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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 26, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Tuesday, May 26, 2026

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

Prayers.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, there is an issue with the bells. They were not functioning very well and rang for five minutes only. Although they did not ring for 15 minutes, do you give me leave to start the session?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: Leave has been granted.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

EID AL-ADHA

Hon. Mohammad Al Zaibak: Honourable senators, I rise today to mark Eid al-Adha — the Feast of Sacrifice — one of the holiest days in the Islamic calendar and a celebration that turns on three timeless virtues: sacrifice, compassion and charity.

Across the world, 1.9 billion Muslims, including Canadians in every province and territory, will mark this celebration tomorrow, which closes the hajj pilgrimage, where more than 2 million pilgrims have gathered today at Mount Arafat near Mecca.

Eid al-Adha honours the story of Prophet Ibrahim — Abraham to Jews and Christians — beloved across all three Abrahamic faiths. Commanded to sacrifice his beloved son, Ibrahim's hand was stayed by divine mercy.

The lesson, honourable colleagues, is as urgent today as it was thousands of years ago: The highest faith is not blind obedience but moral courage, and the sacrifice of a human life is rejected by God in any name, under any flag and in any age.

This is shared wisdom, woven throughout the Torah, the Bible and the Quran: that faith is tested through trial, that mercy interrupts cruelty and that what unites us is greater than what divides us.

For centuries, this truth has lived quietly in the towns and villages of the Middle East, where neighbours of every faith have joined Eid tables, exchanged greetings and shared *ma'amoul* cookies together without ever asking after creed.

For Muslim Canadians, this celebration is also an affirmation that here in Canada, faith may be practised openly, proudly and without apology.

Yet we mark this blessed occasion as conflict still rages on in Gaza, the West Bank, Ukraine, Sudan and Lebanon and as tens of millions remain displaced from their homes.

It is precisely in such hours that Eid al-Adha speaks loudest: faith, resilience and our shared humanity.

Let us, as Canadians, recommit ourselves to mutual respect, inclusion and compassion, and let us extend our prayers and our hands to all those who suffer.

On behalf of my family and the Honourable Senators Ataullahjan, Gerba, Mohamed, Ravalia and Yussuff and from this chamber to all those celebrating, we wish you Eid Mubarak.

May this Eid bring peace, hope, relief and unity to all.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*. *Shukran*.

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 Bob Rae, former premier of Ontario, former leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, former member of Parliament for Toronto Centre and former permanent representative of Canada to the United Nations.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

AFRICA DAY

Hon. Amina Gerba: Honourable senators, I rise today to mark Africa Day, which we celebrate every year on May 25.

This day commemorates the 1963 founding of the Organisation of African Unity, now known as the African Union. It reminds us of Emperor Haile Selassie's unshakable belief: "History teaches us that unity is strength . . . ."

More than 60 years later, nations continue to strive for unity. The African Continental Free Trade Area, made up of 54 countries, illustrates the continent-wide will to build an integrated economy.

[*English*]

Today, Africa stands at a decisive turning point in its history. With more than 1.5 billion people, Africa represents roughly one-fifth of the world's population. By 2050, one in four people in the world is expected to be African, with the continent's population reaching 2.5 billion people.

Above all, Africa is the continent of youth: Nearly 70% of its population is under the age of 30. This young generation is creative, ambitious and forward-looking.

[*Translation*]

This is why the International Monetary Fund boldly described this era as the "African century."

To be sure, challenges persist, as they do on every continent. However, Africa is not defined by its challenges. It is also characterized by its resilience and its innovative solutions, including those arising from ambitious initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda 2063.

As co-chair of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association, I invite you to attend this evening's reception jointly hosted by the group of African ambassadors, which starts at 6 p.m.

• (1410)

Happy Africa Day to all Africans and friends of Africa.

Thank you. *Asante*.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*English*]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of representatives from Caribbean-Canadian organizations from across the country. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Senior.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Margaret Gillis, founding President of the International Longevity Centre Canada; Kahir Lalji, Chief Executive Officer of HelpAge Canada; and Amal Abou Rafeh, member of the Executive Committee of the World Economic Forum's Longevity Economy initiative. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Greenwood.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

AGING AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Margo Greenwood: Honourable senators, I begin by recognizing the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin peoples and expressing my gratitude for the opportunity to work on their land.

Today, I invite my honourable colleagues to join an event I am co-hosting with seven other senators entitled "Leadership in Uncertainty: A Discussion on Human Rights and the Role of the United Nations in Old Age." I think this topic may be of great interest to many of us in this room, not to say that we're old.

Previously, I have urged the government to support the proposed Convention on the Rights of Older Persons currently being drafted by the United Nations Human Rights Council. This convention aims to advance the rights of older persons locally — in the hearts of our communities — in our country and globally.

At this event, we will explore the topic of human rights in later life. It is a fitting occasion to honour the speakers and contributors who have dedicated themselves to this important cause.

Our keynote speaker is the Honourable Bob Rae. He is renowned for his service as Canada's former ambassador to the United Nations, former interim leader of the Liberal Party and the twenty-first premier of Ontario. Bob Rae has consistently championed human rights, including his work as Special Envoy to Myanmar during the Rohingya refugee crisis and as Canada's former special envoy on humanitarian and refugee issues. His lifelong commitment to human rights is widely recognized.

As ambassador, Bob Rae earned the respect of organizations focused on aging for his advocacy of the rights of older persons and the proposed convention.

I also wish to acknowledge the other distinguished speakers: Margaret Gillis, founder and President Emeritus of the International Longevity Centre Canada, has a long and distinguished career in the field of aging. I am not saying you are old either, Margaret.

Kahir Lalji, social gerontologist and CEO of HelpAge Canada, has worked tirelessly to advance older persons' rights at the UN and in Canada. Marta Hajek is the CEO of Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario, an organization that supports older persons and combats ageism and elder abuse. Lastly, I want to recognize Amal Abou Rafeh, who heads the United Nations Programme on Ageing, coordinating efforts across 32 UN entities worldwide.

I look forward to seeing you at our event today, colleagues. Thank you. *Hiy hiy*.

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Juniper Benson Bridges, granddaughter of the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS 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 Art Eggleton, as well as Valerie Andrews and Christine Nayler. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Petitclerc.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

FORCED ADOPTIONS

Hon. Chantal Petitclerc: Honourable senators, I rise today to recognize the courage of mothers who, for far too long, have carried a grief that was made invisible. It is estimated that between 300,000 and 450,000 children were placed for adoption in Canada under circumstances now understood to be forced adoption. That is a staggering number. Behind that number are mothers, children and families whose lives were forever changed.

Across Canada, in the decades following the Second World War, many young, unwed women were pressured, shamed, isolated and separated from their babies. Many were told to forget. Many were told to move on. Many were denied the simple dignity of being treated as mothers.

[*Translation*]

However, a mother never forgets her child. Today, I want to pay tribute to these women, to their pain, but more importantly to their courage: the courage to survive a forced separation, the courage to break their silence after decades, and the ability to turn a personal wound into a collective struggle for truth, recognition and dignity.

[*English*]

I also want to recognize the remarkable work of Valerie Andrews of Origins Canada and of all the mothers, adoptees, families and allies who refused to let this history be erased. Through their determination, they carried a difficult truth forward at the cost of great personal vulnerability.

Among those allies is our former colleague the Honourable Art Eggleton, back with us in the gallery today, who chaired the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology during the study that led to the report entitled *The Shame is Ours: Forced Adoptions of the Babies of Unmarried Mothers in Post-war Canada*. That report helped bring to light deeply moving testimony and a reality our country ignored for too long.

[*Translation*]

These people are not asking for pity. They are asking for their stories to be heard and for their suffering to be acknowledged. They are asking that we finally understand that what happened to them was not a matter of personal shame but a social injustice.

[*English*]

Honourable senators, today I want to honour these mothers and adoptees, those who spoke out, those who are still searching, those who are no longer with us and those who continue to carry this pain with extraordinary strength. They were told to be silent, but today we say, “We hear you. We honour your strength and courage.”

Thank you.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Lisa Zarzeczny, Shingai Manjengwa, Rola Dagher and Sabrina Geremia, panellists from the third session of AI Explained. 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!

CANADIAN FORCES SNOWBIRDS

Hon. Denise Batters: Honourable senators, on Sunday, the gem of the Royal Canadian Air Force, our beloved Snowbirds jets, soared over the Formula 1 Canadian Grand Prix race in Montreal, perfectly timed, as always, to coincide with the patriotic finish of “O Canada.” Shockingly, just days earlier, the Carney Liberal government announced they will soon ground the Snowbirds for several years and replace them with prop planes.

• (1420)

Senator Ataullahjan: Shame.

Senator Batters: I then received a copy of a letter that former 2005-06 Snowbirds Team Lead Ian McLean wrote to Prime Minister Carney, and I want to quote it to you in its entirety:

> Sir, I am a retired fighter pilot who served as Snowbird 7 for the 98-99 airshow seasons. I later commanded the Squadron as Team Lead (Snowbird 1) for the 2005 and 2006 Airshow Seasons.
>
> I was astounded to hear your government announcement suspending the Snowbirds until 2030 irrespective of plans to replace the team with propeller aircraft. The military has spent millions of dollars upgrading Tutor Jets specifically to allow continuation beyond 2030.
>
> The military requires recruitment. Your government has shelved their best recruiting vehicle and disbanded a unit that has spent 55 years representing the skill, professionalism and dedication of the military to the population of Canada and the United States. At a time when our existence as an independent and free nation existing north of an unpredictable neighbour on our southern border

is needed, the government has chosen to eliminate one of the most recognizable symbols of Canadiana that there is. That is indeed an "elbows down" move.

The military will lose corporate knowledge and skills developed by the Snowbird team throughout its 55-year history. The knowledge and skill required to fly close formation at low level while performing aerobatic manœuvres has been earned by successive teams. The cost of that knowledge and skill has been written in the blood of fallen team members. Reacquiring that knowledge following a 5 year hiatus will not be easy or cheap. It will require fiscal input and the sacrifice of personnel as corporate memory will have vanished.

Canada deserves to be represented by a 9 plane jet demonstration team. To do otherwise would simply be stepping backwards and letting the country down. Please reverse the suspension and have the military advance the cause of acquiring replacement jets while maintaining an interim jet airshow presence perhaps with a reduced number of Tutors and serving personnel.

Sincerely,

Ian McLean

Major (Ret'd)

Snowbird 1 (2005, 2006)

Save our Snowbirds!

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of participants in the sixteenth Canadian Parliamentary Seminar, hosted by the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

PARLAMERICAS PLENARY ASSEMBLY

Hon. Rosa Galvez: Honourable senators, I would like to draw your attention to the 22nd ParlAmericas plenary assembly and the tenth gathering of the Open Parliament Network, which were held in Ottawa from May 19 to 22, 2026, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of ParlAmericas.

[*English*]

Across the Americas and the Caribbean, countries are facing geopolitical realignments, shifting trade alliances, climate instability, technological change, growing insecurity and pressure on democratic institutions. Yet, dialogue remains the keystone of parliamentary cooperation. Through dialogue, we recognize these challenges are interconnected, regional and urgent.

We reached a new milestone with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between ParlAmericas and the United Nations Development Programme. This agreement reflects the importance of cooperation between parliamentarians and development institutions, and reminds us that democratic governance must be aligned with sustainable development, transparency, inclusion and collective action.

As moderator of trade conversations, I heard a clear message — trade cannot be separated from sustainability, resilience, inclusion and democratic accountability. Regional cooperation must not only expand markets; it must improve livelihoods, reduce barriers and ensure the benefits of growth reach people from all walks of life.

Senator Greenwood launched the Caucus on the Rights of Indigenous Women and Girls with the objective to advance cooperative political dialogue and protect the rights in all their diversity.

Finally, the ParlAmericas declaration on parliamentary leadership for shared prosperity was adopted. It brings together fourteen commitments across key areas of action: defending democracy and human rights; strengthening parliamentary oversight and transparency; promoting responsible innovation; advancing gender equality, youth participation and Indigenous rights; securing resilient trade systems; and integrating sustainable development and climate resilience into economic policy.

I thank all my colleagues and senators present during the break who, with their presence, contributed greatly to the success of the event. Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

BAIL AND SENTENCING REFORM BILL

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

Hon. David Arnot: Honourable senators, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, which deals with Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and the National Defence Act (bail and sentencing).

(*For text of report, see today's* Journals of the Senate*, p. 923.*)

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*]

MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM MODERNIZATION BILL

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-11, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and other Acts.

(Bill read first time.)

[*English*]

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

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Acting 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: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(On motion of Senator LaBoucane-Benson, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading at the next sitting of the Senate.)

CARIBBEAN HERITAGE MONTH BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Paulette Senior introduced Bill S-248, An Act respecting Caribbean Heritage Month.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-230, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts (debt forgiveness registry).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO RECOGNIZE MAY 25 OF EACH YEAR AS WORLD AFRICA DAY

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

That the Senate of Canada:

1. officially recognize May 25 as World Africa Day in Canada, to mark:

   (a) the importance of relations between Canada and African countries;

   (b) the essential contribution of African and Afro-descendant communities to Canadian society; and

   (c) the shared values of solidarity, diversity, peace and international cooperation; and

2. encourage the Government of Canada and public institutions to recognize this day each year; and

That this recognition be a first step toward officially incorporating this day into the calendar of national days recognized by the Government of Canada.

NOTICE OF MOTION TO CALL ON GOVERNMENT TO ISSUE A FORMAL PUBLIC APOLOGY TO MOTHERS AND CHILDREN WHO WERE VICTIMS OF FORCED ADOPTION PRACTICES IN POSTWAR YEARS

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

That the Senate:

(a) recognize and acknowledge that during the postwar decades, hundreds of thousands of unmarried mothers in Canada were coerced into surrendering their babies for adoption due to forceful pressure from religious organizations, social workers, the medical community and others, particularly in maternity homes and hospitals;

(b) note that other countries such as Australia, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Belgium and the Republic of Korea have all issued formal apologies for the postwar forced adoption practices that took place in their countries;

(c) express profound regret to the mothers affected by this practice, who have experienced lasting emotional, psychological and physical trauma as a result of life-long separation from their children due to Canada's forced adoption practices;

(d) acknowledge the enduring negative impact on adoptees, who were denied the opportunity to grow up with their families and communities of origin, including the loss of identity, familial connection and access to personal history; and

(e) call on the Government of Canada to issue a formal public apology to the mothers and children who were victims of the shameful forced adoption practices in Canada in the postwar years.

[*English*]

NATIONAL SECURITY, DEFENCE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO EXTEND DATE OF FINAL REPORT ON STUDY OF DEFENCE PROCUREMENT IN CONTEXT OF COMMITMENT TO INCREASE DEFENCE SPENDING

Hon. Marty Deacon: 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 29, 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 defence procurement in the context of Canada's commitment to increase defence spending be extended from June 18, 2026, to March 31, 2027.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Acting 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 Sean Fraser, P.C., M.P., Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, will take place on Thursday, May 28, 2026, at 3 p.m.

CONNECTED CARE FOR CANADIANS BILL

THIRD READING

On the Order:

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

Hon. Pat Duncan: Honourable senators, as we express our support at third reading for Bill S-5, the connected care for Canadians act, I am compelled to ensure a northern perspective is placed on the record for our colleagues in the other place to consider.

We have several senators with medical backgrounds and those who have intimate knowledge of the health care system. These senators have expressed their support for Bill S-5, lauding the interoperability of health care records and the benefits to physicians and patients alike.

My experience is in administration, including the interoperability of health care services at the territorial level and including the intersection of non-insured health benefits for First Nations and Inuit.

By way of background, my family moved to the Yukon in 1964. My Glaswegian father had a new job as the administrator of insured hospital services. His career in public service advanced to the director of medical services. He was the public servant behind the drafting and implementation of the Yukon Health Care Insurance Plan Act of 1972, the implementation of medicare and our own Yukon provincial health care number, known as "PHN" to the territory. Remember, the two territories at that time were very much "outposts" funded annually by Ottawa. A certified general accountant and Scottish to his core, my father always said that you should spend the taxpayer's nickel as though it were your very last.

My first Western Premiers' Conference in May 2000 was chaired by Manitoba's Premier Gary Doer. At the top of the agenda was health care funding. *Quelle surprise*.

It was Premier Doer's first conference, also. He made two statements that remain with me to this day. The first was in reference to the tension between Alberta's Premier Ralph Klein and British Columbia's Premier Ujjal Dosanjh regarding Alberta's Bill 11. Bill 11 was felt by some to threaten the publicly funded health care system, to which Premier Klein wagged his finger and asked, "Before you utter those statements, have you read the damn bill?"

Upon this, Gary noted that it was his first conference as chair, and a hockey fight had broken out. It was also May and the hockey playoffs.

The second point Premier Doer noted — and I have repeated it many times in my work at the Senate National Finance Committee and elsewhere — was that Canada is the fourteenth

province at the table when it comes to health care. Canada has a responsibility to First Nations, Inuit and Métis as well as the Canadian Armed Forces, and it must pay the costs.

My travels as premier with then prime minister Jean Chrétien on Team Canada flights overseas also included discussions on health care. At one point, the then prime minister relayed his frustration that his dear friend and political colleague had been in the hospital — I believe it was in British Columbia. Physicians treating this patient were unable to access medical records from Quebec. Canada's health system was the focal point of the premiers' meetings, but funding discussions with Ottawa had not addressed this very basic exchange of patient medical information.

Upon leaving elected politics in 2006, I continued my public service as the manager of registration claims and medical travel at Insured Health Services for the Government of Yukon, in effect, the modern-day equivalent of my dad's old job.

As an aside, I would like to share that his granddaughter — my niece — is now serving as the CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and my daughter is a lead X-ray fluoroscopy technologist at the Whitehorse General Hospital. Our family tradition in health care and health care administration continues.

• (1440)

During my work at Insured Health Services, I represented the Yukon at the Interprovincial Health Insurance Agreements Coordinating Committee meetings. That committee's tasks included confirming the daily hospital rates for every hospital in Canada, which are the amounts that could be reciprocally billed between provinces and territories for stays and services at the hospitals. Our discussions also included the systems that were purchased and advances in technology for the billing systems and electronic medical records. If I were to dig through the archives, I am certain I would find discussions that the technology the digital health records purchased must also be interoperable between the provinces and territories.

A quarter of a century later, we are still trying to achieve digital health care systems everywhere and interoperability between our jurisdictions. I would suggest to you, colleagues, that Bill S-5, the connected care for Canadians act, is not only incredibly important, but it's more than 25 years overdue.

Colleagues, I appreciate that this may be considered by some to be too far into the actual administration of health care — into the weeds, so to speak.

Another piece of political advice I have received is that you do not need legislation for what you can do; rather, you need legislation for what you cannot do. Clearly, provinces and territories have not been able to enact Canadian interoperability for health care services. Bill S-5 helps provinces and territories translate the interoperability of health care from "cannot do," as witnessed in my work career, to "can do."

When we fully consider what the implementation of Bill S-5 can mean for provinces and territories, there are some benefits and costs that should also be taken into account by our colleagues in the other place.

The provincial health care number, or PHN, is the key to the health care of every Canadian and those entitled to be in Canada. An unintended consequence may also occur as we progress to digital health systems everywhere and their interoperability. We might take the opportunity to ensure that every Canadian is registered with a valid provincial health care number. Not everyone already has one. As we move further forward with digital systems, we must reach out to the chronically unhoused without a fixed address and those who fail to confirm their continued residency in a province or territory or even Canada to ensure they have a valid PHN.

Most important are the patient records associated with that health care number. It is the key to information on Canadians accessing health care, no matter where in Canada they access that care.

Others have noted how important the access and exchange of information is, so I do not need to belabour that point. I do need to point out, though, that this is especially important to Northern residents, such as those in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, many of whom frequently travel outside of their ordinary place of residence for medical treatment.

Again, if you will allow me a real-life personal example, my physician recently ordered a fairly routine test that is not available in the Yukon. I suggested that I could perhaps get it done while on one of my stays in Ottawa, to which my physician said, "Well, you can try. However, I have no idea how I will get the results."

That personal example is a minor inconvenience. A Yukon doctor recently shared with me a far more dire example of failing to receive information on a treatment for end-of-life pain care for a cancer patient. This patient lived in rural Yukon and is served by a health centre without the appropriate technology and systems for the exchange of information with his care providers through BC Cancer.

The Yukon is focused on efforts to improve the interoperability of health data systems within the territory. Bill S-5 aligns with this work by eliminating technological barriers and practices that limit the ability to share this vital data within and between jurisdictions.

In short, in plain language, advances in digital health and Bill S-5 will help health care providers provide their best care.

The computer systems and programs that support provincial health care systems are a significant financial investment in critical infrastructure by the provinces that have purchased, maintained and safeguarded against security breaches of their systems. Significant financial investments will be required to ensure their interoperability as contemplated in Bill S-5. I cannot speak for N.W.T. or Nunavut, but I can speak for the Yukon regarding the significant financial investments that are needed for the critical infrastructure of electronic health care records and to bring us up to contemplating interoperability as envisioned by Bill S-5.

For most of the Yukon's history of responsible government, barring 2023 to 2025, the Yukon's premier has also been the Minister of Finance. Thus, I speak from experience that I believe there isn't a Minister of Finance in Canada who doesn't wince every time the Minister of Health shows up with yet another budget request. Funding for health care dominates every discussion.

When considering the work of this bill, the technology contemplated in Bill S-5 to support interoperability should consider, I would argue, the unique challenges of the delivery of health care in Northern Canada and should be considered critical infrastructure.

Funding the access to digital health records and interoperability of systems presents a more challenging circumstance for the Ministers of Health and Finance in the territories than it does in the provinces. Provinces are simply further along in their access to and processes of digital health records. They also have a larger population and tax base to support their purchase and implementation.

Colleagues, while I profess some experience with the administration of health care records, I also sought the advice of the Yukon's Minister of Health and Social Services, the Honourable Brad Cathers. He and his officials advised:

> [The Yukon] Department of Health and Social Services encourages the Government of Canada to acknowledge and ensure equitable investments are considered through federal funding programs to support the Territories, recognizing the limits in fiscal and humans resource capacity while also supporting the opportunity to advance interoperable digital health platforms and technology to better connect people in rural and remote communities across Canada's North to the health care services that every Canadian needs and deserves.

Earlier, colleagues, I noted Canada's responsibility to First Nations, Métis and Inuit, as well as the Canadian Armed Forces. Ensuring health information technology is interoperable to promote a connected and secure health system — the stated summary of Bill S-5 — must also apply to Canada. Earlier, I noted my work as the Yukon Manager of Registration Claims and Medical Travel, and I referenced Non-Insured Health Benefits, which are the health care benefits available to Yukon First Nations. Senator Francis reminded us recently about Canada's responsibility to ensure the availability of benefits to First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Canada's responsibility for these benefits intersecting with the services provided under provincial health care systems and the inability of these governments to agree gave rise to Jordan's Principle.

A 2021 Parliamentary Budget Officer report states that the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, or FNIHB, also provides eligible First Nations and Inuit, regardless of where they live, with supplementary health benefits not covered by provincial or territorial health insurance or private programs, such as prescription drugs, medical supplies and equipment, dental and vision care, short-term mental health crisis counselling and medical transportation.

Indigenous Services Canada states itself on their "About Indigenous health care" web page that:

> A coordinated approach to address the health needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and health care delivery among all levels of government including Indigenous governments, remains an ongoing challenge.

Allow me to outline one of the challenges from an administrative level. Medical travel forms a large part of each of the three territories' health care budgets. Medical travel is a medical evacuation by road, ambulance or an airplane from a remote area to a hospital in Whitehorse or a flight by commercial aircraft or medevac to Southern Canada to see a specialist if deemed necessary by a physician. This is paid for by the Government of Yukon for those on the Yukon Health Care Insurance Plan and holding a valid PHN. If you are Yukon First Nations or Indigenous from another territory, the Yukon government bills Non-Insured Health Benefits Canada for the cost of this transportation.

Sometimes, it can take a very long time for these bills to be sorted out and paid. That's not a problem when you are recouping less than $500 from an Air North airfare to Vancouver. However, a medevac flight to a Vancouver hospital is upward of $30,000 one way. Patients who travel by medevac flight to a hospital are most often returned by medevac flight if they are not discharged. So, potentially, that is a $60,000 bill.

When a doctor locates a bed as well as an attending physician for the transfer of care to a hospital in B.C. and requests a medevac, there is generally not a discussion of which government is ultimately paying the bill, whether it's the Government of Yukon or the Government of Canada. Several medevac flights over the course of a few months that are determined after the fact to be recoverable from Canada under the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program can start to add up very quickly.

The costs I have outlined are for transportation only and do not include the additional costs that governments — federal, territorial and First Nations — provide to these patients to help with the additional costs they incur by being out of the territory.

• (1450)

In the small budget of the Yukon, compared to the provinces, health care bill collection from Canada for Non-Insured Health Benefits and the cost to First Nations governments present yet another challenge for the Yukon's finance minister and for First Nations governments.

The duplication of administration in medical travel is just one example of the challenges in providing health care and health care benefits.

The Yukon advises that digital health technology can enable safer and more coordinated care, reduce duplication and delays and improve access to services and information, particularly in communities.

With the implementation of technology, the interoperability that is anticipated in Bill S-5 and the participation anticipated by all provinces, territories and Canada — especially the support by Canada for the territories and Indigenous Peoples — I believe we can anticipate improved digital health care systems and, ultimately, better health care for all our citizens with the passage of Bill S-5.

Colleagues, I am truly grateful for the privilege of representing my region and, most especially, for your time and attention as I have addressed Bill S-5.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*. *Shàw níthän*.

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Honourable senators, I rise today at third reading as critic of Bill S-5, An Act respecting the interoperability of health information technology and to prohibit data blocking by health information technology vendors, also known as the "Connected Care for Canadians Act."

First, I want to recognize the interventions delivered at second reading and third reading by all intervening senators, bringing their respective lenses as well as the important work conducted by the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. In a relatively short period of time, the committee received close to 40 submissions and heard approximately eight hours of testimony.

At second reading, I indicated that Bill S-5 seeks to address a real and important challenge within Canada's health care system: improving interoperability so that health information can be more accessible where and when it is needed. I also noted that while the objective of connected care deserved support, the success of this legislation would ultimately depend not on aspiration alone but on the timely development of strong regulations and effective implementation.

The committee's study reinforced both of those themes.

Witnesses broadly agreed that Canada's current level of fragmentation creates real consequences for patients and providers alike. The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada described how fragmented records, weak connectivity and reliance on paper workarounds continue to create patient safety risks in rural and remote care settings.

The Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Association of Retired Persons similarly underscored that Canadians navigating complex care, particularly those receiving cancer treatment and older adults, continue to bear the burden of disconnected infrastructure and gaps in continuity.

At the same time, committee testimony also demonstrated that interoperability cannot be treated simply as a technological modernization exercise. Witnesses and briefs cautioned that poorly designed implementation frameworks could create new technological, governance and privacy risks if interoperability obligations are not accompanied by clear standards, strong safeguards and effective oversight.

For example, TELUS Health testified that the operational lift required to implement interoperability across Canada's health care systems is immense and warned that many of the most difficult implementation questions remain unresolved.

Akinox Solutions also cautioned that key definitions within the bill remain too thin and warned that organizations could technically comply with the legislation, while undermining its intended purpose in practice.

Committee testimony further reinforced that privacy and public trust cannot be treated as secondary considerations. The Canadian Bar Association emphasized that Bill S-5 must be aligned with the existing privacy law and recommended making clear that lawful masking and access controls are not treated as data blocking.

Officials from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner reminded us that although individuals are not the physical owners of health care data, existing privacy laws give them rights to access their personal health information, to consent to its collection, use and disclosure, and, in some cases, to withdraw that consent.

Committee testimony also made clear that interoperability frameworks must respect Indigenous data sovereignty and governance principles. Indigenous witnesses and organizations emphasized the importance of free, prior and informed consent; OCAP principles; distinctions-based governance; and Indigenous control over the collection, access, use and stewardship of Indigenous health information.

Honourable senators, those concerns go directly to public trust. Canadians will only support increasingly interconnected digital health systems if they are confident that privacy protections, governance safeguards and accountability frameworks are strong and worthy of that trust.

Committee testimony therefore confirmed both the promise and the risks associated with Bill S-5. As noted at second reading, witnesses broadly supported the objective of improving connected care. However, many also cautioned that several of the bill's most consequential elements, such as technical standards, enforcement mechanisms, governance obligations and privacy safeguards, remain to be determined through future regulations after the passage of this bill.

This brings me to the implementation of Bill S-5. As a reminder, Bill S-5 is a framework bill to make health information systems interoperable and to prohibit data blocking by health information technology vendors. In order for the bill to come into force and attempt to achieve the objective of interoperability, many of the critical details will come through regulations: standards, enforcement mechanisms and implementation phases.

From a practical point of view, what kinds of timelines do we have in front of us?

During committee testimony, officials indicated that the regulatory development process itself could take approximately 18 to 24 months following the adoption of the bill. That is only for the development of the regulations, not the implementation itself.

Colleagues, that timeline is significant.

It means Parliament is being asked to approve a broad legislative framework, while many of the practical, technological, operational and financial details that will ultimately determine the bill's success remain to be developed well after Royal Assent.

Honourable senators, we have already seen in recent parliamentary work how important continued scrutiny of regulations and implementation frameworks can become after legislation is adopted.

For example, our Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages is currently examining draft regulations flowing from the modernization of the Official Languages Act — Bill C-13 from the last Parliament. The committee has been hearing from witnesses on the government's three draft regulations. As a reminder, Bill C-13 received third reading in the Senate on June 15, 2023, and the regulatory process is still not complete close to three years later. The committee tabled its first report on May 7, 2026, and raised concerns about whether the draft penalty regime regulation would meet expectations for stronger compliance. It is a recent example of why scrutiny must continue after a bill has been passed.

I believe that lesson is directly relevant to Bill S-5. Committee study is still an important avenue, but once Bill S-5 leaves the Senate, and if approved by Parliament, our role will increasingly shift to scrutinizing the regulations and implementation choices that follow. Testimony also made clear that many of the most consequential aspects of this legislation, such as standards, enforcement mechanisms and privacy safeguards, will be defined through future regulations, not in the bill itself.

That reality places an important continuing responsibility on Parliament to ensure that implementation ultimately reflects the objectives Canadians are being promised today.

And those concerns are not theoretical. For more than two decades, governments and public institutions have pursued the goal of interoperable digital health care systems in Canada.

Our committee heard from my home province of Nova Scotia, where Dana MacKenzie, Executive Deputy Minister for the Department of Health and Wellness, and Scott McKenna, Chief Information Officer for Nova Scotia Health, provided a practical provincial perspective on how greater digital integration can improve continuity of care and patient access to information. Their testimony made clear that real interoperability requires more than digital tools alone. It depends on sustained coordination across care settings, common standards across jurisdictions and collaboration among provinces, territories and vendors so that patient information can follow people throughout the continuum of care.

They also underscored that this work involves significant coordination and modernization in practice, particularly for smaller provinces seeking to influence vendor behaviour and align fragmented systems around the patient.

Also, from a federal perspective, projects such as PrescribeIT were built around the same ambition: improving care through connected digital infrastructure. PrescribeIT was intended to become a national electronic prescribing system by replacing paper prescriptions and fax machines with secure, interoperable digital prescribing across Canada.

Yet, despite years of development and more than $250 million in public expenditure, the program will cease operations in 2026, having never achieved the adoption or sustainability needed to replace fax-based prescribing across Canada. Fewer than 5% of prescriptions were ever processed through the system.

• (1500)

Honourable senators, the experience of PrescribeIT should serve as a practical warning. Ambitious digital health modernization projects are not inexpensive undertakings, nor do they succeed simply because Parliament endorses their objectives or because the policy goal is widely shared.

That reality raises legitimate questions about Canada Health Infoway and whether the government should place significant trust in the organization to oversee another major national digital health initiative of this scale and complexity. If Bill S-5 relies heavily on Canada Health Infoway for implementation, Parliament must demand far stronger oversight and transparent reporting on how public funds are spent and how results are achieved.

As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to serve as the eyes and ears of Canadians in ensuring that the regulations flowing from this legislation are developed in a manner that is effective, transparent and worthy of public trust. Parliament cannot simply approve broad legislative objectives and assume that successful implementation will naturally follow through regulations and administrative processes alone.

If there is one lesson to draw from both committee testimony and recent digital health experience, it is that implementation is difficult work and that ambitious modernization projects can fail despite clear legislative objectives and significant funding. Parliamentary scrutiny, therefore, cannot end at third reading. Canadians deserve health care systems that communicate more effectively, but they also deserve interoperability frameworks that remain patient-centred, protect privacy and respect provincial and territorial governments' primary role in managing health systems and delivering care.

To conclude, colleagues, our health care system must function as a 21st-century system. While Bill S-5 received broad support from witnesses for its objective of improving interoperability, much of the detail that will determine its success will be left to regulations.

I trust our Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology will continue scrutinizing the regulations and implementation phase and hold the government accountable as this framework is developed in practice. Even if regulations are ready within 18 to 24 months, implementation itself will still take years. There will be a significant gap between Royal Assent, publication in the *Canada Gazette* and full implementation in practice. Parliament cannot be blind throughout that process, while significant public resources are invested in the name of interoperability.

Thank you, honourable senators.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

An Hon. Senator: On division.

(Motion agreed to and bill, as amended, read third time and passed, on division.)

SPECIAL ECONOMIC MEASURES ACT

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING

Senator Dasko moved third reading of Bill S-214, An Act to amend the Special Economic Measures Act (disposal of foreign state assets).

She said: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak at third reading as the sponsor of Bill S-214, An Act to amend the Special Economic Measures Act (disposal of foreign state assets). I am here to advocate for its passage and to address issues raised at committee.

Bill S-214 was studied at committee with 13 witnesses testifying over four panels. Witnesses included former Senator Omidvar and me, government officials from the Department of Finance, Global Affairs Canada and the RCMP, as well as subject matter experts.

I wish to thank Senator Peter Boehm in his role as Chair of the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committee, who offered balanced and impartial insights throughout the study, as well as other senators on the committee, who thoughtfully engaged in this process. They have clearly invested in this topic and what it could mean for Canada going forward.

This bill would amend the Special Economic Measures Act, or SEMA, to create a legal pathway to seize and repurpose the state assets, including central bank reserves, of perpetrators who breach international peace and security. More specifically, it would create a pathway to seize these assets through executive order. These assets could then be redirected to victims who have suffered at the hands of these perpetrators.

The context is very important. After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Western countries, including the EU, the U.S., the U.K., Canada and others, froze hundreds of billions of dollars in Russian state assets, primarily Russian central bank foreign reserves — around €210 billion to €300 billion in total — as well as the private assets of oligarchs, such as planes, yachts and real estate. The bulk of the frozen state assets sit in Europe, with Belgium's Euroclear holding the largest share — around €180 billion.

Soon after these events, Canada took a bold leap. In the Budget Implementation Act, or BIA, of June 2022, the government amended SEMA to permit not only the freezing of the assets of sanctioned individuals and entities but also the seizure and forfeiture of such assets. With this move, Canada became the first G7 nation with the power to both freeze and permanently seize and redistribute the assets of sanctioned individuals and entities.

Parliament thus gave the government the power to seize assets, including both private and state assets. However, the mechanism to seize state assets in SEMA is flawed. Bill S-214 deals with this flaw by giving the executive, the Governor-in-Council, the power to seize state assets, thereby carving out a distinct legal pathway for state assets.

At committee, witnesses Robert Currie, Viscount Bennett Professor of Law at Dalhousie University, and Fen Osler Hampson, Chancellor's Professor at Carleton University, articulated the legal and historical basis of the bill, locating it in the concept and practice of countermeasures.

Professor Currie stated:

> What I want to emphasize is that doing this would be lawful for Canada under international law. . . . All that Bill S-214 does is provide maximum clarity under Canadian law about how to do it.

This bill is enabling legislation. It provides the government with another tool in the tool box. It does not require the government to seize assets.

Further, SEMA requires a high threshold, extreme circumstances, for a state to be listed and, thus, potentially subject to sanctions. Extreme conditions must be met. There must be a grave breach of international peace and security, gross and systematic human rights violations, acts of significant corruption or requests for action from an international group such as the United Nations, to which we belong.

• (1510)

I want to speak now to the risks of the bill.

At committee, concerns were raised by committee members and witnesses — including Preston Jordan Lim, Assistant Professor, Charles Widger School of Law at Villanova University; Robert Brookfield, Director General, Sanctions Bureau at Global Affairs Canada; and Professor Hampson — about potential risks and unintended consequences of this bill.

These include the risk of retaliation by Russia against Canadian assets and the reputational risks to Canada as potentially being seen as untrustworthy or unstable by investors, as well as foreign investment potential losses, which is called the risk of capital flight from Canada, if some nations think their assets can now be more easily confiscated.

This latter effect may be more likely for authoritarian regimes that are concerned about the health of their assets. And in fact, according to Professor Hampson, they may have already moved their assets to more friendly jurisdictions because of the current existing sanctions in this country.

On the other hand, Senator Omidvar noted that capital flight has not materialized in Europe during this period of frozen Russian state assets.

In considering all of these potential risk outcomes, Professor Hampson concludes:

> I think they are manageable risks under the current legislation. The current legislation —

— talking about SEMA specifically —

> — does not give an unrestricted hunting licence to the executive authority. There are many guardrails in that legislation. . . .

These guardrails include the high threshold and the extreme actions that offending nations would be judged by, as I noted earlier, when actions against them are contemplated.

In assessing risk, we must consider that there is always risk in any actions that the government may take when it comes to these proposed sanctions or existing sanctions. In this bill, we must understand that the risks to passing this bill by giving the government this tool will be different from the risks related to decisions that might be made down the road by governments that may wish to seize assets in particular circumstances.

In the opinion of Professor Currie:

> . . . what this bill does is add what is, in essence, a really small tool to an existing tool box. Now, the implications of using this tool might, in a given situation, be very large. But otherwise, this is just a cog in the normal machinery of how Canada administers sanctions.

The risks mentioned above are mitigated by the fact that the threshold for invoking sanctions is very high, as I have noted, and by Canada working together with our allies. Working together is not just a way to minimize risk, but it is also a way to be more effective in our actions and in the outcomes.

Government spokespeople have frequently expressed to me a preference for working with allies on issues related to asset seizure and asset demobilization, and government witnesses at committee concurred with this point. For example, I will quote Mr. Brookfield:

> Certainly, in terms of working with others, that's what we prefer to do, both because sanctions are more effective when we work with others and, as you note, they mitigate the risk.

With respect to the importance of working with allies, witnesses at committee noted that our allies are putting in place similar or related arrangements to those that are contemplated in Bill S-214.

Professor Hampson noted the loan agreement recently reached in Europe, where the €90-billion loan to Ukraine is ultimately backed by the frozen Russian state assets held in Euroclear. He stated:

> The Europeans are clearly moving in the direction of seizure in the event that reparations are not paid by Russia. . . . The legislation that is being proposed here would . . . essentially be applying that under similar conditions.

Another example of allied action is the 2024 Rebuilding Economic Prosperity and Opportunity for Ukrainians Act, or the REPO legislation, in the United States which authorizes Russian sovereign assets held under U.S. jurisdiction to be seized and redirected to the Ukraine Support Fund, and U.S. lawmakers have gone further by proposing follow-up measures that would provide for the regular transfer of those resources to Ukraine. The REPO legislation functions as enabling legislation, much like Bill S-214 would here.

In light of all of these developments, Professor Hampson argued that Canada ". . . risks becoming an outlier if it fails to modernize its own legislative tool kit."

Colleagues, I would now like to turn to other benefits gained from this bill, in addition to the benefit of working with allies on these issues using related legislative options.

At committee, we learned about other benefits of Bill S-214 from the testimony of Inspector Guy Paul Larocque of the RCMP, who described that foreign state assets can be part of an ecosystem of financial crime connected to broader threats such as corruption, kleptocracy, money laundering and more.

Inspector Larocque stated:

> . . . Bill S-214 speaks to a legislative gap . . . where traditional judicial forfeiture pathways may not apply or where assets are clearly linked to foreign state actors subject to restrictive measures.

Bill S-214 will assist the RCMP in investigating this sanctions-related crime.

I have to say that having worked on this subject matter for two years, this is the very first time I have heard this argument used with regard to the benefits of this bill in terms of dealing with financial crime at the state level. I take that as a great benefit.

As to the benefits of this bill, first and foremost, this bill is a mechanism to hold nations who violate international human rights through violence, oppression or war to account for their illegal actions and to assist the victims of these actions.

This bill would allow Canada to be a leader. Professor Currie also said that we ". . . must give way to the moral case at some point."

I will quote committee witness Danylo Korbabicz, CEO of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress:

> . . . this creates a significant opportunity for the government to provide Canadian leadership on a global stage on this critical issue. In so doing, the government would have the strong support of the Canadian people. . . .

I have spoken of this initiative many times. Yet in an ever-evolving geopolitical landscape, its importance has only grown. Our allies are already moving forward with similar legislation and similar initiatives. Without this bill, we risk being unable to act in concert with them. This is our opportunity to contribute meaningfully and to ensure that Canada is ready to work alongside its partners. It aligns directly with the vision of Canada as a capable and engaged middle power. At committee, it was noted as a critique by Senator Harder that the government has not formally weighed in on this bill or indicated its support for it.

• (1520)

I would also note that it is not unusual in our experience for the government to not weigh in on private bills.

However, in an article on Bill S-214 in *The Globe and Mail* published on May 11, after our committee deliberations, journalist Steven Chase quotes the press secretary for Minister Anand as follows:

> "Minister Anand supports the intent of Bill S-214. . . . The minister looks forward to constructive discussions in Parliament once the Senate has completed its initial review" . . . .

Well, I certainly took that as a positive comment.

I am hopeful that, should we pass Bill S-214 in this chamber, both the government around and the other place will see fit to support it.

Colleagues, they're waiting for this bill. I think we heard the minister's spokesperson say that. Let us send it to the other place so it may continue its journey, and, ultimately, the decision will be in their hands.

Colleagues, thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Peter Harder: Honourable senators, I do not expect to speak for long. I wish to put on the record a couple of comments and concerns that I raised in committee.

I do not want to hold up the consideration of this bill that Senator Dasko has been sponsoring so ably for the last number of months. I thank her for her speech. I thank her for her conduct of this bill in committee.

I raise two concerns.

One is the unintended consequences issue, which the senator was kind enough to reference as well. Part of my unintended consequences concern speaks to the broader issue of sanctions policy, as it is being administered by our like-minded countries. By the way, like you — because it was unanimous — I supported the SEMA bill and the amendments that were brought forward in the process that Senator Dasko referenced.

But I do believe it is worthy of this chamber and other bodies that examine the policy issues attendant to sanctions policy to ask ourselves whether the existing sanctions policy is working the way we intended.

Essentially, we're dealing with sanctions against China, Russia and Iran. I won't speak in detail on any of them, except to suggest that what has happened has not been the path forward that we would have wished in developing the sanctions policies.

In fact, I would commend to you a book by Edward Fishman, who was the designer of the policy of the White House for the sanctions regime, the so-called economic sanctions, and who has, on reflection, spoken to the unintended consequences and suggested that we probably overstated what we could do and that, as a result of what we have done, there are alternative mechanisms of the sanctioned regimes to expand their ability to act in ways that are not as subject to oversight as, in fact, the existing regime would have allowed.

Unintended consequences are something we need to be very attentive to, particularly when we are dealing with a sanctions policy against which there has not been a lot of experience.

Leave that aside. My other concern — and, frankly, my stronger concern — is the one that the senator was kind enough to reference at the end.

I could say I would associate myself with the comments made by the press secretary of the minister; I am anxious that the bill be reviewed. But, colleagues, frankly, I am uncomfortable with foreign policy matters as important as sanctions policy not coming from the government itself but from private members' business.

The SEMA regime, we certainly debated it. There had been private members' bills dealing with the sanctions regime. Ultimately, it was a government bill.

While this is a so-called tweak of the SEMA bill, we would be the first jurisdiction to, in a sense, exercise this degree of bypassing judicial processes that I would be more comfortable if they were actually ones that the government embraced.

The senator has spoken about this just being another tool in the tool box. What happens, though, of course, is once the tool is in the tool box, you get all kinds of third parties suggesting to the government to use the tool in its tool box, even if it didn't ask for the tool.

I understand the reluctance of governments to commit to supporting a particular bill, even one whose objective they can share. I think we should reflect at least on whether or not we should be moving forward with bills that impose on the Royal Prerogative of the Crown for foreign policy and foreign relations the way this bill does.

I raise these concerns. I expect that this bill will move forward as it should, but I wanted to be on the record for these two issues.

Hon. David M. Wells: Thank you for your comments, Senator Harder and Senator Dasko. Thank you for conceiving this bill and introducing it. And hearing some of the comments from Senator Harder and your comments as well, this should have been a government bill. The government should have taken the initiative to put this into place.

They have the opportunity, if they would like to assert their Royal Prerogative, to change it, delay it or never let it see the light of day. They have those powers in the other place. I commend you for putting this together in your swan song in the Senate. Congratulations; well done.

I also want to thank the committee for having a rigorous look at this. It is important that, while we support the intent of the bill — and we might even support the wording of the bill — Senator Harder is correct in saying that unintended consequences always come up that were not a part of the objective and that are sometimes a part of the result.

The Conservative Party is supportive of this bill. It should have been done long ago. And, again, thank you for putting it forward and congratulations. With that, Your Honour, I would like to call the question.

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 bill read third time and passed.)

CRIMINAL RECORDS ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Pate, seconded by the Honourable Senator Moncion, for the second reading of Bill S-207, An Act to amend the Criminal Records Act, to make consequential amendments to other Acts and to repeal a regulation.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): I would like to reset this motion, please.

The Hon. the Speaker: You need leave to reset. Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Debate adjourned.)

NATIONAL STRATEGY TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING BILL

SECOND READING

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Ataullahjan, seconded by the Honourable Senator Martin, for the second reading of Bill S-235, An Act respecting the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking.

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan: Honourable senators, I rise today as the sponsor of Bill S-235, the "National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking Act," which represents a critical step forward in Canada's ongoing commitment to end one of the most heinous crimes of our time — human trafficking.

This legislation reflects the ongoing non-partisan work of the All Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, of which I am a member and on which our colleague Senator Miville-Dechêne serves as co-chair.

Colleagues, human trafficking is not a distant problem occurring only in faraway places. It is happening here, in our communities, across every province and territory in this country. It is a crime that tears families apart, destroys lives and exploits the most vulnerable among us.

• (1530)

Over the past two decades, Canada has undertaken considerable work to combat human trafficking. The most recent of this was the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking in 2019. This five-year strategy, which expired at the end of 2024, represented a significant investment of over $56 million initially and over $10 million annually thereafter, coordinating efforts across multiple federal departments and agencies.

Canada has also been active on the international stage, engaging through the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the G7, the G20 and numerous other multilateral forums. However, despite this progress, critical gaps that threaten to undermine Canada's ability to effectively combat human trafficking remain.

The most fundamental gap is the lack of a statutory obligation to maintain and update the national strategy. The 2019-24 national strategy expired at the end of 2024, and there is no legal requirement ensuring its continuation, renewal or regular review. This creates uncertainty for survivors, service providers and law enforcement agencies, who depend on stable, predictable federal coordination and funding. Without legislative backing, the national strategy exists at the discretion of the government of the day, vulnerable to changes in priorities, budget constraints or political transitions.

Second, the June 2024 *Horizontal Evaluation of the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* identified significant data gaps as a critical barrier to understanding the true extent of human trafficking in Canada. Current reporting relies heavily on police-reported data, which captures only a fraction of trafficking incidents due to significant under-reporting. Victims and survivors often do not report to police due to fear of reprisal, distrust of authorities, concerns about deportation or because they do not recognize themselves as victims.

Without robust, disaggregated data-collection systems that capture information beyond police reports, Canada cannot develop evidence-based policies or measure the effectiveness of interventions.

The evaluation noted that ". . . there is a significant need to increase reporting efforts to address data gaps."

Third, despite legislative provisions carrying penalties up to life imprisonment, prosecution and conviction rates for human trafficking remain alarmingly low. Statistics Canada reported that of nearly 4,000 incidents reported to police from 2012 to 2022, only 40% resulted in charges being laid. More troubling still, only 11% of completed adult criminal court cases resulted in guilty decisions. A staggering 83% of the cases ended with charges being stayed, withdrawn, dismissed or discharged.

These statistics reveal systemic challenges in the criminal justice response.

Successful prosecution depends heavily on victim testimony, but survivors face immense barriers to participating in court proceedings. The process can take up to 358 days or longer, requiring survivors to relive their trauma repeatedly through testimony and cross-examination. Survivors' credibility is often questioned due to factors related to their vulnerability — such as substance use, homelessness, mental health issues and inconsistencies in recall due to trauma — or because they were coerced into criminal activity during their exploitation.

Many victims disappear before trial, recant testimony due to ongoing coercion or fear or are unable to participate due to retraumatization caused by court proceedings. The current system places the burden of proof primarily on survivors rather than employing trauma-informed, survivor-centred approaches that could increase successful prosecutions while protecting victims' dignity and well-being.

Fourth, there is insufficient coordination across jurisdictions. Human trafficking is a crime that crosses municipal, provincial, territorial and international boundaries, yet Canada's response remains fragmented. While the federal government has established coordinating mechanisms, like the Human Trafficking Taskforce and the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Trafficking in Persons Working Group, coordination gaps persist.

Different provinces and territories have varying levels of resources, training and investigative capacity to address trafficking. Some jurisdictions — like Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia — have dedicated provincial strategies with substantial funding, while others lack comprehensive frameworks. This inconsistency means that a victim's access to protection and support — or a perpetrator's likelihood of prosecution — depends significantly on geographic location.

The 2024 engagement sessions conducted by Public Safety Canada revealed that stakeholders consistently called for improved interjurisdictional collaboration and information sharing.

Survivors emphasized that:

> This lack of coordination creates massive gaps in survivor support, law enforcement, and prevention efforts and traffickers know this and exploit these weaknesses.

Fifth, and perhaps most critically, Canada's anti-trafficking efforts have not adequately centred on the voices and expertise of survivors. The 2019-24 national strategy committed to establishing a survivor advisory committee comprised of individuals with lived experience of human trafficking. As of April 2024, despite drafted materials, this committee had not been established.

The evaluation concluded that:

> Adopting a victim-centered and survivor-informed strategy ensures that the rights and dignity of victims, including their well-being and safety, are at the forefront of all efforts . . . .

The February 2024 report from the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women emphasized the critical importance of ensuring that Canada's anti-trafficking strategy is ". . . intersectional and developed in collaboration with victims, survivors and those with lived experience."

Furthermore, colleagues, while Canada has primarily focused on sex trafficking, other forms of exploitation remain under-addressed.

Labour trafficking affects migrant workers, international students, temporary foreign workers and others in precarious immigration situations across sectors including agriculture, construction, hospitality, manufacturing and personal services. Yet labour trafficking remains significantly under-reported and under-investigated, with fewer resources devoted to detection, investigation and prosecution compared to sex trafficking.

Emerging forms of trafficking, including forced criminality — where individuals are coerced into illegal activities such as theft, shoplifting, drug dealing and weapons trafficking — are increasingly recognized but poorly understood. Forced marriage, surrogacy and pregnancy as well as trafficking of young men and boys also require greater attention and targeted responses.

Finally, there is a lack of sufficient, long-term, stable funding to better support community organizations.

Colleagues, Bill S-235 directly addresses these critical gaps by providing statutory force to Canada's commitment to combat human trafficking. Let me outline the key provisions and how they respond to identified needs.

Subclause 3(1) of Bill S-235 requires the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to maintain and update the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking. This statutory obligation ensures continuity, stability and accountability regardless of political transitions or changing priorities.

The national strategy will no longer be discretionary. It will be a legislated requirement.

The bill specifies that the national strategy must aim to end human trafficking, address the harms suffered by individuals with lived experience and enhance support for survivors. This victim-centred language enshrines Canada's commitment to prioritizing the well-being of those most affected.

Subclause 3(2) of the bill requires the minister to make every reasonable effort to ensure that the national strategy provides for the fulfillment of Canada's obligations under key international instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

• (1540)

By explicitly referencing these treaties, Bill S-235 ensures that Canada's domestic efforts are aligned with international standards and best practices, reinforcing our commitment to a comprehensive, rights-based approach.

Subclause 3(3) of Bill S-235 outlines detailed measures that the national strategy must include, addressing the full spectrum of anti-trafficking efforts. For example, the strategy must include measures to empower individuals with lived experience to regain independence and reintegrate into communities, taking into account factors that affect recovery. It must also promote sufficient investment in measures and services to support survivors.

It must increase prevention efforts by expanding community awareness through targeted campaigns and addressing the root causes of exploitation.

It must protect vulnerable groups, including Indigenous, Black and Asian women and girls, at-risk youth and migrants. The strategy must increase the capacity of the criminal justice system to identify and prosecute human trafficking cases using a trauma-informed approach.

It must expand partnerships by building and improving national and international coordination and cooperation. It must create and maintain a website consolidating research findings, information on human trafficking and resources for Canadians to address trafficking in their communities.

It must also ensure that federal government employees are provided with ongoing, trauma-informed training and resources, addressing the multi-sectoral training gap.

It must monitor progress through clear objectives and timelines, ensuring accountability and evidence-based decision making. It must ensure that the members of the survivor advisory committee and the Chief Advisor to Combat Human Trafficking are individuals with lived experience.

Clause 4 of the bill establishes a mandatory review process requiring the minister to undertake a comprehensive review of the national strategy within two years of the act coming into force and every five years thereafter. This provision ensures that the strategy remains responsive to the evolving nature of human trafficking and incorporates emerging evidence and best practices.

Clause 4 also mandates that reviews be conducted with the paramount principles of promoting and protecting human rights and pursuing a trauma-informed approach. The review must take into account consultation results and must include a statement of any changes to be made to the national strategy. The report must be tabled in both houses of Parliament and published on the department's website within 10 days, ensuring transparency and parliamentary oversight.

Clause 5 of Bill S-235 requires the minister to prepare an annual report on the implementation of the national strategy and progress on efforts to combat human trafficking. This report must be completed within three months after the end of each fiscal year and tabled in both houses of Parliament.

Colleagues, Bill S-235 is not merely administrative or symbolic; it is transformative legislation that will fundamentally strengthen Canada's ability to combat human trafficking. By providing statutory force to the national strategy, this bill ensures that Canada's commitment to ending human trafficking will continue, regardless of changes in government, budgetary pressures or shifting political priorities.

This stability is essential for building long-term capacity, fostering partnerships, developing expertise and achieving measurable progress toward ending human trafficking. Bill S-235 brings human trafficking out of the shadows by creating transparency, accountability and sustained commitment. It recognizes that ending trafficking requires more than laws and law enforcement.

The evaluation evidence is clear: Canada has made progress, but critical gaps remain. Some may argue that we cannot legislate away human trafficking, and they would be correct. Laws alone will not end this crime, but laws can create the frameworks, accountability and sustained commitment necessary to support the comprehensive, coordinated, evidence-based efforts that will end trafficking.

Bill S-235 does exactly that. It provides the legislative foundation for realizing this vision. It is not the end of our work; it is a critical step forward that will enable all the work that must follow.

Colleagues, I urge you to support Bill S-235. Support it for the survivors who have courageously shared their experiences and called for sustained commitment. Support it for service providers, law enforcement officers, health care workers, educators and community organizations working every day to identify victims and support survivors. Support it for the vulnerable individuals — Indigenous women and children, newcomers, youth, migrant workers and others — who face heightened risks and deserve our protection. Support it because it is the right thing to do, because it will save lives, because it will prevent exploitation, because it will create accountability and because it represents Canada at our best — committed, compassionate, coordinated and unwavering in our dedication to justice, dignity and human rights for all.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Honourable senators, I am rising as the friendly critic of Bill S-235, which was sponsored by my colleague, Senator Salma Ataullahjan. This bill has to do with the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking.

Human trafficking is a serious problem. It is also a crime that is hard to detect because it often takes place behind closed doors and because every effort is made to hide these schemes to sexually exploit young women and girls and to exploit illegal workers who are recruited abroad and underpaid under the table by companies in the industrial, service and agricultural sectors. It is often difficult to prove that human trafficking is taking place.

In the case of sex trafficking, traffickers recruit their victims by showering them with gifts or affection, making them promises and then using violent behaviour to control them. This is the most common form of trafficking in Canada, and the number of trafficking cases reported to the police has been growing over the past 10 years.

In January, the government appointed its first Chief Advisor to Combat Human Trafficking, Jennifer Richardson, who is a survivor herself and who worked very closely with Indigenous communities.

Unfortunately, Ms. Richardson stepped down in December, less than a year after she was appointed, which worries me. What happened? Why hasn't a replacement been appointed? Is the government serious about combatting human trafficking?

I look forward to reading Ms. Richardson's as yet unpublished final report and her recommendations.

It is very difficult to ascertain the actual results of this federal strategy, so it is clear that pressure must be brought to bear on the system. As co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, I was one of those who met with Chief Advisor Richardson.

She faced a huge challenge: making her voice heard within the government.

This strong woman was only just beginning to get the hang of the difficult task of motivating and bringing together all of the many stakeholders in the fight against human trafficking, including Public Safety Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Public Services and Procurement Canada, and Women and Gender Equality Canada. With six departments involved, it is quite a challenge.

She had recently completed a tour of the provinces and the non-governmental organizations that are doing the fieldwork.

To prevent all this from ending up in a bureaucratic quagmire, Bill S-235 proposes that the national strategy prioritize the victims of trafficking, for example, by following through on a long-standing commitment to create a survivor advisory committee.

I've met with survivors. They have been vocal in calling for the creation of a committee for years, because they believe that their voices are not being heard or adequately recognized and that other people are making decisions without consulting them meaningfully.

This bill contains another important item: It requires that the minister responsible review the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking every five years and table a report in the House. The review has to include public consultations with stakeholders — especially individuals with lived experience of

human trafficking, as Senator Ataullahjan mentioned — and with provincial governments, which have developed their own human trafficking initiatives.

Without a serious evaluation of the efforts that are being made, it is not possible to critique them and make progress. The bill also lists about 10 paramount principles that the minister must follow when conducting the review, such as ensuring there is adequate financial support for victims, promoting efforts to address the root causes of human trafficking and adopting a trauma-informed approach.

• (1550)

[*English*]

Human trafficking is one of the most devastating and persistent forms of violence committed against Indigenous people. In fact, half of all trafficking victims are Indigenous women, even though they represent only 5% of the population. A recent report highlights the possible links between the high rates of disappearance and murder of Indigenous women and girls and advertisements for sexual services. This is an important angle, but there's a lack of resources and databases to further this investigation.

The *Missing and Stolen* report published in June 2025 refers to the disappearance in October 2024 of Juanita "Winnie" Migwans while she was walking along a road in M'Chigeeng, Ontario. Despite national efforts to find her, she's still missing.

Drug gangs in Toronto are suspected of increasingly exploiting Indigenous women in rural communities. Indigenous women and girls are clearly overrepresented among victims, as are migrant worker women and girls, who may have a harder time accessing social and medical services due to their unregulated status.

If we are serious about ending human trafficking, we must confront the systems that generate profits from sexual exploitation. That means shifting the blame away from those who are exploited and towards those — generally men — who purchase, facilitate, normalize and benefit from that exploitation. To put an end to human trafficking, we must tackle the demand for sexual services. Recent government efforts to end human trafficking have embraced this logic by prioritizing measures aimed at offenders rather than survivors. However, a closer look at the federal action plan's budgetary allocation reveals a more complex and troubling picture.

According to an analysis by a coalition of organizations aiming to end human trafficking in Quebec, over 70% of the federal budget allocated to the government's action plan to end human trafficking was used for repression. Enforcement is absolutely necessary, but it cannot be at the expense of the protection and care of victims. When repression absorbs the overwhelming share of resources, survivor protections, long-term housing, trauma-informed care and economic reintegration risk becoming secondary priorities, according to this Quebec report.

In conclusion, the intentions behind this bill are praiseworthy, but we must not underestimate the difficulties of reaching consensus between survivors and authorities to move forward. The strategy outlined in the bill is broad — perhaps too broad — given the measures the federal government must take to address this issue. Would it be beneficial to prioritize a few of them?

I invite senators to send this bill to committee for further study. The stakes are high, and lives are being forever shattered by trafficking.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time.)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

(On motion of Senator Ataullahjan, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights.)

STUDY ON ISSUES RELATING TO OFFICIAL LANGUAGES GENERALLY

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

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the second report (interim) of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, entitled *Proposed Official Languages Administrative Monetary Penalties Regulations*, tabled in the Senate on May 7, 2026.

Hon. Allister Surette moved:

> That the second report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, entitled *Proposed Official Languages Administrative Monetary Penalties Regulations*, tabled in the Senate on May 7, 2026, be adopted and that, pursuant to rule 12-23(1), the Senate request a complete and detailed response from the government, with the Minister responsible for Official Languages being identified as minister responsible for responding to the report.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages' report on the proposed official languages administrative monetary penalties regulations. These new regulations are necessary to implement the last of the new powers conferred on the Commissioner of Official Languages when the Official Languages Act was modernized in 2023.

The AMP regime will enable the commissioner to impose a penalty on regulated entities in the transportation sector that fail to meet their obligations towards the travelling public as set out in Part IV of the Official Languages Act.

In the report, the committee makes five recommendations, which, in our view, are essential for strengthening the proposed regulations published by the government in Part I of the *Canada Gazette*.

In particular, the committee is calling on the government to revise the regulations to ensure a more effective and consistent implementation of the AMP regime. Among other things, we are asking the government to review the criteria that the commissioner must consider when imposing an AMP or to review the list of regulated entities.

Honourable colleagues, this is the fourth time since 2012 that the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages has issued a report highlighting the importance of ensuring a consistent experience for the travelling public when it comes to receiving services in the official language of their choice. To comply with the quasi-constitutional Part IV obligations, the AMP regime must be a simple, fast, credible deterrent. That's why we are asking the government for a clear response outlining how it will take our recommendations into account and incorporate them into the regulations.

Thank you for your attention, honourable colleagues.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

[*English*]

THE SENATE

MOTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION IN GAZA—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

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

An Hon. Senator: Question.

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

(On motion of Senator Manning, debate adjourned.)

• (1600)

FUTURE OF CANADIAN NEWS MEDIA

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Cardozo, calling the attention of the Senate to the future of Canadian news media and its long-term funding model, including that of CBC/Radio-Canada.

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Senator Cardozo's inquiry calling the attention of the Senate to the future of Canadian news media and its long-term funding model.

I want to begin by thanking Senator Cardozo for bringing this important matter before us and for his ongoing work on this issue, including his most recent report published last month entitled *Making News Media Sustainable: Options for the Long Term*. Few issues are as central to the health of our democracy as the strength, independence and sustainability of our press.

Earlier this month, on May 3, we marked World Press Freedom Day, an annual observance proclaimed by the United Nations to promote access to reliable information and to safeguard independent journalism. This day is not merely symbolic; it is a timely reminder of our collective responsibility to uphold the fundamental principles of a free press, to defend the media from threats to its independence and to ensure the free flow of ideas and information by word and image.

Today, that responsibility feels more urgent than ever.

There is no denying that journalism is under significant strain. We are living in an era when the lines between fact and opinion, journalism and commentary, are increasingly blurred. Sensationalism often drives engagement, and engagement drives revenue. In such an environment, it is not surprising that credible, fact-based journalism is struggling to compete. This is not only a Canadian challenge but a global one. Yet, in a thriving democracy, a strong and independent press is not optional; it is essential. Today, that ecosystem is under pressure.

The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, amplified by rapid advances in artificial intelligence, has eroded public trust and created widespread uncertainty.

[*Translation*]

Canadians are increasingly questioning whether the news they are getting is reliable. I'm one of them. Just staying informed has become harder, more complicated, more uncertain and, sometimes, more destabilizing, and this trend is picking up speed.

Ironically, as confusion sets in, demand for credible, vetted journalism keeps growing. Canadians are looking for trustworthy sources. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. It signals a need not only to preserve our traditional media institutions, but also to make sure that they're able to thrive in a changing digital landscape.

[*English*]

While I do not pretend to have all the answers, I would like to focus my remarks today on a segment of the media ecosystem that is particularly vulnerable yet profoundly important and dear to my heart: our local, regional and ethnic media outlets. These outlets play a unique and indispensable role. They tell the stories of our communities, reflect our diversity and provide information that is often overlooked by larger national platforms.

Canadians today consume news in many ways. Statistics Canada reported that, as early as 2020, the internet had become the primary source of news, followed by television, radio and print. More recent data suggests that a significant majority of Canadians — 86% — continue to engage with newspapers, whether in print or digital form. This demonstrates that, despite changing habits, there remains a strong appetite for curated, credible journalism.

However, the structure of the media industry has shifted dramatically. Consolidation, coupled with the dominance of large digital platforms, has profoundly disrupted traditional revenue models. Local and ethnic outlets, in particular, have borne the brunt of this transformation. According to News Media Canada, more than 600 news outlets closed in 288 communities across the country between 2008 and 2025. While new outlets have emerged, the overall trend points to volatility and decline. Many communities are now at risk of becoming "news deserts," with limited access to local reporting.

That should concern us all.

In fact, I welcome the work of the House Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, which is conducting a new study on the state of journalism and media sectors in Canada.

I have seen first-hand the vital role that ethnic media plays in connecting communities. Since my appointment to the Senate, I have made it a priority to contribute a monthly column to Italian-language newspapers across Canada. It is one way to remain connected and to support a sector that continues to serve as a cultural and informational bridge for many Canadians.

However, these outlets are under immense pressure. Many operate with limited staff and resources. Advertising revenues are declining sharply, and in some cases operations are sustained only through the support of other businesses. Their survival is far from guaranteed.

There is no single solution to this complex challenge. However, there are practical steps we can consider.

One such step relates to government advertising. Each year, the Government of Canada reports on its advertising expenditures. The most recent data shows that of the $64 million spent on media placement through its agency of record, nearly $41 million was directed to digital platforms, leaving approximately $23.5 million for traditional media. Of that, only a small fraction — about $222,000 — was allocated to print media, a dramatic decline from previous years. In fact, the year before, that number stood at $1.38 million. Between 2023-24 and 2024-25, funding from this program for print media went from 6% of all expenditures to only 1%.

This shift is understandable given changing consumption patterns. However, it also raises an important question: Are we doing enough to support the very institutions that produce reliable, public-interest journalism?

Evidence suggests that Canadians continue to value print media, including for advertising; yet, private sector support alone is no longer sufficient to sustain many outlets. A thoughtful recalibration of government advertising practices could make a meaningful difference. Increasing the share of advertising directed toward local and print media would not only provide financial support to struggling outlets but also reinvest public dollars into local economies and strengthen trusted sources of information.

In his recent report, Senator Cardozo notes that a recurring public policy recommendation is to establish a dedicated stream of government advertising to support news journalism.

Consistent with his findings and with my own views, one practical option would be for all levels of government, particularly the federal government, to commit at least 50% of advertising expenditures to Canadian news organizations, with clear criteria to ensure broad and equitable distribution of those ad placements.

[*Translation*]

The findings for Quebec are just as troubling. Both the Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture and the Confédération des syndicats nationaux have examined this issue.

Consultations held in 2025 revealed a dramatic decline in ad revenue, which dropped 75% over 10 years, meaning a loss of nearly $800 million for news media. Much of that revenue shifted to major digital platforms.

In response, the group made a number of recommendations. For example, it urged the Government of Quebec and the Government of Canada to adopt a responsible advertising policy that supports news media and to stop doing business with web-based multinationals that don't comply with the spirit of Canada's current tax regime.

It is imperative that we think about how public funds can do more to support a diverse media ecosystem anchored in our communities.

I support that recommendation, and I urge the government to re-evaluate its ad placement strategy. I understand why it would prioritize digital platforms. They have reach. However, I remain convinced that by recalibrating those investments, the government can achieve a second and even third objective.

First, it would provide concrete support to local and ethnic media outlets, which play a role in our communities. Second, it would promote better circulation of public funds within our local economies, contributing to their vitality.

• (1610)

Lastly, it would bolster media outlets that are committed to journalistic rigour, that value truth, that actively fight disinformation and misinformation, and that focus on facts and issues that are relevant to our communities.

[*English*]

To be clear, I am not suggesting that increased government advertising alone will resolve the challenges facing the sector, particularly the smaller players, but it is a tangible, immediate measure — one that signals leadership and commitment.

I also welcome the $38 million in federal investments — as announced in Budget 2025 — for the Canada Periodical Fund to support small and community media outlets. This funding provides much-needed financial support to Canadian publishers of print magazines and print community newspapers to enable them to overcome market disadvantages.

However, despite these efforts and other commitments to support the sector, the situation remains fragile, and in many respects, it is worsening.

Honourable senators, we are living in a moment defined by information — its abundance, its accessibility and, increasingly, its unreliability. In such a context, a free, independent and healthy press is not a luxury. It is a cornerstone of democratic life.

The decline of local and ethnic media is not just an industry issue; it is a democratic one. When communities lose their newspapers, they lose more than headlines. They lose accountability, shared understanding and a sense of connection. The urgency of this moment cannot be overstated. We must act — deliberately and collaboratively — to ensure that credible journalism not only survives but thrives.

This means rethinking our policies, aligning our public investments with our democratic values and standing firmly in support of those who work every day to inform Canadians with accuracy and integrity.

I therefore call on the government to urgently review and modernize its advertising strategy with a view to better supporting local, regional and ethnic media. Perhaps it could be inspired by what the Government of Ontario did in 2024 when it directed the largest four government agencies to allocate a minimum of 25% of their more than $100 million in annual advertising spending for Ontario publishers.

Finally, honourable senators, I call on all of us in this chamber and beyond to champion a free and independent press and to recognize its value, to defend its role and to ensure its future. Because without a strong press, there can be no strong democracy.

Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

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. Danièle Henkel: Honourable senators, I would like to thank our colleague, Senator Tony Loffreda, for initiating this inquiry. These days, immigration is fodder for fear and stereotypes in many Western democracies, so it is our job to put facts, history and nuance back at the centre of the debate.

[*English*]

For decades, immigration in Canada was not a major fault line in our political life. On the contrary, it rested on a broad political consensus. That does not mean there were no debates nor an absence of legitimate concerns, but consensus made it possible to build an immigration policy that was relatively stable, predictable and oriented toward the country's economic and social interests.

Let us be clear: That consensus is now under strain. Pressures on housing, infrastructure and public services are causing genuine concerns among many of our fellow citizens. We cannot dismiss those concerns out of hand, but newcomers alone cannot be held responsible for planning decisions made by successive governments over the years.

And reducing all of today's challenges to immigration would be unfair and a mistake. We must reject simplistic narratives and sweeping generalizations directed at families who chose Canada in search of a new beginning.

A serious immigration policy must be planned, coherent and results-driven. It must not only welcome people but also support their integration and enable their full participation in our society and our economy. Indeed, immigration is woven into the very fabric of Canada's history.

[*Translation*]

Canada is one of the most cosmopolitan countries in the world. According to the most recent major census in 2021, nearly one in four Canadians was born abroad. Here in the Senate, I counted at least 17 senators who were not born in Canada. This dynamic is part of a longer history, one that began well before immigration. Before any of us arrived, First Nations and Inuit peoples had been living here for millennia. Their cultures, rights and knowledge are an integral part of our collective history.

Let's be honest. We have not always had the best relationship with immigration. Canada adopted discriminatory policies not only toward its own First Nations, but also toward Chinese immigrants, for example. We must continue to learn from all of the dark chapters of our history. Immigration is also vital to the functioning of our economy.

Take, for example, my province of Quebec. In 2024, for every 93 young Quebecers who entered the labour market, 100 people retired. According to the Institut du Québec, the roughly 1.2 million retirement-age Quebecers will outnumber young workers until 2031. Without immigration, our working population will no longer be able to grow at the pace required to meet our economic and social needs.

[*English*]

Behind many of the essential services on which this country relies are workers who came to Canada through immigration. This is not conjecture; it is fact. Here are some of them: In health care, 37% of doctors, 43% of pharmacists, 45% of dentists and more than 40% of nursing and related personnel are immigrants.

In the scientific and technological sectors — those shaping tomorrow's economy — 35% of computer programmers, 43% of engineers and 57% of chemists were born abroad.

In construction and infrastructure, the conclusion is the same: 41% of architects, 40% of civil engineers and nearly one-quarter of roofers are immigrants.

More than half of those providing early childhood services are also from immigrant backgrounds. And across the country, immigrants represent 51% of business owners with paid staff in the food and beverage sector.

What do these figures tell us? Immigration is not peripheral to our economy; it is present in our hospitals, in our labs, on our construction sites, in our businesses and in our local services. It is part of our collective capacity, day after day, to keep this country running.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Behind this major contribution is a Canadian paradox that too often escapes attention: We are good at attracting talent from around the world, but not so good at allowing that talent to achieve its full potential here in Canada.

Colleagues, that is where the debate on immigration needs to evolve. It's no longer just a question of how many we take in, but what we actually do with the skills, experience and qualifications that they bring us.

[*English*]

Yet, too often, those who arrive here are still met with a maze of barriers: credentials that are only partially recognized, administrative delays, professional hurdles and regulatory silos between provinces.

And then there is the infamous "Canadian experience." How often do qualified individuals hear that they lack Canadian experience, even though they have led teams and international companies, practised in regulated professions or managed complex projects elsewhere in the world? Too often, that phrase conceals a form of discrimination.

At times, this logic becomes absurd. We tell people they need Canadian experience to obtain their first skilled job, while denying them the very opportunity that would allow them to acquire it.

[*Translation*]

I encountered this invisible barrier when I arrived in Canada. I spent years working at jobs I was severely overqualified for so that I could support my family, and mine isn't an isolated case.

We've all heard the mind-boggling stories of engineers driving taxis or doctors working as medical secretaries while waiting years to practise their profession.

Highly qualified professionals end up trapped in jobs far below their skill level, while our companies, hospitals and building sites experience worker shortages.

[*English*]

Statistics Canada's data confirms this: Immigrants with a university degree are twice as likely as Canadian-born workers to be employed in jobs below their level of qualification. This is not befitting a country like ours.

Do we sufficiently grasp what this situation costs us collectively? According to a study by the RBC Economics research team, the wage gap between immigrants and non-immigrants for equivalent work amounts to approximately 2.5% of Canada's GDP, or more than $50 billion a year. That is the price the country pays when it does not make full use of the talent it has chosen to welcome. Worse still, some of that talent ultimately chooses to leave Canada.

[*Translation*]

According to the Institute for Canadian Citizenship's report entitled "The Leaky Bucket 2025," one in five immigrants leaves Canada within 25 years of landing. Furthermore, it is often the most highly qualified who leave first: Immigrants with doctorates are nearly twice as likely to leave the country as those with a bachelor's degree.

Let me put it simply. We have a system that is effective at attracting people, but flawed when it comes to integrating and retaining them.

We must also be honest enough to acknowledge another reality. A growing proportion of the jobs our society is struggling to fill now rely on immigration. Jobs in maintenance, food service, hospitality, agriculture and elder care are all essential to the country's functioning, but they hold little appeal for the local workforce. Any serious immigration policy must take this into account.

Recognizing the dignity of these jobs also means recognizing those who work in them. Based on all of the above, I have a simple conviction.

[*English*]

For too long, our public debate on immigration has focused on a single question: How many? Today, the decisive question lies elsewhere: What are we truly doing with the people we welcome?

Are we able to recognize credentials and skills quickly enough? Are we able to bring professional bodies, employers, universities and provinces into real dialogue, to build pathways instead of labyrinths? In other words, we must move beyond simply attracting talent and build a model that allows people to succeed so that those who choose Canada can contribute fully, prosper here and choose to stay.

Then there is a dimension we too often forget: Work is a powerful driver of integration. It gives people a place, recognition and status. It is human dignity. It allows parents to look at their children and say, "This is what I do here. This is how I contribute." Successful economic integration is the strongest foundation for social and cultural integration.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, standing up for immigration in Canada does not mean turning a blind eye to tensions. Those tensions are the very reason we need to engage in high-quality debate grounded in facts, not fears.

Standing up for immigration means demanding a policy that takes welcoming, integrating and retaining people as seriously as it does the intake process.

When I look at the numbers and recall my own journey, I'm convinced that this country can do a lot better, not by bringing in fewer people or by bringing them in thoughtlessly, but by working harder to welcome them once they're here.

Immigration is neither a slogan nor a problem. It's one of Canada's greatest resources, provided we finally take the trouble to treat it as such. Thank you.

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

[*English*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO HOLD IN CAMERA MEETINGS FOR ITS STUDY ON THE COMMERCIAL FISHERIES LICENSING REGIME ON THE PACIFIC COAST

Hon. Fabian Manning, pursuant to notice of May 5, 2026, moved:

> That, notwithstanding rule 12-15(2), the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be empowered to hold in camera meetings for the purpose of hearing witnesses and gathering specialized or sensitive information in relation to its study on the commercial fisheries licensing regime on Canada's Pacific Coast.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE KOREAN WAR YEARS

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) rose pursuant to notice of April 16, 2026:

> That she will call the attention of the Senate to the milestone seventy-fifth anniversary of the Korean War years, from June 25, 1950, until the signing of the armistice agreement of July 27, 1953, the critical peacekeeping years that followed, and the profound legacy of Canadians who served in the "Land of the Morning Calm" that endures to this day.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

(*At 4:29 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.*)

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