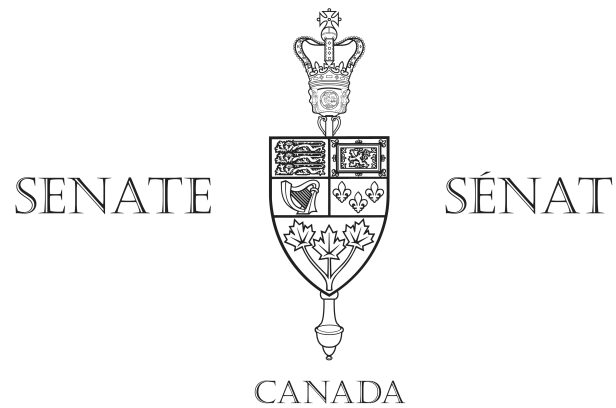




DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION



45th PARLIAMENT



VOLUME 154



NUMBER 53

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 25, 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

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

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

[English]

Prayers.

[Translation]

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable colleagues,

Today we celebrate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Library of Parliament building, a lasting symbol of knowledge.

Completed in 1876, this iconic building has been at the heart of our democracy for a century and a half, representing not only knowledge but also resilience.

The Library of Parliament is one of the finest examples of Gothic revival architecture in Canada. Its slender dome, fine wood sculptures and distinctive circular shape make this place both majestic and functional. It is a place that reflects the dignity of Parliament itself.

Spared during the devastating fire of 1916 that destroyed the original Parliament Building, the Library remains a living testament to the continuity of our democratic institutions.

Our Library is more than stone and wood. It is a beacon of information, connecting people, ideas and possibilities across time and space.

For over 150 years, the Library of Parliament has provided critical support to parliamentarians. We turn to the Library for resources, research and analysis to inform our legislative work.

As we celebrate this milestone, let us remember not only the building itself, but also the important work the institution does in service of Parliament.

Its collections, its expertise and its support ensure that we, as parliamentarians, are equipped to make decisions that serve Canada today and for generations to come.

In a time of rapid change and complex challenges, the constant presence of the Library of Parliament reminds us that thoughtful reflection remains at the heart of our public life.

May this remarkable institution continue to shine as a beacon of knowledge, resilience and service for generations to come.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Christine Ivory, Parliamentary Librarian, and her senior management team, who are present for the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Library of Parliament.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

THE LATE HONOURABLE TERRY STRATTON

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today with a heavy heart, on behalf of the Senate Conservative caucus, to mark the passing of the Honourable Terry Stratton, a friend and former colleague whose life was a master class in service.

Those of us who had the privilege to serve alongside Terry will agree that he belonged to a generation of public servants that is becoming increasingly rare.

While many years have passed since he last sat in one of these desks, his reputation as a statesman never faded. He was a bridge to an era of decorum and grit, a man who understood that his primary duty was to the integrity of this institution and the democratic process it represents.

Senator Stratton was more than a member of our Conservative caucus. He was a proud Conservative in the truest sense of the word: principled, steady and guided by a profound belief in responsibility, service and country.

As my colleague Senator Plett recently reminded me, Terry was one of the finest campaigners many of us have ever known. He was a man of few words, but he lived by example. Even in his seventies, he routinely outworked all of us out in the field, putting up signs for our team with a level of energy that put younger members to shame.

Terry arrived in this chamber in 1993, appointed by the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney. He brought with him the grit of a businessman, the patience of a teacher and the soul of a true Manitoban.

Terry's love for Manitoba was the pulse of his work. He didn't just represent the province; he championed the values of the prairie kitchen table: fiscal sanity, the dignity of hard work and an unshakeable belief that you leave things better than you found them.

He carried that same prairie pragmatism into the engine room of our caucuses, where he became an indispensable pillar of this institution. Whether serving as Opposition Whip, Deputy Leader of the Opposition or later as Government Whip, he navigated the complexities of this chamber with a steady hand and earned the respect of colleagues across party lines. He understood that, while political battles are fought on the field, the integrity of the Senate must always be protected.

On a personal note, many of us will remember his quiet humour, his wise counsel and his unwavering loyalty. He carried himself with dignity, he treated others with respect, and he strengthened this institution through both his conviction and his character.

I remember the whip from time to time would tell me, "Senator Housakos, it might not be pleasant, but it is necessary."

On behalf of Senate Conservatives, I extend heartfelt condolences to his children, Mark, Shannon and Geoffrey, his grandchildren and the love of his life, Marie.

Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES 2026

Hon. Chantal Petitclerc: Honourable senators, I am sure you will agree that the 16 days in Milano Cortina did us good. We experienced some magical moments when everyone across the country seemed to be looking in the same direction and smiling at the same time.

[English]

Honourable senators, I don't know about you, but I felt it. These games pulled us together. For a couple of weeks, Canada was cheering with one heartbeat.

[Translation]

Our athletes gave us plenty of reasons to feel proud by bringing home a total of 21 medals: five gold, seven silver and nine bronze.

What stands out most in my mind are the stories, the comebacks after injury, the refusal to give up, the surprises and the tears of joy.

What can we say about our flag bearers at the closing ceremony, Valérie Maltais and Steven Dubois? That was high performance at its best. This is an example of two different paths

leading to the same place: When you continue to move forward even when things get tough, you end up inspiring an entire country.

• (1410)

[English]

That is the power of sport. It is never just about medals. It is about what we learn from the people who chase excellence. It is about what it does to a kid who is watching, cheering, thinking, "Hmm, maybe I can do that, too. Why not me?" And that is priceless.

[Translation]

I would like to say one thing that has often been repeated over the past few days. If we want to stay at this level, we need a properly functioning sports system. Safe, inclusive, barrier-free sport is not something that can be improvised. We need stable support and proper funding, from playground to podium.

[English]

Because pay-to-play should not be the price of representing Canada. If we want more podium and, most importantly, more participation all across, we need to commit and invest.

[Translation]

Today, we are celebrating.

[English]

Today, we say to all the athletes, coaches and support teams, "Bravo, and thank you!" You made us proud, but it's not over yet.

[Translation]

We are not putting our flags away just yet. Now, we are getting ready to cheer on our Paralympic athletes who will once again deliver incredible performances and teach us about resilience, creativity, determination and excellence.

[English]

Let's get ready now for the Paralympic Games. Let's show up, loud and proud, and keep building a Canada where everyone gets a real chance to belong and to excel.

Thank you.

[Translation]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of members of the management team of the Women's Health Coalition of Canada. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Henkel.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

WOMEN'S HEALTH FORUM ON PARLIAMENT HILL

Hon. Danièle Henkel: Honourable senators, today and tomorrow, Parliament Hill is hosting a national forum on women's health, which I organized following the tabling of Bill S-243, a bill that seeks to establish a national framework for women's health. The forum's objective is clear: to inform and provide tools to parliamentarians on an issue of that, although it concerns over half of Canada's population, remains poorly coordinated and too often neglected among our legislative priorities.

[English]

Hundreds of experts, clinicians, researchers, entrepreneurs and community leaders are coming from coast to coast to coast to meet with us parliamentarians. They bring a wealth of knowledge, talent and expertise. They call for more coordination and oversight. That is precisely why Bill S-243 was introduced — to remedy these issues and to ensure accountability to Parliament. We know that collaboration, coherence and partnership are essential to achieving lasting progress.

Canada prides itself on being a leader of diversity, equity and inclusion. Here is the perfect opportunity to prove it. Colleagues, your presence will send a powerful message to all women across this country that their voices are being heard.

[Translation]

All of these women's health stakeholders are coming here to share their expertise, their solutions and a lot of hope. It's an opportunity for us to ask questions, understand the issues, grasp the system's complexity and act accordingly.

I want to commend the commitment of everyone who is taking the time to be here today and tomorrow. Their attendance is no token gesture; it's an act of public service.

I also want to thank the Women's Health Coalition whose relentless national engagement work has made this forum possible. Colleagues, I urge you to join us.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[English]

GRAIN GROWERS OF CANADA

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, I rise today in the chamber to celebrate the Grain Growers of Canada, who are celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary this year.

This important agricultural organization brings together a number of national, provincial and regional member organizations from across the country, representing a unified voice for the Canadian grain sector. For 25 years, they have represented their members through advocacy and leadership,

championing the way for the grain sector's competitiveness and long-term viability and advancing policy grounded in on-farm realities.

Honourable colleagues, I cannot recognize the significant efforts of Grain Growers of Canada without recognizing the robust and high-performing grain industry that makes up this organization. Canadian grains are as varied as our landscape, and the sector is widely respected around the world for consistently delivering high-quality dependable crops.

In fact, grains are broken down into three groups: cereals, oilseeds and pulses. Cereals would include much of what you think of when you hear "grains" — wheat, barley, oats — which are critical to domestic and international food systems. Oilseeds include canola, soybeans and flax — extremely versatile crops that are used in processed foods and livestock feeds. Finally, pulses include peas, lentils, chickpeas and dried beans, which are not only good for your diet but also good for the planet.

I think it is clear to every one of us that grains include an extremely vast and varied group of foods that are all staples in many of our kitchens at home and in homes around the world.

Did you know that our grains sector generates \$45 billion in annual exports and is one of the top five global exporters of grain?

By advocating for many of our Canadian grain farmers across the country, Grain Growers of Canada is key to protecting our country's food sovereignty and economic success. I have met with representatives of Grain Growers of Canada many times, and they do a great job advocating for their sector and driving positive change on important issues that are impacting their sector.

Representing over 100,000 producers and 120 million acres of farmland across this country, Grain Growers of Canada has played a central role in ensuring that our grain sector remains strong and reliable as a competitor on the global stage for the past 25 years. Through its advocacy, leadership and commitment to innovation, Grain Growers of Canada helps position Canadian growers for long-term success in an increasingly competitive international market.

Honourable colleagues, please join me in congratulating Grain Growers of Canada on celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary and thanking all Canadian grain farmers, including our own Senator Todd Lewis, for their and his continued dedication to feeding our country and our world.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EDUCATORS' CONFERENCE

Hon. Marty Deacon: Honourable senators, last week, while still cheering on Team Canada, I had the opportunity to travel to Yellowknife to speak to educators for the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association conference, rescheduled from the pandemic days three years ago.

It was a very informative four days. Anytime we have a chance to listen and learn from different corners of our country is a good day.

The sessions for the almost 1,000 educators in attendance were a powerful opportunity to learn about the issues, the priorities and the vulnerabilities of the Northwest Territories. Some of the topics included engaging the next generation of youth in treaty negotiation, done through an innovative Treaty Simulation program; supporting trans and binary students; the use of rapidly evolving technology in the classroom, with an emphasis on how to approach generative AI and the usefulness of virtual learning in northern communities; really innovative STEM strategies; empowering students through climate education with a unique northern approach; and using the land as story: connecting to the land through literature and literacy.

The opening speaker, the Storyteller-in-Residence at the University of Victoria, Richard Van Camp, was a highlight for me and many in attendance. He spoke to generational trauma, residential schools and the diversity of learners in northern schools. He addressed his short film entitled *Three Feathers*. This dramatic feature film is based on his novel and was set and filmed in the Northwest Territories and is the only known film in the world produced in four languages simultaneously: English, Cree, Chipewyan and South Slavey.

Dr. Astrid Kendrick from the University of Calgary spoke to compassion, fatigue and burnout, something to think about. It was very interesting, particularly post-COVID. She asked us three questions, which I pose to senators and staff today: What are three emotions you openly display while at the Senate? What are three emotions you hide or regulate when at the Senate? Why do you either show or hide these emotions? I think it is some food for our thought.

• (1420)

Outside it was a deep freeze with daily temperatures of -56 degrees. However, we did manage to cross-country ski and snowshoe on Great Slave Lake, climb the famous Pilot's Monument, drive those cool ice roads and see some incredible work being done building snow castles — wood frames and all — which were being built for a festival beginning in March.

An unexpected bonus for me was an informal meeting with the Canadian Armed Forces leaders who were “in the neighbourhood” as they conducted significant high-readiness winter training, officially called Op NA-NU 26, focusing on Arctic sovereignty and northern defence. I also saw the newly minted tactical unit just received by the local RCMP — so new that although they can open and close it, they are waiting for training to be able to actually use it.

As many of you know, there is so much happening in the North, and I will always jump at the opportunity to travel and learn there.

Thank you to Trent, Marnie, Lorealea and the team for organizing the trip, and for letting me be a part of this informative week.

Thank you, *meegwetch*.

[Senator Deacon (Ontario)]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Teara Fraser, the first Indigenous woman to found an airline in Canada, Iskwew Air; and Anita Pawluk, founding Chief Executive Officer of RaceRocks 3D, a Certified Indigenous Business offering technology-enabled learning. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator McPhedran.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: Honourable senators, this is a tribute to our Black senators.

I also want to acknowledge that Anugo, the new parliamentary adviser with whom I have the privilege of working, took the lead on drafting this tribute.

To the senators, this is for you.

Black History Month causes this chamber to reflect on the contributions and the impact of the sacred work carried on by Black senators. We honour and give gratitude to your ancestors, celebrating their perseverance and tenacity, and their dedication to the path they set on which you, as living ancestors, continue to walk.

This is a celebration of your strength to push through tough barriers to ensure others behind you get to experience a better future; your determination and commitment to community building, innovation, politics and more, which add to the continuous building and strengthening of our country; your achievements across diverse sectors, while also acknowledging that you have a call to action to deconstruct systemic barriers that are still in place; and your tenacity to contribute to transformation in the Red Chamber, new beginnings, growth, shifts and change for us all.

This is for your strength in speaking the truth, especially when it would have been easier not to, the compromises you no longer make, the ways you show our youth to know their worth and the beauty in not staying the same.

We still live in a world that experiences different forms of injustice, racism and discrimination today. This is for the bridges you built, the hills you climbed and the difficult paths you had the strength to choose.

Collectively, we can continue to work with you to make Canada a place hospitable to the dreams of many individuals who, in turn, will add value to our country and lead us all to grow in ways bigger than we can imagine.

Honouring Black History Month sincerely, and recognizing the legacy it carries, will help us to move forward together.

Thank you for giving me this great opportunity.
Kinanaskomitinawow.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

STRENGTHENING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM AND BORDERS BILL

SECOND REPORT OF NATIONAL SECURITY, DEFENCE AND
VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Hon. Hassan Yussuff, Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs, presented the following report:

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

The Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs has the honour to present its

SECOND REPORT

Your committee, to which was referred 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, 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,

HASSAN YUSSUFF

Chair

(For text of observations, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 662.)

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

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

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO CALL ON GOVERNMENT TO URGE THE COALITION OF THE WILLING TO PROVIDE UKRAINE WITH THE TOOLS TO END THE WAR AND ENSURE A MEANINGFUL PEACE

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

That the Senate call on the Government of Canada to act quickly and resolutely to urge the Coalition of the Willing to provide Ukraine with the tools that it needs to end the war and ensure a meaningful peace.

[Translation]

QUESTION PERIOD

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

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

Senator Moreau, we're learning that your government has transformed the asylum system into a simple paper-sorting operation. Since 2019, tens of thousands of claims have been processed without hearings, without meetings and without any contact with officials. Over 25,000 people coming from dangerous countries obtained refugee status without ever having met with or been interviewed by our officials.

There is only one way to describe it: sheer negligence. Even more worrisome, a former official from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada said that security requirements were set aside because the system was overwhelmed. Senator Moreau, did your government willingly relax the screening procedures in order to conceal a significant backlog that it had itself created? Who is taking responsibility for this?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, Senator Housakos.

• (1430)

The government is committed to providing Canadians with an immigration system that ensures the safety of all Canadians and that thoroughly screens individuals seeking refugee status or asylum in Canada.

We will work very hard to strengthen Canada's immigration system, and I thank our colleagues who worked on Bill C-12.

No one is getting a free pass. In some cases, refugees who are in extremely difficult situations and pose no danger may be given more direct access, but in every instance, security screening is carried out by border officials before these individuals are allowed to leave the port of entry.

Senator Housakos: It took 10 years for Bill C-12 to reach the Senate of Canada. This file has been passed from one incompetent minister to another, each one worse than the last. Community organizations can't even reach Minister Diab. Even some of your Liberal colleagues are saying that she's unavailable.

When will the government assume its responsibilities? When will you get this under control and restore credibility to Canada's immigration system?

Senator Moreau: I believe the government is making considerable efforts, as evidenced by the insistence with which questions were put to officials from the Department of Immigration when Bill C-12 was being studied.

I was at the standing committee just two days ago. All the questions that needed to be asked were asked to reassure us that the system is working and that the improvements we wanted to make will indeed keep Canadians safe.

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

EXPORT OF LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, for over a decade, your Liberal government has been telling Canadians there's no business case for LNG, or liquefied natural gas, and no need for LNG infrastructure in this country. During that period, the United States increased its LNG exports from roughly 500 million cubic feet per day to more than 15 billion cubic feet per day in 2025, becoming the world's largest exporter of LNG energy.

Senator Moreau, Canada is home to one of the largest natural gas reserves in the world, yet our overseas shipment of Canadian LNG occurred only seven months ago. Why has your government dismissed the business case for Canadian LNG for over a decade now, putting us in the hole and behind other competitors? Now, all of a sudden, we are being boxed out of the international market.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): The Government of Canada has launched the new Major Projects Office as part of the Building Canada Act. This office will serve as a single point of contact for government proponents and Indigenous communities to submit their proposals for nation-building projects that will grow and transform Canada's economy. As far as the government is concerned, if LNG proposals are to be included as major projects, they will have to follow the path of the office that has been put in place.

[Senator Moreau]

Senator Housakos: Your government often speaks about trade diversification in the Indo-Pacific and deeper economic integration with Europe. Meanwhile, more than 76% of U.S. LNG exports are destined for Europe and Asia. Why should Canadians have confidence in this new Liberal government and its ability to position Canada as a serious LNG exporter when all the old Liberal government ministers who questioned the business case for LNG are still sitting in the Prime Minister's cabinet to this day? They denied the investment case for a decade and are now attempting to champion Canadian LNG. You have to —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator Housakos.

[English]

Senator Moreau: I think that the business case of the Prime Minister concerning trade diversification is very good. As a matter of fact, the Prime Minister has signed 12 new strategic agreements across four continents, opening up 2.2 billion new customers for Canadian businesses. We have new free trade deals with Ecuador and Indonesia, a defence procurement agreement with the European Union, a critical mineral agreement with Germany and a new strategic partnership with China. Don't you think that somebody in the LNG world will think that those agreements —

[Translation]

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

[English]

FINANCE

COST OF LIVING

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Senator Moreau, the Bank of Canada's Canadian Survey of Consumer Expectations for the fourth quarter of 2025 shows that Canadians have a higher likelihood of missing debt payments and growing concerns under financial health. Many households are worried about their ability to make ends meet amid high prices, economic uncertainty and concerns over job security.

These trends suggest growing financial strain on households that could have broader implications for economic stability and consumer spending. Can the government advise the Senate what targeted measures it is taking to support Canadians' financial health, help households manage and reduce debt burdens and ensure that families are better safeguarded against financial distress?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): The short answer would be that there are many targeted measures, Senator Loffreda. Thank you for raising the question.

Since taking office, the Prime Minister has delivered tax relief for 22 million Canadians — our friends on the other side voted against those measures — eliminated the consumer carbon tax, protected pharmacare and dental care, expanded child care, made it easier to access the Disability Tax Credit and delivered targeted relief to help Canadians manage the cost of groceries.

The government is aware that there is a problem, and it is putting forward solutions.

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for that answer and for the specific details. Hopefully, we will see a lot more of those solutions coming forward.

Senator Moreau, what assessment has the government made of the potential systemic risks that these trends pose to Canada's broader financial system and housing market? Specifically, how is the government monitoring rising delinquencies and excessive household indebtedness? What safeguards are in place to prevent these issues from evolving into wider economic instability?

Senator Moreau: The first part of your supplemental was about what we will see in the future. We will see Bill C-4, which cuts GST for first-time home buyers; Bill C-15, which invests \$57 billion in affordable child care; and Bill C-20, which invests \$13 billion for new housing.

That being said, the government is also focusing on the root of the issue by boosting productivity and income through measures like the productivity super-deduction, increased financing for small businesses and enhanced support for innovation.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

EXPORTS TO ISRAEL

Hon. Yuen Pau Woo: Senator Moreau, we are learning from the CBC and independent journalists at *The Maple* that the Canadian Commercial Corporation is doing due diligence regarding its support for Canadian companies that may be providing arms and materiel to the United States that is then shipped to Israel for Israel's atrocities in Gaza.

In particular, they are focusing on a company called General Dynamics, which is known to have a contract with the U.S. Department of Defense to supply propellant for use in deadly howitzers. We know that these howitzers are sold on to Israel and other places. The information has been conveyed to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs — I believe that was Minister LeBlanc at the time — and Global Affairs is aware of it as well.

Can you tell us if the government is aware of whether General Dynamics supplied propellant to Americans at any time in 2024 or 2025?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I was following the news as you were, Senator Woo. Yesterday, Minister LeBlanc was here. It would have been a

good idea to ask him the question, but I checked with the department and the answer is the same one I gave you when you raised that question before.

Canada has not approved any new permits for items to Israel that could be used in the current conflict in Gaza since January 8, 2024, and no new permits have been issued to authorize such a trade.

Senator Woo: Senator Moreau, that is a deflection because you know full well that there's an exemption for exports to the U.S. So I will ask the question again, and I ask for a specific answer, if not from you then from the government.

Are you aware if General Dynamics sold propellant to the U.S. Department of Defense or any U.S. military supplier in 2024 or 2025, under the exception in Canadian law that permits doing so?

Senator Moreau: The answer is the same. In 2024, Canada suspended approximately 30 export permits for items destined for Israel that could have been incorporated into items used in Gaza, and all permits suspended in 2024 remain suspended and cannot be used to export to Israel. Also, I've been told that no such exports have been made since January 8, 2024.

• (1440)

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRATION

Hon. Réjean Aucoin: Senator Moreau, according to cumulative data from January to November for each of the years compared, francophone immigration to Nova Scotia fell from 795 admissions in 2022 to 350 in 2023, then to 250 in 2024 and 260 in 2025. Even when comparing equivalent periods, the decline remains significant and persistent. This represents a decrease of more than 65% in three years.

How does the government explain such a sharp decline, and does it recognize that this is jeopardizing the vitality of the province's Acadian and francophone communities?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): The government does indeed recognize that there's been a decline in the number of francophones outside Quebec. This is one of the reasons why the Official Languages Act was recently modernized. You were here when we welcomed the new Commissioner of Official Languages.

The act provides for a clear government-wide commitment to restore and increase the demographic weight of francophones outside Quebec. More specifically, it requires Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to implement a specific policy on francophone immigration to support the growth and development of these communities across the country.

The government remains committed to protecting and strengthening francophone minority communities across Canada, including in your region, senator.

Senator Aucoin: Senator Moreau, I'm very concerned about this issue since I live in the francophone minority community of Chéticamp. What specific and targeted measures does the government intend to put in place?

You made broad statements about the act, but could the government increase francophone immigration levels in Nova Scotia?

Senator Moreau: The government made changes to its immigration policy by welcoming skilled francophone immigrants through the Express Entry system and francophone immigration pilot projects. The government met and even sometimes exceeded its francophone immigration targets outside Quebec for four consecutive years. The goal is to reach a 12% target of francophone immigrants by 2029 in order to counter the demographic decline and increase the proportion of francophones, including in Nova Scotia.

[English]

CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

SETTLEMENT OF CLAIMS

Hon. Tracy Muggli: Senator Moreau, last fall, I met with a delegation from the Cowessess First Nation led by Chief Erica Beaudin. They were in Ottawa to discuss a settlement to their claim. For context, they asserted that, in 1907, the Crown illegally disposed of land reserved for the Cowessess without their consent.

Six years ago, in early 2020, the government agreed to negotiate a settlement. I understand that a government negotiator and the First Nation came to an agreement on a verbal offer in 2023, yet today, in 2026, it has yet to be formalized. What is happening?

Senator Moreau, what should I tell Chief Beaudin and other Cowessess members the next time I see them? How much longer should those folks wait before this informal agreement is formalized and their claim is resolved?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I'm not sure you will be satisfied with the answer, but I'll give it my best shot.

The government remains committed to honouring its treaty obligations and resolving specific claims, including with the Cowessess First Nation. Given current fiscal pressure, decisions on high-value claims require careful consideration and approvals, which can take additional time.

While I cannot speak on the specifics due to confidentiality in the mandating process, negotiations are ongoing and the government remains committed to reaching a solution rapidly.

[Senator Moreau]

Senator Muggli: Senator Moreau, Chief Beaudin and the councillors have been working on this for years. They are on the fourth Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations since these negotiations started.

Would it be possible to get a more detailed explanation from the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, as well as the Minister of Finance and the President of the Treasury Board, on exactly where things stand with respect to resolving this claim?

More broadly, what is the government's path forward for all other First Nations in Saskatchewan dealing with significant delays in resolving their claims?

Senator Moreau: The government recognizes, senator, concerns around delays and is working with First Nation partners to improve the efficiency and timelines of claim processes.

The government's focus remains on advancing fair, timely and negotiated settlements for First Nations in Saskatchewan, as well as anywhere else around the country.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

REGISTRATION OF CANADIANS ABROAD

Hon. Mary Coyle: Senator Moreau, recent violent events in Mexico's Jalisco state, the location of Puerto Vallarta, have impacted local residents and thousands of Canadian tourists.

At Monday's briefing on the situation, parliamentarians were told there had been some glitches but the registration system for Canadians was up and running and timely information was being provided.

One Canadian speaking to CBC said he had been registered for years with Global Affairs in Mexico but did not hear anything. Others said, "The website sucked. It kept crashing and had outdated information."

Senator Moreau, why did the government not have a reliable system in place to ensure Canadians were able to get the timely information they needed during this dangerous situation?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Global Affairs Canada had emitted a warning message to Canadians who were in this Mexican region following the rise in violence on February 22. Also, Canadian consular services in Mexico received and answered over 2,000 calls from Canadians during these events.

While I cannot comment on specific cases, in rapidly evolving situations, systems can come under pressure. Minister Anand, as you mentioned, is giving her attention to the potential kinks in the communications system.

Those who had difficulty communicating with Global Affairs were later contacted, and we understand that they are doing well.

Senator Coyle: There was a lot of dissatisfaction. It was a dangerous situation. We must do better.

Senator Moreau, what will the government do to learn from the problems with our response to the situation in Mexico so that Global Affairs will be better prepared to support Canadians abroad when there is another situation with spontaneous civil unrest in the future?

Senator Moreau: There are many parts to my answer. When an urgent situation like this occurs, where you are answering 2,000 calls in a very short period of time, the systems are sometimes not able to keep up.

This being said, there are many criteria around creating the range of recommendations and warnings from Global Affairs, from normal security precautions to warnings to avoid all travel.

Diplomatic services are on the ground monitoring the situation and keeping the government updated as it evolves.

HOUSING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS

Hon. Paul (PJ) Prosper: Senator Moreau, for a year and a half, the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre in Halifax was repeatedly assured by the government that they would receive a contribution from the Green and Inclusive Community Buildings Program, or GICB, for their new centre. However, earlier this month, a form letter denied them funding without explanation.

Two weeks ago, the parliamentary secretary to Minister Robertson informed the centre that money could now be accessed through the Build Communities Strong Fund, or BCSF. However, details are not available, and the timing is unclear. Meanwhile, the centre's construction is well advanced and might need to be downsized.

Senator Moreau, what is the timeline for the transition between GICB and BCSF, and what measures are in place to ensure that the transition between these programs does not inadvertently compromise —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Moreau?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, Senator Prosper. You were kind enough to advise me of the question. Despite my best efforts, I cannot provide you a specific timeline.

I understand that the parliamentary secretary of Minister Robertson was informed that the money would now be accessed through another program. I will raise your question to the department again. I will provide you with a timeline as soon as I have the information proper because, at this time, I have no specific answer to your question.

Senator Prosper: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

Of the 9,500 clients serviced annually by the Friendship Centre, 2,500 receive primary care and mental health services. These services will be permanently cut if funding cannot be secured by the end of the fiscal year.

• (1450)

Would your government consider establishing interim bridge financing mechanisms for Indigenous-led infrastructure projects like this one as referenced?

Senator Moreau: I cannot speak to the government's intention on funding agreements going forward, such as interim bridge financing, but over the past five years, Canada has invested over \$3.5 billion to support Indigenous-led mental health programs.

The government is aware of the situation and the importance of bringing proper financing to those programs. Again, I will raise that situation with the minister, and I will get back to you as soon as I can.

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES POLICY

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Senator Moreau, I learned that, nine times out of ten, the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline answers in English, even when the callers explicitly request service in French and even though this hotline claims to offer services in both official languages. This investigation was conducted by the Coalition québécoise contre la traite des personnes after a number of complaints. This is rather appalling considering that this federally funded hotline claims to be bilingual.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your excellent question, senator.

As you know, the hotline in question is not a federal organization, but it is funded by the federal government. The federal government expects the services to be provided in both official languages, French and English. The government certainly expects these services to be provided. I will raise the issue with the department. I assure you that I will personally insist that the department follow up on your question and I will inform you of the results.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: Your answer is greatly appreciated, Senator Moreau, because this lack of services in French means that French-speaking trafficking victims cannot get immediate assistance in their own language when they are in desperate need of it. This also skews the data because the statistics do not include many distress calls from Quebec and French-speaking Canadians.

Senator Moreau: As a French speaker myself, I believe it is the federal government's duty to ensure that the services are provided in French and English. This is a matter of principle for the government, and it is even more important in the case you raised, since we are talking about victims.

Thank you for bringing this up.

[English]

FINANCE

TAX FAIRNESS

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: I have a question for Senator Moreau. The world is in the grip of the virus of inequality. International evidence shows tax systems can either reduce or worsen inequality depending on design, and some governments are increasingly considering wealth-based taxation as part of the reforms to try to narrow the gap between the very rich and those who are not. Will the government commit to a formal review of wealth taxation options and report back to Parliament?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): You are very well aware, Senator McPhedran, that I cannot answer this question because I cannot speak for the government on those issues.

Thank you for raising the question. If our Question Period is being heard outside this building, those who are able to answer the question will be following it.

Senator McPhedran: Senator Moreau, I have just a quick supplementary question to that. The 2025 Parliamentary Budget Officer reported that wealth inequality is growing in Canada, with the top 1% holding about a quarter of Canada's wealth, while many Canadians struggle with housing and basic food costs.

Oxfam Canada estimates a wealth tax on fortunes over \$10 million could raise \$120 billion. Could you please report back on whether the government is considering wealth tax options?

Senator Moreau: I'll take your question as a commentary, and I will certainly make the follow-up. I will see if I have something to report on your question.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Iris G. Petten (Acting Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 4-12(3), I would like to inform the Senate that as we proceed with Government Business, the Senate

will address the items in the following order: Motion No. 52, followed by Motion No. 49, followed by all remaining items in the order that they appear on the Order Paper.

THE SENATE

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

Hon. Iris G. Petten (Acting Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate), pursuant to notice of February 24, 2026, moved:

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.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

MOTION TO EXTEND SITTING ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026, AND AUTHORIZE COMMITTEES TO MEET DURING SITTING OF THE SENATE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

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

That, notwithstanding the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, the sitting of Wednesday, February 25, 2026, continue beyond 4 p.m., if Government Business is not completed, and be adjourned at the later of the completion of Government Business or 4 p.m.; and

That committees of the Senate scheduled to meet on that day be authorized to meet after 4 p.m., even though the Senate may then be sitting, with rule 12-18(1) being suspended in relation thereto.

Hon. Pierrette Ringuette: Honourable senators, I don't rise often in this chamber, but on this one I must.

I object to this motion. I understand the urgency that you see in moving Bill C-4 forward. However, each and every one of us has a constitutional duty of providing sober second thought to government bills, and this is a government bill.

Even if we accept this motion to extend for two hours, most of us have a committee at 4:15 p.m., and, therefore, we would not be here to listen and maybe even intervene on crucial elements of this government bill, thus depriving us of our privilege of sober second thought. That's very important.

One may say that committees can be cancelled or can move forward anyway. Well, if we move forward, we're losing debates and arguments in regard to this government bill, and if committees do not go forward, we have to cancel witnesses who have been scheduled to meet. It's a question of our credibility also.

With all due respect, Senator Moreau, more than 80% of the senators in this chamber are not in a partisan caucus. We are not whipped to vote. Therefore, it is very important for each and every one of us to listen to the debates on a government bill.

• (1500)

I hope, colleagues, that we are not going to be setting a precedent here. It's crucial for the integrity of the institution and for our own personal integrity in regard to our mandate of sober second thought.

I don't have a 15-minute speech, but I hope the few words I have said have registered. Thank you.

Hon. David M. Arnot: Honourable senators, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Hon. the Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say "yea."

Some Hon. Senators: Yea.

The Hon. the Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

Some Hon. Senators: Nay.

The Hon. the Speaker: In my opinion the "yeas" have it.

(On motion of Senator Arnot, debate adjourned, on division.)

MAKING LIFE MORE AFFORDABLE FOR CANADIANS BILL

THIRD READING—DEBATE

Hon. Rodger Cuzner moved third reading of Bill C-4, An Act respecting certain affordability measures for Canadians and another measure.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak on Bill C-4, the government's bill entitled "Making Life More Affordable for Canadians Act."

While this bill has been with us for quite some time, I do believe it is an important piece of legislation that will deliver some much-needed relief for many Canadians. As you know, Bill C-4 will first legislate the delivery of the government's middle-class tax cut, which is targeted at providing tax relief for nearly 22 million Canadians and saving two-income families up to \$840 a year.

The bill will also provide for the elimination of the goods and services tax, or GST, for first-time homebuyers on new homes valued up to \$1 million, which would save them up to \$50,000 on that purchase. It would also lower the GST for first-time homebuyers on new homes valued between \$1 million and \$1.5 million. On top of that, Bill C-4 would legislate the removal of the consumer carbon price, following its cancellation, effective as of April 1, 2025.

The government is carrying out its commitment to deliver a middle-class tax cut to nearly 22 million Canadians. This is all money that Canadians will then be able to spend where it matters most for them. The government reduced the federal personal income tax rate from 15% to 14% for the lowest bracket, effective July 1, 2025. In 2026, this is the tax rate that will be applied on up to \$58,523 of taxable income. This means that virtually anyone who pays federal income tax will benefit from this. Nearly half of the total value of the tax relief is going to those in the lowest bracket.

It is important to note that the Canada Revenue Agency has already updated its source deduction tables. They did this to ensure that employers and pay administrators were able to reduce tax withholdings as of July 1, 2025. This means that Canadians have already begun benefiting from this lower tax rate. This middle-class tax cut is expected to deliver more than \$27 billion in tax savings to Canadians over five years, starting in 2025-26, and it is only fair to say that it represents significant support for Canadians facing broad challenges of affordability, especially during these uncertain financial times.

Colleagues, Bill C-4 also brings forward an important measure to make housing more affordable in this country. As some of you may have heard, Desjardins' economic studies published a report last year concluding that:

Over the past quarter century, the average selling price of a home in Canada has ballooned by more than four times, while the average household disposable income has only

slightly more than doubled. Benchmark home prices now consistently exceed what the average household can afford in several provinces.

This is definitely worrisome, and I am of the view that something has to be done to address this housing access issue. The government has already rolled out a number of measures to make housing more affordable.

For example, the government has, in recent years, implemented a series of measures aimed at both increasing the supply of housing and also helping Canadians make that first down payment on a home. Now, Bill C-4 would complement these measures by eliminating the GST for first-time homebuyers on purchases of new homes valued up to \$1 million. This new first-time homebuyers' GST rebate would mean upfront savings of up to \$50,000 on the purchase of their first newly built home. Upon receiving Royal Assent, the rebate would also lower the GST on new homes between \$1 million and \$1.5 million for first-time homebuyers. In short, the rebate would be phased out in a linear manner for new homes valued between \$1 million and \$1.5 million.

Under this linear phase-out, a new home valued at \$1.25 million would be eligible for a rebate of 50% of the maximum first-time homebuyers' GST rebate, which still means savings of \$25,000.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer concluded, based on support parameters, that the new first-time homebuyers' GST rebate included in the legislation would provide an average subsidy of around \$27,000 to first-time homebuyers on their purchase of a new home. That is very significant, so by supporting Bill C-4, we would allow the government to lower the upfront cost of buying a new home for young Canadians and spur construction of new homes across this country. By doing so, we would also be helping more young people and families achieve their dream of home ownership and begin investing in their futures, their families, their peace, their comfort and their retirement.

Colleagues, one of the first things Prime Minister Carney did upon assuming his responsibilities last year was to cease the application of the federal consumer fuel charge, effective April 1, 2025. However, it is important to understand that this was effectively accomplished through government regulations. Bill C-4 would now take the next step beyond the regulatory ceasing of the fuel charge by completely removing the federal consumer carbon price from Canadian law. As a result, the fuel charge would be permanently repealed. That being said, the government said this doesn't change anything about its commitment to fight climate change.

For example, the government has been clear that a price on pollution for large emitters would continue to be a key component of its plan to build a strong economy and a greener future. Industrial carbon pricing is one of the most important greenhouse gas emission reduction policies in the government's plan to meet Canada's 2030 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target.

Carbon pricing systems for industry are also designed to keep costs low to protect against competitiveness risks while driving investment in the technologies that will shape the clean economies of the future and create good Canadian jobs.

As many of you know — those who have been following the bill — it also includes some technical provisions to clarify Parliament's long-established intent that the activities of federal political parties relating to personal information fall exclusively under federal jurisdiction and the Canada Elections Act. This provision would clarify that federal political parties cannot be required to comply with provincial personal information protection laws in keeping with Parliament's intent that the Canada Elections Act provides for a national, uniform, exclusive and complete personal information protection regime for these parties across Canada. This has been the case since May 31, 2000, which is when the Canada Elections Act was repealed and replaced through a major modernization.

• (1510)

The bill also proposes additional requirements for a federal political party's personal information policy going forward, including that it be available in both official languages; be written in plain language; state the types of personal information it retains, uses, discloses and disposes of; and explain how the party carries out its activities in relation to personal information using illustrative examples. Eligible and registered federal political parties and persons acting on their behalf would need to ensure that they comply with their personal information protection policies.

While Parliament's intent on these matters is long established, the explicit inclusion of these measures in Bill C-4 ensures greater clarity of this intent and timely implementation. Ensuring clarity in Canada's laws and legislation is an important priority for any government, and it's yet another benefit that would flow from Bill C-4.

In conclusion, colleagues, Bill C-4 is an important piece of legislation that would allow the government to implement, among other things, its middle-class tax cut for hard-working Canadians, saving them hundreds of dollars a year. Bill C-4 would also make the first-time home buyers' GST rebate a reality. This measure would save eligible first-time homebuyers up to \$50,000 on their purchase of a new home valued at up to \$1 million and allow savings to extend all the way up to new homes valued at up to \$1.5 million. Finally, Bill C-4 would permanently legislate the removal of the federal consumer fuel charge. This would allow the government to refocus and reinforce its carbon pollution reduction efforts in a way that is fair to Canadians and supportive of clean growth.

Taken together, these measures would deliver help to make life more affordable for Canadians during these uncertain times. As you know, the global landscape is rapidly changing, leaving economies, businesses and workers under a cloud of uncertainty. As Canadians continue to feel the impact of these ongoing challenges, including the uncertainties brought about by developments on the trade and tariff front, I believe that the time is right to deliver some tax relief.

As a result, I would invite all of you, esteemed colleagues, to support the passage of Bill C-4 so that the government can deliver this support to Canadians in a timely manner.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Hon. Pamela Wallin: Would the honourable senator take a question?

Senator Cuzner: Yes.

Senator Wallin: Thank you for your remarks. If we can just set aside some of the arguments that you've made about the benefits to consumers and taxpayers and all of that, the bone of contention here, as raised by many of us over time, has been the implanting of this part about skirting privacy rights for political parties, which has been snuck into the bill. It does not belong here in any way, shape or form, and we'd like to have that discussion separate from the benefits that might accrue to taxpayers.

I still have not heard an adequate explanation, other than straight-up politics, as to why this has been inserted in this bill, and it does not allow us to have a discussion about something that's fundamentally important. It is fundamentally important whether political parties are exempt from the privacy laws of this country and whether there are any controls at all — and this is an issue we deal with on many fronts — on what those political parties can do with our personal information, such as a fine down the road, which would not give us any way of ever determining whether our data had been sold, misused or misrepresented.

I am asking one more time if you would appeal to those in power to take this part out so that it can be properly debated.

Senator Cuzner: Thank you very much, Senator Wallin. I appreciate your comments about Parts 1, 2 and 3 and the benefits to Canadians.

On Part 4, obviously, there were significant interventions on that aspect of the bill. The government and those representing the government were clear in their intent. Their position was that this particular aspect is about jurisdiction. This is about federal political parties not having to comply with a patchwork of provincial laws. When you look at the financing of federal political parties, there is one rule across the country. They don't have to comply with provincial rules because every province has different rules.

It is not a complete vacuum either. The parties have to present their privacy policies and have to post them online. Very good questions came from Senator Dasko and Senator Dalphond during committee. They quizzed the parties on the 10 principles of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, or PIPEDA, and they asked them, "Do you have this? Do you have that? Do you have to report in case of a breach?" Each one of the three parties represented during the hearing all had those aspects on their websites as part of their privacy policies.

There is compliance there, but, again — I know you won't like this one — nothing precludes us from going further. I think that one thing the hearings showed us and the committee showed us is that this is a big issue and, certainly, an important issue. And it is the first time I sat on the Legal Committee, and I want to commend the Legal Committee for the depth and breadth of the questions and the quality of those that it presented. I am convinced that the political parties would like to see this as well, but this is not the bill to do that. There has to be another bill to go forward. That would be my position.

Senator Wallin: I think you've just made my point for me. This is not the bill in which to be having a discussion on a point of fundamental principle about our own personal data access and privacy — you know all of the arguments.

The question is: At this eleventh hour, can we please make some attempt to rescue a proper debate to be held in this chamber? We've heard this point made by others. It is not only our privilege to have a debate; it is our responsibility. This is what the chamber of sober second thought does. It debates legislation that is sometimes created on the back of an envelope or snuck into a bill in a Trojan Horse way — we've seen it lots of times — because they don't want to have the debate.

This is not just another government handout or another measure that may or may not pass. This is not a fiscal measure. This is a fundamental measure, and we don't want to be held to ransom here because by saying "no" to this bill due to Part 4, we would be denying Canadians access to government funds and help in difficult times. Just take it out. Let us have a proper debate. It is our job to look at these fundamental issues and debate them. Take Part 4 out of there, get on with your other measures, make that case — which you have — and let us in this chamber do the job that we are here to do.

Our constitutional obligation is to do that and study these contentious pieces of legislation and not have them slipped by in another bill hidden under the cover of aid to the Canadian population.

• (1520)

Senator Cuzner: Thank you very much, senator. We are having this debate today so those points can be made to have an impact going forward.

I know that the broader issue of the role of the Senate has spread like a wildfire. This particular bill prompted that; there were two bills this week that prompted that discussion, and that's a broader one.

I appreciate your intervention. Again, the government contends that this is about jurisdiction and not allowing the federal parties to be governed by provincial legislation.

Hon. Denise Batters: Thank you for your speech, Senator Cuzner, and thank you for coming to the Legal Committee; it was nice to have you there.

One of the things that we heard during that marathon day — I think we had eight hours of Legal Committee in one day — was a panel that actually had the chief counsel from three of the major political parties — the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party — and they were giving what I thought was quite cogent evidence about why Part 4 was needed. They talked about a national framework so that we don't have 13 different provincial and territorial frameworks, and how that would potentially help Canadians' privacy.

I didn't hear very much in your speech about that panel and what evidence they gave us, so could you provide us with a little more information on that, please?

Senator Cuzner: Again, I thought they presented their cases well during the testimony. So much of the testimony and so many of the interventions were around policy. Again, they continued to go back to jurisdiction.

However, it was unanimous from those who presented that they believe in a single, comprehensive, exclusive, uniform national regime. All three advocated for that. I know that Ms. Denham, who worked in the U.K. and B.C. in privacy protection, talked about the model used in the U.K. They have a policy, but there are special provisions for companies, government and political parties. That is something that would be explored. Two of the lawyers mentioned that they would appreciate looking at that type of legislation, and that could be done in a broader study on this.

The presentations they gave were fairly concise with regard to jurisdiction. Again, they all recognized that privacy is paramount, and they had no objections to taking a deeper dive into it.

Senator Batters: Thank you.

Also, with respect to unanimity, as you were just referencing, I will just refer to something we also heard about: When the House of Commons had a vote on this, the only standing vote they had on Bill C-4 was at second reading in, I believe, June 2024. Every single MP who voted on it, voted for it. That wasn't a matter of political parties; that was every member of the Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Green and Bloc parties — every single one of them voted in favour of it.

We talk about the important deference that we, as an unelected chamber, must have. Yes, we need to provide sober second thought, but we also have to be cognizant of that. I will ask you this question as someone who sat in the other place for 20 years as a Liberal MP in government and opposition, and now we are sitting here. Can you please tell us what you see as being the important deference we should have regarding the people who have been doing that door-knocking, who are hearing from and are responsible to their constituents, and who sit in the House of Commons casting votes on behalf of the constituents in their ridings?

Senator Cuzner: The first word that occurs to me is "shock" that all parties came together and supported something unanimously. "Rare" would be the other word. I think it does send a strong message to this place.

I listened to Senator Simons a few months ago speaking about the Salisbury Convention and what have you. I know this isn't mentioned in the platforms of the parties, but this was an ongoing issue. It was before the courts and was known. So, I think deference does matter in this case.

Again, though, as I try to figure out this place — I was the newest member of the "Ledge," so it was a real experience for me in many ways. It must be something unique to see the parties come together and support it like that. They share a special, exclusive piece of real estate where people put their names on a ballot and go out, and I know there are a number of people in the chamber here who have done that. It is extraordinary to do that, and then to rally the support of volunteers to come out. There are 343 different ridings across this country. We ask Canadians to step up, and they do that willingly. We do it through volunteers for the most part.

One thing that the government representatives consistently agreed on was that having 13 different regimes to respond to puts a fairly significant burden on federal parties. Again, they went back to the fact that they believe in a national, uniform regime, and that they are willing to work toward that.

[Translation]

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Senator Cuzner, would you take a question?

[English]

Senator Cuzner: Absolutely, yes.

[Translation]

Senator Miville-Dechêne: No one here disputes the idea that political parties must come under provincial jurisdiction; that's not the issue. However, I'm having a hard time following the government's logic. We held eight hours of meetings with a lot of lobby groups, but we also had Privacy Commissioner Philippe Dufresne appear as a witness, who is the expert on such matters. He came to tell us that the bill required a number of amendments to bring it in line with the fundamental principles of privacy in Canada.

The first of these principles is consent. As impossible as it seems, this bill doesn't require a voter's consent for the disclosure of private information. This goes against every privacy law we have in Canada. In 2026, how can anyone defend a bill that doesn't require political parties to obtain voters' consent before gathering their private data? I find that inconceivable.

[English]

Senator Cuzner: Thank you very much. My interpretation wasn't great, but I thought I heard you say that you would be supporting the vote? No? Okay, then.

On the issue regarding privacy, I reiterate that the parties know and realize that it is significant and important. When we look back, there was an important piece of legislation here before Parliament prorogued and the writ was dropped. Bill C-65, which died on the Order Paper, had many of these provisions in it. It made it to second reading. It was a complex and, in some ways, contentious piece of legislation. If we are looking for a standalone piece of legislation, then, yes, something like Bill C-65 should probably come forward again. But I don't think there are any objections with going further with the protection of personal information. It is just that this is about provincial jurisdiction being applied to federal parties.

[Translation]

Senator Miville-Dechêne: Once again, I'm left speechless, because the fact is that Bill C-65 included several provisions that seemed to suggest that the political parties would protect privacy. The bill was drafted and a number of its provisions were worthwhile; if time was an issue, you could have used this bill in place of Part 4. That would have solved the problem. It hardly seems like rocket science to me.

[English]

Senator Cuzner: Well, obviously, it does for the government. I would hope — and the sense I get is — that the government itself understands the need for legislation around this and it would be forthcoming. That's my hope and my sense. We will wait for that. That is the best I can offer you.

• (1530)

Hon. Colin Deacon: Would my honourable colleague from Cape Breton take another question?

Senator Cuzner: Yes.

Senator C. Deacon: One of the things that was said that I read in the preliminary transcript was that the Commissioner of Canada Elections pointed out the fact that each privacy regime of the political parties has vague language that is frequently changed. They are not aligned; they are all different.

This is the second time we have seen the language “national,” “uniform,” “exclusive” and “complete,” and it's the second time we've seen “uniform” and “complete” missing. We see “national” and “exclusive.” That's where the doubt comes from that this is a priority.

For me, it goes back to 2018 with that really consequential report that the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics produced. It was unanimously supported by the MPs on the committee. I didn't see you among the group, but there were many names that we all recognized who went through that. It had 26 recommendations, none of which has been implemented, and the government of the day responded in the words of Minister Gould at the time:

... we share the view that it is necessary to modernize our privacy regime to ensure it provides clear, enforceable rules and supports the level of privacy protection that Canadians

expect. The Committee's most recent recommendations in this regard are a valuable contribution to the Government's ongoing privacy modernization efforts.

However, there hasn't been anything since 2018. Yet, a bill was tabled, which was Bill C-65. What was really interesting was listening to the lawyers.

I will get to my question. Thank you, Your Honour.

I listened to the lawyers saying that there are 117 new members of Parliament — new backbenchers, for the most part. That's why they couldn't include Bill C-65 in this bill. I doubt those 117 new MPs in the backbench have enough sway to hold up a piece of government legislation.

How are we to be convinced that you're serious with your words — I believe you are — that the government is actually going to do something at this point that is respectful of international standards in terms of the privacy of political parties, knowing their standards need to be different than a corporation? In what ways? We have to see that defended, but what is your answer to that? I think that's a fundamental concern here.

Senator Cuzner: I think you've articulated the concerns of the chamber very well, Senator Deacon, and I appreciate your sense of belief in me.

The government officials spoke about a single, comprehensive, inclusive, uniform, national regime. As we get into these things, I, myself, was surprised that it was up to the parties to put together their own privacy policies; that surprised me. I was pleased to say that when they were quizzed on the principle around that, they did come up and have something for the right to correct. Each of the parties was asked: Do you have something on the right to correct, a duty to report in case of breach or an undertaking to not sell or share information? Those who were quizzed all had it as part of their policy, and it's all posted online, but I was surprised myself that it wasn't uniform.

Again, you talked about international standards and what's going on in the U.K. They were not offended by that at all. They all expressed an interest in pursuing that.

Senator C. Deacon: I still don't understand why, as it relates to this bill, in particular, there was no effort to include Bill C-65, which had made it to clause by clause. It could very easily have been pulled in. The reason given by the lawyers was not a valid reason, in my opinion.

The second thing I want you to think about for a second is this: We have a situation where we were discussing exactly the same situation before, almost three years ago. The promise keeps coming, but we are not getting a clear answer other than just a promise. No legislation has arrived. It hasn't started in the Senate, for example, to try to get a third-party perspective, because our unbiased view would hear the views of the elected officials and others as to why it needs to be different. We're just not seeing any action. I still haven't really heard a reason why.

That's why I think you're hearing a lot of people in this chamber saying that we have to do something this time because the can keeps getting kicked down the road. I wanted to hear if you have any more to offer on that.

Senator Cuzner: Senator Deacon, the intent of the government, I'm sure, is to move forward with something.

With this new government, I was pleased with Minister Champagne when he appeared here in the spring. When he appeared here and was pushed on one aspect of this particular bill and how it proved to be of no benefit to a group of Canadians with disabilities, he promised at the time to make it whole during the budget bill, and he did, in fact, do that. He came through with his promise on that.

My sense is that this is what has to be done.

But to adopt Bill C-65 — that bill had not been passed. There were still contentious aspects of it. Hopefully, those issues will come forward again in another piece of government legislation.

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: I have a rather different question, Senator Cuzner, and that is the figure that you've repeated a number of times in your speeches, which is a saving of \$840 a year for a two-income family.

Could you share with us the research that goes into that decision to choose that 1 percentage point cut and the significance of \$840 a year, given that a family with two incomes with \$50,000 income is actually considered at the lower end of a "low income" definition in our country?

Senator Cuzner: Yes, and it would be those in the lowest income brackets who are the greatest beneficiaries of this income tax cut.

I have seen Senator Boudreau's bill come through with the increase in the GST. The government can provide some relief through the income tax system and direct benefits, like they are doing with GST, but the government understands that it's a difficult time for a lot of Canadians. They believe that this will be —

The numbers that we received from the Parliamentary Budget Officer — there were a couple of people who provided them — I would have to take trust and faith in the numbers that were provided by the government via the Department of Finance on the impact this cut will make.

Senator McPhedran: I will ask for a little more clarification on that. What we know is that, in this country, a family or an individual with an income of \$3,000 a month is very close to the line of poverty. How would \$840 a year make a substantial difference for almost anyone in Canada?

• (1540)

Senator Cuzner: It will have an impact. Past governments have looked at direct benefits, too. We looked at the Canada Child Benefit, which brings almost \$7,200 a year to families with children. We looked at \$10-a-day child care, which provides more opportunities for people in that household to get out and find employment. Those are the types of benefits that will have an impact in day-to-day lives.

We could look at \$850 as not a great deal, but I know that some people will look forward to it, and it will have an impact. It's broad-based and, again, it's focused specifically on the two lowest tax groups.

Hon. David M. Arnot: Will the senator take a question?

Senator Cuzner: Yes.

Senator Arnot: Senator Cuzner, going back to Part 4, you're aware that there's a case before the B.C. Court of Appeal dealing with the issue of the application of provincial privacy regimes on federal political parties. That case will be argued in the near future. It's quite likely the decision will be forthcoming, but that would be for about a year.

It's quite likely that that case, whatever the decision is, would be appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada for a final decision. We know that the timeline for a case to be argued in front of the Supreme Court and then to receive a decision could be three to five years.

In terms of the urgency of Part 4, it seems that the federal political parties and the federal government have about three to five years to get ready for a definitive answer from the Supreme Court of Canada. It seems that it's not as urgent as you think it may be.

Senator Cuzner: That would be something decided by the legal minds and the legal opinions that the parties have received. They believe that they want to bring it to a head before it goes to the courts.

[Translation]

Hon. Claude Carignan: Senator Cuzner, correct me if I'm wrong, but Part 4 of Bill C-4, which consists of only a few clauses, deals with policies and controls regarding personal information when that information is collected by political parties. However, it is part of a much larger whole, specifically the Canada Elections Act, which sets out the terms and conditions for how the voters list is created, compiled and updated. The act also stipulates that the voters list must be provided to political parties and candidates so they may use it to communicate with voters in order to recruit them as party members and solicit political contributions.

It says “including” because it could be used for other purposes. However, the entire system is set up in such a way as to have legal authorization to collect this information and to share it. There is also the consent of the individual, who must agree when they contribute to the party or participate in activities. Am I wrong to assume that if this part were removed, it would remove something that complements the framework of the Canada Elections Act and eliminate additional protection for individuals’ personal information?

[English]

Senator Cuzner: I don’t want to offer an uninformed opinion, but I think you’re correct on that, senator. It would expose itself should it be taken out.

Hon. Bernadette Clement: Honourable senators, I would like to start by thanking the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance for welcoming me yesterday. I was there for Bill C-4 but also took part in the Bill C-15 conversation. I had the chance to bring up Cornwall, which — as you all know — I love.

I want to thank Senator Cuzner for his hard work as the sponsor of this bill. He has been respectful, effective and thorough, and he always brings that sense of humour, which is just so beautiful. It really relaxes debate, and I thank him for that.

By now, most of us are familiar with Bill C-4, the making life more affordable for Canadians act. I want to commend the government on Parts 1, 2 and 3. However, this bill has four parts, and I rise today to bring your attention to the problems with Part 4 and to ask for your support to delete this part of the bill.

Bill C-4, Part 4, amends the Canada Elections Act to ensure that activities of federal political parties, or FPPs, concerning the protection of personal information fall under federal jurisdiction.

I’m a member of the Legal Committee. We were tasked with studying Part 4 but without the ability to amend. After three panels, 18 witnesses, six hours of testimony and two hours of discussing what should go in the report, the members voted to include three recommendations for the National Finance Committee to consider:

- 1) That Part 4 of Bill C-4 be removed from the bill.
- 2) In the alternative, that Part 4 of Bill C-4 be severed from the other parts of the bill in order to allow for continued study of this Part while the remainder of the bill proceeds on an expedited basis.
- 3) In the alternative, that a sunset clause be included in Part 4 of Bill C-4 to cause the automatic repeal of this Part after two years, or another reasonable timeframe that would give the government sufficient opportunity to develop a more robust and comprehensive uniform privacy regime applicable to FPPs.

A number of arguments have been made to keep Part 4, and I want to offer counterarguments for your consideration.

We’ve heard it said that the Senate should defer electoral matters to the House of Commons, as MPs are directly affected by changes in electoral law. I would argue that MPs have a vested interest in how federal political parties are managed and regulated, whereas senators do not and, therefore, serve as an effective check to ensure strong and reasonable election-related legislation.

When I hear that all the parties were in agreement, that feels like consensus, but it also feels like maybe Canadians should be nervous that all the parties are in agreement on this issue.

As Senator Tannas pointed out at the National Finance Committee yesterday, the other place discussed Part 4 for 20 seconds or maybe a bit more. He eloquently stated:

If Canadians expect anything from us, they expect sober second thought. There is just no way in my mind that the Senate can pass this without expressing the concerns and thoughts that we have.

Senator Cuzner made this case:

... jurisdiction is the big piece, that federal political parties would find an incredible challenge in having to deal with a patchwork of provincial rules and regulations.

We heard him say that again today — that we should have a uniform privacy framework rather than a patchwork.

I agree, but my concern with Part 4 is not because I support a provincial patchwork or don’t want a federal regime. My concern is that Part 4 is a highly flawed federal regime.

Caroline Simard, Commissioner of Canada Elections; Philippe Dufresne, Privacy Commissioner of Canada; and Michael Harvey, Commissioner in the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia, were asked if they had been consulted on Part 4. They had not. Given their testimony, it was very clear that their experience and expertise would contribute immensely to a far better federal regime than what is being proposed here.

A federal example that was frequently referenced at committee was the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, or PIPEDA. That is Canada’s federal private sector privacy law regulating how businesses handle personal information during commercial activity.

PIPEDA set out 10 standards that have been accepted in this country for many years. Very briefly, the standards are: accountability; identifying the purpose; consent for the collection; limiting collection; limiting use, disclosure and retention; accuracy; safeguards; openness; individual access; and challenging compliance.

• (1550)

Part 4 does not meet these standards. In response to a question about British Columbia's and Quebec's provincial laws, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada said:

Those provinces' laws have been deemed substantially similar to PIPEDA, so I would say the 10 fair information principles in PIPEDA have to be there. . . . those principles are there in Canada and internationally. We would need, in my view, a good reason to lower the bar.

Sara Bannerman, Professor and Canada Research Chair of Communication Policy and Governance, said:

. . . I think either subjecting political parties to the same 10 principles as businesses under PIPEDA, whether by incorporating the 10 principles into the Canada Elections Act, if that's what's at hand at the moment, or doing it by a reform of PIPEDA, I think those things are important.

I want to add that federalism should be part of the conversation here, federalism and the discussion of jurisdiction.

Bill Hearn, External General Counsel to the Centre for Digital Rights, said:

At the heart of Canada's constitution lies cooperative federalism: collaboration and coordination between federal and provincial governments. Part 4 violates that. . . . it shares the same flaws as past efforts and the FPPs —

— federal political parties —

— can't sidestep Canada's Constitution . . . by simply enacting a law that puts them beyond the legitimate jurisdictions of the provinces.

Allowing the federal political parties to set their own privacy standards does not create a uniform national framework; it does the opposite. Part 4 allows self-regulation of the parties, which risks — and, I would say, ensures — an inconsistent patchwork, if you will. The existing provincial privacy laws, while varied, provide enforceable minimum standards and independent oversight.

I don't land on the side of provincial or federal regimes. I am on the side of legislation that makes things better, is grounded in existing best practices and is based on consultation with experts, like our commissioners, and involved parties, such as provinces. Part 4 does none of these things.

Another argument was made that political parties are already doing the responsible thing by having data policies clearly listed on their websites. Political party websites do use important words, such as "confidentiality," "respect," "security," "accuracy," "privacy" and "integrity." But here's what our witnesses had to say on this topic.

Michael Harvey, the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia, said:

Among established data protection regimes, these rights commonly include a right to notice, a right of access, a right to rectification, a right to be forgotten and a right to withdraw consent to the use of personal information. These rights are absent from the proposed amendments, and, here again, these rights could only be exercised to the extent that they exist within a party's own self-written policy.

Sara Bannerman said:

My team's work surveying Canadians raises the concern that failing to subject political parties to the 10 basic privacy principles may threaten confidence and engagement in elections. . . .

She continued:

. . . very few respondents saw data collection as important to the democratic process. If collection is important to democracy, our respondents were not convinced.

Part 4 would not create a complete privacy regime; it would undermine provincial laws that do. . . .

I'll quickly talk about the argument that fines exist and incentivize compliance. Matthew Hatfield, Executive Director of OpenMedia, told us that:

Currently, we're in a system in Canada where, even when folk are found to be violating privacy, they will pay very negligible fines If you get caught, you pay it and you move on. . . .

So I asked Rachel Pereira from Democratic Institutions at the Privy Council Office about this, and she said:

. . . the Commissioner of Canada Elections has tools at her disposal, should there be a contravention of a party's privacy policy . . . she can issue a warning letter

But if there is an infraction, and it is deemed to be one, then she can issue a monetary penalty of a minimum of \$50 or more or \$300 for an entity.

To this, Matthew Hatfield of OpenMedia responded, “I find that absurd.”

As many of you know, I have been a federal Liberal candidate two times and a municipal candidate several times. I have had campaign teams, managed volunteers, mailed and emailed letters and pamphlets, and knocked on so many doors. I want Canadians to trust the democratic process, trust political parties and be excited to vote. We are moving, I think, in the opposite direction.

My final argument for you today is that Part 4 further contributes to the erosion of democracy and trust in Canada.

Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, said:

... I believe that better safeguarding of electors’ personal information would help maintain Canadians’ trust in Canada’s political parties and, by extension, in the electoral process.

He added he believed it would:

... contribute to enhancing trust in the political process, writ large. Hopefully, we shouldn’t wait until we have a Cambridge Analytica ... before protections are put in place.

Tamir Israel of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association said:

People in Canada do not want this lawless approach to their personal data and expect Parliament to put in place reasonable rules for how political parties collect, use and disclose personal information.

We recommend deleting Part 4 from this legislative proposal and instead recommend applying Canada’s personal privacy framework PIPEDA to federal political parties.

[Translation]

I’ve been a candidate in the course of my career. I’ve knocked on thousands of doors. Personally, this connection with voters and this relationship of trust are crucial. I don’t want this country to pass legislation that would undermine the bond of trust between the voters, their right to vote and the federal parties they vote for.

[English]

I ask you, colleagues, to support my request to delete this part.

MOTION IN AMENDMENT—DEBATE

Hon. Bernadette Clement: Therefore, honourable senators, in amendment, I move:

That Bill C-4 be not now read a third time, but that it be amended by deleting Part 4.

Hon. Denise Batters: Thanks very much, Senator Clement. In your speech, you referenced the fact that the Privacy Commissioner, when he came to our committee, indicated that he hadn’t been consulted on this bill. Unfortunately, we have seen in the recent number of months that the government has had other bills where the Privacy Commissioner has not been consulted. I can think of one right off the top of my head, and that’s Bill C-26, the cybersecurity act, which the government has recently revised and made Bill C-8 with some minimal revisions.

The Privacy Commissioner was not consulted on that one. The Intelligence Commissioner was also not consulted on that. Given that, isn’t it correct to infer that it’s not just specific to this act, but there could be other acts on which, unfortunately, the government hasn’t consulted these important officials as well?

Senator Clement: Thank you, Senator Batters, for that question.

I reread the transcript of that meeting, and I was quite surprised by the revelation that he wasn’t consulted. Many of us engaged with him on that issue, and I also said to him in response that we have so many commissioners doing such good work. Oftentimes, in their offices, they survey Canadians, they do research, and they provide reports upon reports. I got the sense in that exchange with him that those things are not appropriately consulted when we are making legislation.

I won’t disagree with you. I found that portion of the exchange to be quite uncomfortable because we sit here and appoint commissioners. We interview and grill them. I’m thinking right now of the Official Languages Commissioner from Cornwall. She had a good point: This is what we do. Once we appoint them, these smart people, we should be listening to their reports.

(At 4 p.m., pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, the Senate adjourned until 1:30 p.m., tomorrow.)

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