



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION



45th PARLIAMENT



VOLUME 154



NUMBER 52

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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(Daily index of proceedings appears at back of this issue).

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

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

THE SENATE

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

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

Prayers.

all, stay tuned and join me because sober second thought should never mean a steady state. It's just not an option. Thanks so much.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

[*Translation*]

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

MIKAËL KINGSBURY

Hon. Katherine Hay: Honourable senators, happy Tuesday and remember to wear pink tomorrow for Pink Shirt Day.

Today, my statement is on something we all have a very vested interest in. Before I go on, what strikes me about you all is your extraordinary smarts and your ability to move through incredibly complex things, bringing unique perspectives, creativity and curiosity. You strengthen legislation, ask hard questions and help Canada navigate through a changing world. Colleagues, we are living through extraordinary change in just about everything.

Today, I am speaking about artificial intelligence, or AI, reshaping global markets, redefining productivity, transforming labour, testing national security and challenging policy assumptions. Three committees in this chamber are studying AI. Every committee has it on its mind. Legislation is coming our way.

With so much respect for all our knowledge and learnings, I suspect we are on different playing fields, some elite — dare I say Olympic level — and some Little League, where I happily play with AI. With that reality, I'm proud to announce the launch of a parliamentary briefing series entitled AI Explained for parliamentarians from the Senate and the House and their staff. It's four sessions, four months, four topics — things we are all talking about here, at home, at dinner parties, everywhere.

First, in March, it's basically AI Explained with Armughan Ahmad, well-known global AI tech and Canadian founder of companies; and Tyler Anderson, CEO of Disruptive Edge, a company that goes into the biggest companies to get them AI ready, like Walmart, TELUS and RBC.

In April, stay tuned for AI and National Security, Sovereignty and Governance, Infrastructure with Janice Stein from the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy; and Shannon Bell, Executive Vice President, Chief Digital Officer and Chief Information Officer of OpenText.

In May, there's AI Skilling — which I understand is not upskilling — and Labour with Sabrina Geremia from Google; Rola Dagher, former global channel chief at Dell Technologies; and Lisa Zarzeczny from Elevate.

In June, we are going to top it off with Canada's Play to Win with some of Canada's biggest players. It will be a dialogue about investment, commercialization, scale and leadership in the global AI stratosphere. Here is what I know to be true: First of

Hon. Claude Carignan: Honourable senators, my statement will focus on a person rather than on AI.

Honourable senators, I am very proud to rise today to pay tribute to an athlete who has represented Canada well and who is a living embodiment of discipline, perseverance and excellence. Mikaël Kingsbury is not just a champion. Over the years, he has set a global benchmark in his sport and become a role model for a whole generation of young Canadians.

I would like to share a personal story about Mikaël. Several years ago, through the Fondation Élite Saint-Eustache, a foundation I had the honour of establishing, I awarded a scholarship to a 16-year-old who dreamed of perfecting his freestyle skiing skills. Even at that age, this young man showed extraordinary determination and discipline. Today, he has become a true living legend in Canadian sport.

From the very start, Mikaël established himself as an exceptional athlete. He embodies excellence in every way. His career is inspiring and his performances are truly something to behold. He represented Canada with panache at the Milano Cortina Olympic Games in Italy. As everyone knows, he was the first Canadian to win gold at those Olympic Games. He was part of a contingent of 207 athletes who represented our country with pride and who brought home 21 medals: five gold, seven silver and nine bronze.

Mikaël's track record speaks for itself: 100 World Cup victories, a gold medal at the PyeongChang Olympics and silver medals in Sochi and Beijing. More recently, he won a silver medal in the individual moguls event two weeks ago, and, last week, he won Canada's first 2026 Winter Olympics gold medal.

Few athletes in the history of Canadian sport can boast of such dominance in their discipline. Without a doubt, Mikaël Kingsbury belongs to the very select circle of the greatest Canadian athletes of all time.

Statistics and records aside, what is equally impressive are the qualities he possesses as a human being. Everyone who has had the privilege of meeting Mikaël has been struck by his kindness, easygoing personality and humility. Thanks to these qualities and his remarkable athletic prowess, Mikaël is a role model in the world of sports and well beyond.

His parents — Julie and Robert, who happens to be my chiropractor — are so very proud of him, as are the people of his region, his province and his country. In his own way, he is also an inspiration well beyond our borders.

Through his determination and perseverance, Mikaël has made a name for himself in his sport and has become, for hundreds of young athletes, the finest example of challenging one's limits.

Honorable senators, Canada can be proud. Today, it is our privilege to salute an outstanding journey characterized by hard work, courage and excellence.

Well done, Mikaël.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*English*]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Kirsten Hillman, Canada's former Ambassador to the United States. She is accompanied by her husband, Duncan Cameron, and their sons, Jack and Ewen Cameron. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Boehm.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

• (1410)

KIRSTEN HILLMAN

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Honourable senators, in a democracy, public service is a sacred trust — a bond between the individual, one's country and its people. In my view, it is the highest calling. To exercise that trust abroad is a distinct honour and privilege.

Today, I pay tribute to one of Canada's finest public servants, our now-former ambassador to the United States Kirsten Hillman.

There are many misconceptions about what an ambassador does. It is not, or not always, the high-flying, intrigue-laden life depicted on television and in the movies — much to my regret. It is hard work, 24-7 availability, dealing with unexpected issues,

split-second judgment calls and the effective private and public projection of the national interest. You are the face of your country in a foreign capital.

Uniquely, our embassy in Washington is like a southern branch of the Privy Council Office, responsible for the interaction of all federal departments and agencies with the United States. Throw in the interests of our provinces and territories and other stakeholders, and, well, you get the picture.

Ms. Hillman brought experience, savoir faire and dedication to her lengthy tenure in the ambassadorial role. She came to the vocation through her native Manitoba, with studies and time in Alberta and Montreal. She distinguished herself as a lawyer and high-level trade negotiator in Geneva at the World Trade Organization, but particularly as chief negotiator for Canada for the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP.

I met many foreign officials in my travels who told me that Ms. Hillman's open and friendly nature masked one of the toughest negotiators they had ever faced.

Colleagues, she smashed the glass ceiling and became our first woman ambassador to the United States in March 2020 at the beginning of the most recent period of "unprecedented times" to which we are all too accustomed.

Her tenure covered part of the first Trump administration, the Biden administration and the first year of the second Trump administration. There was a global pandemic, continued bilateral policy differences, threats to our sovereignty from a previously steadfast ally and a trade war, which will make the upcoming review of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA, all the more challenging.

Let me make one last point that illustrates the character of Kirsten Hillman: Knowing that I had served in Washington, Ms. Hillman came to see me in early 2017 to talk about the possibility of accepting the position of deputy head of mission at our embassy in Washington. I expected policy questions, how to deal with Congress, the State Department, the Pentagon, the White House and so on. Instead, she had one question: "Will this posting work for my family?"

To be sure, foreign service is about service abroad. Loved ones often come along. There is a deeply human element at play that Ms. Hillman never forgot. Having her family with her today is a testament to that.

Kirsten Hillman has excelled in serving our country at an incredibly challenging time. For this, all Canadians should be grateful.

Kirsten, welcome home. I wish you, Duncan, Jack and Ewen all the very best.

Thank you, colleagues.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Sharon Burey: Honourable senators, welcome to Black History Month.

[*Translation*]

Let's recognize Canadian history.

[*English*]

Welcome to Canadian history, for it is when we throw off the shackles of caste and class that we can liberate our minds and experience as Canadians the totality of Canadian history, what it means to be Canadian, and what it means to truly unleash the potential and promise of this great country and build a strong Canada.

In December 1995, the House of Commons officially recognized February as Black History Month in Canada, following a motion introduced by the Honourable Jean Augustine. This year's theme is "Honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations – From Nation Builders to Tomorrow's Visionaries." This theme celebrates three decades of Black History Month in Canada and recognizes the enduring legacy of Black Canadians whose leadership, creativity, innovation and resilience have shaped our past, continue to influence our present and will inspire future generations.

It is in this spirit that I am pleased to introduce Dr. Zainab Abdurrahman, the one hundred and forty-fourth president of the Ontario Medical Association and the first Black woman to lead the organization. She serves as an assistant clinical professor of the School of Medicine at the Toronto Metropolitan University and an adjunct assistant clinical professor in pediatrics at McMaster University.

She earned her medical degree from the University of Toronto and completed her pediatrics residency and subspecialty training in allergy and clinical immunology at McMaster University.

Deeply committed to advancing health equity, she has been a key contributor to the Black Scientists' Task Force on Vaccine Equity and the Black Health Vaccine Initiative, in partnership with the Black Physicians' Association of Ontario.

Beyond equity work, she is passionate about the intersection of technology and medicine. She is dedicated to leveraging innovation to enhance patient care and is a strong advocate for advancing the medical profession through inclusive leadership and systemic change.

[*Translation*]

As we celebrate Black History Month and Canada's history, let's pay tribute to their accomplishments while also acknowledging the broader importance of diversity in shaping the landscape of medical research and health care, which will lead to better treatment for all of us.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[*English*]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Travis Keisig, President of the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) and member of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan; Mike Cuffe, Montana State Senator and former President of the PNWER; and Matt Morrison, Director. They are accompanied by other delegates of the PNWER and are the guests of the Honourable Senator MacDonald.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

PACIFIC NORTHWEST ECONOMIC REGION

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Honourable senators, as the Senate Co-Chair of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group, it is my pleasure to welcome today's delegation from the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, or PNWER, as they visit the national capital.

The Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group's work is primarily active in three areas: The Council of State Governments, with its various regional meetings; the National Governors Association conferences, which usually occur twice annually; and the National Conference of State Legislatures. All of these meetings occur on the U.S. side of the border.

However, the PNWER meetings are unique in that they alternate annually between Canada and the U.S. For example, last year it was held in Seattle, and this year it will be held in Edmonton.

Established in 1991, PNWER is a unique statutory public-private partnership created by the states of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Washington, and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, in addition to the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

The partnership brings legislators, governments and business leaders together to advance shared regional priorities with a mission to increase the economic well-being and quality of life of citizens across the region on both sides of the border. For more than three decades, PNWER has served as a trusted forum for cross-border collaboration, policy innovation and the exchange of best practices.

On behalf of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group, I welcome to Ottawa current PNWER president and Saskatchewan MLA Travis Keisig; past president and Montana State Senator Mike Cuffe; Yukon MLA Adam Gerle; as well as Interim Executive Director Brandon Hardenbrook; Special Advisor Matt Morrison; Director of PNWER's Regional Infrastructure Accelerator program Bruce Agnew; Scott Hunter, with the Government of Saskatchewan; and Lianne Bell, with the Government of Alberta.

I look forward to discussing our common goals, especially during this important moment in the history of Canada-U.S. relations. Strong parliamentary relationships, such as those fostered by PNWER, are essential to ensuring that trade continues to flow efficiently and reminding us that the North American economy is deeply integrated, providing shared opportunities for businesses, workers and communities on both sides of the border.

Welcome to the Senate of Canada, and I thank the people of PNWER for their continued leadership in strengthening the Canadian-American partnership.

SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

Hon. Donna Dasko: Honourable senators, I rise today to look back to that terrible day of February 24 four years ago today, the day that Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a day that will live in infamy.

• (1420)

Let us contemplate the destruction that Russia has perpetrated with its illegal and immoral invasion of the free and democratic nation of Ukraine.

First, the lives lost: between 100,000 and 140,000 Ukrainian forces lost and civilian losses, too, with 15,000 killed and 40,000 wounded as of last December. The year 2025 was the deadliest year of all for civilian losses.

And Russia has lost over 300,000 in troop deaths since the full-scale invasion, as Putin uses his own citizens and other conscripts as cannon fodder without remorse or regret.

Russia's invasion has triggered Europe's largest forced migration since World War II, with over 10 million Ukrainians displaced from their homes.

There is evidence of multiple crimes and violations committed by Russia and Russian troops: violations of international humanitarian law; violations of international human rights law; and breaches of international criminal law, including the crime of aggression committed when Russia invaded the sovereign nation of Ukraine with no justification.

The current situation is deeply troubling. Russia is not winning this war. And although Ukrainians have fought tirelessly over these four years, they cannot push the Russians back without more help.

The instigation of the so-called peace talks by U.S. President Trump exactly one year ago has yielded no resolution to the war, no ceasefire whatsoever, and instead provides cover for Russia to continue its path of destruction. As a supposed ally of Ukraine, Trump has brought little to the table, as he urges Ukraine but not Russia to give in and give up.

What should a real peace agreement look like? It must be grounded in the principles of international law and the principle that all decisions concerning Ukraine must be made with its full

participation. It must include robust and binding security guarantees to Ukraine by the U.S., the EU, the transatlantic community and other partners that will prevent and counteract renewed Russian aggression. It must reconfirm that Ukraine has the freedom to choose its own security and political alliances, without limitations on its defence capabilities. Russia must fully compensate Ukraine for all material and immaterial harm it has caused.

Canada must continue our steadfast support for Ukraine, and I, for one, know that Canadians are onside.

Let there not be a fifth year of this war, and let us all look ahead to the day when we can celebrate together a just peace for Ukraine.

Thank you. *D'akuju.*

[*Translation*]

FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF WAR IN UKRAINE

SILENT TRIBUTE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I would ask that you all rise and observe a minute of silence to mark four years since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

(Honourable senators then stood in silent tribute.)

[*English*]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

JUSTICE

CHARTER STATEMENT IN RELATION TO BILL C-14—
DOCUMENT TABLED

Hon. Iris G. Petten (Acting 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-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and the National Defence Act (bail and sentencing), pursuant to the *Department of Justice Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. J-2, sbs. 4.2(1).

[*Translation*]

BUDGET 2025 IMPLEMENTATION BILL, NO. 1

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

Hon. Clément Gignac: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on November 26, 2025, the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on February 13, 2026, its third report, which deals with the subject matter of those elements contained in Divisions 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23, 37, 39, 43 and 45 of Part 5 of Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

(Pursuant to the order adopted November 26, 2025, the report was deemed referred to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance and placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[*English*]

SECOND REPORT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS COMMITTEE
ON SUBJECT MATTER DEPOSITED WITH CLERK DURING
ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. Fabian Manning: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on November 26, 2025, the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on February 13, 2026, its second report, which deals with the subject matter of those elements contained in Division 33 of Part 5 of Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

(Pursuant to the order adopted November 26, 2025, the report was deemed referred to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance and placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

SECOND REPORT OF ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL
RESOURCES COMMITTEE ON SUBJECT MATTER DEPOSITED WITH
CLERK DURING ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. Joan Kingston: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on November 26, 2025, the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on February 13, 2026, its second report, which deals with the subject matter of those elements contained in Divisions 32, 40, 41 and 42 of Part 5 of Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

(Pursuant to the order adopted November 26, 2025, the report was deemed referred to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance and placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

STRENGTHENING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM AND BORDERS BILL

SIXTH REPORT OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF
SUBJECT MATTER DEPOSITED WITH CLERK DURING
ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. Rosemary Moodie: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on February 5, 2026, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on February 20, 2026, its sixth report, which deals with the subject matter of Parts 5, 6, 7 and 8 of Bill C-12, An Act respecting certain measures relating to the security of Canada's borders and the integrity of the Canadian immigration system and respecting other related security measures, and I move that the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this report be taken into consideration?

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

MAKING LIFE MORE AFFORDABLE FOR CANADIANS BILL

FOURTH REPORT OF LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF SUBJECT MATTER
DEPOSITED WITH CLERK DURING ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. David Arnot: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on February 5, 2026, the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on February 18, 2026, its fourth report, which deals with the subject matter of Part 4 of Bill C-4, An Act respecting certain affordability measures for Canadians and another measure, and I move that the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this report be taken into consideration?

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

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

THE ESTIMATES, 2025-26

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B)—THIRD REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Claude Carignan: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, entitled *Supplementary Estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026*, 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 Carignan, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[*English*]

RULES, PROCEDURES AND THE RIGHTS OF PARLIAMENT

SECOND REPORT OF COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Peter Harder: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the second report (interim) of the Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament, entitled *The Role of Non-Affiliated Senators*, 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 Harder, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[*Translation*]

MAKING LIFE MORE AFFORDABLE FOR CANADIANS BILL

FOURTH REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Hon. Claude Carignan, Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, presented the following report:

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

The Standing Senate Committee on National Finance has the honour to present its

FOURTH REPORT

Your committee, to which was referred Bill C-4, An Act respecting certain affordability measures for Canadians and another measure, has, in obedience to the order of reference

of Thursday, February 5, 2026, examined the said bill and now reports the same without amendment but with certain observations, which are appended to this report.

Respectfully submitted,

CLAUDE CARIGNAN

Chair

(*For text of observations, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 643.*)

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

(On motion of Senator Cuzner, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[*English*]

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO RESOLVE INTO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE TO RECEIVE ANTON BOEGMAN, FOREIGN INFLUENCE TRANSPARENCY COMMISSIONER NOMINEE

Hon. Iris G. Petten (Acting Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That, notwithstanding any provision of the Rules, usual practice or previous order:

1. at 3 p.m. on Thursday, February 26, 2026, the Senate resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole in order to receive Anton Boegman respecting his appointment as Foreign Influence Transparency Commissioner;
2. the committee rise no later than 65 minutes after it begins;
3. the witness' introductory remarks be limited to a maximum of five minutes;
4. if, during the Committee of the Whole, a senator does not use the entire period of 10 minutes for debate provided under rule 12-31(3)(d), including the responses of the witness, that senator may yield the balance of time to another senator; and
5. if the bells are ringing for a vote at the time the committee is to meet, they be interrupted for the Committee of the Whole at that time, and resume once the committee has completed its work for the balance of any time remaining.

FOREIGN INFLUENCE TRANSPARENCY COMMISSIONER

NOTICE OF MOTION TO APPROVE APPOINTMENT

Hon. Iris G. Petten (Acting Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That, in accordance with section 9(2)(b) of the *Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act*, S.C. 2024, c. 16, s. 113, the Senate approve the appointment of Anton Boegman as Foreign Influence Transparency Commissioner.

BAIL AND SENTENCING REFORM BILL

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and the National Defence Act (bail and sentencing).

(Bill read first time.)

The Hon. the Speaker: 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.)

[*Translation*]

FEDERAL LAW—CIVIL LAW HARMONIZATION ACT, NO. 4

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate) introduced Bill S-6, A fourth Act to harmonize federal law with the civil law of Quebec and to amend certain Acts in order to ensure that each language version takes into account the common law and the civil law.

(Bill read first time.)

The Hon. the Speaker: 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*]

CANADIAN NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATIONPARLIAMENTARY TRANSATLANTIC FORUM,
DECEMBER 4-6, 2023—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association concerning the Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum, held in Washington, D.C., United States of America, from December 4 to 6, 2023.

JOINT COMMITTEE MEETINGS OF DEFENCE SECURITY
COMMITTEE, ECONOMICS AND SECURITY COMMITTEE AND THE
POLITICAL COMMITTEE, FEBRUARY 19-21, 2024—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association concerning the Joint Committee Meetings of Defence Security Committee, Economics and Security Committee and the Political Committee, held in Brussels, Belgium, from February 19 to 21, 2024.

JOINT VISIT OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON TRANSATLANTIC
RELATIONS AND THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON TRANSATLANTIC
ECONOMIC RELATIONS, APRIL 22-26, 2024—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association concerning the Joint Visit of the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations and the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Economic Relations, held in New York, New York and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States of America, from April 22 to 26, 2024.

SPRING SESSION, MAY 24-27, 2024—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association concerning the Spring Session, held in Sofia, Bulgaria, from May 24 to 27, 2024.

ANNUAL SESSION, NOVEMBER 22-25, 2024—REPORT TABLED

[Translation]

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association concerning the Seventieth Annual Session, held in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, from November 22 to 25, 2024.

JOINT COMMITTEE MEETINGS OF DEFENCE SECURITY COMMITTEE, ECONOMICS AND SECURITY COMMITTEE AND THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE, FEBRUARY 17-19, 2025—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association concerning the Joint Committee Meetings of Defence Security Committee, Economics and Security Committee and the Political Committee, held in Brussels, Belgium, from February 17 to 19, 2025.

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO URGE GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH
A FEDERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK THAT ENSURES PARITY
BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION CARE
AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE

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

That the Senate recognize:

- (a) that the World Health Organization and the Canadian Mental Health Association have identified mental health parity as a critical objective for an equitable health care system; and
- (b) the urgent need to address disparities in mental health care access and coverage; and

That the Senate urge the Government of Canada to establish a federal legal framework that ensures mental health and addiction care are treated on an equal footing with physical health care.

• (1440)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, Question Period will begin at 3:30 p.m.

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE—
MESSAGE FROM COMMONS

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that a message has been received from the House of Commons which reads as follows:

Friday, February 13, 2026

EXTRACT, —

That,

- (a) pursuant to subsection 2(1) of An Act to amend An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying), No. 2, a special joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons be appointed to undertake a comprehensive review relating to the eligibility of persons whose sole underlying medical condition is a mental illness to receive medical assistance in dying;
- (b) five members of the Senate and 10 members of the House of Commons be members of the committee, including five members of the House of Commons from the governing party, four members of the House of Commons from the official opposition, and one member from the Bloc Québécois, with two Chairs of which the House Co-Chair shall be from the governing party and the Senate Co-Chair shall be determined by the Senate;
- (c) in addition to the Co-Chairs, the committee shall elect two vice-chairs from the House, of whom the first vice-chair shall be from the Conservative Party of Canada, and the second vice-chair shall be from the Bloc Québécois;
- (d) the quorum of the committee be eight members whenever a vote, resolution or other decision is taken, so long as both Houses and one member of the governing party in the House of Commons, one from the opposition in the House of Commons and one member of the Senate are represented, and that the Co-Chairs be authorized to hold meetings, to receive evidence and authorize the printing thereof, whenever six members are present, so long as both Houses and one member of the governing party in the House of Commons, one member from the opposition in the House of Commons and one member of the Senate are represented;

- (e) the House of Commons members be named by their respective whip by depositing with the Clerk of the House the list of their members to serve on the committee no later than five sitting days after the adoption of this motion;
- (f) changes to the membership of the committee, on the part of the House of Commons, be effective immediately after notification by the relevant whip has been filed with the Clerk of the House;
- (g) membership substitutions, on the part of the House of Commons, be permitted, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2);
- (h) where applicable to a special joint committee, the provisions relating to hybrid committee proceedings contained in the Standing Orders of the House of Commons shall also apply to the committee;
- (i) the committee have the power to:
 - (i) sit during sittings and adjournments of the House,
 - (ii) report from time to time, to send for persons, papers and records, and to print such papers and evidence as may be ordered by the committee,
 - (iii) retain the services of expert, professional, technical and clerical staff, including legal counsel,
 - (iv) appoint, from among its members such subcommittees as may be deemed appropriate and to delegate to such subcommittees, all or any of its powers, except the power to report to the Senate and House of Commons,
 - (v) authorize video and audio broadcasting of any or all of its proceedings and that public proceedings be made available to the public via the Parliament of Canada's websites;
- (j) pursuant to subsection 2(3) of the act, the committee submit a final report of its review, including any recommendations, to Parliament no later than Friday, October 2, 2026; and
- (k) pursuant to subsection 2(4) of the act, following the presentation of the final report in both Houses, the committee shall expire; and

that a message be sent to the Senate requesting that House to unite with this House for the above purpose and to select, if the Senate deems advisable, members to act on the proposed special joint committee.

ATTEST

Eric Janse

Clerk of the House of Commons

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this message be taken into consideration?

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

[*English*]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CONNECTED CARE FOR CANADIANS BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE

Hon. Joan Kingston moved second reading of Bill S-5, An Act respecting the interoperability of health information technology and to prohibit data blocking by health information technology vendors.

She said: Honourable senators, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak today about Bill S-5, the connected care for Canadians act.

[*Translation*]

I am delighted to rise today and speak to Bill S-5, which supports the establishment of a connected health care system in Canada.

[*English*]

Secure and easy access to our own personal health information is crucial for saving lives and improving health care for Canadians, but it's also about giving people and their care teams the right digital tools to unlock real benefits, not only for better health outcomes, but for reducing costs, driving innovation and growing Canada's economy.

[*Translation*]

We have glimpsed the potential of this tool, but we are still far from making it a reality. In Canada, health information is fragmented and scattered among hundreds of digital systems.

[*English*]

Today, 47% of Canadians access their health information electronically, and only 29% of physicians exchange health records across points of care. Across Canada, fax machines remain the primary way to share health information, which is unacceptable for our country.

First, think about what this means for Canadians. When someone sees a new provider, they are asked to repeat their medical history, including their medications, allergies and conditions, sometimes multiple times. That's assuming they can recall the details correctly. This is not only frustrating for patients, it leads to wasted time, incomplete and inaccurate information and billions wasted in unnecessary costs.

Think about what this means for our already stretched and fatigued health care providers. They are left with incomplete information about their patients, limiting their ability to provide informed care, which can lead to life and death risks. Providers often work with incomplete information, relying on patient recall, manual faxing, piecemeal documentation or informal cross-organization relationships.

This fragmentation creates challenges for things like continuity, since emergency room staff, walk-in providers and community pharmacists often cannot access primary care records. It also impacts patients' safety when medication histories, pending results and care plan details are missing. There are inefficiencies in terms of costs and time for both patients and providers caused by duplicate assessments, tests and referrals.

• (1450)

There are workflow problems in that clinicians lose significant time navigating multiple systems. A physician in New Brunswick recently shared that he has different usernames and passwords for five systems that he could access and five other inaccessible systems that have information that would improve his care of his patients. He shared this with a colleague last week.

There is poor equity. Patients with low health literacy, language barriers or limited system familiarity disproportionately shoulder the burden of coordinating their own care. It also hides the true complexity of care. Much of what keeps the system functioning is unrecognized, unsupported work and workarounds. Physicians report that they spend two hours a day searching for information related to patient care. Patients also receive care through emergency departments, urgent care, walk-in clinics, community pharmacies, pharmacy-based clinics, social services, community mental health settlement services, physiotherapy and allied health clinics.

These care providers cannot share information electronically. Strengthening interoperability across the medical neighbourhood is, therefore, essential for ensuring continuity, reducing duplication and supporting the whole ecosystem of clinicians who contribute to the care of Canadians.

In New Brunswick, the Health Systems Lab and McKenna Institute, both at the University of New Brunswick, or UNB, will conduct a province-wide systems-thinking study to map how providers across patients' medical neighbourhoods access, navigate and reconcile information across multiple electronic medical records by visualizing how work is executed across the whole medical neighbourhood. The study will reveal where interoperability breaks down, how variability emerges and where targeted, co-designed interventions can strengthen coordination, safety and productivity across the provincial system. Those lessons should be shared with provincial counterparts.

Imagine the difference if every patient and their health care providers could easily access health records electronically, no matter where in Canada the patient receives care. Our health

records should follow us wherever we go, across every part of the health care system and from one province or territory to another.

The focus of this proposed legislation is straightforward: to improve patient safety while protecting patient privacy and giving providers the digital tools they need to deliver safe, efficient and accessible care. Bill S-5 would enable health information to be shared securely and effectively on a need-to-know basis, including between patients and health care providers, in an easy-to-read format while safeguarding personal information.

This is connected care.

The issue stems from the fact that health information in Canada is often stuck in separate systems and can't be easily shared due to a lack of common standards and business interests. The lack of standards also impacts the quality and consistency of information, limiting the potential for de-identified data to be used in research and AI-driven innovation that could lead to real health outcome improvements for Canadians.

To address this issue, this proposed legislation would require health IT vendors in Canada's digital health sector to adopt common technical and data standards. It would also prohibit vendors from engaging in data blocking, a practice that prevents authorized users from accessing health data even when privacy legislation allows it.

Bill S-5 has critical implications for the future of our health care system and for the economy. Data saves lives in a very real way, and it has the power, perhaps more than anything else, to transform our health systems.

This is also true for artificial intelligence, or AI, which has the power to improve care and treatment, reduce provider burden and improve productivity and innovation. But the safe and effective use of AI depends on access to high-quality anonymized data that is standardized and can be shared across the system. For example, by standardizing and integrating anonymized data, researchers can find patterns and trends more easily to help diagnose a rare disease or underlying condition that would not have been obvious from one piece of data in isolation. This is also true for researchers analyzing data to improve health or prevent a public health emergency and for innovators building technology that could pave the way for a very different future for our health care system.

Ultimately, better data and digital tools create a more efficient, accessible and innovative health system. It's time to move ahead with a modern, safer and connected health system that strengthens both health outcomes and Canada's economy. Better-connected health data is also expected to drive major efficiencies, with estimates suggesting up to \$9.4 billion in annual savings from reduced duplication, fewer missed appointments and more effective use of resources.

The lack of timely access to health information increases the risk of misdiagnoses, medication errors, treatment delays and unsafe treatments in Canada.

[Translation]

Each of these risks can cause a patient serious harm or result in death.

[English]

Let me take a moment to share the story of Greg Price, whose legacy has been an inspiration for some of us working on this legislation. In 2012, Greg Price, a 31-year-old Alberta man, died of complications from surgery for testicular cancer. From the beginning of Greg's journey through the health care system, he experienced problems. Lost and delayed health information and a lack of communication between digital tools and health data systems undermined the efforts of the health providers involved in his care.

Falling Through the Cracks: Greg's Story is a short film based on Greg Price's experience with the health care system. In spite of the tragic outcome of this story, the message of the film is intended to inspire positive change to the health care system.

[Translation]

Greg's tragic and unexpected death highlights the risks that all Canadians run due to the fragmentation of data in our health system.

[English]

In the lead-up to this legislation, many Canadians came forward; like Greg Price's family, they had suffered because they could not access the health information they needed. One physician shared the story of how they had worked with their cancer patient to set palliative end-of-life goals. However, when the patient was transferred to the emergency department due to worsening symptoms, including a limited ability to communicate, the hospital did not have a record of the patient's treatment plan. This led to the emergency staff preparing the patient for unwanted surgery. By coincidence, the patient's family doctor was working in the ER and was able to intervene. The patient was only able to die peacefully in their home, as they wished, because their doctor happened to be there.

The risks are also high for patients who travel in Canada, whether those in rural and remote communities or those who are out of province or territory for medical treatment or even travelling for business or on vacation.

[Translation]

One health care provider said the hospital where he works is located near a provincial border and accepts patients from the neighbouring province. He explained that these transferred

patients arrive in serious condition, usually with photocopies of their health records. The information is often incomplete because there is no digital connection between the provincial health systems.

[English]

My own province of New Brunswick knows this all too well. Children in our province with complex health needs often face travelling to the IWK Health Centre in Halifax for necessary health care and life-saving procedures and then returning to New Brunswick for follow-up care. Adults with very complex conditions are frequently referred to either Montreal or Toronto. In all these cases, important health information is often missing or inaccessible.

• (1500)

These are real situations that, unfortunately, happen every day. These examples show that patients and health care providers rely on timely and accurate data. Without it, health care providers must make clinical decisions with incomplete information, which undermines their ability to provide safe care.

Shockingly, one doctor in the Northwest Territories has likened the situation to "flying blind" — an unacceptable standard of care in Canada.

From these stories, it is easy to see how this lack of access to patient health information contributes to physician stress, burnout and turnover. Physicians need access to digital tools so they can focus more on patient care than on paperwork, and so they can feel confident about the care they are providing. That also applies to the health care teams that work with them.

This legislation will also break down economic barriers for Canadian firms and innovators. Health data is one of Canada's most valuable natural resources, thanks to our publicly funded health care system.

By breaking down competing provincial and territorial requirements to create consistent national standards, we can unlock the full power of this data for innovation.

Canadian firms need a level playing field where standards are clear and consistent across the country, enabling them to compete at home and abroad.

Aligning with international standards lowers the cost of doing business, frees firms from navigating a web of competing requirements and allows them to focus on scaling their solutions and harnessing the full potential of artificial intelligence.

It also opens the door for emerging small businesses to enter the digital health sector, fuelling job creation and economic growth. By making it easier for Canadian companies to bring their solutions to market, we strengthen competitiveness, accelerate innovation and expand opportunities both nationally and internationally.

With Canada's diverse population and rich health database, we have a unique advantage for building world-leading AI applications, attracting global talent and positioning our country as a leader in health innovation.

[*Translation*]

Consistent standards are essential not just to speed up progress on AI, but also to ensure that health information is accurate, consistent and impartial, lowering the risk of perpetuating inequities in the system.

[*English*]

Just as we wouldn't allow a self-driving car drive without clear, machine-readable signs, AI and other digital tools need reliable, standardized data to function safely.

We know that when health information is connected and accessible to those who need it, Canadians can see benefits, such as improved quality of care, reduced medication errors, increased accuracy of diagnosis and a better, more efficient health system and economy.

While this risk exists for all people across Canada, it is amplified for certain Canadians. For example, people who must travel across provincial or territorial borders for care, like some New Brunswickers; patients who have many interactions with different parts of the health system, and many specialists, such as those with rare diseases or chronic conditions; people in rural and remote communities, who face higher rates of avoidable emergency department use due to gaps in primary care; children, particularly those under the age of 10, who are most likely to visit the emergency department for conditions that could be managed in primary care.

This legislation has been contemplated since 2023, and indeed long before that by health care professionals. Despite significant investments, Canada's health system is under immense strain. Without decisive action, we risk perpetuating an outdated system that can fail patients. Without action, we will fall further behind our peers, losing the confidence of Canadians and missing opportunities to strengthen both our health care and our economy.

This legislation responds directly to the urgent challenges we face today. Health information is critical to improving accessible and efficient care, saving lives and driving change, but unlike

[Senator Kingston]

several OECD countries who legislated on this years ago, Canada is not using this powerful tool to its full potential. Canadians themselves are demanding change. They want digital access to their health information to help them make important decisions.

For many years, industries such as banking and air travel have provided seamless digital services, yet most Canadians cannot easily access their own health records.

In fact, just this month, the Standing Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy made observations on Division 23 of Bill C-15. The committee urged the government to examine, as soon as possible, opportunities to extend data-mobility frameworks to additional sectors of the economy beyond consumer-driven banking, such as health and tax data, noting that Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada has indicated that the current amendments would permit such sector-specific frameworks where desired.

Meanwhile, our health care system is at a breaking point, wait times are growing, and outdated and disconnected systems are holding back progress.

Our health care workforce is also in crisis. Physicians, nurses and other members of the health team are burning out at unprecedented levels, yet health care providers spend hours charting and working with outdated systems.

By improving the accuracy and timeliness of personal health information, the connected care for Canadians act has the potential to enhance collaboration among interprofessional teams, reduce duplication and improve patient outcomes.

The Canadian Nurses Association has been calling for the adoption of clinical data standards for years. Dr. Margot Burnell, president of the Canadian Medical Association, said recently that the inability to share records between health providers puts patients at risk.

Electronic health record connectivity across the care continuum is critical to continuity of care and informed care. Without a seamless exchange of information between systems and providers, the burden of sharing data and information falls to patients and their families.

This advice is not new. A report released in 2015 by the federal Advisory Panel on Healthcare Innovation cites evidence that integrated care where:

. . . inter-professional teams of providers collaborate to “provide a coordinated continuum of services” to individual patients, supported by information technologies that link providers and settings. . . .

results in lower rates of hospitalization for patients, increased preventive services and lower costs per person.

[*Translation*]

Furthermore, without coordinated action, Canada risks losing the ability to leverage this data to improve care, innovation and the system. In this period of global economic uncertainty, we cannot afford to overlook this opportunity. The use of digital health tools, including AI, will strengthen the Canadian economy and keep us competitive into the future.

[*English*]

Recognizing this, provinces, territories and the federal government have been working in an unprecedented way to bring our country together around a unified economy. The digital health sector is no exception; it is one of Canada's fastest growing industries and a major contributor to the GDP, with health care overall accounting for 15% of the Canadian workforce.

In today's uncertain global environment, there is a clear opportunity to strengthen Canada's digital health sector and explore new partnerships.

The legislation aligns with approaches used in other jurisdictions, such as Australia, the United States and the European Union. Their residents have been reaping the benefits of connected care for years. Now it is Canada's turn.

If we act, we can ensure that Canadians have access to connected care that rivals — or even surpasses — the best in the world. However, without a nationwide approach, some regions of the country could see improvements, while others are left with significant gaps, exacerbating health disparities across the country.

Bill S-5 would mandate common requirements for the content and exchange of data that would apply to health IT vendors across Canada. Together with a prohibition on data blocking, the legislation would improve data access and data mobility.

Pan-Canadian standards would be set out and maintained through regulations, with requirements that would enable patients access to their own health information, secure exchange and easy access to health information for those who need it while protecting privacy, and standardize health data content to improve quality and usability.

In this way, Bill S-5 would allow health information to be shared effectively on a need-to-know basis to both patients and health care providers in a timely and easy-to-use format while protecting privacy.

• (1510)

I want to emphasize that this bill does not impact existing privacy legislation. While the intent is to enable a connected care system, sharing or access to personal health information would continue to respect the requirements of Canadian, provincial and

territorial laws that govern the use of personal health information. The Government of Canada remains committed to collaborating with partners to ensure the protection and secure sharing of Canadians' health data and, in turn, to ensure patient safety.

This act would enable, not compel, secure access for patients and secure information sharing between health care providers. Bill S-5 applies only to digital health vendors. Some vendors, operating in markets where governments mandate such standards, have already adopted them.

The legislation does not create a digital ID, platform or database of health information that would be shared with the Government of Canada. It does not compel data sharing. This legislation is about Canadians and their providers accessing their own health data within the strict confines of existing privacy rules, within the circle of care and on a need-to-know basis.

The Government of Canada is taking a collaborative approach with provinces, territories and stakeholders to achieve pan-Canadian interoperability in the health sector.

Recent events in Canada have highlighted the need for better health data for the benefit of both Canadians and the health care system. In 2022, the Pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy Expert Advisory Group released the Pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy. This strategy is designed to support the effective creation, exchange and use of critical health data for the benefit of Canadians and the health care system.

In 2023, at a meeting of Canada's first ministers of health, there was clear recognition that health data could be useful in evaluating health care investments, providing insights into the health benefits and gaps experienced by Canadians.

In June 2024, the connected care for Canadians act was introduced in Parliament, proposing common data standards for health information technology systems with an aim to drive connected care, enhance patient safety and improve health outcomes. Bill S-5 is a reintroduction of the connected care for Canadians act.

Provinces and territories will be able to use the federal framework to make similar laws in their jurisdictions if they choose. The bill will act as a backstop in provinces and territories without similar legislation in place.

Bill S-5 will also support a more coordinated and integrated care system, particularly in rural and remote communities and for Indigenous populations, where individuals rely more often on virtual care, cross-border medical travel and/or both on-reserve and off-reserve care.

Let me take a moment to review recent efforts and investments that align with the goals of Bill S-5. There has been significant collaboration to meet federal, provincial and territorial, or PFT, commitments to improve how health data is collected, shared, used and reported.

[Translation]

In collaboration with the provinces and territories, the Government of Canada is implementing a joint action plan on health data and digital health. These efforts are guided by a Pan-Canadian Health Data Charter that affirms common principles, such as equity, public trust through engagement, and respect for Indigenous data sovereignty.

[English]

As part of these efforts, federal, provincial and territorial governments have also been collaborating on health data reporting. Common indicators have allowed us to measure progress in improving the health system and to communicate transparently to Canadians. Federal, provincial and territorial governments have advanced key initiatives, including pan-Canadian principles to guide ethical and responsible AI use across health systems, a framework for health data stewardship and resources to build public trust and data literacy in health data sharing.

Together, we have also developed a new public health information sharing agreement for more consistent public health data sharing across Canada to combat future public health emergencies.

Importantly, and directly in support of this legislation, the Shared Pan-Canadian Interoperability Roadmap is being implemented, which is led by Canada Health Infoway and outlines a path forward for defining common interoperability requirements in Canada. Bill S-5 would catalyze provincial, territorial and stakeholder efforts on the Shared Pan-Canadian Interoperability Roadmap by accelerating the adoption of common standards by health IT vendors through enforceable measures.

As I have laid out, the government is working collaboratively with provinces and territories to advance the goals of connected care in Canada. This legislation builds on conversations and work with provinces and territories across the country. In fact, we are already seeing progress in parts of the country.

My home province, New Brunswick, through the MyHealthNB portal, is emerging as a leader in giving residents direct access to their health information. To date, more than 230,000 New Brunswickers have already accessed their personal health records through this system, with over 600,000 residents eligible. The province has also made advancements so patients can generate a summary of their health data that can be shared securely to their phone using a QR code, giving individuals the ability to carry their essential health information and securely share it with clinicians wherever they receive care.

These kinds of patient-centred, standards-based solutions show what is possible when health information is connected. Building on these success stories, the intention is to continue to engage

[Senator Kingston]

every step of the way. For example, regulations would be informed by robust consultation with the provinces and territories, partners, Indigenous Peoples and stakeholders through the *Canada Gazette* process, and the work done to date by the PFT partnership will inform and accelerate this process.

A collaborative and transparent approach with provinces, territories and vendors is being taken, providing ample time for them to develop their own legislation if desired and respecting provinces and territories that have made initial progress on mandating standards. Quebec and Ontario are two of these.

[Translation]

Once it is established that administrations have implemented their own similar requirements, the federal framework does not apply.

[English]

As has been the case in other parts of the world, such as Australia, the United States and the European Union, legislation and regulations will be critical tools in Canada for driving change and successfully improving the interoperability of our health systems.

Once it is passed, this legislation can save lives, as the story of Greg Price so poignantly illustrates. Gaps in data collection, sharing and use will only continue to perpetuate the unnecessary risks and frustrations faced by Canadians and their circle of care. It also impedes our ability to make evidence-informed decisions that not only improve health care and promote equity but also drive system efficiencies and support the economy.

There is strong support for change, and I believe that, with this legislation, we have found an approach that works in the best interests of all Canadians. Bill S-5 provides a solid foundation to ensure that we can fully harness the potential of health data and digital tools, including artificial intelligence. Canadians will see improvements in the efficiency, accessibility and quality of care with secure and timely exchange of health information across care teams and settings. That is why I urge all senators to move quickly to support Bill S-5. Thank you. *Woliwon*.

Hon. Colin Deacon: Would Senator Kingston take a question about her wonderful speech?

Senator Kingston: Yes.

Senator C. Deacon: Thank you, Senator Kingston. This has long been needed. Canada's largest public expenditure is health care, and we don't use the data to help us build businesses, improve patient care or really understand how to improve the system. This is very welcome, without question.

My question, though, relates to the coming into force. Health Canada has a history of being very slow on regulatory matters. That worries me, though I did see clause 9 prioritizes incorporation by reference — incorporation of standards. You mentioned standards quite a bit in your speech.

Do you believe the government will move as rapidly as it needs to move to unlock this opportunity for Canadians? Because we have a chance, really, to build new industries that can dramatically improve care in Canada and then help us pay for our health care system by selling those successes around the world, and INOVAIT at Sunnybrook Research Institute is one of the examples that I put down. Could you give me a sense of how the government will move forward to make sure this starts to come into force very rapidly?

• (1520)

Senator Kingston: It is informal, but I have been told by the minister that the real work — that being the work that needs to be done for the regulations — will happen as early as this summer. I'm even more reassured, I guess, by the fact that a lot of the work has been done.

Obviously, the engagement needs to happen as per what happens through the *Canada Gazette*, but the provinces and territories have been working pretty diligently — and more and more diligently, it seems, as the months pass — understanding that there are opportunities out there for growth and that Canadian companies need to be functioning with international standards in mind so that they can sell their products abroad.

Big provinces like Quebec and Ontario are moving on legislation of their own, which is great, and it will be used, most likely, as best practices for a lot of what is developed in terms of the federal government.

I do have hope that it will happen quickly. There seems to be a lot of goodwill amongst the provinces and, certainly, amongst the health care professionals who are organized into groups. There is tremendous support for this to move forward, and they are looking forward to working with the government in terms of the regulations.

Senator C. Deacon: Thank you, Senator Kingston. That is a great answer.

Just to build on what you said about the provinces' involvement, there are, in Canada, 13 different health jurisdictions, and the barriers between those jurisdictions harm patient care in Canada because there are best practices that aren't being shared because they need to get their own data. It's like the water is different in Ontario, so they have to treat things differently.

To what extent does the government see this as an opportunity to build on removing interprovincial barriers, which are problematic for innovative companies that have great new opportunities to improve our health care system and help patients more effectively? To what extent will that be prioritized in the implementation of the bill? Thank you.

Senator Kingston: Working on the standards together is one of the big wins, I guess, in this whole thing. They have begun to do that since 2023, in particular, because the provinces and territories and so on come to the federal government with requests regarding health transfers, and in the most recent health transfer, there was a chunk of money, if you will, given to the provinces with the understanding that this would be spent on these very things — the development of Canadian standards and interoperability between the provinces — because of the things that I mentioned in terms of certain provinces, like my own, having to go for care to other provinces at times.

But you also noted research and innovation, and the sharing of anonymized or disaggregated data is really important to researchers in Canada, both in the health care sector and in the technology sector, to decide what it is we need and how best it would serve Canadians. We're a multicultural country, so there are all kinds of opportunities to develop things that are very workable for all kinds of other situations, other countries and jurisdictions and so on.

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: I am all for this. I remember in the late 1990s when it was the health information superhighway, and all of us health care folks were super excited. There are, actually, 14 health jurisdictions, and, of course, the fourteenth is through the Canadian Armed Forces, which is federal.

We have spent so many years trying to intersect with provinces and one territory — Yukon — where we have service members who also access care because they are outside of the Canada Health Act. We have certainly seen the challenges of this, so I think the standards approach is absolutely outstanding, but I do believe you need to talk about Indigenous Peoples and also the Canadian Armed Forces. Standards are going to be quite important.

My next thing is that this legislation right now talks about privacy and different things, but we also know that health information and health systems are a cybersecurity target. They are directly linked to that. Do you know whether the standards are also moving towards cybersecurity requirements, which affect not only the vendor but also the provinces that do this? The subparagraph to that is that you have talked about transfer payments, and trying to replace existing systems is in the billions per province.

Senator Kingston: First of all, my understanding is that with interoperability, there are things that can happen with the systems that we have. Some of them are clearly outdated and would not be able to do that, but there are systems in my own province, for instance, that should be able to talk to each other, but people haven't done the work in order for them to talk to each other yet.

I'm trying to think of the other thing that you first mentioned — cybersecurity. The privacy legislation that exists in the provinces, which I understand is quite robust in most provinces, would be the part that we would be dealing with in terms of that. All of that still exists, and I know in my own province that there is a particular act that deals with health information in and of itself.

Cybersecurity, as you're more than well aware — better aware than most people in this room — is something that is ongoing, and we will need to have, certainly, not only standards but vigilance in terms of setting up firewalls and so on to protect information, because what this is meant to do is have information for the patient to access, for the providers to access and share amongst the circle of care, but, certainly, any big system — I know universities have been attacked.

Again, it's a provincial issue that goes across all of the jurisdictions, and that will be something that I will mention in terms of needing to think about that, in particular. You're absolutely right.

Hon. Jim Quinn: Would you take a question?

I have to echo what has been said. This is an overdue initiative. There is no reason that anybody in Canada — a Maritimer should be able to go to British Columbia if something happens; my medical data should be accessible to the provider in British Columbia.

I do recall back in the late 1990s and 2000 era when the Canadian health information highway was up for discussion, and there were two or three things — I was one of the central agency folks involved — one was cost, and the second was the system itself. Technology has advanced so much.

Do you have concerns about costs or other challenges? What do you see as the biggest challenge besides cost?

Senator Kingston: There is a cost to not moving forward, and I think that's a larger cost. I worked in health care for a long time, and most of the technology that we use has to be updated every five years. That's a cost of doing business, if you will, and that needs to be built in.

I don't believe that it should be an excuse for not moving forward, and, generally, when you adapt to a new technology or adopt a new technology, it ends up either doing a little bit of cost containment, or — and I have seen it many times — it benefits patients in a way that means that their trajectory or what we spend on them in the health care system is, hopefully, less, and they are getting better at the same time.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Osler, there is one minute left. If you would like to start off with your question, I may have to interrupt.

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Will you take a question?

Thank you for this. I understand the bill is about breaking down silos so that patients can have better and safer high-quality care. As we talk about health data, there is a nuance in there, and that is the health data ownership piece of it.

As patients, we have a right to access our health data, but the physician or the clinic or the hospital that created that medical record is the owner or custodian of the data. As we talk about this, there is a secondary use to health data when it comes to health IT vendors, in particular, once the data is anonymized and disaggregated, because it can then fall outside of typical privacy legislation within the provinces.

[Senator Kingston]

• (1530)

There are concerns about the secondary uses of data once these silos are broken down in terms of data being used for purposes that we as patients didn't know about and didn't consent to, such as for the training of AI models or for commercial use by IT vendors who may seek to own or use the health data.

Can you speak to some of the nuances about the secondary uses? Are there any safeguards within this bill or that are being discussed?

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Kingston, I regret that I have to interrupt you. You will have the balance of your time when debate resumes at the end of Question Period.

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

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

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

[*Translation*]

QUESTION PERIOD

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, to receive a Minister of the Crown, the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy, appeared before honourable senators during Question Period.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, today we have with us for Question Period the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy to respond to questions concerning his ministerial responsibilities. On behalf of all senators, I welcome the minister.

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

MINISTRY OF INTERNAL TRADE

CANADA-U.S. TRADE

Hon. Claude Carignan: Welcome, minister. I'm glad you have one minute and 30 seconds to answer. The answer to my first question is a number, so you should still have one minute and 30 seconds to give me an answer about the illegal tariffs.

On Friday, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a large proportion of the tariffs Donald Trump had imposed on many companies around the world. Several experts estimate that these unjustified and illegal tariffs brought in between \$173 billion and \$227 billion.

Of that amount, how many billions of dollars do you estimate Canadian companies have been cheated out of by these illegal tariffs?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to take a moment to thank the honourable senators for the invitation. It's always a privilege to be here.

Senator Carignan, thank you for your question. As you rightly said, we maintained that the reciprocal tariffs announced by President Trump were unjustified. We were obviously pleased with the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, which has resulted in a reduction in the tariffs applied to Canadian companies. However, a number of challenges remain in certain sectors. If I understand your question correctly, Senator Carignan, you want to know the exact amount of money that Canadian companies have paid and how much they might get back.

I saw a preliminary analysis of these numbers following Friday's decision, but I'd be happy to share the exact figures with you, which are quite high. I think I know what your second question is going to be, so I look forward to hearing it.

Senator Carignan: I anxiously await these figures. The Government of Canada has been rather cautious in its response and fairly silent in the wake of the decision. You gave a few interviews where you said that you were satisfied. Can you explain to us how the Government of Canada intends to recoup these amounts for the companies? What measures will you take to do that?

Mr. LeBlanc: Senator Carignan, I fail to see how you could consider our government's reaction to be cautious. Personally, I had agreed to speak on Gérald Fillion's show and I was on my way to the Radio-Canada building in Montreal when the Supreme Court decision was announced. While I was walking around the Radio-Canada building, I gave about six or seven interviews to

journalists who were following me. I certainly wasn't being cautious. However, you're right about one thing, Senator Carignan. The Supreme Court didn't say anything about refunds. The amounts were indeed paid by private sector companies. U.S. law does provide recourse to recover these amounts. The government will support companies that wish to go that route, but it would be a private course of action.

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Senator Carignan: It sounds like you're not going to take any legal action on their behalf.

Mr. LeBlanc: I didn't say we wouldn't help them. I said the decision —

The Hon. the Speaker: I have to interrupt. I'll go back to Senator Carignan for your next question.

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Hon. Claude Carignan: Minister, you have quite a few roles, including Minister of Internal Trade. On March 21, 2025, during the most recent election campaign, the Prime Minister promised real free trade among the provinces by Canada Day 2025. He said he would gradually remove all federal exceptions restricting internal trade.

Nine months have passed since Canada Day 2025, but nobody has heard a thing about a real interprovincial free trade agreement. Minister, how many federal barriers to internal trade has your government removed, and when?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: I'll give you a very precise answer. All trade barriers have been removed. That was in a bill we passed, Bill C-5. For the first time in a long time, we met with the country's internal trade ministers, and we came to the table with clean hands. All federal barriers, all of the federal government's exceptions to the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, have been fully removed.

Senator Carignan: Did the government show leadership in chairing the first ministers' conferences to ensure that barriers between the provinces were also being removed? We're not seeing results yet. We see the Prime Minister making the rounds of world capitals, but not of provincial capitals to provide leadership on matters concerning interprovincial barriers. What's happening with the interprovincial barriers aspect?

Mr. LeBlanc: The good news, senator, is that we're making very good progress. I think that the Prime Minister visits a lot of provincial capitals and meets with premiers more often. Mr. Harper, for example, never held meetings with all of the provincial and territorial premiers, but I've attended at least four meetings with Prime Minister Carney, including one a month ago in Ottawa. There was a dinner at Meech Lake the night before, then the meeting the next day. We did indeed discuss the importance of making progress in the provinces and territories. As for trucking issues, all barriers between the provinces and

obstacles to the sale of goods have been eliminated. That means we've made breakthroughs in two areas for the first time in a long time, though more progress remains to be accomplished.

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

• (1540)

[*English*]

CANADA-UNITED STATES-MEXICO AGREEMENT

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Minister, it's good to have you here. You recently returned from Mexico after leading probably the largest Canadian delegation in commercial terms to that country, which, of course, is our third-largest trading partner. Much is on the line, obviously, for both of us in the renegotiation — if that's what it comes to — of CUSMA and the overall tension.

I'd like to ask you about opportunities for closer collaboration between Canada and Mexico but also whether the bilateral thinking with your counterpart is aligned in terms of any specific sector revisions versus starting from scratch. That's the first question. And if we are to expand our trade with Mexico, can we do that without sending product through the United States, specifically via intermodal transport along both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator Boehm, thank you for the question. Of course, you have considerable experience yourself in the relationship between Canada and Mexico. You're right; it was the largest bilateral trade mission in decades. Almost 400 Canadians accompanied me, representing 230 businesses — big and small — and business associations. It involved three cities: Guadalajara, Monterrey and Mexico City.

On the first question, Senator Boehm, regarding the Mexican government, I had the opportunity to meet President Sheinbaum with some colleagues. My vis-à-vis is Secretary Ebrard. We are very much aligned with the Government of Mexico in terms of the importance of a trilateral review, not a renegotiation of CUSMA. They are of the view, as we are, that there is a lot of benefit to the three economies to having a trilateral free trade agreement. One country has some particular issues with Mexico and Canada. We can work through those, we believe, and preserve the important trilateral framework. That's the view that the Mexicans expressed to me. It's one with which we are in complete agreement.

If we want to increase our bilateral trade between Canada and Mexico, separate and apart from the North American free trade context, you are absolutely right, senator, that intermodal transport links are critical. An iconic Canadian rail company, Canadian Pacific Kansas City Limited, has invested considerably and has a huge footprint in Mexico; and LOGISTEC, a Quebec company, is acquiring a port on the east coast.

[Mr. LeBlanc]

Senator Boehm: I yield the remainder of my time to Senator Loffreda.

CANADIAN MUTUAL RECOGNITION AGREEMENT ON THE SALE OF GOODS

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Minister LeBlanc, welcome to the Senate. I want to discuss internal and interprovincial barriers — something we've been talking about for almost 160 years now — but, more specifically, the work of the Committee on Internal Trade and the Canadian Mutual Recognition Agreement on the Sale of Goods it signed in November.

My question focuses on Canadian small- and medium-sized enterprises, or SMEs, which I've always described as the heart and soul of our economy. Can you speak to us about the positive impact the agreement will have for SMEs, which sometimes lack the resources to navigate multiple regulatory systems across provinces and territories? How will your agreement help them access a larger domestic market more seamlessly and cost-effectively?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator, thank you for the question. It follows up on Senator Carignan's question. You're much more optimistic than your Conservative colleague, which I think is great.

As you noted, that significant agreement was signed in November among all the provinces at a meeting in Yellowknife, where I was. Ontario and Nova Scotia have shown enormous leadership in our federation. We signed an agreement regarding the mutual recognition for the sale of goods, and we did away with the interprovincial trucking barriers, which made no sense.

Small- and medium-sized businesses can now sell a particular item in Nova Scotia, and it's deemed to comply with all of the sale of goods requirements in another jurisdiction. That's just one thing —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[*English*]

CANADIAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Thank you for that response. I looked at the committee's *2025 Year in Review* highlights, and I noted that the parties have concluded financial services negotiations and will incorporate a new chapter into the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, or CFTA, in 2026. Can you expand on how these changes might facilitate the supply of financial services across Canada and make access to capital for SMEs — which is so important — more easily obtained and delivered?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Again, senator, thank you for the question. Financial services, in terms of having true free trade between the 13 provinces and territories in Canada, have always been a challenge. Different provincial regulators have different rules. They have been for a long time. The Government of Canada had some exemptions to the free trade agreement in financial services, which, of course, were eliminated in June by the adoption of the legislation that this house and the House of Commons adopted.

It is work that is being led largely by Ontario. We have an in-person meeting co-chaired by Canada and Nunavut in March of the Committee on Internal Trade. The premiers agreed with the Prime Minister at our meeting in January that we would try to make very significant, quick progress on building codes and mutual recognition of labour and trades because of the importance, for example, of the construction of housing and other labour mobility issues.

I intend to push the provinces on the access to capital issues, as you said. In Atlantic Canada, the number of financial institutions 20 years ago that might have offered opportunities to those SMEs has significantly diminished, so they're doing business with a company in another jurisdiction now, and they're caught up in these interprovincial rules.

Senator Loffreda: To wrap that up and continue on that thought, how is the communication process coming along to the SMEs? Have you talked to many of them? Are they positive, confident that they will be able to navigate across Canada, have access to capital like they should have and keep our economy going forward, progressing?

Mr. LeBlanc: That's a very good question, senator. In fact, one of the things that the Prime Minister and I committed to first ministers — and I said this when we met as the Committee on Internal Trade at that meeting in Yellowknife you referred to in November — is that we have a Trade Commissioner Service that helps small- and medium-sized businesses — to Senator Boehm's question — access the Mexican market. I saw that last week myself.

We are in the process of standing up with provincial partners the equivalent of a domestic Trade Commissioner Service, precisely so we can take some of that energy and enthusiasm and use federal Regional Development Agencies and provincial partners to assist those small businesses in Canada as well.

CANADA-UNITED STATES-MEXICO AGREEMENT

Hon. Mohammad Al Zaibak: Welcome back, Minister LeBlanc. Since the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, President Trump has pivoted to a new tariff authority, imposing a 10% to 15% global levy.

Minister, how does the Supreme Court's invalidation of the tariffs based on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, or IEEPA, and the president's immediate imposition of new levies under a separate legal authority change Canada's practical

exposure under the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA? And what is the government's legal assessment of whether these replacement tariffs are themselves CUSMA-compliant?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator, thank you for the question. The final legal advice and analysis are being prepared or are being put together. Obviously, over the weekend, we had some preliminary advice, both from our embassy in Washington and from the government's legal advisers, both in Canada and in the United States.

The interesting thing — you're right — is that, since the president's authority under the IEEPA legislation was evacuated, he's using a different piece of American legislation. He has announced 10% and then 15% across-the-board tariffs. Under American law, they can't be in place for more than 150 days without congressional authority.

I spoke earlier this week with the U.S. Trade Representative, Ambassador Greer. The Americans immediately indicated there would be a CUSMA exemption from this new tariff that the President was proposing, similar to what had been in existence under the IEEPA tariffs. That is an important recognition of the value of the trilateral agreement.

• (1550)

There is no doubt the President has always said that he will continue to look at American law to implement his tariff agenda. The fact that the American government recognized the CUSMA exemption again tells me that they see value in the agreement.

Senator Al Zaibak: Also, the Supreme Court's ruling has shifted the tariff debate to Capitol Hill. Partisan legislation aimed at reasserting Congressional authority over trade has gained new momentum.

How is Canada engaging directly with the Congressional counterparts — the Senate Finance Committee, for example, and the House Ways and Means Committee in particular — to help shape any forthcoming U.S. trade legislation in a manner consistent with CUSMA's obligations and Canada's market access interest?

Mr. LeBlanc: Senator, you have, I think, properly identified the very considerable value that we as a government place on parliamentary diplomacy. There are members of this chamber who have relationships with U.S. legislators. There are interparliamentary associations. Many members, I'm sure, who do very good work are in this chamber.

I know our ambassador — the previous ambassador, who I understand was in your gallery earlier today, Ambassador Hillman — had been extraordinarily engaged for many years with legislators in both houses in the United States.

I was with the Prime Minister when he spoke with the new ambassador, Mark Wiseman. It's very much a part of his priority work as well. I, myself, when I'm in the United States, talk to senior Republican leaders.

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[*Translation*]

INTERPROVINCIAL LABOUR MOBILITY

Hon. Danièle Henkel: Good afternoon, minister. Thank you for being here.

Minister, a midwife trained in Vancouver can't work directly in Moncton. An electrician from Alberta can't work in Montreal. The act of bringing a baby into the world or working on electricity does not change at provincial borders, and yet professional orders claim that they do.

Meanwhile, our hospitals are understaffed, our construction sites lack technicians, and skilled immigrants recruited at great expense from abroad are waiting years to be allowed to work in their field.

Minister, you promised a 30-day standard for processing interprovincial recognition applications. Why has this standard still not come into effect? When will that happen?

Thank you.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Thank you for the question, senator.

I completely agree with your question and the issues you raised.

As I mentioned, in the meetings I attended with Mr. Carney, the most insistent premiers were often those from Ontario and Nova Scotia, but the other premiers agreed with these discussions. We need to trust people. If someone is qualified to be a technician in an Alberta hospital, I'd be very pleased if that person could work in New Brunswick and if that mutual recognition were in place.

Legislation governing those professional orders is fully in the hands of provincial legislative assemblies. We have ways of encouraging them. I've even stated publicly that we want to make significant progress on labour mobility. You mentioned the health care sector, which I believe is essential for Canadians. I've been criticized for saying that if we don't see rapid progress, we'll have to look at the money we transfer to the provinces for workforce training to encourage them to move faster.

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[Mr. LeBlanc]

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Hon. Danièle Henkel: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

Today, Canadian SMEs that export to the United States have to follow the CUSMA rules of origin to avoid tariffs. However, if President Trump gets his way in July and dismantles CUSMA in favour of a bilateral agreement, these rules of origin could change overnight.

What exactly are you negotiating on behalf of Canadian SMEs? To what extent were they consulted before you walked into the room?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: We've held substantial consultations with a number of organizations representing SMEs, as you rightly mentioned, with the provinces and territories and with sectors hit with sector-specific tariffs. We held public consultations. This week, I also met with two other important sectors of Canada's economy to discuss these concerns.

I don't want to disagree with your remarks, but I don't think that we're going to end up with bilateral agreements. I think we will still have a trilateral agreement. If the parties want to discuss the rules of origin, we will be —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[*English*]

TRADE TARIFFS

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Welcome, minister. Good to have you and see you here in the peak of health.

Minister, within hours of the U.S. Supreme Court decision on the IEEPA tariffs, the administration pivoted to section 122, imposing a 15% global surcharge that expires in 150 days, while section 232 tariffs remain in place.

While section 122 is temporary, section 301 remains available to target Canada specifically. Have you or your officials conducted a formal risk assessment of potential section 301 exposure?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: You're absolutely right, senator. Section 232 tariffs remain the most significant economic headwind currently for large and important sectors of the Canadian economy.

We are continuing to work with the Americans to see if there is a way to bring some relief to those, we think, also unjustified sectoral tariffs. That's section 232.

You're right. Ambassador Greer, the U.S. Trade Representative, has publicly indicated he will launch some section 301 — exactly the premise of your question, I think — investigations, which then allow him to recommend certain remedies to the President, including the imposition of other tariffs.

This is an ongoing threat of the U.S. administration. It's not new. They pivoted to section 301 in light of the Supreme Court's decision. I know our embassy in Washington is presently doing some work. Again, they haven't announced the details of precisely which investigations have begun.

My communication with Ambassador Greer this week was cordial. I'm hoping to see him towards the end of next week. That's precisely a question I'll put to him. I'd like to understand the detail of where they're proposing to go.

Canada will, of course, be ready to support those industries that may be targeted, as we did in the 232 tariffs, should that be the case.

CANADA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Minister, legal analysts note that section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act could be used to target countries over “unreasonable or discriminatory” practices with no upper limit on the tariff rate.

Canada has provincial alcohol embargoes and supply management issues, and they have been cited as possible triggers that can invite U.S. tariff retaliation. Given this vulnerability, what is the government doing to reduce the risk of retaliatory action ahead of the CUSMA review?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: That's a fundamental question, senator — “to reduce the risk of retaliatory action,” that's a very big phrase to ask. We're constantly looking to reduce the risk of retaliatory action.

This administration is unlike previous administrations; they can decide to go in a particular direction, often without any notice or without much forewarning.

The section 301 tariffs require an investigation that can lead — I don't disagree with the premise of your question. I think we need to continue to make the argument that these interests are against the American —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

• (1600)

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Hon. Donna Dasko: Welcome, minister. My question follows other questions about interprovincial trade. Your government has reduced the barriers that you are responsible for. You have made

more progress than the provinces have in reducing their interprovincial barriers. We also know, from the economic analysis, that a full reduction of interprovincial barriers would increase gross domestic product, or GDP, quite significantly.

You mentioned some initiatives that the provinces are undertaking now. What does your economic analysis show in terms of critical areas or initiatives at the interprovincial level that would have the most impact if they were implemented? I would first like to get a sense of what those areas might be. Thank you.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator, thank you for the question. The premise of your question is absolutely correct. The economic benefit to Canada's GDP is considerable. The Prime Minister said it well, noting, “We will give ourselves far more than any foreign nation could ever take from us.” I think by that, he means reducing these internal trade barriers and focusing on major projects. But regarding the internal trade barriers alone, we have seen estimates as recently as a couple of months ago of 3.5% to 4% of the GDP in a true free trade context.

I'm optimistic, senator. The provinces are showing a great deal of willingness to move at speed. This has been a two-decade-long challenge. Everybody had reasons why this basket of exceptions was critical, including previous governments of Canada.

We are urging and working with the provinces to prioritize the building trades, for example, and in terms of your colleague's question, through mutual recognition of skilled trades. We think that we can do a lot of work on harmonizing building codes. It makes no sense that a modular home made in New Brunswick can be more easily sold in Maine than it can in Prince Edward Island.

Senator Dasko: Are these the areas that you feel would have the greatest impact on GDP, or are there other areas that also need a lot of work?

Mr. LeBlanc: Senator, there are many areas that need a lot of work, so your question about prioritization is the right one.

If you look at the needs of Canadians around housing and the ability to quickly build more houses — including modular housing construction — provinces tell us it's their priority. We have put billions of federal dollars behind that initiative. We think it would be more efficient and improve the GDP of the country — not to mention the housing stock for Canadians — if we made significant progress quickly on mutual recognition and labour mobility. Let's start with skilled trades and perhaps the medical profession as an example.

TRADE TARIFFS

Hon. Hassan Yussuff: Minister, thank you for being here. As you know, the sectoral tariffs have had a significant impact on workers in the auto, steel, aluminum and softwood lumber sectors. Of course, these sectors have been devastated and remain so. We have seen the loss of auto plants that have been idle in Ontario.

The bigger question I have is on the context of our engagement around the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA — I would not want to call it “renegotiation” because that’s not what it is supposed to be. It’s a renewal of the agreement. Is the government priority to seek to eliminate these tariffs as soon as possible given the fundamental impact they have had on workers and communities across this country?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator, you have much experience in representing workers in this country. You have identified sectors of our economy — steel, aluminum, automobiles and softwood lumber — that are critical for Canada’s GDP. Thousands of skilled — and, in most cases, unionized — workers earn their living in communities big and small across the country. Of those sectors, some provinces are more dominant in particular sectors than others. I come from a province where the softwood lumber industry is critical to communities across the province and across the country. We believe that the priority is to bring relief with respect to these sectoral tariffs. And you said it well, senator. It’s not a renegotiation of the CUSMA agreement. It’s not 2016 again. It’s a review that was built into the agreement, six years from the date of it coming into force. It’s July of this year.

It’s not a chapter-by-chapter renegotiation. We hope that, as part of that review, because we believe it’s in the American economic interest for American consumers and workers, that we can get to a position — working with our Mexican friends, American business organizations, American business leaders and groups representing American workers — where these tariffs can be adjusted downward precisely as part of that review.

Senator Yussuff: Minister, the government has certainly shown a commitment to continuing to protect these sectors. They are vital to our industrial economy. Last week, we announced an industrial strategy in this country. How are we going to utilize our broader exports, the internal creation of new markets and new development of our military industrial strategy to ensure we can re-employ these workers in sectors that have been devastated by these impacts?

Mr. LeBlanc: Thank you, senator, for highlighting the announcement the Prime Minister and some of my colleagues made around Canada’s Defence Industrial Strategy last week, at a time when Canadians want the Government of Canada to increase its defence spending to meet our North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, commitments. We must do so in a way that brings maximum benefit to Canadian workers and Canadian industries.

I think the Prime Minister said the priorities would be to build, partner and buy. Let’s build the high-quality equipment that the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces need here in Canada. Let’s partner with like-minded countries that want to build that with us. Ultimately, the third recourse would be to buy if we haven’t been able to build or partner. That might be an example.

HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Thank you, minister, for being here.

Your 2025 CUSMA consultations confirmed a clear consensus among Canadians for a do-no-harm approach to the 2026 review. As you know, medicare is currently protected in CUSMA through reservations primarily found in Annex I and Annex II. However, while Reservation II-C-6 theoretically shields medicare, its public purpose clause is a known legal vulnerability if Canada expands or modernizes its public health offerings.

In light of these findings, how will your enforcement strategy specifically safeguard the autonomy of provincial health insurance plans against trade-based challenges? Will you commit to keeping Annex II protections — the protections for health and social services — off the table to ensure this remains a review and not a platform for eroding our sovereign right to deliver health care?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator, you just asked a fundamental question. I’m happy to commit that the government will, in those review discussions with our American friends, preserve precisely the exemptions that you identified.

This picks up on a question from your colleague. The Americans, in their conversations with us, are focused on a few sectors of the economy where the President is intent on enacting global tariffs as a pursuit of American policy to bring these manufacturing industries to the United States. That is properly the subject of American political discourse and debate.

In my conversations with the United States — with Secretary Lutnick and Ambassador Greer — they have not raised these issues with us in any way, nor would the Government of Canada in any way engage in renegotiating or weakening — and I’m not trying to parse words and be cute. It’s not something the Government of Canada would consider. But, to be very fair, it’s not something up to now that any of our partners in the trilateral agreement have raised with us.

Senator Osler: Thank you, minister.

Alberta's Bill 11 legislates a dual-track system that encourages private insurance coverage for medically necessary care. Legal experts warn this shift could weaken our Reservation II-C-6 protection, which requires health measures to be maintained for a public purpose.

In other words, by allowing physicians to bill both the public system and private patients concurrently, Alberta may be stripping these services of their public purpose status, potentially opening a back door for U.S. firms to demand market access under CUSMA's national treatment obligations. During the upcoming review, what specific safeguards will you implement to ensure provincial privatization does not provide a loophole for the U.S. to challenge our medicare system?

• (1610)

Mr. LeBlanc: Senator, thank you for that question. Right now is the first time I have heard the precision of drawing a connection between those lines, but the importance of protecting the Canadian public health care system from these theoretical or potential American trade actions is obviously of great importance. The good news is I'll be back at the office when the Speaker releases me after 64 minutes — I thought it was 60 minutes. Once my time here has expired, senator, I would be happy to ask that exact question and share with you the answer.

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Hon. Rodger Cuzner: Good to see my friend in good health and good spirits, obviously.

Minister, you have emerged as a bit of a Swiss Army knife for the Prime Minister by taking on a broad scope of responsibilities. One of them is being the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada. As such, surely Bill C-4 has come across your desk.

We have recently heard in committee from the Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Cathy Hawara, about how Part 4 confirms “. . . Parliament's long-standing intent respecting its exclusive regulation of federal political parties' dealings with personal information . . .”

I realize all members of the other house supported this with their votes, but senators have registered a strong concern about that particular provision because of the scant review —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, senator.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Your Honour, what a tragedy to cut off such an excellent question. Perhaps you'll allow me to imagine what Senator Cuzner was going to ask in that fantastic question.

Senators, I was the Minister responsible for Democratic Institutions. It used to be part of the King's Privy Council function, as you know. That particular function now resides with our Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, but for many years, I was the Minister responsible for Democratic Institutions. I was the minister at a time when a privacy commissioner in a province decided to apply the privacy regime of a provincial government to the Canada Elections Act. I do not believe it's in our national interest to have a patchwork quilt of provincial privacy commissioners or interpretations on something as fundamental as protecting the private data of Canadian electors.

The good news is all of the political parties represented in the House of Commons believe that we have found the way to have a robust national regime while working with political parties to provide that protection. I don't think it is the proper jurisdiction of a provincial privacy commissioner to opine on the Canada Elections Act. We, as a Parliament, have to take responsibility for the protection of that private information, and I think we have done exactly that in this legislation.

MAJOR PROJECTS OFFICE

Hon. Rodger Cuzner: My second brief question is about the Major Projects Office. As you know, minister, Nova Scotia is all in on wind energy. The wind west Atlantic energy project has huge potential to revolutionize energy in Atlantic Canada, producing 5,000 megawatts of power. Can you give us an update on that project, specifically where it stands and the impacts for the province of Nova Scotia and markets beyond?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator, that's a critical question in terms of major projects for our region. It's not just for your province of Nova Scotia but also for Atlantic Canada and partner jurisdictions that would benefit from such a significant development in wind energy. Premier Houston, with his Atlantic counterparts, has been an effective advocate. We decided to advance the wind west Atlantic energy project, along with proponents, to be developed with the Major Projects Office.

As you know, senator, last September, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Energy Regulator received — oh, it was such a good question, Your Honour. We're out of time.

The Hon. the Speaker: Well, you were not out of time. But thank you — now your time is up.

CANADA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Minister LeBlanc, I think you would agree that your government's approach to Canada-U.S. relations and the upcoming CUSMA review have significant implications for Canadians. Transparency on these issues should, therefore, be a priority. Yet, according to media reports, you are giving an off-the-record speech at Canadian Club Toronto that's closed to all media. Minister, what are you sharing with that audience that you believe Canadians shouldn't hear?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator, thanks for the question. I regularly accept to meet with business organizations, representatives of workers or others to talk about our conversations with the Americans. Many of these conversations are private. However, I have been around long enough to believe that a private conversation isn't private.

I found out that for the group organizing this lunch, tickets sold out very quickly. I'm excited that it's happening on Thursday. The good news is I asked that, of course, we open it. If you're going to have 200 or 300 people who bought tickets for your lunch, I'm not naive enough to think that somebody is not going to report on what was said. The good news is we opened it to the media. People can livestream it. I'll make sure, senator, it's available on Facebook, if you would like to watch it. I think it will be a fantastic experience on Thursday. I'm sure the people who bought tickets will be very enthusiastic about their investment.

Senator Martin: I do have a Facebook account, so I look forward to that.

Minister, from the outset, your government's message on Canada's trade relationship with the United States has created unmet expectations. Unrealistic timelines and unfocused efforts confuse Canadians and leave businesses hesitant to make critical investment decisions. Why isn't your government prioritizing clear, transparent communication with Canadians, especially given the unpredictability of our key trading partner to the south?

Mr. LeBlanc: It may not surprise you that I don't quite agree with the premise of that question. I think we have been very transparent and open with Canadians about the challenges that the world as well as Canada's economy and workers face with the Trump administration.

We ran an election campaign where we were very transparent with Canadians about the importance of diversifying our trade relationships with reliable partners, building major projects here at home and ensuring that we support workers and sectors of the economy who are unfairly targeted by tariffs that we think are unjustified.

We continue to pursue, if you will, a three-track approach, controlling what we can control here at home and working with our American and Mexican partners —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): My second question is related to a recent International Monetary Fund, or IMF, report highlighting the cost of interprovincial trade barriers — which you already answered questions about — as well as duplicative regulations and restricted labour mobility, significant productivity losses and a potential 7% boost in GDP left unrealized. These domestic constraints are fully within Canada's control. While Bill C-5 is a step forward, it doesn't go far or fast enough. Why is your government failing to deliver the one Canadian economy it promised? What additional measures are being taken to unlock our full internal economic potential?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator, you referred to the IMF report. We think that should encourage all of us, particularly our provincial and territorial partners, to take note of the very significant — which I agree with in terms of your question — economic upside to removing these barriers.

Many of them are properly within the sovereign constitutional jurisdiction of provincial or territorial legislative assemblies. The good news is the provinces are working with one another and with us. Some provinces are, for example, declaring that they will recognize, by default, labour mobility or labour force credentials. We have a patchwork quilt of provinces trying to lead the way. Our job is to encourage all of them to move as quickly as we can and to look at what federal instruments we have to encourage them to move as quickly as possible, with the full partnership of the Government of Canada.

• (1620)

I'm not pessimistic about the progress we can make. I recognize the urgency of the moment, as your question did. The good news is that as recently as January, which was a month ago, in a private dinner the night before the meeting and during the meeting on the Thursday — the day after — the first ministers committed to each other and to us to continue to make effective progress.

Senator Martin: On that note, minister, as you said, provinces have a role, but there are clearly things that the federal government can do. Conservatives have supported common-sense reforms to unleash economic growth. I'm sure you're aware of two very important bills.

Why won't your government follow suit and repeal policies like Bill C-69 and Bill C-48, as well as other regulations that stifle our resources sector? This is something the federal government can do right now.

Mr. LeBlanc: Thank you for the question, senator.

The House of Commons pronounced itself on those particular Conservative motions some time ago. We think the government is making very significant progress in partnership with the Government of Alberta. The memorandum of understanding that the Prime Minister signed with Premier Smith is a very important

step forward. We are working diligently with our partners in Alberta, as well as other provinces and Indigenous groups, on the implementation of those commitments.

We regularly take stock. I chair a cabinet committee that is regularly updated on the progress of that work. I am optimistic that we will be a very good partner for the Government of Alberta within those industries and sectors that you have identified.

[Translation]

CANADA-UNITED STATES-MEXICO AGREEMENT

Hon. René Cormier: Welcome back to the Senate, minister.

With the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement officially coming up for review this July, how is your government measuring the impact and benefit that the cultural exception has had on the Canadian cultural industry since the agreement was signed in 2018?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Thank you for the question, Senator Cormier.

I spent much of yesterday morning with several of your friends who represent the cultural sector and cultural industries. My colleague, Minister Marc Miller, and I spent more than two hours with a group of representatives from across Canada specifically discussing the importance of maintaining the cultural exception and taking stock of the economic benefits it has generated for Canada.

When I travelled to Mexico with some businesses in the cultural industry, I saw how keen they were to have Mexican partners. One that comes to mind is Moment Factory, the Quebec company that created the Akadi Lumina experience at Pays de la Sagouine in Bouctouche, which you know well. That inspired me because they were with me in Mexico to develop business relationships with partners. That generated a lot of positive spinoffs for the cultural industry and its stakeholders here in Canada, including for linguistic minorities.

I was reassuring, just as my colleague was yesterday with the representatives, but I think people may not have fully understood the economic importance of these industries within the context of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement. I did that in Mexico with Mr. Miller and our New Brunswick colleague, MP David Myles, but we'll be doing more of it.

Senator Cormier: Thank you, minister. I'm pleased to hear you talk about recognizing the economic impact that the cultural exception has on our sector, particularly in film, television, publishing and music. In fact, a major feature film is currently being shot in our region. You might have heard about it.

You said you consulted the sector, but what were the main concerns raised about the future? What did you hear about the future of the cultural exception?

Mr. LeBlanc: Senator, they wanted reassurance that we would not negotiate away or weaken the cultural exception. Everyone vigorously and immediately agreed that the French language must be protected, and this undoubtedly helped reassure them of the government's commitment to continue in this direction. For all the reasons you mentioned, this has led to several pieces of good news and Canadian success stories that are being celebrated across the country. Obviously, they are concerned about recurring government funding. That is why we want to be the best partner we can be, by continuing to support them and encouraging our partners to do the same.

[English]

BUILDING CANADA ACT

Hon. Jim Quinn: Thank you for being here, Minister LeBlanc. It is great to see you in such good form. Thank you for being such a good promoter of New Brunswick products, especially those coming from my hometown, which are packaged in green boxes. Thank you for doing that.

In considering the Building Canada Act, does the designation "projects of national interest" apply only to specific projects, or does it apply to infrastructure that supports getting products from the project to market? For example, is increasing supply chain connectivity for a mine via service or rail corridors to ports eligible for inclusion as a component of such a project? Conversely, if a project under the Building Canada Act is taking place at a port and additional infrastructure is required outside the port to allow for the fluidity of cargo to be maximized, would that type of essential supporting infrastructure be eligible as a component of the project?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator Quinn, thank you for the question. I hope and believe your great City of Saint John will be a beneficiary of our investment in improving trade infrastructure. Port Saint John, as you know very well, is a source of great interest for our government and for the Government of New Brunswick. I do believe that improving trade infrastructure, including Port Saint John, among others — but particularly the one that you know well — will very much be part of the work that we'll do over the next number of months.

Regarding your specific question in terms of designating a project, my advice or the interpretation that I have received from Justice officials and from the Major Projects Office is that if the order-in-council process makes a designation, it will be for a single project with a specific proponent, as set out in the Building Canada Act.

I'm happy to go back and work with the Major Projects Office, but I believe that our interpretation of a designation is for the project itself. If you use enabling or adjacent infrastructure, that would not properly be subject to the initial designation. That is the information I have, but I'm happy to confirm.

Senator Quinn: I cede the balance of my time to Senator Gignac.

[Translation]

CANADA-MEXICO RELATIONS

Hon. Clément Gignac: Hello, minister. As an economist and former trade minister, I would like to commend your government's efforts in the area of trade. I will be brief.

My question concerns Canada-Mexico relations and our apparent difference of opinions on the automotive issue with China. We matched Washington's tariffs — which were raised to 100% — but Mexico never followed suit. Then, last September, Mexico increased its tariffs to 50% while we eliminated ours on Chinese cars. Could you explain that? Given that supply chains in the automotive sector are highly integrated, I don't understand how to interpret the apparent lack of coordination with Mexico.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: This was actually the subject of the conversations I had last week in Mexico with the Secretary of Economy, Marcelo Ebrard. I explained to him, as we did to our American counterparts, the targeted and time-limited nature of the agreement the Prime Minister reached with the Chinese government a few weeks ago. As you are well aware, we are returning, to some extent, to where we were in 2023. That is, we have decided to allow a very modest amount of Chinese electric vehicles to enter Canada and then grant import permits in exchange for significant measures in favour of the agricultural industry and —

[English]

HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Hon. Paula Simons: Minister, immigration to Alberta has been falling precipitously since 2024. In the last quarter, there was a net migration of 197 international migrants. Nonetheless, last week, the Premier of Alberta announced a series of nine referenda, many of which deal with denying services to new Canadians. Yesterday, your office said that the province had every right to launch those referenda, and I agree that they have that right, but I am concerned about the specific questions that involve the denial of public health care to new Canadians.

• (1630)

Can you clarify the position of the Canada Health Act on the results of any referenda that deny medical services to people who are not Canadian citizens or landed immigrants?

[Mr. LeBlanc]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Senator, thank you for the question. It won't surprise you that I'm not going to offer a view on a hypothetical outcome of a hypothetical referendum in one particular province, but I can share what I think is the concern and the premise of your question about the responsibility that all orders of government have in our federation for providing public health care services to people entitled to those services. Canadians are understandably proud that we offer those services to those who are in Canada in a way that meets our obligation under the Canada Health Act.

We expect provinces will continue to want to do that, so we will allow the Province of Alberta and the Alberta legislature to make their decisions in the coming months. But we will always talk to our partners in the federation about the importance of offering medically necessary health care services to those entitled to those services, and that would include, of course, asylum claimants and others who are here in Canada, on Canadian soil.

Senator Simons: Now, those nine referenda aren't hypothetical. They are real. The premier has announced them. The tenth referendum is hypothetical, and that's the referendum on Alberta's sovereignty.

As this one is hypothetical, what role do you, as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, intend to play if Alberta does go ahead with a sovereignty referendum? What will the federal government's stance on that be?

Mr. LeBlanc: You acknowledge, senator, that it is a hypothetical question, so I'm not going to offer views on a hypothetical referendum.

You did identify the premier's discussion of these referenda. The outcome, of course, is hypothetical, but in the tenth example that you used, the best thing that we can do is to focus on the work that we have committed to doing with the Government of Alberta and with Alberta business leaders and groups representing workers in the province of Alberta. The Prime Minister and Premier Smith have agreed on a memorandum of understanding. We are committed to implementing that within the time frame in which we agreed to do so. That's the priority —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[Translation]

CANADA-MEXICO RELATIONS

Hon. Amina Gerba: Welcome, minister.

You recently led a major trade mission to Mexico, involving more than 370 delegates and 240 organizations, to strengthen economic ties and explore new opportunities in key sectors. What concrete trade results, planned investments and specific commitments were secured during that mission?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Great question. You rightly mentioned the strong interest from Canadian organizations and companies, both small and large. I took part in a number of sessions in Monterrey and in Mexico City. We arranged over 1,800 meetings between Canadian companies and prospective partners in Mexico. This kind of commercial exchange takes months to bring to fruition. Robust follow-up will take place over the next few months to support Canadian companies.

I took note of two examples. A Quebec company called Logistec announced a major investment in an ocean port on Mexico's east coast. It was a request and suggestion from Mexico's president, Ms. Sheinbaum, to increase port-to-port connectivity. This goes back to Senator Dean's question. This is one very specific example involving a Quebec corporation worth tens of millions of dollars.

Here's some more good news: I met with the CEO of a Mexican mining company that's investing close to three quarters of a billion dollars to purchase a gold mine in Quebec. It's an investment from Mexico to Canada, one of the first ever.

MARKET DIVERSIFICATION

Hon. Amina Gerba: Thank you for that answer.

Are the benefits robust enough to impact the course of export diversification outside the United States? Are other markets being considered?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Yes, senator, I believe so. Our efforts to diversify our exports and our bilateral trade relations with Mexico are off to an impressive start. As I mentioned — and some of your colleagues have a lot of experience in this area — the process takes time so that deals between private companies can be finalized.

Last week, I was in Mexico. The Prime Minister is heading to Japan, India and Australia. All of these efforts are being made to keep reaching out to other markets at the same time. It's an ongoing process.

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[English]

I am certain that you will want to join me in thanking Minister LeBlanc for joining us today.

[Translation]

We will now resume the proceedings that were interrupted at the beginning of Question Period.

[English]

Senator Kingston, I believe you have approximately three minutes left, if you would like to answer the last question posed. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CONNECTED CARE FOR CANADIANS BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Kingston, seconded by the Honourable Senator Moncion, for the second reading of Bill S-5, An Act respecting the interoperability of health information technology and to prohibit data blocking by health information technology vendors.

Hon. Joan Kingston: Thank you for the question. I'd like to answer it in a more fulsome way, so I'll take it back and let others talk about it, except that I think there are things in place already that may put your mind at ease. There may be something similar in Manitoba to that which is in New Brunswick. It is called Data MB, and it was originally set up by the federal government quite a long time ago. Its purpose is to protect data in a secure place and to enter into data-sharing agreements on specific topics. So if I were a researcher, for instance, I would have to provide a specific question, and I would only be given minimum access to the data that I absolutely needed to answer that question.

The data would, of course, be stripped ahead of time of all indicators. There is an identifier number given to each disaggregated piece, if you will, so that departments — for instance, within the New Brunswick government — are able to match up, not people, but identifiers. That's as much as I know right now — that there are protections already built in. It is much like the cybersecurity question, which I will also pose to people who know more than me about what has been going on in these two domains.

• (1640)

I think that it's something that needs to be thought through because even though my province has this institution that I think is pretty robust in terms of how it protects that type of information, I don't have any idea across the country if there are like institutions that could weave together a secure way for Canadians to have their data used, if you will, in a way to promote innovation, research into health questions and so on.

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Thank you for that. Just a quick follow-up because when there have been discussions around data ownership and data sovereignty, certainly I've heard discussions around Indigenous health data ownership, so I'm wondering if that has formed part of the discussions and your preparation for being the sponsor of the bill.

Senator Kingston: Certainly, and there were a few sentences provided by the Department of Health around that, and there is attention being given to the sovereignty of both the data for Indigenous Peoples and indeed how their system is to work, because obviously we have many communities, all of whom have the right to manage their own community's health care, and that data would be part of it. On the other hand, there is much to be gained by Indigenous communities from having a digital system that works well for them because they are often the ones who have to travel long distances, who don't have all the —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, senator. The time allowed has expired.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

THE ESTIMATES, 2025-26

NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO STUDY SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (C)

Hon. Iris G. Petten (Acting Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate), pursuant to notice of February 12, 2026, moved:

That the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance be authorized to examine and report upon the expenditures set out in the Supplementary Estimates (C) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026; and

That, for the purpose of this study, the committee have the power to meet, even though the Senate may then be sitting or adjourned, and that rules 12-18(1) and 12-18(2) be suspended in relation thereto.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

GEORGINA'S LAW

THIRD READING

Hon. Fabian Manning moved third reading of Bill S-242, An Act respecting national action for the prevention of intimate partner violence.

He said: Honourable senators, I am pleased today to speak to third reading of Bill S-242, An Act respecting national action for the prevention of intimate partner violence.

This has been quite a journey to arrive here today to once again speak to this bill and hopefully see its passage in the chamber today so we can finally move it over to the House of Commons.

Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Well, I believe this journey has more than a thousand miles on it, but we're not going to give up.

This process started back in January 2017, when I received a call from a woman who had summoned the courage to try to make a difference and who had become a strong advocate. Through her efforts, she has given a voice to all those abused women who were and still are unable to speak for themselves. That woman was Georgina McGrath, and I am delighted to have her in the gallery here with us today. Gina is accompanied by her husband, Kyran, and her sister Kim.

After our first meeting, we drafted Bill S-249, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for the prevention of domestic violence, whose short title was "National Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act." It was introduced in the Senate for first reading on Tuesday, April 24, 2018. Second reading began on May 31, 2018, and concluded on November 29 of that year, when it was referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

The legislative initiative by myself died on the Order Paper during the First Session of the Forty-second Parliament. While there have been other legislative initiatives regarding intimate partner violence over the years, most of these had sought to amend the Criminal Code, which this bill does not do.

On June 8, 2022, I introduced Bill S-249, An Act respecting national action for the prevention of intimate partner violence. If enacted, Bill S-249 would provide the development of a national strategy for the prevention of intimate partner violence. The title was changed from "An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for the prevention of domestic violence."

Second reading was completed on June 1, 2023. Consideration in committee was completed on November 7, 2024, where Georgina testified along with many other witnesses. The bill did receive some amendments at that time. Report stage was completed on November 18, 2024, and third reading was completed on November 26, 2024, when it passed in the Senate of Canada. Due to the election, the bill did not make it to the House of Commons and, once again, died on the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, December 2, 2025, Bill S-249 was again reintroduced but under the number Bill S-242, An Act respecting national action for the prevention of intimate partner violence, with the short title of "Georgina's Law." First reading was completed on that day, second reading was completed on December 11, 2025, and, hopefully, third reading will be reached here today.

It has been over nine years, many meetings, telephone conversations, Zoom calls, round tables, one-on-one meetings. I'd like to express a few thank yous, if I could, here today for taking the time. Once again, I want to thank Georgina for all her advocacy and her patience with this bill.

I want to thank all my colleagues present today and colleagues who have retired from this place who have supported this bill since the beginning and have always stood with me.

I want to thank all the victims of intimate partner violence and their families we have met with, talked to, conversed with and heard their stories.

I want to thank the members of the Social Affairs Committee for second reading and for taking the time and the patience and for giving the time to the people who presented before them.

I want to thank the members of the media whom we have talked to over the years and who have pushed the bill and certainly supported it in every way.

I want to thank the local RCMP, the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and all others involved in the justice system.

I want to thank the advocates and the organizations that are out there to help and to assist victims of intimate partner violence.

I want to thank the political leaders and the members of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador who have always been supportive and have issued a joint statement of support for our bill, which I will read in a few moments.

• (1650)

I want to take a moment, if I could, to especially thank the former premier of Newfoundland and Labrador and the present Leader of the Official Opposition of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. John Hogan, who has been an advocate and supporter from day one. I am delighted that Mr. Hogan could join us in the gallery today.

I want to read the joint letter from the members of the House of Assembly.

Dear members of the Senate and the House of Commons, The Honourable Helen Conway-Ottenheimer, Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Minister of Justice and Public Safety, on behalf of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, together with the Honourable John Hogan, Leader of the Official Opposition, and Jim Dinn, leader of the third party, the New Democratic Party, are pleased to provide this joint statement of support for Bill S-242, An Act respecting national action for the prevention of intimate partner violence.

Intimate partner violence is a leading, pervasive and serious threat to individuals and communities across our province and our country. The number of victims, particularly women, is alarming and underscores the need for targeted and sustained action.

The impacts of intimate partner violence are profound and far-reaching, affecting not only those who experience violence directly but also their families and loved ones and society at large.

Today, all three political parties in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador stand together in support of the Honourable Senator Fabian Manning and intimate partner violence survivor Georgina McGrath in their ongoing effort to see Bill S-242 passed into law.

As legislatures at various levels of government, we recognize the importance of collaboration. Regardless of political affiliation, we must work collectively to prevent intimate partner violence and strengthen our response to it. This is precisely what Bill S-242 seeks to achieve.

The bill calls for increased national engagement and collaboration, enhanced reporting and transparency and strengthened public awareness of intimate partner violence in Canada.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the Honourable Senator Fabian Manning and Georgina McGrath for their unwavering dedication to this work. For nearly a decade, they have advocated for this legislation, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to supporting victims and survivors. Their efforts have not gone unnoticed and will make a meaningful difference in the lives of those experiencing violence in Newfoundland and Labrador and across the country.

It's signed, as I said, by the Honourable Helen Conway-Ottenheimer, Minister of Gender Equality and Minister of Justice and Public Safety; the Honourable John Hogan, Leader of the Official Opposition in Newfoundland and Labrador; and Jim Dinn, Leader of the New Democratic Party in Newfoundland and Labrador. I want to thank them once again for their support.

I want to thank the past and present federal Ministers of Women and Gender Equality. In just the last hour, Georgina and I sat down with the present minister, the Honourable Rechie Valdez, and Parliamentary Secretary Marie-Gabrielle Ménard, who have once again given their unequivocal support to our bill.

I also want to thank every person who has been in any way assisting us in ensuring this bill becomes the law of the land.

No bill, including this one, will take away or erase intimate partner violence within this country on its own. This bill will ask and ensure that the minister must continue to lead national action to prevent and address intimate partner violence.

Under this bill, the minister must meet with other federal ministers and provincial ministers responsible for women's issues each year. The minister must also meet regularly with Indigenous partners, victims, survivors and other community stakeholders, such as service providers, advocates and experts.

These talks must cover how well current programs work, partnerships, costs and any issues regarding the roles of different governments. Within two years, and then every two years after that, the minister must report progress to both the House of Commons and the Senate of Canada and post that report online within 30 days.

More transparency through public progress reports is what we're asking for in this bill.

The passage of Bill S-242 will ensure regular engagement with our Indigenous communities, which will help align government services with each community's needs.

The Canadian statistics are staggering. Every 48 hours, a woman is killed in Canada by her intimate partner. Since COVID-19, police have reported the numbers around intimate partner violence have increased in every province in our country.

As of early February 2026, authorities and advocates in Quebec reported six suspected femicides in the first six weeks of this year, sparking major concerns over the rising crisis of intimate partner violence.

Announced in 2017, Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence has worked toward and enacted deals and commitments in each of the provinces and territories in our country.

At present, this is a program of the federal government. The passage of Bill S-242 will move that government program to a government policy. It would ensure that our efforts to prevent intimate partner violence and provide support for the victims and their families will continue regardless of who is in government in this country.

Through our combined efforts, we believe that we have kept the conversation on intimate partner violence at the forefront of society. We must not change the channel now. We must continue to stand up and speak for those who are unable to speak for themselves. We must stand up and advocate for those who are unable to advocate for themselves; the victims and their families deserve nothing less.

We have an opportunity in this chamber to be a strong voice for so many people across this country. The numbers are staggering. We have an opportunity to put in place a piece of legislation that will not erase intimate partner violence but will provide those experiencing it with an avenue through which they can seek help — to educate them on what opportunities, programs, organizations and people are out there to help them deal with the situation they're in.

Through round tables and individual meetings — and with Georgina by my side 99% of the time — I have met personally with over 200 victims of intimate partner violence in Newfoundland and Labrador, with a population of half a million people. If that doesn't open your eyes to what is going on, nothing will.

This is an opportunity for us to speak with one collective voice, regardless of political stripe and regardless of our backgrounds. There are people involved and dealing with intimate partner violence in every part of our society. No one is immune to this. We all know someone.

We did not have an open conversation about mental health issues 30 or 40 years ago, and we didn't talk about the gay community then the way we do today. Today is our day to stand up in the Senate. I have done this several times now, but I'm very confident that today we will see the passage of this bill.

[Senator Manning]

I want to thank every one of you for your support and your interest.

I also want to thank Georgina, because without Georgina's advocacy from day one, I wouldn't be standing here today asking for your support. I ask you to give your support to Georgina and all victims of intimate partner violence and their families across this country. They deserve it. We can do it together. Thank you very much.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Hon. Tracy Muggli: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak in full support of Bill S-242, An Act respecting national action for the prevention of intimate partner violence, also known as Georgina's Law, and to advocate for its rapid passage through this chamber without further delay.

I am humbled to make this speech today in Georgina's presence. Thank you for your courage in bringing attention to this important issue and your patience as we move this bill along.

And thank you, Senator Manning, for your persistence in getting this bill to the finish line.

Intimate partner violence is one of the most pervasive and damaging forms of violence in our country. It cuts across geography, income, culture and age. Yet our responses remain fragmented, inconsistent and, far too often, reactive rather than preventative.

• (1700)

In 2024, Saskatchewan published a police-reported intimate partner violence rate of 714 incidents per 100,000 people — a rate that is double the national average. According to the RCMP, more than one quarter of all violent crime reported in their Saskatchewan jurisdictions was intimate partner violence. Saskatchewan has the unfortunate claim of leading all provinces in rates of intimate partner violence year after year, and I emphasize, often twice the national rate.

As we continue to inadequately address prevention, dedicated partners in this field, like the Central Urban Métis Federation Inc., continue to open new safe sheltering and transitional housing spaces for women fleeing domestic violence.

We thank you and all organizations working in this space for providing these services as they continue to be needed.

The numbers alone should compel action. What should compel us here in the Senate to move quickly is the knowledge that we already understand the problem. We have heard from survivors, and we are thankfully seeing some action being taken in certain jurisdictions throughout the long process that it has taken to get this bill passed.

Bill S-242 helps fill a critical gap in our federal framework. While Bill C-16, the protecting victims act, focuses rightly on enforcement, accountability and protections after crimes have occurred, Bill S-242 focuses on prevention — stopping violence before it begins or escalates.

These two approaches are not in conflict; they are complementary. Bill C-16 responds when the justice system is already engaged, but Bill S-242 asks why we allow harm to occur before an intervention is required. This bill can help to prioritize education, awareness, stigma reduction, early risk identification and increased coordinated action across jurisdictions. If we are serious about reducing intimate partner violence, prevention cannot be an afterthought. It must be a core pillar of our national response.

One of the clearest arguments for Bill S-242 is the patchwork nature of intimate partner violence prevention and intervention across Canada. Within my own province of Saskatchewan, programming varies dramatically. The IPV programs available to individuals who have caused harm differ significantly between Saskatoon and Regina in structure, duration and content. That means accountability, rehabilitation and prevention outcomes can depend more on one's location than on best practice or evidence. It also makes it hard to measure outcomes without meaningful investment to do so.

I had the opportunity to meet with IPV program staff in Saskatoon, who felt strongly that it is critical to have early education in school-based programs to prevent dating violence. Young people need support in learning about healthy communication in relationships and how to avoid the consequential online harms related to dating.

Investment in preventative education was also mentioned by the Provincial Association of Transition Houses of Saskatchewan, or PATHS, as being fundamental.

Nationally, the inconsistency is even more pronounced. Some provinces have robust prevention strategies and disclosure tools like Clare's Law; others do not. Some regions invest heavily in education and early intervention; others struggle with limited capacity and funding. Fragmentation of services and programs can undermine effectiveness, confuse service providers and leave victims and those at risk navigating a maze of uneven supports.

Bill S-242 does not impose a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, it provides national leadership, coordination and accountability, while respecting provincial jurisdiction. It creates a framework for sharing best practices, identifying gaps and ensuring that prevention is treated as a shared national responsibility rather than an isolated local challenge.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to meet with the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan, which represents domestic violence shelters and counselling centres across the province. They have been clear in their support for this bill and additional measures to reduce IPV, as that has been their focus since their formation in 1984, more than 40 years ago. PATHS states:

Bill S-242 lays out clear steps to ensure action for the prevention of IPV, including annual engagement of the Minister of Women and Gender Equality with other federal

ministers and provincial/territorial counterparts, as well as victims and survivors, Indigenous partners and other stakeholders.

Importantly, PATHS highlights that prevention must be informed by those closest to the work:

It is important that IPV professionals, victims and survivors and other stakeholders are consulted regarding current programs and prevention strategies, partnerships and the ongoing and increasing costs of addressing IPV.

We know that proactive, preventative tools can make a real difference. Saskatchewan was the first Canadian province to enact Clare's Law in 2020, followed by Alberta in 2021, and Newfoundland and Labrador in 2023. Clare's Law allows individuals to request information about a partner's history of violence as a "right to ask" and allows police to proactively disclose information when there is a credible risk as a "right to know."

Despite continuing to have high rates per capita, Saskatchewan's trend since implementing Clare's Law has been moving downward. Alberta has seen similar declines. Newfoundland and Labrador has stabilized. All three provinces with Clare's Law have seen improvement or stabilization. At the same time, national rates of intimate partner violence continue to climb.

While some other provinces have begun work or passed legislation supporting this type of measure, only three provinces have so far implemented legislation.

Dr. Crystal Giesbrecht, the director of research for the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan, said:

I feel strongly that Clare's Law is an important tool that empowers people who may be at risk of violence from their partner to access information related to safety, leading to more informed decision-making. Clare's Law is innovative because it is proactive, as opposed to reactive.

She further indicated that many people who make applications would have no other way of knowing they may be at risk without the disclosure process.

That brings me to a key point. This bill has already been studied at committee. Survivors have spoken. Experts have testified. Frontline organizations have shared their evidence. The gaps in our system are known. This chamber has even voted to pass a previous version of this bill. We now need to initiate action.

I want to be clear: Bill S-242 will not eliminate intimate partner violence. I don't think anyone claims it will. It does not prescribe exact funding amounts or guarantee immediate uniformity across provinces, but it does do something essential. It commits Canada to sustained national leadership on prevention. It ensures that prevention is not optional or dependent on political cycles. It creates space for accountability, coordination and progress.

Honourable colleagues, intimate partner violence is not inevitable. It is preventable. But prevention requires commitment, coordination and courage. And it is a long time coming. I spent a decade working in this space in the 1990s. We have been talking about coordinated and intentional prevention, as well as better support for victims, since before the terrible tragedy of Polytechnique Montréal in 1989.

That targeted gender-based violence occurred around the same time that, at the age of 24, I was assaulted by a partner and subsequently engaged with a legal system that could not hear or support me. Given the odds, it is unlikely that I am the only one in this chamber with a similar experience. Thankfully, I had many friends and family who could support me through this.

What followed was a decade of social work practice, supporting hundreds of women who were physically, sexually or emotionally abused in their relationships. As I provided the best education, emergency support and therapy I could to support hundreds of survivors to find psychological and physical safety and to heal from the wounds of traumatic bonding, I, as a support provider, was threatened, chased with women and children in tow, stalked, intimidated and manipulated by these desperate abusers.

I experienced many near misses along the way. In fact, police will tell you that these situations are among the most dangerous for them to engage in as well.

So, the biggest challenge remains: How do we stop this cycle of IPV, where abusers believe they have a right to authority in a relationship and a right to the services of their partners, whatever they demand, and where the belief systems are so strongly associated with that dominance that they employ whatever coercion is necessary to maintain it?

How do we understand the root cause of this behaviour that is frequently associated with childhood traumatic events for offenders, including exposure to violence in their own families as they grew up and, for some, directly linked to the oppressions of colonization and residential schools? This, too, must be a part of the strategy and will require investment.

• (1710)

Bill S-242 offers us an opportunity to move beyond fragmented responses and toward a more coherent national approach, one that supports those doing the work on the ground and requires meaningful strategies for preventative education. This bill requires national action.

I look forward to receiving Bill C-16, an act that will allow us to meaningfully debate the creation of a new offence that prohibits engagement in a pattern of coercive or controlling conduct toward an intimate partner, behaviour that has devastating psychological ramifications for far too many.

I urge this chamber to pass this bill without further delay and to send a clear message that prevention matters, survivors matter, and delay is no longer acceptable.

Thank you. *Meegwetch. Marsee.*

Hon. Kim Pate: Honourable senators, I speak today to Bill S-242, and I want to reiterate my thanks to Senator Manning and Georgina McGrath for their work aimed at addressing the longest-standing and ongoing pandemic in Canada: violence against women.

As we support and pass this bill today, I urge each of us to ask: When will we all commit to ending this violence? When will we stop pretending that proposals for ineffective but ever harsher punishments will protect women as our failures to eradicate deep-seated inequalities seemingly condone violence and misogyny? Indeed, when will some of the wealthiest and most privileged men who are known to have committed misogynist violence and yet continue to exert power with impunity be stopped? When will we meaningfully address the realities and circumstances that contribute to the disturbingly unabating rates of violence against women and seemingly emboldened instances of sexual assault and femicide?

We know that when we do not take care of or intervene to protect women and children, we effectively deputize them. When the state does not respond and act when they call for help, we send the message that it is their responsibility to protect themselves from violence.

This is exponentially true for poor, racialized — especially Indigenous and Black — and disabled women. When they are not able to protect themselves, fault and shame, too often, are heaped on them.

As the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls made abundantly clear, it is those failed by other systems who are most directly deputized to protect themselves by state inaction on their behalf. Yet, when they do act to protect themselves or others in their care, previous state inertia melts into near-immediate reaction, and the full weight of the criminal law is often brought to bear.

Bill C-16 has been proposed as a legislative response to violence against women and intimate partner violence, yet it will not alleviate these concerns. It relies on the same criminal-law-based responses that have not protected women in the past and — horrifically, tragically and predictably — will further entrench current inequities and injustices. In particular, Bill C-16 will entrench mandatory minimum penalties, a punitive approach to sentencing that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada identified as perpetuating mass incarceration of Indigenous Peoples and, in particular, Indigenous women who have survived physical and sexual abuse.

Women who react with force to protect themselves or others too frequently do not have access to legal defences. Instead, they are induced to accept plea deals. Experience informs them that no matter whether they are being victimized in their homes or on the streets or criminalized in courtrooms or prisons, the violence, racism and misogyny that they experience will be downplayed and dismissed, and they will be the ones expected to take responsibility.

I have worked and walked with so many survivors trying to find pathways to the supports and connections that they need to integrate and contribute within their communities. I have watched Canada instead waste hundreds of thousands of dollars per person per year on cages, cells and isolation for victims of violence whom we have failed to support.

It doesn't have to be this way — so much could be so different. Tona's story is well known in this chamber. More than a year ago, we voted to pass "Tona's Law" and sent it to the other place. As Bill S-205 is currently being studied again by the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs and will, hopefully, soon be returned to the House in this new Parliament, we hope for a different future for those women as well.

Tona died last week. Her family and friends now hope that her dying wish will be realized and that the types of abuse and isolation that she suffered will end. How did police, when Tona was found sheltering in a school to hide from abuse, end up charging her with breaking and entering instead of offering support and protection to a victim of assault? How did prison staff not realize the impact of strip searches on a survivor of abuse? What other approaches did they try before responding to her resistance with ever more harsh and cruel solitary confinement, until the harms became irreparable, until they became isolation-induced schizophrenia? How did they come to minimize, in her records, the abuse and violence that she lived through? How can we call what happened to Tona anything but layers of injustices and miscarriages of justice?

The conditions that she experienced in prison cost Tona her health and, ultimately, her life. Via "Tona's Law," the rights of others could be upheld, and girls and women could have access to community and health supports that she was denied and that would have made all the difference for her.

Nearly all — at least 9 in 10 — women in federal prisons are victims and survivors of physical/sexual abuse. Past so-called tough-on-crime approaches have not kept women safe. Worse yet, they have punished and criminalized those often in most need of support.

As the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls clearly revealed, the same issues and circumstances that give rise to Indigenous women and girls being victimized, disappeared and murdered also render them more likely to be homeless, criminalized and imprisoned.

The government has stated its commitment to addressing intimate partner violence. Bill S-242 is important because it provides the opportunity for strategies that move beyond simplistic criminal-law-based responses to violence against women and offers a possibility for meaningful measures to uphold substantive equality and redress the root causes of misogyny, racism and colonial violence.

At a time when it seems that misogyny has been emboldened in nearly every public space, Shari Graydon, CEO of Informed Perspectives, stresses that one of the best responses is to "... ensure that women's contributions are equitable, visible and recognized as essential."

Those changes will not happen without the efforts of each and every one of us, so I want to highlight the importance of the men in this chamber, in the other place and beyond using their platforms and privilege to step up, redouble efforts and model the behaviour needed from our leaders and role models in order to uphold equality for all. Thank you, Senator Manning, for doing just this.

I repeat today the words that I shared in my first speech in this chamber nearly a decade ago, those of Elder Lilla Watson. They were first shared with me by a woman who was in isolation in a segregated unit. She reminded me it was not a request for help but a challenge for me to step up. The words are:

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

I repeat today what I urged that day — that we work together with honesty and transparency to bring to light and remedy truths that have long been buried and ignored.

Dear colleagues, it is time for us all to act.

• (1720)

Thank you again, Senator Manning. Thank you again, Georgina. *Chi-meegwetch* to all of you. Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Question.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: It was moved by the Honourable Senator Manning, seconded by the Honourable Senator Martin, that the bill be now read a third time.

Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read third time and passed.)

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH BILL

FIFTH REPORT OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE ADOPTED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the fifth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (*Bill S-212, An Act respecting a national strategy for children and youth in Canada, with amendments and observations*), presented in the Senate on February 12, 2026.

Hon. Sharon Burey moved the adoption of the report.

She said: Honourable senators, I begin by acknowledging that I'm speaking from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe peoples.

In my capacity as Deputy Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, I am honoured to rise to speak on Bill S-212, An Act respecting a national strategy for children and youth in Canada.

[*Translation*]

As Senator Moodie is both the Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology and the bill's sponsor, she recused herself from her role as Chair for the duration of this study in order to preserve the neutrality of the chair.

Senator Osler, as Deputy Chair, presided over the study and, as the committee's new Deputy Chair, I took on the role of Chair for clause-by-clause consideration of this important bill.

[*English*]

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the sponsor of the bill, Senator Rosemary Moodie, and her team for their dedication and hard work in bringing this important landmark legislation before the Senate of Canada, especially during these challenging times for our nation. Canadians, children and youth, parents, teachers, health care providers and first responders — we hear you, and your Parliament is acting.

The committee collaborated diligently to strengthen the bill, approaching its work with openness, humility and a deep commitment to improving outcomes for children and youth. Members listened thoughtfully to a wide range of witnesses, including children and youth, First Nations organizations, experts, academics, advocacy groups and representatives from across civil society. The whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts.

At the outset, I would also like to thank Senator Greenwood, Senator Hay, Senator Petitclerc and their teams for bringing forth substantive amendments that improved the bill, as well as Senator Senior for her thoughtful and substantive observation.

In the review of Bill S-212, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology held seven meetings and heard from 36 witnesses, including officials from Indigenous Services Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada and Health Canada.

Colleagues, we received 39 written briefs. We started our study on November 5, 2025, and we completed it on February 4, 2026. In all, 13 amendments were proposed, and 11 amendments were adopted, affecting seven clauses. Amendments were proposed by Senators Hay, Greenwood and Petitclerc.

We could not have achieved this without the singular focus of committee staff: law clerk Philippe Giguère; analysts Diana Ambrozas, Laura Blackmore and Mayra Perez-Leclerc; administrative assistant Osvaldo Lopes Da Silva Jr.; and our indomitable committee clerk, Ferda Simpson.

Colleagues, pursuant to rule 12-22(4):

The Senator presenting a committee report recommending amendments to a bill shall explain the purpose and effect of each amendment.

Through the collective hard work of the committee, meaningful amendments were developed and adopted to strengthen Bill S-212 to ensure it better reflects the diverse realities and needs of children and youth across Canada in order to build a prosperous, more resilient and stronger Canada — a Canada and a future fit for kids.

The amendments to the preamble set the stage for those amendments adopted in clauses 4 and 7.

Witnesses emphasized that Indigenous children experience markedly different lived realities than other children in Canada. Disparities stem from multiple socio-economic factors, including the ongoing impacts of colonization, which continue to shape their health and well-being. These amendments will ensure that the national strategy fulsomely addresses the challenges that are unique to Indigenous children, and it will ensure that free, prior and informed consent for the national strategy as it pertains to Indigenous children be enshrined in this law.

The committee also adopted important amendments that emphasized the need for Bill S-212 to explicitly recognize mental health and the rights of children and youth with disabilities as core elements of the national strategy. Witnesses highlighted that many young people — particularly First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, newcomers, those living in rural or remote regions, Black youth, racialized youth, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, vulnerable groups and children and youth with disabilities — face systemic barriers to equitable mental health supports. Witnesses stressed that adding explicit references to mental health would ensure the strategy better reflects the holistic needs of children and youth in Canada, citing the current mental health crisis across Canada.

Colleagues, this moment causes me to reflect on the unimaginable recent tragedies in Tumbler Ridge, B.C., and the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation community, and to remember the words of Martin Luther King Jr.:

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects [us] all indirectly.

And so we, as senators and Canadians, stand with you. We mourn with you, and we pledge to do better.

Witness testimony further highlighted the importance of aligning the bill with Canada's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, especially the testimony from Inclusion Canada and the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children. They emphasized that children with disabilities must be meaningfully reflected in the framework so that no child is left behind.

An amendment on quantifiable indicators and outcome measures that are culturally relevant and meaningful to Indigenous youth and children was also adopted.

An amendment to the consultation and reporting process ensured that relevant departments, including Indigenous Services Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada, would allow a whole-of-government approach to be not only adopted but also realized.

Amendments strengthened children and youth as integral to the development of the strategy, including in setting the objectives, outlining meaningful indicators and outcomes and in the reporting of the strategy.

The committee's report includes the observation that children are not inherently poor; rather, they experience poverty through their living conditions. It is poverty within those situations we need to address.

• (1730)

The committee also recommends that a Gender-based Analysis Plus of this bill be conducted to provide a full understanding of who would be impacted by this national strategy.

Colleagues, these amendments and observations together ensure that the national strategy creates a vision that is inclusive, equitable and responsive to the full diversity of children and youth across Canada.

In closing, colleagues, this bill is rooted in a child's rights and a child's well-being approach. I would therefore be remiss if I did not pay tribute to the work of former senator Landon Pearson, known as "the Children's Senator," who spearheaded the work and release of the landmark report entitled *A Canada Fit for Children* in 2004. The report set out a road map toward a common Canadian vision for children and a plan of action on how to create a Canada fit for children. It set out strategies, goals and actions.

However, as witnesses pointed out, we have long abandoned any cohesive strategy, with sometimes disastrous consequences for our children and youth and resulting in Canada falling further behind our OECD comparators in both spending and outcome measures.

Senators, we have a chance to take the baton from former senator Landon Pearson in the relay race that is the life of our country and ensure that all our children have the brightest future possible, with no child left behind.

It is not just a moral imperative to act; it is an economic one as well. Studies have shown that every \$1 invested in early childhood development yields a return of up to \$9 in future savings, primarily through reduced spending on health care, social services and criminal justice interventions.

Investing early in mental health care for children and youth can save trillions of dollars over their lifetime.

As we consider this bill, let us remember the words of Nelson Mandela, who said, "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

While children and youth are 20% of our population, they are 100% of our future. I am immensely honoured, humbled and deeply grateful that the life's work of so many of us in this chamber, through our consideration of this historic bill, sets us on a path toward creating a Canada and a future truly fit for children.

I want to close by once again thanking all the witnesses for their compelling testimony, which moved us all to act and truly do what the Senate does best: analyze and scrutinize bills with due diligence, deliberate care and sober second thought — and ultimately work toward improving the lives of Canadians.

Thank you, *meegwetch*.

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.)

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

(On motion of Senator Moodie, bill, as amended, placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting of the Senate.)

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. Mary Jane McCallum: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak 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. This legislation seeks to expand and extend the federal voting age in Canada to 16- and 17-year-olds.

As I said in my previous speech on Vote 16, when I was first introduced to the idea of lowering the voting age to 16, I had trouble wrapping my head around the idea. My concern was that, for teenagers, democratic participation may feel like a burden rather than the opportunity it is.

I thank Senator McPhedran for not only sponsoring this bill but also challenging me to think beyond my comfort zone, biases and belief that I knew what was best for our youth.

When I was challenged to think about expanding the voting age, I thought about my mother and father and how their generation — and the many generations before them — were already working hard at the age of 12, fishing, trapping and living off the land in minus-40-degree weather. They did so successfully generation after generation, until federal policies, legislation and religious organizations unilaterally imposed oppression.

These generations were expected to work and to contribute to the running of the household as well as to the collective. The young were taught tradition, work ethic, values and life skills to be passed on — life skills to keep us alive in a good way. This was self-government tempered with the Creator's laws. Life was about conservation, enjoyment, purpose, humanhood and spirituality.

I approach the topic of expanding the voting age through a lens of democratic evolution. Our democratic system is a living and dynamic structure — not a static monument — and should, therefore, be treated as such.

Democracy is central to Canada, as it is to the United Kingdom. Canadians take pride in its evolution and how it has and continues to inspire. Over Canadian history, men and women have struggled long and hard for the right to vote. Canada recognized and then corrected the injustices of excluding women; First Nations and Inuit Peoples; Chinese, Japanese and Asian peoples; and those without property from the ballot.

Each generation must have a national conversation on how to protect our democratic system and culture so that we build on our advances and remove unnecessary barriers. We must continue to strengthen, modernize and improve our democracy, leaving this a better place than we found it. Has Canada not attracted people because it has always been an inspiration for the rest of the world?

The world is changing, but has our political system kept pace? If harnessed correctly, new technologies have the power to strengthen and simplify our democracy so voters feel connected

and confident. Yet we have large areas throughout Northern Canada that continue to be left behind because they have been excluded from the benefits of technology.

We must also contend with hostile actors who seek new ways to disrupt life in Canada.

During my many school visits, I've witnessed well-thought-out conversations and questions that have shown me that Canada's teens are using their skills to think critically and that they are not only capable but also invested in their country and the world.

Their projects have demonstrated the wide range of critical ideas that they delve into, including: What is community? How has lobbying affected this country? How does immigration impact our country? What kind of environment are we inheriting? Why is our health system not responding?

• (1740)

Today's youth are very aware of environmental degradation, destruction and climate change. They are well aware that without Mother Earth with its land, air and water, human beings will not survive. They are using sober second thought more than the many adults who are driving this destruction. They are not at a stage where they have been corrupted by greed for land and natural resources. They want a good and long life, with the right to breathe clean air, to drink potable water and to live on uncontaminated land.

Colleagues, as we debate Bill S-222, let us look across the Atlantic for guidance. Canada's Parliament is built upon the United Kingdom's Westminster model. We often look to the U.K. for tradition, but we should also look to them for progress.

On February 12, 2026, the U.K. government introduced the Representation of the People Bill 2026: Extending the right to vote to 16 and 17 year olds. In the policy paper by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published February 12, 2026, it states:

Young people represent the future of our country. Decisions the government makes now will not only affect young people today but will have an enduring impact on their entire lives. As such, it's only right and fair that younger people be able to vote. Further, by engaging voters early, when they are young, and allowing them to have a say in shaping their future, we will build the foundations for their lifelong participation in our electoral processes. . . .

Alongside the legislative measures in the Representation of the People Bill to extend the voting age, empowering and equipping young people with the knowledge and skills they need to participate will be a vital part of successfully implementing this change. We are working closely across government and with the devolved governments and civil society to develop a package of additional measures focusing on practical democratic and civic education and engagement. . . .

. . . the Department for Education has committed to make citizenship compulsory in primary schools and to . . . ensure that all pupils receive an essential grounding in a range of

topics including democracy, government and law. Once these changes are in place young people will benefit from strengthened democratic education before, alongside, and as part of their preparations to exercise their right to vote. This is an opportunity to create truly transformative links between education and democracy.

This shift in the very birthplace of our parliamentary system is deeply relevant. It signals global recognition that the age of attainment for democratic participation must align with the responsibilities these young people already carry. If the mother of parliaments can acknowledge that 16-year-olds are ready to help shape their nation's future, surely Canada can do the same.

Canadian scholars have been busy. In her July 2021 master's thesis at the University of Western Ontario, entitled *From Classroom to Polling Station: A Cross-Canada Analysis of High School Civics Curricula*, author Elizabeth Kozak specifically looked at the recent declines in voter turnout, especially amongst young voters. She writes:

. . . some experts have begun to fear a generational shift towards political apathy; a shift that could lead to a heavily apolitical society as the generations who value politics are replaced by those who do not. . . . scholars have been trying to understand what drives turnout, why participation matters, and predict the attitude and behaviours of the Canadian electorate. Through these queries, it has been found that there is a direct link between political knowledge and likelihood to vote.

Although the findings suggest that there is no clear link between curriculum content, delivery and intended goals to the expected turnout rate for young voters in Canada, we cannot stop there. Yes, voter turnout is different from extending the voting age, but it makes us realize the critical importance of engaging our youth early, especially in light of the reality of apathy.

The research paper states:

Past qualitative studies in Canada and abroad have concluded that locally significant, participatory, and open classroom settings have proven to be the most effective in educating an engaged citizen. With these findings in mind, many Canadian curricula have come under critique for being unengaging as they emphasize structure and political technicalities over a citizen's role in our national democracy. . . . If citizens are better educated on political processes, empowered to act as conscious citizens, and can understand how their individual views translate in political spaces, we might see a more engaged and politically literate young generation in Canada.

That includes 16- and 17-year-olds. With this in mind, we cannot use the argument that youth are uninformed against them. If schools are not engaging students, then how do youth suddenly get political knowledge and life experience at 18, which is a mere one to two years later than 16 and 17?

Opponents to the idea of expanding the voting age question whether 16-year-olds have enough life experience and maturity to vote, and critics have claimed that the decision to move to lower the voting age is opportunistic, as younger people are more likely to vote for left-wing parties.

In the work that I do, I'm not going to paint a rosy picture about how easy it was for the U.K. to form a decision regarding lowering the voting age. Opinion polling done in the U.K. suggested the public is unsupportive. In June 2024, polling showed that 47% of the public is opposed to lowering the voting age, whereas 28% supported it. Only 10% of those over the age of 75 supported the change, but 49% of those aged 18 to 26 supported it.

A poll of 500 16- and 17-year-olds showed young people were split. The poll found that 49% didn't think the voting age should be lowered to 16, while 51% said it should. Polling in Scotland before the change of voting age for devolved elections showed two thirds opposed to votes at 16. In 2015, the proportion of people who supported votes at 16 for elections was 60%. Despite this opposition, the government decided to table their bill to lower the voting age.

In another research briefing, it states:

Lowering the voting age appears to have a positive influence on young people's engagement. A study of German teenagers found those eligible to vote at 16 were more likely to discuss politics with their family and friends and to use voting advice apps. The study suggests that more research may be needed on "whether there is an initial effect of lowering the voting age – e.g., due to press coverage, public debate or discussions in schools – that may dissipate over time". . . . Most young people (about two-thirds) think it's important to learn more about UK politics. Nearly three-quarters believe politics should be taught more in schools or colleges.

• (1750)

It is critical for Canada to learn and adapt to the transformative changes happening in the world. Giving the skills to our youth is not negotiable. As a First Nations adult, I witnessed critical thinking that comes with sober second thought as being a skill set we had but that was removed through an "education" system. We now need to go back to our land-based teachings and become youth-centred again. This ensures the continuation of humanity.

Speaking from the perspective —

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator McCallum, I'm sorry to interrupt, but the time for your speech has expired. Are you asking for five more minutes?

Senator McCallum: Yes.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Is leave granted?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator McCallum: Landon Sanderson is a youth advocate for reconciliation and recently served as Senator McPhedran's Manitoba Youth Liaison. He says:

The extension of voting rights in Canada is a vital step in the active deconstruction of colonial governance. The voices and experiences of First Nations, Metis, Inuit and non-status youth must not be perceived as a passive resource for optics, but rather a valuable asset in the future of equitable institutions.

The voices of youth remind us that maturity is not a light switch that flips at 18; it is a quality demonstrated every day by young people who advocate for foundational change, care for elders and work in our communities. By extending the vote to 16, we aren't just changing a number in an act; we are telling thousands of young Canadians, "We see you, we hear you, and we trust in your experiences."

I ask you to support the referral of Bill S-222 to committee. Let us give our youth the study, the respect and, finally, the power to give voice to what is important in their lives.

(On motion of Senator Martin, for Senator Carignan, debate adjourned.)

NATIONAL THANADELTHUR DAY BILL

SECOND READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator McCallum, seconded by the Honourable Senator Martin, for the second reading of Bill S-225, An Act to establish National Thanadelthur Day.

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Honourable senators, I want to acknowledge that I come from Manitoba, Treaty 1 territory and the homeland of the Red River Métis Nation, and that the Parliament of Canada is located on the unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin Anishinaabeg territory.

I thank Senator McCallum for bringing this bill to the Senate of Canada to honour the life and legacy of Thanadelthur, a young Indigenous woman with the strength, resilience and fierce determination to protect her people. She was a teenager and an effective ambassador of peace in the early 1700s.

Records from the time speak of her as a skilled guide, peacemaker, interpreter and negotiator who played a crucial role in the expansion of the fur trade in the early 1700s. More importantly, at a time when the Dene and the Cree were traditional enemies, Thanadelthur was the indispensable key to forging peace between the two nations.

Her remarkable story allows us to reflect both on the extraordinary impacts she had in shaping our shared history as a nation and, lamentably, on the many ways in which Indigenous stories, cultural practices and contributions have been ignored for far too long. By supporting sending this bill to committee, we are sending a strong message and affirming our commitment that these Indigenous stories must not continue to be forgotten.

Thanadelthur was a peace builder before Canada became a nation and before Manitoba existed. Thanadelthur was a member of the Dene Nation, Indigenous to the sub-Arctic region of what is now known as Nunavut and northern Manitoba.

In 1713, while on a caribou-hunting expedition with her family, she was captured by Cree warriors. She managed to escape after a year of captivity, and, after a harrowing journey, she came back to her family, very near death. At that time, she lived in York Factory, an early Hudson's Bay Company trading post.

Thanadelthur's great work came about a few years later, in 1715, when she was employed as the guide, interpreter and negotiator for the Hudson's Bay Company in their efforts to establish peaceful relations between the Cree and the Dene. Her Dene, Cree and English trilingualism, her tenacity and perseverance, and her skill as a negotiator led to a historic peace agreement between the two traditionally warring peoples. I mark the wisdom, humility and the depth of character of this young woman in choosing to forgo any feelings of revenge or hostility toward those who were her traditional enemies and her captors; instead, she chose to forge a path to peace.

The Hudson's Bay records from that period make it clear that peace would have been unattainable without her pivotal role. In June 1715, a delegation of 150 people set out on a peace mission and travelled some 1,000 kilometres in eight months, pushing through an Arctic winter. It was Thanadelthur's guidance and determination that kept the delegates from turning back. It was her skill and knowledge that kept them from perishing in the wild, and, ultimately, it was her fortitude that saw the final peace accord implemented.

To quote from a record of that period:

She made them all stand in fear of her as she scolded at some . . . and forced them to be at peace.

Remember that this is a teenager.

Her voice was said to be hoarse from persuading her people.

Sadly, she succumbed to illness less than two years later and died on February 5, 1717, buried in York Fort. Hers is a story that still resonates within Cree and Dene communities in their oral history to this day.

Examining her story from a distance of over 300 years, we can learn modern lessons. Thanadelthur is but an early example of the tireless leadership and resolute quality of Indigenous women who both nurture as mothers and protect as warriors. I think of contemporary Thanadelthurs who, despite obstacles, hardship and opposition, are similarly leading restorative peace and reconciliation efforts in our own time — Indigenous activists like

the late Mary Two-Axe Earley, Cindy Blackstock, Pam Palmater, Leslie Spillett, Autumn Peltier, Diane Redsky and our former senator colleagues the Honourable Sandra Lovelace Nicholas and the Honourable Lillian Dyck.

In this place today, we are blessed with Indigenous women leaders who were all esteemed trailblazers before agreeing to be named to this chamber: senators Michèle Audette, Mary Jane McCallum, Yvonne Boyer, Margo Greenwood and Judy White. I think of Inuit leader Rosemarie Kuptana; artist Daphne Odjig; Manitoba's own Jackie Traverse; and my family's beloved friend, the legendary filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, now 93 and working on her fifty-fourth film.

Indigenous women and girls play a key role in preserving their communities. They often act as agents of peace, leading movements that eventually bring warring parties to the negotiation table. These strong, clear Indigenous women leaders are often the first to speak truth to power, including within their own communities, to address the root causes of conflicts and increase community engagement.

When I go home to Manitoba, I am honoured to receive guidance from three of Winnipeg's most effective leaders — Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, Sandra DeLaronde and Diane Redsky — to discuss international advocacy in multilateral processes. Last year, they led the largest delegation of Indigenous women ever to arrive in Geneva to participate in the review of Canada under CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

• (1800)

Before coming to this chamber, I was a professor, who, with a team of students in our human rights program at the University of Winnipeg's Global College, ensured that Canada's first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security noted the importance of domestic peace building and Indigenous women's leadership. International studies have conclusively shown that women's participation in peace agreements leads to better and more sustainable outcomes with higher rates of implementation.

Honouring this historic and heroic peace builder, Thanadelthur, through the passage of this bill also honours Indigenous women as leaders. As a lesson in progress, I'm pleased to note that Canada's third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security sets out efforts aimed at addressing gender-based discrimination, violence, oppression and marginalization faced by women and gender diverse people in Canada, particularly Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people. It acknowledges the intersecting discrimination and violence based on gender, Indigenous identity, socio-economic status and other identity factors.

The second lesson I draw from her story is more sombre because Thanadelthur is also a symbol of unknown, effaced and obscured Indigenous voices, stories sadly forgotten or deliberately erased if not for the oral traditions that keep their lights burning. Remembering Thanadelthur speaks to our

ongoing tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Research shows Indigenous women are 400% more likely than other Canadians to go missing. The problem is so pervasive that the Canadian government does not know how many Indigenous women are missing or have been murdered.

Ironically, these are the women who are overpoliced and under-protected. Estimates suggest that around 4,000 Indigenous women have been lost. Thanadelthur's own grave has been lost. The land of the original Fort York has eroded and been washed out to sea. Without a monument to mark her resting place, a beautiful tradition has developed in northern Manitoba. In Churchill, there is a square in the town that says "Thanadelthur Square," and in northern Manitoba, to mark the date of her passing, people lay red roses into the waters of the Hudson Bay.

Senator McCallum, in speaking to her bill, brought another modern dimension to this historic tale, as she shared aspects of her own Cree upbringing in Manitoba and the ongoing joining of Cree and Dene communities across boundary lines. History is a living, growing thing. When history is "herstory," wisdom transcends time.

To conclude, Thanadelthur's contributions provide a powerful example of the importance of commemorating Indigenous histories, as called for in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 79, which calls for the federal government ". . . to develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration . . ." It continues, saying that this would include ". . . contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canada's history."

Moving this bill to committee moves Canada a step toward actualizing our commitments under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and our domestic law adopting that declaration.

I commend Senator McCallum for introducing us to Thanadelthur and to the act to establish a national Thanadelthur day. My last point is to remind us of Senator McCallum's bill establishing the National Ribbon Skirt Day. At first, there was some difficulty persuading senators to speak to that bill. It did pass, and now, across this nation, on National Ribbon Skirt Day, there are celebrations of little girls and whole generations in Longhouses, community centres and legislatures celebrating National Ribbon Skirt Day.

It is her acute sense of community and her ability to take the pulse of people in Canada that we see in Senator McCallum's bills. This is yet another instance of that, and it gives us a tremendous opportunity to be part of celebrating and respecting Indigenous leadership in this country.

I hope we are ready to call the question. Thank you, *meegwetch*.

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

Senator McPhedran: With pleasure.

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Thank you, Senator McPhedran. I note that March 8 is International Women's Day, and the theme this year is "Give To Gain," emphasizing generosity, collaboration and collective progress to advancing gender equality.

How would national Thanadelthur day contribute to advancing gender equality and reconciliation?

Senator McPhedran: Thank you very much for the question, Senator Osler. I think, more than anything, that International Women's Day is a day when communities come together to focus on the contributions of women to their communities, their countries and the world. Having a young heroine from 300 years ago finally being recognized as a peace builder, a negotiator and a trilingual diplomat, essentially, would be a tremendous addition to how Canadians could think about International Women's Day and celebrate women's contributions.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time.)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

(On motion of Senator McCallum, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples.)

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH IN CANADA BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Henkel, seconded by the Honourable Senator Francis, for the second reading of Bill S-243, An Act to establish a national framework for women's health in Canada.

Hon. Mary Coyle: Honourable senators, I rise today on the unceded lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation to add my voice to those of our colleagues Senator Henkel, the bill's sponsor, and Senator Oudar to speak to Bill C-243, An Act to establish a national framework for women's health in Canada.

I am a fortunate woman with an almost 99-year-old mom. I also have an aunt, three daughters, five granddaughters, two sisters, many nieces and great-nieces, and a great group of women friends. I, like several of you in this chamber, am a cancer survivor. I also have four brothers, three sons-in-law, two grandsons, an uncle, several nephews and great-nephews, and a wonderful group of male friends. Honourable senators, of course,

while we hold our loved ones close, we are here to govern for the benefit of all Canadians — women, men and our nonbinary citizens.

Colleagues, I was thrilled to see the government stepping up yesterday, with Health Minister Marjorie Michel announcing the launch of consultations with men and boys on a national men's health strategy. This is important.

Our former colleague the Honourable Roméo Dallaire bravely brought men's mental health issues out from the darkness into the light by revealing his own struggle with PTSD. We know that today many young men and boys are caught up in the "manosphere" with all of its dangers to their own health and to that of our society. But today my remarks will focus on Bill S-243 and the critical importance of having a national framework for women's health.

Honourable senators, the iconic phrase "Mind the Gap" was first introduced in 1968 in the London Underground. In the London Underground and other subways around the world, that phrase means, "Watch out for that spatial gap between the station platform and the train." The verb "mind" in this situation means "pay attention to." The verb "mind" can also mean "be concerned about or worried by."

• (1810)

I would argue that when we are facing gaps or disparities in women's health, we mind these gaps in both senses of the word: We need to pay attention to those gaps in women's health and should, at the same time, be concerned by them.

There are so many gaps to mind when it comes to women's health.

We mind the achievement gap between the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals — number three on good health and well-being, number five on gender equality and where we currently are on both goals in Canada.

With Canada ranked at sixty-fourth in the world on the Hologic Global Women's Health Index, we mind the large gap between us and the top-ranked countries of Taiwan, Kuwait and Austria. We mind the 24% gap between the time women in Canada spend in poor health and varying degrees of disability compared to men in Canada, as reported by the McKinsey Health Institute. We mind the 27-year gap between now and the last federal framework on women's health from 1999.

We mind the gap between what we already know about women's health and what we are doing about it. We mind the many gaps in the patchwork of fragmented health jurisdictions that many women end up falling through. We mind the gap between what is needed to ensure a health care system that works overall for women and the one that actually exists. We mind the gap in health care availability, quality and outcomes for women in rural, northern and remote communities. We mind the gap in health care availability, quality, suitability and outcomes for Indigenous, racialized, immigrant and incarcerated women.

We mind the gap in funding for research on women's health — only 5% globally and 7% of federal health research funding in Canada. We mind the gap in research and knowledge in areas exclusive to women — sexual and reproductive health, menstruation, menopause, endometriosis and other gynaecological concerns. We mind the gap in research of conditions affecting women in disproportionately large percentages, such as MS, migraines, osteoporosis and osteoarthritis. And to the women among us — who here wishes someone would come up with a new, non-tortuous technology to detect breast cancer? At my hospital, I have heard mammogram appointments referred to as “Pancake Tuesday.”

We mind the gap in modern screening technologies for women. We mind the large gaps in data on women's health. We mind the gaps in tools, protocols and clinical responses tailored to women. We mind the gaps in medical training related to women's physical and mental health. We mind the gap in diagnosis time for endometriosis, which can take a torturous 7 to 10 years to diagnose.

We mind the gap in women's productivity, and often their income, due to untreated menopause or other conditions. We mind the gap in pay for equivalent surgeries on women and men. We mind the gap in women's confidence in and satisfaction with their health care.

Colleagues, there are no doubt more gaps I could list, but I want to now turn to something that I believe will be important to consider when developing the national framework for women's health in Canada.

St. Francis Xavier University — right across the street from my house — is home to the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. Our colleague Senator Greenwood used to run the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health at the University of Northern British Columbia. The National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health provides the Canadian public health community with knowledge and resources to take action on the social determinants of health with a view to closing the gap between those who are most and those who are least healthy.

I quote from their materials:

Our health is determined by the conditions of our everyday lives, and by systems that help keep us healthy and support us when we get sick. . . .

Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts highlights 14 interrelated factors that influence people's health. These are: First Nation, Inuit or Métis status; disability; early life; education; employment and working conditions; food insecurity; health services; gender — yes, gender is a determinant of health; housing; income and income distribution; race; social exclusion; social safety network; unemployment; and job security.

The article also cites the 2009 final report of the Senate Subcommittee on Population Health, which says:

Many Canadians aren't aware that the social and economic circumstances of peoples' lives have a greater influence on individual and community health status than medical care

and personal health behaviours do. The final report of a Senate Subcommittee found that socio-economic factors account for fully 50% of all health outcomes, while health care, genetics, and physical environment account for 25%, 15%, and 10% of health outcomes, respectively.

Therefore, colleagues, I believe it will be critical that the process designed to develop the national framework for women's health in Canada take into account this fundamentally important information and place an emphasis on the social and economic factors that have significant impacts on health outcomes for Canadian women.

I also believe it is important to listen to the voices of leaders in women's health and women on the ground.

The IWK Foundation in Nova Scotia, which focuses on women's and children's health, issued a report in October 2025 entitled *The Voice of Maritime Women: The Unspoken Burden of Women's Health*. It reported the findings of a survey of over 27,000 Maritime women on their health experiences. They have also recently launched the WHEN: Women's Health Equity Now movement. When I asked IWK Foundation President and CEO Jennifer Gillivan about Bill S-243, here is what she had to say:

Canada is the only G7 nation that doesn't have a current national health strategy for women. If we are to build Canada strong —

— you may have heard that expression before —

— it starts with including and ensuring the other 50% of our population have an equal health care system designed for women, informed by research beyond 7%. Women make up over 50% of our labour force and we are not getting a good return on our tax dollars.

Developing a national health strategy for women, supporting more research on women and investing in the fem tech industry could make Canada a global leader.

To close this gap is both a moral imperative and a smart economic opportunity for Canada.

In today's *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's Minister of Health, Marjorie Michel, said:

Men's health is not a niche health issue . . . it's a national one affecting work-force participation, the economy, community stability and family well-being.

Honourable colleagues, women's health is also not a niche issue. It too is “. . . a national one affecting work-force participation, the economy, community stability and family well-being.” It is an issue where there are clear gaps and clear opportunities.

As we gather here today in our nation's capital, near the platform of Ottawa's former Union Station, and as we look to that metaphorical train — a modern train representing the future good health of Canadian women — let's mind the gap; let's be aware of the gap. Let's be concerned about the gap, but let's do

something about the gap. Let's take the leap onto that train and work together to ensure that we close that glaring gap in women's health within Canada once and for all.

• (1820)

Honourable senators, let's vote to send Bill S-243 to committee for further study. Let's show Canadian women that our health matters. Thank you. *Wela'lioq.*

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

INTERNAL ECONOMY, BUDGETS AND ADMINISTRATION

THIRD REPORT OF COMMITTEE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the third report of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration, entitled *Senate Budget 2026-27*, presented in the Senate on December 11, 2025.

Hon. Tony Loffreda moved the adoption of the report.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today to recommend the adoption of the third report of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration, pertaining to the 2026–27 Senate Main Estimates, presented in the Senate on December 11, 2025.

The Senate Main Estimates for the fiscal year 2026-27 are proposed to be \$141,409,806, representing an increase of 1.5%. This includes economic salary increases and related benefits, which account for 2.5% of the overall budget growth. Excluding these increases, the overall Senate budget would have decreased by 1%.

Senator Forest, Chair of the Subcommittee on Senate Estimates and Committee Budgets, will provide a broader perspective on the proposed highlights for the 2026–27 estimates. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Éric Forest: Honourable senators, in 2023, the Senate began a spending review process long before the government undertook a comprehensive expenditure review. A number of efficiencies were identified at that time and have already resulted in annual savings of approximately \$384,000. For instance, the Communications, Broadcasting and Publications Directorate was restructured, the media review supplier was changed, and the number of telephone landlines was reduced.

In addition, in 2023, the Senate set a cap of 449 full-time equivalent positions, and this cap has been respected ever since. After adjusting for inflation and for the transfer of the Parliamentary Protective Service, or PPS, the Senate budget has increased by approximately 19% over the last 10 fiscal years.

[Senator Coyle]

Over the same period, excluding 10-year inflation and the transfer of the PPS, the House of Commons saw its budgets increase by 32%, while the public service experienced a 77% increase.

Here are the increases recommended in this budget for next year: First, a \$3-million increase to cover rising mandatory, non-discretionary expenditures. This includes adjustments to senators' indemnities and travel expenses, as well as contributions to employee benefits.

We recommend a \$1.6-million increase in budgets for services to senators provided by the administration to cover inflation as well as economic increases for executive-level, management-level and unrepresented employees, legal employees and Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada employees.

We also recommend an increase of \$305,000 for office budgets for house officers, caucuses and recognized parliamentary groups, which includes a general adjustment based on a 3% inflation rate, as well as an increase of \$85,000 for institutional training for senators' staff and administration employees, plus funding for institutional programs. This would allow the Senate to achieve a training investment equivalent to 1% of its actual payroll, thereby aligning the Senate with public service training investment levels.

We also recommend increasing senators' individual living expenses budget from \$30,000 to \$36,000, given the financial impact of rising hotel accommodation costs in the parliamentary district.

Lastly, we recommend increasing each senator's annual office allowance from \$268,405 to \$271,645 for 2026-27 to cover economic salary increases and inflation. This amount may be subject to a slight upward adjustment on April 1, 2026, based on actual economic increases, in accordance with the salary adjustment formula applied to parliamentarians.

In closing, I would once again like to thank the members of the subcommittee for their work. I would also like to thank the entire management team for their professionalism and highlight the outstanding support provided by the Finance Directorate throughout this budget process. Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

The Hon. the Speaker: Would you take a question, senator?

Senator Forest: Yes.

[*English*]

Hon. Denise Batters: Senator Loffreda basically said a few sentences in his speech about the \$141-million total for the Senate budget. Then we heard your speech. I was hoping to hear more details in your speech because we all know that most of your speech focused on the parts that deal with senators. For sure, that's important, but we all know that a substantial amount of the Senate's annual budget is for Senate Administration.

I would like to hear more about that. How many employees does the Senate have in its administrative department? Is that an increase or a decrease or the status quo? What are the amounts where the Senate Administration has received substantial increases? Have there been cost savings that they've found? I would like to hear more about that, please.

[Translation]

Senator Forest: Thank you for the question. As I mentioned earlier, we agreed back in 2023 on a maximum of 449 FTE positions, and that limit has never been exceeded. We're holding steady. After tabling the budget, we began an administrative review process encompassing all the directorates. We continue to evaluate efficiency measures and see what we can do to improve the Senate's performance even more, in light of the new 21st-century realities.

In terms of employees, the 449-FTE limit has never been exceeded since it was set in 2023.

[English]

Senator Batters: Thank you. One topic that has been receiving quite a bit of news coverage lately has been the federal public service has been mandated to start coming back to work on-site in larger numbers than they have been previously. Where is the Senate on that? That's been something I've been asking about throughout the time when many Senate Administration employees began working from home. That was the case for quite some time. Is that still the case, where we have Senate Administration employees working from home, or are they all now back to work five days a week? What is the situation on that, please?

[Translation]

Senator Forest: I can't give you the exact percentage of employees working remotely, but it's true, some have returned to the office. The percentage of employees authorized to work remotely relates to decisions made by the Internal Economy Committee. I don't have the percentage at the moment. I couldn't tell you. It's beyond my technical expertise.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): I have a quick question for Senator Forest. Would you be so kind as to repeat the number of administration employees, please?

• (1830)

Senator Forest: I don't have the exact number of administration employees, but I mentioned that we set a limit of 449 FTEs in 2023. That limit has never been exceeded since it was set. Each Senate directorate is asked to stay below the 449-FTE limit.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Housakos, did you have a supplementary question?

Senator Housakos: If I understand correctly, it doesn't really matter whether it's 449, 450 or 440. What matters to me is that there can be 105 parliamentarians in our institution. We have

about four civil servants for each senator in this institution, apart from our political staff, if I understand correctly. Taking all that into consideration, I would like to think about it for a while.

The Hon. the Speaker: Did you wish to comment?

Senator Forest: That was a comment.

[English]

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Will you take another question?

Senator Forest: Yes.

Senator Downe: My understanding is that in 2016, we had 325 full-time equivalents, and now we have 449. Could you explain what those 124 additional people have been doing in the last nine years?

[Translation]

Senator Forest: That is an excellent question. I wasn't Chair of the Subcommittee on Senate Estimates and Committee Budgets at the time. I can't answer your question right now, but I can send you a detailed explanation. There have been many transfers, such as the PPS transfer. There are undoubtedly various reasons, but in 2023, the cap was set at 449 FTEs. I can get back to you with a precise answer.

[English]

Senator Downe: Thank you. I look forward to receiving that. I'm sure you will circulate it to colleagues as well.

In 2016, we also had the Parliamentary Protective Service, which is now off our numbers as well, so those numbers may be even higher.

You mentioned in your comments about the increase in our chamber versus the House of Commons, but, unfortunately, you didn't mention that there are more MPs now than there were a few years ago, while the number of senators has remained the same, 105. That might contribute to some of the difference in cost.

Can you also confirm that in 2016 the Senate budget was roughly \$70 million, and now it's being proposed to be \$141 million? Is that correct? If not, could you find out and let us know?

[Translation]

Senator Forest: I think your figures are correct. If we take a comparable element from 2023 and remove inflation, the Senate's budget has increased by 19% over 10 years, compared to 32%. There has been an increase in the number of members, but not by 80%. If we compare the two, I think that, over the past 10 years, the Senate has been very well managed. The House of Commons manages its own budget, but if we compare the figures after adjusting for inflation, the Senate has increased its budget by 19%, compared to 32% for the House of Commons.

[English]

Senator Downe: This is my last question. I understand about 10 years ago it was about \$800,000 total cost per senator. Now it's \$1.2 million. The House of Commons would have a much higher cost per MP, and there are 15 more MPs than there were nine years ago. That would be a significant cost for the House of Commons that we have not incurred, but our costs have gone from roughly \$800,000 per senator per year to \$1.2 million. Could you also find out in some detail what that increase included?

[Translation]

Senator Forest: I will ask our highly competent services to provide us with these details. There has been an increase of 15 members out of a total of just over 330 — if we look at the percentages, we have maintained our numbers at 105 senators — but I could find the figures for you and share them with our colleagues.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

STUDY ON MINORITY-LANGUAGE HEALTH SERVICES

FIRST REPORT OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES COMMITTEE
AND REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE ADOPTED

Hon. Allister W. Surette moved:

That the first report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, entitled *Breaking Down Language Barriers in Health Care: For Equitable, Safe and Quality Health Care and Health Services*, tabled in the Senate on February 12, 2026, be adopted and that, pursuant to rule 12-23(1), the Senate request a complete and detailed response from the government, with the Minister of Health being identified as minister responsible for responding to the report, in consultation with the Minister responsible for Official Languages, the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Jobs and Families and the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the first report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, entitled *Breaking Down Language Barriers in Health Care: For Equitable, Safe and Quality Health Care and Health Services*, tabled in the Senate on February 12, 2026.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

[English]

THE SENATE

MOTION TO CALL ON GOVERNMENT TO INVESTIGATE
THE CREATION OF A SOVEREIGN, DOMESTIC VERIFIED
TRAVELLERS PROGRAM—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

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

That the Senate call on the Government of Canada to investigate the creation of a sovereign, domestic Verified Travellers Program for Canadians.

Hon. Karen Sorensen: Honourable senators, I'm happy to speak today on my colleague Senator Simons' motion which proposes that Canada create our own verified, trusted travellers program for domestic travel.

Today, many Canadian travellers benefit from simplified security procedures and dedicated lines under the NEXUS program, which is operated collaboratively by Canada and the U.S. Currently, Canadians wishing to apply for a NEXUS card must submit to be interviewed by American as well as Canadian border officials. Given the current political climate, there are many Canadians who no longer feel comfortable with this.

Senator Simons' proposal is to create a Canadian-controlled verified traveller program for Canadians and permanent residents travelling domestically. This is a sensible proposal that has won the support of the Canadian Airports Council.

I believe this is a common-sense approach that will both simplify travel and empower us to stand up for our values. It will allow more Canadians to access pre-screening. And it will be a more inclusive option, given the United States' recent refusal to recognize passports listing genders other than male or female.

Canada's international reputation for inclusivity, safety and good governance is something we should be doubling down on. A well-managed Canada-run verified traveller system, one that doesn't discriminate against gender-diverse Canadians, would allow us to live up to that reputation domestically.

For most people, a NEXUS card is just a faster way to get through the airport or across the border. But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that trusted traveller programs are, at their core, about national security.

Canadian leaders from every side of the political spectrum have spoken about our need to affirm our sovereignty and bolster our independence from the U.S. — for good reason. It seems to me that relying on American officials for traveller pre-screening sends the opposite message.

As Senator Simons recently told CBC:

It is unusual for a country to contract out its airport security fast-pass system to a different sovereign nation. We've just sort of been piggybacking on the NEXUS process using it as a proxy.

The Canadian system she proposes would not replace the current NEXUS regime. It's important to note that the United States already has their own domestic verified traveller program, separate from NEXUS. There is no reason to believe that Canada doing the same would jeopardize the ability of Canadians and Canadian permanent residents to apply for Nexus cards. It would simply create another option, allowing eligible travellers to access shorter lines and faster screenings while travelling domestically without having to go through U.S. chains of approval.

• (1840)

Frankly, it doesn't make sense that someone travelling from Ottawa to Winnipeg or from Calgary to Vancouver should require U.S. approval to access trusted traveller benefits within our own country.

I'd like to digress to talk about the state of Canada's airports, which is a hot topic in the tourism community. This is a subject most people don't spend a lot of time thinking about beyond calculating how early they'll need to leave to make their flight.

As senators from every corner of the country, we spend more time in airports than most. I'm sure all of us have seen first-hand some of the inefficiencies that create hassles for travellers: long lines, understaffing, flight delays, et cetera.

As many in the chamber know, I serve as Co-Chair of the Parliamentary Tourism Caucus. One of our top priorities and something we often hear from stakeholders in the tourism and transportation sector is the need to make it easier to travel to and within Canada.

Why does this matter so much? Because travellers remember bad experiences. They remember the inconveniences of excessive wait times at security, of missed connections, of needing assistance and no one being available. These experiences undermine confidence in the Canadian system. They discourage domestic tourism and make business travel less efficient. They act as a mark against us when we're in contention to host large international conferences and events.

It pains me to say this, as we have so much to offer travellers — from our safe and modern cities to our one-of-a-kind natural landmarks — but to fully take advantage of Canada's potential, we need to reduce the barriers and streamline our processes.

This is one of the reasons I'm personally excited about the idea of creating a made-in-Canada verified traveller program. By making it easier for more Canadians and permanent residents to be recognized as trusted travellers, such a program could play a role in shortening security lines and making travel within Canada more effective.

More broadly, it's also an example of the kind of innovative thinking we'll have to embrace if we want to uplift domestic tourism and elevate Canada as a world-class destination.

This idea is an opportunity to better meet the needs of Canadian travellers and incentivize domestic tourism, all while standing up for our national sovereignty. It seems like a win-win to me.

Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

MOTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION IN GAZA— DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

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

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

(On motion of Senator Batters, debate adjourned.)

[*Translation*]

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF JANE GOODALL

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Klyne, calling the attention of the Senate to the life and legacy of Jane Goodall.

Hon. Rosa Galvez: Honourable senators, it is with deep emotion and sincere respect that I rise today to speak on Inquiry No. 5, calling the attention of the Senate to the life and legacy of Jane Goodall.

I would like to thank my friend Senator Klyne for inviting us to consider her remarkable journey. Today, I wish not only to recall Jane Goodall's achievements, but also to emphasize the example she leaves us and how, through concrete actions, we can honour her memory.

Jane Goodall did much more than study chimpanzees. She transformed the moral landscape of science. When she arrived in Gombe in 1960, with no formal scientific training, few could have predicted that she would redefine an entire discipline, and yet that is exactly what she did.

At a time when animals were referred to by numbers, she chose to give them names: David Greybeard, Flo, Fifi. What seemed like a small gesture was actually revolutionary. By naming them, she affirmed their individuality. She challenged the idea that scientific objectivity required emotional distance from other beings on planet Earth. She demonstrated that scientific rigour and compassion are not opposites — they are allies.

Scientists were surprised by her approach. It was a first; we had never named our study subjects before. However, we give names to all our pets. I'm sure you'll recognize that you all do it too. I have two cats, and each of them has a distinct personality and preferences. One adores me, while the other avoids me.

We even give names to trees, flowers and plants. I have a collection of 50 orchids at home and I've given them names. The oldest of my orchids is 38 years old. Can you believe it? I'm sure that you have children that age.

[English]

Her discoveries that chimpanzees use tools, express emotions, maintain social bonds and transmit culture forced humanity to reconsider its place in the natural world.

When informed of her findings, Louis Leakey famously told her that we must now redefine "tool" and redefine "human" or accept chimpanzees as humans. That moment symbolized a profound shift: The boundary we had drawn between ourselves and the rest of life was far thinner than we had imagined.

But her greatest contribution may not have been scientific. As you can see, it was ethical and moral. Jane Goodall reminded us that we are not separate from nature — we are a part of it. This idea, simple yet transformative, is the foundation of environmental responsibility. If we are part of the natural world, then harming it is self-harm. Protecting it is self-preservation.

She did not remain in the forest. She stepped into the world. In 1977, she founded the Jane Goodall Institute, pioneering a community-centred approach to conservation that recognized that protecting ecosystems requires partnering with local people, especially women and youth.

Later, in 1991, she created Roots & Shoots, empowering young people in more than 75 countries to take action in their own communities. This is the model that Dr. Jane Goodall leaves us: science grounded in empathy, conservation rooted in community, hope translated into action.

Colleagues, we must ask ourselves what it means to honour such a legacy in this chamber. It cannot mean only words. It must mean something more concrete in actions. Jane Goodall believed that small actions multiplied millions of times create transformative change. As legislators, our small actions are votes, amendments, committee studies and budget decisions.

I heard our budget, and I'm not happy with the ratio between people and senators. We can make it more efficient.

[Senator Galvez]

Multiplied across time and across this country, these actions shape the destiny of ecosystems and generations to come.

To honour her memory is to embed intergenerational responsibility into our governance. It means strengthening environmental accountability mechanisms so that, for example, climate targets are not only aspirations but obligations. It means ensuring that biodiversity protection is not secondary to short-term economic interests but central to national planning. It means recognizing that financial systems must account for ecological risk because economic stability cannot exist on a destabilized planet.

• (1850)

Jane Goodall showed us that courage sometimes looks like quiet persistence. She faced skepticism. She faced dismissal. She faced a scientific establishment that questioned her methods. Yet, she continued calmly, persistently and effectively. That perseverance is an example for all of us who have felt the frustration of slow progress.

Since my appointment in 2016, I have often spoken about planetary boundaries, intergenerational justice and the need to align our economy with ecological realities. At times, progress has felt very slow, indeed, but Dr. Goodall's life reminds us that paradigm shifts do not happen overnight; they happen because someone refuses to give up. I very much like Gandhi's saying, "Be the change you want to see in the world." It's a principle that should guide all of us.

Honouring her legacy also means investing in youth. She said, "My greatest hope lies with young people." If that is so, then our responsibility is clear: We must equip youth not only with hope but with opportunity. We can support national youth climate initiatives. We can ensure that environmental education is strengthened. We can create pathways for green jobs and a just transition so that the next generation inherits not economic precariousness but resilience. We can ensure that Indigenous knowledge is respected and integrated into decision making, a principle deeply aligned with her understanding that humans belong within, not above, nature.

We must also defend truth in an era of misinformation. Jane Goodall was a scientist who communicated with clarity and humility. She understood that storytelling connects science to the human heart. As parliamentarians, we must champion evidence-based policies and ensure that independent science remains protected and accessible.

Her final message resonates powerfully. She reminded us that we are part of Mother Nature and that we depend on her for clean air, water, food — for everything; that despair leads to apathy, and apathy leads to inaction; and that each of us has the power to make a difference. Those words are not sentimental; they are strategic. Hope is not naive; it is fuel. Without hope, no movement survives. Without hope, no reform endures.

Jane Goodall did not redefine humanity by placing us above other species. She redefined humanity by calling us to greater responsibility.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, if we truly consider ourselves to be guardians, this responsibility must be measurable. It must be manifested as reduced emissions, protected habitats, restored ecosystems and more resilient communities, especially the most vulnerable communities. It must be reflected in budgets that fund prevention rather than disaster management. It must be embodied in laws that protect biodiversity not only for its utilitarian value, but also for its intrinsic value.

We honour Jane Goodall not by admiring her courage, but by exercising our own. We honour her by ensuring that future generations — the grandchildren she spoke of — inherit forests that are still standing, oceans that are still living, and a climate that is still stable enough to sustain our civilization. We honour her by rejecting cynicism. We honour her by taking action.

[*English*]

Dr. Goodall once showed that naming a chimpanzee could change science. Let us show that naming our responsibility can change policy. May we see the natural world as she did: not as a resource to exhaust but as a community to which we belong. May we remember that the measure of our leadership will not be the convenience of our choices today but the livability of the world tomorrow. May we prove, through concrete actions, that hope in this chamber is not rhetoric; it is resolve.

Thank you, dear colleagues. *Meegwetch*.

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

VITAL ROLE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Deacon (*Ontario*), calling the attention of the Senate to the vital role that physical activity and sport play in enhancing our well-being, strengthening our communities and shaping the fabric of the Canadian experience.

Hon. Iris G. Petten (Acting Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable Senators, I rise today to add my voice to the inquiry brought forward by Senators Deacon, Petitclerc and McBean, calling the attention of the Senate to the vital role that physical activity and sport play in enhancing our well-being, strengthening our communities and shaping the fabric of the Canadian experience. On behalf of my staff, I would like to extend an additional “thank you” to Senator Deacon. My staff very much appreciated the excuse to watch the Olympics as “research” for this speech these past few weeks.

The timing of this inquiry could not be more fitting: 2026 is shaping up to be a landmark year for Canadian sport. Our athletes have taken and will continue to take to the world stage at the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, at the Arctic Winter Games in Whitehorse and at the FIFA World Cup matches in Vancouver and Toronto — and more, welcoming fans from around the globe. These events remind us that sport is not only about medals or scoreboards; it is about belonging, resilience and the stories we carry with us long after the final whistle.

For a province like Newfoundland and Labrador, sport has always been deeply woven into community life. Even when our athletes are not always visible on international rosters, our connection to sport is no less meaningful. It shows up in school gyms, local arenas, outdoor rinks, community fields and in the quiet determination of volunteers, coaches, parents and mentors who make participation possible.

For these past Winter Olympic Games, a physiotherapist, originally from King’s Cove, Newfoundland and Labrador, Miriam Lewis, was part of the support team for Canada’s national speed skating team, an important reminder that behind every athlete stands a team of dedicated professionals whose expertise is equally vital to success. I extend my sincere congratulations to the 206 athletes and staff who represented Canada at the Milano Cortina Winter Olympics, including 107 women who exemplify the strength and progress of Canadian sport. As they competed under the banner of the “true north, strong and free,” they carried the pride of our nation.

I would like to take a moment to highlight the story of Liam Hickey, a proud Newfoundlander and Labradorian Paralympic athlete whose journey exemplifies courage, adaptability and perseverance. Born without a femur in his right leg, Liam found purpose and excellence in para ice hockey, representing Canada on the world stage. Not only a Paralympian at the Winter Olympics, Liam also played for Canada in wheelchair basketball at the Rio 2016 Summer Olympic Games. His story is not only about elite sport; it is about inclusion, resilience and the life-changing power of access to physical activity.

• (1900)

Reflecting on his journey and referring to Newfoundland and Labrador, he stated, “It’s extremely special to come from that province . . . I wear that province on my sleeve wherever I play.”

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, it is now seven o’clock. Pursuant to rule 3-3(1), I am obliged to leave the chair until eight o’clock, when we will resume, unless it is your wish, honourable senators, to not see the clock.

Is it agreed to not see the clock?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Some Hon. Senators: No.

The Hon. the Speaker: I hear a “no.”

Honourable senators, leave was not granted. The sitting is, therefore, suspended, and I will leave the chair until eight o'clock.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

• (2000)

Senator Petten: Liam's words capture the deep connection between athlete and community — a bond that fuels perseverance and pride.

Liam began playing competitive Para ice hockey after being introduced to it through Easter Seals in 2006, which is an organization I have worked closely with over the last number of years. I would like to wish him the best of luck at the 2026 Paralympic Games, held between March 6 and 15, as he competes for the third time, and also to A.J. Murley of St. John's, who joins the team as an equipment manager.

Sport in Newfoundland and Labrador also thrives at the grassroots level. Events such as the Newfoundland and Labrador Games and the Labrador Winter Games bring together youth from across vast and often remote regions, fostering cultural exchange, confidence and lifelong friendships. These games are about far more than competition; they are about identity, pride and community connection.

We have also seen remarkable growth in women's and girls' sports, including the establishment of the Exploits Female Minor Hockey Association, which will become the province of Newfoundland and Labrador's first ever all-girls hockey association.

Additionally, with the arrival of the Newfoundland Regiment hockey club, we are bringing major junior hockey back to St. John's and allowing local players to skate in front of family, friends and neighbours. These moments matter. They tell young people that their dreams are valid and that excellence does not only belong somewhere else.

As we look beyond provincial borders, Atlantic Canada has given this country some of its most cherished athletes, and their presence on the international stage continues to inspire pride across our region. Through the newly launched All-Atlantic Senators' Group, I look forward to hearing more stories not only from Newfoundland and Labrador but also from all of Canada's Atlantic provinces.

For instance, at these most recent Olympic Winter Games, we had the following from Nova Scotia: Blayre Turnbull as part of the women's silver medal-winning hockey team; Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon and Brad Marchand on the men's silver medal-winning hockey team; and Liam Moffatt who participated in some snowboarding events. From New Brunswick, we had Courtney Sarault, the four-time medallist at these past games in short-track speed skating, and Rikki Doak who also participated

in short-track speed skating. Of course, from P.E.I., we had Brett Gallant, winning the gold medal with the Canadian men's curling team.

Honourable senators, sport reflects who we are as a nation: resilient, inclusive and determined. When our athletes compete abroad, they do more than represent themselves. They carry with them the hopes of small towns, northern communities, coastal villages and urban neighbourhoods from coast to coast to coast.

As we share our stories in this chamber over the coming weeks, may we remember that every athlete's journey is shaped by community support, opportunity and belief. May we ensure that when they visit this chamber, they hear not only our applause but also our gratitude, our pride and our unwavering support for all that they represent.

Thank you.

Hon. Pat Duncan: Honourable senators, each time I have given thought to speaking to an inquiry about the vital role that sport plays in our Canadian lives, unbidden, the words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning would pop into my head: “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”

This is not a deep appreciation for the physique of athletes, no matter the sport, nor is it love for a particular sport, although, honestly, hockey is bred in the bones of almost every Canadian I know. This is a deep-in-your-soul, heartfelt gratitude for everything that sport and the love of sport have given me personally as well as my extended family, but most especially my community and our country.

Senator Marty Deacon, thank you for initiating this inquiry with Senators McBean and Petitclerc. Senator Deacon, you began your remarks by noting that we all have a narrative and a past that influences our actions every day.

My involvement with sport began at a very young age with empty bleach bottles cut in half and filled with some cement, until we were big enough to throw the real curling rocks. One of my favourite curling memories is of the Christmas family bonspiels at the Takhini Curling Club in Whitehorse. The bonspiels began on Boxing Day and required members of the rinks to be related and, of course, communicating with each other.

It must have been a blessing for my mother to have some much-needed peace and quiet with all of us out of the house and at the rink after the rush of Christmas preparations. The prizes in that bonspiel were bags of sugar or flour for each member of the winning rinks. Four 25-pound bags of flour was worth a lot to our family of five children and a St. Bernard when all our groceries came up the Alaska Highway by truck with an added freight bill.

Honourable senators, curling teaches you a lot about communicating with one another, both in your family and on your team. Especially in rural Canada, the curling rink was and, in some cases, still is the community club — the gathering place for young and old. During what was then the Macdonald Brier and the Lassie, in the days before TV reached every community with instant replay and the internet, you would have been hard

pressed not to find a dinner table in Canada where the salt and pepper shakers and the water glasses were not being moved around as shots were replayed while sweeping errors or the wrong turn or the lack of ice being called was hotly debated. As a country, Canadians loved the Brad Gushue rink from Newfoundland and Labrador. We were fascinated by the CBC podcast “Broomgate.” And as one, we mourned the loss of Sandra Schmirler and the recent passing of Colleen Jones.

Another curling memory that instilled my love of sport was not a single curling game — one which we lost to Colleen Jones — nor was it winning the bronze medal at the Canada Winter Games in Brandon, Manitoba. It wasn’t the bronze medal — a rarity for Yukon athletes. Beyond the medals were the closing ceremonies when the skip of our team was presented the Canada Games Centennial Cup for Team Yukon. They’re all special memories. The real inspiration, though, was seeing our country uniting in friendly competition with other young Canadians from every province and territory.

One could not speak of the legacy of the Canada Games without recognizing our colleague Senator Larry Smith. Thank you for your commitment to the Canada Games, ensuring a lasting legacy for the athletes, their supporters and their communities. Senator Smith served as the chair of the Canada Games Council from 2001 to 2009, during which the Yukon was awarded the 2007 Canada Winter Games. It was the first time these national games had gone north of the sixtieth parallel. The financial support of the Government of Canada and the Government of Yukon made the construction of the Canada Games Centre, or CGC, in Whitehorse possible.

It’s a multi-use facility and vital community infrastructure. Today, more than 3,000 people a day enter the facility. In our small city, that is an amazing testament to the lasting legacy that sports facilities bring to and leave behind in communities.

The ice surfaces at the CGC are the home-ice advantage for that other senator in Ottawa: the “Workhorse from Whitehorse,” Dylan Cozens, and his younger brother Luke who’s playing in the Western Hockey League. In July of last year, *The Hockey News* listed other Yukoners who use the CGC ice surfaces, including Gavin and Kasey McKenna in the top 20 sister-brother combos in hockey, likely thanks to mom Krystal who’s the coach and their dad who’s well recognized as a skilled player in the old-timers’ league.

The Canada Games facility was not the first legacy facility well used by athletes and their families in Whitehorse. The Mount McIntyre cross-country ski facility was built in 1981 to host the FIS World Cup and North American Championships in cross-country skiing. The membership of the Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club numbers in the thousands. The popular trails adjacent to the Canada Games Centre are an inspiration for several Yukon Olympians, including most recently for Sonjaa Schmidt in 2026.

• (2010)

Last week, I attended the opening of the expanded biathlon facility in Whitehorse. It is the dedication of volunteers and financial support, again, from the Government of Canada and the

Government of Yukon, that make these facilities possible. It will provide an enhanced, world-class training facility for our Yukon Olympic biathlete Nadia Moser.

Earlier, I mentioned the parents of athletes. My children were fortunate to participate in the Canada Games. Our daughter swam in P.E.I. at the Summer Games, and our son played hockey in Halifax at the Winter Games. We could devote an entire inquiry to discussing parents and their athletes — some good, some bad.

What I hoped for my children and all the young swimmers and hockey players who still call me “Momma” Pat — because I fed them, which is what is required for our athletes — was that, by engaging in sports, they would learn how to play on a team. All of these young athletes completed the mandatory Respect in Sport program prior to competing. My observation, as I have watched them grow up, is that they have a discipline that ensures they remain physically active, and many, if not most, continue to give back to whatever communities they live and continue to play in.

At the opening of the new biathlon facility, the volunteer President of Biathlon Yukon, Bill Curtis, had this to say about Olympic biathlete Nadia Moser:

Whenever she gets a chance, she’s up here helping the kids out, doing a bit of coaching and just even being there.

Volunteers are at the core of the success of sports across Canada. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Special Olympics movement. More than 40,000 Canadian Special Olympic athletes are supported by another 20,000 Canadians who volunteer their time, skills and talents to support individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Volunteers truly are the heart of athletic activity in communities everywhere. These volunteers allow both small and large communities to host the Canada Winter Games, the Canada Summer Games and the North American Indigenous Games. It is this volunteer base that will enable Whitehorse to host the forty-sixth annual Yukon First Nations Hockey Association tournament at the end of March this year. Last year, that hockey tournament included 60 teams and more than 1,000 players from the Yukon, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories.

At the beginning of March, Whitehorse will host the Arctic Winter Games for the seventh time. The Arctic Winter Games arose out of a conversation in 1967 between Cal Miller, who had watched the young Yukon athletes not-so-successfully compete at a Canada Games, and the then-Yukon commissioner — the equivalent of a provincial lieutenant-governor — James Smith, who then spoke with his counterpart in Yellowknife, Stu Hodgson. The two reached out to the former governor of Alaska Wally Hickel, and the Arctic Winter Games were born.

Next month, the fifty-second Arctic Winter Games in Whitehorse will host over 2,000 athletes, joined by officials, supporters and special guests. Over 2,000 volunteers will ensure the success of these games.

The Arctic Winter Games are a sporting and cultural event that includes delegations from Greenland, Alaska, northern Alberta, Nunavut, Nunavik in Quebec and the Sami people from Finland,

Norway and Sweden. When the illegal invasion of Ukraine ends, the people from Yamal, Russia, can likely anticipate being welcomed back to the games. The Arctic Winter Games bring the circumpolar world together in a unique way. As the theme for this year's games denotes, it's "What We're Made Of."

Earlier, I mentioned the Yukon being awarded the Centennial Cup at the Canada Winter Games. At each Arctic Winter Games, the Arctic Winter Games International Committee presents the Hodgson Trophy to the contingent whose athletes best exemplify the ideals of fair play and team spirit. The distinctive trophy, donated in 1978 by former Commissioner Hodgson of the Northwest Territories, is a piece of Inuit artwork. Scrimshaw decorates the narwhal tusk that stands as the centrepiece of the trophy, mounted on a soapstone base. A walrus carved into the base wraps itself around the tusk. Near the top, a soapstone bear clings to the tusk, symbolizing "reaching for the top" in competition and fair play.

The significance of the North coming together internationally also brings up the impact of sports tourism, and I will leave that subject to an address in Senator Sorensen's inquiry.

I noted the legacy of the Canada Games is the athletes and their families seeing our wonderful, great big country and briefly noted the facilities and support of governments.

With the support of the territorial government, Sport Yukon's Kids Recreation Fund is available to support children of lower-income families who wish to participate in recreational activities, including sports. I am especially grateful to the volunteers who hosted a Western Hockey League exhibition game last September and raised an additional \$55,000 to contribute to the fund — yet another demonstration of sport bringing community together and building community.

Sport has built, and continues to build, character in all participants, strong communities and opportunities for friendly competition. It provides an opportunity to see our country, grow in understanding of one another and unite as a country. In the circumpolar world of the Arctic Winter Games, it gives an opportunity to showcase culture and witness the arctic sports that were once skills necessary for survival in the North.

Sport, how do I love thee? To the very depths of my soul for the joy you bring every day when we are personally active and when we observe the next generation experiencing that joy as well.

Most especially, I love and am grateful to sport for the legacy it leaves. In my mind, we are better people, we are better citizens and we build a better Canada with our participation as athletes, as parents and supporters of athletes, as volunteers and as governments that fund and build facilities that are home to and encourage active daily living.

With apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, sport — how do I love thee? Thank you, colleagues, for allowing me to recount, with some very personal Yukon stories, the ways.

Thank you. *Shàw nithàn. Mahsi'cho.*

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

(On motion of Senator Kingston, debate adjourned.)

FINAL REPORT OF THE CANADIAN YOUTH CLIMATE ASSEMBLY

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Mary Coyle rose pursuant to notice of December 9, 2025:

That she will call the attention of the Senate to the final report of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly.

She said: Honourable senators, I rise this evening in the Senate of Canada, on the unceded lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation, to speak to Inquiry No. 11.

Today, I will kick off that inquiry — a Senate conversation — on the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly, the first national-level citizens' assembly on climate in Canada and the first citizens' assembly on climate in the world designed for people aged 18 to 25.

The Canadian Youth Climate Assembly was developed by Environmental Leadership Canada and MASS LBP in partnership with Senators for Climate Solutions — with us.

Before I go much further, I want to briefly mention the origins of Senators for Climate Solutions. Five years sure does fly by quickly.

On May 14, 2021, I sent a letter to all senators inviting them to join our own uniquely constituted and mandated Senate of Canada coalition for urgent climate action. To date, 73 senators have responded by joining our Senators for Climate Solutions group, with several retirements and new senators appointed over the past five years. We now have 60 members. Senators Kutcher and Quinn have each served as co-chairs with me, and now Senator Muggli has stepped into that role.

Inspired by Peers for the Planet, the U.K. House of Lords climate group, Senators for Climate Solutions plays a convening and knowledge-building role in order to inform our legislative work.

• (2020)

Senators for Climate Solutions had been looking into the possibility of mounting a citizens' assembly on climate for some time and have had two learning sessions with Professor Graham Smith, Chair of the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies at the University of Westminster, and Peter MacLeod of MASS LBP, who is the pre-eminent Canadian expert on citizens' assemblies.

So, colleagues, let's look at why initiate a citizens' assembly, why on climate and why focussed on youth.

Let me start with the first question: Why a citizens' assembly?

Last week, I was asked to present the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly at an event in Washington, D.C., hosted by FIDE, the Federation for Innovation in Democracy – North America, entitled “Deliberative State Governance – Citizens' Assemblies: Putting the Public Back in Public Policy.” Participants were high-level officials from the states of Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Utah and Washington.

Art O'Leary, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission of Ireland, was an important resource person at the event. He had run Ireland's first citizens' assembly in 2012 and advised on the five Irish national citizens' assemblies since then. With assembly themes ranging from same-sex marriage to abortion rights, to climate, Art said that citizens' assemblies have transformed Ireland. He said citizens' assemblies are how Ireland gets hard work done. He emphasized that citizens' assemblies have created an important bridge of trust between Irish citizens and their parliament.

Peter MacLeod of MASS LBP, co-author of the new book *Democracy's Second Act: Why Politics Needs the Public*, spoke about the 50 citizens' assemblies that have taken place in Canada, including a national one on protecting Canadians from online harms and one in B.C. on electoral reform. He spoke to the close to 1,500 citizens' assemblies around the world — several on climate in France, the U.K., Denmark, Germany, Spain, Estonia, Hungary, Luxembourg and Finland. The cities of Brussels and Milan have created permanent citizens' assemblies to help guide their local responses to climate challenges. Examples of other assemblies include the Netherlands' on the future of agriculture, Poland's on energy poverty, Montenegro's on corruption and Germany's on artificial intelligence.

Peter talked about how people in a democracy are capable of more than just marking an X on a ballot every few years. He explained how citizens' assemblies are healthy for democracy, and they produce well-considered recommendations. They build trust between citizens and their representatives, and they build democratic muscle.

Parliamentarians spend so much of our energy in a reactive posture, with time consumed by lobbyists. Do any of you spend time with lobbyists? In contrast, citizens' assemblies are a proactive approach by reaching out directly to regular citizens. Assembly members are randomly selected representatives of the public rather than the usual suspects. Finally, they are an effective way to grapple with important but sometimes polarizing issues. You can imagine Ireland with same-sex marriage and abortion.

Now let's look at why a citizens' assembly on climate.

Climate change is the defining challenge of our time. Climate impacts are increasing and intensifying in Canada, even more so in our Arctic region, and also internationally. Canada is not on track — nowhere near it — to meet our 2030, 2035 or 2050

emissions reduction targets. That is a serious problem. Our non-U.S. trading partners are rapidly decarbonizing, and it is important for Canada to not be left behind economically.

There is polarization on climate in Canada. Canada's oil and gas sector is a strong and important contributor to Canada's economy and to that of certain provinces, while, at the same time, it is Canada's number one contributor to our greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally, Canada has a new government. We are less than a year into the Forty-fifth Parliament. There should be an opportunity at this point for input on something as important as climate.

Why youth? Why a citizens' assembly on climate with youth?

One of our central responsibilities — and I think we all know them — as senators is to hear from and bring forward for consideration the interests of under-represented populations. Youth are one such population. Youth voices are critical because young Canadians are the generation whose lives will be most affected by climate change and by climate policies. Also, young Canadians are and will be key players in Canada's transition to a net-zero-emissions economy. They have so much to offer and a keen drive to play a role.

Speaker Gagné said it well when she addressed the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly members:

. . . your voices aren't optional. They are essential. And let's be clear – this is about more than consultation. It's about real participation. It's about bringing youth into the legislative process. Not just as advocates, but as partners. . . .

With that background and rationale for the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly, let's now look at the assembly itself.

Members of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly were recruited and selected using a civic lottery process. Citizens' assemblies recruit members by sending invitations by mail to thousands of households at randomly selected postal codes. In this case, 5,000 invitations were mailed out, particularly to rural areas, where we weren't sure we would get the same level of participation, and because this assembly was targeting 18- to 25-year-olds, there was also outreach through social media and contacting youth organizations, such as 4-H, as well as through colleges and universities.

Over 700 young people responded to the invitation. The civic lottery system used randomized sortition to select a final group of 33 young people that broadly reflects our geography and diversity. The goal was to have Canada in the room — and we did.

These young people were asked to answer one central question: What do young Canadians want Parliament to do to meet Canada's climate commitments in a way that reflects their values and priorities? An 11-member advisory and oversight committee collaborated with the project team to design a curriculum that provided participants with pertinent high-quality information and exposed them to diverse perspectives. The committee consisted of representatives of youth organizations;

top climate experts, including academics; private sector individuals, such as the Honourable Lisa Raitt and David McLaughlin, former president and CEO of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

The assembly members met over three months — from August to October 2025 — for 35 hours during nine sessions, four online and five days right here in Ottawa. They heard from 22 experts and engaged in small group discussions and plenary dialogue. They also learned about tools for democratic fitness, about active listening and about making trade-offs.

Together, the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly members developed an impressive, sophisticated and balanced report that highlights their priorities, outlines principles for parliamentarians and articulates 23 recommendations on preparing for climate risks, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and for climate accountability.

Their thoughtful recommendations include wanting parliamentarians to work across party lines to meet climate commitments; building youth voices into decision making; coordinating approaches to emergency preparedness across all levels of government and with Indigenous governments; phasing out public subsidies to the oil and gas sector, with any remaining support tied to clear emissions reduction targets; accelerating the transition to clean electricity across the country; strengthening interprovincial and -territorial grids with connections east-west and north-south; investing in proven green technologies; respecting Indigenous sovereignty and leadership; and expanding relevant mental health supports for Canadians.

The full report is available on the Senators for Climate Solutions website — I encourage you to read it — as is the video.

The crown jewel of this process was the very moving historic moment on September 21, 2025, in this Senate Chamber, when the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly members presented their draft report to the 21 senators and MPs present. Other colleagues watched online. Five other parliamentarians had a chance to interact with the assembly members in Ottawa, including the co-chairs of the House of Commons' All-Party Climate Caucus.

• (2030)

Their report started with these words:

We are coming to you from the most rugged wilderness of the Northern Territories, the soaring mountains of the West, the golden fields of the Prairies, the rushing rivers of Quebec, the endless windy shores of Atlantic provinces, and everything that's in between. We are all different, coming from diverse backgrounds, but we all call Canada home.

We've experienced first-hand the effects of climate change impacting our childhoods, our education, and our careers and we know not enough is being done.

Youth in Canada are not apathetic. We are ready for the challenge and eager to lead with innovation, openness, and dialogue.

Parliamentarians showed us they are willing to be allies, to listen, and to advocate alongside youth voices.

[Senator Coyle]

Honourable colleagues, that high point in the Senate in September wasn't the end.

The final report of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly was released on November 6 at the Environmental Leadership Canada's annual Breakfast on the Hill, which was followed by a press conference.

Twenty members of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly have now formed a group with the intention of continuing to learn together and follow up with senators — that's us — and members of Parliament.

Colleagues, the next stage of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly is really just getting started, and it's so important to keep and build momentum.

We have a high-quality report produced by dedicated, well-informed young citizens who have a lot of skin in the game. Their stake is significant because of their hard work, contributions and ownership, and because their future is on the line. Our stake is also significant because they have presented us with a golden opportunity to respond and to continue to engage.

Honourable senators, let's honour and respect the hard work of the members of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly, and let's be the parliamentarians they said we are, and this is what they said: the ones who “. . . are willing to be allies, listen and advocate alongside youth voices.”

Thank you, *wela'liiq*.

Hon. Rosa Galvez: Honourable senators, I rise again today to speak to Inquiry No. 11 launched by my colleague Senator Coyle, whom I thank for calling our attention to the final report of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly.

What I heard from these young Canadians was not ideology but a deeply personal concern for their own future. Climate advocacy is, at times, very difficult and disheartening. However, meeting with young people always reinvigorates me and reminds me of why and for whom I do what I do.

Let me tell you something. I am the oldest of seven children. My youngest brother was mentally handicapped. Very early, I learned that his vulnerability depended on the love and capacity of us, the older siblings, to protect him.

What does it say to the world when a society forgets its most vulnerable members? What does it say when neither society nor its government can protect its future population?

[*Translation*]

In 1987, the Brundtland Report reminded us that future generations do not vote and cannot challenge our decisions. Almost 40 years later, this observation is still strikingly current. Young people today will have to deal with the extreme impacts of global warming, particularly food insecurity, rising sea levels, displacement and economic losses.

However, they have limited power to influence current policies. This reality goes against the principle of intergenerational justice, which charges us with a duty to act as

stewards of the Earth so that we can protect those who will come after us. As the assembly participants reminded us, future generations are stakeholders who are being denied their rights on a permanent basis. Their interests are too often compromised by short-sighted decisions.

[*English*]

At a time when climate action is advancing in some jurisdictions but weakening in others — and I don't need to tell you the recent developments in the United States — young people are increasingly speaking out and demanding the decisive actions that their future requires.

We must hope this is the beginning of a change. Young environmental advocates are mobilizing worldwide to defend their own rights and those of future generations.

The Fridays for Future movement, sparked by Greta Thunberg, inspired young people around the world.

In Canada, seven youths continue their legal action contesting Ontario's emissions target on behalf of themselves and those yet to come.

Here in Ottawa, a group of young people gathered together to discuss the future of climate policy in Canada. Their message was clear: Meaningful climate action requires accountability from all major emitters whose activities drive a significant share of emissions.

This assembly shows that young Canadians are informed, their concerns are urgent, and their recommendations are practical. Who has the responsibility to listen and offer help? We do.

[*Translation*]

Allow me to begin by saying a few words about the credibility and maturity of these young participants. The citizens' assembly process provided an exceptional opportunity to collectively develop recommendations. It highlighted a particularly useful dynamic for the future youth climate bodies that will soon be set up, if our budget is adopted soon.

It underscores the importance of reliable information, dialogue with experts and democratic deliberation. The means do exist, and so does the capacity. Will we take action? The experiences of young people on the ground bear witness to the impacts of climate change. They are not talking about an abstract threat. They are talking about their own lived reality. They also understand the complexity of our economy and the need for a just transition. Young people know that transforming economic sectors requires time, skills and sustained support.

The scientific consensus is unequivocal. We have exceeded seven of the nine planetary boundaries. Young people understand the systemic nature of the crisis and, for this very reason, they are

calling for greater transparency and clear measures. Their analysis is not ideological. It is based on science, evidence and lived and observed experience.

[*English*]

On these issues, we cannot continue to govern by looking — as I said the other day — in the rearview mirror. We need to look forward. It is like driving at high speed on a winding road, watching only where we have been, rather than where we are going.

Young people are right to demand clear benchmarks, comparable measures and decisions that are easy to understand. Stop the rhetoric; stop the theory.

The climate crisis represents a profound break from past patterns, and we must govern with that reality in mind.

They also stress the importance of education, including alternative forms of learning and the development of new skills to counter the spread of misinformation.

Instead of fearing job losses, they call for confidence in practical training, reskilling and sustained support for workers. They further recognize that reducing dependence on fossil fuels will require innovation as well as stronger international cooperation.

At the heart of their concerns is reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and the recognition of the country's demographic and territorial realities. They call for ongoing participation that reflects both urban and rural contexts and promotes development models that directly benefit communities.

In reality, their concerns reflect those of the broader population and express a shared national interest in safeguarding our planet.

[*Translation*]

Young people remind us that our decisions today will determine their living conditions down the line. They talk about the damage being caused by extreme climate events, but also about mental health, social cohesion and human safety. Ask your children and grandchildren. I am deeply moved by their comments and their eco-anxiety. Climate disasters are not just environmental events. They affect families, communities and territories. They create anxiety, uncertainty, poverty and ultimately the spiralling grief of feeling abandoned by society and government. We are representatives of the government.

• (2040)

As parliamentarians, we cannot ignore this human aspect.

[*English*]

Future generations have no voice in this chamber. We speak on their behalf. That is precisely what intergenerational responsibility means.

I have four grandchildren. Some know how to speak. Others are still in diapers. It's very difficult for me to look at their faces when I know that danger is ahead in their futures.

The young people who participated in this assembly are not asking for privileges. They are asking to be treated as full citizens engaged in the country's shared destiny. They speak not only for themselves, but for communities across every region of Canada. Their message is one of hope but also of urgency. I believe that every one of us in this chamber hopes our legacy will be a world in which future generations breathe clean air, drink fresh water and live with hope rather than in fear.

[*Translation*]

The assembly came up with many practical recommendations based on a pragmatic, action-oriented vision. Resilience is central to their concerns. They propose regular assessments of climate impacts and their economic consequences to inform decision making, as well as the need to transform land use and adopt sustainable agricultural practices. They stress the need for national and intergovernmental cooperation. Climate disasters require a coordinated, humane response. They underscore the fact that community wellness, especially mental health, depends on adequate resources, robust infrastructures capable of resisting future emergencies, and technological innovation.

In terms of reducing emissions from the oil and gas sector, as Senator Coyle mentioned, their recommendations highlight public transit and electrification.

I recently wrote to the Minister of Transport to point out that current funding still falls short when it comes to fully transitioning certain essential fleets, such as school buses. This issue directly concerns families, since it relates to the daily transportation of children and the quality of the air they breathe.

[*English*]

Climate risks also have far-reaching economic implications. Significant exposure to fossil fuel assets also raises concern for long-term financial security. Several young Canadians have argued before the courts that insufficient management of climate risk could jeopardize their retirement savings that the pension system is meant to protect. Should these assets lose value due to regulatory changes, market developments or legal action, pension funds could be among the most exposed, putting Canadians' retirement savings at risk.

In 2025, Canadians experienced an unprecedented range of extreme weather events, from nationwide wildfires to severe flooding. As the climate crisis intensifies, such disasters are occurring more frequently. The resulting damage shattered all previous records, with insured losses reaching \$9.2 billion in 2024. Yet this figure represents only the tip of the iceberg, as

[Senator Galvez]

uninsured losses are not fully captured and the burden on the most vulnerable often remains invisible. These risks are not abstract; they directly affect people in their daily lives.

[*Translation*]

Young people also recommend establishing a Canada-wide grid, stretching from east to west and north to south, powered by renewable sources, as well as improving industrial energy efficiency. They see interprovincial cooperation as an essential tool for enhancing resilience, particularly in a context where our neighbour's policies can change quickly and without notice.

Beyond infrastructure, young people are calling for environmental governance based on transparency, participation and justice. They want to be informed in advance, contribute meaningfully to decisions that shape their future and have rigorous accountability mechanisms in place.

They also feel very strongly about protecting the populations most exposed to environmental impacts, including young people, Indigenous Peoples, marginalized communities and workers who need to retrain.

[*English*]

Initiatives such as the proposed Youth Climate Corps could demonstrate that when we listen to young people, climate action can also create meaningful employment, strengthen community resilience and equip the next generation with the skills needed for a sustainable future. Their recommendations reflect this broader vision. They call for a truly independent Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development and for clear, accessible disclosure of corporate emissions.

They also advocate for an equitable transition that does not place disproportionate costs on consumers. Such a transition should be guided by up-to-date indicators, support independent local media, promote sustainable production in Canada and ensure transparent management of public funds. They further recommend integrating Traditional and Indigenous Knowledge into decision making. Finally, they emphasize inclusion. Citizens, especially young people, must participate in shaping their future.

What is striking, honourable senators, is that while the risks are severe, the solutions are within our reach. This assembly itself demonstrates that many measures already exist, though often fragmented, sometimes underfunded and too rarely coordinated. Our responsibility is to bring them together, strengthen them and act.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Galvez, your speaking time for this debate has expired. Are you asking for one more minute to finish?

Senator Galvez: Yes, I'm asking for one more minute.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, is leave granted?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Galvez, you may continue.

[*English*]

Senator Galvez: The youth climate bodies that will be established can become a source of hope and democratic trust. This assembly demonstrates that a genuine willingness to engage in dialogue and collaboration exists.

[*Translation*]

We have to listen to them, and we have to act. Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

(On motion of Senator Kingston, debate adjourned.)

[*English*]

VITAL ROLE OF IMMIGRANTS

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Tony Loffreda rose pursuant to notice of December 10, 2025:

That he will call the attention of the Senate to the vital role that immigrants have played — and continue to play — in shaping Canada's economic growth, cultural richness and social fabric.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to my inquiry calling the attention of the Senate to the vital role that immigrants have played — and continue to play — in shaping Canada's economic growth, cultural richness and social fabric.

This inquiry follows the important work initiated in 2020 by our former colleague, the Honourable Ratna Omidvar, who called the Senate's attention to the link between Canada's past, present and future prosperity and its deep connection to immigration.

An immigrant herself and a respected authority on this subject, Senator Omidvar founded the Senate's working group on immigration and led this conversation with clarity and conviction. I am proud to continue that work today and delighted that many senators have already shown interest in participating in this important national dialogue.

Immigration is not a secondary feature of Canada's success; it is one of its defining strengths. It is at the heart of most policy discussions and decisions in our country.

[*Translation*]

Our economic growth, our resilient workforce and our vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem are closely linked with the people who choose Canada as a place to build their lives. Immigrants fill important skill gaps, create companies at a solid pace and offer up international networks, new ideas and cultural perspectives that make our economy more competitive and innovative.

• (2050)

Statistics Canada regularly reports that Canada has one of the highest proportions of immigrants among developed countries. Immigrants are also more likely to own a business than persons born in Canada.

In a country that is dealing with a demographic crunch and an aging population, sustained immigration is not an option. In fact, it is essential if we want to maintain productivity, support public services and ensure that future generations will inherit a confident and flourishing nation.

[*English*]

Yet, in recent years, opposition to immigration has grown louder. Newcomers are sometimes portrayed as a strain rather than a strength. These arguments tend to isolate short-term pressures — housing comes to mind — while ignoring the long-term economic and social dividends immigration delivers.

More concerning still, rhetoric that frames immigration as a problem risks eroding the very social cohesion that distinguishes Canada. It is neither necessary nor helpful to pit communities against one another when history and evidence show that inclusive growth strengthens us all.

Canada's story is, at its core, a story of contribution. Immigrants do not simply participate in our economy; they shape it, and they expand it. They are job creators, innovators, community builders and leaders whose impact ripples across generations. Recognizing their achievements is not about dismissing challenges; it is about acknowledging where our true advantage lies.

[*Translation*]

By emphasizing the immense value that immigrants bring, we are reinforcing a message of confidence and unity. We know that Canada prospers when it welcomes, properly integrates and retains talent, ambition and determination from around the world.

Canadians recognize that immigration is a powerful driver of opportunity. In this broader context, I'd now like to present three concrete examples of entrepreneurial excellence within our immigrant community.

[*English*]

Canada's immigration system is designed to welcome newcomers who can contribute to our economy and strengthen our communities and country. I have seen this first-hand over my 35 years in the banking sector. I had the privilege of working alongside thousands of entrepreneurs. I have seen first-hand the risks they assume and the sacrifices they make. Business owners put everything on the line every single day.

Today, I wish to pay tribute to three outstanding Canadians of Italian, Hellenic and Armenian heritage, whose stories reflect resilience, vision and generosity.

First, the D'Argenio family of Laval. In 1950, Gerardo D'Argenio left post-war Italy aboard the ship *Argentina* and arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax on Christmas Eve with his mother.

Each was given \$5 before boarding a train to Montreal. Like so many newcomers, he carried little more than hope, something my own parents could relate to when they chose Canada from among so many other nations a decade later.

Deemed ineligible for the French school system and too old for the English one, Gerardo had little choice but to work, though still a teenager. He took on gruelling jobs, often outdoors in winter, and for years, worked two or three jobs at a time, six or seven days a week, to support his family.

Those early years were difficult for the family, as they are for most newcomers, but his perseverance paid off. Through perseverance and discipline, he eventually co-founded a modest automobile dealership in Laval, mortgaging everything he had. That enterprise grew into one of the largest and most respected BMW dealerships in the country, BMW Laval.

Today, it remains a family enterprise. His son Carmine serves as president, alongside the next generation of D'Argenios. The company employs more than 200 people and is deeply engaged in community philanthropy, supporting numerous charitable causes and organizations. For the D'Argenio family, success has not been measured solely in sales but in impact, in giving back to the country that has given them so much for so long.

As Carmine often says, lasting success is rooted in hard work, accountability and initiative. While support systems matter, personal responsibility and perseverance remain essential to both individual achievement and collective progress.

There is even a unique moment of national pride tied to this story. During the recent opening of Parliament, the blue BMW used by His Majesty King Charles III was provided by BMW Laval, a symbolic testament to how far one immigrant family has come.

The second story begins like the first, with parents who arrived with little but ambition. From Greece, the Mammás family came to Canada seeking opportunity. Their experience reflects that of countless immigrant families: work hard, raise children, integrate into the community and build something lasting. From this foundation emerged Peter Mammás.

Having grown up working in his family's restaurant business and gaining experience in operations, customer service and entrepreneurship, Peter learned early on the value of small business ownership as a pathway to opportunity and integration. In 2016, despite some challenges and financial hurdles, he successfully founded Foodtastic Inc. in Montreal with a clear objective: to build a Canadian platform that supports independent entrepreneurs and strengthens local communities.

Today, Foodtastic Inc. supports more than 25,000 jobs nationwide through a portfolio of well-known restaurant brands in urban, suburban and regional markets. Its system generates approximately \$1.2 billion in annual sales and sustains more than 1,000 franchised small businesses, many owned by first- or

second-generation immigrants. Canadians across the country know its brands: Second Cup, Milestones Grill and Bar, Freshii, Shoeless Joe's Sports Grill and Pita Pit, among others. Today, the business is global, operating in 17 other countries.

Through franchising, Foodtastic Inc. creates entry points into the workforce for newcomers and young Canadians alike. It invests in supply chains, real estate, construction and local partnerships, and its franchisees give back through charitable initiatives and food security programs in their communities.

Like the D'Argenio family, the Mammás family story illustrates how immigrant entrepreneurship multiplies opportunity, not only for one family, but for thousands.

The third story begins in very different circumstances. In August 1975, as civil war engulfed Lebanon, the Afeyan family arrived in Canada as refugees with their children still in high school. They came seeking safety and stability and found in Canada the chance to rebuild. Like so many newcomers, they brought little with them except determination, resilience and profound gratitude to the country that welcomed them.

Soon after settling, the family launched a business. What began as an import venture evolved into manufacturing. At just 18 years old, Levon Afeyan joined the family enterprise while attending CEGEP in Quebec. By 1981, the family had established a manufacturing operation producing vinyl-upholstered cushions for the chair industry. They soon expanded into curved plywood production, earning a reputation for technical excellence and innovation.

In 1994, Levon took over the business known today as Seatply. Under his leadership, the company pursued an ambitious growth strategy. Through sustained investment in technology and research and development, it became the largest producer of its kind in Canada. It expanded into U.S. markets, and by 2025, more than 65% of its sales were exported to the United States and Mexico.

Growth did not come at the expense of the community. The company acquired and revitalized struggling Quebec manufacturers in 2018 and 2020, preserving jobs and expanding its overall operations to 160,000 square feet, with more than 150 employees. In 2021, it also stepped in to save a veneer mill in Lac-Mégantic, protecting 100 jobs and sustaining a century-old industrial legacy.

Equally important is its human impact. Over the decades, it has hired and trained individuals with limited skills, offering stable employment and dignity. In 2015, when thousands of Syrian refugees arrived in Canada, the company welcomed more than 40 into its workforce, many of whom continue to thrive today.

From automotive retail to national restaurant franchising to advanced manufacturing and export leadership, these three stories span sectors, generations and origins. Yet, they share common threads: risk, perseverance, innovation and, most of all, gratitude.

• (2100)

It is a testament to what is possible when Canada opens its doors and its hearts, and when newcomers repay that trust many times over.

Honourable senators, these families did not simply build businesses. They created thousands of jobs. They invested in research, expanded into international markets, revitalized industries and strengthened local communities. They trained young workers and welcomed newcomers into their workplaces. Their success multiplied across generations. Their stories are not isolated. Throughout the country, in each of our communities, there are similar stories that remind us what Canada is all about: kindness, openness and fairness.

[*Translation*]

They prove to us that immigration is not an abstract political debate, but a living force that shapes our economy and strengthens our communities every day. Immigrant journeys remind us that immigration serves to renew Canada's promise. It serves to ensure that talent, courage, and hard work continue to find fertile ground here.

If we aspire to remain economically strong, socially cohesive and confident in our future, then we must remain a country that believes in the power of immigration. Canada succeeds when we open our doors and those who walk through them build, give back, and help write the next chapter of our shared history.

I will leave you with one final thought.

[*English*]

In the spirit of the Olympic Games, one of our beloved Canadian artists reminded us during a recent Canadian Olympic piece that "family isn't just by name. It's a lasting flame."

I would add: In Canada, family is also forged through citizenship. It is built in classrooms and on factory floors, in boardrooms and on main streets. It is built by those who arrive with little but hope and who, through determination, help shape a stronger nation for us all.

Ask the D'Argenio family. Ask the Mammass family. Ask the Afeyan family. Ask the Loffreda family for that matter. Ask millions of Canadians whose stories began somewhere else. When asked who they are, their answer would not be hyphenated or hesitant. It would be clear, proud and loud: They are Canadian.

Thank you. *Grazie*.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Will Senator Loffreda take a question?

The Hon. the Speaker: I just wanted to mention there are only about 35 seconds left, so it has to be brief, unless Senator Loffreda will ask for more time.

Senator Loffreda: I ask for more time, as there will be probably more questions.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Housakos: I do understand and appreciate it's a late hour. My question will be brief, and I will try to elicit a brief response.

I listened to your speech very carefully. I share, obviously, many of the values and principles you articulated because the story doesn't apply only to the Mammass family and the Loffreda family, but the Housakos family as well. My parents came in the 1950s. We both represent constituencies back in the Greater Montreal area that come from that background, that history.

When I go back and speak to those immigrants who came in the 1950s — and, unfortunately, many of those Canadians and Quebecers are passing on; they are getting of a certain age — they lament today that this is not the country that they inherited or that they came to full of promise and hope, as you articulated in your speech. One after another, they have a sense of resentment where they say — and you have heard it; we have gone to the same cocktail parties. It doesn't matter if it's Peter and Lawrence's father or my father or anybody else. They say, "When we came to this great country, we had no security or safety nets. We had no free medicare. We had no welfare. When we got to Pier 21, we had to prove to the Government of Canada before we got to Pier 21 that what was waiting for us was a job and a commitment to work hard to fulfill that Canadian promise."

A lot of these Canadians now have come to a certain age, and they are saying, "Why are we entitling people to services they have paid nothing to gain? When we came to this country and laid the foundations and built up, we never wanted any hand down."

What do you have to say about that?

Senator Loffreda: Senator Housakos, thank you for your question. Yes, I'm proud of your family, too, which came here, and very proud of what you accomplished. I hear it all the time in your community, so congratulations on that.

I said it in my speech. Canada's immigration system is designed or was designed to welcome newcomers who can contribute to our economy and strengthen our communities and country.

I have given you proof that this was the case, and that should be the case going forward. It is up to us parliamentarians, at the House of Commons and here in the Senate, to ascertain and make sure that Canada remains a strong country where newcomers are

welcomed, where we support them and where we choose the proper immigrants who will make our country stronger and better.

Senator Simons once gave a quote — her favourite Canadian was Leonard Cohen. I can't say it as well as Leonard Cohen or as well as Senator Simons, but it says no system is perfect:

There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in

I think we don't have to lose hope. We have to keep trying and working hard. It is up to us parliamentarians to ascertain that that continues. Stories like these continue making Canada a great nation. Thank you for your question.

(On motion of Senator Kingston, debate adjourned.)

(At 9:06 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.)

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