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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

EID AL-FITR

Hon. Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia: Honourable senators, I'm honoured to rise today on behalf of my fellow Muslim senators — Senators Salma Ataullahjan, Amina Gerba, Farah Mohamed, Hassan Yussuff and Mohammad Al Zaibak — to mark the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, the "festival of breaking the fast."

Last Friday, Muslim families across Canada and the world gathered in unity after the sacred month of Ramadan, a time of quiet fasting from dawn to dusk, deepened prayer, reflection and, above all, reminding us all of the shared responsibility to care for the most vulnerable among us.

Eid al-Fitr is a spiritual moment of release and renewal: special prayers in mosques and community halls, embraces with loved ones, sharing sweets and meals, clothing children in new finery and ensuring, through Zakat al-Fitr, that the most vulnerable share in the joy.

These acts remind us that true celebration flows from generosity, from seeing the face of humanity in every neighbour, every stranger and extending a hand without hesitation.

In Canada, Muslim communities — now nearly 2 million strong — live these values daily. They are our compassionate caregivers in hospitals, our dedicated teachers nurturing young minds, our entrepreneurs building opportunity, our volunteers quietly lifting up others and our families weaving threads of kindness into the national tapestry.

Yet, we know that in the globe today, there are heavy burdens: divisions that wound, conflicts that grieve the soul, rising hate that scars hearts and hardships that test resilience. In these times, Eid al-Fitr whispers a softer truth: that compassion can heal, that unity born of shared humanity can mend and that small acts of benevolence light the darkest paths.

To every Muslim Canadian who has fasted with patience, given with open hands and prayed for peace, whether in bustling cities, quiet rural towns or right here in our capital city, may this Eid wrap you in comfort, fill your homes with laughter and warmth, ease any sorrow and renew your hope.

May the spirit of compassion, gratitude and gentle solidarity that defines this day guide us all — senators and citizens alike — toward a Canada and a world where no one is left behind, where empathy bridges every divide and where peace prevails.

Eid Mubarak.

Thank you. *Shukran*. *Meegwetch*.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Don Wood and his two daughters. They are accompanied by Christopher Shannon, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Vimy Foundation, and Caitlin Bailey, Executive Director. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Patterson.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

VIMY RIDGE DAY

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, I rise today to mark Vimy Ridge Day. This is in remembrance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge and has been held annually since 2003 to commemorate that famous battle.

In past years, I have spoken about the bravery of the Canadians at Vimy Ridge: people like Captain Thain MacDowell of Ottawa, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions. But today, I would like to speak about the monument itself: its creation, construction and unveiling.

After the war, the governments of France and Belgium offered Canada various sites for the purpose of building monuments to the fallen.

In 1920, the government called for designs, and of the 160 received, one stood out: the one by Walter Allward. Allward's design was so striking and so unique that the government decided that, rather than building various monuments across Belgium and France, it would build only one: the Canadian National Vimy Memorial.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge, which began at 5:30 a.m. on Easter Monday, April 9, 1917, was the first time that the four infantry divisions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force fought together. The battle itself lasted four days. The monument would take much longer to build.

The construction began in 1924, and over the next 12 years, the monument would rise above the site of a battle that is now part of our national consciousness and our history. I want each of you to imagine, if you can, what that monument looks like as it stands today.

Imagery abounds on the monument. Carved into the base are the words "In Flanders Fields." Along its walls are the names of those 11,285 Canadians who fell across the battlefields of France and have no known grave.

Two tall pylons, representing Canada and France, forever joined by the crucible of war, rise above the ridge. But the most striking feature is the statue *Canada Bereft*, a solitary female figure who grieves for the fallen sons of Canada. This is a monument not to the glory of Canada but a tribute to sacrifice.

The monument was unveiled in July 1936 by King Edward VIII; interestingly enough, it was the only major public act he undertook as the King of Canada. Among those present that day was the 8-year-old boy Don Wood, who is with us in the gallery today. He travelled to Europe with his parents.

Don's father, Henry Wood, a British veteran of the Royal East Kent Regiment, immigrated to Canada in 1906 and joined the reserves of The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada.

In August 1914, Henry Wood volunteered for active service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, serving as Company Quarter Master Sergeant with the 13th Battalion Royal Highlanders of Canada, The Black Watch, at Vimy Ridge.

Henry's son, Don Wood, who is now 98 years old, is recognized as the last living Canadian to have attended the unveiling of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial. He is our last living link not just to that ceremony but, in a way, to the battle itself. That is why I am so pleased he could join us here today.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Mr. Wood and his family for being here with us today. Please know that we see you and, if I may paraphrase from John McCrae, we are here to receive from your hands the torch of remembrance, and we promise to hold it high.

"Lest We Forget."

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Tyler Anderson, Chief Executive Officer of Disruptive Edge, and Armughan Ahmad, global technology executive, investor and board director. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Hay.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[Senator Patterson]

• (1410)

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Hon. Katherine Hay: Honourable senators, the launch of AI Explained happened this morning. I know you are probably happy about that because your daily emails will be a lot fewer now. My deep gratitude to Tyler Anderson and Armughan Ahmad — extraordinary Canadians moving the needle and truly living proof of AI for good in Canada. I am proud to call you my friends. Thank you both. We just scratched the surface today, but that is no small gift.

We also heard directly from Minister Solomon, whose planned 5-to-8-minute opening became 45 minutes. The minister was informal, direct and honest about how Canada is positioned and where we must go. A few principles stayed with me that I thought I would share.

First, "AI" is an initialism for "artificial intelligence" but also "ancestral intelligence." I love that.

Second, we are in an age of pragmatism and political realignment to ensure that our rules-based world order remains sound and steeped in Canadian values.

Third, AI must be Canadian — built, empowered, protected and sovereign under Canadian law.

Fourth, AI moves at the speed of technology — which is warp speed — but adoption moves at the speed of trust. Only 12% of Canadians currently use AI. That is the work in front of us.

One thing became very clear: The strategy about to launch is not simply a good thing to do; it is critical. We need to be bold. Steady state is not an option. Claude would agree.

Let's talk about Claude. I'm sure he is listening. Claude is not just Senator Bernie Sanders's go-to agent. He is mine too. I have asked Claude about AI and quantum, where U2's world tour is going to be and for tax and health advice. That's a lot of data about me. Generative AI is not just coming. It is fully here. It is moving. It is fast and will not wait for us.

As the great philosopher Senator Colin Deacon might say, "You ain't seen nothing yet."

Canada is the best country — full stop — to lead in this space. We have the talent, the institutes, the energy and the values. Canadian values are our competitive advantage.

As Senator Kutcher might remind us, it is a brave new world.

Stay tuned, folks. More emails are coming. Session two covers national security and sovereignty. Be there or just talk to Claude. I do recommend joining, though, because human-to-human communication is always better. 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 Ayman Al-Yassini, Founding President, as well as Hala Derawan, Riad Anthony Haffar and other representatives of the Syrian Canadian Congress. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Al Zaibak.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

THE LATE RODGER BRULOTTE

Hon. Claude Carignan: Honourable senators, it is with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Rodger Brulotte last week.

Today, I would like to pay tribute to him, not only as a well-known public figure in Quebec, but more importantly as an extremely compassionate man whose warmth and generosity touched everyone who had the privilege of crossing paths with him.

Rodger was, first and foremost, a familiar voice for generations of baseball and sports fans. However, he was more than just an incredible sports announcer. He was a man with a big heart.

He was warm, approachable and funny, someone who was always willing to chat, share and debate. He had a rare talent for connecting with people right away, regardless of their age or background.

I met him for the first time here in the Senate, when he was a guest of Senator Jacques Demers. That experience stayed with me. I then met him several other times, mainly at fundraising activities for the many causes he supported.

I found him to be very humble and kind, driven by a sincere and contagious passion. People could not help but be moved by his positive energy.

Rodger was also generous: generous with his time, enthusiasm, and care for others. He made people feel seen and valued and he knew how to bring them together.

He was one of those people we readily admire. He was one of those personalities who, without pretense, become an important part of our collective memory.

His passing leaves a void in the world of sport and broadcasting, of course, but also in the hearts of everyone who knew, loved and admired him.

Honourable senators, in a fast-paced and constantly changing world, people like Rodger Brulotte remind us of the importance of passion, authenticity and kindness.

Today, my thoughts are with his family, his loved ones and all those affected by his loss. Most of all, I remember a man who was loved by all and who, in his own way, brought so many people together and struck a chord with them. We owe him our deepest gratitude. Although he was only five feet and four inches tall, he was an imposing presence.

As a joke, he liked to tell his friends that he knew exactly what people would say about him when he passed: “Bonsoir, il est parti!” Thank you, Mr. Brulotte.

[*English*]

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Ashwant K. Dwivedi, Honorary Consul General of Solomon Islands to Canada. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator Dhillon.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

CANADA-SOLOMON ISLANDS RELATIONS

Hon. Baltej S. Dhillon: Honourable senators, I rise today to recognize the presence of the Honorary Consul General of the Solomon Islands to Canada, Mr. Ashwant Dwivedi, here with us in the Senate.

Colleagues, the Solomon Islands hold a distinct place in global history. During the Second World War, the Battle of Guadalcanal marked a decisive turning point in the Pacific theatre. Over six months of sustained land, sea and air combat, Allied forces halted Japanese expansion and began to shift the momentum of the war.

But beyond its strategic significance, Guadalcanal is also a reminder that these islands were a home first and that their people endured the consequences of a global conflict fought on their shores.

Today, the Solomon Islands are defined by a deeply rooted cultural fabric. Across its many islands and languages, identity is shaped by community, kinship and close relationships to land and sea. These relationships have long drawn the attention of those, including Canadians, who have spent time learning from these communities.

That sense of identity carries into sport. The national futsal — indoor football — team, the Kurukuru, has brought international recognition to the islands, while athletes in weightlifting have represented their country with pride.

We also hear clearly the voices of Solomon Islanders in global conversations on climate change. Advocates such as Belyndar Rikimani, Cynthia Houniuhi and Solomon Yeo remind us that for small island states, climate change is immediate and lived.

Canada and the Solomon Islands share a relationship grounded in cooperation and mutual respect. Through multilateral engagement and development partnerships, we continue to find common ground, particularly in advancing sustainable development and regional stability.

Honourable senators, there is also a lesser-known connection between Canada and the Solomon Islands. For many years, a Canadian anthropologist from Quebec, Pierre Maranda, lived and worked among the Lau people of Malaita, one of the islands of this nation.

There is a story from that time: He was once accused of taking a speckled octopus found in the waters off the island of Foueda, which the Lau people inhabit.

But what is perhaps most memorable about Mr. Maranda's time with the Lau people is the relationship that made such a story possible, one held with care and built over time through trust, respect and deep engagement with language, story and the ways that knowledge is carried within a community.

• (1420)

In that spirit, I hope Canada continues to build relationships grounded in trust — ones strong enough to, over time, resemble kinship — with the Solomon Islands, a small but remarkable nation.

Thank you, colleagues.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of our former colleague the Honourable Marc Gold, P.C.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

SITUATION IN CUBA

Hon. Rosa Galvez: Dear colleagues, for decades, Cuba has faced complex economic restrictions. Measures linked to the United States embargo restricting oil shipments and the disruption of oil supplies from Venezuela have further weakened energy supply chains. These measures violate international law. The consequences are immediate and deeply human.

Cuba relies on imported oil for electricity and transportation. Venezuela previously supplied a substantial portion; those shipments have collapsed. The outcome is not abstract. It is daily life disruption and long-lasting blackouts as hospitals struggle to sustain vital services.

And yet Cuba has consistently extended solidarity to the world. Cuban doctors have treated patients from West Africa to Latin America. Engineers and disaster response teams have assisted after hurricanes and earthquakes abroad. Cuban firefighters and emergency brigades have travelled internationally to help combat forest fires, offering skills and manpower to protect communities.

International organizations have warned that if these shortages continue, humanitarian consequences could escalate dramatically. When we speak about geopolitics and sanctions, we must remember this: It is always ordinary people who feel the consequences first and most severely.

These moments call for responsibility. Political disagreements between governments should never translate into humanitarian hardship for an entire population.

The Cuban people should not be collateral damage in broader geopolitical tensions. As the international community, we must encourage dialogue, humanitarian considerations and pragmatic solutions that ensure energy access and basic services for the population.

In this context, Canada has long championed multilateralism and the rule of law. We should live up to that tradition by standing in solidarity with the Cuban people and calling for respect of international law.

Thank you so much. *Meegwetch*.

[*Translation*]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

AUDITOR GENERAL

2026 SPRING REPORTS TABLED

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2026 Spring Reports of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada, pursuant to the *Auditor General Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. A-17, sbs. 7(5).

[*English*]

TREASURY BOARD

2026-27 DEPARTMENTAL PLANS TABLED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Departmental Plans for 2026-27.

PROTECTING YOUNG PERSONS FROM EXPOSURE TO PORNOGRAPHY BILL

FIFTH REPORT OF LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Hon. David Arnot: Honourable senators, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, which deals with Bill S-209, An Act to restrict young persons' online access to pornographic material.

(*For text of report, see today's* Journals of the Senate*, p. 733.*)

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

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

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SIXTH REPORT OF LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Hon. David Arnot, Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, presented the following report:

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs has the honour to present its

SIXTH REPORT

Your committee, to which was referred Bill S-205, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, has, in obedience to the order of reference of October 21, 2025, examined the said bill and now reports the same with the following amendments:

1. *Clause 3, page 3*: Delete lines 13 to 21.

2. *Delete clause 4, page 3*.

3. *Clause 6, page 4*:

(a) Replace line 9 with the following:

"**6 Paragraph 37.1(2)(a) of the Act is replaced**"; and

(b) delete lines 14 to 24.

Respectfully submitted,

DAVID M. ARNOT

Chair

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

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

[*Translation*]

STUDY ON PRACTICE OF INCLUDING NON-FINANCIAL MATTERS IN BILLS IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS OF BUDGETS AND ECONOMIC STATEMENTS

FIFTH REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Claude Carignan: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, which deals with study and report on the practice of including non-financial matters in bills implementing provisions of budgets and economic statements and I move that the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

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

[*English*]

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO MEET DURING SITTINGS AND ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

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

That the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs be authorized, for the purpose of its consideration of Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and the National Defence Act (bail and sentencing), to meet, even though the Senate may then be sitting or adjourned, and that rules 12-18(1) and 12-18(2) be suspended in relation thereto.

NATIONAL BLANKET CEREMONY DAY BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum introduced Bill S-245, An Act respecting a National Blanket Ceremony Day.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

• (1430)

NATIONAL SECURITY, DEFENCE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO EXTEND DATE OF FINAL REPORT ON STUDY OF IMPACTS OF RUSSIA'S DISINFORMATION

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

> That, notwithstanding the order of the Senate adopted on Wednesday, October 8, 2025, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs in relation to its study on the impacts of Russia's disinformation on Canada be extended from April 30, 2026, to June 30, 2026.

QUESTION PERIOD

INDIGENOUS SERVICES

INDIGENOUS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

The budget, as tabled, shows that many core First Nations and Inuit programs, including, but not limited to, mental health supports, the Inuit Child First Initiative, Jordan's Principle, Urban Programming for Indigenous Peoples and friendship centre operations, have no guaranteed funding beyond March 2026. That is next week.

Multiple analyses, including reporting from the CBC Indigenous news section, confirm that these programs appear as sunset items, with zero in future fiscal years, despite their critical and life-saving roles in supporting the living witnesses of residential schools, intergenerational survivors, families, youth, Elders and remote communities working with the effects of genocide.

Will the Government of Canada provide this chamber with a clear and definitive statement on the status of First Nations mental health funding and all related —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, senator.

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

Economic reconciliation and funding services are commitments of the government. Reconciliation emerges when the government creates meaningful partnerships with communities and stakeholders to move projects and priorities forward. The government is committed to a procurement strategy for Indigenous businesses. The government is committed to equitable police services in First Nations and Inuit communities. I also answered a question concerning the funding of urban programming for Indigenous Peoples with no expiration but that will, instead, move to a new model where services are delivered directly by friendship centres.

The government's commitment to funding Indigenous services is there, and it is evident in the last budget that was tabled by the government.

Senator McCallum: Health programs are tied to legal obligations, treaty rights for health, human rights commitments and Canada's responsibilities for truth and reconciliation. Given the uncertainty created by the absence of confirmed funding beyond March 2026 and the significant operational risk this poses for First Nations communities and service providers, will the government commit to engaging directly and transparently with First Nations leadership and services organizations?

Senator Moreau: For instance, as far as Jordan's Principle is concerned, the government has committed more than $1.5 billion to renew Jordan's Principle for the coming year to protect uninterrupted access to essential services for children and their families. As far as health benefits accessibility and mental health financing, over the last five years, $3.5 billion has been invested to support holistic, Indigenous-led mental health programs that incorporate First Nations —

[*Translation*]

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

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES

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

Senator Moreau, thousands of businesses and jobs in Quebec are in jeopardy: Thirty-seven per cent of the province's entrepreneurs are over 55, and the majority of them have no succession plan. Without people to take over these companies, tens of thousands of small and medium-sized businesses built by baby boomers could disappear.

Quebec has been supporting these entrepreneurs since 2015, but the federal government is slow to take action. Given the fragile economic situation and uncertainty around tariffs, that failure to take action puts our economy at risk.

Prime Minister Carney is an experienced economist. Is his government aware of the magnitude of that risk? Why has it not taken action to create conditions to avert this imminent wave of closures?

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

To answer your question, the government is very aware of the challenges small and medium-sized businesses are facing. That is why it pledged to cut red tape and improve access to financing, in part by giving the Business Development Bank of Canada the authority to increase loans for small and medium-sized businesses to $5 million. The government has also given the bank a $500-million envelope to provide access to resources that will make the work of small and medium-sized businesses easier.

The government's actions are so significant that Canada is the second-best country in the G20 in which to do businesses and the third-easiest country in the G7 in which to start a business.

Senator Housakos: Senator Moreau, we're talking about 9,700 businesses to take over this year alone, and over 50,000 in the next five years. These transfers are protecting 144,000 jobs a year. Right now, billions of dollars and thousands of jobs are on the line.

What is your government waiting for to take concrete action? How many lost businesses and jobs will it take before your government takes real steps to roll out customized supports and effective tax incentives?

Senator Moreau: Senator Housakos, in the past year, more than 137,000 jobs have been created in Canada because of this government's decisions. In addition to measures directly aimed at small and medium-sized businesses, the Government of Canada is forming partnerships across the world to give all companies, including small and medium-sized businesses, access to larger markets, especially in AI.

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

IMMIGRATION FRAUD

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Senator Moreau, yesterday, the Auditor General of Canada published her latest reports, one of which focused on international student program reforms. The Auditor General's report found that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, identified risks of fraud and non-compliance in study permit applications, including concerns related to fraudulent documentation and questionable intent. The audit indicates that while many applications were flagged for potential fraud or non-compliance, the department lacked the capacity and consistent processes to fully investigate or act on these cases, limiting its ability to ensure program integrity.

Given these findings, what is the government doing to ensure that IRCC can adequately follow up on suspected fraudulent applications and ensure that flagged cases of study permit fraud and misuse are properly investigated and resolved?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Loffreda, the government welcomes the report of the Auditor General and agrees that strong program integrity is essential to maintaining confidence in Canada's immigration system. That is why we are currently studying Bill C-12. It is why the government is actively taking steps to strengthen oversight, including the introduction of a letter of acceptance verification system. The government is also now moving to improve follow-up procedures for suspected fraud and non-compliant cases. It is important to note that the audit only reflects the early phase of the reform launched in 2024, and further measures are already under way through 2027.

• (1440)

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for that answer. The report raises some concerns about weak enforcement when non-compliance or fraud was suspected, including gaps in monitoring whether students were actually pursuing their studies. What mechanisms will be implemented to ensure that individuals linked to fraudulent applications or study permit violations are identified properly? What appropriate safeguards or consequences will be applied to protect the integrity of Canada's immigration system?

Senator Moreau: Improving information sharing and oversight to better identify individuals who are not actively pursuing their studies or who may be linked with fraudulent applications is a key part of this work. It is part of a multi-pronged approach that includes enhancing verification tools, strengthening collaboration with provinces and designated learning institutions and improving follow-up mechanisms when risks are identified.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

FUNDING FOR SPORTS

Hon. Marnie McBean: Senator Moreau, the Future of Sport in Canada Commission's final report released today makes clear that sport is essential not only for Canadians' health and well-being but also for national pride and international competitiveness. In 2010, Canada owned the podium and stood at the top of the world as the number one gold-medal nation. Today, following the 2026 Winter Games, Canada finished ninth in gold medals, with five, and eighth in total medals, with 21. This is Canada's lowest medal count at the Winter Olympics since 2002.

While the Prime Minister and other members of government are quick to put on Team Canada jerseys for a photo op, core federal sports funding has remained frozen for 20 years, a 50% cut in real value when adjusted for inflation. Other nations are outpacing us by as much as 10 to 1. Is the government's plan for Canadian athletes to simply hope they can win on grit alone? Or will you make the necessary investments to get Canada back to being more competitive?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, senator. I answered the question, I think, two weeks ago to one of your colleagues, and I understand that we do not measure the importance of sport by the number of medals that our athletes are winning at the Olympic Games. This being said, though, I understand that the government is working to improve the financing of sports in Canada, and that announcement will probably be made shortly.

Senator McBean: The commission's report also emphasizes that sport in Canada has become a luxury for people who can afford it. In the last number of years, the cost of youth sports has exploded, with families now paying thousands of dollars annually, leading to a massive drop in participation among kids from middle- and low-income homes. Girls especially drop out as they move into adolescence. This decline doesn't stop there. Barely 14% of our seniors are sufficiently active as they age. We know that sport and physical activity benefit us in so many ways, from physical and mental health —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, senator.

Senator Moreau: The government recognizes that sport is a core part of our Canadian identity and should be accessible to all. As I mentioned earlier, I know that there is discussion going on actually within the government that will probably lead to an announcement in the near future concerning the increase of support for sports in Canada.

The Hon. the Speaker: Just as a reminder, there is 60 seconds for the first question and 60 seconds for the answer, and then 30 seconds for the supplementary question and 30 seconds for the answer. Thank you.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

LIVE HORSE EXPORTS

Hon. Charles S. Adler: Senator Moreau, the Canadian values — that term we all treasure — are taken to slaughter every time a cargo craft leaves Canada transporting live horses in wooden crates, several in each crate, with more than 24 hours spent in each crate without food or water or protection from harm brought to them by fellow traumatized horses.

In a recent one-year time frame, 9 horses were dead after transport, 29 horses collapsed on flights and nearly 300 horses suffered serious injuries or illnesses, including gouged eyes, wounds, missing ears, dislocated joints and bleeding lacerations. It goes on and on. This is not about agriculture; it's about shaming Canadian culture. Over 80% of Canadians are horrified. In Alberta, opposition is close to 90%.

When will the Prime Minister regulate this butchering of Canadian values into the Dark Ages, where it belongs?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, Senator Adler. You know that the question is an ongoing one since Bill C-355 was proposed. But Canada has strict laws and regulations in place governing the humane transport of animals, including horses, and the government expects those rules to be fully respected.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's officials are present at the airport for every horse export shipment to verify that animals are fit to travel and that transport conditions meet Canadian requirements.

Senator Adler: I have this information because the agency you're talking about isn't doing its job, quite frankly. Senator Moreau, can you ensure that the Prime Minister gets this question put to him personally? If you wish, I will try to overcome my shyness and deliver it to him personally, face to face.

The Hon. the Speaker: I would like to remind senators also that when one senator is standing, everyone else is sitting. When I'm standing, also all senators should be sitting. So I'm just going to ask Senator Adler to please take your seat.

Senator Moreau: Thank you for your generosity, Senator Adler. As I said, we have very strong regulations concerning the transportation of live animals, including horses. I will certainly bring your concern to the minister and to make sure that the agency — I have no reason to think that the agency is not doing its job properly as far as that regulation is concerned. But I will raise the question with the minister.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Senator Moreau, as you know, President Trump has launched an investigation into 60 countries, including Canada, to determine whether goods produced through forced labour are actually being seized at the border. Although Canada has had legislation in place for five years, our Border Services Agency has temporarily seized 48 shipments, only two of which contained goods made using forced labour. That's right, two shipments in five years.

By comparison, since 2022, U.S. customs officials have blocked the entry of more than 10,000 shipments suspected of containing goods produced through forced labour, such as solar panels and electronics. Is Canada doing enough to combat modern slavery?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Miville-Dechêne, the Government of Canada has significantly increased RCMP and CBSA budgets to increase the number of people keeping our borders safe.

Canada has imposed a ban on the importation of goods produced through slavery, as set out in the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement Implementation Act of 2020. Canada passed legislation in 2024 to eradicate forced labour.

These measures demonstrate the government's commitment to doing just that. I believe that Canada's recent investments in both the RCMP and the CBSA will ensure better oversight of the implementation of these legislative provisions.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: I hope so, senator, because the results haven't been great so far.

This investigation is clearly a way for the Trump administration to justify new tariffs. In light of this, shouldn't Canada further strengthen its border laws, specifically by reversing the burden of proof, that is, by requiring importers themselves to prove that their cargo is free of products made by forced labour, as the United States does?

Senator Moreau: Under the amendments made to the law in 2024, the burden of proof is shared between importers and exporters of goods in Canada. These amendments require government entities and businesses to review their international supply chains to identify risks related to violations of the laws I mentioned earlier.

Indeed, the government has committed to doing more in this area to ensure compliance with its laws.

[*English*]

FINANCE

STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, last week marked one year since Prime Minister Carney was sworn into office, with high ambitions and lots of rhetoric.

• (1450)

One year later, here is what your government has achieved: Food inflation is rising twice as fast as before he took office, leading to the worst food inflation of the G7; Canada is now the only country in the G7 with a shrinking economy after a GDP contraction in the last quarter; over 100,000 full-time jobs were lost in February alone; and Canada's unemployment rate is now the second highest in the G7.

Senator Moreau, were your government's promises nothing more than illusions?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): The government is working hard to have this budget adopted. You're working hard to oppose the measures in the budget. If you were working with the government, it would be much easier.

So far, the government has been doing quite well. It is putting more money back into Canadian pockets with the new Canada Grocery and Essentials Benefit, which will provide immediate relief on groceries and essentials for more than 12 million low- and modest-income Canadians.

This is the reality. It is not a question. It is not only Question Period. It's a fact. As a matter of fact, it provides an additional $400 to a single person, more than $500 to a couple and more than $800 to a family with two children. Those are hard facts.

Senator Martin: I'm sorry, Senator Moreau. More rhetoric just won't cut it.

Your government's budget was simply the most expensive in Canadian history and, despite its astronomical cost, it led to no meaningful relief for Canadians while leaving no fiscal room to protect our economy from external shocks. Is this what Canadians can expect from your government: more illusions, no relief?

Senator Moreau: May I remind you, Senator Martin, what your colleagues in the House of Commons are voting against? They are voting against lowering taxes for 22 million Canadians. They are voting against cutting the consumer carbon tax. They are voting against protecting pharmacare, dental care and child care. Now you're asking questions about how to improve the economy in Canada and the situation of Canadian families? You should be ashamed.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

BORDER SECURITY

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Speaking of shame, government leader, let's talk about your government's immigration record.

The Auditor General came out with a devastating report, highlighting how there are about 150,000 illegal foreign student worker permits that have been issued by your government, and only 2.6% have been investigated. What happens, of course, as a result? Minister Fraser and Minister Miller, the architects of this catastrophe, get a big promotion.

I know your government likes to hide behind certain realities, but it was your government that created irregular immigration — which was a fancy word for illegal immigrants to come through Roxham Road and other means — and, of course, we find ourselves in the catastrophe we are currently in.

When will your government step up and realize that Bill C-12 is a step in the right direction, but there is regulation in place — and that has been in place — that hasn't been used to get the officials in Immigration Canada to start doing their job, follow up on illegal permits, make sure they are suspended and make sure they have been sent back to where they should be?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I'm happy to listen to you saying that Bill C-12 is a good proposition. I'm looking forward to Royal Assent on Bill C-12.

That being said, I answered Senator Miville-Dechêne earlier that the government is investing unprecedented amounts in the RCMP and in the Canada Border Services Agency to ensure that our immigration system is protecting Canadians and takes anybody who is a threat to Canada very seriously.

Senator Housakos: Bill C-12 is a good bill, yes; it was constructed by a team of parties in cooperation on the House side.

What is not good, however, is that the government is not putting into place measures and regulations that are already available to them to ensure that Immigration Canada runs properly.

I hate to break it to you, but spending all the money in the world is not going to solve anything. I've been in business my whole life. There is a basic principle that you don't need to spend more money and hire more people in order to become more efficient.

When will Immigration Canada start taking their job seriously and start dealing with all these illegal permits we have in this country?

Senator Moreau: When we spend more on security, you are against the measure. When we cut expenses, you say, "Well, the government is not doing enough."

I think that you have to be realistic here. We are improving our security at the border with Bill C-12. We are improving our security at the border by investing more in the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency. At least, Senator Housakos, you should recognize this.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

RETURN-TO-OFFICE MANDATE

Hon. Marty Deacon: Thank you. My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Moreau, in light of the current oil shock, the International Energy Agency, or IEA, last week recommended governments to encourage people to work from home to preserve fuel. Yet, our government is mandating employees back to the office. This, despite other significant headwinds, such as unreliable public transportation in the nation's capital and the lack of office space for our public servants to return to.

Will the government heed the advice of the IEA, lead by example and put the brakes on the RTO mandate?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, Senator Deacon. I am in a very bad position because I'm turning my back to you to answer the question. My apologies.

I cannot speak to this specific issue. However, the government looks at a multitude of factors when it comes to its in-person work policy. Departments have specific procedures tied to the nature of their work, necessitating many workers to come into the office five days per week.

As far as I'm aware, the government maintains their current hybrid work model for now, which stipulates that, until May 2026, public servants in the core public administration are only required to work on site for a minimum of three days per week, and executives for a minimum of four days per week.

Senator M. Deacon: Thank you. I'm aware of that.

At this moment, are you able to provide or direct us to any research or numbers that give us information on what has been spent thus far in purchasing office space to accommodate this RTO mandate?

Senator Moreau: My understanding is that, under the federal real property modernization initiative, over $2 billion in projects have been completed with an additional $6.6 billion currently in progress or planned. They have space for when hybrid work will be removed.

However, with regard to the actual situation with the oil crisis, I'm not aware of any measures that are now being implemented to address that.

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

RESPECT FOR OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Éric Forest: Honourable senators, we were all deeply affected by the accident at New York's LaGuardia Airport, which claimed the lives of the aircraft's pilot and co-pilot. Over 40 passengers and crew members were also injured. We offer our sincere condolences and support to the families involved.

Like many francophones in this country, however, I was frankly shocked to hear the president of Air Canada offer his condolences to the flight's victims in English only. Unfortunately, this is another example of the lack of consideration shown to francophones by Air Canada and its president.

Although the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Transport spoke out about this matter, at a certain point indulgence turns into complacency. Government Representative, why does the government keep tolerating such disdain for French at the highest level of Air Canada?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Forest, let me start by adding my voice to yours and to the voices of the Government of Canada and all senators in this place to offer the families and loved ones of the victims of this tragedy our sincerest condolences.

I read the statements by the Ministers of Transport and Finance concerning the unilingualism of Air Canada's president and CEO. Considering that we were celebrating the Canadian francophonie only days ago, I speak on behalf of all francophones and francophiles in the Senate when I say that I consider this situation completely unacceptable.

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

LABOUR SHORTAGE

Hon. Robert Black: Senator Moreau, Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector depends on a strong and skilled workforce to remain competitive. However, this industry is challenged by labour shortages that are affecting the success of the sector.

Labour shortages in the agriculture sector have severe consequences that extend beyond this industry. The Canadian Agriculture Human Resource Council found that in 2022 more than 28,000 agricultural jobs went unfilled. These unfilled vacancies resulted in an estimated $3.5 billion in lost sales. Thankfully, Minister Hajdu recently announced measures to permit rural employers to retain their temporary foreign workers and increase the allowable share of low-wage temporary foreign workers. However, other agriculture sectors, like the food processing sector, will not see changes.

• (1500)

Senator Moreau, how will your government ensure that our entire agriculture and agri-food industry is protected and that future changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program will take the needs of this important industry into consideration?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, Senator Black. Our agriculture and agri-food sector is critical to Canada's economy. The government recognizes the very real labour shortages facing producers and processors across the country. That is why the government has taken targeted, time-limited measures to support rural employers, including increasing flexibility under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, where shortages are most acute.

With the new immigration plan, the government will transition 33,000 skilled workers in rural communities and high-need sectors to permanent residency. At the same time, the government is working closely with the provinces and territories who understand what the labour market needs best to ensure that the key sectors — such as the agriculture and agri-food sector — have access to the workers they need to remain competitive.

Senator Black: Thank you.

Senator Moreau, Canada's unemployment rate rose to 6.8% in December 2025, with youth unemployment rising to 13.3%. Our rural and agricultural regions are facing workplace challenges and labour shortages. I'm concerned that Canadians have a misunderstanding about what working on a farm or in the ag sector really means.

With the reduction in the number of temporary foreign workers, what is your government doing to incentivize Canadians to explore jobs in agriculture, agri-food and rural areas?

Senator Moreau: Yes, the government approach is balanced, supporting employers facing persistent shortages while ensuring that Canadians remain first in line for available jobs and that immigration levels are sustainable.

The government is working with partners to promote careers in agriculture and agri-food, support skills development and strengthen workforce participation in rural communities.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, pursuant to the order adopted June 4, 2025, I would like to inform the Senate that Question Period with the Honourable Marjorie Michel, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health, will take place on Wednesday, March 25, 2026, at 2:30 p.m.

CONNECTED CARE FOR CANADIANS BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

On the Order:

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

Hon. Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia: Honourable senators, I am delighted to speak in support of Bill S-5, the connected care for Canadians act, primarily from the perspective of someone who has experienced the front lines of primary care.

I thank Senator Kingston for taking a lead on this bill and for her very informative speech.

Colleagues, I've seen first-hand the triumphs and frustrations of our health care system — the joy of helping patients manage chronic conditions effectively and the exasperation of chasing down faxed reports and records or piecing together incomplete histories from fragmented sources. This legislation aims to foster the interoperability of health information technology, ensuring the secure, seamless sharing of electronic data while prohibiting data blocking by vendors.

I'll outline its key strengths and weaknesses, drawing from my daily experiences and the broader implications for both patients and providers.

To begin, let's acknowledge the bill's core intent. It mandates that health information technology vendors make their systems interoperable, allowing for easy access, use and exchange of electronic health information unless restricted by existing privacy laws. It also bans data blocking — those obstructive practices where vendors impose fees, delays or technical barriers to data sharing.

I see immense potential here. One of the greatest strengths of this bill is its ability to enhance patient safety and care continuity. In my practice, I've lost count of the number of times a patient arrived from another province or from a specialist, and I would have to start from scratch because their records were not accessible. This would lead to unnecessary tests, medication errors or delayed diagnoses — issues that surveys show affect over 70% of electronic health information not being shared across providers.

With interoperability, I could instantly pull up a full history, spot drug interactions or track vaccination records, reducing hospital stays and improving outcomes. For instance, managing a diabetic patient's care becomes far more effective when lab results from a recent electronic record are integrated seamlessly into my system, allowing me to adjust treatments without redundancy.

Another strength of this bill lies in empowering patients and reducing administrative burdens on health providers. The bill promotes person-centred care by enabling patients to securely access their own data, no matter where they live or travel.

Colleagues, in many clinical situations, patients often feel disempowered, repeating their stories endlessly. This legislation could change that, fostering informed decisions and better self-management. Think of a senior monitoring their heart condition via a unified app, for example. For physicians, it means less time wrestling with incompatible software or fax machines. Currently, 95% of physicians use electronic systems, yet many revert to paper because of failed connections or a lack of interoperability.

By prohibiting data blocking, the bill could free up hours for direct patient interaction, combatting burnout and allowing us to see more people amid Canada's primary care shortages.

Moreover, Bill S-5 paves the way for innovation and efficiency in our system. It sets the stage for AI-driven insights, like predictive analytics for disease outbreaks or personalized treatment plans, while creating economic opportunities for Canadian tech firms.

In rural areas from where patients are referred to urban specialists, this could bridge gaps, supporting virtual care and equitable access.

Overall, these strengths align with what organizations like the Canadian Medical Association and the College of Family Physicians of Canada have endorsed: safer, more coordinated care that saves lives and outcomes. That said, colleagues, no bill is perfect, and as a physician committed to ethical practice, I must highlight what I view as some perceived weaknesses.

Privacy and security remain a top concern. While the bill defers to existing federal, provincial and territorial privacy laws, mandating broader data sharing inherently increases the surface area for breach or misuse. In my experience, even de-identified data can be vulnerable, and with cyber threats on the rise, a single hack could erode patient trust.

We've seen this in other jurisdictions like the U.S. where similar interoperability pushes led to unintended exposures without robust safeguards. The bill's enforcement relies on future regulations for penalties and compliance checks, but if these are not stringent, vendors might skirt rules and leave gaps.

Implementation poses another challenge, particularly for small family practices. Upgrading to interoperable systems could incur significant costs, like hardware, software and training, and these are not addressed in the bill. In underserved areas where budgets are tight and where internet is unreliable, this may, in fact, exacerbate the digital divide, disadvantaging elderly patients or those in remote communities who lack tech literacy.

Moreover, the bill's application depends on provincial alignment. If some regions lag, we could end up with a patchwork system, undermining national connectivity.

Finally, while reducing administrative work is a boon, overreliance on tech could introduce new errors if data quality isn't standardized — garbage in, garbage out, as they say.

In conclusion, Bill S-5 represents a bold step toward modernizing Canada's health care, addressing long-standing inefficiencies that have hindered the work of family physicians and specialists every day. I believe its strengths in safety, efficiency and patient empowerment do outweigh the risks, and if we address the weaknesses through strong regulations, funding support and ongoing stakeholder input, we should be able to address them. I believe that together we can build a truly connected system that puts patients first. Thank you for your time and consideration. *Meegwetch*.

• (1510)

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

(On motion of Senator Black, debate adjourned.)

BILL TO IMPLEMENT THE PROTOCOL ON THE ACCESSION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE COMPREHENSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE AGREEMENT FOR TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Iris Petten moved second reading of Bill C-13, An Act to implement the Protocol on the Accession of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

She said: Honourable Senators, I rise today because I have the honour of sponsoring one of the two trade bills before us in this chamber. Though different, both of these bills are very important in diversifying our trade with the world. Bill C-13 simply, but importantly, is the last step required to formalize the U.K.'s ascension to an existing trade agreement, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, CPTPP.

The full title of Bill C-13 is An Act to implement the Protocol on the Accession of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

In an era marked by economic turbulence, geopolitical uncertainty and rapid technological change, the relationship between Canada and the U.K. is not simply historic; it is strategic, forward-looking and full of promise for both countries.

Before we get into the specifics, let's talk about how we got here. Bill C-13 was introduced in the House of Commons on October 21, 2025. It was referred to committee on December 11, and consideration in the House of Commons International Trade Committee was completed on February 10, 2026. The committee met three times to study Bill C-13, including the clause-by-clause meeting. And now the bill is here, in our chamber.

So let's talk about the CPTPP. The CPTPP is one of Canada's largest and most ambitious trade agreements. The 11 founding members of the agreement are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

The CPTPP membership represents approximately 14% of global GDP and over half a billion consumers. Since the CPTPP entered into force in 2018, total merchandise trade between Canada and all CPTPP parties has increased by 38.3%.

The CPTPP covers virtually all aspects of trade and investment, from trade in goods and services to non-tariff barriers and intellectual property rights, and 99% of tariff lines among CPTPP parties will be duty-free once the agreement is fully implemented, creating significant opportunities for Canadian exporters across all sectors of our economy.

In fact, as Canada begins the eighth year since the CPTPP entered into force, the results speak for themselves. Canadian beef exports to CPTPP markets have surged by 122.1%, rising from $338 million in 2018 to $751 million in 2024. This is not incremental progress; this is the result of Canadian producers gaining tariff-eliminated, rules-based access to Indo-Pacific opportunities that were not available pre-CPTPP.

Consider Japan, the largest economy within the CPTPP. Over the past five years alone, Canada's beef exports to Japan grew by 18.6%, a clear demonstration of our products' competitiveness in the global marketplace. Japan is also the largest CPTPP market for Canadian pork, with exports valued at $1.5 billion in 2024. These successes are not abstract. They represent jobs in Canadian communities, a strengthened rural economy and international recognition of the quality of Canadian agriculture.

But these benefits are not limited to the meat sector. As someone whose background is in the seafood industry, I see the benefits that the CPTPP has provided to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Through this agreement, tariffs have been eliminated for many of our signature seafood exports, including shrimp, snow crab, lobster, clams and halibut, products that carry the pride of our harvesters and the craftsmanship of our processors.

With tariff barriers coming down across Indo-Pacific markets, our seafood now lands on distant tables more competitively than ever before, helping our small boats and our processing plants keep their lights on, their crews employed and their communities strong.

Now let's talk about the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom was the first economy to be approved by all members to join the CPTPP trade agreement. Once the U.K.'s application was agreed to by the consensus of all trade agreement members, they must each ratify the U.K.'s accession through their respective legislative processes, hence why we are discussing Bill C-13 today.

Canada and the U.K. share a rich history through our institutions, culture and deep-rooted people-to-people connections. But the value of this partnership in 2026 and beyond lies not only in our shared past but in how we are forging a joint future across trade and investment, critical technologies, security and defence, and global leadership.

The prime ministers of Canada and the U.K. have met on several occasions over the past number of months to underscore the importance of this relationship, highlighting various opportunities to strengthen our partnership, including on trade.

[Senator Petten]

As the U.K. is our third-largest trading partner, with $60.9 billion in 2024, and our second-largest investment partner, with $97 billion in 2024, Canada is always looking for new avenues to improve our bilateral trading relationship.

As an example of our current exporting relationship, we can look to gold. The U.K. is a global hub for gold transshipment, and in 2024, gold accounted for $22.3 billion of Canada's $28.3 billion in merchandise exports to the U.K.

Given some ongoing discussions that need to be had, the Government of Canada created the UK-Canada Economic and Trade Working Group to address existing market access barriers, expand existing arrangements into new areas, such as digital trade, and explore co-operation in the development of critical minerals and sovereign artificial intelligence infrastructure.

Honourable colleagues, ratifying the U.K.'s accession protocol to the CPTPP will reinforce our economic ties, encourage business connections and strengthen job-supporting commerce between Canadian and British firms, including in areas that are increasingly tied to sectors shaping the future: digital, AI, fintech, life sciences, clean energy and defence-related innovation.

It will also support the government's Export Diversification Strategy and its overarching goal of achieving 50% more overseas exports by 2035.

• (1520)

New CPTPP entrants mean more opportunities for our businesses to trade and to invest with fewer barriers, leading to lower costs, higher competitiveness and increased innovation. This ultimately helps Canada's businesses in diversifying their supply chains and ensuring that their products are more price-competitive.

This is especially important at a time when the global trading system is facing fundamental and unprecedented challenges. Expanding CPTPP membership strengthens our connections to alternative supply chains beyond North America. This enhances our economic resilience in the long term by ensuring that not all of our eggs for our economic success are in one basket. It opens doors for growth while boosting shared prosperity in a world that increasingly depends on collaboration across borders.

Canada is a trading nation. We must ensure we do not place all our economic bets on a single region or a narrow set of channels. We must continue strengthening relationships with reliable partners, providing our businesses with stable, predictable and transparent trading environments.

This is why, coupled with existing comprehensive access under the Canada-United Kingdom Trade Continuity Agreement, which is the bilateral in-force free trade agreement known as the TCA, the U.K.'s accession will develop even more pathways for Canadian businesses into the U.K. market.

A Canadian company exporting to the U.K. may choose to claim preferential access for their product under whichever agreement offers the best outcome. Depending on the product and circumstances, one trade agreement may offer better market access than the other or vice versa.

While 99% of bilateral trade is duty-free under the Trade Continuity Agreement, through the U.K.'s accession to the CPTPP, Canada secured new benefits for our agricultural and agri-food sectors. This includes additional duty-free volumes into the U.K. for pork and beef, as well as unlimited access for sweetcorn.

The U.K. is Canada's third-largest market for sweetcorn, but exports have been limited, as duty-free volumes are constrained by a quota under the Canada-U.K. Trade Continuity Agreement. This improvement will support sweetcorn producers, which is of particular interest for the province of Quebec.

In addition, the CPTPP Rules of Origin, which determine how goods are accorded preferential tariff treatment, will allow more of Canada's agricultural export interests to be eligible for preferential access to the U.K., including for meat, processed foods, sugar-containing products and pet food.

The U.K. is already Canada's ninth-largest agri-food and seafood export market, and the U.K.'s accession will help our agri-food and seafood exporters to build on that partnership, making trade more transparent, predictable and accessible for Canadian agribusinesses.

Under the CPTPP, for the first time, Canadians seeking to establish or manage a business in the U.K. now have more predictable access for stays up to one year. Consider a Canadian tech start-up looking to expand into Europe. With the U.K. now part of the CPTPP, that start-up can send its team to London to set up operations, train staff and build partnerships without the bureaucratic hurdles that often slow down international expansion.

Government procurement represents one of the most significant and reliable markets available to Canadian businesses pursuing opportunities in the U.K. Governments are consistently among the largest purchasers of goods and services in any country, procuring everything from office equipment and IT services to major infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, transit systems and public facilities. These purchases occur year after year, regardless of broader economic cycles, making government clients uniquely stable and predictable.

The ratification of the U.K.'s Accession Protocol will provide improved access to procurement opportunities at all levels of the U.K. government, including regional and local. For Canadian firms, procurement commitments can translate into contracts and jobs. For procurement opportunities covered under the CPTPP, procuring entities must abide by three key principles: non-discrimination, transparency and fairness.

These rules are not just there to benefit large corporations. Small- and medium-sized enterprises, or SMEs, across Canada also stand to benefit from greater access to information, predictable processes and the stable business environment that is supported by the CPTPP's obligations on government procurement. Canadian companies seeking to diversify their activities can look forward to opportunities in the U.K. evaluated to be worth over C$460 billion annually.

These opportunities are not only economically significant; they also support Canada's broader trade diversification strategy. At a time when global economic uncertainty is prompting countries to rethink supply chains and reduce reliance on single markets, the U.K.'s participation in the CPTPP offers Canadian businesses a stable and familiar partner with shared values and strong commercial ties.

As a founding party to the CPTPP and a strong advocate for open trade, Canada's ratification will demonstrate its commitment to expanding and deepening economic ties across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. It will ensure that we are aligned with our CPTPP partners, who — with the exception of one, Mexico — have already brought the U.K.'s Accession Protocol into force in their respective jurisdictions. And Mexico is also in the process of ratifying this agreement. This will help to validate the CPTPP's collective ability to launch, execute and conclude accession processes. It will maintain the integrity and unity of the bloc, while making it more attractive to other potential economies in the future through the addition of another major G7 economy to the agreement.

Following the conclusion of the U.K.'s accession process, CPTPP parties launched accession negotiations with Costa Rica, a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, with a proven ability to negotiate high-standard free trade agreements, and are working toward their completion. In November of last year, CPTPP parties also established an Accession Working Group for Uruguay, and the work with this partner is actively progressing. The more accessions we successfully complete, the more enticing CPTPP membership becomes.

By ratifying the U.K.'s accession, Canada reinforces the agreement's role as a forward-looking, rules-based trade framework that adapts to a changing global environment. It sends a strong message that CPTPP members stand together in supporting new partners who share their values and economic ambitions. In a world of rising economic uncertainties and shifting alliances, expanding CPTPP membership strengthens multilateralism and helps build a more stable, prosperous regional order. It shows that like-minded countries remain committed to cooperation, high standards and inclusive growth.

• (1530)

As a senator from Newfoundland and Labrador, I bring to this debate a perspective shaped by uniquely close and enduring ties to the United Kingdom. Colleagues will remember that, in 2024, we celebrated 75 years since Newfoundland and Labrador joined Confederation, a milestone that invited us to not only celebrate our place in Canada but also reflect on the deep historical ties that predate it.

Among the most moving moments of those commemorations was the repatriation of an unknown First World War soldier. I was honoured to be part of the delegation that accompanied those remains home to Canada, a solemn reminder that our shared history with the U.K. is written not only in treaties and trade but in sacrifice, service and kinship.

It is from this place of history, relationships and shared values that I welcome the United Kingdom's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. For Newfoundland and Labrador and for Canada, this is not merely an economic decision but a continuation of a long-standing partnership grounded in trust and mutual respect.

Now is the time when we must stand together as Canadians against the economic and political threats that continue to test our resilience. We must work with reliable partners to diversify our trade so that our businesses and consumers can continue to prosper for years to come.

The CPTPP is more than just a trade deal. It is a platform for like-minded partners to align our economic interests and a core component to our trade diversification agenda. Implementing the U.K.'s accession will extend concrete, commercially meaningful benefits for Canadians.

In this pivotal moment, strengthening a high-standard, rules-based partnership with a trusted ally is not only prudent but a forward-looking step that supports Canada's long-term economic security. To this end, I urge all my honourable colleagues to vote to send Bill C-13 to committee and thereafter to enable Canada to bring the U.K.'s accession protocol to the CPTPP into force.

Thank you.

Hon. Marty Deacon: Senator, would you take a question?

Senator Petten: Yes.

Senator M. Deacon: Thank you very much. This bill is very important in this time of shift, change and trade diversity. Could you share with us, Senator Petten, the government's consultation process with Canadians on the U.K.'s accession to the CPTPP? When did it begin in relation to the U.K.'s accession timeline within the trade bloc?

Senator Petten: I understand that from March 12 to April 27, 2021, Global Affairs Canada held public consultation on priorities related to the U.K.'s accession to the CPTPP and potential Canada-U.K. free trade negotiations alongside the targeted discussions. They also met with provinces, territories, Indigenous groups and advisers. This included virtual meetings and sector-specific round tables, particularly in agriculture, natural resources and clean technology. They were involved in regular updates. I think about 118 written submissions were received.

All the input gathered, both formally and informally, was shared with the negotiators, who helped inform future discussions with the U.K.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator M. Deacon, do you have a supplementary question?

Senator M. Deacon: Thank you very much.

You mentioned great diversity and great submissions. What were the top two or three issues the government took away from the consultations? How will those help guide Canadian business if and when this bill passes?

Senator Petten: They are supporting the U.K. trade agreement, and Canada's accession emphasized, as I indicated, the strong economic and historical ties and the opportunities around that. However, I think the importance of it was around stable trade relations while advocating for enforcing labour and environmental standards and inclusive provisions benefiting, as I indicated, small- and medium-sized enterprises — or SMEs — and women, Indigenous Peoples and those in racialized communities.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Michèle Audette: Would the senator take a question?

[*English*]

Senator Petten: Yes.

Senator Audette: My English is rusty, so I'll ask it in French.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for sponsoring the bill. We come from the same region. I was born in Labrador. It's a beautiful area, rich in resources, including critical minerals and many others. I also come from the region known for Sept-Îles shrimp, scallops and many other wonderful local products. Indigenous nations have been there for millennia, and I'm trying to gain a better understanding, from reading the bill and listening to you. My first question is this: To what extent will Indigenous Peoples be

involved, not only in consultations, but also in economic delegations and travel, to ensure that we can also support Indigenous workers, Indigenous businesses and the pride we've had for a very long time? Second, how can we use the three rules — transparency, fairness and no discrimination — to assess the level of inclusion of First Nations Peoples in this wonderful project?

[*English*]

Senator Petten: Thank you for the question. I can relate with respect to one of the things I know, seafood, as well as some of the Indigenous things, particularly in Labrador and Northern Canada and what we have been doing there. This trade bill provides opportunities for more trade and to create jobs for Indigenous Peoples. It has been doing that through some of those businesses that have been supported through and working with the opportunities of trading, particularly with the U.K.

For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador, which would be part of where you're talking about, the northern cod are returning. Part of what is happening — even with the northern cod, the biggest market — is that what they are doing and producing now is going to the U.K., into the fish and chips market.

Of course, we had not been dealing with cod because it was not there to deal with. However, with the moratorium being lifted, even though the industry is a shadow of what it was, those opportunities are there to perform the trade. I think they have been included in some of those.

[*Translation*]

Senator Audette: You also mentioned critical minerals. This concerns our Mushuau-nipi territory, where there will be open-pit mines for critical minerals. To what extent will the Indigenous Peoples in these territories be consulted and included — from start to finish — to ensure that projects are viable and meet environmental standards, and most importantly, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? You may not have an answer right now, but the ministers responsible for the bill could certainly write to me to address my concerns regarding critical minerals, as well as the role and rights of Indigenous Peoples. Thank you.

[*English*]

Senator Petten: Thank you again. Of course, this bill is about international trade. With some of the minerals, I mentioned the opportunities afforded, particularly under the goal and what has been happening with other things, but with critical minerals, we are able to look at those opportunities for trading with the U.K., as well as other partners involved in the CPTPP because there are 11 countries included in some of that as well.

(On motion of Senator Housakos, debate adjourned.)

• (1540)

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO EXTEND SITTING ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026, AND AUTHORIZE COMMITTEES TO MEET DURING SITTING OF THE SENATE WITHDRAWN

On Government Business, Motions, Order No. 49, by the Honourable Patti LaBoucane-Benson:

> 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. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 5-10(1), I ask for leave of the Senate to withdraw Government Motion No. 49.

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

Hon Senators: Agreed.

(Notice of motion withdrawn.)

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SOIL HEALTH BILL

THIRD REPORT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY COMMITTEE ADOPTED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the third report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry (*Bill S-230, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement, with an amendment*), presented in the Senate on March 12, 2026.

Hon. Mary Robinson moved the adoption of the report.

She said: Honourable senators, I rise to speak to the third report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry concerning Bill S-230, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement, or the "National Strategy for Soil Health Act."

Bill S-230 calls upon the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to work in collaboration with other ministries, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments, as well as members of the public, to develop a national strategy to improve, support and promote soil health across Canada. It outlines various measures to be included in the strategy, falling into four

categories: policy and legislation, knowledge improvement, education and information, and the appointment of a national advocate for soil health.

In February and March, over the course of five meetings, the committee heard from 18 witnesses across a broad spectrum of expertise. During our two clause-by-clause meetings, the committee considered and adopted two amendments. I will now speak briefly to both amendments.

In line with some concerns we heard in regard to representation in regional flexibility and to broaden the scope of public consultation and the development of a national strategy, the committee amended clause 3 to ensure that, one, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food consult Indigenous representatives of agriculture and industry organizations; and, two, the minister account for the views of farmers representing diverse regions, soil types and farming operations in a meaningful way.

Senators, I believe these amendments have further strengthened an already robust bill. I look forward to its adoption at report stage and to voicing my support at third reading. Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

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

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

AUDIT AND OVERSIGHT

THIRD REPORT OF COMMITTEE ADOPTED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the third report of the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight, entitled *Senate Audit and Oversight Charter*, presented in the Senate on December 2, 2025.

Hon. Marty Klyne moved the adoption of the report.

He said: Honourable senators, I'm pleased to speak today to the revised *Senate Audit and Oversight Charter*, which is presented to this chamber in the third report of the Standing Senate Committee on Audit and Oversight. The revised charter before you today is the result of a thorough review carried out by the Audit and Oversight Committee, the first review to take place since the Senate first adopted the charter in 2022.

The committee's work is in accordance with the charter itself, which mandates a periodic review of the document. As part of its review, the committee received and carefully considered feedback from the three major divisions of the Senate administration: legislative services, the corporate sector and the legal sector. The Audit and Oversight Committee's revisions to the charter add some clarity and transparency to the work of the committee, and some of the revisions are simply editorial in nature. For example, some of the text has been simplified in order to remove duplications with the rules.

One notable change relates to the committee's reporting obligations to the Senate, which are clarified in section 6-5 by adding that the committee will be able to table information in the Senate on the approved multiyear risk-based internal audit plan, including planned engagements and any resource limitations. This revision shows the Audit and Oversight Committee's commitment to transparency.

Other changes proposed by the committee also claim to add clarity. I will outline some of these changes.

The Audit and Oversight Committee's CIBA membership restrictions, outlined in chapter 2, were expanded to add that senators cannot be members of AOVS and CIBA committees simultaneously. This change is in keeping with the sessional order that was adopted by the chamber on June 4, 2025.

• (1550)

Recognizing that the Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration Committee does sometimes create working groups, the charter was revised to specify that the Audit and Oversight and Internal Economy membership restrictions do not apply to Internal Economy working groups.

Chapter 5, on the Audit and Oversight Committee's budget, was revised to ensure that the text accurately reflects current practices. I would like to reassure colleagues that the edits in this section do not change anything with regard to the Audit and Oversight Committee's budgetary processes. Rather, this section clearly reflects established practices. The revisions differentiate between the budget allocated annually to the Audit and Oversight Committee in the estimates, on the one hand, and the budget process that the Audit and Oversight Committee must follow when requesting any additional funds, on the other hand.

Again, I wish to stress that the Audit and Oversight Committee must still present a report to the Senate for the Senate's decision when asking for additional funds on top of the Audit and Oversight Committee's allocated budget. This requirement remains unchanged.

Section 6-6 provides that the Audit and Oversight Committee will have access to information from the Senate Administration that falls within the purview of the committee's mandate as set out in the Rules. Additionally, section 6-12 relates to access to information for the Senate's Chief Audit Executive, which highlights the need to respect parliamentary privilege and solicitor-client privilege and the need to adhere to security clearance requirements.

Revisions were made to the sections pertaining to the Audit and Oversight Committee's intersessional authority. The edits clarify the intersessional authority's membership and quorum. For instance, an edit now specifies that external members who

were members of the committee at the time of prorogation or dissolution remain members of the intersessional authority, notwithstanding the expiry of their term of appointment.

Finally, the section on the periodic review was revised to enable a review to take place every five years rather than every three years. Increasing the length of time between reviews is more reflective of the amount of work involved in conducting such a review.

The Audit and Oversight Committee's third report also contains two other requests. First, the Audit and Oversight Committee requests this chamber's authorization to propose amendments to section 3:05 of the *Senate Administrative Rules*, or SARs. If the revised charter is adopted, the Audit and Oversight Committee believes that the section on the committee's budgets within the SARs should also reflect current practices and should, therefore, align with the budgetary provisions within the revised charter.

Second, the Audit and Oversight Committee requests this chamber's authorization to propose an amendment to the *Rules of the Senate* to incorporate an automatic referral of work by the Audit and Oversight Committee in past sessions and by past intersessional authorities to the Audit and Oversight Committee in a new session. This request is not linked to anything in the charter itself. Rather, the Audit and Oversight Committee would like to propose such a rule change in order to ensure that the committee can carry out its responsibilities without any delays upon the start of a new session.

Before ending my remarks, I wish to emphasize the following: The *Rules of the Senate* retain their precedence over anything contained within this charter. The changes proposed by the Audit and Oversight Committee seek to add clarity and enhance transparency. The Audit and Oversight Committee's revisions, if adopted, would ensure that the charter accurately reflects current practices and would make the charter as effective a document as it possibly can.

To conclude, I would like to draw my colleagues' attention to an edit made to section 1-4 to emphasize the Audit and Oversight Committee's role in sustaining Canadians' trust in the Senate. An effective and accurate charter will help the Audit and Oversight Committee fulfill this important role.

I therefore ask for my colleagues' support in adopting the Audit and Oversight Committee's third report. Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator McCallum, seconded by the Honourable Senator Martin:

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

(a) removals through the Indian residential school system;

(b) Indian day schools;

(c) the Sixties Scoop;

(d) the epidemic of Indigenous children in care; and

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

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

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

(On motion of Senator McCallum, debate adjourned.)

THE EMERGING PROBLEM OF SATELLITE DEBRIS FALLS

INQUIRY—DEBATE

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Simons, calling the attention of the Senate to the emerging problem of satellite debris falls in Canada and to the challenges of satellite congestion, pollution and liability.

Hon. Paula Simons: Honourable senators, I rise today to call the attention of the Senate to the emerging problem of satellite debris falls in Canada and to the challenges of satellite congestion, pollution and liability.

Two years ago, in April 2024, Barry Sawchuk, a grain grower who farms near Ituna, Saskatchewan, about 165 kilometres northeast of Regina, went out to his fields to check moisture levels in his soil.

What he found instead was a big chunk of metal and carbon fibre, weighing about 40 kilograms and standing about two metres tall. At first, he couldn't figure out where it had come from until he and his family came to the unlikely but correct conclusion that it was space junk — a space junk trunk, specifically, the cargo trunk for a SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft. It seems the trunk was ejected by the Axiom 3 private astronaut mission that had re-entered over the Canadian prairies in February 2024. The trunk was supposed to burn up upon re-entry to earth's atmosphere. Instead, several sizable chunks landed on Barry's farm.

Luckily — and it really was sheer luck — no one was hurt, and no property was damaged. But it left Mr. Sawchuk in legal limbo. When he started to call around, no one could tell him how this stuff had landed on his farm, whether it posed any risk or what he was supposed to do with it. He eventually connected with Dr. Samantha Lawler, a goat farmer and professor of astronomy at the University of Regina and an expert in orbital dynamics. Dr. Lawler called every government department and agency she could think of, without much success.

As seeding season continued, another five Saskatchewan farmers found eight pieces of SpaceX debris scattered over a 50-kilometre radius. Finally, SpaceX came to retrieve Barry Sawchuk's hunks of metal and carbon fibre, paying him a modest fee, which he donated to the construction of a new hockey rink.

The Canadian Space Operations Centre is supposed to track all launches and flag debris risk. However, this launch was not flagged as a cause of risk. Global Affairs Canada only learned of the issue from media reports.

SpaceX was supposed to tell the American government of the incident, which was, in turn, supposed to tell Canada. That also did not happen.

Once our government learned about the debris fall in Saskatchewan, it fulfilled its international obligations to report the incident to the United Nations and the U.S. State Department. According to Global Affairs, they received a confirmation receipt from the State Department and no response at all from the UN.

Then, in August 2024, Travis Kennedy was combining lentils on his family farm near Hodgeville, Saskatchewan, about three hours from Ituna. He found a different kind of space debris — a computer panel about the size of a laptop computer, a part of a Starlink satellite which was supposed to have burned up on re-entry. Travis mailed his chunk back to Elon Musk's company and received a cheque for US$3,900 for his trouble.

Then, in September 2025, two buddies from Saskatoon, Cody Koloski and Justin Tan, looked up to see chunks of flaming space debris streaking through the night sky of Saskatoon — yes, more Starlink litter, a piece of falling satellite.

Now, why Saskatchewan, you might wonder. According to a recent academic paper published by University of British Columbia academics Ewan Wright, Aaron Boley and Michael Byers, the majority of satellite debris is most likely to fall in the areas around 50 degrees north or 50 degrees south latitude, putting large parts of Canada squarely in the bull's eye. Southern Saskatchewan is under one of the densest bands of satellites. The professors calculate that, for one round of re-entries for on-orbit Starlink satellites, Saskatchewan will likely have 11 re-entries, while Canada as a whole will have 110.

It's also possible we are just finding more debris in Saskatchewan because it's flat prairie, farm and ranchland, and the debris isn't being obscured by trees.

That said, there was another Starlink space debris incident just south of Calgary this month. Pieces of what were believed to be part of Starlink-1723 were seen streaking through the sky.

• (1600)

Launched in 2020, Starlink-1723 was decommissioned in 2025 and had been slowly de-orbiting since —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Simons, I'm afraid I must interrupt you. It is now 4 p.m.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Pursuant to the order of March 12, 2026, I leave the chair for the Senate to resolve into a Committee of the Whole in order to receive Annette Ryan respecting her nomination to the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer. The Honourable Senator Cormier will chair the committee.

[*English*]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

ANNETTE RYAN RECEIVED IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

On the Order:

> The Senate in Committee of the Whole in order to receive Annette Ryan respecting her appointment as Parliamentary Budget Officer.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended and put into Committee of the Whole, the Honourable René Cormier in the chair.)

The Chair: Honourable senators, the Senate is resolved into a Committee of the Whole in order to receive Annette Ryan respecting her nomination to the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Honourable senators, in a Committee of the Whole, senators shall address the chair but need not stand. Under the Rules, the speaking time is 10 minutes, including questions and answers, but, as ordered, if a senator does not use all of their time, the balance can be yielded to another senator. I would now invite Annette Ryan to join us.

(Pursuant to the order of the Senate, Annette Ryan was escorted to a seat in the Senate Chamber.)

The Chair: Ms. Ryan, welcome to the Senate.

As I have informed my colleagues, the question-and-answer period will be divided into 10-minute blocks.

These blocks will be shared between two or three senators and will include time for your responses.

I would ask you to make your opening remarks of at most five minutes.

Annette Ryan, nominee for the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer: Thank you very much, Your Honour.

[*Translation*]

And thank you, honourable senators.

I am honoured to be here with you today to present my candidacy for the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer of Canada.

[*English*]

As I did yesterday at the Standing Committee on Finance in the House, I will open by honouring the leadership of senator Hugh Segal, who advocated for many years to create the independent Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO.

The core goal for the office is to inform parliamentary scrutiny and vibrant debate with common facts and analysis that are independent from government.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to reiterate my deep respect for all my predecessors who have shaped the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. As has already been noted, the OECD recently recognized that the PBO is a highly effective source of non-partisan and credible advice. In the same report, the OECD set out balanced recommendations to guide its next steps.

[*English*]

I want you to know that I agree with the OECD recommendations, and I commit to deepening and strengthening the office's attention to the sustainability of the government's overall fiscal track. I will also focus the attention of the PBO to how government budget proposals are executed as they flow through to main and supplementary estimates and then to public accounts. This is core to House and Senate business and to the practical question of what return Canadians get on the investment of taxes raised from them and in their name.

As I introduce my vision, let me introduce myself. My name is Annette Ryan, and I am a proud Atlantic Canadian. I was raised on a family farm in Newfoundland and then in Prince Edward Island. I earned a mathematics degree from Acadia University in Nova Scotia and a master's degree in economics from Oxford University, which I attended as a Rhodes Scholar. I started my professional career at the Institute for Fiscal Studies in London, U.K., where I analyzed complex data sets to inform pressing public policy questions related to productivity, innovation, wages and employment.

I returned to Canada in 1996 to work at the Prince Edward Island Provincial Treasury, where I managed all aspects of transfer payments and income taxes. These were years of intense debate on Canada's fiscal imbalance, following the debt crisis of the early 1990s.

I then moved to the federal civil service, where I have held senior executive positions for most of my career, with experience briefing prime ministers, ministers and parliamentary committees, as well as opposition MPs from all other parties, on complex issues in respect of the budget and estimates process, taxation measures, fiscal federalism, innovation and productivity, social policy, financial sector policy and national security.

I feel strongly that all parliamentarians should benefit from the same quality of advice and analysis as do government members, which is my core motivation to seek the role of Parliamentary Budget Officer.

[*Translation*]

I humbly seek your approval for this appointment so that I can put my expertise to work for you.

Before concluding, allow me to reiterate the commitment I made to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance yesterday.

[*English*]

While the Parliament of Canada Act currently allows a second term for the Parliamentary Budget Officer, I commit to serving one term only. I believe there are certain accountability roles in the senior public service that should not be eligible for reappointment in the interests of maintaining their integrity 100% beyond reproach. I believe that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is such a role.

[*Translation*]

In order to safeguard the independence of the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, I will not stand for a second term.

[*English*]

I want the trust of parliamentarians and of Canadians. And I want the government to have a clear timeline to appoint the next Parliamentary Budget Officer. You have my commitment that, if confirmed, I will serve all parliamentarians with diligence, neutrality and integrity.

[*Translation*]

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ryan.

We shall now proceed with questions.

[*English*]

Senator Housakos: Ms. Ryan, thank you and welcome to the Senate.

Since 2010, one of the hallmarks of the PBO's work has been the Fiscal Sustainability Report. Last year, instead of the usual full report, we only received a very small publication entitled *Budget 2025: Long-term Fiscal Sustainability*. Can you tell us if you plan to maintain the previous practice of releasing full fiscal sustainability reports if you are appointed as Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. Yes, absolutely, senator. One of the two priorities that I am setting for myself and the office, above others, is to deepen and broaden the work of the PBO in respect of fiscal sustainability. I think that there is a lot of scope to examine different types of fiscal metrics and fiscal anchors, if you will, that can inform parliamentarians about the track of government finances, and I think there is also scope to do different scenario analysis to test some of the assumptions about what a downside risk and an upside risk can mean for those long-term financial forecasts.

Senator Housakos: Thank you, Ms. Ryan. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's "Long-term Fiscal Sustainability" note published with Budget 2025 found that the federal government's fiscal room had narrowed dramatically, from much more room under earlier projections to only a very small margin under Budget 2025. As you know, this means that the government has far less room to absorb future shocks or new spending pressure than there once appeared to be. Does this concern you, and should this concern us?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you for the question, senator. If I may, thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I think it is very concerning whenever there are reductions in the government's and the country's fiscal room.

That said, I think it is the prerogative of the government to take decisions about how they will spend those finances, and, in the case of the current government, I think they have put forward a statement to say that the spending that they want to do out of borrowing is to go towards capital projects predominantly. That is an area that can be informed by analysis and numbers and figures.

• (1610)

If I may, sir, I would just conclude by saying that, as Parliamentary Budget Officer, PBO, I will pay close attention to the questions that can be informed by analysis and facts versus the normative questions about the right levels at which governments should spend and take risks.

Senator Housakos: My deep concern, Ms. Ryan, is that these are the kinds of observations on which this government has pushed back. My good friend here in the Senate, the government leader, pushes back on these observations all the time. I would like to know, if you are confirmed as the new PBO, what practical guardrails give you confidence that the PBO can and will remain neutral and independent in the face of the political pushback that PBOs face in Parliament from time to time?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you. The guardrails come from a couple of different directions, and I would be happy to have conversations about how they can be further strengthened. The act itself protects the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Parliamentary Budget Officer's independent voice that can support that analysis to help you challenge decisions as they continue.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, report that I spoke of also made suggestions and recommendations about bringing in the voices of other Canadians to test the strength of the analysis of the PBO. That's another means to strengthen the possibility of responding in a balanced way to a government response that might say that the analysis of the PBO is incorrect or off base and so on. Transparency runs both ways and can both protect and strengthen the office.

Senator Martin: Hello, Ms. Ryan. When Mr. Jacques was the interim Parliamentary Budget Officer, he used terms such as "unsustainable," "shocking" and "stupefying" to describe the state of the federal finances, remarks which he later qualified.

In light of the PBO's *Budget 2025: Long-Term Fiscal Sustainability* analysis, which shows that the government's fiscal room has been reduced to virtually nothing, and given the absence of a plan to return to any balance, I can understand why such strong concerns were raised by Mr. Jacques. I know you are not yet confirmed as PBO, but you are familiar with the numbers. I'm wondering what your assessment of our current fiscal outlook is.

Ms. Ryan: Thank you very much. My assessment is that the current fiscal track is sustainable. I think that aligns with the view of Mr. Jacques himself, as well as other voices, such as the International Monetary Fund. A lot of attention has been brought to the fact that the fiscal tracks of successive governments recently have increased in step. It has been somewhat of a mix of analyses that people bring to the question of whether a given fiscal track is sustainable versus the tendency of fiscal tracks to surpass each other.

The current fiscal track is sustainable. The aspect of having fiscal tracks step up markedly with subsequent budgets is something that will have limits and will need close attention.

Senator Martin: On another note of concern, the government frequently relies on net debt to GDP to suggest that Canada's fiscal position remains sound, but that measure is reduced by the inclusion of Canada Pension Plan, CPP, and Quebec Pension Plan, QPP, assets, even though these pension assets are not available to the federal government to fund its operations or pay down its liabilities. This makes it a bit misleading as an indicator of our fiscal health.

If you are appointed, do you think the PBO should give Parliament a fuller picture by placing greater emphasis on measures that more clearly reflect the government's own underlying fiscal position?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. A range of indicators sheds light on different aspects of the government's fiscal track. The government puts forward both sets of metrics right now for perhaps different purposes. I would offer that, in the annual budget documents, the primary fiscal track that is presented is essentially the gross debt as a share of GDP, which you favour for the reasons that you described.

If I may, the government has used the net debt figure for international comparisons that are pertinent in comparison with countries, like the United States, where the forward pension liabilities for government are less well covered than they are in Canada.

Senator Martin: I understand why we have international comparisons, but, for us in Canada, in your view, would it be useful for the PBO to present fiscal sustainability using both net debt and measures that exclude pension assets so that parliamentarians can better understand that difference?

Ms. Ryan: Yes, senator, I absolutely agree with that. If I may, I would further extend those metrics by other measures, such as the share of every revenue dollar collected that goes to debt service charges. That is a critical measure that will also inform the sense of what we can afford and what we can permit ourselves in any given context.

The Chair: Thank you. We will now proceed to the second block of questions.

Senator MacAdam: Ms. Ryan, thank you for being here today. My question for you is the following. In its first external review of Canada's Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the OECD highlighted that while independent fiscal institutions "help hold governments accountable, they have a special duty to be accountable as well." The report made several recommendations that seek to safeguard the independence and sustained performance of Canada's PBO.

Could you comment on how you plan to implement and prioritize these recommendations? Would you commit to having periodic external reviews conducted on the Office of the PBO?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. I appreciate the question very much. It is well aligned to the question of how to get maximum value for the dollars spent at the Office of the PBO and by the PBO.

Right now, there are some 40 employees at the PBO; there are some 369,000 federal civil servants. It is crucial for both the integrity of the office as well as its ability to speak to a range of questions that the Office of the PBO taps into the wider network of thought leaders, academics and community and business leaders in Canada. That aligns well with the recommendations in the OECD report to build different governance bodies that can amplify the work of the office. Those types of structures are also very well suited to challenging the analysis of the office, both to make it better and also to give confidence to parliamentarians that the work has been well done and appropriately put forward.

Senator MacAdam: With regard to committing to having a periodic external review done on the office, is that something that you can speak to?

Ms. Ryan: I would absolutely support that, yes.

Senator Yussuff: Ms. Ryan, welcome, and thank you for being here. My question is along the same lines. The PBO has a history of serving the independence of parliamentarians in both houses over time. You will be new, obviously, to this role if you are appointed. From your perspective, how will you manage this office to continue that independence and to assure parliamentarians that the advice you're providing to them will meet the integrity needed in their jobs and ensure they can hold the government to account?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you for the question. It's something that I have been puzzling, both as I applied through the process to become the Parliamentary Budget Officer as well as in these recent weeks when I had been honoured to be nominated.

On balance, it lines up well with my experience in the past. I have spent decades running policy groups and research groups inside government. Typically, how I approach the problem that you describe is with a portfolio approach. A certain number of the projects have to be very responsive to members of the House of Commons and the Senate as well as there being some room within the work plan and staff availability to tackle new issues that are on the horizon or aren't quite as responsive to members.

• (1620)

I think that type of portfolio approach also allows for a certain adjustment between longer-term research and shorter-term work that can inform pressing questions of the day as they evolve.

I hope that answers your question.

Senator Yussuff: The government has embarked on an expenditure reduction right across government in all departments. In the context of that challenge, how is this office going to continue to serve parliamentarians, given that your office is obviously going to face some challenges in expenditure reduction going forward?

How do you see yourself meeting that responsibility while at the same time serving parliamentarians?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you very much. I think that regular review of how organizations spend funds is ultimately good for an organization to ensure that priorities are the highest and everybody is, essentially, working well together to produce at their best.

The question of how the office will respond to cuts is one that I feel comfortable addressing with the teams, should I be confirmed.

You started with a different question, which is how Parliament can engage in the conduct of overseeing the comprehensive expenditure reductions. For me, that relates to the question of how to support parliamentarians through the Main Estimates and supplementary estimates process and through the Public Accounts of Canada to ensure that you are supported with analysis and even issue sheets and open questions rather than necessarily having all answers be mathematical so that you can, in fact, use that time to best pull forward the accountability of ministers and senior officials.

If I could give a quick example, a lot of the departments and agencies have said that they will address reductions with the use of artificial intelligence, or AI. That brings its own risks in a governmental setting, and I think that supporting parliamentarians with an analysis of some of those risks can help you hold the feet to the fire of those government officials and ministers.

[*Translation*]

Senator Forest: Earlier, you referred to the recent OECD report lamenting the fact that the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer doesn't have access to all the documents it needs to do its work effectively.

For example, the PBO's long-running effort to produce an estimate of the tax gap in Canada has been hampered by the absence of personal tax data.

The problem is that many laws impose restrictions that make it difficult to access information.

As a result, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer can only obtain aggregated or anonymized data, which limits its ability to produce comprehensive and timely analyses.

How do you intend to work with parliamentarians to resolve this impasse and make it easier to access the data you need to do your work?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you for the question. I think that's an important question for the office.

I have spent most of my career working with large and complex databases. Typically, the owners of these databases are not part of my team.

I think there's a way to deal with issues around access to data. For example, we can suggest that the analysis be done on site instead of bringing the data to us. We can reach reasonable agreements to solve these problems.

However, if the organization that has the data absolutely doesn't want our office to have access, I think there are other ways to solve the problem that focus on the organization's obligation to defend its position and put forward its own estimates so we can examine them.

Senator Forest: Thank you. You haven't started your new position yet, but surely you've already familiarized yourself with the resources available at the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

In your opinion, does the organization have adequate human and financial resources, given the scope of its mandate and the expectations of all parliamentarians?

Ms. Ryan: Thanks again for the question, senator.

I have always been impressed — and still am — by the quality, the volume of work, and the analyses produced by the office.

I look forward to starting my new role, meeting the team, and seeing what they do. Before I answer your question, I think I need to get started first. I'll probably have a more specific answer for you later when I ask you for money.

[*English*]

Senator Ross: Thank you, Ms. Ryan, for being here with us today. I believe we will be seeing each other quite a bit. I am a member of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, and I'm very happy to see a fellow East Coaster hopefully take on the role of Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO.

My question has to do with how you view the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Yesterday, when you were asked what your five priorities are, in your answer, you said your second priority is holding the government's feet to the fire when it comes to commitments to programs and projects they have announced in the last budget.

In media reporting, the PBO is often referred to as the "budget watchdog." Do you consider this characterization accurate? Do you believe it is the PBO's main job to hold the government's feet to the fire and be a budget watchdog, or do you believe — as I do — that it is primarily to provide quality analysis for parliamentarians to conduct their jobs?

In the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer's communication strategy, it says:

> It must also be able to anticipate how the message could be misinterpreted so that potential distortions can be prevented. . . .

I'm interested in your view because although the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is an independent office, it doesn't exist in a political desert, and your comments can impact the interpretation of reports and the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. I think the legislation that created and mandates the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is clear that the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is there to support the quality of debate in Parliament, not to engage in the debate of Parliament.

I think that you have expressed very well the nuance of the role of the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, which is to support senators and members of Parliament in terms of having a base of facts and analyses that is independent of the government of the day so that those facts and analyses can speak to matters of "What is?" and to matters such as, "If we were to change factor A or factor B, what would be the result in factor X or factor Y?" I think that's safe ground for the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

I think the question of "What should be?" gets a clear delineation of being Parliament's role, and that's the line that I see and I intend to follow.

Senator C. Deacon: It's nice to see you again, Ms. Ryan. Congratulations on your nomination, and welcome to the Senate.

Knowing Ottawa's strong resistance to change and the need for the office that you hope to hold to promote informed dialogue that promotes sound economic and fiscal policies, how will your past experience help you in that role?

I'm really thinking about some of the places where we have interacted over the years and where there has been excellent advice, evidence and policy options in place around open banking, anti-money laundering and fraud — where there hasn't been the political will.

• (1630)

If you will be promoting that sound economic and fiscal policy, how will that help you in this new leadership role?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. It's always a pleasure, and it's an extra honour to be here today.

The question you pose is core to why I stepped forward and am honoured to be here today as the nominee.

I think that the civil service actively needs the oversight of parliamentarians to step further into that space of creative policy and exacting implementation of government budget measures. Informed parliamentarians push the civil service to provide that advice and have those debates more forcefully inside government.

As I look around the chamber, I see people like Senator Cuzner who, as I said to him previously, always made me work extra hard when I went to committee. I knew I would have to answer his questions and yours, senator. That is important given the challenges that the country currently faces in the geopolitical and fiscal realms and the struggles that Canadians face day-to-day in their families and communities.

Senator C. Deacon: So your frustration of the past might become your fuel for the future? We can hope.

Ms. Ryan: I like that word, senator: "fuel."

Senator C. Deacon: I have a second question. Your roles in the past have, in many ways, been behind the scenes. You have been coaching teams and working on policy initiatives that haven't yet been implemented.

The PBO's reports and role are heavily scrutinized by Parliament, journalists and the public. This is a very different role for you. I can identify with that. My role as an entrepreneur was very different from my role as a senator. It took a long time to adjust to that change.

How do you see that history being a strength in this change? What do you see as the challenges there?

Ms. Ryan: As you were speaking, my mind went to my time as Director General of the Employment Insurance program. We would — and I led this work — produce an annual report for Parliament of 200 or 300 pages outlining every aspect of the program, breaking down different criteria on who benefited. It was, essentially, a similar type of work.

Much of that work has parallels to this type of work, from the civil service to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Parliamentary Budget Office.

I see myself as supporting Parliament, senators and members of the House.

[*Translation*]

Senator Gignac: Welcome, Ms. Ryan. As you know, the National Finance Committee relies a great deal on the guidance of parliamentary budget officers. I'd like to know your opinion of the current government, which divides expenditures into two categories: operating expenditures and capital expenditures. In fact, it seems like the only remaining fiscal anchor involves balancing operating expenditures. In your opinion, is balancing operating expenditures a fiscal anchor or rather an objective?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you for the question, senator. As I said yesterday before the House of Commons Finance Committee, I see the government's statement about operational spending compared to capital spending as a kind of political statement, a matter of transparency. I see it as a statement that the government is going to spend and incur debt, that there will be a deficit, but that it represents an investment in the future, to improve the economy.

I think it's a statement with implications and that it suggests that the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer can use analysis and other methods to scrutinize spending. So I don't see it as a new kind of accounting, but as statement of political direction.

Senator Gignac: If that is a statement, am I to understand that, for the first time in 30 years, since Paul Martin, there are no fiscal anchors left in the federal government, given that there's really no objective to really scrutinize apart from balancing operating expenditures?

Ms. Ryan: The budget was clear. The government intends to follow two fiscal anchors. The first is the one you mentioned and described. The second relates to the fact that the government intends to follow an anchor where the debt-to-GDP ratio declines over the medium term.

[*English*]

Senator Cardozo: Welcome, Ms. Ryan. First, how would you handle disagreements with departments and agencies over data access? It's an ongoing problem.

Second, in terms of public accounts, how do you see the roles of the Senate and the House of Commons as being different?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you. I think your question about data access is similar to one that was posed earlier.

There are ways to meet people where they are and listen to what their constraints are regarding data access, for example, if it's a privacy issue, a cybersecurity issue and so on. What are the options to work through that to allow the analysis to happen and so on? You can meet the departments in good faith and try to work through these issues.

There will inevitably be areas where they will not be forthcoming with data, information and so on. I think that, in those situations, what is called for is to first name it: that they do or do not respond to requests from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, which has a standing in law. There is always a way to inform the question in a way where perhaps the department or agency would see merit to bringing forward the numbers. I think there are different ways to get at the question.

If I may, sir, could I ask you to repeat the second question?

Senator Cardozo: It regarded the different roles we have in the House of Commons and the Senate vis-à-vis public accounts.

Ms. Ryan: I will respectfully say that I will inform myself about those different roles and look forward to building some means to support both.

Senator White: Thank you for being here today, Ms. Ryan.

As others have noted, your CV and your experience are exceptional. Also, as a senator from Newfoundland and Labrador, I was particularly delighted to learn that you were raised on the island portion of our province.

I was also pleased to see that Kevin Page, who was the first Parliamentary Budget Officer, wrote a glowing endorsement of your nomination. He also said:

> PBO will be pushed and pulled in in different ways — on the fiscal stance of the government in an uncertain economic outlook; on prospects for hitting fiscal targets in a period of unprecedented increases in defence spending; on due diligence for major capital projects; on promoting fiscal transparency on complex public-private projects.

Can you give us an overview of how you intend to tackle these challenges he has outlined?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. To the first part of your question, as a Newfoundlander, I enjoy a good scrap; it's a plus for the job, senator.

• (1640)

In terms of your second question, which is more substantive, for all these questions, I would start by trying to outline, for a given policy proposal, project or program, what the government has said it wishes to achieve, and how it has said it plans to go about it. In working with the staff of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO, as well as consulting widely with departments, thought leaders, and so on, I think the PBO can break that issue down into the risks of that plan. What are the possible unintended consequences of the way the government plans to go about it? What are the key milestones the government sees for itself in obtaining a given outcome?

By helping to frame the issues in respect to each of those types of plans and circumstances that you ran through, the PBO can set forward mini agendas of challenge function for the government, which, in some cases, will involve numerical calculations, analysis, and so on; but perhaps, for smaller, shorter issues, sheets about budgetary issues might help.

[*Translation*]

Senator Miville-Dechêne: Welcome, Ms. Ryan. As a former ombudsman for Radio-Canada, I am particularly interested in your commitment to not accept a second term as Parliamentary Budget Officer. Could you tell us a bit more about the risks of a second term? I haven't seen a commitment like yours very often. First of all, let me congratulate you on that. Second, what are the risks for a Parliamentary Budget Officer or any independent officer to accept or seek a second term?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. I see two risks. First, I see the risk that the PBO might tone down or alter the nature of their analysis in order to seek the favour of the government in power so as to obtain a second term or other benefits. Second, the mere perception of such a dynamic is inherently harmful.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: Should the rule be changed so that another officer cannot be offered a second term?

Ms. Ryan: That's up to you, but I can tell you that I will not accept a second term.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: Thank you.

[*English*]

Senator K. Wells: What steps would you take to ensure equal service to all parliamentarians regardless of party? For example, here in the Senate, we have non-affiliated senators who are not part of any group.

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. I will pull my punches a little bit in terms of what steps I would take because I want to understand how work plans are set inside the PBO right now to make sure the balance is set between the House and the Senate, between committee work and work that is favoured by the opposition parties.

I appreciate the question about how to respond to blocks rather than parties. With respect, I'll leave that as read today, rather than propose a specific method, if that's okay.

Senator K. Wells: Thank you. My next question involves the following scenario: If your analysis contradicted a major government claim shortly before an election period, how would you handle timing and communication?

Ms. Ryan: I would handle it with transparency to the utmost degree and with timing that would prove useful for the election and the ability of Canadians to make that decision.

There are precedents. For example, the Congressional Budget Office is very good at sharing all its assumptions on how it comes to its conclusions. Canada is blessed with many interested and talented analysts outside of the PBO, who could then formulate their own opinion about whether the government's or the PBO's analysis is more accurate.

Senator K. Wells: Great. Thank you.

Senator Smith: Welcome, Ms. Ryan.

For years, the government has touted the debt-to-GDP ratio as a positive measure of the health of federal finances. In its most recent budget, it abandoned this fiscal anchor and introduced two new ones, including the declining-debt-deficit-to-GDP ratio. Both the old and new fiscal anchors apparently have the same weaknesses. They measure the government's obligations against the entire economy. These ratios can artificially look appealing, simply through an increase in the size of the economy.

Could you speak to how, if your appointment is confirmed, you and your office will challenge the government on the robustness of its fiscal anchors and whether they reflect the reality of the finances? Moreover, should the government pursue potentially alternative fiscal anchors that you think are more relevant?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. On balance, my view is that more fiscal anchors are better than fewer, so let's have a range of lenses to watch how things are evolving.

With respect, sir, I think the growth of the economy is something that should be a goal, not a condition that is seen as in any way problematic. That said, there are a number of scenarios that could test the fiscal track that we're on outside of the government's control, like interest rates, the price of oil, the potential path of war and conflict, and trade deals. These are all types of scenarios about which one can be categorical and explicit, and one can run them through what it means for the economy, government revenues, government spending, and so on. There are absolutely models to build from on that.

In doing that, you learn whether a government's given plans hold up well under different circumstances. That's at the heart of what you're asking. I'm happy to learn more if I have misread it.

Senator Smith: Thank you.

Senator MacDonald: Welcome to the Senate, Ms. Ryan. In your testimony at committee in the House of Commons, you mentioned that you had previously developed a database system which tracks spending from the budget through the estimates process and the public accounts. I'm sure we all agree that that is something that would be very useful to parliamentarians who are struggling to track this government's spending.

If you're appointed, would you be willing to build a comprehensive and transparent tracking system that could be made available to all parliamentarians and the public in order to increase oversight of government expenditures?

Ms. Ryan: I would be happy to talk about that at great length, but today, I will just say that that is a system that exists. I believe it is still in use. I believe it is used internally by the government to create essentially something called an expenditure monitor, which parallels *The Fiscal Monitor*, which is available publicly.

I would certainly want to check on its ongoing use and status. I don't believe it uses confidential data, so I hope it is something that could be available to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and parliamentarians.

Senator MacDonald: Thank you. You have pledged in your testimony to both chambers that you would serve only one term. I applaud you for that commitment.

Would you support and actively promote formal legislative changes to entrench a single, non-renewable term? Are there any other reforms you would recommend to strengthen the role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator. I would be happy to engage in these types of conversations. They are in that space of "should," which belongs more to the space of parliamentarians, so I would respectfully defer to the Senate and the House on what the future path of the legislation should be.

Senator MacDonald: Are we going to get any recommendations?

• (1650)

Ms. Ryan: For example, the recommendations in the OECD report spoke to transparency, priority setting, independence and a number of issues that could certainly lend themselves to legislative amendments. I don't have strong personal views about how the legislation should change, so I will limit my comments there.

However, as I said earlier, I see it as important for my tenure to not accept a second term. I defer to you as to whether that should be the case for all future Parliamentary Budget Officers.

Senator MacDonald: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Senator Oudar: Welcome, Ms. Ryan.

In the recent report from the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer entitled *Demographic Implications of the 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan*, we see that Canada's population growth is now almost entirely dependent on net immigration. In a country that is officially bilingual, these demographic trends have a significant impact on minority francophone communities outside of Quebec.

As the nominee for the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer, how would you consider integrating the issue of minority francophone communities into the future budgetary analyses of your office, particularly in terms of the impact on the need for public services in French, and related expenses?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you for your question, senator.

I would like to emphasize that Canada's bilingualism is of fundamental importance to me.

In response to your question, I believe there are factors that can be analyzed using quantitative and economic methods. I believe it depends on the nature of the services provided under any given program; we will need to determine whether the cost of those services needs to be adjusted.

I look forward to continuing the discussion so that I can better understand your specific concerns regarding these studies and issues.

Senator Oudar: Thank you.

In your view, what types of costs and financial impacts could be documented more systematically, and how might this information help Parliament better assess budgetary decisions?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator.

I think that the estimates system differs from the budget in that a budget sets out projects, programs and objectives, along with the rationale behind them.

However, in the estimates system, votes and authorities do not inform questions of implementation, commitments made by the government. This is not necessarily a gap, it is simply a different way of looking at the budgetary and estimates documents. Parliamentarians should look at that shift, and that is what I had in mind when I raised the issue.

Senator Hébert: Welcome, Ms. Ryan.

As part of your duties — and I believe several of my colleagues have pointed this out — you have, in a sense, a mandate to protect the integrity and independence of your analyses. You also undeniably work in an environment where your work can have significant political impact or repercussions.

I'm trying to get a better sense of how you plan to reconcile these two things. I will ask my question using a hypothetical scenario. Suppose you publish a major budget analysis and, during a press conference, the minister responsible for that budget policy presents figures that differ from your conclusions. If the media were to point this out, what would you do in such a situation, and how would you respond?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you for the question, senator.

I think it is inevitable that there will be discrepancies between the government's estimates and those of the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. In fact, I believe it is the Parliamentary Budget Officer's job to look for instances where there are discrepancies in the estimates in order to attract media attention and spark criticism, so as to determine whether or not we are wrong.

As I said earlier, I believe transparency works both ways. I am perfectly comfortable with my figures being criticized in the same way the government is criticized.

Senator Galvez: Good afternoon, Ms. Ryan.

[*English*]

As we have heard, many government fiscal reports emphasize Canada's net debt-to-GDP ratio as an anchor of fiscal sustainability. In particular, we use it to compare with our peers, notably those in the G7. However, we know this metric doesn't fully capture the long-term fiscal risk.

So, if you're appointed PBO, how will you broaden the analytical framework to systematically incorporate other indicators, such as debt, affordability, the structural deficit, the public net worth and the long-term fiscal gaps?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you, senator.

I agree with you. I think we need many metrics to make sure that we're staying on the road. All of these metrics bring something different to the discussion, so re-basing the regular analysis of government finances through the lens of a number of different parliamentary fiscal anchors, if you will, will hopefully help to bring that light and greater understanding to these questions rather than conflict and either/or; let's have "both/and."

Senator Galvez: How would you assess whether the current deficit levels remain sustainable in light of demographic pressures or climate-related liabilities and the need for transformative economic investments?

Ms. Ryan: Thank you again, senator. Those are really good questions.

They speak to that aspect of stress testing these fiscal tracks. Let's do the analysis of what scenarios we're missing. If there are different climate scenarios that will affect the government's medium-term, long-term fiscal track in ways that are important, let's tackle them, give them structure and put them on the table.

The Chair: Honourable senators, the committee has been sitting for 65 minutes. In conformity with the order of the Senate, I am obliged to interrupt proceedings so that the committee can report to the Senate.

Ms. Ryan, on behalf of all senators, thank you for joining us today.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Honourable senators, is it agreed that the committee rise and I report to the Senate that the witness has been heard?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the sitting of the Senate is resumed.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, the Committee of the Whole, authorized by the Senate to receive Annette Ryan respecting her nomination to the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer, reports that it has heard from the said witness.

• (1700)

THE EMERGING PROBLEM OF SATELLITE DEBRIS FALLS

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Simons, calling the attention of the Senate to the emerging problem of satellite debris falls in Canada and to the challenges of satellite congestion, pollution and liability.

Hon. Paula Simons: Honourable senators, we all know that what goes up must come down, and the number of satellite launches have skyrocketed, if you'll forgive the pun. Today, there are nearly 15,000 active satellites in orbit around our planet. Most of those are in megaconstellations. The challenge there is one of planned obsolescence, where each satellite only has a service life of a few years.

Since operators don't want to clutter up Earth's already-crowded low orbits with dead satellites, they de-orbit their old equipment into our upper atmosphere. Here, these "throwaway" satellites are supposed to burn up or break apart into smaller pieces. The trouble is, that doesn't always happen.

Doctors Wright, Boley and Byers modelled the re-entry of 11 satellite megaconstellations. Their disturbing finding? There is a 40% collective risk of on-ground casualties every five years if satellites do not burn up entirely and a 20% risk from Starlink satellites alone.

When I spoke with Doctors Boley and Byers a few months ago, they highlighted a separate grave risk: the danger of a piece of satellite debris, even a small one, smashing into a passenger plane travelling at jet speeds.

I'm not Chicken Little. I'm not even Henny Penny. I know the sky is not falling, and the risks are still low. But we are filling low Earth orbit with tens of thousands of new satellites without any clear sense of what will happen when, not if, they come down.

Those, of course, are just the physical risks if larger bits survive and smash into things. That doesn't even begin to deal with the risk we are only now starting to study — the risk of atmospheric pollution when satellites do actually vaporize as planned.

A 2023 study published by the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* used high-altitude air sampling and found tiny particles of things, including aluminum, silicon, copper, lead and lithium. We are now using Earth's mesosphere and stratosphere as garbage incinerators for space junk with no real idea of the long-term consequences, especially for our ozone layer.

Space may be the final frontier, but it's not entirely the Wild West. Space is regulated by five international treaties, most of them created during the coolest days of the Cold War. They include the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, the Rescue and Return Agreement of 1968, the Liability Convention of 1972, the Registration Convention of 1975 and the Moon Agreement of 1979. There was also the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs' Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in 2010.

But if I may paraphrase Geoffrey Rush in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, those codes are more what you'd call "guidelines" rather than actual rules since the UN has no method or power of enforcement.

The 1967 Outer Space Treaty says that space is free to all and is to be managed for the benefit and interests of all countries, so no nation can make a claim of sovereignty or property rights. But it is the subsequent 1972 treaty on liabilities which may be more important here.

In 1972, you will recall, space was pretty much the preserve of governments, particularly the governments of the United States and the U.S.S.R., and countries were held liable for disasters. In 1978, for example, Kosmos 954, a Soviet nuclear satellite, exploded over northern Canada, spreading radioactive debris across 124,000 square kilometres of the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan and what we now know as Nunavut. The worst of the radiation poisoning affected the Dene people at the eastern end of Great Slave Lake, leading to drastic increases in cancer rates. In 1979, Canada sued for damages, and in 1981, we received $3 million from the Soviet Union, but that was a nation-to-nation settlement.

Still, the 1972 Liability Convention did imagine what might happen if private companies started sending stuff into space. Article VI of the treaty requires countries to keep an eye on the things that they launch:

> The activities of non-governmental entities in outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, shall require authorization and continuing supervision by the appropriate State Party to the Treaty.

This means that launch states would be technically liable for damage done on re-entry or to airplanes in flight.

So if your barn were damaged by falling Starlink debris, you could, in theory, go to a Canadian or American court to seek redress or even to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. But, in truth, these systems just weren't designed for a private commercial space race. And what a race it is.

Starlink's competitors from within the United States and around the world are working on their own satellite launches. The Chinese company G60 is planning for 13,904 new satellites. GuoWang, another Chinese company, has plans to launch almost 13,000 low Earth orbit satellites. Amazon Leo is planning its own 3,000-and-some satellites, and Canada's own Telesat Lightspeed is getting ready to enter the game with plans for a constellation of 300.

But it's Elon Musk who has the wildest ambitions. On January 30, 2026, SpaceX filed an application with the United States Federal Communications Commission, or FCC, seeking permission to launch 1 million new low Earth orbit satellites to function as data centres in space. Let me quote from that rather extraordinary FCC filing:

> Launching a constellation of a million satellites that operate as orbital data centers is a first step towards becoming a Kardashev-II level civilization — one that can harness the Sun's full power — while supporting AI-driven applications for billions of people today and ensuring humanity's multi-planetary future amongst the stars.

As for the risks of putting a million new satellites into the already-crowded low Earth orbit, running the risk of outer space crashes, the SpaceX filing promises that the new satellites will be incredibly maneuverable to avoid space collisions and that they will ". . . pose no calculable risk to humans upon re-entry . . . ."

But a group of North American astronomers critiquing the Musk application calculates that if the 1 million satellites, which, remember, have five-year lifetimes, are disposed of in Earth's atmosphere in the same way that Starlink satellites are today, there would be one satellite re-entry every three minutes, dramatically increasing the risk of accidents. It could also cause catastrophic changes in the atmosphere, including ozone depletion. And that doesn't even begin to touch on the issue of light pollution and the potential impact of all those bright little satellites on the careful observational work of professional astronomers.

I launched this inquiry not because I have easy answers to these questions but because I don't. I want to draw the attention of the chamber to an emerging problem with real potential risks for Canadians. Right now, Canada has no clear response to these risks, with responsibility dispersed among several government departments and agencies, including Global Affairs Canada; National Defence; Transport Canada; Public Safety Canada; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada; NAV CANADA; and the Canadian Space Agency.

My friends, we need a more co-ordinated, coherent response to the issue of space debris and its literal impact on our country. We can't begin to address the consequences of satellite pollution until we recognize it as a challenge and start a national and, indeed, an international conversation. We can't begin to address the issue of space sovereignty without talking about how we support the Canadian Space Agency, Telesat and other players in Canada's own emerging space economy.

I hope that over the coming weeks and months you will add your voices to this inquiry to help us do just that. Thank you. *Hiy hiy*.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

(On motion of Senator Kingston, debate adjourned.)

VOTE 16 BILL

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

Leave having been given to revert to Other Business, Senate Public Bills, Second Reading, Order No. 8:

On the Order:

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

Hon. Mohammad Al Zaibak: Honourable senators, I wish to begin by acknowledging, with thanks and admiration, the work of Senator McPhedran, who has championed this legislation with patience, rigour and genuine conviction. She started this work before I entered this chamber, and I hope to see it carried forward.

This bill is as much about the conversation it drives as the change it seeks. Today, I am pleased to add my voice to that conversation.

I rise in support of Bill S-222, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act to expand the federal voting age to 16- and 17-year-olds. As a senator, a Canadian by choice and someone who has spent a career building bridges between cultures, economies and, today, generations, I rise to do something that some of my distinguished colleagues may find rather startling — to trust young people more than we currently do.

• (1710)

Yet I believe you will find — as I have — that this is not merely a defensible proposition; it is an overdue one, and I intend to make that case today with evidence, personal experience, conviction and — if you will indulge me — just enough humour to keep us all awake.

As the co-founder of Lifeline Syria Fund, I helped coordinate the private sponsorship and resettlement in Canada of thousands of Syrian refugees. Of those newcomers, the younger ones were consistently among the most impressive — the most energized, the most eager to contribute and the most determined to understand and participate in this society.

I came to this country as an immigrant myself. I know what it means to stand at the margins of a governance system — to observe its workings, to be shaped by its decisions and to possess no formal mechanism by which to participate. The right to vote, when I finally exercised it, was not a bureaucratic formality. It was an act of belonging, of being counted, of being — in the fullest, most democratic sense — here.

To me, this bill is not merely about a ballot. It is about the vitality of our democracy and the full inclusion of a generation of energized, capable and deeply affected citizens in the formal processes that will govern their futures far longer than our own.

Before I turn to the evidence, I would like to take you on a short journey that begins in our own childhoods. Those of us who belong to the baby boomer generation — and I count myself warmly among its distinguished ranks — grew up in a world that, by today's standards, was technologically — let us say — charmingly modest.

Our toys were wooden, plastic or — if we were particularly fortunate — battery powered. Our calculators were our fingers, and if the arithmetic grew complicated, we had pencils.

I recall with some fondness — and I share this with the chamber in a spirit of full transparency — that the first so-called portable computer I was able to acquire came during my first university summer break away from home. I was 21 years old. It was, in fact, an electrically powered electronic calculator with red light-emitting diodes displaying numbers — a device with the ergonomic grace of a small brick, capable of performing precisely six operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, a percentage function and a square root function.

I was thrilled. I used it and carried it everywhere to the amazement of my classmates and professors alike. I believed, not entirely without justification at the time, that I was living in the future. I was not living in the future. I was living in 1972.

Then there was the computer. Honourable senators, I had the privilege of attending a fine school of engineering, and that institution was the proud custodian of what was at the time considered a magnificent technological achievement: an IBM System/370 mainframe computer that occupied an entire climate-controlled floor of the main university building. It was a machine of immense physical presence and modest intellectual output accessed through punch cards. These were small pieces of cardboard onto which one typed coded instructions. Then you fed them into the machine in careful sequence and waited, sometimes for hours. One misplaced character, one card slightly out of order, and the machine would produce a printout of spectacular uselessness and you would begin again. It happened to me several times.

We called this computing. We were very proud of it.

I tell you this not to mock the ingenuity of that era. Those engineers and scientists were brilliant people doing extraordinary work within the constraints of their time. I tell you this because of what it means in contrast to where we stand today.

The smartphone currently sitting in the pocket of a 16-year-old student in a Canadian high school — a device they have used since early childhood with the casual fluency of breathing — is not merely more powerful than that mainframe; it is incomparably more powerful. We are not talking about a marginal improvement but the difference between a birch bark canoe and a nuclear submarine.

The processing power, memory, connectivity and access to real-time global information — it all fits in a rectangle the size of a deck of playing cards.

Honourable senators, I want to dwell on this for a moment because it is not merely a charming generational anecdote; it is a substantive democratic argument. There is a cognitive and informational gulf between what our generation had access to at 16 and what today's 16-year-olds possess that is, without exaggeration, historically unprecedented. No prior generation in human history has arrived at adolescence with such deep exposure to information, such facility with analytical tools and such an intuitive grasp of complex, interconnected systems.

These young people can code, edit videos and build applications. They manage digital platforms with audiences larger than many newspapers. They fact-check in real time because they grew up in an environment where misinformation was abundant and critical evaluation was a survival skill. When a political claim appears on their video feed, they do not wait for the morning paper. They open three browser tabs, consult two databases and have formed a reasoned opinion before the commercial break.

Are we seriously asking whether they are ready to vote? With respect, honourable senators, I had a six-function calculator, and I was considered prepared for adult civic life.

Let me now move from the personal to the empirical. As a telecommunications and electrophysics engineer who has spent a career making decisions on facts, I have done my own fact-checking on cognitive development, and what I found reinforces this bill's premise. As Senator Black astutely observed, we apply no knowledge test to voters of other ages. The question before us is not whether 16-year-olds are perfect reasoners; it is whether they are capable of the deliberate, reflective act of democratic choice. And the answer is yes, they are.

On the fiscal side, which, as a businessman, I take seriously, Statistics Canada reports that 27% of 15- and 16-year-olds are employed nationally. In Quebec, that figure rises to a remarkable 40%. These young workers contribute through sales taxes, user fees, motor fuel taxes and Employment Insurance premiums, directly funding the social safety net that protects all Canadians, and they have absolutely no voice in how those contributions are allocated. Taxation without representation, honourable senators, is a principle we resolved rather dramatically in the 18th century. I will not belabour the historical parallel, but it remains a reasonably compelling argument.

• (1720)

At the age of 16, young Canadians can drive a motor vehicle, which requires judgment, spatial reasoning and rapid decision making at 100 kilometres per hour on the Trans-Canada Highway. They can consent to medical treatment, leave school, enter the workforce and pay taxes. In some circumstances, they may be tried as adults. We ask them to bear adult accountability. The least we can do is grant them a voice in the laws that create that accountability.

Austria has allowed 16-year-olds to vote in national elections since 2007. Young voters there turned out at higher rates than 18- to 20-year-olds, were better informed and were more deeply engaged with policy substance. Scotland, Wales, New Zealand, Germany, Argentina, Ecuador and Brazil are all serious democracies that looked at the evidence and acted on it. Canada can do the same.

Some in this debate suggest that an appointed body should not initiate changes to the Canada Elections Act and that doing so would usurp the power of the people or impose reform from the top down. Section 91 of the Constitution Act, 1867, grants the Senate equal legislative authority with the House of Commons, except in matters of money bills. Senators of all affiliations have, throughout our history, introduced public bills that became law or shaped policy. We are not only a chamber of sober second thought but also, since Confederation, a chamber of initiative.

As Senator Martin recalled, the voting age has changed before, lowering from 21 to 18 in 1970, with relatively limited controversy, reflecting the judgment that democratic thresholds must adapt to changing conditions. We find ourselves again at such a moment.

By supporting this bill at second reading, we are not unilaterally changing the law. Every bill requires the support of both chambers. We are opening the door, inviting evidence, expert testimony and rigorous public discussion. We would be welcoming young Canadians into institutions that have too often kept them at arm's length. If we could engage our youth in the formal processes of democracy, we would cultivate a new generation of leaders. That is not a risk. That is an investment.

Honourable colleagues, there is a young person — I am certain of it — watching these proceedings today, perhaps because of a school assignment or perhaps because something in the news caught their attention, and they reached for that supercomputer in their pocket — the one that makes the IBM mainframe I used in my studies look like a paperweight — and found their way here. That young person is informed. That young person has opinions shaped by more information than I had access to at any point in my own education, and that young person has grown up navigating extraordinary complexity with remarkable grace.

This bill says to that young person: We see you. We take you seriously. We believe your voice belongs in this democracy, not someday, not eventually, but now.

I began today by confessing that I once considered a six-function calculator the pinnacle of portable technology. I have since updated my understanding of what young minds are capable of. I respectfully suggest it is time for our electoral law to do the same.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator, I'm sorry, but your time for debate is over. Would you like to request leave for more time to finish your speech?

Senator Al Zaibak: Yes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

[*English*]

Senator Al Zaibak: Thank you.

Lowering the voting age to 16 is not a radical act. It is a generous one. It is a democratic one. Given everything we know about young people, their world and the extraordinary tools and minds they bring to it, it is, I would argue, simply the right thing to do.

I urge every honourable colleague to support this bill and send it to committee where experts, scholars and the young Canadians most affected can be heard. Let us prove that this Senate is a place where the future is welcomed, not feared.

Let the process work, let the evidence speak and let this generation know that we have not forgotten that this is, ultimately, their country too.

Thank you. *Meegwetch. Shukran.*

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Denise Batters: Senator Al Zaibak, would you take a quick question?

Senator Al Zaibak: If we have time, I would be happy to.

Senator Batters: Thank you for your speech. In it, you spoke about the transition period in 1970 — the year I was born, actually — when the federal voting age in Canada went down from 21 to 18 years of age. We don't have a federal age of majority in Canada, but we do have provincial ages of majority, and I'm wondering if you realize that 1970 was a time when many provinces lowered their age of majority from 21 to 19 or 18. British Columbia did that in 1970. The drinking age at that time also changed in tandem with the age of majority. So, for example, in Ontario, it went down to 18 in 1971. Were you aware that that transition period was a time when many provinces were also changing both the age of majority and the drinking age from 21 to 18 or 19?

Senator Al Zaibak: Thank you for the question, senator. That preceded my arrival to this country. Thank you for enlightening me about the circumstances and what happened at that time, but I don't know if you are making a suggestion about something related to this era.

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Will the senator take one more question?

Senator Al Zaibak: I'd be happy to.

Senator Martin: My question follows on what Senator Batters asked. In my speech — and you referenced some of the things I said — I mentioned that the process of making those changes happened over a long period of time and that the provinces had made the changes, so it was a natural change, and nobody questioned it. In other countries where the age of voting has been lowered federally, it happened at the municipal and provincial levels, so it was not a top-down change; really, it is a national change. Did you also see those facts in your research? I did cite some of that in my speech.

Senator Al Zaibak: I did. Thank you so much for reminding me of that. My suggestion here is to open the door. It is not a top-down process. It's opening the door to every segment of our society to contribute to the debate. That may take it to other levels of government. I don't see any contradiction between what happened then and what we are trying to do now.

(On motion of Senator Kingston, debate adjourned.)

THE HONOURABLE JUDITH G. SEIDMAN

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Martin, calling the attention of the Senate to the career of the Honourable Judith Seidman.

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today with a heart full of love and nostalgia to pay tribute to a dear friend, a steadfast ally and a truly distinguished former colleague, the Honourable Judith Seidman. Having officially retired in September 2025, her absence from this chamber is a void that is felt every day.

Judith and I began our journeys as senators nearly 16 years ago, arriving just months apart in 2009. From those early days, we found in one another a kindred spirit. For years, we occupied adjacent offices and sat in close proximity here in the chamber. As I served as Deputy Leader of the Opposition and she as our opposition whip, our days were punctuated by whispered strategies and the heavy lifting of keeping the government accountable.

• (1730)

Beyond the logistics of leadership, Judith was my confidante. In the most turbulent of political storms, it was her calm, strategic mind and her steady friendship that made the toughest of times manageable.

Judith's contributions to this institution were profound, but perhaps none were more vital or more difficult than her work as chair of the Standing Committee on Ethics and Conflict of Interest for Senators. She poured countless hours into this committee, navigating complex reports and sensitive deliberations with a deep sense of duty. Judith understood that the Ethics Committee does not just oversee rules; it guards the very reputation of the Senate of Canada. She took this responsibility with the utmost seriousness, knowing that the public's trust in our institution rested upon the fairness and rigour of the committee's work and her work as the committee chair.

Beyond her work on ethics, Judith brought the precision of her background as an epidemiologist and researcher to every debate. Of course, she served for years on the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology and contributed greatly to its studies and assessments of various bills.

Two of her many notable achievements included championing health and safety. She was the sponsor of Vanessa's Law, a landmark piece of legislation that transformed drug safety in Canada. She was also a voice for the minority anglophone community of Quebec. She was their fierce advocate, ensuring their vitality and rights remained a priority on the federal stage.

In the quiet moments between votes, our conversations often drifted toward the people who truly ground us. I had the privilege of hearing about the joys of her life: her daughter and her grandson. To Judith, her family is her greatest achievement, and her devotion to them is a beautiful testament to the woman she is outside of this chamber.

In her parting remarks last fall, Judith spoke of the nobility of the Senate. She lived those words. While we are part of the Conservative family, Judith was respected by all sides of this chamber for her integrity and her ability to build consensus without ever sacrificing her principles.

Dearest Judith, please know that your legacy lives on in the Senate of Canada and beyond. I value our friendship more than words can express, and I look forward to our many conversations continuing long into the future. Thank you for your service to Quebec and Canada, and thank you for your wisdom and, most of all, for your beautiful friendship. Thank you.

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Honourable senators, I also rise today to pay tribute to the Honourable Judith Seidman.

It was my privilege to serve alongside Senator Seidman on the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology from the time I joined the committee until her retirement in 2025. She was generous with her institutional knowledge, diligent in her insistence on data, pragmatic in her advice and always an example of what it means to serve with integrity. Senator Seidman often reminded us of the importance of Senate committee work, especially through studies and reports.

As a scientist in the Senate, she was at the table for some of the most consequential health debates of our time: medical assistance in dying, cannabis, pandemic oversight and, most recently, pharmacare. Through all of these, she insisted on rigour, she insisted on data and she reminded us that good public policy must be built on evidence, not just opinion. She also had foresight. Long before these issues reached the front pages, she sounded early warnings on vaping, advocated for improvements in long-term care and highlighted the looming crisis in aging and health human resources.

She was ahead of her time, asking questions and raising concerns that foreshadowed the challenges that Canada is facing today. For Senator Seidman, health was never just technical; it was always human. Her questions and her lens always came back to people, and she never let us lose sight of the human dimension at the heart of public policy.

Senator Seidman remains a mentor for me personally and a model for women in leadership. I recall first meeting her at a medical conference in Montreal in 2019. It was a conference for doctors. I was struck that not only was an epidemiologist attending a meeting on cardiovascular disease, but this particular epidemiologist was also a Canadian senator. I was awestruck. She is a powerful role model for those of us whose expertise intersects science and politics — spheres where women's voices have historically been under-represented.

Colleagues, in honour of Senator Seidman's legacy, may we keep data-driven decision making and the people impacted by those decisions at the centre of our work in this chamber. Senator Seidman, thank you for your leadership. We — and I especially — will miss you. On behalf of the Canadian Senators Group, we wish you all the best in your retirement from the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, the Honourable Judith Seidman was a thoughtful, whip-smart, feisty and fierce parliamentarian. She had a big impact on this chamber, even though she was barely five feet tall in a tiny little package.

Judith and I were the first women to occupy the whip of the opposition and government liaison positions respectively at the same time in the history of the Senate. We might also be the first two people to hug it out in the centre of the chamber, walking down the aisle after a standing vote.

We were also whip and liaison during the pandemic, and what a time that was. Judith was the friend who always checked in and always asked how things were going, even when we were working from home for a short period of time. She would always text after a speech — and I know she did this for many of us — and she would say, "Good job. Great speech. Boy, that was an impactful speech." She always thought about people, and I know I'm not the only person in the chamber who felt like I was her special friend. I think we all felt like we had a special relationship with Judith.

Senator Seidman and I spent a lot of time at the Usher of the Black Rod's dais, waiting for the bells to stop ringing. Colleagues, for anybody who was there during a certain period of time, you know there were a lot of bells. While we were there, we had wide-ranging conversations. Most people don't know that Judith and I almost convinced the Usher of the Black Rod to sing us down the aisle, and I almost convinced Judith to dance with me while he did that.

Colleagues, it was an honour to serve with Senator Seidman. I miss her every day. I kind of want to speak on behalf of former senator Marc Gold and maybe our Speaker as well, because we were all working together, and I just want to say what an awesome human Judith is.

Judith, I hope you're having fun with your daughter. I hope you're sleeping a lot. I hope you're well rested. Please come and visit from time to time. Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Wells (*Newfoundland and Labrador*), debate adjourned.)

• (1740)

NATION-BUILDING VALUE OF TOURISM

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Sorensen, calling the attention of the Senate to the nation-building value of tourism in Canada.

Hon. Marty Deacon: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Senator Sorensen's inquiry into the nation-building value of tourism. Today, I'd like to take a moment to highlight tourism in my home region of Waterloo, an hour west of the Toronto airport and three hours east of the Windsor-Michigan border.

Let's start with some numbers. We have the calculator. Each year, the Waterloo region welcomes about 5 million visitors. We're home to roughly 3,000 tourism businesses, employing more than 17,000 people, primarily in the restaurant and transportation sectors.

Right now, as Canadians look to support local in-Canada tourism industries, more and more of them are choosing Waterloo.

I'll admit that I may be a little biased, but I would recommend Waterloo as a travel destination in a heartbeat. It offers the best of all worlds: beautiful natural spaces, a rich cultural scene and countless learning opportunities. We're rightly known for our festivals, farm-to-table cuisine, farmers' markets and agri-tourism. For many Ontarians — and Americans — it's also an easy and authentic getaway not too far from home.

Colleagues, indulge me for a moment as I walk you through my ideal weekend in Waterloo. You might start your Saturday morning at the St. Jacobs Farmers' Market, wandering through its bustling buildings and outdoor stalls, sampling farm-fresh produce, artisanal foods and handcrafted goods. In the afternoon, I recommend exploring our extensive trail network. Walk, hike, jog or bike — the choice is yours.

If you visit at the right time of year, you might catch the Waterloo Mistletoe Trail. It connects dozens of local businesses and attractions through a series of mistletoe installations created in partnership with local artists, encouraging visitors to explore and shop locally across all seven of Waterloo's municipalities. It even won an Ontario Tourism Award of Excellence in 2024.

Or perhaps your visit will coincide — and you are invited — with Kitchener-Waterloo's very own Oktoberfest, Canada's greatest Bavarian festival and the second-largest Oktoberfest in the world. I am just sorry I have not yet seen Senator Boehm dancing in his lederhosen.

Of course, no trip to Waterloo would be complete without spending time experiencing our agricultural heritage. Our visitors often love getting out and exploring farm life, walking alpacas, visiting farm gates or trying out goat yoga.

I also recommend the self-guided Fields & Flavours Trail. With 19 stops, including orchards and local markets, it allows visitors to meet growers, makers and producers while experiencing the region's agricultural heritage first-hand. Along the way, you may spot horse-drawn buggies or come across Mennonite farm stands, reflecting the Mennonite communities, whose traditions remain central to the Waterloo region's story today.

There is plenty to learn as well. The Ken Seiling Waterloo Region Museum, Ontario's largest community museum, tells the story of the Waterloo region. The University of Waterloo's Earth Sciences Museum welcomes visitors of all ages with open arms. And the Schneider Haus community museum preserves the region's unique identity and Germanic folk traditions through more than 7,000 historical objects.

Waterloo region is also known as the "Silicon Valley of the North." You have heard me refer to this before. We have a strong start-up community as well as entrepreneurship. There is a high-calibre talent pipeline with the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College, which provides a constant stream of highly skilled graduates.

You may hear this more and more, but the University of Waterloo has a unique intellectual property, or IP, policy. It allows students and researchers to retain ownership of their IP, which, of course, encourages entrepreneurship and start-up formation.

There is a very supportive start-up ecosystem and tech cluster with Toronto that includes 15,000 tech companies and more than 300,000 employees.

Collaboration and growth are abundant, which results in strong internal mentorship and funding. Tech giants like Google, SAP and OpenText operate alongside newer companies. As I speak, a team is working hard to produce the first-in-the-world quantum computer.

Let me be clear: In the Waterloo region, tourism is about far more than just the economic impact. It is about sharing our natural beauty, our agricultural heritage and our vibrant cultural traditions.

Excitingly, the region's tourism offerings are also expanding beyond these staples as the region becomes a high-tech hub for esports, gaming and technology-driven events.

This past Canada Day weekend, for example, the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium was packed to the brim with fans as Waterloo hosted the Call of Duty League Championship. You may or may not have heard of that before. Eight of the world's most elite teams competed for a US$2-million prize pool. It was the first year this event had been hosted outside of the United States, putting Kitchener on the international map. Visitors came from all over: from across the United States, the U.K., Europe, Mexico and beyond. Gamers, content creators and digital superfans filled hotels, restaurants and local businesses.

This weekend, over 2,500 young people — 1,500 streamed and another 2,000 on a wait-list — attended the Socratica Symposium in the Waterloo region — thousands of creative, international young people appearing to randomly invent stuff in three different buildings. It was quite something.

This University of Waterloo-based event is a multidisciplinary science fair for students — from robots to AI, to the arts and creative work. Imagine seeing a robot flip pancakes, a laptop turned into a trombone, AI designing live light shows, handmade jewelry, live art and more. This is the diversity of Waterloo.

This same energy and growth, however, also brings its unique set of challenges. Event organizers are increasingly telling us that the region lacks hotel capacity and large meeting spaces to support major conventions and events. As Waterloo continues to attract attention for its innovation and creativity, many have pointed to the need for a convention centre as a key opportunity to support this momentum.

Colleagues, this demand is only continuing to grow. This August, the Waterloo region will host the Ontario Summer Games. We're excited to welcome 4,200 athletes and coaches competing across 23 sports. The event will bring thousands of visitors to the region and millions of dollars in economic activity as people stay, eat and shop locally. I'm confident I speak for the entire community in saying that we're excited to host these young athletes and look forward to cheering them on as they compete in their respective sports.

We also continue to seek strong infrastructure where all local communities can feel connected to sport, culture and our history.

I'd like to close by extending a heartfelt thank you to Senator Sorensen for creating the space for each of us to talk about the places we call home. Sharing these stories matters because tourism does more than support local economies — it strengthens communities and brings people together. And it gives regions like mine the opportunity to share what makes them special with the rest of the country.

In the Waterloo region, we're proud to welcome Canadians and visitors from around the world to come experience it for themselves.

Senators, I welcome you and look forward to hosting you some day in Waterloo.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

(On motion of Senator Kingston, debate adjourned.)

FINAL REPORT OF THE CANADIAN YOUTH CLIMATE ASSEMBLY

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Coyle, calling the attention of the Senate to the final report of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly.

Hon. Marty Deacon: Two for one. I am not sure how this all works, but Tuesday night is inquiry night.

Honourable senators, I rise today again to speak to Senator Coyle's inquiry on the final report of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly. I would like to begin by thanking Senator Coyle for kicking off this important discussion in the chamber.

I also want to commend the 33 remarkable young Canadians whose thoughtful work brought forward the sophisticated, eloquent and impressive report before us. We hear you, and we are immensely grateful for your work.

This report conveys a clear and powerful message: Reducing our dependence on fossil fuels is essential, and this transition will require innovation.

As someone who worked in education and sport with young people, I cannot help but look to the world of sport and our young people as the potential leaders in driving this change. Sport at every level is already experiencing the effects of climate change. Each winter, athletes wait for snow to fall with bated breath, hoping there will be enough to support competition. Their anxieties are far from unfounded. In Cortina, average February temperatures have risen by 3.6 °C since Italy last hosted the Olympics only 20 years ago. Meanwhile, snowfall levels around the world have steadily declined since the mid-20th century.

• (1750)

Summer sports do not escape unscathed. In January, athletes competed in the Australian Open under extreme heat conditions, with play suspended as temperatures rose to 40 °C. In coastal regions, rising sea levels and increased flooding threaten stadiums, playing fields and venues for beach sports.

The evidence is clear: Preserving sport as we know it requires decisive and timely action, and the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly's recommendations lay a framework for this action.

Young Canadians are calling on governments to invest in retrofits that will strengthen the resilience of existing infrastructure. This recommendation is no less relevant for sports facilities. Progress is already under way, with countless projects in progress, aiming to improve the sustainability and resilience of sports infrastructure. At the same time, many local and provincial

sports organizations are adapting their policies and professional development programs to better protect athletes and address climate risks.

Alberta Soccer is a phenomenal example. They have implemented air quality policies requiring officials and coaches to modify play intensity, shorten practices or even reschedule when air pollution reaches unacceptable levels.

Meaningful climate action extends far beyond adapting to rising temperatures. It also means recognizing the role that sport itself plays in contributing to the climate crisis. The professional sports sector alone generates emissions through stadium operations, merchandise production and waste management, as well as through the extensive travel required of athletes, employees and spectators. Work is under way to address this.

The recent Milano Cortina Olympic Games exemplify this environmental impact. While we're watching from the comfort of our living rooms, it is easy to forget that athletes are not always competing on real snow. While this may have been the case decades ago, declining snowfall levels have made it increasingly rare. Today, Olympic ski runs, half-pipes and snow parks owe more to water from springs, valley rivers and dam reservoirs than to freshly fallen snow.

There is a challenge here. Climate change makes it more difficult to host winter sporting events, which, in turn, pushes organizers to intensify artificial snow production. Ultimately, this diverts water resources and damages local ecosystems in the process.

Colleagues, I believe deeply in the power of sport. It brings people together across national, cultural, linguistic and religious lines. But the unity and joy that sport fosters should never come at the expense of the planet that we all share. Fortunately, it does not have to. Not only can sport be sustainable, but it is also uniquely positioned to demonstrate that decarbonization is both achievable and necessary. Few other sectors can claim the same global reach, demographic diversity or ability to inspire collective action.

Encouragingly, many parts of the sporting world have taken up the mantle. Major leagues are pursuing sponsorships aligned with environmental, social and governance standards. Athletes are increasingly speaking out as advocates for sustainability. Recreational facilities are being retrofitted with climate-smart technologies.

The International Olympic Committee, or IOC, has been addressing sustainability for several decades. Prince Albert II of Monaco, a five-time Olympian, presently chairs the Sustainability and Legacy Commission of the IOC.

While you heard about the challenges, the Milano Cortina Olympics were still perhaps the most sustainable in Olympic history. Eighty-five per cent of the infrastructure used was pre-existing. They developed sports clusters, used public transportation — reducing the use of private cars — made Olympic medals from recycled metals, ensured that 20,000 items from the Games will be reused and plan on restoring the games sites back to their natural state.

While the final data still needs to be assessed, organizers also pledged that 100% of game-time electricity would be drawn from renewable sources, reflecting one of the youth assembly's central recommendations: accelerating the transition to clean energy.

Canada is also making strides. Municipal infrastructure projects such as Vancouver's Hillcrest Centre, the Richmond Olympic Oval, Halifax's Canada Games Centre and Toronto's net-zero carbon community recreation centre demonstrate how climate-smart infrastructure can make sport more sustainable, energy-efficient and resilient.

I am so proud of Mr. Seyi Smith, a former Canadian summer athletics sprinter and winter bobsled team member who has used his platform — he is incredible — and professional background to bridge the gap between high-level sport and environmental action. In fact, he founded a company called Racing to Zero that offers sustainability education, carbon inventories and sustainable strategy support to local, regional and national sports organizations in Canada.

The Canada Games Council, or CGC, which runs games, as we know, in our communities every few years for young people, has also been very busy. They have been able to build capacity and integrate sustainability into their overall practices. They launched an environmental sustainability strategy in the spring of 2025 and now work with all of their host societies on initiatives to reduce the impact on the environment over the course of the games' lifecycle, from vision to planning, to execution and follow-up.

In 2019, the Canada Games Council joined the United Nations Sports for Climate Action Framework as the first Canadian signatory. To this day, the CGC remains committed to this framework, which unites sports organizations globally to play their part in responsible climate action.

Since 2022, the Canada Games Council has been monitoring GHG emissions related to hosting its events in Canada, including carbon offsets related to participant travel, annual emissions of the franchise holder and, most recently, game-wide emission measurements for the 2025 Canada Games in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Coming up in 2027, the games will be in Quebec City, and they will be using all this data, including detailed recommendations, towards having games with as low emissions as possible.

Honourable senators, if there is one point I hope resonates with you from my remarks today, it is this: We cannot overlook sport as we consider the assembly's recommendations. Decarbonizing the sports sector is essential not only because it's an emitter in its own right but because the very future of sport depends on it and, perhaps most importantly, because it has the power to inspire others to follow its lead.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

Hon. Jim Quinn: Honourable senators, today I rise to speak briefly to the inquiry initiated by Senator Coyle on the final report of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly. I felt compelled to add my voice to Senator Coyle's and encourage those of you who haven't yet engaged with the report to do so.

I want to reiterate some aspects of her observations as delivered to the chamber on February 24 of this year and offer other observations.

Before I begin, I want to congratulate and thank our colleague Senator Coyle for her ongoing leadership and dedication as founder and continued co-chair of Senators for Climate Solutions. The group has grown to have over 60% of our chamber as members. As you know, this group brings together senators who want to learn more about efforts here at home and abroad, exploring solutions for climate change.

I had the pleasure of co-chairing that group with Senator Coyle for three years. Senator Muggli has assumed the co-chair role since I stepped back. Thank you and congratulations for taking on this responsibility.

The focus of our sessions over the years has been to bring informative discussions and presentations by experts who have shared their work and their experience in environmental and climate change areas. This provides an opportunity for senators to learn and ask questions so that we can better understand the vast array of subject matter being considered in this area. It's an invaluable learning opportunity.

I want to focus the rest of my brief remarks on events that took place last August, September and October as the Senate hosted the first-ever Canadian Youth Climate Assembly.

Climate change is here, and its effects are increasing rapidly and more frequently. Unprecedented floods, fires, droughts, shore erosion due to rising sea levels, larger spring runoffs and extreme fluctuations in temperatures are some among the many challenges we face, and all are indicators telling us that things are out of balance.

Further, there is an urgency that things must be done before that balance is skewed in a manner that takes us beyond the point of no return. While I cannot define where the point of no return is, I can say that the past 10 years have each resulted in increasing global temperature records, and it is projected to be an even hotter summer this year, so we will find out then.

• (1800)

This assembly reflected the approach taken by citizens' assemblies that have been held for many years around the globe. Those assemblies bring together citizens who are chosen to debate, query and provide input on issues of the day, and the results are made available to decision makers in government.

Discussions addressing this reality most often include those well informed within academia, political practitioners, environmental experts and so on, but it has not been a common practice to bring young people into the fold — who are on their way to adulthood — and ask them their views on climate change.

Senator Coyle was the driving force that made this idea become a reality: Canada having the first youth climate assembly. When Senator Coyle first talked to me about her idea of having a youth climate assembly, I was not sure where she was going with it, but the more she talked, I knew that this woman from Nova Scotia — from Antigonish — was not going to be distracted. She was going to make it happen, and she did. And I congratulate her for doing that.

There were 33 young participants, ranging in age from 18 to 25, who were chosen from a pool of over 700 applicants. They came from regions all across the country and represent the diversity of what makes Canada Canada.

Their involvement took place over several work periods, discussing their points of view, organizing their work, collaborating and producing a report — which is the topic of this inquiry — that summarizes their combined effort. If you haven't read their report, I would encourage you to do so. It reflects insightful thinking from tomorrow's leaders.

The assembly heard from subject-matter experts, engaged in extensive small-group and plenary dialogue and reached consensus on the 23 recommendations presented in their final report.

The recommendations were grouped into three themes: preparing for climate risks, reducing emissions in the oil and gas sector and climate accountability. Their observations were astute, their resolve was admirable and their arguments were compelling.

In the report, participants noted that they have experienced first-hand the effects of climate change on their lives. They also noted their disappointment that young people's opinions aren't being heard, and I agree that this is a reality for the most part.

They found themselves united by a common goal to build toward a green and sustainable future. They said they are ready for the challenge and eager to lead, and they are not only prepared to demand solutions but also ready to be part of them.

This was abundantly clear when participants of the assembly had the opportunity to present their report to a group of senators and members of the House of Commons here in the Senate Chamber on September 21, 2025. At the end of their presentation, parliamentarians posed thought-provoking questions, and the assembly participants' responses demonstrated informed understanding of the issues and pragmatic solution-based inputs on the larger discussion around climate change.

But they are also further highlighting what we should already be doing: encouraging parliamentarians, public policy-makers and private sector actors to find their own grit to seize the moment and act.

Colleagues, I want to briefly summarize all of what took place at that assembly. They challenged us to take them into consideration, including their thoughts and willingness to participate in dialogue that will lead to solutions for abating the disastrous effects of climate change.

For my part, I felt that this Sunday presentation provided great insight into the views of young people from across Canada, as represented by the participants. I also felt very optimistic about our future and dealing with climate change. These future leaders will continue to push this generation to move the dial forward.

As their own stories unfold, climate action will be pushed even more decisively. We owe it to them and to future generations to take this seriously.

In closing, I want to reiterate that Senators for Climate Solutions offers an opportunity for all of us to learn more, as well as have a better understanding of the challenges associated with climate change and perhaps help steer us in a direction to become more involved and responsive to young Canadians.

I want to add that being part of the group is not a significant demand on time, but it is time well spent. The more informed we are, the more meaningful our contribution to this discussion can be. In closing, colleagues, thank you for allowing me to share these brief observations with you.

(On motion of Senator Kingston, debate adjourned.)

VITAL ROLE OF IMMIGRANTS

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Loffreda, calling the attention of the Senate to the vital role that immigrants have played — and continue to play — in shaping Canada's economic growth, cultural richness and social fabric.

Hon. Andrew Cardozo: Honourable senators, I would like to begin by thanking Senator Loffreda for launching this inquiry into the contribution of immigrants to Canada and also for chairing the Senate Immigration Working Group.

Some 95% of Canadians trace their heritage to immigrants or are immigrants. To keep this discussion contemporary, I will focus primarily on Canadians who are immigrants, having arrived here in their own lifetime.

I will highlight the role of a few individuals and then make some observations about a group of immigrants: people who work in health care and senior care.

[*Translation*]

Yoshua Bengio is a computer scientist who is recognized as one of the three godfathers of artificial intelligence, or AI. Professor Bengio was born in France. His family emigrated to Montreal in the 1960s. He built his academic career in Canada. He received the Turing Award, an honour regarded as the Nobel Prize in computing, as well as the Order of Canada and several others. I had the pleasure of awarding him the King Charles III Coronation Medal last year here in this chamber.

Professor Bengio founded Mila, the Quebec Artificial Intelligence Institute, a world-renowned AI research centre that trains and attracts the top scientists in the field. He has been a strong advocate for more responsible and ethical AI, as well as for AI security.

[*English*]

At a time when many of his peers have gone off to join the big-spending American AI companies, Professor Bengio has been here carrying the torch for Canada, putting us on the map — alongside another godfather of AI and immigrant to Canada, Geoffrey Hinton — when it comes to the forefront of technological advancement.

Next I want to talk about John Menezes, a first-generation immigrant who came to Canada with the same hope shared by many newcomers: to build something meaningful in a country that rewards hard work and perseverance. He founded Stratejm, a cybersecurity company based in Mississauga. He grew it from a start-up into a nationally recognized managed security services firm.

Over the years, the company has employed dozens of highly skilled Canadian professionals and helped protect critical infrastructure, hospitals, enterprises and public sector organizations across the country from cyber threats.

In 2024, Stratejm was acquired by Bell Canada — a powerful example of how an immigrant-founded, homegrown company can scale, create jobs, strengthen national security and ultimately become part of one of Canada's most established corporations. It reflects not just his business success but also the broader contribution that immigrants make to Canada.

Dr. Theresa Tam — a name that will be familiar to all of us — served as Canada's Chief Public Health Officer until June 2025. Dr. Tam was born in Hong Kong and grew up in Great Britain, where she trained as a doctor at the University of Nottingham.

In Canada, she undertook further study at the University of Alberta and the University of British Columbia, where she specialized in pediatric infectious diseases. She held senior positions at the Public Health Agency of Canada before being appointed Chief Public Health Officer in 2017.

In this role, Dr. Tam was instrumental in our pandemic response through which she became a familiar name to many. She was the steady expert voice that calmed a nation through that unprecedented crisis.

• (1810)

Colleagues, I want to tell you about a hard-working middle-class family here in Ottawa. It is a story that is very illustrative and exemplifies the roles that many immigrants in Canada take.

Masuda and Feroze Anwar came to Canada from Bangladesh in the early 1970s. Masuda has spent many years as a public servant at the Canadian International Development Agency, or CIDA, and then at Global Affairs. Feroze built the trendy and popular Zuni Grill in the south end of Ottawa, a restaurant the whole family worked to make successful and popular. Their son, Tariq, is an IT specialist who is also known in the local Ottawa music scene. Their daughter, as her friends will tell you, is passionate about senators: first, with respect to the hockey team, about which she has loud and strong opinions; and, second, with respect to the Senate of Canada, about which she is professional and shares no opinions. She is today one of the most senior public servants in Ottawa. She is, of course, Shaila Anwar, the Clerk of the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator Cardozo: My final example concerns Canadians working in the health care industry. It is an observation based on personal experience.

My mother lived in a retirement home in the northeast end of Toronto for some eight years, until 2022. It was a home with about 100 residents. I want you to think about some of these figures: Over the eight years she was there, I would estimate that about 10% to 15% of the residents or clients were immigrants. The staff, on the other hand — from the kitchen staff, to the food servers, to the front desk receptionists, to the senior management — were, at all times, upward of 95% immigrants. Put clearly, if it were not for immigrants, that seniors' home could not exist and those 100 residents would not have had the retirement residence to live in.

Keep in mind that many of these workers, such as the food servers and personal support workers, for the most part worked part-time and were called to duty when needed. Servers may have had an early morning breakfast shift for three hours and then another shift at lunchtime or even dinnertime. Housing and rent being fairly expensive in Toronto, most were not able to live nearby. Some would pick up shifts at a nearby Tim Hortons to make ends meet, where they would be paid even less. Remember COVID? During that time, senior care workers were not permitted to work anywhere else, and yet they went on serving seniors day in and day out.

They always did their work with strong positive attitudes despite their paltry pay. They took their work seriously. With 100 residents, they took care of 100 particular needs: food, beverages and the things people liked and did not like. They called the residents by their names, but, more often, they called them "dear," "darling" or "my love." These personal support workers who were paid a very low wage, who made Canada home, served up food and care. More importantly, they served up love at all times to our seniors.

When people today sometimes say that we can't have too many immigrants because they will be a drain on our social services, part of me thinks, "Isn't that ironic?" If it weren't for these immigrants — these relatively recent ones — there wouldn't be many of the social services we take for granted.

Immigrants work at all levels of society, from the most senior to the most junior with the lowest wages. When was the last time you saw a non-immigrant taxi or Uber driver? When was the last time you saw a White person deliver food? Uber and DoorDash exist because there are scads of new arrivals, including those legendary international students who are willing to work those insecure and low-paying jobs so we can get an Uber in a hurry, a package delivered by Amazon or even have a hot Starbucks coffee delivered to our front door from a block away.

Perhaps the Amazon arrow logo should have a tag line that reads, "Packaged and delivered to you by a low-paid immigrant worker."

I have often wondered what would happen if all immigrants went on strike for just one day. Senator Yussuff, I'm sure, will like the idea of a strike. Sometimes, it's important to withdraw labour to make a point.

My query was answered in part when the federal government reduced immigration levels over the past few years. The drastic reduction in immigrants available to work caused a gaping shortage for many private-sector employers, as it did for colleges and universities in Canada. International students are the backbone of funding for most of the post-secondary system in Canada, which is a big, complex issue. Suffice it to say, without many of them, universities and colleges have had to reorganize themselves significantly.

Colleagues, if I can shift gears slightly, there are more people on the move worldwide than ever before. According to the United Nations, in 2024, the global number of international migrants was 304 million, a figure that has nearly doubled since 1990. Concerningly, immigration is the main issue shifting the political centre of gravity toward the far right across the world, especially in the developed world. For some, immigration is fundamentally changing their society in ways they find acceptable; for others, it is doing so in ways they find unacceptable. The far right gaining ground not only results in pro-immigration ideas losing out but comes with the rolling back of gender equality, human rights and the fight against climate change.

Canada has avoided this fate so far. It has been a bastion of stability compared to the politics of many of our peers, but we should not consider ourselves immune from these trends. While some measures we considered in Bill C-12 tighten immigration and refugee laws, we can see that as part of a broader context. Sometimes, difficult decisions are made.

Colleagues, I want to focus on a few things before I conclude.

Immigration is and will continue to be a net benefit to society. We will continue to welcome immigrants. If we want to continue to enjoy those benefits, we must ensure that immigrants thrive in society by removing barriers they face to making full contributions to Canada. However, we must be conscious of the need to maintain immigration at reasonable levels so as to not upset what has been a fragile consensus for many years.

As an aside, I will say for the record that I have never been in favour of the proposal of the Century Initiative, an organization that has proposed a population of 100 million Canadians by the end of this century.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, the next time you sign up for training in French, your instructor may be an immigrant from Haiti, Djibouti, Lebanon, France or Morocco.

While some fear that immigrants speak only one official language, if any at all, upon arrival and thus pose a threat to bilingualism, my experience over many years of studying French has shown me that immigrants are, in fact, a key driver of bilingualism. Without immigrant French instructors, our efforts to promote bilingualism would be very much in jeopardy.

• (1820)

[*English*]

The next time you arrive somewhere late at night, chances are that your taxi driver will be an immigrant. When you check into a hotel past midnight, the receptionist may well be an immigrant. The next time you call for food delivery at home, the deliverer may be an immigrant. The next time you go for an X-ray, the lab technician will likely be an immigrant. The next time you go to the drugstore to pick up your prescribed medicine, the pharmacist or maybe the pharmacy owner will likely be an immigrant.

These are the platoons of immigrants spread across this country who are advancing the cause of a strong Canada that has the range of economic and social services with which we thrive and that make our daily lives better.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Krista Ross: Honourable senators, I, too, rise today to speak to Senator Loffreda's inquiry on the vital role that immigrants have played and continue to play in shaping Canada's economic growth, cultural richness and social fabric.

It will come as no surprise to most of you that I will be focusing on economic growth specific to Atlantic Canada. When we speak about immigration, the conversation is often dominated by the larger provinces that have much higher numbers of newcomers. In places like Ontario, with a population of 16 million people, or British Columbia, with 5.6 million people, newcomers make up 30% and 29% of the populations, respectively.

You may have read in the news about some post-secondary institutions abusing immigration programs in some large regions to make more money off international student enrolments, and the crackdown that happened across the board to try to address this issue.

However, it is important to remember that immigration plays a very different role in other parts of the country. In New Brunswick, with a population of 867,000 people, less than the city this chamber sits in, immigrants make up only 6%. I'll take a quote from David Campbell, an economic development consultant and a former chief economist with the Government of New Brunswick. As he put it:

> It's intellectually lazy and sloppy to look out your window and assume your weather is the same across the country.

So, let's not forget that when discussing immigration, the situation is not the same in every province, and a one-size-fits-all policy does not, in fact, fit all.

In New Brunswick, we cannot sustain our population without significant and consistent immigration — not even close. In 2025, Statistics Canada reported a population decrease in the last quarter for New Brunswick, its largest quarterly decline since the 1970s. New Brunswick's natural growth rate, or births versus deaths, came in at a net decline of 300.

There was also a loss in interprovincial net migration, with more people moving out of the province than coming in. The median age in my province in the 1970s was 24; now, it's 45. New Brunswick is getting a lot older, and we need younger people to move to our province. If we don't have a workforce, our economy will stagnate.

Of course, we also want to repatriate more New Brunswickers and retain more youth, but a clear-eyed evaluation of the situation inevitably concludes that immigration will provide our biggest net gain. Economic newcomers help fill labour-force gaps caused by an aging workforce and low birth rates. Demographically, newcomers are typically younger, often with families. They have significant positive economic impacts on our communities. When a new family moves into a community, the priority is usually finding suitable housing, followed by finding a job.

That family adds to consumption and economic activity in that community. They pay property taxes, either indirectly through rent or directly through home ownership. They pay income taxes. They buy food, clothing and transportation. They become involved in social and cultural activities. Perhaps they join a church or volunteer in their community with local organizations. Their children go to the local schools. They start businesses, create jobs, fill vacant positions and bring expertise. They increase the creation of net new businesses and jobs in the city, expanding the tax base for all levels of government, unlocking wealth creation. They make our communities more prosperous.

However, the economic impact is only part of the story. Of course, newcomers add so much more value to our communities than simply economic impact. Learning from their diverse experiences, cultural practices and different perspectives from around the world makes us better, as individuals, as citizens and as communities. Newcomers also bring social diversity and global perspectives; they are active volunteers.

Some may see newcomers as data points instead of seeing them as individuals who each have their own potential and ability to contribute to our culture and economy. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we approach immigration in a welcoming way and see immigrants for what they are: friends, neighbours and fellow Canadians.

When looking at New Brunswick, according to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, 89% of permanent resident admissions are economic immigrants, 5% are refugees and the remaining 6% fall into other categories. Perhaps the most important initiative that has helped change the prospects for Atlantic Canada in terms of attracting newcomers to the region was the Atlantic Immigration Program, which was introduced in 2017 by the federal government. Based on the success of the pilot, the program became permanent in January 2022. It is driven by marketplace demand. It works by having designated employers provide job offers to qualified newcomers, while the applicants must have an individualized settlement plan in place for themselves and their families.

To put it in perspective, according to *Toward Prosperity: The Transformation of Atlantic Canada's Economy* by Don Mills and David Campbell, between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024, over 38,000 newcomers settled in Atlantic Canada. That is the highest number ever to come to Atlantic Canada, and 11 times the number recorded 20 years ago. For example, in 2004, New Brunswick welcomed 761 newcomers, but in 2024, it was nearly 15,000.

We need to focus on both improving the process to attract newcomers but also to be better prepared to receive and welcome immigrants to improve our retention rates. In fact, the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce recently launched a population growth strategy aligned with Atlantic principles. Built upon shared principles adopted by chambers of commerce and boards of trade across Atlantic Canada, the strategy features a dual focus: engaging and retaining our domestic population, and attracting and supporting newcomers from across Canada and around the world.

Two points included in this strategy focus on reducing barriers to employment for international students and skilled immigrants by improving credential recognition as well as ensuring immigrants' skills are fully utilized in Atlantic labour markets, reducing overeducation and underemployment.

If we are to welcome newcomers, we must ensure they have the tools to succeed and contribute to our communities.

Growing New Brunswick's and Canada's populations is foundational to sustained economic growth. It is important to keep the population growth momentum of the previous five years going. Growing the population is required to fulfill our current and future labour needs, but the benefits are far beyond the workforce issue. Stories about newcomers' successes need to be told so Atlantic Canadians and, indeed, all Canadians can better understand and appreciate the value that newcomers bring to all of our communities.

The government has a responsibility to keep Canadians informed about the contributions of newcomers to our economic growth and prosperity. As Senator Loffreda said in his recent speech on the subject:

> Immigration is not a secondary feature of Canada's success; it is one of its defining strengths. It is at the heart of most policy discussions and decisions in our country.

Newcomers have played and continue to play a vital role in New Brunswick, both economically and culturally. In the face of ever-increasing negative rhetoric and discrimination aimed toward newcomers, we must stay focused on ensuring that we remain a welcoming and supportive place for those who have decided to call the Atlantic region or Canada home.

I thank you all for listening. Perhaps if you take one thing away from what I have said, it's that one size doesn't fit all and that we need to consider our regional differences in federal policies in all areas, but particularly as they relate to immigration.

Thank you, *wela'lin*.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Judy A. White: Honourable senators, as the third senator rising to speak to this, I think this is Senator Loffreda's hat trick.

As has been noted, this is a timely discussion, particularly in light of some of the unfavourable discourse about immigrants happening in Canada and around the world. This population has been portrayed by some as a threat to public safety, public health, and to economic and social stability. Such rhetoric has fuelled negative sentiments, normalized discrimination and justified violence in some cases.

At such a time, it is critical to remind ourselves how vital immigration has been to Canada's prosperity and growth. Immigration has shaped our country's economic, political, social and cultural fabric. It is also important to remember that, other than Indigenous Peoples, who have lived on this land since time immemorial, every resident of Canada or their ancestors have a history of immigration.

• (1830)

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator White, I'm sorry to interrupt, can you watch that your card is touching the podium?

Senator White: Sorry.

In my remarks, I would like to focus on the importance of immigration to rural communities and small towns and the experience of newcomers there, specifically in communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, where immigration has become increasingly important to help address population decline, labour shortages and aging demographics while supporting economic renewal and community vitality.

Newcomers go through significant hardships to settle in Canada, especially in small towns where challenges are magnified due to policies that research shows are often biased toward the settlement of migrants in urban spaces and largely ignore non-urban ones. While the objective of many immigration policies is to distribute immigrants across the country, research shows that government funding does not adequately support this goal, which has a negative impact on smaller communities.

In fact, some qualitative studies show that while immigrants to rural communities are generally not worse off than their urban counterparts, they receive different levels of social supports and access to cultural amenities. Many experience social isolation, discrimination and racism and face barriers in addressing these experiences. However, the focus of most academic studies has been on immigration in large- and medium-sized communities, especially Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, where there have been large numbers of newcomers. Consequently, stories of immigrants to rural Canada are often overlooked.

As a senator from Newfoundland and Labrador, I have witnessed first-hand how newcomers bring cultural diversity, entrepreneurship and fresh perspectives that strengthen community life and support long-term regional development.

Allow me to share one such story. In July 2003, a young man from Bangladesh stepped off a long and exhausting flight and into a new chapter of his life in Stephenville, a small town on the west coast of the island of my province.

For Khalid Nasim, known as Clete, that first day in Canada was unforgettable and not just because of the terrible flight. Everything felt different: the air, the pace and the people. He had come because his father-in-law was already a permanent resident and his wife-to-be held permanent residency status. Within six months, his own immigration process was complete. What began as a family decision quickly became a life-defining journey.

Clete is proud of where he comes from. A practising Muslim, he credits Bangladesh with giving him faith, discipline and a strong moral grounding. Before coming to Canada, Clete had already built an international educational journey. He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia. His education gave him business knowledge, but it was Newfoundland and Labrador that gave him the opportunity to flourish.

As is the case for many newcomers, Clete's first months were not easy. Despite his education, he could not secure work in his trade. To support his growing family, he began driving a taxi. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Driving a cab in Stephenville allowed him to meet all kinds of people. He told me with a smile that it was fantastic to make money while meeting people. Many customers were surprised to see a Bengali man driving a local cab so far from Bangladesh. He was often the subject of Newfoundland jokes, but always in good fun, in the warm and teasing spirit that is so characteristic of my province. That was when he began to feel this place had room for him.

What started as driving someone else's vehicle turned into something much larger. Clete eventually purchased his own vehicle, then another and another.

Today, he owns and operates King's Cab, which has 11 cars serving the Bay St. George area and 4 cars in the nearby city of Corner Brook. His entrepreneurial journey did not stop there. In 2022, he opened Asian Food Mart in the city, a grocery store specializing in Asian food and supplies, helping to meet the needs of both newcomers and long-time residents seeking diverse products.

His biggest challenge as a newcomer entrepreneur was access to clear information. Understanding how to start and structure a business was not straightforward. Even as recently as 2023, he felt that finding accurate, consolidated guidance for small business owners required persistence and self-navigation. But he persevered.

When asked how Canada compares to his home country in terms of business, Clete spoke candidly. He said the Canadian business environment is safe and free of corruption. I was so proud to have this conversation with him. He explains that there is no corruption in the system and this gives him confidence. He feels that he is being treated fairly. While he believes taxes on small businesses can be a bit too high, he remains extremely grateful for the stability and transparency of the system.

Clete and his wife are raising six children — five daughters and one son — all born in my province. Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador especially have given him the opportunity to raise his family in his faith, grow a business and live in health and peace.

For Clete, home is not defined only by birthplace. It is also defined by opportunity, fairness, community and the ability to raise his children. For a man who arrived on a difficult flight in July 2003, Stephenville is not just where he lives. It is home.

Clete's story is one of thousands across the country. There are many who, like him, left family, friends, communities and everything they knew behind to build a new life, drawn by the promise of Canada: a promise of safety, stability, opportunity, good governance and a better life for themselves and their children.

Clete's story is also an important reminder that immigration is essential to the economic and social stability of small towns across Canada.

Yes, a successful immigration system requires alignment between immigration levels and the ability to properly welcome newcomers with housing, accessible health care and education. We know this. We understand this reality. However, as we discuss adjustments to our immigration system and revise policies, let's keep the stories and contributions of immigrants at the forefront. Let's continue to see diversity as our strength and remain a country grounded in the principles of inclusivity, fairness and respect. *Wela'lioq.* Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Clement, debate adjourned.)

[*Translation*]

BUDGET 2025 IMPLEMENTATION BILL, NO. 1

SIXTH REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Leave having been given to revert to Presenting or Tabling of Reports from Committees:

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

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

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

SIXTH REPORT

Your committee, to which was referred Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025, has, in obedience to the order of reference of Tuesday, March 10, 2026, examined the said bill and now reports the same without amendment but with certain observations, which are appended to this report.

Respectfully submitted,

CLAUDE CARIGNAN

Chair

(*For text of observations, see today's* Journals of the Senate*, p. 743.*)

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

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

• (1840)

[*English*]

THE SENATE

MOTION TO CALL UPON THE GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT MILITARY HONOURS REVIEW BOARD ADOPTED

Hon. Marty Klyne, pursuant to notice of December 11, 2025, moved:

That the Senate call upon the Government of Canada to establish an Independent Military Honours Review Board to review veterans' cases where evidence suggests Victoria Cross criteria are met.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

[*Translation*]

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DESJARDINS GROUP

INQUIRY—DEBATE

Hon. Lucie Moncion rose pursuant to notice of February 3, 2026:

That she will call the attention of the Senate to the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of the Desjardins Group.

She said: Honourable senators, as 2025 marked the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of the Desjardins Group, this seems like a fitting time for me to remind this chamber about an endeavour that is much more than financial in scope. These 125 years of bold action, solidarity and commitment to serving communities have shaped this francophone financial institution into what it is today: an institution that embodies a certain economic vision, one rooted in democracy, guided by the principle of collective responsibility and focused on people and the common good.

The Desjardins Group will wrap up its celebration of this historic milestone at its annual general meeting in the spring. With over $510 billion in assets, $3.8 billion in surplus earnings and $638 million returned to members and the community, the Desjardins Group is Canada's leading francophone cooperative financial institution. It is worth taking a moment to look back on the organization's foundations, its history and the values that have enabled this business model not only to stand the test of time, but also to establish itself as a key player in the economic and social development of Quebec and Ontario's francophone communities. So what is the Desjardins Group?

Colleagues, the Desjardins Group is much more than just a financial institution. It is a cooperative organization fully owned by its 10 million members, located mainly in Quebec and Ontario. Its business model enables it to make its members' interests a top priority, in the name of solidarity and collective responsibility. It is run democratically, so it relies on the active participation of its members, who elect their representatives and take part in decision making at annual general meetings.

In addition to its financial services, the Desjardins Group is very engaged in social causes. It redistributes a significant portion of its surplus earnings in the form of member dividends and donations to the community. The Desjardins Group is also a key player in regional economic development, actively supporting local small and medium-sized enterprises. As the heartbeat of the local economy, it promotes job creation and wealth generation and help communities grow wherever it operates.

Desjardins is also active internationally and has been providing technical support and investment services in the inclusive finance sector in developing countries for the past 50 years. Its actions show that the economy can serve people and can be inclusive and democratic, while actively contributing to the well-being and growth of communities. Its 125 years of operating in a constantly changing world are a testament not only to incredible institutional resilience, but most of all, to the timeless strength of cooperative values, such as autonomy, responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

To better understand the origin and lasting impact of these values, allow me to take you back to the very beginnings of the Desjardins Group. At a time when lending practices were not only unfair but often abusive, Alphonse Desjardins refused to let workers and families be subjected to usury, exploited and trapped in poverty and ignorance.

In 1897, while working as a stenographer in the other place, Alphonse Desjardins was deeply moved by a member's speech decrying the ravages of usury. The member cited the disturbing case of one citizen who had been forced to pay $5,000 in interest on a modest loan of $150. This abomination, a symptom of a profoundly unfair system, so outraged Alphonse Desjardins that he felt compelled to come up with a fairer and more humane answer to the problem of financial exploitation targeting the most vulnerable members of society.

The solution he devised was inspired by various European cooperative models. At the heart of this vision lay the simple yet powerful principle of collective and participatory financial management. Members pool their savings, share their resources, bear the risks jointly and exercise decision-making power together.

Thus, on December 6, 1900, the first credit union was established in Lévis by Alphonse and his wife Dorimène. She managed the day-to-day operations, while he continued his promotional and development activities.

Very early on, Alphonse Desjardins understood that the trustworthiness and credibility of the cooperative model had to be based on the principles of honesty and accountability. He also realized that in order to turn the next generation into engaged citizens who could plan ahead, they needed to learn to save, which is why he launched a school savings program that encouraged children to save every penny.

From 1907 onwards, the credit union model attracted growing interest beyond Quebec, particularly in other Canadian provinces.

Alphonse Desjardins's work as a stenographer required him to spend several months a year in Ontario, so that is where he focused much of his efforts. Starting in 1908, he played an active role in establishing the Civil Service Savings and Loan Society, known as the Civil Service Co-operative Credit Society Limited, for federal employees. Building on this experience, he expanded his work by founding seven new credit unions in French Canadian parishes, mainly located in Ottawa.

Alphonse Desjardins played a role in founding a total of 24 credit unions in Ontario, demonstrating his commitment to the development of the province's francophone community. He proved that commitment in other ways too. In 1915, for example, he played a leading role in a demonstration organized by the Association catholique de la jeunesse canadienne-française, which was campaigning against Regulation 17 and restrictions on French-language education in Ontario.

At the time, *Le Droit* described the credit unions as the tip of the spear for the French language in Ontario:

> By helping us achieve economic independence, credit unions will do more for the bilingual issue than many a political struggle.

Those words ring true to this day. They remind us that the vitality of a language and the survival of a culture also depend on the ability of its communities to prosper economically. After Alphonse Desjardins's death in 1920, the post-World War I economic crisis of 1921 had a significant impact on the credit unions.

Between 1921 and 1925, several of them were forced to cease operations, and the network, then consisting of some 150 credit unions, saw its assets decline. Against this backdrop, some credit unions began to combine into regional credit unions responsible for monitoring, inspecting and managing surplus funds. These unions formed gradually, helping to shape and consolidate the network.

Moreover, while the crisis of the 1930s deeply shook the Desjardins Group, it also brought about a renewal. It played a pivotal role in the regional credit unions' decision to join forces to form a federation. The added structure made it possible to more efficiently organize the inspection, oversight and promotion of the credit unions, while preparing for the Desjardins Group's relaunch. The influence of this dynamic extended beyond Quebec's borders. In other Canadian provinces, credit unions proliferated, drawing inspiration from both the Desjardins Group and the Antigonish Movement, which emerged in Nova Scotia in the early 1930s.

The economic prosperity that was restored in the wake of World War II also helped consolidate the position of these new savings and credit cooperatives. However, the postwar period was not without its challenges. The recession of 1947 and 1948,

which brought back memories of the 1921 recession, along with the precarious state of certain credit unions that had taken excessive risks during the boom years, led to the creation of the first security fund in August 1948. It was intended to financially support struggling credit unions and came with a dues increase for federation members to strengthen the inspection service.

• (1850)

Far from weakening this institution, the crises and recessions that have marked its history made its foundations stronger and revealed its incredible resilience. The Desjardins Group has emerged more united, better structured and invigorated by the success of cooperative values.

Today, Desjardins is one of the country's leading financial institutions. It was recently recognized by *The Banker* magazine as Canada's best financial institution of 2025 and by *Forbes* magazine as one of the best institutions in the world. It is a francophone financial institution that was founded in Quebec and is still operating 125 years later.

Its financial strength, recognized by credit rating agencies, attests to the relevance of the cooperative model in a highly competitive environment. It has performed well not in spite of its values, but because of them.

People are the core of Desjardins' success. In the spirit of upholding the values of cooperation and commitment, I consider it especially appropriate to pay tribute to the many people who have been instrumental in the remarkable success of the Desjardins Group, the people who dreamed big dreams and made them come true.

I am referring to the government of René Lévesque, which, after the 1976 elections, paved the way for more permissive legislation adapted to Quebec's financial institutions.

I am referring to the various presidents of the Desjardins Group, who have steered the organization to the heights we see today.

I am referring to the people who have worked for this organization, who believed in it and who contributed to its growth and reputation. Through their vision, integrity and dedication, they forged the culture of cooperative excellence and community engagement that has become the Desjardins hallmark.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak about the Desjardins Group during Francophonie Month. I would also like to highlight International Women's Day and the contributions made by women within the Desjardins Group.

Allow me to conclude my remarks by paying special tribute to Dorimène Desjardins. She was a woman of vision, a devoted wife and a mother of 10. She was also a faithful partner in her husband's grand plans. As an active co-founder of the first credit union branch in Lévis, she embodied diligence and a strong sense of duty. She played a discreet yet indispensable role, and her journey invites us to recognize that economic development is only possible when women are able to fully and completely participate in institutional and financial systems.

Even today, having more women on boards of directors, in management teams and across all professions helps foster balance, performance and innovation. It is safe to say, without a doubt, that diverse governance promotes better risk management, greater transparency and more inclusive decision making — qualities that are in keeping with the traditions of cooperative principles.

To highlight Dorimène Desjardins's legacy is to acknowledge that Canada's history has been shaped in part by the competence, determination and leadership of women. It is to acknowledge that their participation, expertise, vision and support form the bedrock of our society and its growth.

Honourable senators, celebrating the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of the Desjardins Group means acknowledging the remarkable history of this francophone financial institution, which has made its mark in Quebec, across Canada and around the world. It also means highlighting the ability of citizens to take charge of their own lives, to exercise their economic power democratically and to build lasting institutions together. Furthermore, it means understanding that money can be used to help people and communities develop. Finally, it is tangible proof that solidarity is the future, and that is as true today as it has ever been.

Thank you.

Hon. Amina Gerba: Honourable senators, I would like to speak to Senator Moncion's inquiry marking the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Desjardins Group in 2025. As we just heard, Desjardins is a major cooperative institution that has had an impact on both our past and our present.

In light of Senator Moncion's remarks, I believe it would be entirely appropriate to highlight a complementary aspect of the cooperative's success: Desjardins's international commitments, particularly in the area of inclusive finance.

Since its earliest days, Desjardins's founding principle has been the simple but powerful idea that finance should serve people. This vision contributed to the economic and social development of both Quebec and Canada and has now gone international.

Through Desjardins International Development, the group puts its cooperative expertise to work for partners in nearly 60 countries in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. Its work focuses on concrete, strategic levers, such as providing technical support for local financial institutions, investing in inclusive finance, and strengthening people's long-term economic empowerment. These initiatives have one basic objective: to expand access to secure financial services designed specifically for people who are too often excluded from them. The economic empowerment of women is of particular importance.

I'd like to share a personal anecdote.

In my previous career, I had the opportunity to visit several African countries where Desjardins International Development was operating.

In Burkina Faso, I met with female shea butter producers who were organized into cooperatives and supported by financial institutions backed by Desjardins. I saw very concrete results there: Women had access to credit for the first time, they could open secure savings accounts, and their financial literacy markedly improved thanks to training tailored to their specific circumstances.

Beyond the numbers, these initiatives directly contribute to strengthening economic self-sufficiency, community resilience, and women's ability to play a greater role in the development of their communities.

Honourable senators, as we mark Desjardins' one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary, we recognize not only the strength of a financial institution that was founded in Quebec and has grown to serve clients around the world, but also the impact of a cooperative model that has demonstrated, for over a century, that economic performance and social inclusion are not mutually exclusive.

• (1900)

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator Gerba, I'm sorry to interrupt. Honourable senators, it is now seven o'clock. Pursuant to rule 3-3(1), I am obliged to leave the chair unless honourable senators agree not to see the clock. Is it agreed, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Yes.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: So ordered. You may continue, Senator Gerba.

Senator Gerba: Please join me in marking this milestone anniversary and wishing the Desjardins Group continued success. Thank you.

Hon. Rosa Galvez: Honourable senators, I, too, rise to speak today with deep gratitude and a sense of honour, as Senator Moncion draws our attention to the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Desjardins Group. The Desjardins Group is my neighbour. I live in Lévis, not far from its headquarters.

It is an institution that, over the decades, has transformed the way Canadians view finance, solidarity and stewardship of our planet. That means a great deal to me. Since its founding in Lévis in 1900 by Alphonse Desjardins and Dorimène Desjardins, this institution has become one of the most striking examples of the cooperative model's success worldwide, as my colleagues have explained. The Desjardins couple understood, well ahead of their time, that money is merely a tool. What matters is who holds the money and what cause it serves. One hundred and twenty-five years on, this lesson is more relevant than ever.

Colleagues, we're in a climate emergency. The IPCC reports are unequivocal: If we do not act now, the consequences will be catastrophic for our children, for future generations, and especially for developing countries, which contribute the least to global emissions but suffer the most devastating effects.

It is against this backdrop that Desjardins's leadership in sustainable finance deserves to be commended, and that is in addition to the other qualities of the Desjardins Group that have already been mentioned. I wholeheartedly and unequivocally applaud these efforts. In 2020, the Desjardins Group took a clear stance in favour of getting out of thermal coal. In 2021, it renewed its climate ambition by setting a target of achieving net zero by 2040 — ahead of the rest of Canada — for all its operations, as well as for the financing and investments of its insurers in three sectors that are major emitters of greenhouse gases: energy, real estate and transport.

Furthermore, through its foundation and its responsible investment funds, Desjardins is channelling billions of dollars into renewable energy projects in the fields of sustainable agriculture and the circular economy. These projects are positive examples of what is possible when financial institutions align themselves with our climate and environmental goals.

[*English*]

Desjardins has also been a pioneer in green bond issuance, sustainable investment funds and integrating environmental, social and governance, or ESG, criteria into its lending and investment decisions. Desjardins funds show up multiple times in the Corporate Knights 2026 Responsible Funds ranking. It has shown that a co-operative model, built on long-term thinking and member accountability, is inherently better suited to sustainable finance than the short-term profit logic that has too often governed Bay Street and Wall Street. Desjardins continues to present strong financial results despite global uncertainty.

I want to speak about something that does not always receive enough attention in these halls: Desjardins' commitment to the developing world. Through Développement international Desjardins, known as DID, the movement has spent decades building co-operative financial networks across, as my colleague mentioned, Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia.

This is not charity, colleagues. This is solidarity. This is the export of a model that empowers communities to own their own financial futures.

DID has helped establish and strengthen local financial co-operatives that serve farmers, women entrepreneurs and small-business owners who would otherwise be entirely invisible to the global financial system. These are precisely the populations most vulnerable to climate change and other polycrises affecting our planet. Giving them financial tools is not separate from the climate agenda; it is central to it. Climate resilience requires economic resilience. You cannot adapt to a changing climate if you cannot access credit to invest in a drought-resistant crop, for example, or in a solar panel for your home.

[*Translation*]

I am from Peru. In Peru, I've seen first-hand rural communities that were transformed by access to cooperative microfinance. I'm thinking of women farmers who were able to invest in drought-tolerant seeds or young entrepreneurs who started green economy businesses in regions neglected by the big banks. All of this is the Desjardins model in action.

Over the course of the last century, Desjardins has become a major player in the financial system. With more than 7.8 million members and clients, about 55,000 employees and more than $470 billion in assets, the Desjardins Group is the sixth-largest financial cooperative in the world. Today, it is the largest co-operative financial institution in North America.

Unlike traditional banks, Desjardins redistributes a portion of its profits, paying out several hundreds of millions of dollars per year in the form of member dividends, investing in communities and funding local and social projects. Since 2017, for example, the GoodSpark Fund has supported more than 920 projects with funding of over $200 million.

Desjardins has played a key role in several areas, such as providing access to credit for farmers and SMEs, providing financing for housing and entrepreneurship, and supporting cooperatives and the social economy. For decades, credit unions have been allowing Quebec households to build up savings and capital, which has contributed to the economic growth of my province.

That's why I say with conviction that Desjardins is a Quebec institution and a global model. We should be proud of this Canadian institution and ensure that its values are replicated elsewhere in the Canadian financial system. Indeed, we must encourage all types of socially oriented financial institutions, whether public, private or non-profit.

[*English*]

Desjardins did not become what it is by following the path of least resistance, as you can imagine. It became what it is by holding very strong to its values — through the Great Depression, through wars, through financial crises — and by trusting that those values, over time, would prove their worth.

And 125 years later, they have.

Meegwetch. Thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Honourable senators, I rise today as part of Senator Moncion's inquiry to pay tribute to the Desjardins Group, which celebrated its one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary in 2025.

Not all Canadian organizations are fortunate enough to reach such a venerable age. Today, we celebrate not only the longevity of an institution, but also the significance of a key player in our country's financial and social history.

For 125 years, this remarkable cooperative institution has served millions of Canadians, especially in Quebec, while demonstrating that financial institutions can be profitable, responsible and deeply rooted in the community.

• (1910)

Having worked in the banking sector for 35 years myself, I have seen first-hand the vital role that institutional diversity plays in the strength of our financial system. Financial institutions and cooperatives such as Desjardins are a key pillar of this system.

Although the Royal Bank remains the largest banking institution in the country, in Quebec, Desjardins Group holds a special place. Quebecers share a deep sense of belonging with Desjardins. It is a relationship built on trust that has lasted for over a century. It is a true love story whose flame shows no signs of fading.

[*English*]

Senators will also remember that the United Nations designated 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives. In its resolution, the United Nations reaffirmed that co-operatives ". . . promote the fullest possible participation in the economic and social development . . .," including for women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples. It recognized that inclusive participation strengthens economic development and contributes to the eradication of poverty and hunger.

The UN also called upon member states to raise awareness of the important role co-operatives play in social and economic development. Senator Moncion's inquiry contributes directly to that objective, and I thank her for bringing this important topic before the chamber.

[*Translation*]

The history of Desjardins began in 1900 in Lévis, thanks to the vision of a remarkable man: Alphonse Desjardins.

At the beginning of the 20th century, access to financial services was far from universal.

Many working-class families and small business owners had few opportunities to build up savings safely or obtain credit on fair terms. All too often, they had to turn to lenders who charged exorbitant interest rates, trapping borrowers in cycles of debt and financial insecurity.

Alphonse Desjardins recognized this injustice. He firmly believed that ordinary people deserved access to reliable savings products and fair credit.

His solution was simple yet revolutionary: to create a member-owned cooperative financial institution that would pool members' savings to provide loans to the community.

The first credit union was born.

[*English*]

The Desjardins model was never limited to financial services alone. It was built on dignity, solidarity and empowerment. It sought to combat usury and financial exclusion while giving workers the tools to build more secure lives. In many ways, Desjardins represented a financial solution to a social problem.

That founding vision proved remarkably powerful. Over the decades, the co-operative model has spread across communities in Quebec and beyond. What began as a modest local initiative has grown into the largest financial co-operative in Canada and the eighth largest in the world, with assets of more than $510 billion as of December 31, 2025.

[*Translation*]

Of course, we cannot talk about Desjardins's success without mentioning its expansion beyond the borders of Quebec.

Desjardins credit unions are well represented in French-speaking Ontario and New Brunswick, for example.

Despite its considerable expansion, Desjardins has never lost sight of its roots.

Its cooperative structure — owned by its members — ensures that decisions are guided not only by financial performance, but also by the well-being of its communities. Its credit unions remain deeply rooted in local life, supporting families, entrepreneurs and community organizations far beyond traditional banking services.

As a former banker, I can say that institutions like Desjardins strengthen our entire financial sector.

Competition and diversity of institutional models are essential to a healthy financial ecosystem. Cooperative institutions bring a distinct perspective — one that prioritizes long-term stability, prudent management and community impact.

This approach has proven its worth time and again.

The Canadian financial system is widely recognized as one of the most stable and resilient in the world — and I say that to anyone who will listen. One of the reasons for this resilience is precisely the presence of strong cooperative institutions operating alongside chartered banks and other financial players.

Desjardins is a striking example of how a member-owned organization can combine financial rigour with a social mission.

[*English*]

Of course, anniversaries are not just moments to reflect on the past; they are also opportunities to look ahead. The financial sector is evolving rapidly. Digital transformation is reshaping how Canadians interact with their financial institutions, and new technologies are redefining expectations in terms of accessibility, speed and personalization.

In fact, the Desjardins Group was named Canadian Bank of the Year in 2025 by *The Banker* magazine, a well-deserved recognition in this milestone year. This distinction reflects, in part, the organization's major transformation aimed at simplifying banking operations and improving access to financial services for its members and clients.

Today, approximately 85% of customer interactions and 96% of transactions are conducted digitally, primarily via mobile devices. These figures are remarkable and place Desjardins among the leaders in its field. Innovation, in fact, has long been part of its DNA. Desjardins was the first financial institution in Canada to introduce online banking as early as 1996. I'm sure that is a surprise to many.

At the same time, the global economy is confronting major challenges, including the transition to a lower-carbon economy and the growing importance of sustainable finance. Institutions like Desjardins will play an important role in navigating these transformations.

Their co-operative structure uniquely positions them to balance innovation with responsibility, investing in new technologies while remaining firmly focused on the needs of their members and the vitality of their communities. Communities are important to Desjardins.

[*Translation*]

Equally important is their ongoing commitment to community development.

For generations, Desjardins has supported local projects, cultural initiatives, small businesses and social organizations across Quebec and Canada. These investments help strengthen the social fabric and ensure that more people get to share in our economic prosperity.

In a constantly changing economy, the cooperative values that guided Alphonse Desjardins more than a hundred years ago remain deeply relevant: solidarity, prudence and community.

These principles remind us that finance is not an end in itself. It is a tool that can empower individuals, support families and help communities prosper.

I'm thinking in particular of the Desjardins Foundation, which, in 2024 alone, invested nearly $7 million to support young people's full potential. Over half a million Quebec youth benefited from these initiatives.

As we celebrate the Desjardins Group's one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary, we are also celebrating the enduring strength of the cooperative model, a model that puts people at the heart of economic life and ensures that financial institutions remain deeply connected to the communities they serve. That is precisely why co-operative institutions are so important to the economic fabric of Canada.

For 125 years, Desjardins has proven what can be accomplished when financial innovation is guided by a social mission.

Let's hope that the next 125 years will carry on this proud tradition. Congratulations to the members, employees, leaders and communities who have built and supported the Desjardins Group and who continue to do so. Their work reminds us that when finance truly serves people and communities, society as a whole benefits.

• (1920)

[*English*]

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 4, 2025-26

FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-23, An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

(Bill read first time.)

SECOND READING—DEBATE

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-6(1)(f), I move that the bill be read the second time now.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Pupatello: Honourable senators, I am pleased to rise and introduce Appropriation Act No. 4, 2025-26, which would provide supply for the Supplementary Estimates (C). Through this bill, the government is seeking Parliament's approval of $5.4 billion in planned voting spending.

It should come as no surprise that we are once again seeing a significant focus on spending by the Department of National Defence. This includes $1.2 billion for the Department of National Defence, including $34.4 million to support Canadian Armed Forces operations in the Middle East; a further $1.2 billion for the Treasury Board Secretariat, of which $1 billion is designated for national defence priorities; $1 billion for the Canada Post Corporation; and $508 million for the Department of Indigenous Services.

[*Translation*]

This Supplementary Estimates (C) also include additional funding to support the initiatives announced in the budget, including $150 million to modernize the CBC and $127.3 million to strengthen the Canadian Coast Guard's security role.

Honourable senators, the funding provided for in this bill is intended to help protect Canadians and ensure that they continue to have access to the essential services on which they depend.

[*English*]

As I discuss these Supplementary Estimates (C) here in front of us today, it is worth placing them within the broader financial cycle — in particular for new senators like me who are not experienced at the federal government level — to understand the cadence of how all this money is spent throughout the year.

Each step in that cycle reflects an important responsibility we have in the Senate, which is the authorization of this public spending.

Every year, roughly 130 federal organizations take part in this process. They refine their operational plans and align them with government priorities and mandates.

These individual plans are then brought together by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat to produce the Main Estimates, which remain the foundation of Parliament's scrutiny. The Main Estimates lay out the planned spending for programs and services across the country.

But as honourable senators can appreciate, they are only a snapshot in time. The Main Estimates cannot predict every emerging financial requirement, particularly in the case of fast-moving issues, emergencies or new government initiatives that arise throughout the year. This has been one of those years.

The federal government must often respond to circumstances that evolve well beyond the early stages of the fiscal planning cycle. This is why we have the supplementary estimates. They provide Parliament with a structured and transparent mechanism to consider adjustments to previously approved spending, whether it's to address unforeseen pressures or refine allocations as programs mature and conditions change.

The Supplementary Estimates (C) before us represent the final financial update for the current fiscal year that ends this coming week. They help us ensure that departments have the authorities they require while maintaining appropriate oversight and accountability.

With that said, let me turn to some of the major proposed spending items listed in these estimates, beginning with the Department of National Defence. Canada finds itself in an era shaped by significant global uncertainty. The international landscape confronting us today is complex and increasingly unpredictable.

We face technological and military capabilities that transcend borders with unprecedented speed; state and non-state actors who operate with diminishing regard for international rules; and a global order in flux, prompting all nations to reassess long-standing relationships and strategic orientations. No country knows this better than Canada.

[*Translation*]

Canada clearly needs to take stronger action to protect itself while continuing to collaborate with its partners around the world.

We know that we have to redouble our efforts to become more self-sufficient and better prepared to protect our country.

These challenges also open the door to important opportunities, opportunities that encourage us to think big and act accordingly.

[*English*]

The government is doing just that by rebuilding, rearming and reinvesting in the Canadian Armed Forces; reaching 2% of GDP spent on defence this fiscal year and setting us on a path to meet NATO's 5% Defence Investment Pledge by 2035; and strengthening our presence and asserting our sovereignty in the North.

[*Translation*]

These Supplementary Estimates (C) are a continuation of the government's significant investments in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, with proposed spending of $1.2 billion.

[*English*]

Also, $560 million of that over $1-billion total is accessed from the department's Capital Investment Fund — a fund approved by Parliament in 2019.

The Capital Investment Fund is a fund for large long-term projects, such as constructing facilities, purchasing equipment or upgrading major assets. It is a dedicated source of funds that matches the accrual profile of the Department of National Defence's existing and planned capital assets.

The Department of National Defence only requests funding on a cash basis that can be reasonably spent in a given fiscal year. Additional funding, when needed, is requested through the supplementary estimates.

This structure matters because major defence equipment and infrastructure often take years to plan, build and maintain. Having a predictable funding profile helps the department manage complex projects, avoid unexpected cost pressures and ensure the money is in place when the assets are needed. It also supports more stable planning across the entire life cycle of these investments.

And let me clarify an important point: When money set aside for major capital projects is not used in a particular year, it does not simply disappear. Under the Capital Investment Fund model, the Department of National Defence can request to move — or reprofile — those funds into future years. They can reallocate funding as necessary toward projects that are ready to advance to the next phase. This allows long-term projects to stay on track even when timelines shift.

Reprofiling gives the Department of National Defence the flexibility to adjust funding to match real project schedules, which helps avoid delays and keeps major investments properly supported.

[*Translation*]

The Department of National Defence is also requesting close to $314 million for the Strategic Tanker Transport Capability Aircraft project.

This project provides for a fleet of aircraft to replace the CC-150 Polaris.

[*English*]

Canada is acquiring nine CC-330 Husky aircraft. I wanted to bring a photo, but I understand it is a prop. These aircraft will handle several important tasks, such as air-to-air refuelling, transporting military personnel and equipment, conducting medical evacuations and transporting Government of Canada officials when needed.

• (1930)

This fleet will give the Royal Canadian Air Force greater operational flexibility, faster response times, improved communication security and improved aircraft protection systems. It will also make it easier for Canada to operate alongside its allies, which is vital when tackling these modern threats.

Let me now turn to the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, or TBS.

[*Translation*]

Honourable senators, in these Supplementary Estimates (C), the Treasury Board Secretariat is seeking Parliament's approval to include the new "Vote 50" having to do with defence and security initiatives, in the amount of $1 billion.

This additional funding will give organizations the flexibility to address unforeseen expenses related to national defence or national security.

It will also support the government's efforts to meet its commitment to NATO to allocate 3.5% of GDP to core defence needs.

[*English*]

Another item that I found to be of interest, and perhaps is of interest to you, is what the CBC would do with $150 million. They plan expanding journalistic presence around the world, increasing local news budgets, investing in Northern Canada, improving the user experience of the CBC/Radio-Canada platform and developing new content to showcase regional realities.

If you follow line by line in the Supplementary Estimates (C), you see a proposed transfer of funds from the Jacques Cartier and Champlain bridges in Quebec of over $3.7 million to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the National Research Council Canada and VIA Rail. It is for the Federal Contaminated Sites Action Plan, so it's good to know that cleanup continues.

The Treasury Board is also seeking parliamentary approval to increase its Vote 30 — Paylist Requirements by $140 million. This increase would provide funding to support mandatory payments, such as parental and maternity allowances, and other adjustments that have not been provided by Vote 15 — Compensation Adjustments.

The TBS will also be seeking parliamentary approval to increase its Vote 15 — Compensation Adjustments by $31.2 million. This increase would cover pay increases and lump-sum payments from recently signed collective agreements and updated terms of employment for the Ship Repair (West) and Air Traffic Control groups.

Finally, for TBS, the Supplementary Estimates (C) include $371 million for professional services. I know this, too, is of particular interest to people in this chamber. Contracted services have always been an important part of how the government delivers its services to Canadians, and demand for different types of services can vary significantly from year to year.

For instance, there has been recent growth across the government in engineering and architectural services related to defence, health and welfare services related to immigration. But there have also been reductions. For example, spending on management consulting services decreased by 46% from nearly $900 million in 2024 to less than $450 million in 2025.

Lastly, it is important to clarify that these Supplementary Estimates (C) do not reflect the implementation of the government's Comprehensive Expenditure Review, or CER, which is being led by the Treasury Board Secretariat. The reductions as part of that review will begin in the 2026-27 fiscal year and will be reflected in the Main Estimates and Departmental Plans that our colleague deposited today in the chamber.

[*Translation*]

Honourable senators, the last federal organizations I would like to briefly talk about are Canada Post and the Department of Indigenous Services.

As Canada Post continues to go through a period of significant transition, the Crown corporation is seeking $1 billion to address revenue shortfalls and support continued operations.

The Department of Indigenous Services is requesting $508 million to fund critical programs like the First Nations Child and Family Services Program. This program provides culturally appropriate prevention and protection services to First Nations children, youth and families living on reserve or in the Yukon. It focuses on early intervention to keep children safe, help families stay together and preserve essential cultural and linguistic ties.

[*English*]

Honourable senators, I would like to close with a few words about transparency. The estimates give parliamentarians and Canadians a clear view of how public money is being spent. The government strongly believes that people — and those of us in Parliament — should be able to examine these plans closely.

I encourage us all to make full use of the detailed — it's good sleeping material if nothing else — information available in the estimates, which can also be found online at Canada.ca.

There is also the GC InfoBase, which provides a clear and accessible view of government spending. It offers visual insights into complex financial data to promote transparency and understanding.

I understand that when Canada joins fellow member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, it sees that we are often used as the gold standard in the transparency of our financial documents — very good for us to hear.

Your Honour, the bill before us today demonstrates how the government plans to invest public resources to meet the challenges and opportunities that are before us and address the priorities that matter most to Canadians. The government remains committed to providing Canadians with the critical services they need.

This appropriation bill gives important insight into how public funds would be used. It also shows that the government is responding to immediate needs whilst continuing to make long-term investments that benefit all Canadians.

Senators, I look forward to further debate on what is such a vital piece of legislation, one that lets the government do its job. Thank you.

Hon. Denise Batters: Would Senator Pupatello take a question?

Senator Pupatello: Yes.

Senator Batters: Thank you. In your speech today, near the end, you were saying that you wanted us to have a clear view and Canadians to have a clear view on how public money is being spent.

Some of the things you detailed in here dealt with the Department of National Defence, which is very important, and also there are these upcoming NATO targets. The initial 2% target date was supposed to be last December 31. That didn't happen. Then it was revised to be this fiscal year, which ends on March 31. So, is this designed to help the government meet that March 31 NATO target of 2%? Will these amounts in this achieve that 2% NATO target?

Senator Pupatello: It's unclear if by March 31 that 2% target will be reached. When we see what is tabled next — which is Bill C-24, with the interim supply, which gives the layout for all of the expenses coming up next year — I think it's clear that the government is moving towards that goal of meeting its NATO target, in fact, that larger target for 2035, which I think is critical.

So I do believe that we're moving that way, but I will see whether or not that amount actually meets 2% by March 31.

[*Translation*]

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Clément Gignac: Honourable senators, the bill we are discussing is not currently available to us. There's a precedent for this. I remember Senator Marshall once brought up this issue. Given that the bill is not available on the website, it's hard for us to follow what is happening. I wonder whether we should suspend proceedings, as this has happened in the past: Senator Marshall pointed out that the bill was not available on the website, and proceedings were then suspended.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that it is difficult for us to form an opinion, given that we don't currently have access to the bill.

[*English*]

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator Pupatello, do you want to comment?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: If that was a question, if I may — because I know how much history this particular senator has, especially dealing with budgets both provincial and federal — I would say that because the National Finance Committee was able to go into quite a level of detail, in fact, this afternoon and this morning on elements of Supplementary Estimates (C), perhaps the chamber might feel comfortable with the content that is surely expressed in the bill that was just tabled tonight. It was literally just sent over from the House of Commons.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I think that the intervention by Senator Gignac is wholly appropriate. There has been a tradition, obviously, that there is a bit of a delay sometimes for a short period of time when we receive a bill. However, it's also reasonable for all members of the chamber to have access to the content of the bill if we're going to continue to debate.

• (1940)

I, for one, would be more than happy to acquiesce and continue working on this, and I would be happy to speak on this at the next sitting while the bill is posted.

Senator LaBoucane-Benson: I move the adjournment of the debate.

Senator Housakos: Before we take the adjournment, Senator Batters has informed me that she would still like to ask some questions.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: I'm sorry, Senator Housakos, but we have a point of order, so we must deal with it. Also, there was a motion to adjourn the debate.

Regarding the point of order, the Senate approved the second reading of this bill, but the Senate can still approve the adjournment. That's for the senators to decide.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierrette Ringuette: Honourable senators, I rise on the point of order raised by Senator Gignac. We do want to continue the debate, but we can't debate a topic if we can't see the form or the content.

I believe that there are two solutions to this point of order. Either we suspend the sitting until the bill is available online, as was done when Senator Marshall raised a similar point of order, or we seek the consent of the Senate on Senator LaBoucane-Benson's motion to adjourn the debate.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I'm rising on the point of order. In essence, we have no information as to when the text of the bill will be available on the internet or electronically. Therefore, on behalf of the government, let me reiterate the suggestion to adjourn the debate on the bill.

[*English*]

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Is leave granted on the motion of adjournment of the debate? I am hearing "yes."

[*Translation*]

Honourable senators, given that we need to deal with the point of order, that is the issue, so the solution to the point of order, from what we're hearing, is to adjourn the debate on this bill.

Senator Moreau: My understanding is that my proposal would have to be amended. Senator Batters has a few more questions she wants to ask. We're willing to let Senator Batters ask her questions, after which we would proceed with the adjournment of the debate so that the text of the document can be made available, since it seems that Senator Batters can ask her questions without having the text in hand.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: If I understand correctly, the solution to the point of order would be to allow Senator Batters to ask her questions and then move to adjourn the debate on the bill. Is that correct?

Senator Moreau: Yes.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Honourable senators, is it agreed?

Senator Gignac: I wanted to avoid wasting our time on the debate, but if the chamber agrees, I agree too.

[*English*]

SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Pupatello, seconded by the Honourable Senator Petten, for the second reading of Bill C-23, An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

Hon. Denise Batters: Honourable senators, thank you. I appreciate that.

I have just a few more questions about defence spending, because there are significant amounts in here, but I don't feel as if we have a clear view on the precise amounts yet. You mentioned in your speech that there is $1.2 billion for the Department of National Defence, or DND, and then a separate amount of $1.2 billion for the Treasury Board, which is allocated for defence. In that $1.2 billion for DND, you were speaking about nine transport aircraft, and then you were speaking about the Treasury Board amount to deal with "unexpected expenses."

Could you give us more precision about that amount, and is that the total of the defence amount within the $5.4 billion for this? I don't want to have amounts that aren't defence-related in this.

Then, after you answer that, I have a follow-up question.

Senator Pupatello: Thank you.

The additional $5.4 billion that we're looking for in Supplementary Estimates (C) includes all of that amount, including the $1 billion that is destined for the Treasury Board. That is almost like a placeholder for defence at the Treasury Board so that, should defence need that, it has fewer paces to go through in order to access that funding.

Given the level of spending that is happening at the moment with the variety of programs that are at various stages of needing supplementary funding, they decided to place $1 billion there. When that actual spending happens, it will then be represented and assigned to the appropriate ministry. So, it's sitting at Treasury as a placeholder, knowing there is likely going to be more, and they need to be able to move quickly.

So, it was reasonable that they would ask for that placeholder to be put over at Treasury.

Senator Batters: Thank you for explaining that.

Given those amounts — and $1 billion is quite a substantial amount as a placeholder — we just recently saw a story, which I believe was in *Blacklock's Reporter*, in which they talked about the types of non-defence-related spending that are happening to try to reach the 2% target and, eventually, the 5% target. They included things like landscaping at military bases and pension payments for non-military employees of certain departments, as well as Coast Guard expenses, which had not previously been included. There was a $7.13-million grant for Ottawa Hydro to upgrade their infrastructure, and there was also mention of a water treatment plant in Saguenay.

Those things are not defence-related items, yet they are all being included as part of the amount to reach the 2% NATO target.

Do they intend to do more of that? I ask because that's not really what we're trying to get at when we have these NATO targets of 2% and then 5%. We are trying to improve our military, not simply arrive at a number.

Senator Pupatello: Thank you.

You mentioned the Coast Guard, for example. You'll see that they are moving the Coast Guard into additional operations that are defence related, so it's appropriate that that funding for the Coast Guard then be attributed to defence because their role is not just emergency evacuation on waters, for example; it goes well beyond that. That is happening now, so it's appropriate for that funding to be included.

Other items, like upgrades to electrical grids, are clearly going to be for upgrading activity around military bases. All of those things, if they are identified as defence, then they are properly attributed to defence spending.

I understand the point that you're making in terms of spending in order for us to get to it. It could well be that there will be many areas that are attending to defence support that heretofore had not been included. However, I'm happy to ask them very specifically if there are elements that actually are not defence that we're counting as defence, and I would be happy to report back to you.

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

• (1950)

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 1, 2026-27

FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-24, An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

(Bill read first time.)

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

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-6(1)(f), I move that the bill be placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading at the next sitting of the Senate.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

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

[*Translation*]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DESJARDINS GROUP

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Moncion, calling the attention of the Senate to the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of the Desjardins Group.

Hon. Clément Gignac: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Senator Moncion's inquiry marking the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Desjardins Group, the first savings and credit cooperative in North America.

Colleagues, I want to echo all the praise expressed by my colleagues regarding this Quebec financial institution's important role in providing access to credit on favourable terms, as well as in helping empower francophones in the world of finance.

Rather than repeating what my colleagues have said, allow me to share with you a more personal perspective based on my own experience and my personal connection with the Desjardins Group.

I'm the youngest son in a family of eight children. My mother was in charge of the family finances, and she taught me the virtues of saving very early on, when I was in primary school. She encouraged me to take the wages I earned as an altar boy and deposit them with the credit union branch in Saint-Marc-des-Carrières, a place that Senator Petitclerc is very familiar with.

What a surprise it was to discover, at the end of the first year, that the balance in my savings booklet was higher than the sum of the small deposits I had made throughout the year, not only because of the interest paid, but also, of course, because of the famous dividend. The budding economist in me caught the economics and finance bug.

Honourable senators, you can easily imagine the joy and pride I felt upon completing my university degree in economics when I was hired as an economist by Desjardins to work at the head office of the Fédération des Caisses populaires in Lévis.

At that time, Desjardins Group's total assets amounted to barely $10 billion, compared to more than $500 billion today.

What a relief it also was for my parents — who were farmers and had made great sacrifices to pay for my education — to see their youngest child land a job at the credit union's head office in Lévis, without necessarily being able to explain in detail to their friends or family members what an economist actually did on a daily basis. This pedagogical challenge still exists today.

Later in my career, I had the opportunity to serve on the board of directors of the Caisse populaire de Lauzon. It was there that I saw first-hand the Desjardins Group's strong commitment, not only to local economic development, but also to supporting community organizations.

As a director, the credit union manager made it clear to me at my first board meeting that the important thing for most members wasn't the number of loans approved in a year, or the size of our assets, but the social balance sheet. It was common in the regions for bank branches to refuse to sponsor or donate to local community activities. A credit union refusing a request from a non-profit to organize a cultural sports event, however, was unthinkable.

Twenty-seven years later, I could tell that the Desjardins Group was struggling under a serious lack of visibility and recognition here, in Ottawa.

When I worked as a special adviser with the federal Department of Finance in 2008-2009, to my great surprise, I noticed that some public servants were unaware that Desjardins was the largest financial institution in Quebec in terms of its market share.

This isn't meant to blame or criticize the federal civil service or our public officials; rather, it's a result that can be explained by the fact that the Desjardins Group rarely appears on Ottawa's radar, since it isn't subject to federal regulation.

It was a great source of satisfaction for me to be able to convince my new boss at the time, Tiff Macklem, who was then the Associate Deputy Minister of Finance, at the beginning of the 2008-09 financial crisis, to invite a representative from the Desjardins Group to join the special round table made up of Export Development Canada, the Business Development Bank of Canada and the Bank of Canada.

So as not to offend anyone, we had to call the Quebec finance minister to get his permission for Desjardins to be at the table.

This is a reflection of our federal system, which involves shared financial responsibilities.

It's worth noting that the Desjardins Group is highly respected internationally. It is often approached by leaders in developing countries to help set up credit unions to promote local economic development for the benefit of the community.

As Quebec's minister of economic development and, in that capacity, the minister responsible for cooperatives, I had the opportunity to witness the appeal of the Desjardins Group during my annual visits to Davos.

After all, Quebec is recognized as the birthplace of the cooperative model in North America.

In closing, the Desjardins Group's continued success is a testament to the fact that its mission to promote personal and mutual responsibility, democracy, equality, fairness and solidarity is just as relevant today as it was at the beginning of the last century.

I wish the Desjardins Group a long and prosperous future. Thank you for your attention.

(On motion of Senator Clement, debate adjourned.)

(*At 7:57 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.*)

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