SENATE SÉNAT

CANADA

DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION • 45th PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 154 • NUMBER 33

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 6, 2025

The Honourable RENÉ CORMIER,
Speaker pro tempore

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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

Thursday, November 6, 2025

The Senate met at 1:30 p.m., the Speaker pro tempore in the chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

VETERANS' WEEK

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, as we mark Veterans' Week in the days leading up to Remembrance Day, I rise to pay tribute to the brave men and women who have worn the uniform of Canada's Armed Forces to defend the freedoms and values that define our nation.

This week, we take time to reflect not only on the great battles of history, but on the courage, discipline and quiet devotion to duty that our veterans continue to demonstrate long after the weapons fell silent.

From the muddy trenches of the First World War to the deserts, oceans and skies of modern missions, their service has safeguarded democracy and human dignity around the world.

We also recognize the families who stand behind them, carrying their own share of the sacrifice, and the communities that welcome home our veterans with respect and gratitude.

The story of Canada's veterans is woven from every part of this country, from coast to coast to coast, and from every community that has answered the call to serve. Among them are the many Indigenous men and women whose courage and skill have strengthened our military since its earliest days.

In a few days, we will observe national Indigenous Veterans Day, a fitting time to reflect on that proud legacy of service and sacrifice to Canada.

Honourable senators, above all, Veterans' Week reminds us that remembrance is not and should never be confined to a single day. It is a commitment to uphold the values for which our veterans served and to ensure that their legacy endures in our national life and in our way of life here in Canada.

Lest we forget.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Marty Klyne: Honourable senators, each year on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, Canadians from coast to coast to coast pause in silence. We gather in cities, small towns, schools and legions. We lay wreaths, bow our heads and remember the men and women who served and sacrificed for freedom, peace and democracy.

Remembrance Day is not only a time to honour the fallen, but also to reflect on the generations who answered the call to serve, often leaving behind families, farms and futures to defend ideals greater than themselves. Their courage and sacrifice are woven into the fabric of our national identity.

Among those we remember with particular pride are the soldiers of Saskatchewan's own Royal Regina Rifles, the men affectionately known as the "Farmer Johns."

They came from all walks of life: farmers, students, northern trappers, ordinary young men turned extraordinary warriors. Some were barely out of high school. Others dismissed them as "just a bunch of Farmer Johns," but the men of the Regina Rifles wore that nickname as a badge of honour.

On June 6, 1944, they proved their courage beyond doubt. Landing on the Nan Green sector of Juno Beach, one of the most heavily fortified stretches of the Normandy coast, they faced relentless fire. Yet, side by side with the tanks of the 1st Hussars, they fought their way off the beach, through minefields and machine-gun nests, clearing the town of Courseulles-sur-Mer block by block.

By nightfall, the Royal Regina Rifles had achieved their D-Day objective, capturing Courseulles-sur-Mer and pushing inland to secure the bridges at Reviers on a day of bitter, costly fighting and extraordinary bravery.

Lieutenant Bill Grayson became one of the regiment's legends. Under fire, he caught a grenade, hurled it back and captured 35 enemy soldiers. His courage earned him the Military Cross, but countless others showed the same spirit.

Of the 4,000 men who served in the Regina Rifles, only a few remain with us. Yet their legacy endures in the regiment that still bears their name, in the communities that honour them and in Canada, which remains free because of their sacrifice.

This Remembrance Day, as we stand in silence across the nation, let us remember the Farmer Johns of the Royal Regina Rifles, those ordinary Prairie men who did extraordinary things in the service of peace and humanity.

Lest we forget. Up the Johns!

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Zach Goobie, son of the Honourable Senator Arnold.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

INDIGENOUS VETERANS DAY

Hon. John M. McNair: Honourable senators, I rise today to mark Indigenous Veterans Day, which is November 8, and pay tribute to an elite military unit of Cree speakers who fought in the Second World War and were known as "code talkers."

The unit was tasked with developing a coded system based on the Cree language to discreetly communicate military intelligence. Code talkers translated messages containing vital information about Allied plans, including orders for troop movement and the identification of supply lines or aircraft that were to carry out bombing runs from England.

The messages were translated into Cree and then sent to battlefields in Europe, where another code talker translated them back into English and sent them to military commanders. Some examples of disguised words include "*iskotew*," meaning "fire," which was the code word for the Spitfire plane; and "*pakwatastim*," meaning "wild horse," which referred to the Mustang aircraft.

The code was so sophisticated that enemy soldiers were never able to crack it.

To my knowledge, the federal government has never formally recognized the services that the Cree code talkers rendered to Canada. Indeed, many of them remain unidentified. Code talkers were sworn to secrecy during the war, and that's part of the reason. It was not until 2003 that a code talker named Charles Tomkins was interviewed by the Smithsonian for an exhibit on the well-known Navajo code talkers.

We know the names of a few other Cree code talkers who were in Charles Tomkins' immediate circle, including his brother Peter Tomkins, his half-brother John Smith and his friends Archie Plante and Walter McDermott. However, many others remain unknown.

It is estimated that around 4,300 First Nations men fought in the Second World War. Signing up was not an easy choice for many to make as they were faced with racist recruitment policies.

The majority were recruited into the Canadian Army but were shut out of the Royal Canadian Air Force, or RCAF, and the Royal Canadian Navy. The RCAF stipulated that enlistment was only for "British subjects of pure European descent" until 1942, and the Navy for those "of pure European descent and of the white race" until 1943.

On top of that, some First Nations men experienced criticism at home from their communities for joining the war effort.

Colleagues, I believe it is time to recognize the sacrifice that these individuals made for the war effort. At a time when history is at risk of being rewritten in countries like the United States, it is incumbent upon us to keep the memory of these soldiers and their efforts alive.

On Indigenous Veterans Day, let us take a moment to remember the sacrifices and service of these brave individuals who fought to defend Canada.

Lest we forget. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Rachel Aucoin, niece of the Honourable Senator Aucoin.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*English*]

REMEMBRANCE DAY
VETERANS' WEEK

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I am honoured to rise today, during Veterans' Week, to pay tribute to our Canadian heroes, past and present, our brave men and women who proudly wear the uniform with honour and distinction.

Veterans' Week is a sacred time to pause, to remember and to honour all those who have served our nation in times of war, conflict and peacekeeping. We remember the more than 2 million Canadians who have worn the uniform of our Armed Forces and the more than 118,000 who made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of freedom. Their courage and devotion have shaped our nation's history and safeguarded the liberties we hold dear.

Their bravery on the battlefields of the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, in Afghanistan and in missions around the world is woven into the very fabric of who we are as Canadians. When war erupted on the Korean Peninsula in 1950, Canada was among the first nations to respond. More than 26,000 Canadians selflessly answered the call to serve, facing harsh winters and fierce combat throughout the Korean War. Their resilience helped defend a nation under siege and uphold the principles of freedom and peace.

This year marks the start of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Korean War years, a historic milestone that invites us to reflect on the bravery, hardship and sacrifice of those who served. The bond forged between Canada and South Korea through shared sacrifice endures to this day, symbolizing hope, gratitude and the enduring power of friendship born from courage.

I owe my life to our beloved veterans of the Korean War, and I will forever be grateful for their sacrifice and courage. The visible and invisible wounds of service and the families who have stood steadfastly beside them remind us that the impact of war reaches far beyond the battlefield.

As we wear our poppies with pride and bow our heads in silence this Remembrance Day, and as wreaths are laid upon memorials across our nation, let us remember that remembrance is not confined to a single day; it is a lifelong promise. It is a promise to carry forward the memory of those who stood in the face of fear and did not falter, a promise to never forget their courage, their sacrifice or the tremendous cost of the freedoms we enjoy today.

We also remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice and the loved ones who waited and prayed for their safe return, a return that never came.

On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, we pause together as a nation to honour and remember them.

Lest we forget.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

THE LATE PETER FRANCES HANNAM

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, today I rise in the chamber with a sombre heart to pay tribute to a friend of mine, Peter Hannam, who peacefully passed away on June 5, 2025, at the age of 85. Peter Frances Hannam was an icon in the Ontario agricultural sector, but he was also an exceptional man, friend, mentor and farmer whose legacy is much too profound to fit into a short statement.

Peter Hannam was born on his family farm outside Guelph, Ontario, and, in his own words, he ". . . never left home and never had a real job."

Everyone knew that Peter was also a dedicated professional and an innovator in the agricultural sector, with a particular interest in discovering how to adapt soybeans so they could grow in our Ontario climate. According to Peter's son Greg, "It was a love, a passion and a hobby."

His success was integral to the expansion of soybeans as a major Canadian crop. He went on to be co-founder and president of First Line Seeds, an innovative soybean seeds company bringing new technology and marketing opportunities for Canadian growers. He also occupied numerous leadership roles with various agricultural organizations, advocating for farmers with respect, integrity and skill. He was described by his staff and colleagues as fair but firm, a quiet, humble and generous leader.

As his dear friend Kathie MacDonald told me, "The impact that Peter had on many of his employees can be seen in where their careers have led them."

He was inducted into the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame in 2006, the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame in 2015, and he received an Honorary Doctorate of Science in 2007 from the University of Guelph. He was also a founding father of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program, or AALP, the program I am proud to have delivered for 12 years.

He was a constant supporter, donor and regular presenter at AALP seminars. Peter also participated in 4-H, a youth leadership program you all know I hold close to my heart. He was a mentor, a champion and a leader in the agricultural industry, with many professional accomplishments, but I will always remember him for his integrity, his generosity and his kindness, before all else.

For many, Peter was always more than a farmer or a professional. He was an inspiration, a mentor and a friend. He will live on in the countless lives he has touched and in the joy and love he effortlessly shared.

My condolences are with his children — Rob, Greg, Carol — and their families. May he rest in peace.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

THE LATE RITA JOE, P.C., C.M.
THE LATE ELSIE CHARLES BASQUE, C.M.

Hon. Mary Coyle: Honourable senators, I rise today to celebrate two important Mi'kmaq women, both inspirational trailblazers, as we stretch the conclusion of Mi'kmaw History Month and Women's History Month.

Dr. Rita Joe and Dr. Elsie Charles Basque are Mi'kmaq women who made history, and both were Survivors of the notorious Shubenacadie Residential School.

Dr. Elsie Charles Basque was born in 1916 to Margaret Labrador and Joe Charles, and she was the first Mi'kmaw person in Nova Scotia to earn a teacher's licence and the first Mi'kmaw person to teach in a non-Indigenous school.

Elsie spent much of her life in Boston, Massachusetts, which was common for people from Nova Scotia. Locally, we called the U.S. Eastern Seaboard "the Boston States."

While living in Boston, Dr. Basque taught many about Indigenous issues, including Mi'kmaq culture, Indigenous elderly and the status of American Indigenous Peoples. She was one of the founding members of the Boston Indian Council.

Elsie received many honours for her leadership in the field of education, including honorary doctorates from the Nova Scotia Teachers College in Truro, l'Université Sainte-Anne and Acadia University.

Dr. Basque was presented with Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee Medal, and, in 2009, she became a Member of the Order of Canada.

Dr. Rita Joe was a Mi'kmaw poet born in 1932 in Whycocomagh, Nova Scotia. Often referred to as "the Poet Laureate of the Mi'kmaq People," Rita Joe wrote powerful poetry that spoke about Indigenous identity and the legacy of residential schools in Canada.

She was orphaned at 10 and sent to residential school. Like Dr. Basque, Rita Joe ended up living and working in Boston for a period. She was made a Member of the Order of Canada in 1992, was called to the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, received what was then called a National Aboriginal Achievement Award and honorary degrees from Dalhousie University, Cape Breton University and Mount Saint Vincent University.

Rita Joe authored six books and inspired many Indigenous writers. Before concluding, I will leave you with the famous words of Rita Joe in her poem *I Lost My Talk*:

I lost my talk.
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away:
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me.

Colleagues, please join me in celebrating these remarkable women leaders from Mi'kma'ki, Dr. Rita Joe and Dr. Elsie Charles Basque.

Wela'lioq.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

JUSTICE

CHARTER STATEMENT IN RELATION TO BILL C-3— DOCUMENT TABLED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a Charter Statement prepared by the Minister of Justice in relation to Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (2025), pursuant to the *Department of Justice Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. J-2, sbs. 4.2(1).

• (1350)

AUDIT AND OVERSIGHT

SECOND REPORT OF COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Marty Klyne: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the second report (interim) of the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight, entitled *Annual Report of the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight: Activities and Observations for Fiscal Year 2024-2025*, and I move that the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

(On motion of Senator Klyne, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[*Translation*]

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AMEND THE *RULES OF THE SENATE*

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I give notice that, two days hence, I will move:

That the *Rules of the Senate* be modified:

1. by renumbering current rule 3-4 as rule 3-4(1);

2. by adding the following new rule 3-4(2):

"Sitting on day of death of a Senator
3-4. (2) If a Senator dies on a day the Senate sits, either before or during the sitting, the Speaker shall advise the Senate of the death as soon as practicable during the sitting. The Speaker shall then observe a minute of silence in honour of the deceased Senator. The Senate should then normally adjourn, as soon as practicable, following the adoption of a motion that would be moved pursuant to regular procedures. For greater

certainty, this normal practice does not, in the absence of leave, take precedence over any other provisions of these Rules.";

3. in rule 12-18(1), by replacing the words "Except as otherwise ordered by the Senate" by the words "Except as provided in subsection (4), or as otherwise ordered by the Senate";

4. in rule 12-18(2), by replacing the words "in subsection (3)" by the words "in subsections (3) and (4)";

5. in rule 12-18(3), by replacing the words "The Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight" by the words "Except as provided in subsection (4), the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight";

6. by adding the following new rules 12-18(4) and (5):

"Death of a Senator
12-18. (4) Except as provided in subsection (5), if the Senate follows normal practice and adjourns after being informed of the death of a Senator, as outlined in rule 3-4(2), and the motion to adjourn mentions that rule or the senator moving the motion notes that it is moved pursuant to that rule, the Clerk of the Senate shall cause all subsequent committee meetings scheduled that day that have not yet started to be cancelled. The Clerk shall also advise the chair of any committee then meeting of the death, whereupon the chair shall advise the committee, which shall observe a minute of silence in honour of the deceased Senator, after which the chair shall immediately adjourn the meeting. No other committee meetings shall be scheduled to take place on the day the Senate is informed of the Senator's death.

Committee meeting if a Senator dies
12-18. (5) The provisions of subsection (4) shall not apply:

(a) if the Leader or Representative of the Government, the Leader of the Opposition, and the leader or facilitator of any other recognized party or recognized parliamentary group, or their designates, unanimously agree that it is in the public interest that a committee meeting either continue or take place, provided, for greater certainty, that if such a meeting was cancelled pursuant to subsection (4) before this determination, the meeting may be called again for that day; or

(b) if the committee is meeting outside the parliamentary precinct pursuant to previous authority granted by the Senate."; and

7. in rule 12-28:

(a) by replacing the words "The committee" by the words "Except as otherwise provided, the committee"; and

(b) by adding, at the end of the rule, an exception referring to new rule 12-18(4).

CITIZENSHIP ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (2025).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

[*English*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE INDEPENDENCE OF COMMERCIAL INSHORE FISHERIES IN ATLANTIC CANADA AND QUEBEC AND REFER PAPERS AND EVIDENCE FROM FIRST SESSION OF FORTY-FOURTH SESSION TO CURRENT SESSION

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

That the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be authorized to examine and report on the independence of commercial inshore fisheries in Atlantic Canada and Quebec, and the policies and legislative tools used by the Government of Canada to preserve it, such as the Owner-Operator Policy;

That the papers and evidence received and taken and work accomplished by the committee during the First Session of the Forty-fourth Parliament as part of its study of issues relating to the management of Canada's fisheries and oceans be referred to the committee;

That the committee submit its final report to the Senate no later than December 31, 2026, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings for 180 days after the tabling of the final report; and

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.

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE COMMERCIAL FISHERIES LICENSING REGIME ON THE PACIFIC COAST

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

That the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be authorized to examine and report on the commercial fisheries licensing regime on Canada's Pacific Coast;

That the committee submit its final report to the Senate no later than December 31, 2026, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings for 180 days after the tabling of the final report; and

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.

QUESTION PERIOD

FINANCE

FISCAL MANAGEMENT

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the government leader.

Government leader, yesterday, we had Beatrice up in the gallery. You were asking a question about the kind of world she's going to inherit, but you forgot to mention that the debt that has been piled onto that generation is going to take years to dig out of.

Yesterday, you also tried to defend your government's abysmal fiscal record by cherry-picking the only rosy metric available — the net debt-to-GDP ratio — but the International Monetary Fund's, or IMF's, latest fiscal analysis tells a much different story. Canada's gross debt-to-GDP ratio is the fifth largest amongst the G7 at a staggering 113.9%. Our total debt ranks seventh highest among the IMF's 32 advanced economies, and Canadian households now carry the highest debt levels in the G7. None of these figures even include the debt offloading to the provinces to sustain our universal health care system.

Leader, will you stop hiding behind selective statistics and admit that this government's fiscal management makes former prime minister Justin Trudeau look like a fiscal budget hawk?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I don't need to hide behind anything, because I think that the government is very proud of the budget tabled yesterday. Let me quote the Prime Minister on the debt.

He has said that the debt burden as a share of GDP is lower now than it was when the Conservative government was in power — I think it's six times less — all while the new government is investing in Canada and protecting transfers to the provinces for health care, education and social services. This is looking toward the future.

• (1400)

Seventy-five percent of the budget measures are for sovereignty to protect our borders, our communities and our way of life. The balance, 25%, is for affordability and middle-class tax cuts.

This budget invests in Canada at twice the rate of any budget during this millennium. There is no way we have to hide behind anything about the budget we tabled yesterday.

Senator Housakos: Government leader, I will quote former prime minister Justin Trudeau at the election debate in 2015: "Canada has the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the world and the most balanced GDP ratio in the world." That's the former Liberal prime minister giving Prime Minister Harper the credit for that.

Second of all, let's point out that, when it's all said and done, over the last 10 years we have had food banks at record levels, and we have had young people dreaming about buying a house while youth unemployment is hitting record levels.

Will your government continue to cherry-pick statistics to try to make a point or will you acknowledge what we all know — we're drowning in debt?

Senator Moreau: Well, if we were drowning in debt, we would already be drowned because of the Conservative government, because it was seven times worse than what it is right now.

As far as affordability is concerned, let me talk to you about Automated Federal Benefits, the National School Food Program and Personal Support Workers Tax Credit benefits. Build Canada Homes is providing $1 billion for transitioning from homelessness and for people in need.

[*Translation*]

BUDGET 2025

Hon. Claude Carignan: Leader, in the budget tabled this week, the government is planning a new $51-billion fund over 10 years for provincial infrastructure.

If we look just at Quebec, that represents $375 million per year. Right now, Quebec is investing $19 billion per year in infrastructure, so the federal government's contribution will amount to only 1.9% of needs. It is easy to see why the Quebec finance minister, Eric Girard, said that he is dissatisfied with the federal budget. Worse still, leader, are you aware that Quebec's $19-billion investments are generating several billion in direct and indirect tax revenue for the federal government? That means that the $375 million that the government is giving Quebec represents only a tiny drop in the giant bucket of what it is receiving.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I see you had a question on your cue cards, senator. You left out part of the quote from Quebec's finance minister, Mr. Girard. He concluded his remarks by saying that the federal government had exercised caution because of the uncertain times we are currently experiencing.

I think the federal government was very clear when it tabled the budget. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance indicated that, at a time of global uncertainty, the government needs to focus on what it can control. What did the government do? It tabled a budget that will stimulate the economy and, with the help of the provinces, municipalities and the private sector, could attract up to $1 trillion in investment. That is unprecedented in the history of budgets in Canada, and certainly not a lesson we could have learned from the budgets tabled by the federal government when you were part of the government, senator.

Senator Carignan: Leader, you're criticizing the Conservative government; do you still have your Conservative Party membership card? People often say that a picture is worth a thousand words. If we consider nothing but the investments that are needed for the Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital's much-needed renovations, the latest estimates put the budget at $5 billion.

Based on this example, leader, would you agree with Minister Girard, who says he's not satisfied? I would add that the $375 million is an insult.

Senator Moreau: I completely disagree that it's an insult. The federal government has voiced its intention to cooperate with the provinces and municipalities, in the health sector and others, by transferring large sums of money and investing in infrastructure.

Yesterday, senator, you rose to criticize us for spending too much, and today, you say that we're not spending enough. Fortunately, there is no Question Period tomorrow or your third position could be very uncomfortable.

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

VISA APPLICATIONS

Hon. Yuen Pau Woo: Senator Moreau, my question is about Canada's Gaza special measures visa program. In March 2024, then-Minister of Immigration, the Honourable Marc Miller, confirmed to Gaza special measures families that they should not have to wait to complete their visa applications in Gaza and should take any opportunity to leave for safety, for example, to Egypt.

Can you confirm that no families have had their visa applications delayed or denied because they applied from Egypt, and can you assure us that the Resettlement Operations Centre in Ottawa officers are not penalizing Gaza special measures families for applying from outside of Gaza?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for raising this important question, Senator Woo. I have been informed that applicants don't need to be in Gaza to have their application processed. As a matter of fact, since biometric collection is not available in Gaza, applicants must exit Gaza before being able to take their biometrics in Egypt — or anywhere else they want — to have their application proceed, das there is no specific requirement as to where biometrics must be taken.

I understand that, as of August 26, 2025, more than almost 1,790 people who exited Gaza and had Temporary Resident Visa applications in process were able to submit biometrics, complete their application and receive approval to come to Canada.

Senator Woo: Thank you for the clarification.

Can you also advise if the government — now that it has recognized the State of Palestine — will step up its efforts to facilitate the application of visas for Palestinians to come to Canada — of course — those who are eligible to do so?

Senator Moreau: I will certainly raise the question with the minister. My understanding is that there is no restriction whatsoever concerning those requests.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

INFORMATION SHARING

Hon. Colin Deacon: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. Senator Moreau, since 2010 Canada has dropped from third to forty-seventh rank in the UN E-Government Development Index, with only 23% of federal services being fully digital from end to end.

This government's Digital Ambition 2024-25 called for better data sharing across departments to improve service delivery and public trust. Yet, without a whole-of-government approach, personal data protection relies on thousands of fragmented data- and information-sharing agreements between departments. This is highly inefficient and means that Canadians cannot access seamless service delivery, with 270 single sign-on points spanning 33 departments.

Can the government confirm how many data- and information-sharing agreements currently exist at the federal level?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Unfortunately, I do not have a number to share with you at this time, senator. However, the government is taking every step to ensure that it runs efficiently.

To that end, Budget 2025 announced the government's intent to set up an office of digital transformation, which will proactively identify, implement and scale technology solutions across the federal government.

As an example, the office will identify and eliminate redundant and counterproductive procurement rules, as well as leverage expertise from internal sources and the private sector to address the issue of AI adoption.

If I obtain more information to answer your question with a figure, I'll get back to you as soon as I can.

Senator C. Deacon: Thank you, Senator Moreau, for that commitment.

We understand that there are as many as 10,000 of these agreements out there, and they're not being carefully monitored. One of the ways to deal with that is Canada's Privacy Act, which protects Canadians' personal information held by the federal government and ensures that it's collected, used and disclosed for authorized purposes only, and gives them rights. When does the government intend to update and revamp this 40-year-old Privacy Act?

Senator Moreau: Let me first praise your work on this file. I know you have been very active on it.

While I cannot speculate as to when any potential future legislation may be tabled, I will say that this government takes the privacy rights of Canadians very seriously. That is why the government has taken steps in Budget 2025 to strengthen the privacy of Canadians, including the proposal of amendments to the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.

• (1410)

HEALTH

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Hon. Katherine Hay: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. Welcome back. It's good to see you. There's always a seat over here for you.

Senator, the mental health of young people in Canada is in crisis, and this government's response has been somewhat silent lately. The 2025 Budget makes only a passing mention of mental health while youth face record high levels of anxiety, depression, cyberbullying, climate anxiety and suicide. In fact, Canada has a leadership role. We hold the fourth-highest youth suicide rate in the industrialized world. The government announced a $500-million Youth Mental Health Fund last year. The call for proposals closed in January of this year. It has been pretty quiet since then: no details, no disbursement and no timelines for community-based organizations outside of approximately 35% of the fund for Integrated Youth Services network.

A campaign pledge said it was —

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Thank you, senator.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, senator, for your invitation. I know that crossing the floor is getting quite popular these days, but I will refrain from doing it.

To your important question, young people across Canada are struggling with their mental health, and it is an unfortunate situation. Through the Youth Mental Health Fund, the Government of Canada is making strategic investments to create lasting and meaningful improvement in the mental health of youth and for their families.

It includes investments in increasing access to community-based mental health services and improved navigation and referral to mental health services and support.

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CANADIAN SOVEREIGN AI COMPUTE STRATEGY

Hon. Katherine Hay: Thank you, senator. I will look forward to those funds being in the community-based organizations.

AI is advancing rapidly, and Canada is lagging. Budget 2024 committed $2 billion to the Canadian Sovereign AI Compute Strategy, followed by another $1 billion in Budget 2025. Can you provide an update on the 2024 funds that have been used? How will the remaining balance of that fund work with the new tranche of funding that was just announced?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I will try to answer that to the best of my knowledge. Innovation and scientific discovery are the foundation of long-term economic growth. This is why the government is investing $4.2 billion in annual support for the Scientific Research and Experimental Development tax incentive program.

The budget will enable Canada to build the necessary AI compute infrastructure, including the development of sovereign Canadian clouds; it's $925 million. The Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

[*English*]

Senator Moreau: I'll give you the information.

[*Translation*]

Senator Carignan: There was nothing written on the card.

[*English*]

FINANCE

COST OF LIVING

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, my question is also related to the debt burden on young Canadians. In Budget 2024, the Liberal government declared that "financing the investment we need through more debt would be unfair to young Canadians . . .," yet one year later that is exactly what your government is doing, piling on new debt while leaving young Canadians to shoulder the long-term costs of servicing it. Those now entering the workforce face a weak job market, rising debt payments, soaring living costs and an ever-growing bill from this government spending.

Leader, does this government now believe it is acceptable to place even more debt on the backs of young Canadians?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I repeat that the debt burden is lower now than it was when the Conservatives formed the government. This is not magic. It's because the government that follows a Conservative one takes wise and good actions in order to lower the burden of the debt, and that's exactly what the current government is doing with the current budget.

I will repeat the data from the International Monetary Fund, or IMF, Fiscal Monitor for October 2025: The net debt-to-GDP ratio is at 13.3%. Germany follows at 48.7%. It's 13.3% here.

You want to have more information? I'll give you more information. The lowest deficit-to-GDP ratio, second only to Japan; it's 2.5% now, and it's going to fall to 1.5% in —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

Senator Carignan: Does that not include the provinces and the municipalities?

[*English*]

Senator Batters: Respect the Speaker.

Senator Martin: Senator Moreau, your government's youth employment programs amount to little more than window dressing when weighed against the massive financial burdens being placed on this generation. How does the government reconcile its stated concern for fairness to young Canadians with policies that leave them paying more and getting less for their future?

Senator Moreau: Well, affordability: When we look at the future, we want young people to be able to have housing. We're investing in housing, and with the program that the government has tabled, we cut the GST on first-time home purchases. We're investing in the future of young people in Canada, and we're investing in those who need more in Canada. That's the responsibility of the government, and that's what the government is doing —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

[*English*]

FISCAL MANAGEMENT

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, you're very creative with your math, but the truth of the matter is this government, over the last decade, has had historic debt and historic deficits. No one will deny the historically high cost of living. We've been battling inflation. We have a crisis of scarcity. Young people have a hard time renting a house, buying a house. No one can deny that. There are historic lineups at soup kitchens. These are the facts.

We also know that when you overborrow, you overuse debt, it eventually has an impact on the buying power of your dollar. We know the state of the Canadian dollar over the last few months of the leadership of Prime Minister Carney and last few years under the leadership of Prime Minister Carney's ministers. It's a dismal existence for that dollar. Can you tell this chamber, government leader, which years the Canadian dollar last enjoyed being at par with the U.S. dollar? I'm curious if you remember those glorious years.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Instead of looking backwards, the government chooses to look forward because, unfortunately, if we look backwards, we see the Conservative government increasing the debt not only for Canadians — and this is accurate. But you know what? I will quote somebody who agrees with the government:

> After serious consideration and thoughtful conversations with constituents and my family, I came to a clear conclusion: there is a better path forward for our country — and a better path forward for Acadie-Annapolis.
>
> Prime Minister Mark Carney is offering that path with a new Budget that hits the priorities I have heard most in my riding, to build strong community infrastructure and grow a stronger economy.

This is Chris d'Entremont.

[*Translation*]

Senator Carignan: There should be an election so he can consult his —

[*English*]

Senator Housakos: Quoting Liberals to defend your budget is not going to get you anywhere, Senator Moreau. Let's be honest now. You're the one who, since the beginning of Question Period, has been looking back. I'm simply saying that if we look at those years under Prime Minister Harper from 2008 to 2013,

not only was our dollar at par, but it was also, at various times in that period, stronger than the U.S. dollar because we had fiscal responsibility and a plan. When will your government start emulating fiscal responsibility like Prime Minister Harper and even Prime Minister Chrétien before him?

Senator Moreau: He already did by tabling a responsible budget. He did that the other day, and we'll have the pleasure in the coming weeks to study the budget truthfully, and maybe one day you will agree with Chris d'Entremont.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Farah Mohamed: My question is for the government leader. Senator Moreau, I was pleased to see the government is providing funds to invest in youth employment in the *Canada Strong* budget. However, given the enormity of the crisis where youth unemployment is double that of adult unemployment, this can only be considered a downpayment.

The government has chosen the Canada Summer Jobs program as one way to help youth develop skills and to create jobs for youth. Having used the program, I can see merit to it. The program, however, has been found by the Auditor General to lack basic data on how many jobs it creates or whether these jobs lead to careers, which is really what young people have said they wanted. Will the government take steps to fix these deficiencies so that the program results in pathways to meaningful employment instead of pathways to short-term paycheques?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Canadian youth are facing challenges in the labour market. We all acknowledge that, with the youth unemployment rate sitting at 14.7% in September 2025. In the 2025 Budget, the government expects the Canada Summer Jobs program to support 100,000 summer jobs as it is investing $594 million in the program.

• (1420)

Although the government is also committed to helping youth find gainful employment, it takes this issue very seriously, so it is also investing more than $300 million in the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy to provide training for 20,000 young Canadians facing employment barriers and $635 million for the Student Work Placement Program to support 55,000 work-integrated learning opportunities for post-secondary students.

Senator Mohamed: Leader, the Auditor General also raised concerns that the Canada Summer Jobs program does not require employers to show that the positions funded would not otherwise exist, nor does it track the quality or outcomes of those jobs. Without the data, there is no way to know whether public funds are creating new opportunities for youth or simply subsidizing wages for employers who would have hired anyway.

How will the government use better data and program design to ensure that taxpayer dollars genuinely build youth skills and career pathways, and not just offset existing temporary job payroll costs for employers?

Senator Moreau: In 30 seconds, I understand that in the government's response to the Auditor General, they did agree with her recommendation and are working on developing options and recommendations to collect this data more effectively. To be clear, there is evidence that the Canada Summer Jobs program supports the creation of jobs for youth. I think the government is committed to that.

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

BUDGET 2025

Honourable Éric Forest: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

In the budget tabled this week, the government announced billions of dollars for provincial infrastructure. Announcements are all well and good, but it would be even better to see some cheques.

I did some quick math, and $8.5 billion earmarked for Quebec is still tied up in Ottawa. That money is intended for housing, public transportation and the fight against climate change. Despite an agreement in principle, we are still waiting for $1.3 billion under the Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund, $6.6 billion under the Canada Public Transit Fund, $308 million under the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund and $246 million for three Green Municipal Fund programs.

I'm sure that the Government Representative in the Senate, who used to serve as the Quebec Minister of Municipal Affairs and Land Occupancy, understands municipal officials' frustration.

Why is this $8.5 billion earmarked for Quebec still sitting in Ottawa's coffers?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Forest, not only did I serve as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Land Occupancy, I was also the minister responsible for housing in 2014. That was 10 years ago. Now I see how quickly all levels of government are acting in terms of capacity, and not just the federal government.

You know as well as I do that there are three levels of government involved in housing issues: the federal government, provincial governments and municipalities. It would be reasonable to think that sums are disbursed as soon as agreements are reached, but what often happens is that, even after agreements have been signed, for all sorts of reasons involving the three levels of government, funds do not reach their destination. All three levels of government would do well to try to find ways to ensure that the funds will be available more quickly.

Thank you for the question.

Senator Forest: Dealings between the municipalities and the government in Ottawa are often not entirely legitimate. Quebec citizens and municipalities are therefore bearing the brunt of a jurisdictional war between Quebec City and Ottawa. While the two sides are arguing over the terms and conditions of programs, the money is just sitting in Ottawa, as you said yourself. Why can't the federal government come to an agreement with Quebec City on the funds earmarked for Quebec municipalities and the people of Quebec?

Senator Moreau: That's a very interesting and very complex question. Nobody in Quebec would say that the federal government should deal directly with municipalities. Quebec is very protective of its jurisdiction over municipal matters. I myself was once a member of the Government of Quebec, and I stood up for that, as I will stand up for it here. There is no doubt about that.

About making that money available, you're right in saying that all three levels of government should make the necessary effort.

[*English*]

INTERNAL ECONOMY, BUDGETS AND ADMINISTRATION

BUSINESS OF THE COMMITTEE

Hon. Percy E. Downe: My question is for the Chair of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration.

As you know, the government has a program to hire qualified medically released members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. These are people who were injured in the service to Canada and can't continue in their current positions because of physical limitations.

Is the Senate participating in that program, and have we hired any of the medically released members of the Canadian Armed Forces or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police?

Hon. Lucie Moncion: Thank you for the question, senator. I will have to verify that.

Senator Downe: Thank you. I fully understand that.

If not, would you consider adding it to the agenda of the Internal Economy Committee for consideration for the Senate to participate? Additionally, would you let the Senate know if any members of that committee are opposed to that initiative?

Senator Moncion: Thank you for the question, senator.

I will ask that you please send your request by letter, with Pascale Legault copied so that she can add it to the committee's agenda and get the work done if there is work that needs to be done on this. She can also see if we have material already available, or if we have to work on material.

FINANCE

SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, small businesses across Canada were hoping for meaningful tax relief in the 2025 federal budget. They were especially hoping for a reduction in the small business corporate tax rate to free up capital for investment, jobs and innovation. Yet, the budget offered mostly re-announcements and no substantive changes.

Leader, why has this government failed to deliver the tax relief that our small-business sector desperately needs, and when will it finally stop treating small-business owners as an afterthought in favour of political spending?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I listened recently to the declarations of representatives from the small-business sector, particularly in Quebec, and they were quite happy with Budget 2025. I am not aware that there is dissatisfaction.

When the government is trying to stimulate the economy to get our economy stronger, it benefits all Canadians. It benefits small, medium and large corporations. It benefits all Canadians and the future of Canada.

I disagree with the way you're looking at the budget. We'll have the opportunity to look meticulously into the budget measures in the coming weeks, and we'll see whether the representatives of small businesses are as unhappy as you mentioned. But I don't believe they are, because they know that the government cares about growing a strong economy.

Senator Martin: Small businesses can benefit from every tax break. Across the country, they are shouldering a lot of burdens at this moment.

Leader, small firms know that today's deficits become tomorrow's taxes. While you continue to borrow and spend, you're squeezing the lifeblood of the economy. Will your government commit to lowering the small business tax rate this year so that Canada's entrepreneurs can invest rather than just survive?

Senator Moreau: Respectfully, you will have to talk to your colleague. Just a few minutes ago, he asked questions because he thought that the government is not spending enough. You have to agree within your own group.

The government said that we will spend less and invest more. What part of that proposition are you against?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 4-12(3), I would like to inform the Senate that as we proceed with Government Business, the Senate will address the items in the following order: Motion No. 24, followed by Motion No. 25, followed by Motion No. 26, followed by all remaining items in the order that they appear on the Order Paper.

THE SENATE

MOTION TO AFFECT PROCEEDINGS ON BILL C-3 ADOPTED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate), pursuant to notice of November 5, 2025, moved:

That, notwithstanding any provision of the Rules, previous order or usual practice, in relation to Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (2025):

1. if the Senate receives the bill after the adoption of this order, the bill, once read a first time, be placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading later that day, provided that if the Senate has already passed the point on the Orders of the Day where it would deal with the bill at second reading, it be taken into consideration at second reading forthwith, or, if another item is under consideration at the time the bill is received, the bill be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at second reading as the next item of business;

2. if, before this order is adopted, the bill has been placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading at a sitting subsequent to the one at which this order is adopted, second reading be brought forward, upon the adoption of this order, so that the bill be taken into consideration at second reading as the next item of business;

3. if the bill is adopted at second reading, it stand referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, which, for the purposes of its consideration of the bill, be authorized to meet even though the Senate may then be sitting or adjourned;

4. on November 19, 2025:

   (a) if the committee reports the bill without amendment, the bill be placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading later that sitting;

   (b) if the committee has not reported the bill by the end of Routine Proceedings, it be deemed to have reported the bill without amendment at that time, with proceedings on the bill then subject to the above provision;

   (c) if the committee reports the bill with amendment or with a recommendation that the Senate not proceed further with the bill:

      (i) the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration later that sitting; and

      (ii) once the Senate decides on the report, the bill, if still before the Senate, be taken into consideration at third reading forthwith;

   (d) proceedings on any item related to the bill not be adjourned and no vote requested in relation thereto be deferred;

   (e) if the Senate has not concluded proceedings on the bill by 7 p.m., the Speaker interrupt any proceedings then before the Senate in order to put all questions necessary to dispose of the bill at third reading without further debate, provided that:

      (i) if a report on the bill is on the Orders of the Day at that time, but has not yet been moved for adoption, it be deemed to have been moved for adoption at that time; and

      (ii) if the bill has not yet been moved for third reading at that time, the sponsor, or a designate, be recognized solely to move third reading either at that time, or once the Senate has made a decision on the committee's report, if the bill is still then before the Senate;

   (f) if the Speaker interrupts proceedings at 7 p.m. pursuant to the provisions of this order, no further debate or amendment be permitted at any stage, and, if a standing vote is requested thereafter, the vote not be deferred, and the bells ring once, and for only 15 minutes, without being rung again for any subsequent votes necessary to dispose of the bill;

   (g) the Senate not adjourn until all proceedings on the bill have concluded, with the rules and any orders respecting the time of adjournment being suspended until all business required to take place on that day pursuant to this order has been completed;

(h) the provisions of rule 3-3(1) be suspended; and

(i) committees scheduled to meet after 4 p.m. be authorized to do so even though the Senate may then be sitting;

5. if the Senate does not sit on November 19, 2025, any provision in this order referring to that date be read as if it referred to the next day thereafter that the Senate does sit;

6. once the bill has been reported by the committee, or is deemed to have been reported, no motion to refer the report or the bill back to that committee or to another committee be received; and

7. if a vote on any item relating to the bill had, before November 19, 2025, been deferred to that date, proceedings relating to the bill continue after the deferred vote, subject to the terms of paragraph 4 of this order, as applicable.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

• (1430)

CITIZENSHIP ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING

Hon. Mary Coyle moved second reading of Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (2025).

She said: Honourable senators, I would like to begin by recognizing that we are gathering today on the traditional and unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg Peoples. We are grateful to live and work on these lands, and we must continue to reflect on how our laws, including citizenship laws, are shaped by our shared responsibilities.

Colleagues, it's interesting that we are considering Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (2025), related to the restoration and acquisition of Canadian citizenship, at the same time as the Senate is considering Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements).

While today we are concerned with restoring the rights and entitlements to Canadian citizenship by descent, our colleagues on the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples have been studying a law which addresses some of the remaining inequities in the registration and band membership provisions of the Indian Act. Both of these laws are about the right to belong, about identity.

As a Nova Scotian who has spent much of my career working with communities in Canada and around the world, I have seen how belonging, identity and citizenship shape people's lives. I have heard from families who carry Canada in their hearts whether they live in Antigonish, Edmonton, Botswana or Bolivia. Their experiences remind us that citizenship is about more than paperwork. It's about connection. It's both a privilege and a profound bond, and for many of those we are talking about today, it's actually a right.

By way of background, on January 1, 1947 — cast your minds back to 1947 — the Canadian Citizenship Act came into force. That marked the beginning of Canadian citizenship as a legal status. Prior to this post-Second World War initiative of the government of former prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, individuals born in Canada and naturalized immigrants were classified as British subjects.

The Canadian Citizenship Act was a significant expression of Canada's emerging sense of national identity. The government also hoped that the creation of Canadian citizenship would alleviate racial and ethnic tensions in Canada and foster a sense of unity amongst its increasingly diverse population.

In Canada's first citizenship ceremony, on January 3, 1947, 26 individuals were presented with their certificates of Canadian citizenship. Among the recipients was Prime Minister Mackenzie King himself. He received certificate number 0001.

• (1440)

The Canadian Citizenship Act established three ways to acquire Canadian citizenship: first, by birth on soil if a person was born in Canada; second, by naturalization, if a person immigrated to Canada and acquired Canadian citizenship status; and, third, by descent: If a person was born outside Canada, they could derive citizenship from a Canadian citizen parent.

A new Citizenship Act was introduced in 1977, and it maintained those three ways to acquire Canadian citizenship. It did remedy some of the obstacles to citizenship that had resulted in Lost Canadians earlier on, but it did not resolve all of them.

Today, we're discussing a bill many have been waiting for, one that aims to address long-standing issues in Canada's Citizenship Act so it better reflects both the value of Canadian citizenship and the reality of how Canadian families live today in our very interconnected world.

Over the years, changes to our citizenship laws have had some unacceptable consequences for Canadian families — in particular, the first-generation limit introduced in 2009. It has meant that a Canadian citizen born outside our country who acquired citizenship by descent generally cannot pass citizenship to their child if that child is also born abroad. This includes families with genuine ties to Canada. This includes families like mine and, I suspect, families of some of my Senate colleagues. I know Senator Boehm had two children born outside Canada.

Imagine all the children born to Canadian Armed Forces personnel while their families were posted in Europe, Canadian diplomats posted around the world, Canadians working for the UN or international NGOs and Canadians running or working for international businesses.

Now I will tell a personal story. On April 8, 1982 — I will now take you with me into my labour — by the light of the kerosene lantern, assisted by two highly skilled Botswanan midwives in the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital in Kanye, Botswana, I gave birth to my youngest daughter, Lindelwa Naledi, or Lindi. My husband and I had been living in Botswana for close to two and a half years. I was working for the Ministry of Commerce and Industry as the Rural Industrial Officer for the southern district of that country. Our 6-year-old daughter, Emilie, and our almost 3-year-old daughter, Lauren, were born in Canada.

At 27 years old, I had no idea the rights of my new baby, born that night, would be different from those of her Canadian-born sisters. Lindi did get her Canadian citizenship as the daughter of two Canadians. But when she gave birth in 2017 and 2019 to her two daughters in Monterrey, Mexico, she did not have the right to pass on her Canadian citizenship to her children Violetta and Sierra, my two youngest grandchildren.

Those children did get their Canadian citizenship through their Nova Scotia-born father, not through their mother, my daughter. If her partner had been Mexican, or any other nationality, they would not have had the right to Canadian citizenship, even though their mom was Canadian and her mom was a Canadian senator.

Her sisters, Emilie and Lauren, could have passed on their citizenship to their children no matter where those children were born in the world because these first two children of mine were born in Canada. This didn't end up being tested for them because my other grandchildren were born in Edmonton, Halifax and Antigonish.

Colleagues, you have three sisters — my three daughters — all Canadian, all born to Canadian parents who, before Bill C-3, do not have the same right to pass on their citizenship.

Fortunately, in the *Bjorkquist* litigation in 2023, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice declared key provisions of the first-generation limit on citizenship by descent are unconstitutional. The court found this limit, as it stands, is inconsistent with the Charter. The court has suspended its declaration from coming into effect until November 20, a date approaching very soon.

Unless we act by that date, the court's declaration will come into force and citizenship by descent will have no limit for many, while some Lost Canadians will remain in limbo. That's why I urge this chamber to move this legislation forward as quickly as possible. The term "Lost Canadians" has generally been used to describe those who lost or never acquired citizenship due to certain outdated provisions of former citizenship legislation.

Bill C-3 is a reasonable response to the court's declaration. It affirms the right to citizenship, as conferred under this bill, can't come with arbitrary restrictions. It strikes an important balance, ensuring fair access while protecting the value of Canadian citizenship.

Let me outline several features that speak to the clarity and fairness of this bill.

First, Bill C-3 proposes clear rules for access to citizenship by descent going forward, from this point on. In future cases where the Canadian parent was born or adopted abroad, their child born or adopted abroad can access citizenship as long as the parent has a substantial connection to Canada. Substantial connection is shown by being physically present in Canada for 1,095 days, or three years, cumulatively before the child's birth or adoption.

The government chose this approach because it's similar to the 1,095-day physical presence requirement for naturalization. It recognizes that Canadians born abroad may have established a connection to Canada and this connection can continue to be maintained while pursuing opportunities abroad, as many Canadians do.

For example, a Canadian born abroad may spend most of their childhood in Canada, choose to come study here or accumulate time in our country through visiting and/or caring for family members.

Second, the legislation addresses historical gaps like the one I was talking about. If enacted, this bill would confer citizenship on those subject to that first-generation limit, meaning all those born abroad in the second or subsequent generations to a Canadian parent before this legislation comes into force. This would have been the case for my Mexican-born grandkids of my Botswanan-born daughter if they hadn't had a Canadian-born dad.

This will be the case for friends of mine who live in Washington, D.C., and probably friends of many of you. My friend Annie is Canadian by descent through her mom. Her two children were born in the U.S., as was she. Her children are not currently automatically eligible for Canadian citizenship due to the first-generation cut-off. With Bill C-3 coming into force, her children will receive their Canadian citizenship.

This bill will also restore the citizenship of people who previously lost it due to the now-repealed age-28 requirement. This was a situation whereby some Canadian citizens born abroad lost their citizenship if they did not apply to retain it by age 28, as was required at that time by section 8 of the Citizenship Act.

This includes people who considered themselves Canadian in every way or lost citizenship unknowingly. Bill C-3 ensures the law will finally reflect that reality.

Third, the bill maintains the framework that provides similar access — and this is important — to citizenship for families who adopt children abroad. This will ensure that, before the bill becomes law, families have access to citizenship through the direct grant pathway — that's the other pathway, a naturalization pathway — for all children adopted by a Canadian parent. They

will have access after it becomes law, provided the Canadian parent, who was also born or adopted abroad, has accumulated the required three years of physical presence in Canada. This will align the approach for children both born and adopted abroad.

Fourth, Bill C-3 provides for access to a simplified process for those who may automatically receive Canadian citizenship through these changes but don't wish to keep it, for example, in some cases where dual citizenship may conflict with another country's laws.

We've heard concerns that Bill C-3 could mean hundreds of thousands of new citizens, which could put pressure on social services.

• (1450)

No one can give a precise forecast of how many people will become citizens through Bill C-3 because Canada has not tracked births abroad since 1977. Uptake also depends on future personal choices: where Canadians have children, whether they even do so, how many they might have and whether any of these new citizens will choose to come forward to seek proof of their new citizenship.

What we do know is that between January 2024 and July 2025, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, received just over 4,200 applications for discretionary grants of citizenship under the interim measure for those affected by this first-generation limit. Since the government introduced previous amendments in 2009 and 2015, in that period, around 20,000 Lost Canadians have come forward to apply for proof of their citizenship. IRCC received fewer than 2,400 applications per year from Lost Canadians in the busiest years after the changes came during that period came into effect.

Based on that evidence, today, IRCC anticipates volumes in the tens of thousands over time, not hundreds of thousands.

When it comes to the question of the cost to Canada, it's true that anyone who becomes a citizen as a result of Bill C-3 will be entitled, like any other citizen, to access the government programs or services for which they are eligible. That's the key: for which they are eligible.

It's important to note that every program or service, whether federal or provincial, has its own eligibility criteria. These criteria can include age, income level, tax filing, residence in Canada or residence in a specific province or territory for a specific amount of time. They don't just depend on whether or not a person is a citizen.

Anyone who applies to any specific program or service needs to meet all the relevant criteria to benefit from the program or service, just like any other Canadian.

We've also heard suggestions that the legislation should impose security checks on people who become citizens under Bill C-3 — a cohort, I should note, that is largely low-risk children — or that these people should pass a test verifying their proficiency in one of Canada's official languages.

Citizenship by descent has never required screening for security, criminality or language proficiency, and Bill C-3 — consistent with the amendments the government made to citizenship by descent in 2009 and 2015 — keeps it that way.

Bill C-3 is about citizenship. It is not an immigration law. As senators, we have a duty to ensure our citizenship laws are fair, inclusive and reflective of how Canadian families live here at home and around the world. This chamber has often come together to address complex, long-standing issues with care and pragmatism. Bill C-3 is precisely such an issue.

I also want to acknowledge the groundwork that has brought us to this moment. Parliament has taken steps over time to restore citizenship to those affected by the first-generation limit, including thoughtful deliberations around Bill S-245 and the former Bill C-71, and the valuable contributions made in committee.

This bill builds on that work with a complete and forward-looking solution that restores what was lost and provides access to citizenship to those who have a genuine connection to Canada.

With Bill C-3, we can provide a framework that's consistent with the long-standing treatment of citizenship by descent, avoids unnecessary barriers and addresses legitimate concerns with evidence rather than conjecture.

In my work around the world, I have witnessed the difference that clear, fair and compassionate laws can make. With this bill, we have the opportunity to ensure that our citizenship framework does not arbitrarily divide Canadian families and that it recognizes genuine ties to Canada in a way that is principled and, quite frankly, practical.

Colleagues, the deadline facing us is real, and we have a responsibility as parliamentarians to right some historical wrongs. The Lost Canadians who will be brought home through Bill C-3 were not lost through any actions of their own or their parents. I urge you to adopt Bill C-3 so that it can be referred to committee without delay.

Thank you. *Wela'lioq*.

Hon. Michèle Audette: Will Senator Coyle accept a question?

Senator Coyle: But of course.

Senator Audette: Thank you so much for agreeing to be the sponsor for this bill and, most of all, for talking about Bill S-2 in your introduction. Just to clarify, Bill S-2 doesn't solve the second-generation cut-off for the first women of this land. I hope we will get your support because some amendments will probably address what Bill C-3 is doing for families born outside of Canada. This comment is just for clarification.

Senator Coyle: I don't think that was a question.

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Thank you, Senator Coyle, for your speech; it was very informative. Since the bill just arrived in the Senate today, I've not had a chance to review it in detail. I wonder if you could tell me about the security status of these extra-generation Canadians coming to our country. In other words, as I understood your speech — and correct me if I'm wrong — if someone spent three years in Canada and had a child, that child would have Canadian citizenship. I assume that means the person could automatically come to Canada at any point in their life. Would there be any security checks on that person coming to spend their three years before they arrive here? How does that work, do you know?

Senator Coyle: I'm trying to make sure I understand the scenario that you're proposing there. There are two things. We're trying to rectify the situation for people who were caught in this first-generation cut-off before the law comes into force — people like my daughter, for instance, and her children. For her, it's not an issue because she spent lots of time in Canada. Frankly, for any of them, it's not an issue until this point because you can't impose something retroactively. You can't make that three-year requirement to people who didn't know that was a requirement. First of all, I'll state that.

What you're talking about, I believe, is that from this point going forward, the parent has to prove that they have a substantial connection to Canada. That is three years over any period of time before they give birth or have a child to pass their citizenship on to. That's a Canadian citizen who is going to be passing on their citizenship to their child, and that child would have citizenship if the parent had met that substantial test. That child would not have to go through any kind of security check.

My children, who are citizens, don't have to go through security checks. Your children wouldn't either. These are Canadian citizens. If you have met that test, you are a Canadian citizen like any other.

Senator Downe: Just for clarification, if my daughter was born in Canada and then had a child in Switzerland, that child would automatically have, under this legislation, Canadian citizenship, as I understand it. And then that child could automatically come to Canada after spending 50 years of their life in Switzerland, because they're a Canadian citizen. However, in those 50 years in Switzerland — I'm picking Switzerland for no particular reason — they could have had a very long criminal record, but that would not impact their ability to come to Canada. Am I correct?

• (1500)

Senator Coyle: It depends. Yes, there would be no test of criminality.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to speak at second reading as critic of Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act.

Previously tabled as Bill C-71 in the last Parliament, this bill seeks to respond to the Ontario Superior Court's decision in *Bjorkquist et al. v. Attorney General of Canada*, commonly known as the Lost Canadians case.

Before getting into the details of Bill C-3, it is important to step back and understand how we arrived at this point where, yet again, the government's lack of preparation is creating an urgency in this place where a bill is being expedited and sober second thought brushed aside.

In December 2023, the *Bjorkquist* decision addressed the constitutionality of the first-generation limit in paragraph 3(3)(a) of the Citizenship Act. The court declared that provision unconstitutional under section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and suspended its declaration of invalidity for six months, until June 19, 2024, to give Parliament time to respond.

While a significant ruling, it was not issued by a court of appeal or the Supreme Court of Canada. At that moment, the federal government faced a choice. It could have sought clarification or review from a higher court, as governments often do when constitutional questions touch upon fundamental national policies such as citizenship. An appeal to the Court of Appeal for Ontario — or even a reference to the Supreme Court of Canada — would have provided guidance and allowed Parliament to legislate on a firm constitutional foundation.

There is a clear precedent for doing so. When fundamental questions of national policy arise, governments have sought higher court clarity before legislating. In *Carter v. Canada*, for example, the government appealed the Supreme Court of B.C. decision — a court of the same level as the *Bjorkquist* court — that struck down the Criminal Code's prohibition on assisted suicide, an issue with deep constitutional and moral implications.

The Supreme Court's eventual ruling provided national guidance and ensured that Parliament's response rested on a settled constitutional framework. By contrast, in *Bjorkquist*, the government chose not to appeal, leaving Parliament to legislate without the benefit of appellate court or Supreme Court clarity.

That decision not to appeal set the tone for everything that followed. By foregoing an appeal, the government chose expedience over clarity and politics over prudence. What should have been a moment of careful legal and policy reflection became a self-imposed race against the clock to advance its ideological vision of citizenship. In doing so, the government limited Parliament's ability to study the issue properly and reinforced the perception that judicial deadlines are being used as pretexts to rush complex bills through without adequate deliberation.

We have seen this pattern before. During debate on Bill C-7 during last Parliament, which amended the Criminal Code to expand medical assistance in dying, the government likewise cited a court-imposed deadline as justification for limiting debate and accelerating passage.

Instead of appealing the Superior Court of Québec's *Truchon* decision to seek clarity, it accepted the ruling immediately and used its timeline to compress parliamentary review on an issue of profound ethical and constitutional importance. That precedent revealed a troubling habit: treating judicial deadlines not as guardrails for justice but as tools for political urgency.

The same impulse is evident here with Bill C-3.

Time and again, the government has shown itself unwilling to prioritize this legislation. Having missed its first June 19, 2024, deadline, it sought multiple extensions with the most recent one — a fifth extension — to November 20, 2025. Now, two weeks before that deadline, with only four sitting days remaining, this chamber is asked to approve, not to deliberate.

Bill C-3 extends automatic citizenship to individuals born abroad in the second generation and beyond, even where there may be limited or no tangible connection to Canada. This broad expansion risks creating new uncertainties and inconsistencies rather than simply addressing the specific inequality identified by the court.

Perhaps most concerning is how the government has treated the court's ruling, not as guidance for Parliament to consider but as justification to rush complex legislation through without the full rigour of the proper process.

In our parliamentary system, due process is not a formality; it is a safeguard. It ensures that legislation is tested, challenged and improved before it becomes law. When a government uses a court-imposed timeline — or any deadline — to constrain Parliament's deliberation, it undermines the very principles of transparency and accountability that give this institution its legitimacy.

While we are in the early days of the Forty-fifth Parliament, Prime Minister Carney is already showing the same disregard and reflexes for parliamentary process as his predecessor. Rather than allowing both chambers the time needed for meaningful debate, expert testimony and sober second thought, the government is pressing our chamber for the bill's swift passage to meet a deadline.

What should have been an opportunity for collaboration and careful review has instead become an exercise in executive haste. A clear example is the technical briefing offered today from 12:35 p.m. to 1:15 p.m., ending just as the bells were ringing for this very institution. That timing left barely two hours between the briefing, the debate on legislation that directly concerns the meaning and transmission of Canadian citizenship and a second reading vote. Such an approach leaves little opportunity for careful preparation or informed discussion. When measures of this significance are handled under such conditions, the Senate's capacity to provide genuine sober second thought is not strengthened but constrained. Rushing complex legislation does not serve the public interest; it serves only the government's timetable.

Our role in this chamber is not to expedite the government's schedule but to uphold Parliament's duty of review. The Senate was never meant to be a rubber stamp for executive convenience; it was created to provide sober second thought, especially when a bill affects something as fundamental as who we are — our citizenship.

If the government's approach to this legislation — rushing committee study, limiting debate and treating a court deadline as a sword of Damocles — is what it considers sober second thought, then it has misunderstood the purpose of this institution. True scrutiny requires patience, proper debate and respect for process — yes, it sometimes takes time — things that Bill C-3 has not and will not be afforded in our chamber.

At its core, Bill C-3 extends automatic citizenship by descent to the second generation born abroad and introduces a new requirement that a parent must have spent at least 1,095 days — roughly three years — at any time in life, physically present in Canada before the child's birth or adoption in order to transmit citizenship.

The bill also restores citizenship to Lost Canadians, who lost or never obtained it under earlier provisions of the act. In short, Bill C-3 broadens who can automatically inherit Canadian citizenship while setting out a limited physical-presence test for those transmitting it.

The bill defines a "substantial connection" to Canada as 1,095 cumulative days — about three years — of physical presence in Canada before the birth or adoption of a child abroad. Those three years can be accumulated at any point in a person's life; a parent does not need to have been born in Canada to pass on citizenship. As a result, citizenship would now be multigenerational as parents no longer have to be born in Canada.

This could translate to having a family living permanently outside of Canada with multiple generations born outside of Canada gaining citizenship.

In committee in the other place, amendments were adopted to strengthen this framework by specifying that those three years of physical presence must be accumulated within a five-year period preceding the child's birth or adoption, a reasonable amendment. This mirrored existing structures in the Citizenship Act, such as residency requirements for naturalization, and would have ensured consistency and clarity.

By requiring that those three years fall within a five-year period, Parliament would have upheld a clear and familiar standard of current, demonstrable connection. Yet despite this alignment with existing principles of the Act and strengthening the legislation, the government decided to overturn every amendment adopted in committee in the other place.

Furthermore, extending citizenship automatically to individuals with little or no enduring connection to Canada risks eroding coherence in the law. The Citizenship Act has long sought to balance fairness with tangible connection, which gives citizenship both meaning and stability.

When policy moves too far toward automatic entitlement without ensuring a demonstrable link to the country, that balance begins to weaken. Citizenship has always reflected a balance between the responsibilities of the state and the participation of its people. It is more than a passport or a piece of paper; it is a commitment to place, community and reciprocity. When we extend it broadly, without any expectation of participation or shared obligation, we risk diluting not only its legal meaning but its civic purpose.

• (1510)

It is worth recalling, colleagues, how previous governments addressed similar challenges. In 2006, during the conflict in Lebanon, Canada undertook one of the largest civilian evacuations in its history, airlifting tens of thousands of citizens and dual nationals to safety. That extraordinary operation also underscored difficult questions about connection, residency and the obligations that accompany citizenship, concerns widely discussed at the time as issues of "citizens of convenience." Rather than ignoring those lessons, the government recognized the need for a balanced approach that upheld both mobility and accountability.

Under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Parliament pursued that balance through concrete legislative reform. In 2009, Bill C-37 restored citizenship to those who had lost it under the former retention rules and ensured that it could be automatically passed to the first generation born abroad, a solution that respected fairness without opening the door indefinitely.

Later, in 2014, Bill C-24 modernized the oath, reinforced the responsibilities that accompany citizenship and addressed cases of fraud or false representation. These reforms strengthened confidence in the system by making citizenship meaningful, deliberate and accountable.

Conservatives have consistently supported efforts to correct the injustices experienced by the Lost Canadians, those who, through outdated provisions such as former section 8 of the Citizenship Act, were stripped of or denied citizenship through no fault of their own. Successive governments acknowledged this injustice, and Conservative members have backed targeted remedies to restore citizenship to those unfairly affected. That, colleagues, was a balanced path, one rooted in fairness, clarity and respect for both the individual and the institution of citizenship.

In contrast, Bill C-3 departs from that tradition. At the end of the day, colleagues, citizenship should never be treated as something to be handed out casually. It is far more than a legal status; it is a shared commitment that must be protected with clear standards and meaningful safeguards. Citizenship is, at its core, a social contract, a relationship between the state and the individual that carries both rights and responsibilities. It reflects not only what the state owes to its citizens but also what citizens owe to the values, institutions and traditions that bind our country together.

Honourable senators, while we recognize the legal realities before us, including the court's suspension of invalidity and the uncertainty that missing the deadline would have created for families abroad and for officials administering citizenship, that does not excuse the government's approach. We supported the procedural motion to ensure this chamber could meet the court's timeline, not out of deference to the government's haste, but out of respect for Parliament's responsibility and the rule of law.

Yet, the fact remains that the government has chosen ideology over process and haste over prudence. It has taken a court decision and turned it into a broad legislative exercise without the benefit of full parliamentary debate. While we support certain provisions in Bill C-3 that address section 8, correcting the injustices faced by the Lost Canadians and related to adoptions, the bill in its current form goes well beyond the necessary remedy. By dismissing reasonable amendments that would have strengthened the bill and aligned it with the principles already found in the Citizenship Act, it asks this chamber to endorse uncertainty rather than reform.

For those reasons, honourable senators, we cannot support Bill C-3 in its current form. Thank you.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

An Hon. Senator: On division.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time, on division.)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Pursuant to the order adopted earlier this day, the bill was deemed referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

[*Translation*]

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

STATUTES REPEAL ACT—COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO STUDY 2025 REPORT AND LIST OF ACTS OR PROVISIONS OF ACTS PROPOSED TO NOT BE REPEALED IN 2025

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate), pursuant to notice of November 5, 2025, moved:

> That the report on the *Statutes Repeal Act* for the year 2025, whose tabling was recorded in the *Journals of the Senate* of May 29, 2025, together with the list of Acts or provisions of Acts proposed to not be repealed pursuant to the same Act, tabled in the Senate on November 5, 2025, be referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs for examination and report; and
>
> That the committee submit its report to the Senate no later than December 4, 2025.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

[*English*]

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION ADOPTED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate), pursuant to notice of November 5, 2025, moved:

> That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, November 18, 2025, at 2 p.m.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR A GUARANTEED LIVABLE BASIC INCOME BILL

SECOND READING

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.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

An Hon. Senator: On division.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time, on division.)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

(On motion of Senator Pate, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance.)

[*English*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Downe, seconded by the Honourable Senator Prosper, for the second reading of Bill S-217, An Act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (reporting on unpaid income tax).

Hon. Elizabeth Marshall: Honourable senators, I rise today as the critic of Senator Downe's Bill S-217, An Act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (reporting on unpaid income tax). Although I am the critic, I fully support this legislation and hope that this time it completes its journey to becoming law.

As most of you know, Senator Downe has been a consistent advocate on this issue for over 10 years. His first Senate public bill on the matter was tabled in April 2015 with Bill S-226, which died on the Order Paper following the election that year. He reintroduced the legislation as Bill S-243 in 2018, which was passed in this chamber with minor committee amendments and reached second reading in the House of Commons.

• (1520)

Bill S-258 was the next version, which was introduced in March 2023, and it incorporated amendments which had been recommended during the debate on the previous bill. Bill S-258 was passed at second reading and subsequently studied at our National Finance Committee, where we held two meetings on the bill and heard from the Canada Revenue Agency and the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO.

While the Canada Revenue Agency tried to make the case that the bill was unnecessary and unwarranted, the PBO at that time strongly endorsed it, saying that Bill S-258 would strengthen the PBO's ability to access the data on the tax gap that is required to conduct an independent analysis. He went on to say that he also believed that such an analysis would greatly benefit parliamentarians and the Canadian public.

Bill S-258 was passed by this chamber without amendments in June 2024. Unfortunately, this bill died on the Order Paper in the other place with the prorogation of Parliament.

The current bill, Bill S-217, has received significant scrutiny over the years and strong support from this chamber on multiple occasions. I sincerely hope this latest version will receive the same support not only in this chamber but in the other place as well.

Bill S-217 is unchanged from Bill S-258. It proposes three main amendments to the Canada Revenue Agency Act. Firstly, it requires the Canada Revenue Agency to produce statistics on the tax gap at least once every three years. Secondly, it obliges the Minister of National Revenue to share tax gap data with the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Lastly, it mandates the Canada

Revenue Agency to publish in its annual report to the Minister of National Revenue a list of all convictions for tax evasion, including those related to international offences.

The tax gap refers to the difference between the amount of tax that should be collected and what is actually collected. While calculating it is not an exact science, given that it often involves hidden income or honest errors, credible methodologies do exist to estimate a reliable range.

In 2022, for example, the Canada Revenue Agency estimated that Canada's gross tax gap was between $35 billion and $40 billion, roughly 9% of total federal revenue. It also projected that it could recover about $17 billion through enforcement efforts, leaving a net gap of $23 billion.

Why does this matter? It is because measuring the tax gap gives us an essential diagnostic tool, a benchmark that tells us how effectively our tax system is functioning. Without it, we lack a clear sense of whether enforcement measures are working, and we are left with no meaningful way to assess progress.

As I noted in my speech on Bill S-258, while simply measuring the tax gap solves nothing on its own, it is very much like taking a reading of someone's vital signs: It reveals if something is wrong and whether it is getting better or worse. If your tax gap is high, you know you have a problem; if your tax gap is rising, your problem is becoming worse; but if your tax gap is dropping, you're doing something right.

This data can help government improve revenue collection, assess tax policy, promote fairness, allocate enforcement resources more efficiently, build better compliance strategies and more accurately evaluate the Canada Revenue Agency's work. However, despite the value of measuring the tax gap, until a few years ago, Canada had no consistent approach to tracking it. That began to change in 2016, when the agency started releasing reports on specific components of the tax gap, including the methods used to estimate them.

In 2022 the agency published its first comprehensive report, *Overall federal tax gap report: Estimates and key findings for non-compliance, tax years 2014-2018*, which examined all major federal tax sources.

As noted on the Canada Revenue Agency's website:

> The CRA's tax gap program plans to publish the second overall tax gap report in 2025 (target: end of June) with updated estimates and key findings up to tax year 2022 . . . .

Interestingly, the Canada Revenue Agency points out, "This approach is aligned with the proposal in Bill S-258 by Senator Percy Downe in March of 2023."

Honourable senators, I believe this is an acknowledgment on the part of the Canada Revenue Agency that Senator Downe's work has already made a difference. Although the fact that the steps taken by the CRA are encouraging, they continue to fall short in three key areas.

First of all, there is no statutory requirement for the agency to continue to do the work required in order to release reports on specific components of the tax gap. Given the value of this information to Parliament, producing it on a timely basis must be a requirement imposed on the agency by law rather than something which is left to their discretion.

Regular legislative reporting on the tax gap is necessary in order to track progress over time. Bill S-217 would fix this by mandating tax gap reports every three years.

The second way the existing process falls short is that there is currently no obligation for the agency to share tax gap data with the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Without access to this data, the PBO is limited in its ability to independently verify or assess the agency's estimates — a significant gap in public accountability.

Bill S-217 addresses this directly, as I mentioned, to the satisfaction of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Thirdly, while the Canada Revenue Agency does publish some convictions for tax evasion, the current list is not comprehensive and provides little information about international cases. This lack of transparency hinders public accountability in efforts to combat offshore tax evasion. Bill S-217 would remedy this by requiring full disclosure of such convictions.

At its core, this bill represents a starting point in the fight against tax evasion. When individuals or corporations evade taxes, they avoid their fair share of the cost of public services, placing a greater burden on those who do pay, which undermines the integrity of the entire system.

Tax evasion also reduces government revenues, potentially leading to cuts in public programs or increased taxes on compliant citizens. These outcomes further erode trust in the government and its promises to combat tax evasion.

Although Bill S-217 would not eliminate tax evasion, it would be a strong step in the right direction. It would fill key information gaps that Parliament needs to perform effective oversight. It would increase transparency and accountability. It would support better enforcement and better policy making. And it would promote greater public awareness, which, in turn, would encourage voluntary compliance and strengthen confidence in the system's fairness.

Honourable senators, while no tax system is perfect, we have a responsibility to make ours stronger and more equitable. Bill S-217 would help us do this. I encourage you to support this bill and allow it to proceed expeditiously to committee for further examination.

Thank you.

Hon. Kim Pate: Will Senator Marshall take a question?

Senator Marshall: Yes.

Senator Pate: I want to take the opportunity to thank you for all the incredible work you do on all of these financial matters. It's well appreciated.

Since I am no longer on the Finance Committee and can no longer ask these questions, I want to ask you a question. When Senator Downe talked about this bill and did his second reading speech, he talked about the situation of the Panama and Pandora Papers, and he named some countries that had gone after the resources.

I took the opportunity over the summer to explore, particularly with Iceland, because I thought, it's a very small country, how did it manage this? So I discussed it with the prosecutors in Iceland. You may recall that in the National Finance Committee we heard many times from the officials who said that these were far too complex, and that was part of the rationale given for going after zero dollars and zero people who were named in those papers in Canada. Yet, in Iceland, they did more than merely go after folks. I asked them how much work it was and how complex it was. Their response was that it was one investigative journalist, two prosecutors and full cooperation from all the authorities they contacted, and they obtained that information through the Pandora and Panama Papers.

Are you surprised by this? What do you suggest we should do in light of this information?

• (1530)

Senator Marshall: Thank you very much for the question, Senator Pate.

I must say, no, I'm not surprised. I think the Canada Revenue Agency has struggled for a number of years. I don't know why. I know you're familiar with the report that was released by the Auditor General a couple weeks ago. They seem to be struggling with even the most basic functions. The way I look at it is that if you can't fix your telephone system, then you really have a problem, and they can't fix their telephone system.

So, no, I'm not surprised at all.

I do think legislation is the way to go. While they had indicated in the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance hearings that they didn't need the legislation, I would not leave it up to them to voluntarily disclose this information. I think the best way to go is to make it a statutory requirement.

Senator Pate: Thank you, Senator Marshall. Since I'm not on the National Finance Committee anymore, would you be willing to ask some of those questions, and could we work together on that?

Senator Marshall: Yes, and I'm looking forward to hearing from the Canada Revenue Agency because, in addition to this new requirement, you'll notice in the budget that they will also have to deal with some significant cuts and reassignment of resources.

Therefore, yes, I will be asking those questions. Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Moncion, for Senator Clement, debate adjourned.)

VOTE 16 BILL

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator McPhedran, seconded by the Honourable Senator Sorensen, for the second reading of Bill S-222, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Regulation Adapting the Canada Elections Act for the Purposes of a Referendum.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today at second reading of Bill S-222, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Regulation Adapting the Canada Elections Act for the Purposes of a Referendum.

I thank Senator McPhedran for her commitment to young people and for the introduction of this bill. Like her, I deeply believe in the importance of sparking young people's interest in democracy and in civic or political participation. However, I believe that addressing an issue this important should not come at the expense of democratic legitimacy.

It is precisely for that reason, dear colleagues, that I cannot support this bill.

Behind this seemingly simple proposal — lowering the voting age to 16 — lie two fundamental issues. The first is the legitimacy of an unelected chamber changing the rules that determine who can elect the elected chamber, and the second is the question of civic maturity among 16- and 17-year-olds.

Honourable colleagues, nothing in the Constitution prevents the Senate from introducing a bill touching the Canada Elections Act, but the question here is not constitutional; it is political and institutional. In other words, the Senate can do it, but it should not do it. Showing our restraint in this area is not a weakness, colleagues, but a democratic tradition grounded in common sense. The Senate does not directly represent the people, and it would be paradoxical for any unelected chamber to redefine who can vote to elect the members of the elected chamber.

As early as 2008, during the study of Bill C-29, which sought to amend the Canada Elections Act, the Minister for Democratic Reform, Peter Van Loan, issued a clear appeal to respect the role of the elected chamber:

> I am hopeful and optimistic that when it reaches the Liberal dominated Senate, that it will respect the importance of a decision taken by the House of Commons with regard to elections for members to the House of Commons and the rules that govern them. I hope senators will not take the opportunity to obstruct and delay the bill in their party's

> partisan interests, but will in fact respect a decision of the House of Commons about how the House of Commons should be elected.

Then 10 years later, in 2018, during the study of Bill C-76, which aimed to comprehensively reform the Canada Elections Act, NDP MP Daniel Blaikie criticized the government's choice to assign to the Senate, rather than the House of Commons, the responsibility for making certain amendments to the bill. He then reminded the House:

> Why is it that we have to depend on an undemocratic house to get changes to our democratic instruments here in Canada?

[*Translation*]

As our colleague Senator Dalphond said during the debate on an earlier version of this bill:

> . . . it's very delicate for unelected people to decide what is good for elected people and who should be the elected people.
>
> It's up to them to initiate this type of important reform.

[*English*]

Since the current Canada Elections Act was adopted in 2000, 21 Senate-originated bills have referenced it. Only one received Royal Assent: Bill S-4 in 2022, adopted in a pandemic context. Its objective was not to reform the electoral system but to make a related amendment to subsection 175(9) of the Canada Elections Act in order to authorize the general use of telecommunications to request or deliver writs, a purely administrative and ancillary measure.

By contrast, Bill S-222 is an initiative that targets a central pillar of electoral law. In doing so, it crosses a line the Senate has always respected: that of institutional restraint. If we begin unilaterally redefining the right to vote, we risk not only undermining our legitimacy but also creating a dangerous precedent — one that could, tomorrow, justify further Senate interventions in areas that fall directly within the purview of the elected house. Once that boundary is crossed, it would be very difficult to restore.

The Senate is already the target of public scepticism. We do not need to add further doubt by substituting ourselves for the House of Commons on fundamental questions of universal suffrage.

This is not a partisan question. It is a question of respecting the democratic mandate of the other place. The House of Commons represents citizens because it is elected by them. If MPs, after consultation, decide to lower the voting age, that would be their responsibility and their legitimate right. But we, an appointed chamber, cannot impose such a reform from the top down. That would amount to usurping the power of the people.

It bears repeating that the question of the voting age is neither new nor neglected by the House of Commons. This debate has already taken place there on multiple occasions. Since the Forty-second Parliament, at least six bills have been introduced in the House of Commons to lower the voting age to 16. In the Forty-fourth Parliament, two nearly identical initiatives were introduced: Bill C-210 by MP Taylor Bachrach and Bill C-227 by MP Don Davies. Bill C-210 was defeated at second reading on September 28, 2022, in a recorded vote: 77 in favour, 246 against. Nearly three quarters of MPs opposed it. Bill C-227 did not even pass second reading, colleagues.

In other words, the House of Commons has clearly and democratically — and unequivocally — ruled against this measure.

That is the crux of the issue. We are not merely discussing an electoral bill introduced by an unelected chamber but a text that the elected chamber has already debated and rejected categorically. Reopening this debate here would circumvent the will of the Canadian people as expressed by their legitimate representatives.

It's not the Senate's role to revisit a democratic decision that has already been made on a number of occasions in the other place. Our role, as Sir John A. Macdonald reminded us, is to be a chamber of sober second thought, not a chamber of popular initiative.

[*Translation*]

That brings me to the second part of my speech: the question of maturity and responsibility in civic life. That is the basis of my argument that the voting age should remain 18.

The Lortie commission, tasked in 1989 with conducting an in-depth review of our electoral system, already examined this fundamental issue. It concluded that the voting age should correspond to the age at which individuals reach civic maturity, that is, when they are able to understand collective issues, exercise sound judgment and bear the consequences of their choices.

This same approach was confirmed by Justice Lefsrud in *Fitzgerald v. Alberta*, who emphasized that the legislature's objective in setting an age limit for voting rights was to ensure that voters had sufficient maturity to exercise that right in a rational and informed manner.

• (1540)

[*English*]

Thus, colleagues, according to both the judge and the commission, the dividing line for the right to vote rests on a certain maturity: understanding the issues of civic life, the capacity to judge and the ability to assume the consequences of one's democratic choices.

So the second question is this: Why 18 and not 16? At 18, the age of majority, young Canadians begin to assume their own decisions, understand the scope of their choices and participate actively in the country's economic and social life.

Justice Lefsrud illustrated it as follows:

> In general, 18 year olds . . . . take on the responsibility of voting at the same time as they take on a greater responsibility for the direction of their own lives. . . .

Colleagues, I acknowledge that determining the voting age is not a simple matter. The arguments put forward by Senator McPhedran and those who support lowering it to 16 are sincere and deserve consideration. Nevertheless, I believe that certain concrete benchmarks in our society help us locate more precisely when full civic readiness manifests itself, and those benchmarks clearly point us back to the age of 18.

On the fiscal front, for example, the numbers speak for themselves. In 2025, only 3.1% of 16- and 17-year-olds pay federal income tax, versus 96.9% who do not, a proportion in steady decline since 2021, when 15.3% contributed. In other words, fewer than 1 in 30 young people currently take part in funding the state.

By contrast, among 18-year-olds, who have just reached the age of majority, participation in economic life rises sharply to 43.3% who pay federal income tax. This sharp increase illustrates the transition that occurs at 18, when a significant share of young Canadians begins to contribute tangibly to the financing of public services and to the responsibilities of citizenship.

For the vast majority of those under 18, however, participation in economic life and civic contribution remains largely theoretical.

Legally, 16- and 17-year-olds are not tried as adults under the Youth Criminal Justice Act. They cannot serve on a jury, nor can they sign certain types of contracts without parental consent.

Even within the Canadian Armed Forces, enrollment at 16 requires such clear consent, and no active deployment is permitted before 18.

Likewise, the minimum age to purchase alcohol or cannabis is 18 or 19, depending on the province, and driving remains governed by graduated licensing that limits fully independent driving until at least 18, and even 20 in some jurisdictions.

Honourable senators, voting is not a pedagogical exercise; it is an act of responsibility. To vote is to choose the government that will set tax rates, adopt the budget and define the country's security and defence policies.

Honourable colleagues, there is no contempt in this position. Young Canadians are bright, curious and engaged. Their commitment should continue to be expressed in other ways: through volunteering, youth councils, community campaigns and certainly by political activism.

Setting the voting age at 18 is therefore not exclusion but a principle of coherence. It reflects a solid democracy founded on coherence and on the inseparable link between rights and duties.

Of course, reflecting on the voting age is not in itself a problem. On the contrary, questioning our democratic practices is healthy in any democracy as long as it respects the proper boundaries, especially between our two parliamentary chambers.

The Lortie commission recommended that Parliament periodically re-evaluate this question. That re-evaluation is already taking place in the House of Commons, where it rightly belongs.

Elected members have debated this issue on several occasions and have chosen, in full democratic legitimacy, to maintain the current threshold. Nothing today suggests that it should be changed and certainly not through the initiative of an unelected chamber. I fundamentally believe that. Preserving the coherence and legitimacy of our institutions is our foremost responsibility.

Colleagues, I also want to say this: As we all know, in politics and political life, and in the process of voting, cynicism starts to become an important element.

So, Senator McPhedran, why in the world would we want young people, who are positive and open-minded by nature, to rush to become part of a political process that invariably breeds some degree of cynicism? Let's allow these young people to continue to be free, to blossom and to let their reflection take place with no stress, no pressure and none of the cynicism that the electoral process invariably breeds in due time.

So, for all these reasons I just highlighted, colleagues, I cannot support this bill. Thank you.

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Thank you very much, Senator Housakos, for that very interesting speech. I want to make an observation, then ask a question.

It is fascinating that you refer to the process as top-down —

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator McPhedran, I want to be clear. Will you be asking a question?

Senator McPhedran: Yes. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator Housakos, would you take a question?

Senator Housakos: Absolutely, I'd be happy to.

[*English*]

Senator McPhedran: It's so interesting that you refer to it as a top-down process. I guess that means you see the Senate as a higher body than the House of Commons. I don't have nearly your expertise regarding history and procedure in the Senate. My understanding — and I want to ask if it is also your understanding — is that nothing becomes law in this country unless the identical bill is accepted by both houses. So I hope you can help me understand why you would frame this as top-down.

Also, are you aware of any procedural rule that stops someone in the Senate from introducing a bill? We've researched this pretty carefully and have not been able to find one, but perhaps with your greater experience, you know of a rule of procedure that stops this.

Senator Housakos: Thank you. Honourable colleagues, there is no doubt that this is the upper chamber. That's why it is referred to as such. It has certain rights and privileges that the other place does not, even though the reality is that both chambers were put together by the Constitution on a completely equal footing. I think it is section 18 of the Constitution that gives the Senate the absolute same rights, authorities and powers that the House has, Senator McPhedran.

But we also recognize in the British parliamentary system that we don't function inherently just by the written rules, so you are looking in all the wrong places. We also function, and very much so, on precedence. For example, we have the right to defeat a budget in the Constitution. We have the right to move bills that allow us to spend money. There is nothing in the Rules that says we can't. But we have learned over time that we are a democratic institution, and that in 2025 — and for that matter, in 1995 — compared to 1875, the perception of parliaments has changed.

We have to be very cognizant and careful of the certain inherent rights, democratic rights that the elected house has that we cede. I never said that we don't have them in the Constitution. But we cede them, as I said in my speech, using common sense and by being tempered in our approach, knowing what we can do and justifying what we cannot.

For example, we have come to accept the principle that you can't have taxation without representation. Therefore, there are certain things we don't do here. It is not a written rule. Also, I think it is common sense when it comes to amending the Elections Act and imposing on the other house rules that set the way they are governed. I think we are crossing the line and that most senators will recognize that.

How often do we ensure, in the principle of the system we have, that there is a clear division between the two houses? This is clearly, in my view, an infringement upon their fundamental rights by the upper chamber.

I could go on and on about why we are perceived as — and in reality are — the upper chamber. Just go through the list of protocol. For example, our Speaker is fourth on the list of protocol in this country. The Speaker of the House of Commons is fifth. Our Speaker doesn't represent just the Crown but also the government. It's an order-in-council appointment. In the other place, it represents wholly the elected house in an elected process.

I could go on and on about how we are in reality the upper chamber and how this would be viewed as a breach of our place in a democratic parliamentary system.

Senator McPhedran: Thank you very much, Senator Housakos. I have another question and a puzzle that I am hoping you can help me solve.

In the past 20 years — including your entire term as a senator, though I know it's not as long as 20 years and that you are much younger than that — 15 bills have been introduced in the Senate to amend the Canada Elections Act. Never did you speak against it or vote against the fact it had been introduced in the Senate, and it was an amendment to the Canada Elections Act, including in one case by a Conservative senator.

• (1550)

Please help me understand what makes this bill to expand voting rights to include 16- and 17-year-olds so different that you would oppose it in this way.

Senator Housakos: Senator McPhedran, you're referring to that one Elections Canada bill that I did vote in favour of. I don't remember the details, but I do remember it was many years ago. I've been here for a number of years.

The answer to the question is that everything evolves in this place, including how we approach certain things. At that time, I was young, naive and not as experienced as I am now. It highlights how, with time and experience, you become more sage and tempered in how you approach things.

Hon. Paulette Senior: Will Senator Housakos take a question?

Senator Housakos: Yes.

Senator Senior: Senator Housakos, I am wondering about other countries, including the U.K., that are among our peers and are extending the voting age to 16- and 17-year-olds. I can only assume they have done extensive work to make that decision to expand democracy in their countries.

Do you think there's a difference between the maturity or the ability of young people in the U.K. and other similar countries compared to those in Canada?

Senator Housakos: No, I don't. I think there's overlap between young people from all parts of the world. Again, I don't see how it's relevant to the point of my argument here.

The point of my argument is that all these things you're highlighting should not be debated by us. They should be debated in the other place. I've also highlighted in my speech that, over the last few years, they have been looked at closely by the other place in two different bills that looked at the age aspect. I assume they also reviewed what's happening in the U.K. and other places in the world.

My issue isn't why one country has chosen to have a different age limit compared to others. That's not the debate here. The debate simply is: Should we do it? More importantly, I'm saying: Should we have a say in it as senators appointed by prime ministers? I don't think that's an appropriate way to take a decision on the Canada Elections Act.

Hon. Andrew Cardozo: Would the senator take another question?

Senator Housakos: With pleasure.

Senator Cardozo: I'm not debating the merits of the issue. I see there are strengths and reasons for and against extending the age. By the way, often when I engage in SENgage events with 15- and 16-year-olds, I get them to debate this question. I see among them young people who are for and against this issue.

Your suggestion that the Senate should not engage in this debate, I would suggest, is problematic because we would, for the first time, be saying there are certain things the Senate should not be involved in and which the House should.

Alternatively, if you take your argument to its full extension, if the House passed such a bill, you would say we shouldn't be engaged in that and we should not vote on it because we shouldn't be engaged in a matter relating to democracy and the lowering of the age. Am I misunderstanding your approach?

Senator Housakos: The Senate decides what we do or don't do. We decide through debate and collective discussion. For example, through precedent, many years ago, the Senate decided that we're not a house of confidence. We are not going to amend budgets. We're not going to defeat budgets. We thought it was common sense.

If you look at the constitutional rights and obligations, if this place wants to defeat a budget, we can. If I understand correctly, what you're saying is we should exercise that particular role. We made a choice. It's not that we started making the choice today. The Senate has been making these choices for decades.

All I am saying is that when it comes to the Elections Act, it is not within our purview because we have nothing to do with it, no different than when we have a confidence vote on a budget. You know what happens when there's a confidence vote? This place shuts down, and politicians go before the Canadian people to get a mandate.

You know what happens when we make changes to the Elections Act? I will tell you what happens. We can make all the changes and propose all the changes. The day after an election, you'll walk into your office, and you know what you're going to hear? "Good morning, Mr. Senator."

I find we have those rights and privileges. We should guard them, exercise them wisely and be very careful when we start stepping over the line, because it won't be viewed positively by the Canadian public and, most importantly, it won't be viewed positively by the other place.

There was a bill passed in 2015, the Reform Act, for example, that excluded senators. They asked us to deliberate here and vote on the bill because, constitutionally, we have an obligation and a right to make sure that bills pass both houses.

All the political parties who unanimously accepted that bill — I don't know how many of you were around back then; there aren't many of us — they made it clear that they did not want us to participate at national caucuses on the House side to exercise the Reform Act. They just wanted us to rubber stamp it, because it touched upon the fundamental principles of the electoral process over on the House side. We have always accepted that principle over the last 25-35 years.

Senator Cardozo: To clarify, you're not arguing that we should be staying out of electoral issues?

Senator Housakos: What I'm saying is that we should not be amending the Elections Act, which directly impacts the House of Commons without having any implication on our house. That's what I'm saying.

Senator McPhedran: Senator Housakos, I perceive you as perpetually young, so the reference to your maturity is perhaps not the most relevant to this discussion.

Let me go back, because part of my question was not answered.

Can you please help me understand how, after 15 bills have been introduced in the Senate to amend the Canada Elections Act, not once was your argument used by Conservatives or any other senator saying those amendments should not have been brought in this place? What is so different for you about this expansion of voting rights? What makes it so different from those other 15 bills? During your time, you never objected to one of them.

Senator Housakos: I'll ask a question in the process. Are you implying we had 15 bills that dealt specifically with the voting age over the 17 years I've been here?

Senator Martin: The Elections Act.

Senator Housakos: Exactly. To clarify, we have dealt with a lot of technical bills that have had nothing to do with anything as significant as determining the minimum age of the electorate. This is a significant decision.

There were many technical bills to such a degree that I don't remember most of them. There was one in particular I do remember voting for. Again, I attribute that to the fact I didn't think it went far enough that it implicated and had an effect on the electoral process.

There are many bills we deal with here that are technical in nature. We all have seen those bills. I would venture to say that if I go through those 15 bills in question, I would bet the vast majority of them were technical in nature.

Again, if there are instances — and I'm not always perfect, although I'm as close as you get in this place, but I'm not — so there may be inconsistencies in my voting pattern. There are a number of senators here who, through the years, have voted for a number of bills, and after the fact those votes don't always look that great. Hindsight is always 20/20.

In this particular instance, I genuinely believe my argument is rooted in common sense.

Senator McPhedran: Again, there is a bit of a puzzle that I'm hoping you can help me with. Of course, you will be familiar with the Scottish referendum and familiar with the decision in the United Kingdom to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in the next federal election in all four countries.

• (1600)

I need to ask, though, in relation to the Right Honourable Damian Green, a U.K. Conservative, who noted that the idea of giving 16-year-olds the vote has been to reject it on the grounds they are not mature enough. They don't pay taxes, and therefore they don't feel the consequences — basically, some of the arguments you've been making here today.

But he goes on to say:

> . . . we were confident of taking our arguments to a new generation —

— meaning, why the Conservative Party switched its position —

> — We could introduce them not only to the good habit of voting in elections —

— and you'll like this —

> — but to the even better habit of voting Conservative.

That is a quote from the Right Honourable Green.

Another Conservative voice, Ruth Davidson, the former leader of the Scottish Conservatives — and she changed her position as well — said:

> But having watched and debated in front of 16 and 17-year-olds throughout the referendum . . . . My position has changed. We deem 16-year-olds adult old enough to join the army, to have sex, get married, leave home and work full-time. The evidence of the referendum suggests that, clearly, they are old enough to vote too.

My question is this: As an esteemed Conservative senator, how is it that you and your colleagues who are going to speak against this bill are not prepared even to consider the possibility in the face of the fact that your fellow Conservatives in the U.K. have so eloquently and logically changed their position?

Senator Housakos: I don't want to conflate the British experience, the U.K. experience, the Irish experience or any other experience with the Canadian experience. I'm not that well versed in terms of the process through which they came to their conclusions.

I don't know, for example, if the House of Lords participated in amending the Electoral Act over there, for example, which would impact the House of Commons. I don't know. If they did, it's for them to justify.

All I do know — and I said that clearly in my speech — is that in this country, when we give a driver's licence to a 16-year-old and put them on probation, they can't obtain a legitimate licence until they are 18. Until the age of 20, they don't serve on a jury. They serve with certain parameters when they join the cadets in the military. We don't try young people as adults in the court of law in this country.

All of these are elements in the debate if you want to just start considering that we can open up and look at the level we consider to be adult and when someone is mature enough to do various things. It's an opinion, obviously, and opinions are very flexible in scope. In my perspective, if you look at the number of 15- and 16-year-olds who pay taxes or 15- and 16-year-olds who take full responsibility, and try them in an adult court of law, in the elements of law, military service, you name it, we don't consider them adult enough to participate in the scope of those activities. Yet, we think they should be participating in the scope of voting, which I think should be reserved for the people who are shareholders of the company and are participating in the annual shareholders meeting.

For me, it's not a partisan issue, senator; you know that. The Conservative Party in the U.K. can have the opinion it wants. I know some argued many years ago here in Canada that the Conservatives don't want to lower the voting age because young people don't vote Conservative, and the Conservative base is people aged 55 and above. We've seen in the last election campaign that that's not quite the case. My opinion hasn't changed just because it is politically more expedient for the Conservative Party today to have 17-year-olds vote, because between 18- and 25-year-olds we cleaned house last election. For me, that's an irrelevant argument because I'm trying to be independent and open-minded in looking at your legislation.

Hon. Scott Tannas: We're talking a lot about the U.K. experience, and you mentioned that you didn't know too much about it. Would you agree that this might help your argument to know that the U.K. moved to 16 as a result of an election promise by the government? It will be initiated by the government — it hasn't yet — but they are fixing and ready to put a bill forward, not by an independent crossbencher in the House of Lords. It will be generated after the public has spoken.

Referendums are also a way in which the public speaks. We don't speak for the public. Does that help your argument do you think, sir?

Senator Housakos: It does. Thank you for all of that, because I will look into it. I'm sure, over a cup of coffee, Senator McPhedran and I will look at the details of how they're going about their business. But that makes a lot of sense. Like I said, my initial reaction would have been shock if this were an initiative that the House of Lords, for example, had been carrying forward or even that the House of Commons had done very lightly. These are very important elements that influence the democratic process.

Senator McPhedran: Senator Housakos, some time ago, I sent an email to you with an attachment, and that attachment had quite a comprehensive list of academically qualified research that had been done on the impact of expanding voting rights to include 16- and 17-year-olds and the positive reception of that by a number of Conservative leaders, not only those we've talked about here today. I hope you read the attachment. In my question, I'm going to assume you read what I sent to you.

You will know that according to that research — the academically, credible, published research, including longitudinal research in Austria that stretched from when they first expanded voting rights in 2007 through to this day — the overall conclusion or review was that nothing bad happens.

My question is this: Are you relying on some other research that you found somewhere? If you are, could you please share that?

Senator Housakos: Again, it's not a question of research. It's a question of experience. Again, for me it's not a partisan issue. I have read all the reports saying that it is in the favour of the Conservative Party today to expand the voting age. However, as I said before in my answer, and I'll repeat it again, that's not part of my consideration in making this decision. It really isn't.

I just genuinely believe it in my experience as somebody who has been involved in the community — I've now raised two children of my own — and to be clear here, if there is anyone in this institution who is an advocate of young people being politicized and engaged in politics, it's me. I started in the Conservative movement at the age of 15 as a card-carrying member of the party, as an activist who went to the convention. I think Peter Harder and I were at the same convention, believe it or not, back then, once upon a time. We supported the same guy, indeed.

I believe that political engagement is important. They should start as young in age as possible, but I also believe that citizenship of this country provides you with certain privileges and rights that are there for the taking, but you also have certain obligations and responsibilities. I just don't think that, at the age of 15, 16 or 17, the level of obligation and responsibilities give an individual at that age the merit to have the privilege and right to cast a ballot. It is a personal opinion. It's not based on data or science.

Hon. Denise Batters: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to the second reading of Senator McPhedran's Bill S-222, a bill that would lower the federal voting age in Canada from 18 to 16 years of age.

Senator McPhedran has been a committed advocate of this proposed electoral change, having promoted several different iterations of this bill since 2017. I commend her for her determination and passion for involving young people in the democratic process. However, I do not agree that the age for the very serious democratic act of voting should be lowered, nor that lowering the voting age will have the intended outcome Senator McPhedran is hoping to see.

• (1610)

Eighteen is generally recognized as the age at which a person achieves maturity under the law. This is why, for example, there is a separate statute — the Youth Criminal Justice Act — for dealing with criminal charges for youth between the ages of 12 and 17. This is also why teens under 18 are forbidden from purchasing alcohol or cigarettes. Most tattoo parlours will not ink a young person under 18 without parental consent and, in some cases, without the parent being physically present.

For many facets of life, Canadian legislatures have determined that a minimum age of 18 is appropriate for independent decision making. The age of 18 is a reasonable natural minimum for allowing young people to make independent decisions about serious or legal matters. This age tends to coincide with the end or near end of high school. For many young people, this is the age at which they will begin to separate physically from their parents and homes to attend post-secondary education, training or jobs. It is a natural divider between one's childhood — dependent on parents for emotional and financial stability — and an emerging independence where one can make decisions to determine his or her own future.

Are there some young people who are mentally and emotionally capable of making these kinds of decisions for themselves at 16? Clearly, yes. And are there some young people who remain immature and routinely make poor decisions well into their mid-twenties or thirties? Also yes — maybe even forties. But to provide certainty and organization in our society, we need to draw that minimum-age line somewhere, so it does make good common sense that 18 is a reasonable limit.

Sixteen-year-olds are prohibited from participating in many adult activities by virtue of their age. In many provinces, including my province of Saskatchewan, they are unable to drive without conditions. They cannot buy cannabis or, as I already mentioned, alcohol or cigarettes. Sixteen-year-olds cannot sign a legal contract. Also, they require parental consent in order to marry before the age of 18. In some provinces, like Manitoba, New Brunswick and Ontario, teens cannot drop out of school until the age of 18.

There are some instances where a minimum age of 18 can be waived with parental consent. This is because while an older teen under 18 can be reasonably expected to have some decision-making competence, a parent or guardian's guidance is still required to ensure the situation — and its accordant potential risks — is considered from all angles.

For this reason, in Canada, you must be 18 to join the regular military forces, but it is possible to apply at the age of 17 with parental consent. Senator McPhedran argued here that teens can join the military Reserve Force at 16, again with parental consent. Yet even then, as Senator Patterson clarified during the debate in this chamber, that 16-year-old would be restricted from actually fighting in combat.

Senator McPhedran also cited "16 and younger" as the age for joining military cadets. Youth can become military cadets when they are as young as 12, but, again, they require parental consent if they are under the age of 18. Furthermore, just because a child can join military cadets at the age of 12 certainly does not make them competent to determine the best course of action for the future of the country through voting.

The fact of the matter is we need to establish a minimum age at which Canadians can vote. For the vast majority of capacity-dependent decisions, that age is 18, and when it is lowered to 16, it is usually only with parental consent.

If capacity is the pivotal issue for determining voting age, it is pretty clear that the age of 18 is superior to that of 16. Senator McPhedran spoke at length of the difference between neurological tasks requiring "cold cognition" — decision making that can take place in the absence of emotion — versus "hot cognition," or processes whereby emotion affects decision making adversely. Senator McPhedran argues that voting is a "cold cognition" activity and that therefore 16-year-olds are capable of that level of decision making.

I actually don't agree that voting is not a task influenced adversely by emotion. We vote often in this chamber, honourable senators. Can you honestly say your vote has never been influenced by your strong emotions on a given issue? We certainly aren't robots.

Marcus Roberts, a senior researcher at the Maxim Institute in New Zealand, described the research this way:

> . . . other studies suggest that one cannot so neatly divide adolescent decision making in this way [between "hot" and "cold" cognition]. Our brains develop unevenly: our "socioemotional system" ("rapid, automatic processing") matures around the age of puberty, but our "cognitive-control system" (deliberative, controlled and reflective) does not mature until our mid-20s. . . . Thus, although teenagers have the capacity to make rational and intelligent decisions, "it is unwise to conclude that they always make decisions using the same cognitive processes that adults do" . . . .
>
> By way of contrast, adults are more able to resist social and emotional influences and to make better decisions when the stakes are high.

One could argue that when it comes to voting, essentially setting the direction for the governance of the nation, the stakes couldn't be higher. I think the best cognitive parallel for the act of voting would be the ability to sign legal contracts. Essentially, when an elector votes in a federal election, he or she is hiring someone to represent their interests in Parliament. Cognition for an 18-year-old is superior to that of a younger teen. Clearly, this is why the legal age for signing contracts in Canada is the age of majority — which is 18 in some provinces, 19 in others — rather than a younger age of 16.

As I have noted here before, former NHL number one draft pick and still very young pro hockey sensation Connor Bedard was only 17 years old when he was faced a few years ago with signing his first NHL contract. Thus, his dad had to sign his first contract for him.

Teens are at a disadvantage when making this type of a decision because their cognition tends to favour the immediate moment rather than the long-term view, potentially without adequate consideration of eventual consequences or alternatives. And if those decision-making skills continue to develop until a person is in their mid-twenties, some may argue it would be better to raise the minimum voting age, not lower it to 16.

Perhaps this is why the Constitution sets the age of 30 as a minimum for appointment to this chamber, honourable senators. The minimum age to run to be a member of Parliament is 18. It only makes sense that the people who elect that member of Parliament would have to be 18 as well.

Another consideration seems to be that any democratic gain made from allowing youth under 18 to vote seems to be modest. When a 16- or 17-year-old is given the vote, they may indeed be more likely to vote while they still live with their parents and are not yet independent. Although evidence is somewhat limited, studies have shown that enthusiasm tends to fade as those voters age.

A study conducted in Austria, for example, showed that 16- and 17-year-olds who were able to vote initially voted at a rate of 65%, while only five years later, that rate had declined to 60% — well under the official turnout of 75%.

While I do not agree with lowering the voting age to 16, I certainly do believe youth should be encouraged to engage politically. On this, I speak from experience, as I was a very politically interested child and teenager. From a very young age, I watched "This Week in Parliament" on Saturday nights to stay current on emerging political issues and to see the best Question Period zingers from Brian Mulroney and his Progressive Conservatives. I knew from the time I was 12 years old that I wanted to become a senator one day, and, yes, I know that is not normal. And as I grew older, I eagerly anticipated the day when I would turn 18 and be able to vote in my first election. I understood and accepted then, as I believe most kids probably would still agree now, that voting was not something a 14- or 16-year-old was sufficiently competent to do, nor was it something most were sufficiently invested in.

In my case, I didn't join the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada until the age of 18, in my first week at the University of Regina, at the start of the 1988 "free trade election." I volunteered for my local candidates in that election, and I even helped Progressive Conservative Larry Schneider beat Ralph Goodale in that campaign.

I was later elected to different youth positions in the Saskatchewan PC Youth Federation and the federal Progressive Conservative Party. I was a youth delegate at the 1989 and 1991 national PC Party conventions.

And I met my future husband, Dave Batters, crossing the street at the Saskatchewan Progressive Conservative Convention in mid-November 1989 in Saskatoon, 36 years ago next week. We were 19 and 20 then. Dave was a young political geek too and later became a member of Parliament. As they say, the rest was history.

While voting in an election is not appropriate for a 16-year-old's level of cognition, there are many other ways for youth that age to be politically involved. They could volunteer at and attend political events or volunteer to help with a candidate or campaign. They could organize petitions or letter- or email-writing campaigns for causes about which they are particularly passionate. There are lots of opportunities for young people to practise the political arts, including student governance opportunities, councils, mock parliaments, debate clubs and speech competitions.

• (1620)

As Senator Senior mentioned in her speech, many schools run mock election votes — like Student Vote — to coincide with federal elections for students ranging from elementary school to high school.

These exercises give students an opportunity to learn about the major federal parties' political positions, MP candidates and leaders, and to consider what issues are a priority for them. But here's the most important thing: They allow youth to practise political engagement without having to suffer the real-world consequences for their political choices. That is largely the difference between 16- and 18-year-old voters.

Your average 16-year-old likely lives with his or her parents, is not responsible for family expenses or bills and probably doesn't make enough income to pay taxes they won't get back. They don't have a lot to lose if they make the wrong choice in an election, because they don't have a lot of skin in the game.

An 18-year-old, on the other hand, is more likely to be making real-world decisions about living arrangements, jobs, advanced education and is often juggling these competing priorities on a very finite income. The choice they make in the voting booth has a very real impact on their own life and future.

Honourable senators, although we should encourage young people to become politically involved and remain politically involved, it is also important that their political involvement is at an appropriate level for their age. I submit that 16 years old is too premature for the heavy responsibility — and the consequences — that come with casting a ballot. Simply put, voting is a matter requiring competency, capacity and maturity.

It is for these reasons that I encourage you to vote against Bill S-222 and against lowering the voting age to 16.

Thank you.

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Senator Batters, would you take a question?

Senator Batters: Yes.

Senator McPhedran: Senator Batters, did you review the Lortie commission as part of what you were using to prepare your speech? I realize you didn't quote it, but I wanted to ask if you had reviewed it.

Senator Batters: No, I did not.

Senator McPhedran: I also want to ask a question about the research that you quoted. I believe you said it was an Austrian study that demurred on the widespread consensus that 16- and 17-year-olds are well equipped and qualified to vote. I wonder if you could, please, provide the citation for that research study.

I'm blessed with an amazing group of young people who are researchers — and they were texting me as you spoke — and they can't find your study. If you could please provide the citation, we would be grateful.

Senator Batters: Yes. I had the citations taken out of the speech that I'm delivering here, so I don't have it with me, but we will definitely get that to you by the end of the day.

(On motion of Senator Black, debate adjourned.)

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

FIRST REPORT OF JOINT COMMITTEE ADOPTED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the first report of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations, entitled *Work of the committee and other matters*, presented in the Senate on November 5, 2025.

Hon. Yuen Pau Woo moved the adoption of the report.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

STUDY ON SEAL POPULATIONS—COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO REQUEST GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE EIGHTH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TABLED DURING THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition), pursuant to notice of November 4, 2025, moved:

> That, pursuant to rule 12-23(1), the Senate request a complete and detailed response from the government to the eighth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, entitled *Sealing the Future: A Call to Action*, deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on May 23, 2024, and adopted by the Senate on September 24, 2024, during the First Session of the Forty-fourth Parliament, with the Minister of Fisheries being identified as minister responsible for responding to the report, in consultation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Revenue.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

(*At 4:27 p.m., the Senate was continued until Tuesday, November 18, 2025, at 2 p.m.*)

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