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The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

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

Prayers.

[*Translation*]

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

NATIONAL ACCESSABILITY WEEK

Hon. Lucie Moncion: Honourable senators, this week is National AccessAbility Week.

It's an opportunity to celebrate the invaluable contributions of persons with disabilities in Canada and the work of allies and organizations that are trying to make Canada a more accessible and inclusive place.

Eight million Canadians aged 15 and over have a disability. These Canadians include professionals, colleagues, family members, friends and athletes.

During this National AccessAbility Week, it is fitting that we recognize the efforts being made in our workplace to ensure that each and every one of us is able to fully participate in the democratic process.

[*English*]

I would like to thank Julia Zayed, the Senate's Accessibility Officer, and the many employees who lead initiatives to achieve the plan's objectives. Each year, these efforts are summarized in a report that is presented to the Internal Economy Committee and submitted to the Accessibility Commissioner of Canada.

I'd also like to highlight the important work of our parliamentary reporters who provide live captioning of our proceedings in French and English. Thanks to closed captioning of Senate broadcasts and live transcription via our simultaneous transcription communication service, our proceedings are accessible to a greater number of Canadians.

We want to improve accessibility by listening to people with disabilities. To do this, we hold annual consultations, which were launched this week.

During last year's consultations, we heard from many people and organizations, including Inclusion Canada, the Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility, Specialisterne Canada and Indigenous Disability Canada.

A link to this year's survey was emailed out this week. I encourage you to fill it out if you have experiences that can help us determine how to eliminate barriers. By doing so, you will help make the Senate a barrier-free environment.

[*Translation*]

As senators, we must be accessibility leaders in the Senate and in our regions to show that we care about representing all Canadians.

Senators can contribute to these efforts by taking the accessibility awareness course that is part of the Senate's accessibility plan.

This training, which is available via IntraSen, outlines steps that we can all take to improve accessibility and inclusion in the Senate.

As we mark National AccessAbility Week, let's recognize that we can all help make our workplace one that is free from barriers and obstacles.

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

UNITED FOR LITERACY

CONGRATULATIONS ON ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard: Honourable senators, I rise today grateful to be on Algonquin Anishinaabeg territory to acknowledge the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the organization United for Literacy, formerly known as Frontier College.

Literacy serves as a fundamental pillar of individual empowerment and societal progress, enabling individuals to navigate the complexities of modern life with confidence and dignity. However, despite strides made over the past century, significant challenges remain.

Shockingly, over one million children in Canada struggle to read at grade level, according to a study by Deloitte in 2022, and nearly one in five adults lack the necessary literacy skills for daily tasks. These statistics underscore the urgent need for continued collective action to address the root causes of low literacy rates.

United for Literacy is committed to actions to address literacy. Within the past year alone, they have supported over 33,000 people with literacy and numeracy. They have distributed over 72,000 free books and 10,000 custom reading packages in over 190 communities across our nation.

More importantly, their innovative programming is tailored to the unique needs of different populations, transforming lives and uplifting communities across the country. I am very impressed with their presence in Preston Township in my home province, where lower literacy rates have been impacted by systemic racism. They facilitate multiple programs there such as the

Afrocentric Literacy Club, a program for African Nova Scotian youth with the goal of learning about the unique history of African Nova Scotians while strengthening their reading and writing skills.

There is also youth in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, tutoring and STEM clubs that offer hands-on science experiments. Their summer literature day camp provides literacy-focused activities for children, and their reading tents provide summer literacy support in underserved neighbourhoods. They work with community partners to develop these very engaging literacy programs.

Colleagues, please join me in congratulating United for Literacy on their 125-year legacy of service and commitment to advancing literacy in Canada. I look forward to joining them in a reading tent on Emancipation Day to celebrate these 125 years.

Working together to promote educational equity and opportunities for all Canadians, we will build a brighter and more inclusive future for all individuals.

Asante, 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 Rosemary Wagner. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Black.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

ONTARIO AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable colleagues, I rise today with immense pride to highlight that this year marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the University of Guelph's Ontario Agricultural College, also known as OAC. Since opening its doors in May of 1874, OAC has become internationally renowned for its research, teaching and knowledge extension in the broad areas of food, agriculture, rural communities and the environment.

Throughout its history, OAC has nurtured generations of enthusiastic students, instilling in them a deep sense of stewardship for our land, a commitment to scientific inquiry and a spirit of collaboration with industry and community partners.

Today, as we celebrate this milestone anniversary, let us reflect on OAC's enduring contributions to society. Its groundbreaking research has revolutionized farming practices, enhanced food security and fostered sustainable agricultural solutions for a changing world.

Ranked number one in Canada for agricultural sciences and number two in Canada for plant and animal sciences, these accolades reflect their unwavering commitment to excellence and their relentless pursuit of knowledge and innovation. OAC's dedication to excellence in teaching has empowered countless

students to become leaders and innovators in agriculture, driving forward progress and shaping the future of our rural communities across Ontario, our country and beyond.

As we look ahead, let us reaffirm our support for institutions like the Ontario Agricultural College, recognizing their pivotal role in addressing the challenges of our time — from climate change to food security — and in fostering a thriving and resilient agricultural sector.

Here is to 150 years of excellence and to 150 more years of innovation, discovery and impact.

And go, Aggies!

Thank you, *meegwetch*.

• (1410)

INDIGENOUS HERITAGE

Hon. Bernadette Clement: Honourable senators, I rise today as a settler and a proud ally. A settler — it's taken some time for me to get comfortable with that word, as a Black woman whose family roots run from Canada to Trinidad to Nigeria, where the slave trade uprooted my ancestors and forcefully brought them west. A settler, an ally, a Black woman and a francophone — we all carry these diverse identities with us wherever we go.

I brought them with me to Yellowknife and Dettah and Mackenzie Island in the Northwest Territories this year. Senator Anderson was supportive of my goal: I wanted to meet with folks to understand their experiences.

[*Translation*]

I set my sights high and requested meetings with a dozen groups. I underestimated just how hospitable northerners can be, and I ended up with a very full schedule.

[*English*]

I snowmobiled across Great Slave Lake to Dechinta Liwe Camp, where the community was invited to pull in fishnets, cut and gut fish, and meet with elders and leaders. I won't be able to do justice to what it felt like to be warmly welcomed on the land, to watch a storm roll in across the lake while we talked about the creation of different words for climate change, and to witness the pride that my new friends felt in their culture and their traditions.

I went back to Dettah the next day to meet with Chief Betsina, Chief Sangris and language expert Mary Rose Sundberg. They were clear that last-minute, temporary grants were not going to do the job of restoring language skills, which were so thoroughly cut off by residential schools. We talked about solutions — namely, stable, sustainable funding sent directly to communities.

At CKLB Radio, I met journalist and translator Judi Kochon. Judi is a champion of her language, and I'm honoured to be able to share with you, honourable colleagues, how she inspired me. As a residential school survivor, she'd spent only two months a year speaking with her parents in her native language, North Slavey. She didn't think she was fluent enough to speak on radio,

but the elders said to her, “Try. We’ll help you. We have confidence in you.” So when she told listeners that wood buffalo were on the highway, but mistranslated and said they were sneaking in the willows, there were calls to correct, yes, but there was also laughter.

After decades in the business, Judi still has so much energy, and she’s well supported by Native Communications Society CEO and ally Rob Ouellette.

I have so many more stories to tell, and more shared wisdom to pass along, but that will have to wait for another day. I’ll end with this: I was originally going to give this statement on March 31 on National Indigenous Languages Day, or in the month of June during National Indigenous History Month, but here I am today on a random Wednesday in May. As a Black woman, I know that Black history shouldn’t be celebrated and recognized only in February; it matters every day of the year. In the same way, I carry the work of allyship with me every day, as well as gratitude for the folks I met in the Northwest Territories. Thank you. *Nia:wen*.

NEWFOUNDLAND’S UNKNOWN SOLDIER

Hon. Iris G. Petten: Honourable senators, my grandson, Kai Millar Ewing, is a descendant of Edwin Edgar Jr. Born in 1896 in Greenspond, Newfoundland and Labrador, he was the son of Helen Ewing Edgar and Edwin Edgar Sr.

In December 1914, aged 18, Edwin enlisted at the C.L.B. Armoury in St. John’s as a proud member of the Newfoundland Regiment. The enlistment of her youngest child had Helen overwrought with fear. Edwin Sr. felt that Edwin should be supported in “doing his bit,” and that this war would be “of short duration” and “the making of young Edwin.”

In February 1915, Edwin sailed for Europe, for the first time seeing another world far from his beloved Newfoundland. By April 1916, his regiment was in France preparing for the summer offensive on the Somme. It was here where the event that would forever be etched into the hearts and memories of Newfoundlanders was about to unfold.

Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916 — to this day, it is the first piece of island history passed to the children of Newfoundland and Labrador. There were 800 Newfoundlanders who entered an onslaught of machine gun fire, from which only 68 answered the morning roll call. The advance halted only because “dead men could advance no further.”

How did Edwin feel on that defining morning? Did he advance through the hail of bullets “with his chin tucked into his collar as if shielding himself from the bite of a Newfoundland blizzard”?

Edwin was reported missing in action on July 1, 1916. As the news of the losses from the regiment spread to every community, Edwin’s family held out hope that he had survived. By October, they were finally informed that Edwin had been killed in action. He was 19 years old. Edwin has no known grave. His resting place is known unto God, and his name is etched beneath the caribou at the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial.

With the repatriation from France of the unknown soldier of Newfoundland, Edwin and all the lost sons of our beloved island have returned. In the words of The Ennis Sisters:

Too soon to leave this earth
How could all your work be done
Ash to ash and dust to dust
Seemed to me you just begun . . .
I will sing you home

They are now home.

Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Doris Chan. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Omidvar.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

JUSTICE

CHARTER STATEMENT IN RELATION TO BILL C-58—
DOCUMENT TABLED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a Charter Statement prepared by the Minister of Justice in relation to Bill C-58, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Canada Industrial Relations Board Regulations, 2012, pursuant to the *Department of Justice Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. J-2, sbs. 4.2(1).

CHARTER STATEMENT IN RELATION TO BILL C-69—
DOCUMENT TABLED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a Charter Statement prepared by the Minister of Justice in relation to Bill C-69, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 16, 2024, pursuant to the *Department of Justice Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. J-2, sbs. 4.2(1).

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

THIRD REPORT OF SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE—
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TABLED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government response, dated May 28, 2024, to the third report of the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying, entitled *MAID and Mental Disorders: the Road Ahead*, deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on January 29, 2024.

ADJOURNMENT

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, June 4, 2024, at 2 p.m.

QUESTION PERIOD

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

POULTRY IMPORT REGULATIONS

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Senator Gold, yesterday I had the distinct pleasure of meeting with the Chicken Farmers of Canada. They once again raised with me the problem that they are having with chicken meat being fraudulently imported into Canada as spent fowl in order to bypass import controls. Unlike chicken, there's no limit on how much spent fowl can be imported.

There is a solution to this problem, leader. It involves using existing DNA tests to verify imports on a random basis. I'm told it is not very difficult at all to do and yet, for some reason, this government is doing nothing about this issue.

• (1420)

Leader, can you tell me why the Trudeau government is not listening to our chicken farmers? Why hasn't this problem been addressed?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question.

I also had the pleasure of meeting representatives from the Chicken Farmers of Canada, or the poultry producers, this week. Unfortunately, they didn't raise that issue with me, but thank you for bringing it to my attention. I simply don't know the answer, but I will certainly raise the issue with the minister.

Senator Plett: Leader, I've attended meetings of the Senate's Agriculture Committee where representatives of the Trudeau government assured us repeatedly that they were considering the feasibility of using DNA testing to address this problem. That was in 2016. I appreciate your reply and that you will follow up on this. I hope I don't have to wait eight years for an answer.

Do you expect us to believe that this is still under consideration? Why the holdup?

Senator Gold: Thank you, senator.

I was never able to attend meetings of that committee. As you might know, I was the deputy chair of the Fisheries Committee, which met at the same time. This really is the first time this issue has been brought to my attention, so I will certainly raise it with the minister at my first opportunity.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Hon. Leo Housakos: Senator Gold, I have some good news for you and your Liberal Party. We've actually found somebody who's less popular than Justin Trudeau: your beloved CBC. Their ratings are actually lower than Justin Trudeau's polling numbers. Despite that, Senator Gold, your government continues to throw good money after bad at the CBC.

Of course, you're going to tell me that they produce great Canadian content and do great work, but the truth is that the only thing they do is try to make fat cats as rich as possible. We have just found out that \$15 billion in bonuses for fiscal year 2023 has been paid to executives and managers — imagine that — for operating with low ratings and failing in terms of their mandate. Meanwhile, they've fired 346 people at the CBC who produce programming.

Senator Gold, does your government think this is a valuable use of taxpayer money? Do you think the CBC is producing what Canadians actually want? Are they getting value for their dollars, or are they just not worth the cost?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and for your ongoing attacks on CBC/Radio-Canada. They are attacks, Senator Housakos.

Let me address your question. Yesterday, if you were listening, Senator Forest offered a very fair and balanced assessment of the importance of the CBC to many areas, communities and constituencies in this country. The Government of Canada continues to believe that a public broadcaster is in the best interests of Canadians, notwithstanding the challenges that it and

all other broadcasters are facing as the digital age and people's ways of consuming news evolve. It will continue to do what it can to support the CBC as it seeks to transition into this new age.

Senator Housakos: You keep fighting for the fat cats. I'll keep fighting for the taxpayers.

Senator Gold, when CBC President and CEO Catherine Tait appeared before a parliamentary committee just three weeks ago, long after the fiscal year-end, she said that no bonus for 2023 had been paid out and that her own bonus wouldn't be decided upon until a board meeting in June this year. She lied to a parliamentary committee, Senator Gold. If you're not concerned enough about the millions going to executives instead of programming, are you at least concerned about the highly paid civil servant lying to a parliamentary committee about her bonus?

Senator Gold: Senator, I think you are misrepresenting the situation yet again.

I will refer you to articles in the *National Post*, hardly a friend of this government, which explain more clearly the differences between what was said and what you are asserting.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

CONFLICT IN SUDAN

Hon. Mary Coyle: Senator Gold, the conflict in Sudan has led to a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Over 15,000 people have been killed and more than 8.8 million people are displaced, with millions facing imminent famine. A recent report from the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights said that it's "... nearly impossible to overstate the global indifference and inaction in the face of ongoing devastating mass atrocities in Sudan." At our May 23 Foreign Affairs Committee meeting, former Canadian ambassador to South Sudan Nicholas Coghlan said, "... we need eyes on the ground if we're to make a difference. We have quit the field in Sudan. ..."

Senator Gold, former ambassador Coghlan said that our allies have kept staff in the region or have given them roving commissions. Is this something Canada is planning to do? Indifference is really not the Canadian approach.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, senator.

Indifference is not the Canadian approach. The scale of violence and human suffering is devastating. The government condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the violence that is happening in Sudan, which includes, as we all know — and tragically so — sexual and gender-based violence. It must end.

I understand that due to the ongoing security situation, the Canadian embassy in Khartoum, Sudan, has temporarily suspended operations. Having said that, Canada continues to provide humanitarian aid, and we will continue to work with international and regional partners to support African-led solutions.

Senator Coyle: Thank you.

Mr. Coghlan also mentioned the importance of the Office of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise, which handles complaints about possible human rights abuses by Canadian companies. Former ambassador Coghlan said, "... It has no teeth . . . It must be given at least the power to compel testimony from defendants . . ."

Others have called for greater investigatory powers and independence.

Senator Gold, does the government plan to give the ombudsperson sufficient authority and independence to hold Canadian companies operating overseas to account and prevent human rights abuses?

Senator Gold: Thank you for underlining the work of that office. It is an important institution. Canada has taken and supported many new measures related to RBC, or responsible business conduct abroad, since the creation of CORE, the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise.

With regard to your specific question, I've been informed, as the fifth anniversary of the creation of CORE approaches, that the government recognizes the value of it and will undertake a review of that office later this year.

HEALTH

ACTION PLAN ON ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

Hon. Stan Kutcher: Senator Gold, almost a decade after the Auditor General raised the alarm, Canada finally released its Pan-Canadian Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance. We are already behind international counterparts in bringing new antimicrobials to the domestic market. That means physicians and health care professionals in Canada do not have ready access to the full complement of globally available antimicrobials, limiting treatment options for Canadians.

Can you tell us what specific measures the government has put in place since the release of that report to ensure that Canadians have the same access to new antimicrobials as citizens from other Western countries do?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, senator.

As part of the Pan-Canadian Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, there are five pillars and associated priority actions. Under the research and innovation pillar, the government will develop and implement economic and/or regulatory incentives to support innovation and to facilitate sustainable access to new and existing antimicrobials, diagnostics and alternatives to antimicrobials. That is in addition to developing a National One Health Research Strategy for combatting AMR across all action plan pillars.

Senator Kutcher: Thank you for that, Senator Gold. We are aware of what the report says. I was just wondering what action has been taken.

For example, as far as I can tell, funding for the action plan was not mentioned in the 2024 federal budget. Funding for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, or CIHR, is already inadequate to support international competitiveness and scientific research.

Can you share with us how this action plan will be funded?

Senator Gold: Thank you.

Since its release there have been a number of initiatives under the plan that have been funded. That includes an investment of \$6.3 million in the Combatting Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria Biopharmaceutical Accelerator, CARB-X, in support of global and domestic antimicrobial innovation. It's a non-profit organization and a global partnership that works to address the threat of antibiotic resistance. There is also funding through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, or CIHR, that established the AMR Research Initiative, which provides \$1.8 million in annual grant funds.

• (1430)

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS

Hon. Jean-Guy Dagenais: Leader, the government you represent recently passed what it called the Official Languages Act applicable to federal institutions. This means that, since June 2023, the managers of Canadian institutions must be able to communicate with their employees in the official language of the employees' choice. However, the position of Chief Statistician of Canada was recently posted, and I was surprised to see that bilingualism is not a requirement for the big boss at Statistics Canada — which, by the way, also employs francophones.

Once again, does the Prime Minister have the right to ignore French as an official language? Do you honestly think that a unilingual francophone would be hired to head up Statistics Canada?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): The government takes its constitutional and legal responsibilities towards official language minority communities and official language communities very seriously.

The best person to fill a position may not necessarily be bilingual in the strict sense of the word, although knowledge of both official languages is important. The ability and willingness to work toward becoming proficient in a second language are an essential asset for people who accept a position.

Senator Dagenais: I would like to point out that Kori Cheverie, a unilingual anglophone who coaches Canada's national women's ice hockey team, is giving radio interviews in French just six months after saying she would learn French.

Can you tell us whether the Governor General of Canada would be able to speak even two sentences in French today, without notes, or was her promise to learn French, which was made three years ago now, just a way to silence her critics? How much progress has she made in learning Canada's second official language?

Senator Gold: I can give a very brief answer. Yes, she is able to do that.

[English]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

LEGACY OF SLAVERY

Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard: Senator Gold, while there have been a number of very positive initiatives under the three pillars of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent — which are recognition, justice and development — there is still much work to be done. I am pleased to see that the government has committed to continuing the work of the UN Decade for another three years, since we were late signing on to that work; however, I hear from many Black Canadians who are descendants of enslaved Canadians due to Canada's role in the transatlantic slave trade that there is unfinished business. Despite two petitions over the past few years, the federal government has not issued an apology for this historic injustice, which is crucial to advancing work on these three pillars. Can we anticipate an apology from the federal government for Canada's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and for reminding us that our history is blemished in this regard, as it is in others. It's a mark of a mature country that it is willing to face its past and subject it to honest and transparent criticism.

I'm unaware of what the government's plans are with regard to your question, but I will certainly raise it with the relevant minister at the first opportunity.

Senator Bernard: Senator Gold, thank you for your commitment to raising this. When you do so, it would be really good for Black Canadians to know why there is such resistance to issuing an apology to Black Canadians for the transatlantic slave trade. Thank you.

Senator Gold: I certainly will raise the issue, though I really am not in a position to opine as to whether there is resistance, as you said or as others may fear. I will certainly raise this issue at the earliest opportunity.

PUBLIC SAFETY

EXTORTION OFFENCES

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan: Senator Gold, according to Statistics Canada, extortion offences have risen by 218% across the country. In the Greater Toronto Area, extortion has increased by 155% in the past decade. In Vancouver, it has grown by a horrific 228%. It's a sad and scary reality that many Canadians are living in fear and facing threats at the hands of organized crime or gangs. Families and small businesses pay huge sums of money in the hopes of avoiding property damage or physical violence.

Leader, why has the Trudeau government done nothing to address the surge of extortion on its watch?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. Actions such as those you've described, whether they occur in Toronto or other cities, are a very unacceptable part of our landscape. They affect too many Canadians of all ages and their families.

Canada has robust laws in the Criminal Code that rely on the detection, reporting and prosecution of these crimes to enforce. They are largely outside federal jurisdiction; however, if you believe that there are changes to the federal Criminal Code that would assist provincial prosecutors and police forces, the government would be pleased to take action.

Senator Ataullahjan: Leader, if the NDP-Trudeau government is serious about fighting surging extortion, then why did MPs vote to kill a private bill from Conservative MP Tim Uppal last week?

Senator Gold: Though I'm responsible for many things, I perhaps don't follow all the private members' bills that are still in the House as carefully as you do. I'm not familiar with the bill and really cannot speak to its merits or why it did not pass.

CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Leader, last week Senator Martin asked you if you agreed that housing starts should go up during a housing crisis instead of down. Your answer was no. As someone who has spent a lifetime in construction trades, I can only shake my head at that response.

Richard Lyall, President of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario, also spent his career in construction. He appeared before a House committee on Monday and was asked if the Prime Minister's promise to build 3.87 million homes by 2031 was realistic. His response was, "Not a chance."

Leader, should Canadians believe this man or the incompetent Trudeau government that caused the housing crisis in the first place?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. Hansard will reveal the exact words I used, but I was trying to communicate, as someone who has experience in building houses and that area of construction, that after a project is conceived, it can take much time — indeed, many years, depending on the project — before the shovels are in the ground. That was the purpose of my answer. It was not about whether it should or should not. Of course, we want houses to spring up miraculously, as they would in a video game, but the reality is much more complicated and involves more than just the federal government's role.

That said, what the government is doing, along with municipalities and provinces, is unlocking a great deal of potential. Houses and projects are going forward.

Senator Plett: Maybe to you "no" means something other than what it means to me. When asked about housing starts, Mr. Lyall told the committee:

Right now, we're staring into a pit. What we're saying is that when cranes come down, they're not going back up.

• (1440)

His words were backed by recent data. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, said that housing starts are down 9% year over year and multi-unit starts are down 11%. Leader, these are statistics from your own agency. Are they wrong, leader?

Senator Gold: I'm not questioning the statistics. I'm questioning the foundations of your analysis as to how houses are built. It is a good thing for those residents of Ontario that the Government of Ontario has finally come up with a revised plan that has allowed the federal government and the Province of Ontario to partner and use the hundreds of millions of dollars of federal money to build more houses for Ontario residents. That's the way houses get built.

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

CANADA DISABILITY BENEFIT

Hon. Chantal Petitclerc: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, as Senator Moncion pointed out, we're in the middle of National AccessAbility Week, a special time of year to celebrate our progress and take stock of our challenges.

As you know, many of us, both inside and outside Parliament, are still reeling from seeing the modest amount announced in the budget for the Canada Disability Benefit.

Senator Gold, your government has been pressured on this issue for weeks now, and rightly so, as we recall that the stated objective of that benefit was to lift people living with disabilities out of poverty.

This is what we've been told dozens of times:

[*English*]

“To lift persons with disability out of poverty.”

[*Translation*]

We cannot do that with \$200 a month. Knowing that, can you assure us that your government will be proposing other measures in the near future to help us to achieve our objective?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, senator. I want to once again sincerely reiterate that the government understands people's disappointment with the amount allocated for this first step.

However, it's important to remember that this a first step, and it's accompanied by all of the other measures that the government has put in place or is in the process of putting in place to help people who are living in poverty.

As you said, it is entirely fair and legitimate to focus on the Canada disability benefit, but I would invite you look at it in the context of all of the investments that Canada has made and continues to make to help those who are struggling with problems related to the cost of living and poverty.

Senator Pettilerc: Senator Gold, you should take advantage of this wonderful National AccessAbility Week to visit the government's website, which is peppered with messages about inclusiveness and accessibility. Do you agree that, when it comes to accessibility, what we need is less talk and more action?

Senator Gold: Of course, I agree. We need to roll up our sleeves and get the job done.

That being said, words, like intentions, are important because they give us a vision and a glimpse of what is to come. The government continues to work on this issue.

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

CITIZENSHIP LEGISLATION

Hon. Jim Quinn: My question is for Senator Gold. It relates to Bill C-71, an act to amend the Citizenship Act. This legislation is in response to a December 19, 2023, Ontario Superior Court ruling that ruled that first-generation limit found in the present Citizenship Act is contrary to the Charter and unconstitutional.

[Senator Pettilerc]

The court gave the government a six-month period to fix the legislation, and that six months is up on June 19. The government can now demonstrate that it is taking action through the introduction of Bill C-71 in the other place last week.

Given this and the importance of this matter in determining who is a Canadian, should the government not seek an extension to the June 19 deadline so this important piece of legislation can be fully considered in the other place and not sent to the Senate with little time to be fully examined by committee, fully debated and senators having the opportunity to provide sober second thought?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, Senator Quinn. You may know something that I don't. I don't know that it is the intention of the government to send it to the Senate so that we will then be asked to pass it before June 19. That is not my understanding of what is on the agenda in the other place. Nor do I have knowledge of whether they are going to ask for an extension because — to the best of my understanding, Senator Quinn — this important Bill C-71, which was only recently introduced in the House, will not receive Royal Assent by June 19.

Since you've raised this question and as I have no knowledge of any plans to get it here soon, much less out of here soon, I'll certainly make some inquiries so that I am aware of what the situation is. Thank you.

Senator Quinn: Thank you, Senator Gold. As a follow-up, surely there is an obligation to respond with the court's decision to reply by June 19, but it sounds like that may not be a legal requirement. Would that be correct?

Senator Gold: Well, no, Senator Quinn, I think what senators should understand is that when a court gives a grace period for a government to respond, they're simply inviting the government to legislate or to take the time to legislate if that's how they choose to respond. There is no sanction that a court could impose upon a sovereign parliament to act or not act. The consequence, however, would be if Parliament doesn't fill the legal gap and there are legal consequences. But I'm sure the government has taken that into account.

PUBLIC SAFETY

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

Hon. Leo Housakos: Senator Gold, foreign influence has been an issue for the Conservative Party now for many years. We had legislation in the other place, the Kenny Chiu bill. I moved legislation here because it is an existential crisis facing our country which challenges our democracy and our economic institutions. Yet, this government has been negligent in dealing with this issue. In her preliminary report from the public inquiry

that your government called, Justice Hogue released a scathing report against this government and how negligent you have been. I can't wait to read the actual report.

You've now tabled a bill in haste — I believe it's a public relations exercise because nobody seems to be interested in foreign interference in this chamber over the last two years or by your government. Can we have a commitment that your government in this chamber will do whatever it takes to make sure that Bill C-70, which was tabled in the other place, will become law expeditiously and efficiently before the end of this Parliament, which is 12 months or less as things are going?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Well, senator, you never miss an opportunity, do you? It's a serious problem. I simply do not — and the government does not — accept your characterization either of what the interim report of Justice Hogue has said or of the government's behaviour.

The Government of Canada was very pleased to see Michael Chong's expression of support for Bill C-70 and the offer of your party to expedite its passage through the House. I can assure both you and this chamber that when we get this bill — and I do not know when we will — I have every confidence in the Senate to study it properly.

You can count on the Government Representative Office in the Senate to do everything that we can to have this bill studied properly and passed effectively and expeditiously because it's an important bill.

Senator Housakos: Senator Gold, for a number of years, the public has seen your government run and hide when it comes to this issue. You procrastinated on having a public inquiry — it took months and months of pressure from the opposition to have one. Now we finally have a bill, and I'm asking a simple question. Yes, we will come to terms. We agree. We want to do this. We wanted to do this six years ago.

All I'm asking you is this: Will your government commit that we will get to the end of the finish line and have legislation in place so we can deal with these nefarious forces by the end of this Parliament? Can we have your commitment that it will be law, passed by both chambers, before the end of this Parliament?

Senator Gold: Senator Housakos, you may be projecting into the future or longing for the past. I do not have the power to give you a commitment as to how the Senate will deal with a government bill. Believe me, it would make my job a lot easier if I could. I'm counting on your support, Senator Housakos, and the support of senators to do a proper study of this bill and to pass it without any delay.

• (1450)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate):

Honourable senators, pursuant to the order adopted December 7, 2021, I would like to inform the Senate that Question Period with the Honourable Diane Lebouthillier, P.C., M.P., Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, will take place on Tuesday, June 4, 2024, at 4:00 p.m.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS BILL

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING

Leave having been given to proceed to Other Business, Commons Public Bills, Second Reading, Order No. 2:

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Housakos, seconded by the Honourable Senator Seidman, for the second reading of Bill C-281, An Act to amend the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act, the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Sergei Magnitsky Law), the Broadcasting Act and the Prohibiting Cluster Munitions Act.

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

(On motion of Senator Housakos, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade.)

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR EYE CARE BILL

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING

Leave having been given to proceed to Other Business, Commons Public Bills, Second Reading, Order No. 3:

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Ravalia, seconded by the Honourable Senator Woo, for the second reading of Bill C-284, An Act to establish a national strategy for eye care.

Hon. Brent Cotter: Honourable senators, I rise to speak briefly on Bill C-284. I don't usually get to speak on Wednesday, so this is a special honour.

You've heard the numbers with respect to vision: the extent of vision loss among Canadians in the millions; the economic losses in the billions; the emotional effect of loss of enjoyment of life; and the cost to Canadians who suffer — often unnecessarily — from vision loss. These are heartbreaking messages, and I hope they will motivate us to act with respect to this bill.

My own motivation to speak today, though, is inspired by two things: first, the wise, thoughtful leadership of Senator Ravalia on this matter; and, second, personal experience.

One of the remarkable things about this version of the Senate is the diversity of expertise residing in our individual senators. Each of us in this place looks to make meaningful contributions, often drawing on our own non-Senate experience and expertise and hopefully finding ways to make contributions that are consistent with our values and hopes to build a better Canada. Senator Ravalia is an exemplar in this regard, drawing from his experience as a medical doctor, his knowledge and his empathy for so many — including many patients suffering from vision loss, particularly in cases where this was preventable.

Senator Ravalia has agreed to sponsor this meaningful bill. It will not cure vision loss, but it will mandate the development of a long-overdue national strategy to address a scourge experienced by so many. I'm confident that its value is incontrovertible. I'm confident it is incontrovertible from your perspective as well. It is a bill from the heart — is a model of the man who sponsors it in this place. I hope we will appreciate this work and commitment on his part and his partner in the other place, member of Parliament Judy Sgro.

Thank you, Mohamed. I'm honoured even in this small way to be associated with your work. We will all bask in the reflective glory of this achievement, both when the bill is passed and in the years ahead when a national framework makes a real difference in reducing preventable vision loss.

My second motivation in speaking today is personal. My mother passed away a few years ago at the age of 95. She was a loving, kind, devout woman and a supportive spouse to our father. My father tended to occupy a larger-than-life place in the close, loving family, but my mother was a critical anchor to it.

For pretty much the last 25 years of her life, my mother lived with steadily advancing macular degeneration and was legally blind for pretty much the last 20 years of her life. However, my mother was fortunate in so many ways — ways in which others who suffer from vision loss are not. She had a happy marriage of 55 years, a loving husband and wonderful children. She's not here to dispute that. It's kind of fun when there are no rebuttals.

Our family was not wealthy, but we lived comfortable lives, and my mother had a deep, deep religious faith — deeper than anyone I have ever known. I mention these things for two reasons. First, unlike many in her situation, although her own steadily declining loss of vision caused a meaningful diminishment in her life, she was fortunate and aware of it. This was one negative aspect of an otherwise fulfilling and meaningful life.

For example, she loved to travel. When it came to travel, she had the view that one third of the joy of travel was the anticipation, one third was the experience and one third was the remembrance. Even with macular degeneration, she still loved to travel, and the more exotic, the better. Though the experiences were much diminished by vision loss — and she had to hear more and more of what we told her we saw — she still had a great experience in those regards.

With respect to “the more exotic, the better,” I have one example. One year, when she was about 80 and had lost most of her vision, we went on a trip to Uganda. While we were there, we stayed at a resort near a lake in the western part of Uganda in the heart of a pretty basic, unfenced reserve filled with, among other animals, hippopotamuses — if that's the right plural. Walking back to our rooms after dinner one evening just at dusk, she and my daughter Kelly got out in front of the rest of us. Between my daughter's lack of attentiveness and my mother's lack of vision — a bad combination of “lacks,” let me tell you — they came within a few feet of walking into the rear-end of a hippopotamus enjoying an early evening feeding. We learned afterward that this was a very dangerous situation. Our host rescued them. However, my mother, stoic as ever, was of the view that if this was the way she would meet her maker — through a combination of lost vision and an unfriendly hippo — so be it.

• (1500)

She was this way with her vision loss too. It was her lot in life, she felt. Her powerful faith made this acceptance possible for her in life.

I greatly admire the way in which my mother accepted — even embraced — this infirmity, but all of us wish that she had been able to live her life more fully with good eyesight.

I hope — as I'm sure my mother could — that through the initiative of this bill, we will reach a stage where this kind of vision loss and so many other vision infirmities are a vestige of the past. It is, in some respects, a small tribute to my mother that I make these remarks.

I hope you will support this bill, help to send it across the finish line without delay and get this important work under way. Thank you.

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

(On motion of Senator Ravalia, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-13(2), I move:

That the Senate do now adjourn.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(At 3:02 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.)

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