



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION



45th PARLIAMENT



VOLUME 154



NUMBER 28

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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Publications Centre: Publications@sen.parl.gc.ca

Published by the Senate
Available on the Internet: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

THE SENATE

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

OXI DAY

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to commemorate a moment in history that continues to inspire not just the people of Greece but all those who cherish the principles of freedom and democracy.

On this day, we remember the moment in 1940 when Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas was faced with an ultimatum from Mussolini's fascist regime. The choice was clear: Submit to occupation or face war. The response from Greece was swift, resolute and unequivocal: *Oxi*. No.

That single word defined a nation's courage, proving that moral strength can stand against military might. It was a refusal to surrender to tyranny and a declaration that liberty and dignity are not negotiable.

The resistance that followed turned the tide of history, having helped delay Axis advances and contributing to the ultimate defence of the democratic ideals in Europe.

As a proud Greek Canadian, I know that the spirit of *Oxi* lives on today in the Hellenic community here in Canada and around the world.

The values that guided Greece in its darkest hours — courage, integrity and liberty — are the same values that generations of Greek immigrants have carried into their Canadian life. These principles are not only Greek values but also core Canadian values, reminding us that freedom, opportunity and the strength of community are not inherited; they are built and defended by each generation. That really is the essence of Oxi Day. It reminds us that the fight for freedom is never finished.

The same test of principle that Greece faced then confronts nations today in different forms and contexts. Each generation must decide whether to stand firm in its values or yield to convenience and complacency.

We live in a world where, too often, we see the temptation to compromise on principles for short-term political or economic gain. Too often, we see leaders in the West turn a blind eye to the actions of authoritarian regimes that trample on human rights and undermine the very values we hold dear.

We cannot afford such compromises. Standing here today, we are reminded that the courage of a single nation can set an example for the world. Oxi Day challenges us to act with conviction, confront injustice wherever it appears and hold fast to the values that define us. Let us carry that spirit forward in the

choices we make as citizens and leaders by ensuring that the forces of tyranny are never allowed to gain ground and that freedom and integrity are never sacrificed.

Thank you, colleagues.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

Hon. Dawn Arnold: Honourable senators, I rise today to celebrate the diversity of voices that we are privileged to have here in the Red Chamber.

As someone who has worked to advance diversity and inclusion throughout my career, I've witnessed first-hand how it transforms organizations and communities. When we have a range of voices, life experiences and perspectives around our decision-making tables, we make wiser, more inclusive and more forward-looking choices.

[*Translation*]

I also want to take a moment to celebrate a truly remarkable event that occurred in my province of New Brunswick. For the first time in the province's history, New Brunswick is being led by three extraordinary women: the Premier, Susan Holt; the Lieutenant Governor, Louise Imbeault; and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Francine Landry. I recently had the privilege of hearing them speak at a conference organized by Women for 50%, a non-partisan movement to support gender parity in politics.

[*English*]

When Women for 50% was founded in 2017, only 16% of our legislative assembly were women. That number rose to 22% in 2018, 29% in 2020 and 35% in 2024. Their goal now is clear and ambitious: full parity — 50% — by the 2028 provincial election.

Through my work encouraging women and diverse voices to step forward for municipal leadership in Moncton, I have seen first-hand the transformative power of representation. When women lead and when diverse perspectives are heard, our communities become stronger, more innovative and more compassionate.

Today, as we reflect on the diversity within this chamber, let us remember that this is who we are as Canadians: a country strengthened by many voices, many perspectives and many stories. Let us continue to open doors so that the decision-making tables of tomorrow truly reflect the full diversity of the people we serve from coast to coast to coast.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of the Deputy Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy, Rear-Admiral Dan Charlebois, and the Commissioner of the Coast Guard, Mario Pelletier. They are accompanied by other members of the Canadian Coast Guard and Royal Canadian Navy. They are the guests of the Honourable Senators Henkel and Patterson.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY
CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, today, we are paying tribute to the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard. I want to do so by recognizing a simple truth: Canada is and always has been a maritime nation. However, regionalism and sea blindness have made this sector and this work invisible to too many Canadians.

[English]

Canada's maritime future depends not only on ships and infrastructure but also on its people. These are the skilled, dedicated professionals — some of whom are in the gallery with us today — who cover every discipline and will keep our waters secure, sustainable and prosperous.

From our ports and shipyards to our research institutes, from the bridges of merchant vessels to the decks of the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard, we share a common challenge and purpose: building and maintaining the workforce that supports our maritime strength.

We are bordered by three oceans and blessed with numerous inland seas. We are profoundly connected to all of them for our sovereignty, our economy and our environment.

The Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard are central to this national effort. They represent dedication, technical skill and a strong commitment to protecting Canada's interests, both at home and abroad.

Their success relies not only on advanced ships and systems but also on the men and women who serve. Whether they are watchkeepers, operators, deckhands, engineers, logisticians or — yes — even medical professionals, we will always need crews who bring expertise, resilience and heart to every mission.

Enhancing the wider maritime workforce reinforces these institutions and, in turn, boosts our nation's ability to exercise sovereignty, maintain safety and respond effectively to crises.

• (1410)

I wish to remind everyone present that the maritime workforce is not just one sector; it's an ecosystem that includes both civilian and military parts. It spans public, private and academic realms.

Long-term success will depend on alignment across that ecosystem, including education and training, recruitment and retention, policy and partnerships. The sector's significance, combined with persistent labour challenges, strengthens the case for declaring it a critical industry with government support. It is a major nation-building effort.

[Translation]

We need to encourage the next generation to see the maritime industry not as a career, but as a vocation, one that contributes to Canada's security, prosperity and openness to the world.

Our success will depend on our ability to recruit, retain and empower those who will carry out this essential work.

That is why, on behalf of all honourable senators, I want to thank the men and women of the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard for their leadership, discernment and dedication.

Hon. Danièle Henkel: Honourable senators, today, we are celebrating Navy and Coast Guard Day. This is an opportunity to pay tribute to those who watch over our waters, coasts and lives day and night.

The Canadian Coast Guard is a quiet but essential force. Operating on three oceans, the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence, it ensures maritime safety, protects the marine environment and supports coastal and northern communities through rescue, icebreaking, environmental monitoring and sovereignty operations in the Arctic.

[English]

In the Northern territories, where distances are vast and conditions are extreme, the Coast Guard's presence is a matter of not only logistics but survival.

The *Polar Max* icebreaker, currently under construction, will further bolster this capacity. Showcasing cutting-edge technology, it will demonstrate Canada's ability to respond and serve in the most challenging regions of the globe. Behind every beacon and every ship are women and men — sailors, engineers, technicians and scientists — who have chosen to serve the public good. Their motto, "Saluti Primum, Auxilio Semper" — or "Safety First, Service Always" — is not just a slogan: It is a promise that they keep every day, often far from the public eye.

[Translation]

As the first female honorary captain of the Canadian Coast Guard, I had the privilege of meeting these crews and witnessing their expertise and courage. They embody the noblest values of the public service: duty, solidarity and humility. Behind them stand their families, who share in the sacrifices of this vocation.

The Coast Guard is also a tangible demonstration of our presence on our oceans and ice, a presence that protects, connects and affirms Canada as a responsible and peaceful maritime power.

Today, let's pay tribute to their strength, endurance and dedication. I want them to know that the Parliament of Canada sees them, recognizes them and thanks them. Long live the Canadian Coast Guard and long live the Royal Canadian Navy.

Thank you.

[English]

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Senator Hay's mother, Jeanne Hay.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

THE MAN FROM NEWFOUNDLAND

Hon. Fabian Manning: Honourable senators, today I'm pleased to present Chapter 94 of "Telling our Story."

Newfoundland and Labrador recitations are a distinct form of oral poetry and part of the province's rich storytelling tradition. For those of us who missed out when God was distributing musical talents, having the ability to recite a story or poem gave you an opportunity to participate, whether the party was around the kitchen table or out in the shed.

Recitations are often performed by storytellers and shed light on the province's unique heritage, culture and way of life. They can cover a wide range of topics, from humorous tales about everyday life to more serious and tragic stories that preserve local history and tradition.

Thousands of recitations exist, but with my allotted time here today, I can bring forward only one, so I chose "The Man from Newfoundland," written by George Hoskins.

You will know him when you meet him,
He's different from the rest.
He hails from Terra Nova,
And he's better than the best.
He's a downright Newfoundlander,
A man of many parts.
He can spin a long and salty yarn
or talk about the arts.
With the chainsaw, he's a wizard,
He can walk a rolling log.
He can make his way to his own stagehead through the
thickest pea soup fog,
And he likes to sit and smoke his pipe and drink his glass of
grog.
Sometimes he goes a roaming in places faraway,

You can hear him sing with a little lilting ring,
"The Star of Logy Bay."

Now maybe he comes from Ireland's Eye or maybe Joe Batt's Arm.

It matters not, he will greet you with a handshake firm
and warm and treat you as a long-lost friend with rare,
delightful charm.

His forebearers came from England or across the Irish Sea.

Like them he loves his island home,

Where the winds blow strong and free,

And the strangers stand spellbound and thrilled
by the unmatched scenery.

Now when it comes to politics,

He'll let you understand.

He accepts Confederation, but he is still for Newfoundland.

He is touchy on this subject

And you will find him hard to sway.

He's blunt and always speaks his mind in a plain,
straightforward way

Be he a city man or a Bayman,

From north, south, east or west.

His views on mainland ways are dim,

the good ole times were best.

He speaks the King's language

In a casual sort of way,

And sometimes quite inadvertently

His H's go astray.

And if he drops them, you can safely bet,

He comes from English stock,

A man you can depend upon,

As solid as a rock.

But if you want a different accent,

Come up the Southern Shore,

Where people speak the richest brogue,

And they are Irish to the core.

He may be of the rugged type,

And fished the banks for cod.

He may occupy the pulpit,

And preach the word of God.

But whatever his vocation,

Be it low or be it high.

He's just an average Newfoundlander

And a pretty decent guy!

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 Iris Evans, former Minister of Finance and Enterprise of Alberta. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Pupatello.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

SARAH MCLACHLAN, O.C.

Hon. Marnie McBean: Colleagues, today I'd like to share, with respect and admiration, the career and contributions of Sarah McLachlan, who is playing in Ottawa this evening.

Sarah is one of Canada's most respected and beloved singer-songwriters. Born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, she began playing music as a child, signed her first record deal while still a teenager and has built a remarkable international career that has spanned decades.

Sarah's early albums established her as a thoughtful and emotionally resonant songwriter. Her 1997 record *Surfacing* made her a global star; songs like "Angel," "Adia" and "Building a Mystery" became classics, earning her multiple Juno and Grammy Awards.

Sarah's music has always stood out for its emotion, honesty, beauty and the way it connects deeply with listeners.

But Sarah's influence goes far beyond her music. She made history in the late 1990s when she founded Lilith Fair, a touring festival that celebrated and showcased female musicians at a time when women were regularly left out of major concert lineups. Lilith Fair was a cultural turning point. It proved that audiences really wanted to hear women's voices. It was a financial success for the artists, and as it swept across North America, it raised and donated millions of dollars for women's organizations.

Through her art, advocacy and philanthropy, Sarah McLachlan has strengthened Canada's cultural identity and enhanced its global reputation for creativity and compassion.

In Vancouver, she founded the Sarah McLachlan School of Music, which provides free music education to young people who might not otherwise have access to lessons or instruments. The school has helped thousands of children discover their creativity, confidence and a sense of belonging through music.

Sarah continues to lead by example. Recently when Jimmy Kimmel's show was sanctioned by the Federal Communications Commission, or FCC, and taken off the air, she cancelled her performance at the U.S. premiere of her documentary *Lilith Fair: Building a Mystery*. She chose to "... protest the muzzling of free speech ..." and perceived "... erosion of women's rights, of trans and queer rights. ..." When Kimmel was reinstated, he recognized her solidarity and had her play on his first show back.

• (1420)

Her documentary, by the way, is available on CBC Gem. It's an incredible behind-the-scenes journey of how much Sarah had to battle to overcome gender-based barriers in her efforts to showcase women's voices and how she changed everything for female artists.

By nurturing the next generation of artists and using her platform to promote inclusivity, empowerment and social good, Sarah has become not only a national icon but also a living symbol of Canada's enduring values of generosity, equality and

artistic excellence. Her contributions have inspired countless artists, opened doors for women in the music industry and demonstrated the power of compassion in leadership.

As I conclude, it isn't a mystery that Sarah McLachlan has built. It's a lighthouse built of talent, empathy and vision to show us a way forward. As she reminds us in her lyrics, "The world is on fire ... tap into the water, try and bring my share ..."

She continues to represent the very best of Canadian creativity and spirit. Thank you, Sarah McLachlan. Have a great show tonight.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Stephanie Yong, co-founder of Indigenous strategy and inclusion firm Sohkiisiwin in Saskatoon, her business partner Michael Linklater and his son Amari. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Muggli.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of MS Canada representatives. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Coyle.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**THE SENATE****MOTION TO AFFECT TODAY'S QUESTION PERIOD ADOPTED**

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

That the Senate receive the Honourable Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services, during Question Period at 4:00 p.m. today, subject to the terms and provisions of the order of June 4, 2025.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

**BILL TO AMEND THE WEIGHTS AND MEASURES ACT,
THE ELECTRICITY AND GAS INSPECTION ACT,
THE WEIGHTS AND MEASURES REGULATIONS AND
THE ELECTRICITY AND GAS INSPECTION
REGULATIONS**

FIRST READING

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) introduced Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Weights and Measures Act, the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act, the Weights and Measures Regulations and the Electricity and Gas Inspection Regulations.

(Bill read first time.)

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

(On motion of Senator LaBoucane-Benson, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading two days hence.)

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

**NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGY SECTOR**

Hon. Larry W. Smith: Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications be authorized to examine and report on the opportunities and challenges of artificial intelligence (AI) in the information and communication technology sector, such as:

- (a) the application of AI in content creation, distribution and processing in this sector;
- (b) the implications of AI for Canada's copyright and intellectual property framework, including questions of authorship, ownership, enforcement, and the balance between innovation and the protection of creators' rights; and
- (c) the rise of AI-generated disinformation, misinformation and deepfakes, and their potential impact on public trust and media integrity;

That the committee be permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit reports on this study with the Clerk of the Senate, if the Senate is not then sitting, and that the reports be deemed to have been tabled in the Senate; and

That the committee submit its final report to the Senate no later than December 31, 2027, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings for 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

**NATIONAL SECURITY, DEFENCE
AND VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY
DEFENCE PROCUREMENT IN CONTEXT OF COMMITMENT TO
INCREASE DEFENCE SPENDING**

Hon. Hassan Yussuff: Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs be authorized to examine and report on defence procurement in the context of Canada's commitment to increase defence spending;

That the committee be permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit its reports on this study with the Clerk of the Senate, if the Senate is not then sitting, and that the reports be deemed to have been tabled in the Senate; and

That the committee submit its final report to the Senate no later than June 18, 2026, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

**NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE
STRENGTHENING OF FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS' ARTS, CULTURE
AND HERITAGE RESPONSIBILITIES**

Hon. Allister W. Surette: Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages be authorized to examine and report on the strengthening of federal institutions' arts, culture and heritage responsibilities in official language minority communities and in Canada more broadly;

That the committee specifically examine issues relating to:

- (a) the training and professional development of human resources, including the development of digital skills;
- (b) support for artistic, cultural and heritage infrastructure, including digital capabilities;

- (c) the alignment of domestic and international initiatives to support cultural sovereignty, protect the diversity of cultural expression and ensure the online discoverability of cultural content produced by and for official language minority communities; and
- (d) the implementation of the legislative and regulatory provisions that apply to federal institutions with regard to:
 - i) providing services of equal quality in both official languages;
 - ii) enhancing the vitality of official language minority communities;
 - iii) promoting the presence of strong institutions serving those communities;
 - iv) fostering the full recognition of both official languages in Canadian society; and
 - v) protecting and promoting French; and

That the committee submit its final report to the Senate no later than March 31, 2027, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings for 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

• (1430)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, pursuant to the order adopted earlier today, Question Period will take place at 4 p.m.

[English]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Gold, P.C., seconded by the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson:

That the following Address be presented to His Majesty the King:

To His Most Excellent Majesty Charles the Third, by the Grace of God King of Canada and His other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY:

We, Your Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the Senate of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both houses of Parliament.

Hon. Farah Mohamed: Your Honour, honourable senators, first, I will take the opportunity to thank you, Your Honour, the Usher of the Black Rod, Clerk Anwar and their teams, as well as my Independent Senators Group colleagues and all senators across the chamber. I would also like to thank the Senate administrative teams, including security and facilities; and my own team — John Inca, Julie and Sola — for the tremendous professionalism and support shown to me since my appointment.

Special thanks to Senators McBean, Saint-Germain and Harder for their advice and moments of levity as I calibrate myself inside and outside this chamber.

Thanks as well goes to my seatmate, Senator Arnold, who assures me that I'm not alone on my own island figuring out this august place. If she were to peek in my desk, she'd see that I have extra-strength crazy glue so that if she tries to go somewhere, I can put my plan into action.

While they're not here today, I also thank my mom, Dilu; my father, Aba; my sister, Amina; my brother-in-law, Tomas; and my incredibly amazing niece Hailie. It is because of their love, support and encouragement that I stand here.

I'm a big believer in community, and I'm honoured to be part of this one, a place where you can speak freely, act independently and bring your own brand of curiosity and courage to addressing issues that define us as a nation.

As I reflect on how I will serve in this role, I marvel at the symmetries that have framed my journey to this moment. It's not lost on me that former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau welcomed my parents, my sister and me to this amazing country as political refugees, and 53 years later, former prime minister Justin Trudeau appointed me to the Senate, a place that is entrusted to serve and protect the very institutions that gave us refuge and hope. Neither is it lost on me that I'll end my career in the same place where it began, on Parliament Hill. So I stand before you, humbled by the immensity of this privilege and motivated by the duty to serve.

My love of Parliament Hill began 30 years ago. I was fresh out of university and landed a job with the Honourable Paddy Torsney, my Member of Parliament for Burlington. Later, I had the pleasure of working with the Honourable Anne McLellan while she served as Minister of Justice, then Health and then Public Safety and then as Deputy Prime Minister.

These two incredible women gave me the opportunity of a lifetime to serve Canadians in a unique and impactful way by moving forward legislation on gun control, same-sex benefits, environmental protection, anti-terrorism and the creation of the Public Health Agency of Canada, among other investments and initiatives.

Now, my engagement with the Senate began quite informally. Former senator Raynell Andreychuk learned that I was from Uganda. As the former High Commissioner to Kenya and Uganda, she thought it would be nice for us to have lunch. She was kind, insightful, approachable and oh-so-very glamorous. I remain grateful that she took the time to tell me about the work of a senator, because she planted the seed.

More formally, my exposure to the Senate came through the many different occasions my minister appeared before Senate committees. I was struck by the calibre of the questions, the sense of purpose and, of course, the commitment to good old-fashioned debate — and there were some truly feisty moments. Those experiences shaped my appreciation for the important work that is done here. I know all too well the difference that the Senate can make. I have seen it, and I'm deeply honoured now to be a part of it.

With that in mind, I'd like to focus my remarks on the difference I hope to make and provide a sense of the issues I will champion and the way that I will champion them.

Perhaps because I'm a product of others creating opportunities for me when I was young, or it's because I've witnessed the incredible impact the committed, creative and connected young people can have — whatever the reason — I believe, now more than ever, we must continue to create opportunities for young people to thrive today and into the future.

Those who know me will recognize this as familiar ground. As a political staffer, a social entrepreneur, a CEO and a board member, I've always tried to be a voice, an ear, an ally and a champion for young people.

In the Speech from the Throne, His Majesty King Charles III said:

We owe it to this generation, and those who succeed us, to think and act for the greater good of all.

To accept this challenge, first, we need to face some hard facts.

Last November, as CEO of The King's Trust Canada, I commissioned Deloitte to provide an up-to-date study about the economic and social costs of youth unemployment and its long-term impact on our country. We already knew the situation was dire, but it was hard to cut through the noise and get government and media to focus on the crisis, and that's what it is. So we decided to put a number on it. Once you quantify the cost of wasted potential, it becomes impossible to ignore.

The report *Failure to Launch* was clear. First the bad news; I will get to the good news. In July 2024, the youth unemployment rate hit 14.2%, its highest level since September 2012 excluding the pandemic years. This past July, it rose to 14.6%. Canada is moving in the wrong direction. While

some of our peers — the U.S.A. is at 8%, Germany at 6%, Japan at 4% — are stabilizing or improving. Our numbers are getting worse.

Youth unemployment results in higher expenditures on a range of government services, including the criminal justice system and health care, in particular mental health and welfare. Given the focus we have on AI now, it's worth noting that by 2030, nearly 40% of the jobs in Canada will be disrupted by automation and AI. That's not a distant forecast; it's right around the corner.

Now for the good news. A reduction of youth under- and unemployment in Canada could result in an \$18.5 billion increase of real GDP by 2034. If we seize the moment, 228,000 jobs will be created, generating \$9.2 billion in wages and an increase to government revenues of \$5.3 billion.

Honourable senators, these numbers are more than data points. They are young people delaying their independence, questioning their futures and losing hope. This impacts our economic and social systems in ways that are dangerous not only for young people but for everyone. For example, employers are already having shortages in health care, skilled trades and technology. Youth unemployment fuels anxiety, depression and despair. Indigenous, racialized, rural, disabled and newcomer youths face even greater barriers.

Demographic shifts mean that Canada's prosperity tomorrow depends on young people today. In other words, our aging population will rely on the productivity, the tax contributions and the innovations of the next generation.

And then there are the political risks. A generation that feels excluded is a generation that disengages: lower voter turnout, less civic participation, eroding trust in our institutions, reduced engagement with volunteerism and public service, diminished willingness to challenge injustice or advocate for change. These are not abstract concerns. They strike at the very foundation of our democracy. When young people feel unheard or sidelined, the health of our democratic institutions is directly threatened.

So what can we do? Just as we have embraced gender-based analysis, we would benefit from applying a youth lens to legislation. Imagine if every bill we debated and every regulation we passed were consistently assessed not only for their fiscal or gender implications but also for their impact on young Canadians.

Supporting young Canadians requires bold, practical action. I'll give you just a few examples: updating policies for automation in the gig economy, where many young people are working; incentivizing employers to hire and train young people at a scale not done before; investing in programs that reflect current needs and solve for the long term, not just for the summer; using data to guide evidence-based solutions; and investing in youth sport, which has proven to improve employability skills and mental health — and as we all know, sport is a nation builder. Go, Jays, go!

These are some of the areas where I hope to lend my voice so that young Canadians see an opportunity and are empowered to seize it.

Honourable senators, investing in youth is not charity, and it's not optional — it's nation building. If we ignore this moment, we will inherit slower growth, deeper divides and weaker institutions. History will judge us not for the debates we've had but whether we rose to meet this generation's defining challenges. I sincerely hope that we do not legislate as if youth are a side file, because youth are the main file. They are the future of our economy, the guarantors of our democracy and the innovators who will harness technology in ways that we can only imagine.

• (1440)

Honourable senators, let's imagine Canada 20 years from now. Will our young people look back and say that we had the foresight to prepare them, that we treated their future as the defining issue of our time? Or will they say we failed them by looking away when they needed us the most?

I want to share with you just a few examples of what I have experienced when listening to and working in service to youth. During my time as the CEO of the Malala Fund, I had the extraordinary opportunity to meet with refugee girls in Lebanon. Malala and I travelled there with Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, to announce our partnership. At one point, we sat in a circle with these young women, and one by one, they told us what they had gone through, but really what they wanted to share with us was where they wanted to go.

Despite what they had experienced — war, witnessing the death of parents, not going to school for months, living in camps — each of them spoke of their desire to return to their country, get an education, acquire skills that would let them give back to their communities and provide for themselves and their families. Their resilience was palpable. Many of them are on their path to becoming health care professionals so that they can save lives, and one will become an architect to rebuild her own town — literally.

In Canada, I have been blessed to meet hundreds of young people who tell me they did what they were told. They were told to go to school and graduate, and that they would get a good job. They would earn a great living. They would be able to buy a house and build a family. For hundreds of thousands of young Canadians, they feel they did their part, but it has not paid off.

Senators, this isn't about blame; it's about course correction. We made the promise. If the promise cannot be kept, it must be revisited. The future of youth is not an abstract debate; it's the competitiveness of our economy, the survival of our democracy and the future of Canada.

I hope to meet this moment with courage and contribute as if the future depends on it, because it does. Colleagues, it is my honour to work with you in service to Canada, the best place in the world in which to live, to learn and to love. Thank you. *Shukran. Meegwetch.*

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Honourable senators, I am proud to rise today in this chamber for my inaugural speech in response to the Speech from the Throne.

[English]

I am delighted to be following Farah, who was sworn in with me on the same day.

I was an Italian kid who grew up in Little Italy in Windsor, Ontario, the southernmost city in Canada — it's 800 kilometres south of Vancouver, to be exact — practically surrounded by two Great Lakes, Ontario and Erie, and a stone's throw from Detroit, Michigan. It is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe people of the Three Fires Confederacy — a fact that, I admit, I didn't know while I was growing up.

Some would call playing road hockey with my brother on the street the idyllic Canadian upbringing, until you hear that I was the designated goalie and regularly took shots to the midsection. It was perhaps a harbinger of things to come in my career; most of the time it was great, but every now and then, a hard, cold tennis ball to the gut.

My parents were Italian immigrants from the 1950s. My dad learned English by reading the newspaper. He was a carpenter who went to work in an auto parts plant. My mom landed at age 11. She learned English quickly and became the friends-and-family translator for all the people receiving government mail. She started work with Immigration Canada as a stenographer — and actually wrote with that — and retired years later as an immigration officer. She was an office favourite of many immigrant clans, because that's how they arrived in Windsor at the time. She would speak to them slowly, articulating every letter, because she knew it would help them to understand. Sometimes she continued talking like that when she arrived home, and we would say, "Mom, you're not at work."

[Translation]

My family has always been deeply involved in our Italian community. Our heritage comes to us by way of northern Italy, more specifically, the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. We were active members of our region's Fogolar Furlan Club. I eventually became the first Canadian-born female club president. In 1962, each member of a small group of immigrants contributed \$1,000 toward the purchase of land to build a large building to house the club. Thirty years later, we had the honour of hosting a Canadian citizenship ceremony.

[English]

Thirty years after building this Italian club, the bricklayers, cement pourers and drywallers hosted an immigration ceremony — the first time the government did so outside of government buildings.

[Translation]

The Minister of Immigration at the time, Sergio Marchi, was originally from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region as well.

[English]

That was the day I met my first senator, who was also from the region of Frioul-Vénétie Julienne. Many of you will remember — I hope — Senator Peter Bosa.

In the midst of a typical high school life — school, sports, my job at McDonald's, my big union job at A&P — I received a fateful call. It was 1974, and Herb Gray's office called me and invited me — he was the local MP — to come to an event to meet the Prime Minister.

Looking back, I don't think Herb Gray knew his volunteers called me. I don't think he knew that I actually attended the event, but for me it was a pivotal moment, not just for meeting the Prime Minister and Herb Gray, but for understanding the machinery of politics. I was hooked.

In 1981 I attended the University of Port Elizabeth in South Africa. I was a Rotary student. Apartheid was the government policy. Nelson Mandela was still in jail. It was the first year that university allowed all races to enroll.

In addition to experiencing the country's beauty and getting my national colours in volleyball, I had a critical awakening in my political thinking. Imagine if your life's outcome were based on whether your SIN started with 01 or 04, which depended, in turn, on the colour of your skin.

I am convinced that government can destroy, but it can also be the partner that enables people to reach their full potential. I am forever grateful to the Rotarians I met over the years, both as a student, and then when I worked for Rotary years later. They provided me with valuable insight — global and local — that serves me to this day.

In this first speech, we're supposed to share thoughts about what brings us to this great hall. For me, it's as much about people as it is about events. My husband, Jim Bennett, is one of those people. Unlike me, he comes from a very political family. His father was a Member of the House of Assembly, or MHA, in the same district where he himself became one 40 years later. He would be on the west coast of Newfoundland, where we need a little more representation with the Newfoundlanders.

No one would predict this particular pairing. We only met because he ended up at the University of Windsor's law school. His view has always been that you regret the things you don't

do. As a lawyer, he loves fighting for the underdog. "The big guys can take care of themselves," he says. "It's the little guy that needs the help."

I served in government for 16 years. In cabinet, you aren't able to pick your posts. You sort of hold your breath and hope for the best. Premier Dalton McGuinty gave me great portfolios, such as education, where my challenge was class size — having to bring them down to 20 students or fewer for all kids Grade 3 and under, and all the capital requirements that ensued.

• (1450)

Another one was community and social services, where only creativity can move us forward on so many difficult files. We had a few firsts there: welfare reform to ease people back into the workforce and opening adoption records.

A really creative solution came with my colleague John Gerretsen, the former Minister of Housing. With a massive federal allocation of units at that time, he handed over the capital for the housing units while I found funds for the services needed for people with developmental disabilities. I argued, "You'll still hit your target, but we're just expanding who gets them." There are still not enough spaces today, but we moved the needle.

Responsible for the secretariat for women's issues, we created a domestic violence action plan that involved 12 other ministries, which was unheard of at the time.

It was the move to economic development and trade in 2005 that began my obsession with how public policy can impact our economy. I wanted as much passion shown for the economy as we shower on social issues.

There's nothing like a Great Recession to focus the mind. We found partners to get assistance to companies quickly. We stepped up to reverse the decision by Ford to close the engine plant in my own community. We stepped up to save GM and Chrysler, which are companies that would not exist today had the provincial and federal governments not stepped in — companies that should feel a stronger loyalty to us today.

We knew we had to go where there could be opportunities. We organized our first international trade mission to Alberta. We brought manufacturers and opened the door to the oil and gas sector to get them into a very different supply chain. Of course, this couldn't have happened without my colleague who was a minister from Alberta, first as the Minister of Finance and then the Minister of Industry, calling on her contacts to meet our companies.

A journalist from Calgary called me for an interview. "So here comes Ontario, tail between your legs, looking for work." I answered, "Yes, absolutely." That stopped him cold.

It was a big hit, culminating in a reception that featured Alberta's captain of industry, Ron Southern, and, of course, Iris Evans, the minister who opened doors for our companies. The first year featured 30 Ontario companies. By the third year, there were 200. Iris and I always kept in touch over the years, and I'm delighted that she is here in the gallery today.

We're in that tough economic spot today for altogether different reasons, and we need to look for new markets and new ways of doing things. Back then, we wanted to engage the EU in trade negotiations. Peter Mandelson, then-EU commissioner, said, "If the provinces aren't interested, why would we bother?" So former Quebec minister Raymond Bachand and I headed off to Brussels and said, "Here is 70% of the GDP of the country. We want a deal."

It was the first trade deal that actually placed the provinces at the table in those negotiations.

Canada has been really good at inking agreements, and we need to operationalize them. Businesses take customers and logistics that are the most lucrative. That's what they're supposed to do. What we need to do is make those C countries a consideration for their business.

I am delighted to see our focus on infrastructure, especially transportation. We've had great corridors that run north and south, which is the same way that trade is constantly running. Highway 401 goes through the Ambassador Bridge, along the interstates, all the way to the Mexican border, with 25% of that trade coming right through my community in Windsor.

If we're serious about new markets, we have to consider ports, rail and airports for people and cargo and make it as smooth east and west as it is north and south, and we must seriously listen to our business community about the regulations required to make this trade happen.

Our country doesn't just order companies to invest, divest and expand. Other countries do that. Our public policies have to help, and they need to want to do it.

Canada has always been good for its word in international agreements. We always abide by tribunals and dispute mechanisms. When our friends don't abide by lawful trade agreements, why should we? The pandemic was a watershed moment for many of us.

[Translation]

On a positive note, it gave me a chance to start taking French lessons again. I promise that, with time, I will get to the point where I can deliver an entire speech in French.

[English]

But here is the biggest thing that happened to me since the pandemic: I am still fixated on the localization of our supply chain. Still they decided to go back to their old ways as soon as the pandemic was over, with the same customers importing and exporting goods and services. To the extent that it is competitive, we need to cut our risk for them. What is missing to do that and find the local alternatives? It's data and the analysis of that data.

Let's start with the public sector. There is no data collected that tells us what level of expense is made here in Canada at the municipal, regional, provincial and federal levels. How much do we localize? How much is imported? Surely that's an easy place to start feeding those billions of dollars to our own companies right now.

In the 1980s, Industry Canada used to collect all manner of data about everything that was imported into the country and where it was going. Staff would manually pore over the lists and spreadsheets. They would see what was coming and what potential there was to do it here. We stopped that collection sometime in the early 2000s, probably never contemplating that there might be a risk to 75% of our trade, as we're seeing today. We need that data, and we need to analyze that data. We did it in an era of manual lists. Imagine what we could do today.

In both those instances, not only do we keep that money roiling around our economy, but it also gives our start-ups the opportunity to have that first big customer, and it helps our struggling businesses find new business right here at home — no currency fluctuations and no border delays. You get the picture.

Am I in the right place to work on these economic issues in order to offer solutions to help our economy? I think that I am.

[Translation]

I see some of the giants with whom I've worked in the past.

[English]

There is Clément Gignac, the very one who walked me into this building on day one.

[Translation]

He and I organized the first joint cabinet meeting between Ontario and Quebec, among many other initiatives together.

[English]

I worked with Tony Dean, the former secretary of cabinet at the Ontario legislature, who deftly stickhandled a government from deficit to surplus and expanded services while we were at it.

There's Peter Boehm: While Ambassador to Germany, among his many diplomatic roles, I saw a finely tuned, economically minded ambassador who made even the Germans giddy about the prospects of business with Canada.

I am honoured to be in this chamber of sober second thought. We are here to give solid advice about legislation and about unintended consequences, using our experiences to make laws better.

I noticed that the successes I'm most proud of only happened because somebody else stepped up — somebody partnered, lent a hand and joined in. That is the best of the Canadian story, and I hope you all will help me write the next chapter.

Thank you.

(On motion of Senator LaBoucane-Benson, debate adjourned.)

[Translation]

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 Duncan, for the second reading of Bill S-206, An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income.

Hon. Clément Gignac: Honourable senators, I would like to begin by congratulating my friend and former counterpart, Ontario's former minister for the economy, on her maiden speech.

Esteemed colleagues, I rise today to speak to Bill S-206, An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income.

For those of you who know me well, you'll know that I'm not in the habit of speaking on a bill at second reading before it's even been referred to a Senate committee. However, is that the case with this bill? The answer is no.

In the last session, I had the opportunity to thoroughly examine Bill S-233, Bill S-206's predecessor.

• (1500)

The Standing Senate Committee on National Finance devoted four meetings to studying that bill, which is fairly typical for a public bill. As such, I believe I am now in a position to comment on the substance of this bill.

Let me begin by saying that Senator Pate's intention is laudable. Like most of us here in the Senate, I too want to see our society's poverty rate go down.

[Senator Papatello]

There are reasons to believe that direct cash transfers can, in some cases, serve as an effective solution to poverty. However, the evidence suggests that introducing a universal guaranteed basic income is not an effective remedy for poverty. Such programs can also be financially risky, depending on the terms and conditions.

Bill S-206 states that the program would be for anyone over the age of 17 and that there would be no requirement to participate in education or the labour market to qualify.

In an analysis published in February 2025, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated the cost of such a project. Using the parameters of a pilot project conducted in Ontario in 2018, the PBO estimated the cost of such a program at \$107 billion per year. What's more, such a scenario would require a fundamental transformation of our tax system as well as tough negotiations with the provinces, which would see it as the federal government encroaching on their jurisdiction once again.

By way of information, the province of Quebec, my province, the all-time champion when it comes to social programs, studied a similar guaranteed minimum income project in 2017. What happened? The independent panel of economists, tax experts and sociologists recommended that the Quebec government reject the idea. Among the reasons cited were the complexity of such a reform, its prohibitive cost and the adverse effects on single-parent families, who are often the most in need.

Furthermore, a guaranteed minimum income system would also have a negative effect on labour force participation rates. The PBO came to the same conclusion. Fewer hours worked means less revenue for the government, making this already costly bill even less sustainable.

Our former colleague and distinguished economist, the Honourable Diane Bellemare, aptly summarized why a guaranteed basic income is not the right way forward. She said:

There are many solutions we can work on to eliminate poverty and inequality in Canada, but a GBI should not be one of them. It's time we abandon this utopian dream for pragmatic, rigorously tested, targeted programs that will reduce and prevent poverty, provide skills and training and create an inclusive labour market.

Allow me to briefly share some thoughts on the place that non-government bills like this one should occupy in the work of our institution. As you know, the number of public bills introduced in the Senate has increased significantly since the 2015 reform. This phenomenon is not without consequences. A growing portion of our time is devoted to studying these bills. In the last session, one in 10 subcommittee meetings was about public bills.

I would like to thank Senator Housakos for his recent speech in this chamber in which he shared the parameters that we should be using to determine whether to accept or reject Senate public bills at second reading. Senator Housakos, I don't often do this, but I would like to commend you for that.

If you ask me, these are good criteria for determining whether a bill should be sent to committee or not. What are these criteria? First, they must not generate any expense for the government. Second, they should potentially be able to secure support here and in the other place.

I don't know if you've noticed, but an election was held this spring, and I believe that priorities in the other place have changed. After 10 years of stagnant GDP per capita, more attention is being focused on creating wealth than on redistributing it.

In closing, allow me to remind you that the world is a different place now that Donald Trump is back in the White House. As millions of Canadians wait and wonder how big the federal deficit will be next week, I hate to think how much more worried Canadians would be if they found out that the Senate plans to study a new bill on developing a national GBI framework. Given the need to invest 5% of our GDP in defence and national security by 2035, our efforts and our energy should instead be going toward projects that generate wealth. We're not living in a fantasy land anymore.

Honourable senators, I believe we need to be more strategic in managing our time and our work and be prudent in the use of public funds. For all these reasons, I suggest that you vote against this bill.

Thank you for your attention. *Meegwetich.*

Hon. Lucie Moncion: Would Senator Gignac agree to answer a question?

Senator Gignac: It would be my pleasure, senator.

Senator Moncion: Thank you, senator. I really appreciated your speech. I do have some reservations about some of the comments you made, including regarding private or public bills being considered by the Senate. For example, you said that there were far too many.

Did you know that if the Senate weren't studying these bills right now, we wouldn't have much to work on in this chamber?

Senator Gignac: I don't know if your comment applies to all senators and all committees, because our committee has already had eight meetings on the subject of access to housing. I think that, here in this chamber, there's enough grey matter and intellectual capacity to think about a lot of special studies. That's one of the Senate's strengths.

I remember that, three years ago, under Senator Dean's leadership, nobody at the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence was talking about Arctic sovereignty. It was thanks to our colleague's leadership that we were able to do a special study and see the impact that study had on the government.

Can we influence what gets done? I'm not worried, and I think there are other ways to approach it than by studying bills for which there is a foregone conclusion if you have even a rudimentary understanding of what is going on in the other place. It should be obvious that there is vanishingly little interest in a guaranteed basic income. That's my answer.

Senator Moncion: Thank you for the explanation. Here in this chamber, we completely agree as regards public bills. We need to carefully consider the work that we do here in the Senate and the work that gets done in committee. A lot of initiatives are introduced through public bills and could become studies; these studies could be introduced in the form of motions, and certain committees would end up conducting the studies themselves.

Would it be worthwhile to study the guaranteed basic income bill in a different way? More specifically, instead of a bill, there could be a study. There would be much more scrutiny in a committee setting, where the file would undergo an exhaustive analysis. Are you already so sure about how it would go? Do you think bills or studies are unnecessary and not worth the bother?

Senator Gignac: I want to make a distinction between a bill and a motion. In this instance, I was speaking on a bill. Once a bill is introduced — and correct me if I'm wrong because I have only four years of experience — if I understand how committees work, government bills are given priority, followed by special studies.

• (1510)

With a bill like this one, we have to set our special studies aside. The Banking Committee has several ideas for studies, because it's the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy. Our committee would like to undertake all kinds of studies, but we know that if this bill passes, it will be referred not to our committee, but rather to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, most likely, since that committee has already begun studying and working on it.

I do know one thing: all studies must be set aside because after government bills, we have to study these kinds of bills, and at that point, we have to forget about those studies. That is why I spoke out against the bill. Given that Quebec has already analyzed this issue at length with the help of a panel of experts, I would be very uncomfortable with the Senate studying such a bill in committee, especially in 2025, with the new reality that exists in the other place.

Hon. Raymonde Saint-Germain: Senator Gignac, I would like to come back to the substance of the bill that is on the agenda, Bill S-206.

I was Deputy Minister of Relations with Citizens and Immigration, and as such, I contributed to the study that was done. You said in your speech that one of the findings of the experts and the many specialists and senior officials who were consulted was that this type of measure would have a negative influence on the labour market, as I recall very well, especially on the labour market for newcomers and vulnerable persons. Could you elaborate on these reasons?

I have a quick follow-up question. Consultations were done at the time and comparisons were made with the Government of Ontario that led to comparable conclusions.

Senator Gignac: I won't be able to answer your very specific questions in detail, but I'd be happy to get back to you on that.

As a matter of fact, we know the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that labour market participation would drop by 1.5%. We saw how that played out with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, or CERB, which businesses said made it difficult for them to hire part-time employees, especially in retail and convenience stores. Studies have shown that systems like that disincentivize labour market participation.

The cost of a program like this depends on the goal. If lawmakers don't want the people receiving benefits associated with those programs to be affected, the deficit would increase significantly. If lawmakers want no impact on the deficit — if they want this change to be fiscally neutral, as our former colleague, Senator Bellemare, explained — a single-parent family with two children would receive less in basic income than if those measures were in place.

I'm sorry I don't have detailed information about the experts' findings. This is an undesirable consequence of guaranteed basic income because it eliminates the incentive to participate in the labour market or accept part-time jobs.

The Hon. the Speaker: Your time is almost up. Are you asking for more time to answer the question?

Senator Gignac: Apparently, yes, I'd like that.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechéne: I'll be brief.

I agree with Senator Gignac that various studies have been done and that some consensus has emerged among Quebec experts that a guaranteed basic income is not the right solution. That is certainly true.

However, I think that to describe our colleague's bill as a waste of public funds is going way too far. Those words were used last week to describe our senatorial work in a very derogatory manner. If anyone in this chamber disagrees with a bill — which is the case here, because a lot of people disagree with our colleague's bill — to call it a waste of public funds is in very poor taste, to my mind.

Senator Gignac: First, if I did use those words, it was inappropriate, but I'd be curious to see the transcript, because I did not use the words "waste of public funds" in my speech. That may be the impression it gave, because I did say that it would be costly and risky, but I don't believe I used the words "waste of public funds."

First, if we adopt Senator Housakos' approach, it is quite clear that we should not launch initiatives that generate spending, but the situation has changed over the past 12 months. We need to focus more on wealth creation. We're going to have to increase defence investment from 1.5% of GDP to 5% per year.

As we know, the defence budget will increase from \$50 billion to \$150 billion per year. That is what that means. If we go from \$50 billion to \$150 billion per year, we need to constantly accelerate wealth creation in this country, which has not been the case for 10 years. Our GDP per capita is stagnant. I believe that such a bill is inappropriate.

If I did say that, it was part of an answer I gave during an exchange because I got a little excited, and I apologize for that. I am not suggesting our colleague, Senator Pate, is ill-intentioned. I have a great deal of respect for her. Like her, we all want to see less poverty in Canada. Senator Bellemare, a distinguished economist and labour market expert, made it clear that guaranteed basic income is not the best way to tackle this problem.

I apologize in advance if I used those words, but I don't think I talked about a "waste of public funds."

[English]

Hon. Kim Pate: Will you take another question, Senator Gignac?

Senator Gignac: Yes.

Senator Pate: Thank you very much. Thank you for raising your concerns because I think it is important to raise the concerns you have.

I just want to check because the figures that you raise and the economists that you quote are economists who have certainly done incredible historical work, but you did not talk about the more recent economists who have looked at these issues, looked at the numbers, and, in fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer — that figure you provided was the gross figure. The net figure was \$3.6 billion, and, in fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer talked about negligible impact on labour.

Are you aware that Dr. Zhao's research recently has shown that of the \$90 billion we currently spend per year on poverty, if we actually engaged in perhaps the type of approach we are suggesting, we could not only cut poverty by half but increase the benefits to the economy, and we could actually provide an avenue for more people to be able to step up to work? Are you familiar with that research?

Senator Gignac: Thank you, senator.

An economist is not an accountant. You could have three economists and four opinions. I think that you are fully aware of that.

All kinds of studies — I do not wish to bother the Senate here with numbers — are based on different parameters. The new Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO, goes with new parameters, and, in fact, you know that depends on how you work with the parameters.

These kinds of things are just that. If you drill more, I really trust the former PBO. The former PBO had a huge reputation, and I really trust Senator Bellemare. I trust the expert from Quebec on that.

For all of these reasons, I do not want to go —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gignac, I apologize for interrupting, but your time has expired.

(On motion of Senator White, debate adjourned.)

• (1520)

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE DAY BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Moreau, P.C., seconded by the Honourable Senator Dalphond, for the second reading of Bill S-219, An Act to establish Judicial Independence Day.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

HELLENIC HERITAGE MONTH BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Loffreda, seconded by the Honourable Senator Coyle, for the second reading of Bill S-220, An Act to designate the month of March as Hellenic Heritage Month.

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill S-220, An Act to designate the month of March as Hellenic Heritage Month.

I want to thank Senator Housakos — a great Greek Canadian — who accepted to serve as a friendly critic. Thank you.

Senators will recall that I introduced Bill S-259 during the previous Parliament. The bill we have before us today is the exact same version.

My remarks today coincide with Oxi Day, an important public holiday in the Greek calendar. It was on October 28, 1940 — exactly 85 years ago today — that the prime minister of Greece denied the request from Italy's Mussolini to allow Italian troops to cross the border into Greece. And we just heard the compelling statement from Senator Housakos today. Thank you for that.

It seems only fitting that I speak to Bill S-220 today, a day that is associated with the bravery, solidarity and heroism of Greeks during the Second World War.

Today, I will address four key points in my remarks. First, I will briefly speak of my connection with the Hellenic community. Second, I want to speak to how this bill came about. I will then provide a short summary of Canada's Greek heritage. Finally, I will end my remarks by sharing with you some positive feedback I received from the Hellenic organizations and community leaders who support the passage of Bill S-220.

My speech today borrows quite heavily from the one I delivered at second reading on June 1, 2023. I invite you to review those remarks should you want a more comprehensive account of my views.

Many may wonder why an Italian Canadian is sponsoring a bill to honour Greek Canadians.

An Hon. Senator: A good question.

Senator Loffreda: It is a good question. The answer is quite simple. In so many ways, I've been an honorary member of the community for decades. The Greek community in Montreal has more or less adopted me as one of their own.

In my former life, I had the honour to play an active role in supporting various community organizations and ethnic groups by sponsoring and chairing numerous events and fundraising activities. They were numerous. Montreal's Hellenic community was certainly one of the communities I had a deep connection with. The prestigious École Socrates-Démosthène comes to mind.

Along with our colleague Senator Housakos, I am a patron of the Montreal chapter of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, also known as AHEPA.

I also serve as a distinguished patron of the Hellenic Ladies Benevolent Society, a non-profit organization that celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary last year. They help all those in need. Over the years, I am proud to say we've helped the community raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for many worthy causes that have benefited various groups and individuals of Hellenic descent. Earlier this month, I was once again honoured to take part in the Hellenic Ladies Benevolent Society's annual gala in Montreal.

A few years ago, I was also deeply honoured to have been named Philhellene of the Year by the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal for my advocacy and commitment to the community. It was Senator Housakos who presented me with that award. That is my connection.

I also had the distinct honour to join our Speaker, along with Senator Housakos and Senator Saint-Germain, for an official visit to the Hellenic Republic in 2022. Our visit coincided with the eightieth anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations with Greece. This was my first official international trip as a senator. I returned to Canada determined to have Parliament adopt a bill to honour our Greek communities and to celebrate the strong ties that unite our two nations.

[Translation]

It's often said that good things come in threes. The bill before us today is more or less the third version of the same bill.

In March 2021, our colleague Annie Koutrakis, an MP from Montreal, introduced Bill C-276, which died on the Order Paper.

Following discussions with MP Koutrakis and Senator Housakos, we decided that I would take over.

So here I am again today.

For the second time, I am seeking the Senate's support for this bill, which aims to recognize a community for which I have the utmost respect and admiration.

MP Koutrakis did a lot of community outreach before introducing her bill in 2021. Of course, I had confidence in her work, but I also felt the need to reach out to Hellenic organizations and community leaders myself to seek their feedback.

[English]

After conducting such research on my own, I launched consultations in early 2023. I reached out to different organizations and many individuals across the country from a wide spectrum of sectors including non-profits, academics and scholars, legal experts, community advocates, religious leaders and individuals of Greek heritage. In total, my office contacted nearly 150 different groups and individuals.

The feedback we received was unanimous: everyone supported this initiative. They encouraged me to introduce the bill as soon as possible, and — not to put any pressure on us — they also urged parliamentarians to adopt the bill as soon as possible.

Most importantly, I was delighted that we received some constructive suggestions and minor editorial changes to the preamble of Bill C-276, the predecessor of Bills S-259 and S-220. Working with a few of our fellow parliamentarians, including member of Parliament Annie Koutrakis and Senator Housakos, I feel we have properly integrated these changes into the bill we now have before us.

I am hopeful and confident that Bill S-220 in its current form will meet the needs and aspirations of the Hellenic community. I trust that the committee to which this bill will be referred will invite members of the community to hear their views on it.

I want to publicly thank everyone who, I think, made the preamble better, along with MP Koutrakis, who did a lot of the heavy lifting in the initial development of this bill.

Let me discuss the history of Greek Canadians. The history of Greek Canadians goes back nearly 200 years, when some of the first immigrants settled in Montreal in the 1840s. Modest in numbers at first, the Greek population increased over the years thanks to two waves of emigration from Greece.

The first one occurred in the late 19th century and early 20th century in response to the 1893 economic crisis in the Hellenic Republic. The second wave occurred after the

Second World War. Of the more than 1 million Greeks who left their country during this second wave, nearly 120,000 chose Canada as their destination.

Today, there are over 260,000 Canadians of Greek heritage in our nation. They are strong, they are proud, and they are an integral part of Canada's cultural mosaic.

In a scholarly article published in 2022, the following account summarizes how Greek immigrants integrated to their new home country:

. . . Greeks in Canada tried to balance their efforts at integration in their new country and maintaining their Greek identity as many of them were hopeful that they would return to Greece within a decade. . . .

The author goes on to say:

For various reasons . . . most of the Greek immigrant families stayed in Canada, and for the original immigrants and their descendants, integration became the main goal. . . .

I think this excerpt speaks volumes about Canada — about our warm hospitality and caring nature. Many Greeks intended to return to Europe but then opted to stay here. Many reasons may explain this change of heart, but I have no doubt that many chose to stay because they felt welcomed and at home. They knew Canada could offer them countless opportunities and a safe environment to raise a family. I know that to be true for the Italian community, as well.

• (1530)

Naturally, as the Greek population increased in Canada, so did the number of Greek-centric associations, organizations and churches in communities across the nation. In no time, Greeks were making a difference in our communities at every level. As stipulated in the preamble of the bill, Canadians of Greek descent have made lasting contributions to our nation in various fields, and I know those organizations have played an integral part in those individual success stories.

I thank Senator Cardozo, who spoke to Bill S-259 during the last Parliament and highlighted the achievements of 10 great Canadians of Hellenic heritage.

Let me share some examples of positive feedback we received from some of the associations. While there are many, it's important to put at least a few of them on the record. As I mentioned earlier, through my consultations with the Hellenic community, I have amassed a great deal of support and formal endorsements from Canadians who welcome this legislative initiative. If I'm unable to convince you of the merits of this bill, surely community leaders will be able to. And if not, Senator Housakos will be able to.

The Canadian Hellenic Congress, or CHC, is very favourable to the bill. Dr. Theodore Halatsis, the President of the CHC, wrote that the CHC “proudly and wholeheartedly endorses” my initiative. The Canadian Order of AHEPA also welcomes Bill S-220. As they pointed out, not only will this bill pay tribute to the contributions of Greek Canadians to the economic, social, political and scientific fabric of Canada over the past century, but it will also pay homage to the contributions of Greek culture and civilization to Canadian values of liberty, democracy, education, civic responsibility and individual and family excellence.

The Socrates Educational Foundation wrote to me, indicating to what extent Bill S-220 “has elicited excitement and pride” in its members.

Vasilios Sioulas, President of the Ottawa Chapter of AHEPA, wrote that:

The history of Greeks in Canada is full of inspiring stories of accomplishment and success. It is a history of significant and important contributions to their adopted country.

Should Bill S-220 be adopted, he feels that:

... it will ignite the immortal spirit of our ancestors and fire our imagination to the beauty and mutual benefit of all concerned.

His colleague at AHEPA, Nicolas Pantieras, also endorsed our legislative initiative. He feels that:

By recognizing March as Greek heritage month, we acknowledge and celebrate the rich cultural and historical contributions of the Greek community to Canada and the world.

He added that:

It also provides an opportunity for Greeks to share their culture and heritage with the wider Canadian community, promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding.

Tony Lourakis, former president of the highly respected Hellenic Heritage Foundation, which encourages and provides higher education in Hellenic studies, reminded me that what isn't shared, studied or recognized is ultimately forgotten. Therefore, as he put it:

Recognizing Hellenic culture and history is vital to preserving it and vital to understanding the roots of a culture that influences our society to this day.

He added that:

Recognizing Hellenic heritage month, gives us the opportunity to highlight Greece's priceless history, both classical and modern, while emphasizing Canada's greatest strength, which is undoubtedly its diversity.

I couldn't have said it better myself.

Archbishop Sotirios, the head of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada, offered his full support, both personally and on behalf of the archdiocese. He wrote:

This Act is not only important to the current Greek community of this country, but I believe it will be even more meaningful for future generations who are born and raised in this glorious country of Canada, but whose roots trace back to Greece and its unparalleled history.

Vasilis Molos, Director and Research Lead of the Hellenic Heritage Foundation Greek Canadian Archives at York University, wrote the following:

Heritage months offer Canadians an opportunity to celebrate different cultural groups' contributions to our country. Empowering communities to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives helps to promote greater understanding and inclusion in Canadian society. And in learning about our differences, we nurture a sense of belonging to a shared Canada, blurring the contours of our vibrant mosaic.

Scott Gallimore, past president of the board of directors of the Canadian Institute in Greece, or CIG, shared his organization's full support for the bill, indicating that “. . . the CIG believes this is an important initiative to further strengthen relationships between our two countries . . .”

[Translation]

Professor Jacques Perreault of the Université de Montréal, who's also a director of the CIG, endorsed my initiative while reiterating that the Greek community's contribution to the economic and cultural development of Canada and Quebec and the promotion of its cultural heritage have helped make Canada what it is today.

Chris Adamopoulos, who's a close friend of mine, and the staff of Montreal's École Socrates-Démosthène shared the following testimonial with me:

We think this initiative should be supported, of course . . . But especially in this time of younger generations with Greek origins, there is a great need to revitalize their Greek heritage and also honour the contribution of past generations of Greek people.

Honourable colleagues, I'll stop there, but I could have shared many other testimonials from people who welcome Bill S-220.

If these testimonials have failed to convince you of the need to pass this bill, I invite you once again to speak with Senator Housakos, who will undoubtedly succeed in changing your minds.

As I have mentioned, I made it my duty to consult the community before introducing my bill. It was important to me to get their feedback and their support. I believe I have truly incorporated their comments into the wording of the preamble, and I believe that I have their support.

Obviously, I would like yours too.

To that end, I encourage everyone to pass this bill at second reading as quickly as possible so we can send it to a committee.

[English]

I appreciate that the Social Affairs Committee, to which this bill will likely be referred, is often overwhelmed with bills. I am available to work with its members and steering committee to help complete the study of this bill as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

We saw great collaboration earlier this fall regarding two other bills recognizing Ukrainian and Arab heritage. I hope that I — but, most important, that Canada's Greek community — can rely upon similar collaboration and support from all of my honourable colleagues to pass Bill S-220 as soon as possible. We should keep that winning streak going before our legislative agenda becomes inundated with government legislation.

I'm on a bit of a winning streak myself with the adoption of Bill S-1001 in the other place last week. Hopefully, we can move this bill along just as quickly.

While I was at the Hellenic Ladies Benevolent Society's Ilios Soirée earlier this month, many were asking about my bill. They wondered why a bill as straightforward as Bill S-259 was not adopted during the last Parliament. I bring this up so that we are all aware that the Greek community is watching and patiently waiting for us to formalize March as Hellenic Heritage Month. We are in a minority Parliament once again, so there is that added pressure and urgency to consider, as well.

In conclusion, honourable senators — and yes, I know you have been waiting for my conclusion. However, it is important to put those associations and individuals who helped us on the record.

• (1540)

I have much more, but I have to conclude at some point. So, in conclusion, it is important to them. They'll show it to their kids and their grandkids, and we're all part of history. Right? That's important.

Honourable senators, it has been a personal honour for me to introduce Bill S-220, an Act to designate the month of March as Hellenic Heritage Month, and to speak to you about the lasting achievements and immense contributions of the Greek community to our nation's social, cultural and economic fabric.

In my view, Canada's outstanding reputation on the global stage is attributed to our rich history of immigration and successful integration policies. Immigrants have helped build this country and shape it into one of the most envied nations in the world. Arguably, our diversity may be Canada's greatest strength and most important asset. We must be proud of this rich heritage. Our differences make us better. They unite us. They don't divide us.

I want to conclude with a touching story, which I shared during my remarks two years ago. The Honourable Andromache Karakatsanis, the first Greek Canadian to serve on the Supreme Court of Canada, once commented on how her name always marked her as different.

Many in this chamber, including myself, can probably relate to her, but she never allowed her name to be anglicized. She was proud of its heritage. After all, Andromache was a strong woman in Greek mythology. Her parents always told her that different could be better.

As Madam Justice Karakatsanis once said:

... in Canada differences are strengths. It is a land of astonishing generosity and diversity. And the daughter of Greek immigrants can become a justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. This illustrates the opportunity of Canada.

Colleagues, Greek Canadians deserve this special recognition. They have helped make our country stronger, better and more vibrant. I hope you will join me in recognizing this lasting legacy by supporting this legislative initiative.

Parliament could send a clear, united and resounding message to Greek Canadians with the passage of this bill. Bill S-220 gives us the opportunity to thank them for all they have done and to ensure that every March, moving forward, we take the time to celebrate Hellenism, honour Greek Canadians, past and present, educate Canadians on their many contributions to our society and indulge in all things Greek.

To all Greek Canadians, I want to extend my very best wishes on Oxi Day. I reiterate my commitment to them to have this bill cross the finish line in this Parliament. Thank you. *Efcharistó*.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

(On motion of Senator Housakos, debate adjourned.)

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SOIL HEALTH BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Black, seconded by the Honourable Senator Downe, for the second reading of Bill S-230, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement.

Hon. Todd Lewis: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill S-230, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement. This is my first speech in this place.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Lewis: Can you imagine a farmer talking about dirt?

I will admit that I had some homework to do while I prepared my speaking notes. One thing I learned is that debate on a bill at second reading focuses on the principle or merits of the bill. *Senate Procedure in Practice* notes:

This debate is intended to address questions such as: “Is the bill good policy?,” “Is it worth pursuing further?” and “Will it be a good law?”

Another thing I learned from *Senate Procedure in Practice* is that the role of the Senate is, first and foremost, one of carefully reviewing legislation, conducting long-term investigations, representing the regions and protecting linguistic and other minorities.

So, as I see it, our collective job at the second reading of Bill S-230 is to determine whether it is good policy, and my particular job is to apply a regional lens to the legislation.

Per the bill’s summary, Bill S-230 requires the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to develop a national strategy to support and promote efforts across Canada to protect, conserve and enhance the health of soil. It also provides for reporting requirements in relation to the strategy.

Senator Black’s perspective is informed by his region: Ontario faces significant challenges, as much of its farmland is in proximity to its cities and is at risk of being converted to housing, industrial or commercial use. In my province of Saskatchewan, the situation is somewhat different. In fact, when it comes to soil health, we have had many successes in the past decades.

In 2016 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, or AAFC, released a report entitled *Environmental Sustainability of Canadian Agriculture*. The report defines soil quality as “. . . the soil’s fitness to support crop growth without resulting in soil degradation or otherwise harming the environment.” Soil quality can be degraded by natural processes such as erosion, salinization, loss of soil organic carbon and the accumulation of trace elements.

The AAFC report shows that, in most provinces, soil loss from erosion — that is, the combined effects of wind, water and tillage — decreased between 1981 and 2011. In 1981 only 29% of cropland was identified as at “very low risk.” By 2011 that number was up to 61%. Much of this change was in the Prairie provinces, thanks to the widespread adoption of conservation tillage, especially no-till.

Regarding salinization, AAFC notes that 8% more land area was in the “very low” to “low risk” classes in 2011 than in 1981. These improvements are largely attributable to a 78% reduction in summerfallow area and a 14% increase in permanent cover. A reduction in risk has been observed in all Prairie provinces, with the greatest decline recorded in Saskatchewan.

In more good news, the Prairies’ soil organic carbon is increasing primarily due to a reduction in tillage intensity and summerfallow area.

AAFC’s webpage on soil organic carbon explains:

About 60% of soil organic matter comes from carbon. Plants capture carbon dioxide gas from the atmosphere during photosynthesis. This carbon is converted to a solid form in plant tissues. Animals and micro-organisms consume plants and this carbon becomes part of the food web. When plants and animals die, their tissues decompose. During this process, most carbon returns to the atmosphere. However, a small amount of this organic carbon is transformed into soil organic materials that do not decompose as easily.

What that means is roots of plants. When we talk about no-till, those roots stay in the ground and don’t rot. The air doesn’t get to them, and they don’t turn into carbon. That is, in layman’s terms, how the carbon cycle works. The improvements we have seen in organic matter are mostly due to not tilling up the soil and exposing those roots to the air.

Soil organic matter holds soil particles together. This stabilizes soil structure; reduces soil erosion; improves the ability of soil to store and transport air, water and nutrients; improves soil workability or tilth; binds potentially harmful substances, for example, heavy metals and pesticides, reducing their adverse environmental effects; and it also acts as a storage sink for carbon dioxide captured from the atmosphere.

In the Prairies, we are correcting past practices that caused soil degradation. As Dr. Lana Awada and her co-authors note in a 2014 article in the journal *International Soil and Water Conservation Research*:

In the 1930s, the Prairies experienced a period of severe drought and dust storms. As a result, the period was named the “Dirty Thirties,” and the area became known as part of the “Dust Bowl”

• (1550)

As Dr. Awada outlines, governments, experimental farms, universities and farmers launched co-operative efforts to address the dust bowl crisis. Soil scientists confirmed that tillage should be kept to a bare minimum, land should only be worked to control weeds and crop and weed residue should be kept on the surface to reduce soil erosion.

In 1935, the federal government established the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, or PFRA, including the establishment of experimental substations, agricultural improvement associations, community pastures, water projects and shelterbelt programs. The PFRA worked with experimental farms, universities, provincial agencies and farmers to share knowledge and feedback with the objective of developing more sustainable agricultural practices.

The agricultural improvement associations facilitated the two-way flow of information among different participants in the network. However, these advancements coincided with the Great Depression, which drove farmers to prioritize immediate survival. Economics were hard, and conservation tillage would not become the norm.

After the introduction of the herbicide paraquat and some no-till seeders in the 1960s, researchers experimenting with low-disturbance direct seeding systems reported that yields under this system were as good as those under traditional tillage systems. Early adopters of conservation tillage technology shared their knowledge with conservation tillage associations, agents, scientists and equipment company manufacturers and representatives, as well as other farmers. Nevertheless, barriers to the adoption of conservation tillage persisted into the 1970s. In the 1980s, however, the problem of soil degradation, aggravated by drought, emerged again.

Dr. Awada notes that three publications contributed significantly to understanding the importance of soil degradation in Canada: *Land Depletion and Soil Conservation Issues on the Canadian Prairies* by the PFRA; *Will the Bounty End?: The Uncertain Future of Canada's Food Supply* by Garry Fairbairn; and *Soil at Risk: Canada's Eroding Future* by the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry — as it was then known — chaired by then-Senator Herb Sparrow.

Dr. Awada writes that Senator Sparrow's report led the way for the establishment of the Soil Conservation Council of Canada and the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association. In turn, these bodies responded to farmers' questions, provided technical assistance, arranged field days and workshops for the effective use of conservation tillage technology and offered social and moral support.

Then, in the 1990s, the price of the herbicide glyphosate decreased, the price of fuel increased and interest rates went down. Summerfallow and traditional tillage became more expensive than conservation tillage, which prompted farmers to take advantage of lower interest rates and invest in machinery.

Today, more than 75% of Prairie cropland is under some form of conservation tillage, and more than 50% is under zero-till.

However, in regions of Canada east of Manitoba, soil organic carbon is generally decreasing due to the steady conversion of tame pastures and hay land to annual crops or development.

In the dirty thirties, the federal government established the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration. In the 1980s, the PFRA released a report that contributed significantly to understanding the importance of soil degradation in Canada. So did the report written by the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. What I'm getting at here is that there is an important role for the federal government to play when it comes to soil health.

According to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, in 2021, more than half of the cropland in Central Canada and Atlantic Canada was at high risk for soil degradation because of loss of soil organic carbon.

We must keep our eyes on the prize in Western Canada as well. Grasslands accumulate and store carbon, purify water, mitigate flood risks and provide a habitat for grassland species. But over 80% of Canada's Prairie grasslands have been lost to crop production or urban development.

Soil is the base of everything we do in Canada, whether in the North, South, East or West — and whether in urban or rural Canada. That's why soil protection, conservation and enhancement is so important to all constituencies in Canada. Soil health can be improved by management practices that add carbon to soils — such as reduced summerfallow, reduced tillage, planting high-residue crops and spreading manure — and by maintaining natural areas that accumulate and store carbon. Doing so benefits us all.

Therefore, colleagues, I believe that Bill S-230 is good policy and am proud to support it at second reading. Thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Black, do you have a question?

Hon. Robert Black: I do. Will my colleague take a question?

Senator Lewis: Yes, I will.

Senator Black: Thank you. During our testimony for the soil health report, we heard about significant regional differences. I want to congratulate Western Canada, and Saskatchewan specifically, as we heard good news about the soil health there.

I know how much topsoil is in my own area of the province. I would like you to put on the record how much topsoil you have on your farm in Saskatchewan.

Senator Lewis: We're in a very unique position south of Regina. It's an old ocean bed. Where I farm, on some of the land, there is an inch drop over three miles. That's how flat it is. The topsoil is 25 feet deep, so there are no wells; there is no undersurface water. We dig dugouts, and they might be 25 feet deep. We spread that soil on top of the ground and farm it the next year. So there is really no soil profile in our country except black dirt.

To your point about the success in Western Canada, the reason I bring that up is because it's never too late to start doing the right thing and protecting our soils.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

Hon. Réjean Aucoin: Would the senator take a question?

[English]

Senator Lewis: Yes.

Senator Aucoin: The question is this: Can you send some of that soil to the Maritimes?

Senator Lewis: That might pose a railroad problem.

(On motion of Senator Ataullahjan, debate adjourned.)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, before proceeding to Question Period with the minister, I would like to remind you of the time limits the Senate established for questions and answers in the order of June 4, 2025.

When the Senate receives a minister for Question Period, as is the case today, the length of a main question is limited to one minute, and the answer to one minute and 30 seconds. The supplementary question and answer are each limited to 45 seconds. In all these cases the reading clerk stands 10 seconds before the time expires.

I will now ask the minister to enter and take her seat.

• (1600)

QUESTION PERIOD

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, to receive a Minister of the Crown, the Honourable Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services, appeared before honourable senators during Question Period.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, today we have with us for Question Period the Honourable Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services, to respond to questions concerning her ministerial responsibilities.

On behalf of all senators, I welcome the minister.

Minister, as I have noted to the Senate, a main question is limited to one minute and your response to one minute and 30 seconds. The question and answer for a supplementary question are both limited to 45 seconds. The reading clerk stands 10 seconds before these times expire. I ask everyone to respect these times. Question Period will last 64 minutes.

[English]

INDIGENOUS SERVICES

INDIAN ACT

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: Welcome, minister.

While Bill S-2 is a small step forward to remedy one of the many inequities still contained in the Indian Act, our committee's study has been loud and clear. We cannot wait any longer to address the second-generation cut-off. How can you justify passing Bill S-2 when it brings the *Nicholas* litigants into the very same discriminatory provisions effectively perpetuating a continued cycle of litigation for future generations, who will face the same inequities?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you.

[Editor's Note: The minister spoke in an Indigenous language.]

Thank you for asking the question.

It's really a pleasure for me to be here today. I want to speak about Bill S-2. I want to ensure that the 3,500 individuals who are facing enfranchisement will have that barrier to enrollment lifted for them. I have been very committed to this process. I've asked my deputy minister to ensure that those individuals whom she has identified will be responded to with immediacy. That is really my first and primary concern for Bill S-2.

I know that there has been a lot of work done by the Senate on looking at the second-generation amendment. I just want to point to one of the items that you raised, which is litigation. It is my duty as minister to consult community. If I try to bypass that process, the question of litigation will be more extensive than is disclosed in this process — or identified in this process, I should say.

I'm a minister who is there to ensure that I work with the communities that I'm offering a service to. For me, first and foremost, respecting the duty to consult, also as a former Indigenous leader, is the criterion that I will uphold in my work.

Senator McCallum: Although your government's intentions may be noble, its approach has been piecemeal and reactionary, acting only after the courts compel change. Between each round of litigation, we hear renewed promises to consult and collaborate, only for the cycle to repeat. Consulting has occurred for over 30 years. What will the consultation be about?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you for that follow-up question.

I really want to ensure that the importance of the consultation process — in respect to free, prior and informed consent, or FPIC, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, or UNDRIP — is clearly understood by the Senate in my response.

In 2023, we launched a process to ensure that a solution determined by the community is identified. It will come back to the ministry, where we will do a legal test for viability. We will go back to the community and consult on the outcomes of legal viability. That is what consultation is. "Consultation" means working with our partners so that they can define what the outcome is for their best interests.

INDIAN STATUS CARD APPLICATIONS

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Hello, minister. In the Auditor General's report released last June, it was revealed that over 80% of applications for registration under the Indian Act exceeded your department's own 6-month service standard, with the average decision taking 16 months. The report also found a backlog of nearly 12,000 applications, with some applicants waiting more than two years, along with serious gaps in staff training and monitoring.

Minister, why has your government failed to ensure timely and properly managed registration services, despite years of warnings and clear recommendations from the Auditor General?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you for bringing that question forward. It is truly a very important and critical question for me to respond to.

I did receive and thank the Auditor General for her work. It points to a period of a five-year window when I asked, "How does the COVID pandemic factor into this?" The response I received from the Auditor General was that when First Nations come to ensure that they're doing their registration, there are a number of documents required at the provincial level. During the pandemic, there was a long period of time when we were not working from the office. That means those important, necessary documents were not always available. This did factor into the delay.

It is important to me as somebody who, herself, has to be registered that we respond to the deadlines. The standard offered to me from my department is a goal for them. We can do better because service delivery for me is important, not only because I believe in it but also because many of the people I am serving are my friends, my family and my colleagues. This is something very important to me: to ensure that we work well with the people who we're serving.

Senator Martin: Thank you. As I said, it is a 12,000-application backlog.

Bill S-2, which was previously asked about, would expand eligibility for status and could significantly increase the number of registration applications that your department would have to process. Given that the system is already struggling with lengthy delays and backlogs, how will your government ensure that Indigenous Services Canada is actually prepared to handle the additional workload and deliver these registrations in a timely and respectful way?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you for your follow-up question.

In fact, we have been extremely proactively prepared, I'll say, in the work that we're doing with Bill S-2, and officials in my department have identified the list of 3,500 people, and they have been set aside to ensure their registry will be prompt and, I will say, acted upon with immediacy and urgency.

There is still the question of the 12,000 outstanding registrations. We have been working very closely with our department to close that target. I want to share with the Senate that my vision is to ensure that you can get your registration as quickly as your passport.

INDIGENOUS YOUTH IN CARE

Hon. Mary Coyle: Welcome, minister. In 2020, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families came into force. This act allows for Indigenous Services to work with Indigenous groups who wish to design and deliver their child and family services.

Minister, according to the latest stats from Statistics Canada, over 50% of the children in care are Indigenous, despite the fact that Indigenous children represent less than 8% of the total child population in Canada. Also, according to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, youth from the child welfare system are at much greater risk of becoming involved with the juvenile criminal justice system, a process referred to as the child-welfare-to-prison pipeline.

Indigenous people continue to be overrepresented in prison, as you know, with 40% of youth admissions in correctional institutions being Indigenous. In your new capacity as Minister of Indigenous Services, and we're —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Coyle, I'm sorry. Thank you.

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you. This is one of the priority files in my office.

• (1610)

As minister, I believe it is with urgency we must act with our partners to address the children who are living with the reality of the impact of trauma in the community, with the challenges of being removed from home.

I'm sorry; it's very personal to me because I am impacted by people in my family being involved in this situation. For me, I am going to speak to what I can. This is in front of the tribunal right now. I'm engaging, and I've spoken to many communities in the summer. There is an urgency. We have come up with a strategy that I think will respond to those needs.

I want to let the Senate know there is progress on this file. I am committed. My greatest priority is to meet the deadline put in place for December 20.

Senator Coyle: Thank you. In the recent Auditor General's reports, Auditor General Hogan said that Indigenous Services Canada does not give enough support to increasing First Nations capacity to deliver programs and takes a "passive and siloed approach" to supporting those communities. With this in mind,

and with the implementation of the act we spoke about, could you provide the Senate with some examples of what your department is already doing to increase the capacity of Indigenous nations, communities and organizations to deliver their own programs?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. First, I want to start by saying it is clear for me the government is sending a strong signal of the urgency of ensuring that First Nations are able to make decisions for themselves in a First Nations context, working with a First Nations person. This is a strong approach. I am pleased to be a part of the government doing that.

I myself, in all of my files, have prioritized ensuring we respond to our partners in a timely way, ensuring internally, within the department, that we are respecting capacity building as our key core competency in service delivery.

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Hon. Margo Greenwood: Thank you for coming here today to meet with us, minister.

Last week, the Auditor General tabled a report outlining that Indigenous Services Canada made unsatisfactory progress in implementing 53% of its recommendations from previous audits over the last decade to improve programs and services. This is despite an 84% increase in funding since 2019.

The Office of the Auditor General, or OAG, found four barriers, two of which are a “lack of sustained management attention” and a “passive and siloed approach to supporting First Nations.”

How do you plan to address the barriers the Auditor General identified in her report?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you for the question.

I welcomed the Auditor General's report. I think that 53% shows there is a pathway that needs improvement. I also want to point out that the areas of success in the report were the areas on which we worked closely in co-development with our partnerships.

In terms of nursing, this is a nationwide situation where we are seeing a critical lack for nursing. I believe, first, that investment into education to ensure there are more Indigenous nurses is important. The report references 100 nurses who came on board to offer that service. My primary goal is to ensure they receive that service in the community.

One of my priority objectives is to introduce virtual health service delivery where individuals do not have to participate in medical travel; they can receive it from people they know. I hope it will be in their language. I hope they are also going to ensure that prevention and follow-up aftercare are delivered in community.

The government is working to lift those barriers of recognition for credentials both for the people in Canada and for those new Canadians coming in. They have a part to play in immediate

response. In the long term, that critical investment into education is the component that is going to offer the quality service we need to give First Nations by First Nations.

Senator Greenwood: As a follow-up, the same report states:

Although an action plan was developed, we found that the department had not made satisfactory progress in implementing any of our 5 recommendations to ensure that First Nations communities had ongoing access to safe drinking water

Can you describe how you will address this?

Ms. Gull-Masty: We are ensuring we're supporting communities where they are, removing the barriers for innovation, listening in a culturally based approach to what they're looking for to ensure they are advancing the situations in community, improving on service. We're ensuring that if there is a community that is not in a place to respond to the situation they are in, we incorporate building capacity for them, looking at a multi-faceted approach to support them to get them where they are. That, for me, is one of the biggest take-aways in all of the files — that partnership is critical.

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Hon. Paul (PJ) Prosper: Good afternoon, minister. There are millions of dollars in program funding set to sunset by March 31, 2026. As you well know from your time as Grand Chief, communities, tribal councils and organizations rely heavily on these programs for health, well-being. They are priorities for First Nations communities.

While stable, predictable and long-term funding is always preferable, allowing these programs to expire would mean severe layoffs and uncertainty for First Nations.

Minister, in this new age of austerity, how will your department reconcile the need to cut spending by 15% over the next three years with ensuring that First Nations do not lose access to critical program funding?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: As a minister, I was heavily involved with the process for comprehensive review. I worked closely with the Minister of Finance.

I am aware that many senators are eagerly awaiting the news on November 4 regarding the budget. I am confident in the outcomes we are going to see there.

The whole-of-government approach is one that reflects a need for review efficiency. I have done my work for efficiency. I have also done my work to ensure I protect the investments we've had over the past 10 years. I am going to hold this position to ensure that future investments are further aligned with the greatest amount of detail and support to First Nations and where they want to be.

We are not here to determine outcomes. We are here to build relationships. We trust communities to know what they want for themselves. I am going to ensure that my work as a minister reflects that process and that I have the funds to do it.

Senator Prosper: Thank you, minister. Given the uncertainty, the bureaucratic burden and the inability to plan that are created by program funding, will your government look to move to stable, long-term funding arrangements in the near future?

Ms. Gull-Masty: As part of the work we are doing, I want to reference that in many of the OAG reports a lot of the historical work we've done to co-develop and co-define was based on a space of stability. That is the best approach.

When we ask our partners to invest in defining what good work is, we also have to invest in our partners to know they have the capacity and the financial backing to do that good work. That's important to me as a minister.

Yes, I think this is progress, and we are moving towards that space.

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

Hon. Brian Francis: Good afternoon, minister. Last Wednesday marked the birthday of the late Jordan River Anderson, who inspired the creation of Jordan's Principle to ensure no other First Nations children suffered as he did.

Yet, nearly two decades later, too many still struggle to get timely and equitable access to essential care. Last February, Indigenous Services Canada added new rules and restricted services, leading to more delays and confusion.

Minister, you have publicly committed to revising these changes. What solutions will your department introduce to reduce the massive backlog of approximately 140,000 unresolved applications, including 25,000 marked as "urgent," and fully and properly deliver on the promise of Jordan's Principle? And how will you track and report on progress?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you, senator. This has been the most important file in my ministry. There is an urgency in this file. There is critical work which needs to be done. I have spent the entirety of my summer engaging with partners to address the decisions made in the bulletin issued last February.

As a minister, I have to acknowledge that there were decisions made in this ministry that didn't align with the objectives of what Jordan's Principle was doing.

• (1620)

Earlier this year, I also heard from the father of Jordan River Anderson who stated, "This program is a legacy to my son. This program needs to return to the place where it began." As a minister, I am going to respect the request of that family.

In my next steps on this file, I am going to ensure that I will first begin with the engagement of identifying with my partners and with community what that space is. That is how you define

the service you are going to offer. I don't only look at consultations as a necessary part of my role as a minister; it is also an obligation for me to ensure that if I'm going to change something, I'm doing it where I'm going to meet and maximize the response that I'm providing to community. My department has been directed to follow their lead.

Senator Francis: Thank you, minister. The bottom line is that under Jordan's Principle, Canada has a legal duty to deliver timely and equitable access to care, and your department needs to manage its resources and capacity more effectively to deliver a program that truly puts our children first. I hope that you will be able to make real progress and commit to greater transparency, accountability and certainty.

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. Of course, we have a shared objective. I have instructed my department to come back to me with a strategy that ensures the capacity we have internally meets the needs of what we are doing regarding engagement with our partners, ensuring we have people in place who are able to respond to the backlog.

I want to address the backlog. In the backlog, there are components that are reapplications and components that we are treating sequentially. Sometimes that is a challenge. Having clear criteria in what is applicable is a tool that I believe will give the department better capacity to respond to the requests.

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Hon. Margaret Dawn Anderson: Welcome, honourable minister. My question concerns the integrity of federal funding allocated to Indigenous Peoples.

Over the past decade, federal and territorial programs designed to support Indigenous communities have expanded, yet funding continues to be directed to self-proclaimed Indigenous organizations that are not recognized rights holders, including the NunatuKavut Community Council in Labrador. The Nunatsiavut Government, supported by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Inuit Circumpolar Council and Innu Nation, has been clear that the NunatuKavut Community Council is not an Inuit collective and does not hold rights under section 35 of the Constitution. Providing such funding diverts resources from recognized Indigenous governments, undermines treaty relationships and violates the Inuit Nunangat policy, which affirms that federal programs and resources for Inuit must flow through the four recognized Inuit treaty organizations.

Minister, what verification process does the government use when allocating —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, senator.

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you for the question. For me, the domain of identity is challenging to speak to. As I said, the reason that consultation is there is to identify for ourselves what our identity is. When I say "ourselves," I'm not speaking as a minister; I'm speaking as an Indigenous person. There is a complexity to that.

There are individuals who know where they are affiliated and individuals who know where they are not. There are some instances where there has been a determination by government of who should be affiliated and who shouldn't. This is why I believe it is important that we empower communities to define for themselves who their members are and what their status is. That is my objective as a minister: to ensure that pathway exists. This is how we are able to work with partners because they have determined for themselves what their identity is.

Government cannot proceed with the continuity of trying to define who is a legislated member of a group. It is up to those groups to acknowledge who their members are and determine their future for themselves.

Senator Anderson: Honourable minister, given the concerns raised by the Nunatsiavut Government and others across Inuit Nunangat, what, if any, concrete steps will your department take to review existing funding agreements and prevent future allocations to unrecognized, self-proclaimed groups that do not represent rights-bearing communities?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you for the question. As a minister, I want to be clear that I have instructed my department to ensure that we are progressing forward with partners who come to the table and tell us what their needs are, with partners who have a clear connection to the services we offer and with partners who have determined a path forward.

Some of these things in question are before the court. There are some things I can speak to and some things that I can't for that reason, but I want to be clear: My objective is to ensure that the service delivery I provide is to Indigenous Peoples. That should be determined by them.

MATHIAS COLOMB CREE NATION

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: The 2,200 citizens of the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation were evacuated for 126 days this summer because the community was without power. On August 20, the Minister of Indigenous Services was presented with a shovel-ready backup generator solution for the community, but to date, there has been no response.

The Mathias Colomb Cree Nation has paid 10% of the \$8-million cost of the ready-to-ship backup generator solution that has been vetted by Manitoba Hydro and hydro consultants. The First Nation will forfeit the \$800,000 down payment if the remaining \$7 million is not paid by October 31, 2025.

Will you issue a comfort letter so that they can pay and secure this critical backup?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you for the question, Senator McCallum.

It is challenging for me when I receive multiple requests from communities, and sometimes those requests are outside of the scope of Indigenous Services Canada. One of the issues is that Indigenous Services Canada is not responsible for energy supply to communities. That is at the provincial level and Crown corporation level.

I am well aware of the presentation they provided to me. I have asked the province to respond to their needs in a timely manner. I know that Mathias Colomb Cree Nation was outside of their community for an extended period of time. I believe this space requires the province to ensure the services they offer to all residents of that province are reflected even in remote, isolated regions.

Senator McCallum: It is a firmly established practice that Canada and Manitoba, specifically Manitoba Hydro, have cost-shared all energy-related capital infrastructure that serves First Nations in northern Manitoba, such as transmission lines and diesel generating systems. The minister has a constitutional obligation and fiduciary duty to ensure that the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation has energy security, especially for emergency response, which is becoming increasingly important with the increased frequency and intensity of severe weather and wildfires driven by climate change.

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. As a minister, I am doing everything to invest within the scope of the services that I offer. That means working with my fellow ministerial colleagues to align emergency management so that we are not only looking at prevention but also empowering communities to be decision makers that respond to emergencies and to ensure there is a climate component included in that. This is a new reality that we are living in. We have to be prepared to respond to it. That includes everybody in every province and in every community.

For me, at the same time, I have to ensure that I stay within this scope. Providing energy services to a community continues to lie within the jurisdiction of the provinces.

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

Hon. Rosemary Moodie: Welcome to the Senate.

Minister Gull-Masty, delays in Jordan's Principle applications are harming children and families. The Auditor General has stated it and the media have stated it. Children are waiting months for speech therapy, mobility aid, special ed support and critical mental health support. For a child with autism or chronic illness, these delays can mean a loss of developmental progress and an increase in risk of preventable illnesses.

Minister, can you tell us how many Jordan's Principle cases are currently waiting beyond the target timeline for processing? What immediate measures are you and your departmental officials intending to take to prevent children from being caught in these delays?

• (1630)

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you for the question. As I have stated previously, for me, ensuring that no future delays are identified is a critical step. Working with partners to ensure that we identify the things that are applicable to Jordan's Principle is a huge part of the response to that backlog. It is something that we want to prevent — future backlog.

For existing backlog, I have asked my department to come together to create a task force to ensure that they have a methodology in place to treat the existing backlog. For us, that ensures that we are able to respond rapidly. I believe that we have extremely competent staff who work directly with the community, with Jordan's Principle advisers. We are going to move forward with that next step.

I think it is critical for the Senate to know and understand we cannot rush through addressing a backlog. We have to make sure that we are making the right decisions for those children's needs. For me as a minister, it also means protecting their access to that service for the long term. I understand the backlog is there. It's part of my work to address it. It's part of my work to bring it down. For me, the bigger context is it's part of my work to protect the future of these kids who are using that service.

Senator Moodie: Minister, the Senate has heard from many First Nations leaders that they'd like to take control over the Jordan's Principle process, determining what eligible expenses are. Minister, can you provide an update on the Government of Canada's commitment to support greater First Nations control over Jordan's Principle management?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. I stand firm with my beliefs that when you work with partners, this is where you have the greatest success. There are some places where communities work very closely and have the lead in delivering Jordan's Principle service.

We're looking for those models of success. We're looking to be able to share that information with those communities that do not have the capacity to do it. I'm very open to what communities want to define as a step forward. I'm there to ensure that I have the resource available for it, the funding available for it. But for me, ensuring the continuity of that service is number one. Working with communities, working with partners to define the scope of what Jordan's Principle began as and where it should go is the critical dialogue for an outcome.

OVERREPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN PRISONS

Hon. Kim Pate: Welcome, minister. Thank you for being here.

Incarceration remains one of the starkest legacies and the current manifestation of residential schools and other colonial practices of forced separation and institutionalization. Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, or TRC, Call to Action No. 30, the government committed to eliminating the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in prisons by this year — in fact, by the end of last month.

One in two women and one in three men in federal prisons are Indigenous, and efforts such as the Indigenous Justice Strategy have only, however unintentionally, perpetuated and exacerbated overrepresentation. What concrete social, health, economic and educational services is your department funding in communities

to help end the conditions that result in systems failing Indigenous Peoples such that they end up in the only system that cannot refuse them, the prison and criminal legal system?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you. Every single one of the Calls to Action is important work that needs to be done. For me, as an Indigenous person, I have to acknowledge that centuries of harm done to people continue to contribute to the reality, much like in the justice system, that people are facing today.

There is continued work that needs to be put in place to respond to that action. I support my colleague Minister Fraser in the work that he is doing; I'm more than willing to help him with the insight that I have as an Indigenous person, with what I'm hearing from communities.

But there are supports that we have to continue to provide in the community. That prevention component is critical: investing in early childhood, investing in support and homes, taking a whole-of-family approach when there is an issue. This is what I envision for other files, like child and family care, ensuring that we are not only looking at the child that is facing adversity, but we are looking at the home, and we are working with every member in that family to support them in a healing process. That is not on a timeline. That is meeting them in their needs, on their timeline, in their space and supporting them based on a cultural context, supporting them in a context that allows for them to speak their language or empower themselves in land-based programs.

Senator Pate: At a time when the government is focused on efficient public spending, how is it evaluating the financial costs and public safety outcomes of mass incarceration of Indigenous Peoples versus what could be achieved by investments through Indigenous Services Canada, or ISC, in health care, housing, education, social and income supports and other measures that address the marginalization and, therefore, the victimization and criminalization of Indigenous Peoples?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. The work of my colleague Minister of Public Safety is critical work. We are there to support him with the information that he needs. I am able to ensure that I raise this with him the question that came to me today. I have had discussions with him.

It's really a part of the work that we're doing to have an inter-ministerial approach. I support my colleagues. I am always there to be in a position to offer them the information that they need, to speak about things that are outside of their scope, such as, as I said previously, the importance of prevention, aligning ourselves with having a restorative justice approach. All other mechanisms that we can offer to them within ISC's scope, we want to build that efficiency and the capacity for them to apply their —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

FIRST NATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Paul (PJ) Prosper: Minister, this chamber heard a lot of debate around Bill C-5, particularly the Building Canada Act portion. It was made clear that government will take into account First Nations' input when determining the national interests.

The Assembly of First Nations, or AFN, said the massive infrastructure gap on-reserve is a major priority. While ISC supports governance in communities, there is no governance-related infrastructure. This leaves communities like Bear River First Nation without a band office for years. Imagine Ottawa without the City Hall.

Minister, how is your government defining the national interest in a way that incorporates First Nations interests?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you. This government was elected on a platform that really responded to the urgency of the situation. We are ensuring that we are trying to protect and defend the interests of Canada; that includes Indigenous Peoples.

There are five criteria for major projects to move forward in Bill C-5. Those are projects that are shovel-ready, that will have an impact on the Canadian economy, that are going to meet Indigenous interests, that have participation of Indigenous groups, that are also going to attract that private capital.

So there is work to ensure that we are supplementing the economy by attracting the investment. I am there to respond to the infrastructure gap that is critical, meeting communities, providing them the service that they need so that we can build and close the infrastructure gap.

As to the urgency of what Bill C-5 is trying to do, it would be unfair to First Nations to proceed with that without giving them the time to be able to identify how they factor into it. They are part of the major projects process. The — I'm going to say — public component of governance-related infrastructure falls outside of the scope of that bill. We still have the work to do at ISC.

Senator Prosper: Minister, I was asked by your predecessor, Minister Hajdu, to support water legislation, formerly Bill C-61, as a sponsor in the Senate. It was my portfolio as Regional Chief and was part of my call for action within the first 100 sitting days of your government.

Minister, can you advise us if and when you will be reintroducing water legislation? Will it be in the amended form that left committee in the other place?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. Ensuring that access to quality water is very important to me. I'm an Indigenous person. I have on occasion seen what a boil-water advisory looks like. But I also know that when you are in government and you are trying to address something, there has to be a strategy of when you put forward legislation. I will let the government do the work needed to define when it's coming on schedule. I'm confident that this is a positive outlook for me. I'm looking forward to seeing what those next steps will be. I'm looking forward to working with the Senate in addressing what this new legislation will look like.

• (1640)

ELIMINATION OF SEX-BASED INEQUITIES IN THE INDIAN ACT

Hon. Judy A. White: Welcome, Madam Minister. It is an honour to have you here. To see an Indigenous woman serving as Minister of Indigenous Services is historic. It's a powerful indicator that our voices are not only being heard, but they are leading. Thank you for that.

I want to go back to Bill S-2. My question regards that. I would like to hear what your ministry would want to see as the outcome of Bill S-2. My supplementary question, which I'll introduce now, is this: How does your department plan to deal with the impacts of the second-generation cut-off with respect to gender-based discrimination?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you. I will be very frank: My ideal outcome regarding Bill S-2 is that it will pass with immediacy to address those the bill was intended for, the 3,500 members looking to have reinstatement of status. This is what I put forward. My ideal outcome would be that we're able to have an answer for them. There is a court deadline in place. As minister, I want to ensure I protect those facing enfranchisement issues.

In terms of the second-generation cut-off, since 2023, consultation has been undertaken. It is my duty as minister to ensure that I respect the process of consultation. I believe that for second-generation cut-off, the response is not one-size-fits-all for all of Canada. Nations, their needs and their relationships with their members are unique. I have to respect that and ensure that I bring a solution forward that is tailored to them. I can only get that through the consultation process.

Senator White: I have a supplementary question. Is there a time frame or a road map regarding when that consultation will be completed and/or how it will be approached?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. For consultations to occur, the community must determine the solution that they wish to identify. We have put in place a process that will conclude by December 2025. At the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, I offered to come back and speak to what I had heard.

I am not going to give a timeline, and the reason for this is very specific. I will not rush the communities that I work with to ensure that I'm finding a solution that meets the timeline of an outside institution. We have to be sure that we respect our partners in consultation. We have to give them the space they need to do that work. I know and sense that there is true urgency from the Senate to try to address this. I share that urgency.

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Minister, the Auditor General's latest report found that Indigenous Services Canada failed to implement more than half of the recommendations to improve programs and services for Indigenous Peoples made over the past decade. Despite an

84% increase in funding, from \$13 billion in 2019-20 to nearly \$24 billion in 2023-24, progress was deemed unsatisfactory on 18 of 34 recommendations.

How does your government explain such a staggering disconnect between record-level spending and so few tangible results?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: I will respectfully say there is a component of your question that I cannot find myself in agreement with. Ensuring that we respond to and provide funding to address years of critical underfunding for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities is not something that we should identify as requiring justification. For me, it's ensuring that we're working with communities where they are.

There are some communities that were extremely high capacity. They were able to succeed in what they identified. These are some of the outcomes in the report. There are some communities that need additional support and capacity to meet those targets in the report. There are some communities, unfortunately, still struggling with trying to move forward. I have to support this spectrum of communities and meet them where they are. If that means that I'm not able to meet the timeline of the Auditor General, I will accept that outcome. But I will first and foremost protect the integrity of those communities to ensure that what we have identified as targets are met in the space where they are. I will do everything I can to support them with that progress.

Senator Martin: I'm also looking at taxpayers and the fact that billions of dollars more have been spent without meaningful accountability for failure. Minister, after six separate Auditor General reports, what concrete steps will your government take to ensure that Indigenous Services Canada finally implements the Auditor General's recommendations? When can Parliament expect measurable results instead of yet another follow-up audit saying the same thing? This is now six Auditors General later.

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. As I tell my colleagues in the House and the people I work with, Indigenous issues are non-partisan. They are issues that we as a country must respond to and work with. There is a history and legacy in this country that has been extremely harmful. We are not going to force a perceived proper outcome on First Nations. I say this with all due respect for the Auditor General; I know that she is sharing a reflection and an opinion. As a minister, I will continue to respond to communities and support them where they are.

FIRST NATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): As you say, there has been more money spent, but your government often speaks of reconciliation and closing the infrastructure gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Yet recent reports now place that gap at an estimated \$425 billion — this is the reality — with Indigenous leaders expressing skepticism that the 2025 Budget will offer new investment in urgently needed housing, clean water and community infrastructure.

[Senator Martin]

You said that with the anticipated budget, you have faith and are looking forward to what will be there for Indigenous communities. But can you assure this chamber that essential Indigenous services will not be reduced to offset government-induced fiscal pressures and that your department's commitments in this budget will deliver concrete and measurable improvements for Indigenous communities?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: I can assure you that our target is not only a baseline of essential services. Our target is to ensure that we are improving service and meeting communities to define what that service looks like — that it is culture-based, that the outcomes are driven by them and that social determinants are identified in culture, language and identity.

I can also assure you that on November 4, we will have a budget. This is where we will see additional information. My statement was that I feel confident that we're making the right decisions for Indigenous People. I will also say that I am confident that these decisions meet Canadians where they are right now. We're in a place where there are extreme challenges and pressures on Canada. We are not sidestepping our obligations that exist outside of that context.

I'm very confident and looking forward to the budget being announced on November 4.

Senator Martin: Minister, the Assembly of First Nations, or AFN, and Indigenous Services Canada, or ISC, released a report in 2023 entitled *Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030*, but that target now appears increasingly out of reach. I know you have confidence, but what specific actions will this year's budget take to finally narrow the \$425-billion gap? How will your department measure real progress instead of repeating the same commitments year after year?

• (1650)

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. ISC is, first and foremost, going to work with rights holders in addressing their concerns. I believe that the Assembly of First Nations does really important work. They have always highlighted and pointed to those important questions for communities — the direction they are looking for. This is one document you can reference.

My responsibility and my obligation is to work with rights holders, and that is directly with the community. In terms of the investments they are looking for, those include infrastructure in the community, support in moving forward with major projects, support in the development of relationships and partnerships with other levels of government to see what they would like to contribute to or participate in their region, making sure that mechanisms for economic support in my department —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Madam Minister. Your time has ended.

NESKANTAGA FIRST NATION

Hon. Bernadette Clement: Minister, yesterday, I met with an impressive delegation from Northern Ontario: the Neskantaga First Nation, including Chief Gary Quisess. I understand that you met with them, too. Former Chief of Neskantaga First Nation, Wayne Moonias, asked me to raise these needs with you: the closed nursing station, the future of high school education in the community, the need for a youth wellness and culture centre and the replacement of the water treatment plant.

This delegation suggested that the government has failed in its obligations to Neskantaga First Nation, and I agree. They have been dealing with Band-Aids when they need permanent solutions. They have been given promises when they need action. These crises — water, health, suicide and housing — impact the well-being of the community.

Did you make commitments to Neskantaga's leadership yesterday? When can they expect their concerns to be addressed?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you.

Yes, I did, in fact, also meet with the delegation that came from Neskantaga. It was my first opportunity to meet with them. They raised many of the items that you referenced. The majority of our time was really spent focusing on the issue of nursing. When a nursing station is not open, it forces the community, in their case, to have to declare a state of emergency and evacuate. It also requires them to seek alternative health care services.

It was an incredibly important discussion for me, because, as minister, the nursing station is a capital asset that my department invested in. They have asked for a long-term feasibility study for a new nursing station. For me to be able to move forward with the request, there is information that I need in order to do the analysis to determine the state of the capital asset that exists now.

My commitment to them was to work with them to ensure that we're able to gather that information to determine what the portrait of the existing capital asset looks like and to understand what a long-term feasibility study can look like in health care service delivery.

Senator Clement: Thank you, minister.

Community leaders advised me yesterday that they received a commitment from the previous government that they would start on a new water treatment plant design immediately. That was two years ago. The community has been working for years with water experts, trying to find a way to fix the system that simply doesn't work. They need a new one.

We know that they will need years, maybe decades, to begin trusting in the safety of the new water treatment plant.

That work needs to start now, and they want to know: Have you instructed your staff to fund the design of the water treatment plant?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you.

We did have a discussion at the end of our session directly with the individual who is responsible for the operations of the water plant. They brought to my attention the existing study that was put in place for design. Unfortunately, I did not have the information to respond to them at that time.

I am aware that Neskantaga is one of the boil-water advisories that has existed for almost three decades. I'm not going to speak to the commitment of my predecessor; I have a lot of respect for her, and I think she was trying to meet the community where they are. For me, I want to give the proper answer, and I will be coming back to the community. We have agreed to have a follow-up session in a very timely manner.

INDIGENOUS HEALTH

Hon. David Arnot: Minister, thank you for attending the groundbreaking of the Whitecap Dakota Nation's Virtual Health Hub in Saskatchewan on September 12. The Virtual Health Hub telepresence model will significantly improve health care outcomes for people living in rural and remote communities in Canada.

Much-needed funding, provided by the Government of Canada and the Government of Saskatchewan, was instrumental in making that groundbreaking happen. As we know, it is stable and consistent ongoing operational funding that ensures long-term success.

Minister, will you or your department commit to the long-term funding for the operations of the Virtual Health Hub to ensure these critical health care outcomes are met?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you.

It was a pleasure for me to be there. It was my first trip to Saskatchewan.

I'm going to take part of my time to shine a light on this incredible project, where there is worldwide leading innovation at the community level to offer virtual health services. I was so impressed — "impressed" is an understatement — by the work that I have seen being done there. The innovation and the support from the doctor that was part of it impressed me. I intend to bring this idea forward within government with my colleagues for them to understand that the future of health care has been identified in Saskatchewan. We need to meet it in this moment, bring it forward and apply it in those remote regions, even beyond the province.

I also want to ensure that the success of that project is met with viable funding. Once again, on November 4, we will see a budget. We're looking to progress with them. They are a very valuable partner. I have a lot of respect for Chief Darcy Bear. I had the opportunity to work with him as a former lands claim Grand Chief. I really have a lot of respect for what he has done for his community. Kudos to him.

Senator Arnot: Thank you, minister.

Canada has committed to a renewed relationship based on rights recognition, implementation and measurable outcomes. On June 22, 2023, Bill C-51, An Act to give effect to the self-government treaty recognizing the Whitecap Dakota Nation / Wapaha Ska Dakota Oyate and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, received Royal Assent. An issue still facing Whitecap Dakota members who have married in or transferred in, and who have significant community ties, is that they are not eligible for benefits, such as annuities and agricultural provisions.

Bill S-2 does not provide an adequate remedy in such situations. Minister, what can be done to fix this fundamental wrong?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you.

Chief Bear is an incredible partner. I was pleased to hear his news. I know that my colleague Minister Alty — this is within the purview of her file — is very supportive of the process. I will raise a follow-up question for her to respond to.

I also want to state that Bill S-2 was not intended to address that. The work that we need to do with “second gen” and everything around status really needs to be a responsibility that we give back to communities for them to define among themselves, nation-to-nation, at the Indigenous/First Nations level, how they can work together. We are a partner in that process.

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister. Your time has expired.

AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY

Hon. Mary Robinson: Many First Nations in British Columbia have forged an economic pathway for their well-being through salmon farming and see great potential in it for their future. The previous government’s decision to ban open-net pen farming in 2029 is not supported by science or by nations. According to the BC Salmon Farmers Association, today, 100% of B.C.’s farmed salmon is raised in agreement with rights-holding First Nations. The sector directly and indirectly employs over 1,000 Indigenous People and provides \$134 million in total annual economic benefits to First Nations Peoples.

What has your consultation with First Nations looked like on this front? Do you consider this a viable path forward for First Nations in their pursuit of economic self-determination and reconciliation?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you.

Subsistence hunting and access to cultural food are important to me. It is about 75% of my diet. I’m very thankful that I married a hunter.

All First Nations want to have access to their traditional foods, not just because it is enacting their culture, a part of their history and their identity, it is part of their diet, it contributes to well-being and to spirituality. The consultation process and the determinants of salmon fishing make for a complex situation. It is also not part of the scope of my department. Environment and Climate Change Canada, or ECCC, has a part to play in this. I’m very encouraged by my colleague and her approach. I’m looking forward to continuing that dialogue with her.

• (1700)

I want to be respectful of the communities and where they are with their consultations and to respond that we are listening to them. We, and I personally, understand the importance of what they are asking. But I also want to make sure that, as a minister, I’m working with my colleagues to really stress that importance and why it is so significant to respond to their consultations.

Senator Robinson: Thank you, minister. It is important that the government change its policy direction on this. Aquaculture is a \$2-billion industry employing more than 17,000 people in Canada, in all provinces and the Yukon. The science does not support the ban.

Can you commit today to working with Minister Thompson on this important decision to give these First Nations the ability to continue salmon farming in their territories and, importantly, empower them to shape their economic futures?

Ms. Gull-Masty: Thank you. I can commit to working with my colleague Minister Thompson. I fully know and support that ministers are coming together and trying to identify the closing of the gap between the necessary protection of culture, of harvesting activities, and the work that other ministers do. I will say not just Minister Thompson, but all ministers have a responsibility to respond to the Indigenous thread that runs through their departments. This is my approach as a minister. I encourage that. I’ve had many ministers who are extremely receptive to that.

INDIAN ACT

Hon. Marty Klyne: Minister, welcome. Last week, the Whitecap Dakota Nation recommended two amendments to Bill S-2 at our meeting of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples. One is an interim solution to the second-generation cut-off, which is threatening the survival of many First Nations and excluding individuals from their communities. Whitecap proposes to allow First Nations to convey irrevocable 6(2) status on their own authority to an individual with at least one 6(2) parent and a connection to the community.

This workable solution would respect the principles of self-determination, heritage connection to status and community connection. It also has an opt-in model, since the First Nations would have to choose to exercise their own authority to confer status.

Would you please consider this interim amendment as a solution with immediacy to address urgent harms? Would you like to make any comments?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services: Thank you. The need to consult First Nations on second-generation cut-off is critical because although Chief Darcy Bear and Whitecap feel like that could be a solution for them, that could potentially not be a solution for many other groups. That could cause — I had a term shared with me meaning “consequences that were not foreseen as a part of a decision.” I’ll remember the term the minute I leave, but consequences of a decision are highly impactful for some First Nations.

For me, the scope of that consultation will allow for communities to determine their solution. It is complex. It is not a one-size-fits-all solution. We have to meet communities in letting them identify what their solution is. We cannot determine a single process and try to apply it.

Once again, as a minister, I cannot bypass the consultation process. I am required to do that. I am not only required to do that, as an Indigenous person I have held the government to task, to respect it, to respect free, prior and informed consent, or FPIC and UNDRIP. I continue to maintain that position as a minister.

Senator Klyne: Minister, the second amendment raised by Whitecap concerns the transfer of treaty benefits. Currently, when a person from a numbered treaty nation transfers to a non-numbered treaty nation, such as the Dakota Nation, they lose their treaty benefits. However, nowhere in the treaties does it state that marriage or transfer extinguishes these rightful benefits, which are essentially inheritances.

Would you please consider an amendment to clarify that such benefits should not be lost because of transfer and, instead, see the inherent rights that lay within our treaties as an answer?

Ms. Gull-Masty: The relationship with the Crown falls within the scope of the work of my colleague Minister Alty. I have a lot of respect for her, and I really welcome our working relationship. We both feel that when you are going to make those adjustments, they should be driven by the community.

The consultations on second generation are a part of the work that we’re doing to address status. There’s a component of her work that needs to align with this. I believe that taking the time to ensure that alignment is reflective of what communities are asking us to do is the pathway that we have to follow. It is for that reason that we are, once again, reaffirming the importance of the consultation process with rights holders.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the time for Question Period has expired.

I am certain you will want to join me in thanking Minister Gull-Masty for joining us today. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES DAY BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Forest, seconded by the Honourable Senator Dasko, for the second reading of Bill S-237, An Act respecting a Cities and Municipalities Day.

Hon. Claude Carignan: Honourable senators, I rise today to express my sincere support for an initiative that, in my opinion, fills a void in our system of institutional and democratic recognition: the creation of a “Cities and Municipalities Day,” as proposed in Senator Forest’s Bill S-237.

It’s time for us to recognize the fundamental role that municipalities play in the lives of Canadians. I would stress that this is not just a symbolic gesture, not just another civic holiday. It is a meaningful recognition of the values, skills and commitment that municipal governments contribute to the social and economic fabric of our country.

More often than not, when people talk about governance, they immediately think of the federal or provincial government. However, the first level of government that citizens turn to, the one closest to them, is the municipality.

When a park needs renovating, people go to city hall.

As I crossed the road to get here earlier today, I thought to myself that, if we want to have an impact as a government, we need to look at the municipal level. The sidewalk I was walking on is under municipal jurisdiction. The street I was crossing is under municipal jurisdiction. The traffic lights, public safety, that’s all under municipal jurisdiction. The pipes that run under the road are under municipal jurisdiction. The bus that passed in front of me is under municipal jurisdiction.

Back when I was a mayor, I sometimes had fun at certain people's expense when they came to question period and complained that the \$250 waste collection tax was ridiculously high. I found it amusing to suggest we make a deal: They would not have to pay the \$250 waste collection tax, it would be taken off their tax bill, but they would have to dispose of their waste themselves — legally, at an approved site and at their own expense. They thought I was joking. I told them to try it and then let me know if it cost more than \$250. That put a swift end to the debate, of course.

The mayor gets calls when neighbourhood safety becomes a concern. The councillors meet every week to listen to the residents' concerns, big and small. This is what I call the "government of everyday life."

This government often operates with limited resources, under heavy pressure, but always with an unshakeable desire to serve.

• (1710)

I'd like to take this opportunity to salute the men and women who have been elected to municipal councils, who devote long hours, including evenings and weekends — often to the detriment of their personal lives — to moving their communities forward. Their role is too often misunderstood or underestimated, yet they embody what is most noble in politics: local, direct, selfless commitment to the common good. They are the ones who manage municipal infrastructure and services such as waterworks, sewers, local roads, day camps, urban planning, police services, fire services, civil security, affordable housing, homelessness, budget management, environmental management, the many impacts of climate change, garbage, recycling and compost collection, parks, sports facilities, public transportation, animal control, and more. As you can see, colleagues, the list is long. If you want to have an impact on people's lives, it's at the municipal level that the work gets done.

A "Cities and Municipalities Day" would be a simple but powerful way of saying thank you to them for their dedication.

I would also like to remind you that municipalities are often on the front lines when major crises occur, as we recently saw. When floodwaters rise, municipalities are there to coordinate evacuations. When wildfires break out, municipalities are there to set up shelters. During the pandemic, cities, towns and villages adapted their services, sometimes overnight, to keep Canadians safe. They are the first to respond but often the last to be consulted. Yet their leadership, their resilience and, most of all, their innovation command respect. They do not have the luxury of time; they need to act quickly and decisively.

Allow me to respectfully remind you that according to our Constitution, municipalities come under provincial jurisdiction. However, their role in Canadian life extends far beyond this legal formality.

Respect for our institutions requires a functional recognition of municipal governance. We need cooperation based on mutual

recognition between the three levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal. A "Cities and Municipalities Day" would serve as a gesture of openness and send a clear message that the Parliament of Canada recognizes and respects the invaluable contributions that municipalities make to the country's development.

Let's think for a moment about the diversity of municipalities across Canada. We have big cities like Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary. We also have dynamic medium-sized cities like Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke, Saguenay, Kelowna, Moncton and of course Saint-Eustache, the city where I had the honour of serving as mayor. We have small rural municipalities, sometimes with just a few hundred people, and Indigenous communities with their own local forms of governance. All of these entities have different realities, but they have the same objective: to serve their citizens with efficiency, fairness, diligence and dignity.

We here in the Senate must listen to this diversity. We must honour it.

A "Cities and Municipalities Day" would also be an opportunity to raise public awareness, particularly among young people, about the importance of getting involved at the municipal level. The first step in democratic life is often voting in municipal elections, getting involved in a neighbourhood committee or an urban planning advisory committee, and asking the municipal council questions. We have everything to gain by promoting local democracy. By encouraging local involvement, we strengthen national democracy. By giving municipalities visibility, we give citizens a renewed desire to get involved.

Finally, honourable colleagues, I see this day as something that will bring people together, an opportunity to set aside partisan and geographic differences and celebrate what we share in common. Every Canadian, whether in Gaspé, Iqaluit, Winnipeg or Victoria, is a resident of a municipality. What unites us is our sense of belonging to a community, a city, a town or a village. That is why I believe that the Parliament of Canada needs to support this proposal.

Colleagues, supporting the creation of a "Cities and Municipalities Day" is not a meaningless gesture. It is a sign of recognition, respect and institutional maturity. For all the people in every corner of the country who are working to improve their communities, I say this: We see you, we respect you and we're with you.

I urge you to support this initiative wholeheartedly, knowing without a doubt that by recognizing municipalities, we are strengthening Canada as a whole. Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Tannas, debate adjourned.)

[English]

THE SENATE

MOTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION IN GAZA— DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Woo, seconded by the Honourable Senator Dean:

That, in light of findings and orders from the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court on the situation in Gaza, the Senate call on the Government to examine the risk to Canada and Canadians of complicity in violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and to report on its findings within three months of the adoption of this motion.

Hon. Tracy Muggli: Honourable senators, I wish to thank Senator Woo for introducing this motion. We have seen what happens when the world looks away, when international law is ignored and humanitarian norms are cast aside. When journalists are barred, when infrastructure is destroyed and when aid is weaponized, civilians suffer. They pay the price with their lives, their dignity and their mental well-being.

According to Save the Children, at least one Palestinian child has been killed every hour on average by Israeli forces in Gaza during the past two years of violence, with the number of children killed now surpassing 20,000, or 2% of Gaza's child population.

Over a thousand of the children killed were under the age of one. Four hundred and fifty of those babies were born and killed during the violence. I want to repeat that, colleagues: 450 babies were brought into this world and left it during this genocide, 450 babies who never knew peace for even a single day.

These are some of the facts we've heard over the past year from fellow Canadians who have served as doctors and humanitarians in Gaza. Many in this chamber have taken advantage of informal meetings to hear the stories of Canadians who have returned. Many of you have come and heard first-hand accounts of the situation in Gaza and the West Bank. We have heard from organizations like Save the Children — whom I quoted a moment ago — Oxfam, the Red Cross, Doctors Against Genocide, Reporters Without Borders, CARE Canada, UNICEF and many others.

We have heard that people are suffering not only from bombardment and starvation but from the severe psychological trauma of displacement and loss. These are the invisible wounds of war.

I want to pause for a moment to acknowledge that those invisible wounds extend to the humanitarians we heard from as well, those who sacrificed a part of themselves when they volunteered to go abroad. Not a single person who served on the

ground in Gaza will escape psychologically unharmed. Not one will be immune to what they endured, and yet they did it. Then they returned home and shared their stories.

With independent journalists largely barred from Gaza, these humanitarians have become the witnesses, reliving unimaginable memories, often breaking down as they speak. We owe them a debt of gratitude, and I think we owe them a response.

Colleagues, we cannot change the past, but we must examine and acknowledge our role in it. I believe we must respond to the moment and shape what happens next.

The World Health Organization estimates that one in five people in conflict-affected populations lives with a mental health disorder, and about one in ten suffers a moderate to severe condition.

In Gaza, even before this latest war, over half of all children showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, according to a 2020 study in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. Following months of siege and bombardment, UNICEF warns that virtually every child now shows signs of trauma and “toxic stress.”

• (1720)

The United Nations reports that nearly 90% of Gaza's population has been displaced and faces chronic and unrelenting trauma. Recent clinical data underline the scale of this mental health emergency.

A 2025 peer-reviewed study entitled “The Psychological Toll of War and Forced Displacement in Gaza” found that 79% of respondents reported moderate or severe anxiety, 84% reported depression and nearly 68% met full diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, under the DSM-5, or *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Almost two thirds suffered significant symptoms of all three conditions at once. The majority were unemployed and displaced into camps or shelters, and more than one in five had lost a first-degree relative.

The researchers concluded that Gaza's internally displaced population is facing “. . . very high rates of psychiatric disorders . . .” and that mental health interventions “. . . must be prioritized to support society's long-term recovery.”

As terrible as these statistics are, they are not unexpected. We know what prolonged terror and deprivation do to the human mind: They fray communities, fuel despair and make recovery far more difficult.

In Bosnia, 10 years after the war ended, roughly 1 in 10 citizens was still living with PTSD. In Rwanda, survivors of the 1994 genocide continue to battle depression and flashbacks. A 2018 study on the population found 35% had major depression and 28% had PTSD.

Former senator Roméo Dallaire, who has publicly struggled with PTSD following the genocide, put it this way:

... there's no time factor [for PTSD] A very close colleague of mine, who was with me over there, ran a program for us with veterans. . . . He fundamentally crashed—22 years later. The stress was so powerful that he could not sustain it and he nearly lost his mind. . . .

Trauma does not stop when the conflict ends. People and families carry the weight of grief long after the world moves on. For Palestinians today, their trauma is layered: war upon war, loss upon loss, famine, destruction, displacement and death. People returning from Gaza have told me that Palestinians feel abandoned by the global community. They are in despair.

As Canadians, we take pride in being a nation that believes in human rights and international law. But those principles mean little if we abandon them when they are most needed.

We must be honest: We did not do enough to prevent this catastrophe. We hesitated to speak when early warnings were sounded. In January 2024, the International Court of Justice ruled it plausible that Israel's actions in Gaza could amount to genocide. Did Canada do enough to ensure that we were not complicit?

I am speaking in support of Senator Woo's motion today because I believe we must acknowledge our actions and inactions. I also speak today because I believe we still have a duty to act. We must help those who survived to rebuild and recover. We cannot abandon the people of Gaza again.

Colleagues, I believe that healing is integral to recovery. After every atrocity, we learn the same lesson: If we focus only on infrastructure and if we ignore psychological repair, we leave societies fragile and divided for generations.

In Rwanda's community-based sociotherapy, the "You heal me, I heal you" approach had significant benefits for mental health and social cohesion.

In my experience as a mental health professional, I have seen the importance of ongoing support in communities that experience tragedies. We know that suicidality becomes a prominent reality and must be addressed for many years following the tragedy. In this case, generations of psychological interventions will be required. We have an abundance of evidence on how to move forward. What we do not have is time.

I believe Canada must step up, learn from the past and lead international efforts for mental health recovery in Gaza and the West Bank, just as we once led on land mines and refugee resettlement.

We can fund humanitarian partners to provide mobile counselling clinics; to train, support and empower local mental health teams; and to ensure mental health is a pillar of all the work that will need to be done to help Gaza heal.

Women and children especially need focused support. A West Bank woman who spoke at an Oxfam panel this year told us:

We need the world to see that mental health is survival too. Food and shelter keep people alive. Mental health helps them live again.

Colleagues, we know what happens when we fail to act, and we know what can happen when we do. Canada has the capacity and credibility to help rebuild lives as well as homes.

We can make mental health support a cornerstone of recovery and help families find stability after so much loss. This motion is not only about looking back; it is also about acknowledging what kind of different roles we want Canada to play going forward.

I want to draw your attention to something I read in an article about former senator Roméo Dallaire, where he described his feelings as the genocide ended and he returned home, carrying the invisible trauma—the mental agony that was manifest through his experience.

The article said:

Already, in the immediate aftermath, Dallaire couldn't sleep. His right arm was mysteriously fluctuating between sharp pain and paralysis. A voice in the back of his head was incessantly screaming, "Why is the rest of the world carrying on like nothing has happened?"

Colleagues, we cannot undo the past, but we can choose to be present now. We can choose to respond. We can choose to lead with care, decency and the humanitarian values we expect of ourselves.

All Palestinians have left is hope.

We cannot carry on like nothing has happened.

Meegwetch, marsee.

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Honourable senators, I stand today to speak to Motion No. 13, presented to this chamber by Senator Yuen Pau Woo, which is proposing:

That, in light of findings and orders from the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court on the situation in Gaza, the Senate call on the Government to examine the risk to Canada and Canadians of complicity in violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and to report on its findings within three months of the adoption of this motion.

In speaking to this motion, my goal is to look more closely with you at the framework of the international rule of humanitarian law and to encourage colleagues in this chamber to see that the inquiry recommended in this motion is worthy of this chamber and worthy of the Government of Canada, if only to

back up years of frequent references by Canada's cabinets and diplomatic corps affirming Canada's commitment to defending and upholding the international rule of law. This motion is respectful of the words of Canada's representatives on the world stage, and this motion returns to this chamber the opportunity to invite Canada to match the standards set in these words with responsible self-examination.

I invite you to join me as I look briefly at some key components of the international rule of humanitarian law, of which Canada speaks as a defender, which are implicit in Senator Woo's Motion No. 13.

There is the case of *South Africa v. Israel*. The International Court of Justice, or ICJ, is the United Nations court composed of 15 judges elected to nine-year terms of office by the United Nations General Assembly and the UN Security Council by voting simultaneously but separately. In order to be elected, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes in both bodies.

• (1730)

Judges must be elected from among persons of high moral character who possess the qualifications required in their respective countries for appointment to the highest judicial offices or are jurists of recognized competence in international law.

The court may not include more than one national of the same state. Moreover, the court as a whole must represent the main forms of civilization and the principal legal systems of the world. Once elected, a member of the court is a delegate neither of the government of their own country nor of that of any other state.

Unlike most other organs of international organizations, the court is not composed of representatives of governments. Members of the court are independent judges whose first task, before taking up their duties, is to make a solemn declaration in open court that they will exercise their powers impartially and conscientiously. The current court is made up of judges from Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Romania, Slovakia, Uganda and the United States.

The case before the ICJ on the issue of Palestine and Israel is known in short form as *South Africa v. Israel*. The full title is *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip*.

South Africa is far from alone in asking the ICJ to examine the Genocide Convention. It is joined by several dozen other countries, including Ireland, Spain, Brazil and China. So far, the ICJ has ruled on several provisional measures directing Israel to halt its offensive in Rafah and ensure basic measures such as food, water and clothing are available.

Almost two years ago, in the order of January 26, 2024:

... the Court also found that at least some of the rights claimed by South Africa under the Genocide Convention and for which it is seeking protection were plausible, namely the right of the Palestinians in Gaza to be protected from acts of genocide and related prohibited acts mentioned in Article III, and the right of South Africa to seek Israel's compliance with the latter's obligations under the Convention.

The court went on to state:

... in conformity with its obligations under the Genocide Convention, Israel must immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.

In addition to South Africa's case before the ICJ as the UN court, the United Nations General Assembly, or UNGA, the governing body of the United Nations with 193 member states, requested an advisory opinion from the court on its obligations in terms of the genocide in Palestine.

On December 19, 2024, UNGA adopted the advisory opinion, which assessed the evidence of genocide in Palestine. The court concluded that the "... State of Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful ..." and:

... the State of Israel is under an obligation to bring to an end its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as rapidly as possible ...

This advisory opinion from the ICJ also laid out the legal consequences for UN member states if they are complicit in the genocide. Israel did not consent to the jurisdiction of the court to give this advisory opinion. However, the court retains jurisdiction to give this opinion because it is not a bilateral dispute but an advisory opinion on legal consequences requested by the UN governing body, UNGA.

The court noted that since Resolution 181(II) in 1947, the General Assembly has had a permanent responsibility toward the question of Palestine. The court also found that the Security Council does not have exclusive jurisdiction under the United Nations Charter to address issues of international peace and security.

The court summarized the work done by the United Nations and the International Court of Justice on the question of Palestine

and Israel since 1947, noting that Israel has been constructing illegal settlements in Palestinian land since 1967 and concluding that:

All legislative and administrative actions taken by Israel to change the status of the City of Jerusalem, including expropriation of land and properties, transfer of populations and legislation aimed at the incorporation of the occupied section, are totally invalid and cannot change that status.

In its opinion to the UN General Assembly, the International Court of Justice found:

The fact that an occupation is prolonged does not in itself change its legal status under international humanitarian law. Although premised on the temporary character of the occupation, the law of occupation does not set temporal limits that would, as such, alter the legal status of the occupation. . . .

It continued, stating:

With regard to the right to self-determination, the court considers that, while it is for the General Assembly and the Security Council to pronounce on the modalities required to ensure an end to Israel's illegal presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the full realization of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, all states must co-operate with the United Nations to put those modalities into effect.

As recalled in the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations:

Every State has the duty to promote, through joint and separate action, realization of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter, and to render assistance to the United Nations in carrying out the responsibilities entrusted to it by the Charter regarding the implementation of the principle . . .

This is General Assembly Resolution 2625.

Now I would like to turn to a brief discussion of the International Criminal Court, or ICC. Canada contributed significantly to the Rome Statute that created the International Criminal Court. This is not a UN court. It is an independent, permanent court of last resort with jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute the most serious crimes of international concern — namely, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Canada became the first country in the world to incorporate the obligations of the Rome Statute into its national laws when it adopted the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act. On November 21, 2024, the ICC issued warrants for the arrest of

Israel's prime minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, and Mr. Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The extensive evidence cited by the court includes:

The effects of the use of starvation as a method of warfare, together with other attacks and collective punishment against the civilian population of Gaza are acute, visible and widely known, and have been confirmed by multiple witnesses interviewed by [the Office of the prosecutor], including local and international medical doctors. They include malnutrition, dehydration, profound suffering and an increasing number of deaths among the Palestinian population, including babies, other children, and women. . . .

Israel, like all States, has a right to take action to defend its population. That right, however, does not absolve Israel or any State of its obligation to comply with international humanitarian law. Notwithstanding any military goals they may have, the means Israel chose to achieve them in Gaza — namely, intentionally causing death, starvation, great suffering, and serious injury to body or health of the civilian population — are criminal.

• (1740)

I'll now return to Senator Woo's Motion No. 13 to note that the central concern is that Canada and Canadians are at risk of being found to be accomplices or allies in what is increasingly being seen as a genocide under the international rule of law.

Up until recently, Canada, as confirmed by Global Affairs Canada, was still supplying Israel with arms and weapons parts. Only last month did Canada's Prime Minister recognize Palestine as its own state, despite Canada supporting the United Nations' decades-long call consistent with the 1947 two-state solution stipulating the creation of two separate states.

In essence, this motion calls on senators to urge the Government of Canada to dedicate attention and resources to mobilize the expertise of lawyers, scholars and experiential authorities to examine the degree to which —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator McPhedran, the time allowed for debate has expired.

Senator McPhedran: May I have 60 seconds?

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator McPhedran: Thank you very much.

As the United Nations and the International Court of Justice continue to find violations of international humanitarian law by Israel, Canada needs to ensure that it is complying with its international obligations as a member state under treaties that Canada has signed and ratified, treaties that make up the international rule of law, including the Genocide Convention. Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Would the honourable senator take a question?

The Hon. the Speaker: The senator asked for 60 seconds, and leave was granted. Is Senator McPhedran asking for more time for questions?

Senator McPhedran: If the chamber permits.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Housakos: Thank you. I'll try to be brief because a lot of things have been said on this issue in this debate, and there's a lot of revisionist history.

Senator McPhedran, you're a learned person. You definitely understand the history and the importance of history. Modern-day Gaza was under colonial rule by the British prior to 1948. Before that, for hundreds of years, it was under Ottoman rule. Before that, before the word "Palestinian" ever existed in the lexicon of the Hellenic people who occupied that part of the world once upon a time — and the Philistines were there before them — in what portion of the history of mankind was there ever a Palestinian state, established, self-governed and recognized by the international community?

Senator McPhedran: Thank you very much for the question, Senator Housakos. As much as I enjoy the long-range historical overview, let me begin in 1947 with the United Nations and the international law establishing a Palestinian territory and also the recognition of the State of Israel. Everything that I said in my speech, mostly quoted from judgments, makes it clear that the existing international humanitarian law, to which Canada has signed on and been a leader in many ways, is being violated in the opinion of the world's judicial experts.

Now, Senator Housakos, we've had some conversations about the UN. I know it's not your favourite place. However, it is the existing organization in which Canada, over and over again, has shown respect, signed treaties, made commitments and, in particular, promised to uphold the international rule of humanitarian law.

(On motion of Senator Osler, for Senator Wallin, debate adjourned.)

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEES TO STUDY THE NEED FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO CONSULT AND ACCOMMODATE FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS RIGHTS HOLDER—
DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum, pursuant to notice of June 3, 2025, moved:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples and the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs be authorized to examine and report on:

- (a) the need for the federal government to fulfill their legal obligation in their fiduciary duty to consult and accommodate First Nations, Inuit and Métis rights holders regarding legislation that impacts their treaty rights, inherent rights and traditional lands; and
- (b) the need for the federal government to fulfill their legal obligation in their fiduciary duty to consult and accommodate at all stages of the legislative process, from conceptualization to drafting to implementation and review; and

That the committees submit their final reports no later than December 31, 2025.

(On motion of Senator McCallum, debate adjourned.)

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY HOW THE FORCIBLE REMOVAL OF FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS CHILDREN FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND CULTURES CONSTITUTES A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY AND A GENOCIDE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum, pursuant to notice of June 3, 2025, moved:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples be authorized to examine and report on how the historical and ongoing forcible removal of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children from their families and cultures, including but not limited to:

- (a) removals through the Indian residential school system;
- (b) Indian day schools;
- (c) the Sixties Scoop;
- (d) the epidemic of Indigenous children in care; and

- (e) the resultant intergenerational effects of this child apprehension, such as missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and the over-incarceration of Indigenous peoples;

constitutes a crime against humanity and a genocide, pursuant to the *Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act*, S.C. 2000, c. 24, and Articles 6 and 7 of the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, and in accordance with Article II of the *United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*; and

That the committee submit its final report no later than December 31, 2025.

(On motion of Senator McCallum, debate adjourned.)

[*Translation*]

THE EMERGING PROBLEM OF SATELLITE DEBRIS FALLS

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Paula Simons rose pursuant to notice of May 29, 2025:

That she will call the attention of the Senate to the emerging problem of satellite debris falls in Canada and to the challenges of satellite congestion, pollution and liability.

(On motion of Senator Simons, debate adjourned.)

(*At 5:49 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.*)

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