterloo Presbyterian Church. Through this church, Stephanie participated in many activities, including a mission trip where she took many wonderful photographs. She also made sure to give back, including planning a fundraising event for the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance.

Last summer, Stephanie was able to fulfill a lifelong dream and move into her own place in the neighbourhood she grew up in. Her sister Beth lived in the apartment above her, where she could provide support. They spent much time together. Beth was a great source of support, love and friendship for Stephanie, and they both loved their sister time. Stephanie loved her family, which six years ago ballooned from 3 to 31 when her mother, Barb, married Fred, and they became a part of his clan.

Sadly, colleagues, Stephanie passed away last month, having touched the lives of so many in her short time with us — so many, in fact, that Knox Church was barely able to contain the 400 who came to pay tribute to her at a celebration of life, along with her family, Dream Team, Fab Five, Gourmet 2.0 and many, many friends.

Even in death, she found a way to make the world a better place, with her friends carrying on work she left unfinished to fundraise for others with heart disease. They were able to raise \$12,000 in her honour two short weeks ago.

Stephanie defined grace for all who knew her, and she leaves a legacy that will truly stand the test of time. Her community — a very large community — was built on her love, caring and courage every step of the way, every day. The world is lesser with her passing, but she leaves it in better shape than she found it, and for that we all owe her a great debt of gratitude. Her light will shine forever. Thank you, *meegweetch*.

• (1420)

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Jennifer Vornbrock of the University of Victoria. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator McCallum.

On behalf of all honourable senators, I welcome you to the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

INDIGENOUS LAW PROGRAM

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: I would like to thank Senator Tannas and the Canadian Senators Group for giving me space so we can celebrate the graduates of the world's first Indigenous law program.

On Saturday, April 9, 2022, I was invited to join the University of Victoria's celebration to commemorate the graduation of the inaugural class of the world's first Indigenous law program. These young and vibrant leaders are graduating with two professional degrees — a Juris Doctor and a Juris Indigenarum Doctor. This will position them to practise law at the local, national and international levels.

Through their education, students were taught various types of law through a trans-systemic lens, comparing common law with Indigenous legal traditions. The students also spent a semester in each of their third and fourth years immersed in community-led field schools. Here, the students observed the Indigenous legal processes and worked with the community on law-related projects. In their upper years, student learnings also included the legal traditions and language of the Coast Salish region.

This program, co-founded by Val Napoleon and John Borrows, two of the nation's leading legal scholars, builds upon the University of Victoria's commitment to Indigenous law and Indigenous legal education. The program is transformational and will have incredible impacts in training people who will lead us towards true and lasting reconciliation.

But do not take my word for it. Graduate Heather Middlemass has some advice for anyone considering the program:

... know that it's going to be this profound experience that will transform you. And it will empower you with legal skills that go beyond what you would get in a regular law program, by weaving in a lot of lived experience into your legal education.

I was asked to be a witness to the graduation, and part of that responsibility is to carry the news far and wide. The graduation was woven with ceremony as the graduates were drummed into the hall by two young leaders, who then explained the ceremony. Throughout the event, we could feel our ancestors standing among us, dancing with pride. You could sense the recovery of ancient knowledge from ancestral blood memory from the land and our relatives.

The journey of these graduates represents one of strength, survival, recovery and rebuilding. These future leaders are now a bridge between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous world views and ways of knowing. This groundbreaking program truly represents reconciliation in action.

Kinanâskomitin. Thank you.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION BILL, 2022, NO. 1

FIRST REPORT OF NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE
COMMITTEE ON SUBJECT MATTER TABLED

Hon. Tony Dean: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, which deals with the subject matter of those elements contained in Divisions 19 and 20 of Part 5 of Bill C-19, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 7, 2022 and other measures.

SECOND REPORT OF BANKING, TRADE AND COMMERCE
COMMITTEE ON SUBJECT MATTER DEPOSITED WITH
CLERK DURING ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. Pamela Wallin: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on May 4, 2022, the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on June 6, 2022, its second report, which deals with the subject matter of those elements contained in Divisions 5, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17 and 30 of Part 5 of Bill C-19, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 7, 2022 and other measures.

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS, APRIL 13 TO MAY 27, 2021—
REPORT TABLED

Hon. Salma Atallahjan: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union concerning the One Hundred and Forty-Second Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly and Related Meetings, held by video conference from April 13 to May 27, 2021.

QUESTION PERIOD

FINANCE

AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for Senator Gold, the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Leader, while the Senate debated your government's request for two pre-studies last Thursday, the House Finance Committee amended Bill C-19, including striking out a complete section of the bill — section 32 of Part 5. Government members supported

most of these amendments, including throwing out section 32. The Senate Social Affairs Committee was scheduled to study section 32 on Thursday as part of their pre-study of Bill C-19. It had witnesses lined up, and senators made their travel arrangements accordingly. Less than two hours before the meeting was supposed to start, it was cancelled.

Last week, several senators raised the fact that pre-studying bills that could be amended in the House is a loss of valuable time and resources for the Senate. You brushed aside these concerns by saying that when doing a pre-study, the committee is studying the issues in general, not specifically the bill's text.

Leader, why do you think the Social Affairs Committee decided to cancel its meeting? Isn't this proof that we were right that considering pre-studies carries a risk of wasting resources on matters that will no longer be in the bill when the bill gets here?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. I will resist the obvious response about the use of this chamber's time.

The fact is that pre-studies for budget implementation bills are a regular practice. The two issues to which you referred have related to different bills.

To your question, it is a measure of the utility of the pre-study of Bill C-19 that the issue about the section which was removed was raised by senators on the committee, indeed, and the views of the Senate were communicated to the government as they always are in these matters. In that regard, rather than a demonstration that it was futile or wrong to do it, this demonstrates the validity of the pre-study, and, I hope, as the pre-studies that we in this chamber approve will demonstrate as well.

Senator Plett: Well, of course, they were set to study the part of the bill that was taken out, so I'm not sure how the Senate gave the instruction before they were even able to study it.

Senator Gold, as Leader of the Government in the Senate, you must have known the government would support deleting section 32 of Bill C-19. It had been discussed at another House committee on May 26, and this was supported by Liberal members there.

Why did you let the Social Affairs Committee organize a meeting on section 32 knowing that it would be deleted?

Senator Gold, you are not just a bystander in this Senate. You and your office have a role to play in making sure that the Senate is efficient and does not waste its time. Why didn't you give more consideration to the witnesses and committee members?

• (1430)

Senator Gold: The senators who were studying this bill, as all senators, I hope — certainly senators with whom I'm familiar — do their homework well before a bill is actually to be studied on the day of the committee hearing. That is the partial answer to the first aspect of your questions, though views of senators were well communicated before the meeting.

[Senator Plett]

As for the rest, I stand by my answer, honourable colleague. This was an example of the Senate working appropriately and collaboratively. As such, the bill that is ultimately passed is the best bill to serve Canadians.

[Translation]

JUSTICE

NOT CRIMINALLY RESPONSIBLE

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: My question is for Senator Gold, of course. On May 13, the Supreme Court struck down section 33.1 of the Criminal Code, which stated that self-induced intoxication is not grounds for a verdict of not criminally responsible. The court's decision was not well received by victims' groups, women's groups in particular. The Supreme Court also asked the federal government to create mechanisms to better protect victims.

We know this decision will affect women most of all, especially mothers and their children. Can you tell me what the government is planning to do about this and how soon it will take action to protect the victims the Supreme Court has abandoned?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, senator. The government is reviewing the Supreme Court's decision and, once it's done, it will decide what measures, if any, need to be taken at that point.

Senator Boisvenu: Senator Gold, as I have previously said, 35% of the criminal cases before our courts have to do with intimate partner violence. From now on, a man who kills his wife while intoxicated will be able to plead not criminally responsible. Furthermore, many such criminals who were incarcerated will be released because of this.

Senator Gold, the provinces are fighting intimate partner violence by adopting Clare's Law, and Quebec is implementing the use of electronic monitoring devices, so why hasn't the government adopted a single measure since 2015 to protect women now that the Supreme Court has made this ruling?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question. The Government of Canada has made several changes to the Criminal Code to make it more just, more equitable and more appropriate. It will continue to do so as and when necessary.

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA—RIGHTS OF FEDERALLY SENTENCED PERSONS

Hon. Kim Pate: Honourable senators, my question is for Senator Gold, the government leader in the Senate. In light of the report released last week by the Auditor General chronicling the mass incarceration and disproportionate and discriminatory maximum security classification of Black and Indigenous peoples — most particularly Indigenous women, who are more

than three times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be classified and released to the community for maximum security — my question is: Will the government commit to implementing the recommendations of the Senate Human Rights Committee report, as well as the measures proposed in 2019 by this chamber, to address these issues and ensure judicial oversight and effective remedial options for these and other miscarriages of justice?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, senator, for the question, and thank you for your continued advocacy on these important issues.

The government, as I'm sure we all are, is appalled by the shocking overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in our justice system. I'm advised that the government has confirmed its commitment to addressing first the disproportionate prevalence of Black, Indigenous and other marginalized groups in higher-security facilities; second, the systemic racism present in the custody rating scale; third, the timely delivery of correctional programs to reduce recidivism; and finally, diversity of our workforce and implementation of diversity training. This is a top priority for our government. The government is working closely with stakeholders and with Correctional Service Canada to address and implement reforms and the various recommendations from independent investigators.

Senator Pate: Thank you, Senator Gold, for that information. The Auditor General also expressed significant frustration that, on the same issues and concerns that have been reportedly identified by her office, the government has not acted to redress or even ensure accurate data collection and accountability also exists. In addition to the issues with corrections, the Auditor General also provided examples of the lack of data collected by the CRA and ESDC regarding who is eligible but unable to access programs like the Canada Child Benefit and GIS. What concrete and immediate actions will the government take to remedy these realities?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question. The government welcomes the Auditor General's report and accepts the recommendations. Indeed, the Auditor General's report highlights the challenge that the government has been working to address for many years. The government recognizes that some Canadians, particularly the most vulnerable, still face barriers in accessing government services or benefits for a variety of reasons. For example, they don't appear in administrative databases, they do not or are not required to file taxes and they are not reflected in the census. It then becomes difficult to remind them to apply for a benefit by mail or telephone because we may not know who they are.

I'm advised that the Reaching All Canadians Initiative, an initiative to eliminate barriers to access and delivery and to ensure more people are getting benefits to which they are entitled, will continue and that the government will expand and strengthen its response to the findings in the audit to which you referred. I am further advised and assured that the government will continue to develop programs and processes to ensure that all Canadians, especially marginalized and underserved people, are able to access services, benefits and support.

[Translation]

RCMP REFORM

Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. Two weeks ago, on May 25, to mark the second anniversary of George Floyd's death, the U.S. President signed an executive order on the use of deadly force in policing. On December 16, 2021, Prime Minister Trudeau clearly set out the following priority in the Minister of Public Safety's mandate letter:

Prohibiting the use of neck restraints in any circumstance and the use of tear gas or rubber bullets for crowd control alongside developing national standards for the use-of-force;

If the Minister of Public Safety hasn't yet prohibited the use of neck restraints in any circumstance, would he consider announcing plans to deliver on that commitment at the Coalition for Canadian Police Reform conference being held next week?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. All Canadians deserve to feel safe and secure. I have been told that the minister remains committed to reviewing use-of-force policies.

I would also note that the recent report on police intervention options indicates that the RCMP is making progress towards reform. With the implementation of its incident management intervention model, which was updated in April 2021, RCMP training now focuses on de-escalation and communication techniques.

I have also been told that the minister has asked the RCMP to carefully review the use of force in policing, specifically by eliminating the use of neck restraints, tear gas and rubber bullets. The minister is also committed to ending the use of chokeholds.

Although significant progress has been made, the government knows that there is still work to be done. The government is committed to continuing to review RCMP policing practices in collaboration with the provinces, territories and municipalities, as well as Indigenous and racialized communities.

Senator Mégie: Thank you for your answer, Senator Gold. I'm pleased to know that at least some work is being done in that regard. Do you know whether there's a simpler, more effective legislative approach for putting an end to the use of neck restraints in Canada, either through regulations or a bill?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the supplementary question, senator. I don't know whether there are any plans for a legislative response at the federal level.

• (1440)

You will recall, as everyone knows, that other than the RCMP, police forces fall under provincial jurisdiction. That is why I mentioned the collaboration between the Government of Canada and the provincial and territorial authorities.

[*English*]

FINANCE

CANADA DISABILITY BENEFIT

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, my question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, according to the mandate letter of the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the minister will proceed with the implementation of the Accessible Canada Act and the harmonization of accessibility standards across Canada.

It has come to my attention that benefits in my province of Manitoba are clawed back once a disabled person's threshold of allowed dollars is reached. That threshold is below the poverty level.

Are discussions for the Canada disability benefit dealing with concerns of provincial clawbacks, and is the minister responsible working towards a harmonization of accessibility standards and the transition off disability payments to ease the financial burden on people with disabilities?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for that question; it is an important one. I will have to make inquiries and report back. As you know, the bill has just been tabled in the other place and will be studied and debated. I'm sure I will be able to have an answer for you in a reasonably short period of time.

[*Translation*]

TRANSPORT

COVID-19 PANDEMIC—TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

Hon. Claude Carignan: My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Leader, last week I asked you about the passport delays. Right now, travelling in Canada is like navigating an obstacle course. First, you have to wait in line for hours to get a passport. If you're lucky enough to get a passport, now you have to get yourself to the airport. There, your journey starts with useless requirements that increase delays and create unnecessary lineups.

However, it's even worse on the way back. People have to queue up for hours to get to the customs officer. Some of them then have to wait several more hours to get their luggage.

[Senator Gold]

When will the government listen to the airline and tourism industry and end its useless, contrived requirements, such as the ArriveCAN app, so that Canadians can travel on the same terms as other travellers elsewhere in the world? We are a bit of a laughingstock right now, leader.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. The government understands very well the frustration felt by Canadians who want to travel outside Canada or in Canada and those coming home.

That said, the government does not agree that all the measures we have put in place to protect Canadians are ineffective or useless. The government has invested and continues to invest significantly to reduce the delays.

Senator Carignan: Leader, the Prime Minister is aboard his own plane right now, on his way to the Summit of the Americas. I hope he will take note of the measures currently in effect in California and draw inspiration from them. As for the Prime Minister's return, do you have any idea how long it will take him to get off his plane, collect his bags and get home?

Senator Gold: What a question. No.

[*English*]

HEALTH

TOBACCO AND VAPING PRODUCTS ACT

Hon. Judith G. Seidman: Honourable senators, my question is for the government leader. The Tobacco and Vaping Products Act came into force on May 23, 2018. As part of this act, I introduced an amendment here in the Senate that three years after coming into force and every two years after that the Minister of Health would undertake a legislative review of the provisions and operation of this act. From March 16 to April 27 of this year, the Government of Canada conducted public consultations on the legislative review of the Tobacco and Vaping Products Act with a particular emphasis on the act's ability to address youth vaping.

Senator Gold, according to the Tobacco and Vaping Products Act, the Minister of Health should have tabled a report summarizing the review's findings in both houses of Parliament at the end of May. However, this has not yet happened. When can we expect this report to be published?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you. I don't have a date of publication. I will make inquiries and report back.

Senator Seidman: The Tobacco and Vaping Products Act amended the Tobacco Act to add a new and separate class of products, vaping products, for which there was little scientific evidence available about the harms and benefits. We did not know if vaping was effective for smoking cessation. We did not know the harms of vaping flavours, and we did not know the overall effect of vaping as a gateway to tobacco use for youth. That is why the requirement that a legislative review be

conducted is of critical importance. It allows parliamentarians to update this innovative health legislation as the science evolves, to address potential unintended consequences.

Senator Gold, how can we ensure that this important legislative review is completed, and the report is tabled here in the Senate and in the other place as soon as possible?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question. The provisions to which you refer are important ones. I am pleased that the consultations and the process have begun. Again, I will try to get a specific date and report back.

INFRASTRUCTURE

CANADA INFRASTRUCTURE BANK

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Honourable senators, my question is for the government leader in the Senate.

Senator Gold, the Canada Infrastructure Bank, or CIB, has launched a new Knowledge and Research initiative aimed at building “a centre of expertise,” with a goal to “partner with leading experts from across Canada.”

Senator Gold, on the face of it, so far all the money in this initiative seems to be going to big think tanks. Could you please name and tell us how many Indigenous-led, as well as northern-led, knowledge-gathering project proposals are planned under this initiative?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. The government is committed to making critical infrastructure investments across the country. In that regard, the Indigenous infrastructure partnerships and projects include the following: the Kahkewistahaw Landing Infrastructure; the Kivalliq Hydro-Fibre Link; the Oneida Energy Storage, which is under the Investment-Focused Centre of Expertise; and the Tshiuetin Railway. I also note that in the Northwest Territories, there is the Taltson Hydroelectricity Expansion; and in Atlin, British Columbia, and Yukon Territory, there is the Atlin Hydroelectricity Expansion.

Senator Patterson: Senator Gold, northern leaders say that we need to properly inventory existing northern infrastructure to make sure we’re making smart, targeted investments. This could be in the form of an interactive map. However, an initiative to do just that was turned down by the CIB.

Does the CIB have an equivalent tool already at their disposal? If not, would such a tool not be useful given the difficulty the CIB has had getting money out the door to northern projects?

You mentioned some projects, not all of which are in the North. For context, my research shows the CIB website only lists four nascent, embryonic projects in the Arctic: one is an MOU and another is classified as advisory.

Senator Gold: Thank you for raising this question. Unfortunately, I don’t have an answer to your question. I will make inquiries and report back as soon as I can.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

PROCESSING TIME OF VETERANS’ BENEFITS

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is also for the government leader in the Senate. Last week’s report from the Auditor General shows that the NDP-Liberal government continues to fail our veterans when it comes to the timely processing of their applications for disability benefits. The Auditor General found that veterans applying for benefits for the first time wait an average of 39 weeks for a decision — more than double the service standard of 16 weeks. The report stated the service standard itself has not been met for seven years. As well, Veterans Affairs Canada doesn’t know if any of the initiatives taken recently to speed up processing have worked or whether they slowed down processing instead.

• (1450)

Leader, why does your government continue to do such a poor job of providing our veterans with the benefits they earned in service to our country?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. The government welcomes the Auditor General’s report and agrees with the recommendations. The government knows that the current processing times for disability benefits for veterans are unacceptable, and reducing them remains a top priority. That’s why the government has recently invested \$140 million to extend its staff working non-stop to reduce the backlog on top of its previous investment of nearly \$200 million.

With this investment, the government has reduced the backlog by 50%. There is more work to be done, and the government is committed to doing it. The government is working hard to close the gaps in wait times, for example, for francophone and female veterans. The government is working to improve the quality of data and processes within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP. Reducing wait times for veterans is a top priority. It will continue to be a priority until the backlog is under control.

Senator Martin: I’m glad to hear it is a priority. However, leader, the Auditor General found that RCMP veterans wait significantly longer than Canadian Armed Forces veterans for decisions on their applications, with a wait time of 51 weeks versus 37 weeks. Women wait 24% longer than their male counterparts to have their applications processed. As well, francophone veterans, whom you mentioned, wait 21% longer than anglophones.

These ongoing discrepancies between different groups should not come as a surprise to this government. In fact, I raised the long wait for benefits faced by francophone veterans with Minister Petitpas Taylor during Question Period last month.

Will the NDP-Liberal government ever be able to improve service to all veterans, regardless of the group to which they belong, or does your government still believe, as the Prime Minister said in 2018, that veterans are asking for more than the government is able to give?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question. The government has made, is making and will continue to make progress on this issue. For example, as of this moment I'm advised that there is less than a one-week discrepancy between male and female applications. That's down from a seven-week difference not that long ago.

The government has also improved the discrepancy between anglophone and francophone veterans by seven weeks. There is still a problem. There is still an eight-week difference, which is not acceptable but is down from a high of fifteen weeks.

The government has hired a 30-member francophone team based in Montreal to work solely on processing these claims. They have also increased the hiring of bilingual staff across the country to process these claims and reduce the times. The government, with all of these actions and investments, is seeing real, tangible progress, but there remains work to be done.

INDIGENOUS SERVICES

MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, last Friday marked three years since the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was released. Each one of these cases involve families who want to know what happened to their loved one. They want justice, and they want cold cases reopened.

Leader, a year ago I asked you for an update on the status of RCMP investigations into these cases based on information provided in answer to one of my written questions on the Order Paper. I asked what your government was doing to assist the RCMP in resolving more of these cases and if arrests had been made or charges laid. I never received an answer in that year. Leader, what progress, if any, has been made in resolving cold cases since the final report was released?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, colleague. I regret you haven't received an answer. I was not aware. I shall follow up and report back as soon as I can.

Senator Plett: Hopefully, that won't take another year.

One of the recommendations in the final report was the creation of a national task force to review and reinvestigate unresolved files of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. A report released last week by the Native Women's Association of Canada found that there has been no update on the status of a national task force. The report called this extremely concerning and said it was critical that cases be reinvestigated to bring closure to the families.

Leader, a year ago the NDP-Liberal government finally responded to the national inquiry with a so-called action plan of its own. Why hasn't there been any action taken on the creation of a task force? Will the families see one established this year?

Senator Gold: Again, thank you for your question. It's an important one, and I thank you for your commitment to the issue. I will make inquiries and report back.

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Lena Diab, Member of Parliament for Halifax West.

On behalf of all honourable senators, I welcome you to the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR A GUARANTEED LIVABLE BASIC INCOME BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Pate, seconded by the Honourable Senator Dean, for the second reading of Bill S-233, An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income.

Hon. Colin Deacon: Honourable senators, I rise to speak in support of the principle of Bill S-233 and ask the Senate to have the courage to vote in favour of studying this bill.

Let me start by reminding us of the fact that, contrary to the vast majority of the 10,000-plus emails that we have received on Bill S-233, it's not about controlling people's lives or arbitrarily cutting off access to cherished government programs. On the contrary, Bill S-233 is designed to explore how to better empower some of our society's most marginalized and vulnerable in a more effective and, potentially, more cost-efficient manner.

There are two reasons why I think the study of Bill S-233 is so important. The first is the deeply troubling level of disinformation associated with this bill. Some groups are knowingly creating and sharing false information, and too many vulnerable Canadians believe and share this false information. They are fearful that their access to various government programs will be arbitrarily cut off if Bill S-233 somehow becomes law.

As our colleague Senator Simons said in a well-articulated Twitter thread, an unelected Senate “. . . CANNOT commit the government to spend any money.” Studying this bill, let alone passing it, will not take away people’s rights to existing social programs and does not initiate the World Economic Forum’s takeover of our democracy. Rather, the bill proposes to look into how our social support programs and payments might be streamlined with the intention of improving delivery of such programs, particularly to vulnerable Canadians.

I believe that the scourge of disinformation can only be countered with evidence and transparency, and that’s something we can proudly say is reliably delivered through our Senate reports.

• (1500)

The second reason I would like us to study Bill S-233 is that I’m increasingly worried about Canada’s addiction to creating, and never reducing, regulatory burden. Particularly, we have a concerning affinity for command-and-control regulations, regulations that maintain the status quo, limit innovation and too often create economically unsustainable programs. In business terms, we call this “red tape.”

But too often we forget that it is not just businesses that have to deal with Canada’s OECD-leading levels of regulatory burden; it is all of us, and it is also our country’s most vulnerable. That is why I think it is important for us to study Bill S-233, to address the plague of disinformation head-on and to reduce regulatory burden and red tape.

Interestingly, the desire to reduce regulatory complexities and red tape is what caused guaranteed annual income to be studied at a major policy conference for a national political party back in 1969. A fellow Nova Scotian tabled the idea of implementing a simple and effective guaranteed annual income and highlighted its promise of ending costly and inefficient rules-based income support programs that were weighed down by overlapping and often competing federal, provincial and territorial authorities.

Over 50 years ago, the principle of Bill S-233 was being discussed and debated at a national policy conference. The focus was on replacing the inefficient status quo with an income-tax-based minimum income that would be available to all Canadians if and when their income fell below a predefined level. So who was that Nova Scotian, and what was his political party? It was the Honourable Robert Stanfield, leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada.

The reality is the idea behind Bill S-233 is far from new and might even represent one of the first times that Senator Pate has actually promoted Conservative Party policy. Actually, Senator Pate, I am hoping that Senator Plett does not accuse you of plagiarism.

More seriously, I want to see S-233 go to committee so that the Senate can explore, identify and better understand innovative approaches to addressing pervasive poverty. I believe Robert Stanfield’s vision of our inefficient status quo being replaced

with a more efficient system of helping Canadians if and when their income falls below a predefined level is a very powerful one indeed.

Perhaps unfairly — but prove me wrong — I believe that our income support to vulnerable and marginalized Canadians is fraught with inefficiency, limitations and constraints that severely limit how effectively we enable these Canadians to access the support needed to create success in their lives. In addition, this support exists at the always complex intersection of federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictional authorities and the oft-competing departmental authorities within each level of government. It’s a recipe for program gaps, overlaps and administrative burden.

I’d like to describe four stories that have shaped my support for the study of Bill S-233 and have me believing in its promise.

The first story is from my youth, retold to me more recently. The increasingly neglected plight of Ontario’s seniors in the early 1970s resulted in a bit of shenanigans at the powerful Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee, TEIGA, of the Ontario legislature.

At the time, newspapers were telling stories of seniors whose only source of affordable protein was cat food because 35% of them over 65 in Ontario had incomes below the poverty line. My dad, who was an Ontario MPP at the time, found this to be reprehensible as the vast majority were women, and they were the ones who had struggled through the Great Depression and then worked tirelessly to hold Canada’s families, factories and country together during World War II.

I had never heard about the shenanigans part of the story from my dad. I did hear about it from retired senator Hugh Segal about three years ago. At a TEIGA committee meeting during a minority government, the majority of members voted to reduce the salaries of the minister and deputy minister of what would now be Ontario’s Ministry of Finance to \$1 per year. The purpose was to familiarize those gentlemen with the effects of poverty. Former Senator Segal was working with Premier Bill Davis at the time and suddenly he had a very worried group of MPPs arriving at the door of his office. Hugh’s response was to learn more.

The result was that, within six weeks, the Ontario legislature unanimously passed a new guaranteed income supplement. What were the results? The supplement helped to reduce the poverty rate for those over 65 to under 5% of the population within three years.

The second story I want to tell you was also discussed around our kitchen table when I was in my youth; it was Manitoba’s MINCOME program, which ran in Dauphin, Manitoba, from 1974 to 1979. The focus was to empower versus control those living in poverty. It became highly politicized and was shut down, with all the data collected being locked away in the Winnipeg regional office of Library and Archives Canada.

What were the results? Well, 25 years later, a health economist by the name of Dr. Evelyn Forget rediscovered the project and was able to analyze the data. Dr. Forget's analysis illuminated some successes of the project. Dauphin's hospitalization rate for accidents, injuries and mental health-related issues dropped by 8.5% for those who received basic income. School performance for children in the town improved, with a surge in enrollment rates for Grade 12 students.

But because Dr. Forget's analysis focused mainly on health outcomes of basic income, there was not sufficient data to assess the causal relationship between basic income and other social or economic outcomes.

The third story that I want to tell you is also from the Prairies. It's a powerful social innovation called Housing First, developed and refined in the courageous and caring Prairie town of Medicine Hat. In 2015, Medicine Hat became the first community in Canada to end chronic homelessness, meaning that no more than three people were chronically homeless for more than three months.

Housing First worked because it identified individual and structural risk factors of homelessness, such as chronic health issues, disabilities, addictions and abuse, and centred programming on reducing these risks as well as providing opportunities to build social relationships, earn adequate income and gain access to affordable housing.

What were the results? Between 2009 and 2014, the amount of time participants spent in jail reduced by 67%; the number of days spent in hospital reduced by 32%. But some questions remain. For instance, it is unknown what the total net cost savings of the Housing First initiative in Medicine Hat are over the period it has been active, which existing programs were eliminated and which other programs may have been made redundant as a result of it.

The fourth and last story I want to tell you is about a more recent experiment, the Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project; it was commissioned as part of a larger poverty-reduction strategy following recommendations from retired Senator Segal. When asking the government to consider implementing a pilot, Segal reflected on what a pilot should and shouldn't do. I'd like to quote him:

A pilot project must begin with an understanding of the costs of poverty, not only in present welfare and disability payments, but also in terms of added pressures on our health system, and the Ontario economy as a whole, through its impacts on economic productivity and existing government revenues.

Senator Pate reviewed the interim results of this program when she introduced Bill S-233, so I will not repeat them, despite their merit. Suffice it to say, I still find it very sad that former Senator Segal's lifelong efforts to have a well-controlled study in GBI were cut short in Ontario in such an abrupt manner.

In closing, for me, Bill S-233 is about reducing red tape for those who require society's support because they have not been able to get their feet under them, be it through their own choices or circumstances beyond their control.

As I've said, too often, accessing support is highly complex and unnecessarily restrictive. I hazard to guess that there likely aren't many of us who would have the patience to navigate the current system. Many like to think that is a good thing, I expect, because it's a deterrent, but I don't agree.

Why? Because I believe it's possible for us to have a system that empowers versus controls those who need it most. For those who are already struggling to cope, why would we ever think that imposing administrative complexities would help them turn their lives around?

I also believe that administrative burden is the enemy of productivity; moreover, due to my Scottish heritage, choosing to maintain an inefficient and less effective system causes me to have an allergic reaction.

Canada's moribund productivity growth continues to worsen because we do not innovate in everything we do. Canadians are hard-working, innovative and determined. But too many of our public services are constrained by a legacy of habit, not evidence of effectiveness.

The OECD now predicts that Canada will have the worst-performing economy through 2060. I'm not willing to lay this at the feet of any single political party or level of government. I believe it's due to a culture that is not committed to innovating in everything we do. We must stop tolerating the sentence, "But that's not how we do it."

• (1510)

Let's have the courage to innovate. Yes, innovation and change bring risk, but they also bring the evidence of what to do and what not to do.

Colleagues, let's send Bill S-233 to committee and ask them to focus on how the federal government might work with one willing province or territory to complete a well-documented study of the principle underlying Bill S-233. Let's not just look at the costs but at all of the programs and services across all levels of government that might be replaced or eliminated, the savings potentially enabled and the opportunities that might create.

If we value the prosperity of our grandchildren, we must embrace change and innovation. We must eliminate unnecessary rules and red tape, and focus our attention firmly on the intended result. If we do not do so as it relates to supporting the most vulnerable in our society, then for whom?

Thank you, colleagues.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Bellemare: Would Senator Deacon take a question?

Senator C. Deacon: Yes.

Senator Bellemare: Here's my question. I believe, as you do, that it is very important to empower people. In your opinion, what level of guaranteed income should people receive as part of a guaranteed minimum income program so they can truly escape poverty?

Which programs do you believe involve so much red tape they should be abolished?

[*English*]

Senator C. Deacon: Senator Bellemare, those would be the questions I hope we would answer in committee as we look at this program and see all the areas that it reaches into, such as health care services and paramedic services. Certainly in my own community, the fire department recognizes that a great many of their calls relate to health crises and issues from those who are not getting appropriate health care.

So who knows to where we should limit this and who knows what programs could be delivered more effectively? But it's arguable that the patchwork — and I would argue this — provides the evidence to the contrary that a great many efficiencies can be gained.

To answer your question, I would look at that as being something that would come from a Senate study.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator Deacon, your time has expired. Are you asking for five more minutes?

Senator C. Deacon: Yes, if it is the wish of the chamber.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Is it agreed, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Thank you, Senator Deacon, for taking my question.

As you are aware, the three parties in the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island — the Conservative Party, which is the government; the official opposition, which is the Green Party; and the Liberal Party — have all passed a motion asking the federal government to support a trial project in Prince Edward Island. It would be a continuation of what was undertaken but stopped in Ontario, as you indicated in your speech.

The federal government, so far, has not agreed to doing that because, as you know, there are two schools of thought. Prince Edward Island thinks it is a substantial replacement for existing programs and would target the very people you talked about in your remarks, whereas the other concern is that the report done by the Government of British Columbia indicates that the costs would not be sustainable over the long term.

One of those views is obviously wrong.

Would you agree with me that the child benefit, in the case of Prince Edward Island, has had a tremendous impact? Over \$500 million has gone to Prince Edward Island in the last four years in tax-free benefits, affecting 25,000 families and 13,000 children. In my view, a pilot project in P.E.I. would also work. Would you share that view as well?

Senator C. Deacon: Thank you, Senator Downe, for the question. I would offer that if P.E.I. gets to it first, that would be great. I totally believe it's worth doing and that you've got an advantage over other provinces and territories on having that all-party support in your legislature. I would love it to happen in Nova Scotia, but the point is that I would love it to happen, period. We assume what the costs are, but we don't know what programs and overlap can be eliminated. We don't know what opportunities can be created by empowering people and freeing them.

There are examples from the past and from other countries where, if there is a second income that comes into the house, you will lose your benefits. Then you choose to push one parent out of the house, in effect.

If they can't get jobs that employ them at a certain level, we have to look at how rules are creating opportunity and preventing opportunity. We don't know about that opportunity side of the equation.

That's why I would love to see it go ahead in P.E.I., but I want to see it go ahead. I want us to have a controlled study that really gives us insight into all the different areas where impacts, negative and positive, will occur.

I may be proven wrong, but the evidence right now does not exist to say that helping people first will not create greater opportunities. The evidence certainly isn't there that our status quo is performing to the level it needs to.

Hon. Frances Lankin: Will Senator Deacon take a question?

Senator C. Deacon: I would be honoured.

Senator Lankin: Thank you very much. I can't tell you how much I agree with what you said to Senator Downe. I thought it was right on point.

A lot of what we hear in terms of pushback to this idea comes from a sense of intuition and not from any evidence. The evidence that we have seen, whether via pilot projects completed or partially completed, shows the opposite.

But what we hear is that marginal effective tax rates will make it very difficult for us to determine where the clawback is or at what level to set the benefit. We hear that it would be a disincentive to work. I think some of the evidence you alluded to disproves that.

I wonder if you could just expand on that a little bit in terms of what we do know from the evidence and why this is worthy of the next step in a national collaborative study with P.E.I.

Senator C. Deacon: Thank you, Senator Lankin. I can only speak from personal experiences of times when my life was really tough. My ability to see opportunity and my willingness to take risks to step out of the circumstances that I found myself in — things just close in on you.

I don't know how to quantify that at this point in time, but I believe that, personally. I see that with people in my life, where things just become overwhelming and their ability to see what might be obvious to you and me as a next step — they just can't get there; they can't imagine that change.

I look at my own community where there have been people who have had the courage to create new opportunities. Invariably, there's been a little bit of a cushion underneath them that has allowed them to go and take a risk and maybe fail. But it's that controlled risk that I think is essential for us to make progress in every community, in every life and every family.

I don't know how to quantify it. I have the examples I gave. The Housing First example from Medicine Hat I found so inspiring. If I couldn't have a good night's sleep, a shower in the morning and a meal, how could I deal with any major issue in my life? Telling people they have to do X, Y and Z before they get that key element puts them in an impossible position.

I don't have an answer, but that's why we need to do a study.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REGULATIONS

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Griffin, seconded by the Honourable Senator Tannas, for the second reading of Bill S-236, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Employment Insurance Regulations (Prince Edward Island).

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Are honourable senators ready for the question?

Some Hon. Senators: Question.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time.)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the third time?

(On motion of Senator Dean, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry.)

• (1520)

LEBANESE HERITAGE MONTH BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Jane Cordy moved second reading of Bill S-246, An Act respecting Lebanese Heritage Month.

She said: Honourable senators, Canada is a country with a rich heritage of immigrants from all over the world arriving on our shores to pursue the dream of a better life for themselves and their families.

Bill S-246 aims to recognize and celebrate the experiences and contributions Lebanese Canadians have made and continue to make to Canada.

As the preamble to the bill states, Lebanese Canadians have — for generations — made significant social, economic, cultural, religious, military, philanthropic and political contributions to our social fabric and to the strength, resiliency and diversity of our communities.

Colleagues, I must begin my remarks by first acknowledging Member of Parliament for Halifax West, Lena Metlege Diab, whose leadership on this initiative has been instrumental.

Ms. Diab is a long-time community leader and active member of the Halifax Lebanese community. In 2010, she was the recipient of the Outstanding Professional of the Year award from the Lebanese Chamber of Commerce in Nova Scotia.

She has served as president of the Canadian Lebanon Society of Halifax at several intervals since 1993, including 2013 when the society celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary.

Honourable senators, according to the 2016 Census data of those respondents who identified as Lebanese, Canada is home to 220,000 Canadian Lebanese. However, unofficial estimates by Global Affairs Canada put the number anywhere between 200,000 and 400,000. The largest Lebanese communities are in Montreal and Toronto. Recognizing and celebrating a Lebanese heritage month will encourage Lebanese Canadians across the country to share their stories, their traditions and their culture with all Canadians.

With the passage of this bill, each and every year throughout Canada the month of November would be designated as “Lebanese Heritage Month.”

Honourable senators, why designate November as Lebanese heritage month? From time immemorial, the region of modern-day Lebanon had been under the rule of any number of empires, dynasties or colonial powers.

Beginning in 1920, the region fell under French colonial rule. In 1940, during the Second World War, the Nazi-installed Vichy France government assumed power over Lebanon. While the war continued, the Vichy government was removed in 1941 as Nazi control of Europe eroded and Allied forces made military gains in the region.

General Charles de Gaulle visited Lebanon shortly after Vichy France released control of the region. National leaders in Lebanon approached de Gaulle requesting independence. On November 26, 1941, General Georges Catroux, a delegate general under de Gaulle, proclaimed the independence of Lebanon.

However, this proclamation was essentially a hollow gesture as France maintained administrative and political control over the region. In defiance of France and following national elections in early November 1943, the first order of business for the new government was to amend the Lebanese Constitution to abolish France's mandate over the country.

On November 11, 1943, the Lebanese flag flew for the first time over Lebanon.

The French government responded by arresting and imprisoning the newly elected president, prime minister and several other ministers.

Under immense pressure from other countries and wartime allies, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, the Arab states and the Soviet Union, France had little choice but to reconsider. On the morning of November 22, 1943, France released their political prisoners, and, after 23 years of French colonial rule, Lebanon was then officially an independent state.

November 22 has since been recognized and celebrated to mark Lebanon's independence. The month of November holds significant importance for the population of Lebanon, Lebanese nationals and Lebanese descendants worldwide.

Honourable senators, in 2018, my province of Nova Scotia became the second province to officially recognize November as Lebanese heritage month. Ontario was the first to do so in 2017.

Nova Scotia has a robust Lebanese community with a rich history in our province. Many of the first Lebanese immigrants coming to Canada landed in Nova Scotia beginning in the late 1800s, and they chose to make the province their new home.

In 2018, a statue commemorating Lebanese immigrants was unveiled in Halifax. It portrays a Lebanese traveller wearing traditional clothes. The plaque accompanying the statue reads:

This monument is a universal symbol of a proud, strong, and globally united Lebanese community. The statue honors the early Lebanese settlers who, 130 years ago, established a presence in this country, sewing the bonds of loyalty, faith,

and perseverance. We are thankful to our Nova Scotia community and for the enduring friendships built in our new home, Canada.

Nova Scotia is also home to the Canadian Lebanon Society of Halifax, one of the oldest Lebanese societies in North America.

This past weekend, the fifteenth annual Lebanese Cedar Festival took place in Halifax. This annual festival was first conceived in 2006 under the leadership of Father Pierre Azzi and the parish council of Our Lady of Lebanon Parish. The focus of the Lebanese Cedar Festival in Halifax is to:

... promote and foster the Lebanese culture and traditions as integral elements of Canada's multicultural mosaic and to provide a venue for Canadians of Lebanese heritage to reacquaint themselves with their rich roots. The Cedar Festival is an opportunity for families and groups of all ages to be together to experience the culture and heritage in a fun, free, and safe atmosphere!

Honourable senators, my husband and I spent last Saturday afternoon at the Lebanese Cedar Festival. It was a wonderful, sunny afternoon with singing, dancing and games for the children. Of course, there was also plenty of homemade traditional Lebanese food. Best of all, there were lots of smiling faces and friendly people.

It was the first festival since COVID, so there was a special feeling of coming together again. When the festival was cancelled in 2020, the community rallied to donate 2,000 meals of Lebanese food to first responders, health care workers and charities.

Honourable senators, Canada's story is one of immigration. People from all over the world have left their homes, some by choice, but far too many have been forced to leave their homelands, to forge a new life in Canada.

• (1530)

We know that immigration enriches Canadian society and grows the economies in communities large and small, urban, rural and remote, and leads to stronger Canadian trade and cultural ties with other countries.

Canada is not so much the melting pot that we are told growing up. Canada is rather like a big salad, with each culture adding a new ingredient and a new flavour. Cultures are not lost like they would be in a melting pot. But, rather, they come together to complement each other for a truly Canadian flavour.

Honourable senators, in 2015, a report entitled *Economic Benefits of Immigration: The Impact of Halifax's Lebanese Community* was prepared by the Halifax Partnership and the Canadian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce. The aim of the report was to provide a case study and a summary of the impacts immigrants have on the Canadian and Halifax economies, with a focus on the Lebanese experience in Halifax.

According to the National Household Survey, the broader Lebanese community in Halifax in 2015 was 4,500 people. However, unofficial estimates put the number close to 7,000.

Officially, the Lebanese community makes up 3.75% of the Halifax population, of which nearly 20% are self-employed. The Lebanese Chamber of Commerce in Halifax counts among its members owners of many restaurants, grocery and convenience stores and construction and real estate development companies. They are innovators and they are entrepreneurs.

The report estimated that developers from the Lebanese community were responsible for nearly \$4 billion in construction in Nova Scotia between 2005 and 2015, and that number has grown significantly since then. The report also estimated the direct and indirect employment related to Halifax's Lebanese community and related business in Halifax is between 4,000 and 5,000 full-time jobs.

Honourable senators, the Canadian Lebanese community, like all immigrant communities that have chosen to make Canada home, have contributed greatly to the fabric of Canadian society and an enriched Canadian culture. I know in my province, Lebanese businesses have left an indelible mark on the city of Halifax with billions of dollars in construction projects.

And let's not forget another significant cultural contribution to my province when, as the story goes, in 1901 Lebanese immigrant George Shebib introduced the unofficial card game of Cape Breton: tarabish. For those of you who are from Cape Breton, you have probably all played tarabish. I know that many Cape Bretonners still enjoy a good game of tarabish with friends around the kitchen table.

Honourable senators, I hope you will join me and support this bill in recognition of the rich history and contributions the Lebanese community has made to Canadian society. I look forward to hearing about the contributions Lebanese Canadians have made in your corner of Canada. Thank you.

Hon. Paula Simons: Honourable senators, I am delighted to rise today to speak in support of Bill S-246, An Act Respecting Lebanese Heritage Month. I speak quite selfishly, since Senator Cordy's bill gives me such a wonderful opportunity to share with you more of the Alberta history that I love.

I want to take you back to 1905 — the year Alberta entered Confederation. The province was booming with the arrival of waves of pioneer settlers. In 1901, the population of Alberta had been just 73,000. By 1905, it had more than doubled to 160,000.

Among the newcomers to arrive that year was young Alexander Hamilton. No, not the \$10 founding father without a father Alexander Hamilton; not the American revolutionary immortalized in rap by Lin-Manuel Miranda. I'm talking about Alberta's Alexander Hamilton, whose adventure story is no less amazing.

Our Alexander Hamilton, who was born Ali Ahmed Abouchadi, arrived in Alberta in 1905 from his home in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. He was just 12 years old.

He and his uncle Sine Abouchadi came to Alberta via Winnipeg, hoping to strike it rich in the Klondike gold fields. Finding themselves almost a decade late for the gold rush, they

decided to become travelling fur traders instead, buying pelts from Cree and Métis trappers around Lac La Biche and then selling them in Edmonton.

When young Ali was just 16, his uncle decided to go back to Lebanon, leaving the teenager alone to make his own way on the western frontier. But Ali, who changed his name at that point to Alexander, made his fortune — and I do mean his fortune — as a fur trader, merchant, farmer, cattle salesman and finally as one of Alberta's first dealer of Ford automobiles. He was one of the first Lebanese pioneers to settle in Alberta. Immigrants: they get the job done.

Hamilton was soon followed by a wave of others from the Bekaa Valley, some of them inspired by his early successes. There were Hamdons and Tarrabains, Shabens and Saddys, Mouallems and Kazeils and Chadis, Awids and Johmas and Amereys, Haymours and Salloums and Darwishes — cousins, friends, in-laws and neighbours who emigrated, one after the other, from small Lebanese villages such as Lala, Qab Elias and Kherbet Rouha.

Peddlers and shopkeepers, fur merchants and farmers, ranchers and restaurateurs, they left their homes half a world away to become settlers on a vast new frontier.

For the Indigenous peoples of Alberta, this wave of settlement in the wake of the treaties was a profoundly difficult and unjust time. But the Lebanese newcomers learned Cree and Dene and forged strong bonds of friendship with the First Nations and Métis people they met as they built new lives for themselves as traders and merchants in Lac La Biche, Fort Chipewyan, Fort McMurray, Athabasca and High Prairie, plying the rivers to the north in the Northwest Territories in search of the best furs.

When you think of fur traders, homesteaders and ranchers — Alberta pioneers — Lebanese immigrants might not be the first people who come to mind. But there were Lebanese settlers in Alberta from the very moment it became a province. They laid the foundation for the vibrant, multicultural province we were to become. Without their contributions, Alberta would not be the province we know today.

The first to arrive were single men, but the women soon followed and left their mark on their new homeland. There were women such as the formidable Hilwie Jomha Hamdon. Born in 1905 in Lebanon, Hilwie moved to northern Alberta as a bride of 17 to join her husband, Ali Hamdon, a successful fur trader who greeted her, on her arrival, with a full-length sable coat.

The couple spent their early married life in Fort Chipewyan, a primarily First Nations community in the north of the province. There, Hilwie formed enduring friendships with her Indigenous neighbours, learning to speak both Cree and Chipewyan. An *Edmonton Journal* story from 1964 reported that one of the local chiefs had dubbed her “the finest white woman in the North.”

Hilwie hosted visiting celebrity bush pilots, including “Wop” May and “Punch” Dickins, in her home. But, as their family grew, Hilwie wanted a better education for their six children and insisted that they all move to Edmonton, where she soon became a leader in the capital's growing Lebanese community.

You may already know that Edmonton was home to Canada's first mosque, the Al Rashid. You might not have known that it was Hilwie Hamdon who led the charm offensive that got that mosque built.

She convinced Edmonton's then-mayor John Fry that the city should donate the land. Then she convinced Muslims and Arabs all across Alberta and Saskatchewan, as well as Edmontonians of all faiths and backgrounds, to donate to the mosque and raised the necessary \$5,000 to pay for construction.

The mosque was built by Ukrainian-Canadian contractor Mike Drewoth. Mike had never seen a mosque, so he designed the Al Rashid to look like a Ukrainian church, complete with those distinctive signature "onion domes" that mark eastern Christian churches — one onion bulb atop each minaret. You could hardly imagine a more uniquely Edmonton building than one that fused Lebanese and Ukrainian culture and aesthetics into a harmonious whole.

The original Al Rashid opened in 1938 and stands today in Fort Edmonton Park, Edmonton's living history museum, where young Muslim guides provide tours and programming through the summer, teaching tourists and reminding Edmontonians about our city's deep Lebanese and Muslim roots. In 2017, the Edmonton Public School Board opened Hilwie Hamdon School, named in honour of this remarkable Edmonton champion of education and inclusion.

While many of Alberta's early Lebanese settlers were Muslim, others were Christian or Druze, and certainly not all of them were northern fur traders.

Isper Shacker, for example, got his start in the small Alberta town of Hanna, where he ran the local movie theatre. He would later go on to become the Mayor of Hanna. And though he himself was Christian, not Muslim, he travelled to Edmonton and attended the opening of the Al Rashid Mosque as a special guest of honour.

• (1540)

William Haddad, the son of Lebanese shopkeeper Abdelnoor Farhat Haddad, graduated from law school at the University of Alberta in 1941, becoming one of Canada's first Lebanese lawyers. He served in the navy during the Second World War, became president of the Edmonton Bar Association, the first chair of the Edmonton Police Commission, vice-chair of the Alberta Securities Commission and finally a judge on the Court of Appeal of Alberta — one of the first Arab judges in Canada.

In keeping with such legal traditions, just last month, Edmonton lawyer and community leader Bob Aloneissi, the son of Lebanese immigrants, was appointed to the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, becoming, I do believe, Alberta's first Druze judge.

Of course, the first Lebanese pioneers were joined in Alberta by later waves of immigrants in the 1950s and the 1970s and continuing to this day.

By 1969, the Muslim population in Lac La Biche made up about 10% of the town's total population, the largest proportion of Muslims in any town or city in North America at that time. Today, one in six people in Lac La Biche can claim Lebanese roots, and the town claims it has the highest proportion of Lebanese Canadians in the country.

Alberta certainly has, by far, the largest Lebanese population outside of Quebec and Ontario. This has, perhaps, given Albertans — especially Edmontonians — a disproportionate passion for hummus and donair.

The Edmonton novelist Todd Babiak — not Lebanese himself — once wrote that it was impossible to have a party of any kind in Edmonton without someone bringing hummus. Now, Ottawa may think it has cornered the market on shawarma, and Halifax might think it can claim the donair, but Edmonton has something to say about that.

Alberta, though, can certainly claim the Lebanese-inflected Burger Baron mushroom burger, recently immortalized by the award-winning Edmonton author, journalist and documentary maker Omar Mouallem, in his film, *The Last Baron*, which tracked the social history of Lebanese immigration via the stories of the Burger Baron restaurants that were, and are, landmarks across the Prairies.

Less calorically, Alberta will also proudly claim Canada's first Lebanese cabinet minister, Larry Shaben, who served with distinction in the cabinets of premiers Peter Lougheed and Don Getty, and who was the first Muslim appointed to any provincial or federal cabinet in Canada.

Notably, while commuting north to his riding in High Prairie, Larry Shaben survived a horrific small-plane crash that killed six people, including his friend and colleague, the Alberta NDP leader Grant Notley, father of Rachel Notley. The story of Shaben's extraordinary escape, not just from death in the crash but from death in the freezing northern wilderness, was told in the award-winning book *Into the Abyss*, written by acclaimed Lebanese-Canadian journalist Carol Shaben — Larry Shaben's own daughter.

Edmonton was also home to Canada's first-ever Muslim judge, Ed Saddy, the proud son of Lebanese immigrants, and one of my dad's oldest friends. They grew up together on Edmonton's Boyle Street, where Lebanese and Jewish kids shared a special bond.

Today, Alberta's Lebanese community — Muslim, Christian, Druze or decidedly secular — is stronger than ever, whether its members are newly arrived immigrants or fourth-generation Albertans.

Those deep, deep roots are among the reasons that the Edmonton Public School Board currently offers Arabic bilingual immersion programs at six of its public schools.

They're the reason the *Edmonton Journal* recently reported that there are nearly 120 shops and restaurants in Edmonton with "donair" as part of their name, which, in the words of Postmedia columnist Chad Huculak, ". . . dwarfs Calgary's minuscule 50 and Toronto's less than 20."

And they're the reason Edmonton is proudly home to the Canadian Druze Centre and a significant population of the Druze diaspora in North America.

I guess you might say every month in Alberta is Lebanese heritage month. But I don't think anyone back home will object to having an excuse, every November, to celebrate, and I'll bring the hummus.

To Senator Cordy, I say thank you, *hiy hiy* and *šukran*.

Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer: Thank you, Senator Simons, for your speech on Edmonton, and Senator Cordy, thank you for your speech and also for starting this inquiry. I may have missed you saying it, but wasn't the first Muslim mosque also built in Edmonton?

Senator Simons: Yes, I think you did miss it. It opened in 1938 in downtown Edmonton on a gift of land from the City of Edmonton with \$5,000 raised from communities across the West. I have to say, the original mosque was moved brick by brick and now stands in Fort Edmonton, but the Al Rashid Mosque endures as one of the largest mosques in Western Canada, throwing open its doors in times of fire and disaster. The Al Rashid Mosque has been remarkable for welcoming the homeless during cold snaps and for opening its doors to people who were fleeing the Fort McMurray wildfires. It's an extraordinarily important part of Edmonton's cultural and social community.

Senator Jaffer: May I ask a second question Senator Simons?

Senator Simons: If I have time, absolutely.

Senator Jaffer: Thank you. Senator Simons, I did mean to say that it was moved, and that it was the first mosque ever built is something that we Muslims celebrate. Of course, the women from that mosque are some of the most forward-looking, including Dr. Lila Fahlman who was sort of a matriarch of the women's movement in the Muslim community. So thank you for raising that.

Senator Simons, I think you would agree that the Muslim community is still very vibrant in the Al Rashid Mosque.

Senator Simons: Absolutely. I think those first Lebanese pioneers laid down a foundation that has allowed Muslim immigrants from around the world to come and find a home in Edmonton, whether they are coming from North Africa, East Africa or Indonesia. Wherever Muslims have come from to Edmonton, the Al Rashid Mosque community has been there to welcome them.

You mentioned Lila Fahlman. I didn't raise her in my speech for one reason, which is that her family was Syrian rather than Lebanese. I know the border is liminal, but as this was about Lebanese heritage month, I wanted to focus on Hilwie Hamdon, who was the remarkable woman who fought for the Al Rashid Mosque, which was, indeed, the first mosque in Canada.

Interestingly enough, the first mosque in North America was, I believe, in North Dakota and not in Chicago or New York as you might have expected. There was really an important Lebanese diaspora that came and filled up that whole prairie west on both sides of the Canadian-American border.

(On motion of Senator Dean, debate adjourned.)

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Pamela Wallin moved second reading of Bill S-248, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying).

She said: Honourable senators, I have some brief remarks on Bill S-248, the Senate public bill that I tabled last Thursday.

The bill amends sections of the Criminal Code relating to medical assistance in dying to allow individuals diagnosed with an incurable illness, disorder or disability to make an advance request for medical assistance in dying.

This bill is a result of many years of careful consideration and consultation with dozens of stakeholders, organizations, experts and those, most importantly, with lived experiences.

Last year, we passed an amendment here in the Senate to the government's bill regarding advance requests. Sadly, that amendment was rejected by the government. Still, I am proud to be trying again after another year of further consultation and study.

I wish to speak only briefly to the bill now and provide more fulsome comments when we return in the fall and have time for proper debate and study. However, I believe it is important that this bill be tabled now for two reasons. Our Special Joint Committee on MAID has been looking at advanced requests, mature minors, mental disorders as a sole underlying condition, the state of palliative care and the protection of Canadians with disabilities. We have a decade of federal reports and expert panels on these subjects, and particularly on advanced requests. They are wide-ranging and have set out recommendations in support of advance requests, but it is still unclear whether the committee will hear from further witnesses on advanced requests before the reporting deadline in October. So I am uncertain that the review will be able to examine a potential gap in the law.

• (1550)

It is necessary that we seek legal clarity on the issue. A few weeks ago, the Quebec government tabled advanced request legislation. It is a reasoned bill based on the recommendations of the Quebec all-party committee on the end of life. This report and subsequent bill established a framework and a timeline for advanced requests, outlined requirements for a registry and for the process of updating an advanced request and its notarization.

I believe it offers an appropriate balance between safeguards and respecting the autonomy of the individual. However, if this bill is passed in Quebec, there will be a gap between the exemptions for medical assistance in dying established in the Criminal Code and the advanced request framework being created in provincial legislation. That obviously creates some concerns about criminal liability and could lead to another Supreme Court challenge. So the aim here is to anticipate and avoid any federal-provincial ambiguity and to begin to look at this. A Senate committee will reassure all of us and, I hope, the Canadian public, as our goal would be to educate, anticipate, prepare and give us all time for more fulsome consideration of the legal issues.

I believe an advanced request is a right to a dignified death. Public support is already there. The government has been a bit reluctant to take the lead, so I believe this is our opportunity to do just that. This is our responsibility, as legislators, to do the heavy lifting, to look at how to provide safeguards and to create a path forward. I look forward to working with you to fix the gap in our MAID laws.

(On motion of Senator Wallin, debate adjourned.)

AUDIT AND OVERSIGHT

FOURTH REPORT OF COMMITTEE ADOPTED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the fourth report (interim) of the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight, entitled *Senate Audit and Oversight Charter*, presented in the Senate on June 2, 2022.

Hon. Marty Klyne moved the adoption of the report.

Hon. David M. Wells: Honourable senators, the charter that is now being considered by the Senate is part of the overall work of the Audit and Oversight Committee. It's a governance document that outlines how the committee will carry out its mandate.

It has been a long road that started back in 2014 with the recommendation from the Auditor General to establish independent oversight and to retain an internal auditor. The Subcommittee on the Senate Estimates and Committee Budgets, which I chaired at the time with Senator Jaffer as my deputy chair, was charged with addressing this recommendation.

To preserve the rights of senators to be the masters of their own house, we developed a novel approach that protected our rights but also gave confidence that the best practices were employed in our work. The Auditor General recommended that the committee look at senators' office expenses only, but we believed that it would be better to have an entity that had oversight over all Senate expenditures — not just the 10% that was recommended, but 100% of the full expenditures of the Senate, now at approximately \$120 million.

In order to establish this process and, eventually, this committee, we had to develop novel approaches. Some of these were that the Chair of the Internal Economy Committee and Audit and Oversight Committee cannot be from the same caucus or group. And we have external expertise, unlike other committees that have internal expertise, in some cases by good

fortune. On the Fisheries and Oceans Committee we might have fisheries experts, on the Agriculture and Forestry Committee we might have agricultural experts, and obviously we are fortunate to have lawyers and legal scholars on our Justice Committee, but this is not mandated; it's really by chance. We are fortunate to have the opportunity of nominating and having external members that have the expertise join our Audit and Oversight Committee.

The committee is unique in that we targeted candidates with that specific expertise. I'll note that, at the time, the original steering committee was made up of Senator Downe, our deputy chair, Senator Dupuis, and me, as chair. We targeted candidates with specific backgrounds and special expertise. Through a rigorous process, we were able to have Robert Plamondon and Hélène Fortin, two highly qualified chartered professional accountants, join our committee. There is an overlap in the initial terms of these individuals so that there is continuity for the committee, and only parliamentarians on the committee can vote, although thus far we have easily and successfully worked based on discussion and consensus.

As well, the audit world is a very rules-based place, as I'm finding out, and that guides our processes as well. In the absence of external members having a vote, any member of the committee can include a dissenting opinion in any report, which is unlike any other committee that we have in the Senate.

In addition, the Audit and Oversight Committee doesn't have a code like the Ethics and Conflict of Interest Committee has, so for good governance we developed this charter, which is what is before us today. It maps out our processes, our standards and our operating procedure. The rules that we have in the Senate are a general document for all committees. The Senate Administrative Rules apply to the administration of the whole Senate. This charter is such a document for this committee. This is the only instance in the history of the Senate that a committee has developed a charter, one more groundbreaking item designed for continuity of its activities and operations.

Honourable senators, none of us should expect the Canadian public, the media, or the "abolish the Senate" crowd to applaud this significant initiative and accomplishment. Of course, we didn't do it for that reason. We did it because we needed to get it done, and we did it for the right reasons. Honourable senators, it's for this reason that our new charter is before us today and will be the guiding document that assists the Audit and Oversight Committee in carrying out its mandate. This is a novel model for a novel institution, and one for which we should all be proud. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Renée Dupuis: Honourable senators, the first annual report presented by the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight outlines the work that the committee has accomplished since it was created by the Senate on October 1, 2020.

This special new standing committee represents a significant step forward in the Senate's history, because it is responsible for auditing and overseeing all Senate expenditures and the management of public funds allocated to the Senate as an institution and to senators as individuals. By taking responsibility for overseeing its own administration and spending, the Senate

and all of the senators are taking control of any reviews or examinations of its practices, so that this process is not left up to external bodies.

Moreover, the decision to add external members to a Senate decision-making structure represents a significant shift. The institution as a whole has decided not only to examine itself, but also to involve people from outside the institution in that examination. This decision brings us in line with many legislative chambers from around the world that have established oversight and monitoring mechanisms in response to growing societal demand for accountability from our institutions.

The process of creating a committee involves a series of tasks, steps, analyses and discussions on the governance of the committee, as well as a series of legal questions that need to be answered. All this kept the committee members very busy, on top of having to make adjustments because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The act of creating a new structure within an institution brings its own share of change and uncertainty. As deputy chair of the committee, I want to acknowledge all the members, both the senators and the external members, for working cooperatively, sharing their expertise and experience, and showing mutual respect over the past 18 months. The Senate members shared their experience with the institution, and the external members shared their technical expertise and professional experience, while making any necessary adjustments to accommodate the unique characteristics of a legislative chamber. We requested and obtained the help of staff from many Senate Administration directorates, which made our task much easier.

• (1600)

By tabling this first annual report in the Senate, along with the internal charter adopted by the committee, we are submitting the first archival documents related to the Senate's important decision to create an audit and oversight committee. Even more importantly, we are reporting to our fellow senators on the work that has been accomplished to date.

Thank you.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

[Senator Dupuis]

[English]

THE SENATE

MOTION TO CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ADOPT ANTI-RACISM AS THE SIXTH PILLAR OF THE CANADA HEALTH ACT— DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator McCallum, seconded by the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson:

That the Senate of Canada call on the federal government to adopt anti-racism as the sixth pillar of the *Canada Health Act*, prohibiting discrimination based on race and affording everyone the equal right to the protection and benefit of the law.

(On motion of Senator Dean, debate adjourned.)

ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE CUMULATIVE IMPACTS OF RESOURCE EXTRACTION AND DEVELOPMENT—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator McCallum, seconded by the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources be authorized to examine and report on the cumulative positive and negative impacts of resource extraction and development, and their effects on environmental, economic and social considerations, when and if the committee is formed; and

That the committee submit its final report no later than December 31, 2022.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

[*Translation*]

RULES, PROCEDURES AND THE RIGHTS OF PARLIAMENT

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO MEET DURING ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE WITHDRAWN

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Bellemare, seconded by the Honourable Senator Cordy:

That, pursuant to rule 12-18(2), for the remainder of this session, the Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament be authorized to meet at their approved meeting time as determined by the third report of the Committee of Selection, adopted by the Senate on December 7, 2021, on any Monday which immediately precedes a Tuesday when the Senate is scheduled to sit, even though the Senate may then be adjourned for a period exceeding a week.

Hon. Diane Bellemare: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and pursuant to rule 5-10(1), I ask that Motion No. 55 be withdrawn from the Order Paper.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon Senators: Agreed.

(Motion withdrawn.)

[*English*]

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Simons, calling the attention of the Senate to the challenges and opportunities that Canadian municipalities face, and to the importance of understanding and redefining the relationships between Canada's municipalities and the federal government.

Hon. Karen Sorensen: Honourable senators, I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak today on the essential — and often overlooked — role of municipalities in Canada. I'd like to thank my colleague Senator Simons for commencing this important inquiry.

I agree with Senator Simons when she states that municipalities "are the most poorly resourced order of government," and that we need to redefine the federal-municipal relationship.

As many of you know, I have a long history in municipal politics, as do many of my Senate colleagues. I began my political career as a school trustee, before serving two terms as town councillor in Banff, followed by three terms as mayor.

As you can probably guess, I'm very passionate about municipal politics. But it's not just the politicians and policy wonks who should be paying attention to this debate — all Canadians are impacted by the way their governments interact. I've often said that municipalities are the most grassroots level of government.

Decisions made at the municipal council table impact the everyday lives of residents, and mayors and councillors are among the most accessible politicians. Residents don't have to travel to Ottawa or their provincial capital to make their voices heard when they can run into their local representative in the grocery store buying Cheerios.

Municipal leaders are able to hear directly from their constituents and engage with issues as they develop. They're also personally affected by these issues and the debates and feel the impact of their decisions on their communities.

With that in mind, you'd think other levels of government would make a point of coming to municipalities for feedback and advice. But all too often, Canada's towns and cities are an afterthought.

Housing, social issues, natural disasters and climate change are interjurisdictional, but it's municipalities who are on the front lines.

The federal government is leading national efforts to fight climate change, but it's the municipalities who bear the community burdens of fires, floods and other extreme weather.

It's local communities who most keenly feel the impacts of crime, addiction and poverty, and it's municipalities who pay the tab for local police and other first responders, but the federal government legislates on these issues.

It also frequently falls on municipalities to manage the impact of decisions made by higher levels of government, whether it's figuring out appropriate zoning rules for cannabis shops after the legalization of marijuana, helping integrate refugees or determining how to care for vulnerable community members when social services funding is insufficient.

An example of this can be seen in the issue of police funding. Many towns and cities across Alberta and Canada rely on RCMP for policing. When the federal government negotiated a retroactive pay raise for RCMP officers, it was a serious and unexpected hit to many municipal budgets.

Some cities were on the hook for millions in back pay alone.

Global News reported that the City of Surrey was facing a bill of \$46.6 million. It's often the case that municipalities struggle to dance to the federal government's tune.

I remember in 2016-17, when the federal government pledged free entry to all national parks for Canada's one hundred and fiftieth anniversary. This was great news for Canadians, but over at the Town of Banff, we didn't know how we would be able to accommodate the expected increased influx of visitors and vehicles.

Now, there is a silver lining to this story. The Town of Banff is unique in that it's a municipality within federal land. So in this case, we were able to go directly to the feds to work out a solution. As it happened, we had long been pushing for Parks Canada to participate meaningfully in Roam transit, and 2017 was the first summer they actually stepped in to operate buses out into Banff National Park. Ever since, Parks Canada has been an active participant in Roam transit.

Canada's municipal leaders are highly skilled at advocating for their communities and making their voices heard at a provincial and a national level.

It should also be incumbent upon the federal government to consult directly with cities and towns to understand the local impacts of their policies, not just after the fact, but as the policies are being designed.

I can't gloss over the need for more tangible forms of support. Municipalities by their nature have limited avenues to increase revenue.

As Senator Simons noted in her speech, around 70% of municipal revenues come from property taxes. Residents, of course, don't like to see property taxes and other fees go up, and many of those revenues don't even stay local.

Municipalities are constantly collecting money for other people. A lot of people don't realize that in Alberta 50% of municipal taxes go right back to Edmonton.

I have had to explain many times that the Town of Banff doesn't get any cut of the National Park fees which support Parks Canada, or municipalities don't get provincial hotel tax or the local tourism improvement fees that support marketing efforts. I certainly support all of these fees for their individual purposes, but the perception is that the municipality benefits from them operationally. They don't.

In my experience, municipalities tend to have far less money and resources than people think. And the demand for services at the local level is only increasing.

I know municipalities across the country are grateful for programs like the Rapid Housing Initiative and the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, which support many worthy local projects. But the administration of these programs is not perfect.

Smaller communities are often overlooked for infrastructure funding; provincial grants are often per capita, based on federal census data that doesn't tell the whole story. Using provinces as middlemen between municipalities and the federal government delays the flow of funding and resources, and in some cases lets politics get in the way of much-needed investments.

• (1610)

Several of my colleagues in this place have observed that the perception of municipalities as children of the provinces has resulted in a harmful, paternalistic mindset. This metaphor conjures an image of Canada's towns and cities as meddling children with their hands in the cookie jar, and the federal government as an absentee grandparent, who occasionally hands over a \$20 bill through the provincial parents, of course. But they're not always quick to hand it over. This couldn't be further from the truth, and municipalities are tired of being sent to the kids' table.

I'm not proposing a one-sided relationship. I've long said that municipalities can be valuable partners in advancing national priorities. For example, municipalities play an essential role in advancing Canada's climate goals. Municipalities have the ability to accurately track GHG emissions on a small scale, providing much-needed local data to advance the fight against climate change. They can also develop specific, actionable programs to target GHG emissions and promote sustainability in their day-to-day operations through zoning, developmental approval procedures and management of roads, public transit and parks and recreation. They're the ones who make the call whether to build a new parking lot to accommodate more cars or to invest in public transit instead.

Again, a brief personal anecdote: One of my last accomplishments as Banff mayor was to call the vote and support the implementation of user-pay parking in our downtown core. Parking revenues from visitors are now paying for free transit for Banff residents to keep local vehicles at home. It's not a bad trade-off, and it's a win for the environment as well.

Taking all that into account, it's not hard to understand how municipalities have influence over approximately 50% of GHG emissions in Canada.

Municipalities also do laudable work welcoming newcomers to Canada. Like many regions, Alberta relies heavily on temporary foreign workers, and the municipalities manage successful, federally funded programs that help these individuals to adapt and integrate. It always touches my heart to see my community providing this valuable mentorship and guidance — from helping new workers fill out their first Canadian tax return to supporting families as they reunite after many, many years apart.

While funding for these efforts comes from many sources, it's the cities and towns where new immigrants will be making their homes, and the important work of welcoming them is done on the ground in local communities.

This issue, of course, is top of mind lately as thousands of Ukrainian refugees have entered Canada since January, and tens of thousands have applied for emergency entry.

Canada's municipalities have the same goals as the federal government: to create opportunity for our residents and ensure our communities are safe, healthy places to live. Municipalities play a huge part in reaching these goals, and they need to be respected as partners in Canada's prosperity.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

RCMP'S ROLE AND MANDATE

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Harder, P.C., calling the attention of the Senate to the role and mandate of the RCMP, the skills and capabilities required for it to fulfill its role and mandate, and how it should be organized and resourced in the 21st century.

(On motion of Senator Busson, debate adjourned.)

(At 4:14 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.)

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