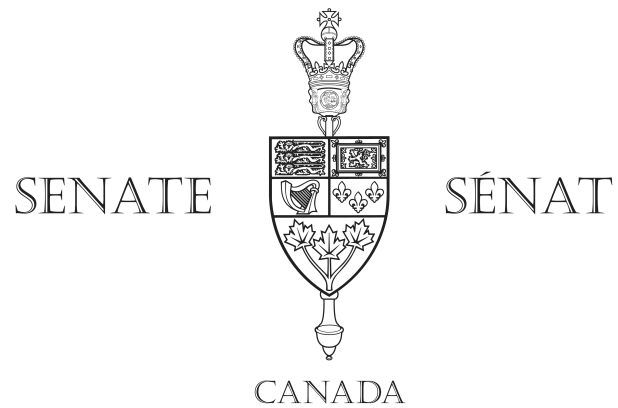




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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, October 6, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Tuesday, October 6, 2026

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

Prayers.

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I received a notice from the Facilitator of the Independent Senators Group, who requests, pursuant to rule 4-3(1), that the time provided for the consideration of Senators' Statements be extended today for the purpose of paying tribute to the Honourable Raymonde Saint-Germain.

Is it agreed that the time for tributes be extended into regular statements until the conclusion of the anticipated tributes?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: I remind senators that pursuant to our rules, each senator will be allowed only three minutes, and they may speak only once.

These times do not include the time allotted to the response of the senator.

[English]

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

TRIBUTES

THE HONOURABLE RAYMONDE SAINT-GERMAIN

Hon. Yuen Pau Woo: Honourable senators, I am honoured to deliver a tribute to Senator Raymonde Saint-Germain on behalf of the Independent Senators Group, or ISG.

Our journeys through the upper chamber track each other very closely. Together with seven others, we were the first cohort of senators appointed as independents under the arm's-length, application-based process.

I start my tribute in this way because Senator Saint-Germain's distinguished tenure in the upper house is marked by her dedication to a more independent Senate and by her success in making progress toward it. When we started out as facilitators of the ISG in 2017, our group had no formal status, no meaningful budget and no parity in the treatment of our leadership positions or that of the group.

Senator Saint-Germain fought these inequities with patience and determination. It was under her watch that the Parliament of Canada Act was finally amended to recognize non-partisan groups and their leadership teams.

However, it wasn't only through the statute that she campaigned for change. Raymonde worked toward reform across the suite of Senate rules, practices and procedures, from the Rules Committee to the Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration and the Joint Interparliamentary Council. There is not a single significant change in Senate practice over the past decade she has not had a say in or influence over.

Not least, she was deeply involved in the evolution of the Independent Senators Group, from amendments to our charter to changes in the composition of the leadership team and the way in which decisions are made. Many of those changes remain in place, and I know our current facilitator, Senator Lucie Moncion, is grateful for the groundwork that was laid by her predecessor.

Raymonde was voted by her colleagues as Senator of the Year at the inaugural iPolitics' Parliamentarian of the Year award in 2024. She is, of course, no stranger to awards, having received accolades for her work as Quebec's Protecteur du citoyen, as a deputy minister for the Quebec government and as an advocate for psychiatric patients.

Senator Saint-Germain could have retired after her decades of public service in Quebec, but she chose, instead, to apply to become a senator. For that, we — and all Canadians — should be immensely grateful. You may recall that she even declined a big severance check from the Quebec government on the grounds that she was moving into a well-paid position in the federal Parliament. Such is the integrity of our honourable colleague.

Finally, I will share a few words about bilingualism. Raymonde was a staunch defender of French language rights, but she was generous with her anglophone colleagues who did not speak French. It helped, of course, that she was so fluent in English. One word that she used a lot in English was "pedagogical," which always sounds so sophisticated. I have come to learn that the French equivalent has a different nuance even if the meaning is essentially the same. In an effort to sound more learned, I have decided to use that word more often in my speaking, and I will now for my closing.

[Translation]

Senator Saint-Germain is an inspiring leader and an excellent teacher whose educational approach encourages the members of her group to be independent. On behalf of the Independent Senators Group, or ISG, thank you, Raymonde. We wish you all the best in your next adventure.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, some people spend their career learning how these institutions work. Senator Saint-Germain spent hers wondering whether they worked as they should and,

more importantly, who they worked for. That concern shaped her entire career, and it may be what best sums up her contribution as she prepares to leave this chamber.

Well before she arrived in the Senate, she brought this vision of public service to the highest echelons of the Quebec government. She served as Deputy Minister of Government Services, Deputy Minister of Relations with Citizens and Immigration, Assistant Deputy Minister of International Relations and Quebec Ombudsperson. That is where I met this woman, who would later become Senator Saint-Germain, for the first time.

She knows the government from the inside, including its rules, limitations and responsibilities, but she never lost sight of those on the outside: citizens who sometimes have very few means to assert their rights.

• (1410)

As ombudsperson, she had to listen, establish the facts and, where necessary, tell public authorities what they didn't want to hear.

Fairness is easy to talk about. It's not easy when it means reconsidering a decision, acknowledging a mistake or changing course.

That's the kind of rigour she brought to the Senate in 2016, at a time when our institution was itself undergoing transformation.

[English]

As the Senate modernized and adapted to the changes initiated by former Prime Minister Trudeau, Senator Saint-Germain became one of those entrusted with ensuring a proper transformation. First as deputy facilitator and later as facilitator of the Independent Senators Group, she helped carve out a new form of leadership — less of a focus on top-down directives and more of a focus on persuasion, less about discipline and more about trust while leaving plenty of space for disagreement without allowing it to become divisive.

[Translation]

Senator Saint-Germain understood something essential: Independence is not the absence of responsibility. It demands more. It requires discernment, accountability and respect for the judgment of others.

[English]

That same sense of responsibility shaped her work on the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration and as the Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Resources. These may not be the Senate's most visible files, but they go to the heart of institutional credibility. Are we prepared to hold ourselves to the standards we expect of others? It is a question that Senator Saint-Germain never stopped asking.

[Senator Moreau]

[Translation]

She is demanding, direct and well-prepared, and she expects others to be the same. Sloppy arguments rarely stand up to her scrutiny for long.

Underlying that rigour is a deep respect for public service fuelled by the simple conviction that, when an institution makes a decision that affects people's lives, it must be able to explain that decision, defend it and take responsibility for it.

Senator Saint-Germain's approach to public service has been recognized on several occasions. In 2016, Laval University awarded her its Medal of Honour. In 2024, as Senator Woo noted, her parliamentary colleagues named her Senator of the Year.

These honours matter, but there is another, perhaps more telling measure of a person's impact: what she brings to those who work with her. Everyone knows that Senator Saint-Germain will ask the tough questions, spot shortcuts and, above all, take any issue that comes before us seriously.

On a more personal note, Senator Saint-Germain's departure from the Senate today is, for me, the departure of a friend, an adviser and a mentor. She helped me in my early days here in the Senate and, as I took my first steps as government leader in the Senate, I benefited from her experience at the leaders' table, whose members represent this institution so well. I will miss her very much, but I know she has many wonderful days ahead with her husband, Pierre, who is also a friend. I hope to stay in close contact with her so I can continue to benefit from her valuable advice for a long time to come.

Thank you, Raymonde.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, tomorrow the Senate will bid farewell to an exceptional individual whose distinction, intelligence and integrity are widely recognized, as Senator Saint-Germain retires. I myself have had the privilege of serving alongside her for nearly 10 years. Her leadership in this chamber will remain etched in our memories for many years to come.

Senator Saint-Germain arrived in the Senate already recognized as one of Quebec's most eminent and respected senior civil servants. She had previously served as Deputy Minister of Relations with Citizens and Immigration, and subsequently as Deputy Minister of Government Services.

Anyone who worked with her came to know an exceptional woman who understood how the state functions and, above all, the people she was called upon to serve. This conviction led her to one of the most demanding positions in the province, that of Quebec Ombudsperson, where she defended citizens with a dedication that earned her the trust of Quebecers. It came as no surprise that this woman from Quebec was appointed to the Senate of Canada to stand up for the interests of Quebec.

[English]

When Senator Saint-Germain arrived in the Senate in 2016, it didn't take long for colleagues to recognize her abilities, and it is no surprise that it did not take long to realize her leadership skills because, colleagues, leadership is not something that is developed; you are born with it. And if there is a true-born leader, it is Senator Saint-Germain.

For me, it was always a pleasure and a privilege to serve alongside her at various committees, especially that first day she walked in at the Internal Economy Committee, where I really came to know Raymonde and her acute sense of fiscal responsibility toward taxpayers. In this institution, she showed there was no-nonsense when it came to her interventions. Whenever she spoke, we all made certain we listened because I can tell you this: She always had something to contribute in her deliberations, which were always relevant and always substantive. She commanded the respect of the room, honourable colleagues. The magnitude of her leadership in this place is hard to overstate and will be greatly missed.

I hope she will permit me to say that, in many ways, Raymonde Saint-Germain reminds me of another female political figure whom I love and truly respect, and that's the Iron Lady. Raymonde Saint-Germain is truly the Iron Lady of this institution. She's genuinely smart and very tough but very fair, with a heart of gold and a compassionate spirit. Some people may find that toughness formidable, but I think that we will come to appreciate her leadership and her style because her firmness was always rooted in conviction, and her conviction came from a genuine caring for this institution and the people whom she represents.

These qualities were evident to all who had the privilege of crossing paths with her, both in and out of this institution. In fact, honourable colleagues, Senator Saint-Germain has no bigger fan than my wife. Many of you might know that my wife doesn't suffer fools easily. The first time we were on a parliamentary trip, Demi turned to me after seeing Senator Saint-Germain in action and said, "Leo, Senator Saint-Germain is graceful, elegant, articulate, razor-sharp and an outstanding senator," and she was absolutely right. She fits all those criteria.

Honourable colleagues, many senators come and go in this institution, but I can tell you this: Senator Saint-Germain's legacy will live on forever as somebody who made this place better and stronger and as somebody who made an important contribution on behalf of Quebecers and Canadians.

On behalf of the Senate Conservative caucus here in the official opposition, we want to wish you all the best. You are leaving far too early; you still have a lot to offer. We wish you and your family continued health and continued success.

[Translation]

Hon. Judy A. White: Honourable senators, I rise today to pay tribute to our colleague Senator Raymonde Saint-Germain.

[English]

You may be surprised to hear me try to speak a few words in French today, but I do so with the utmost respect for our colleague and friend Senator Saint-Germain.

One of the things I've most enjoyed about working with Raymonde has been our conversations about the French language. She always encouraged me to try a few words and phrases, even when I was content to rely exclusively on my most favourite French word *enchantée*. I suspect there were moments when she was a little exasperated by my limited French vocabulary and probably more so by my determination to keep using the same expression *enchantée*, even when it wasn't applicable. But she never let it show. Instead, she responded with patience, kindness and good humour, whether explaining the proper use of *bonne nuit* or gently expanding my French horizons beyond *enchantée*.

These moments of learning and much laughter — at my own expense, I might add — were always a highlight, and they are memories I will cherish forever.

For those of you who may not know, *enchantée* means delighted, pleased or simply, "I'm very happy to meet you," and I think it is a rather fitting word for Raymonde. She has a way of making people feel welcome and at ease. That same quality has been evident throughout her long career in public service and, of course, her years here with us in the Senate.

Raymonde comes to her retirement with quite an impressive record, with a long career in public service, including as the Quebec Public Protector — that sounds so impressive — and as a deputy minister. She has brought that experience to the Senate since 2016 through her committee work, her leadership within her group and her many parliamentary and interparliamentary responsibilities. I think it is fair to say that Raymonde has never been someone to sit quietly on the sidelines.

• (1420)

I am sure her family will be *enchantée* to have a little more of her now that she is leaving this chamber. On behalf of the Progressive Senate Group, Raymonde, it has been a pleasure to work alongside you, and I wish you all the best in the next chapter.

[Translation]

I wish you continued success, Raymonde. Most of all, I am delighted to have been your colleague.

Thank you.

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Honourable senators, I rise today on behalf of the Canadian Senators Group to pay tribute to our colleague, Senator Raymonde Saint-Germain.

[English]

As we have heard today, Senator Saint-Germain's retirement brings to a close a remarkable career in public service — one defined by a deep commitment to protecting the rights of Canadians and strengthening the public institutions that serve them.

In a 2018 interview with the Senate's in-house magazine, Senator Saint-Germain was asked what she believed were the biggest public policy issues facing Canada. She highlighted the importance of looking beyond the short term — of balancing economic, environmental and social considerations, mitigating the negative effects of public policy and paying particular attention to Canada's relationship with the United States. It is striking how relevant her answer remains today.

In that same interview, she was asked why more Canadians should care about what happens in the Senate. She spoke about our responsibility, first and foremost, to legislate — to carefully examine the bills before Parliament and consider how they will affect the people, organizations and businesses that will ultimately be subject to them.

Looking back now, her answer was more than a reflection on the role of the Senate. It describes remarkably well the approach she herself brought to her work throughout her tenure here.

Dear Raymonde, thank you for setting such an excellent example for those of us who follow in your footsteps.

[Translation]

As a new senator, I recall witnessing the careful thought that Senator Saint-Germain invested in the words she spoke in the Senate. She listened carefully, asked thought-provoking questions and always contributed a nuanced perspective to our discussions.

[English]

Those qualities — thoughtfulness, careful listening and a genuine respect for the work of this institution — have characterized her contribution to the Senate.

[Translation]

Raymonde, on behalf of my colleagues in the Canadian Senators Group, thank you for your service, your leadership and your contribution to this institution.

[English]

I hope this next chapter gives you more time for your family, your friends and all the things that matter to you most.

[Translation]

I wish you a very happy retirement. Thank you for everything, dear Raymonde.

Hon. Pierrette Ringuette: Honourable senators, today, we are paying tribute to a truly amazing woman. I have only a few minutes to express both my sadness and my appreciation.

[Senator Flordeliz]

November may be the month when the days grow darker, but when Senator Saint-Germain joined the Senate on November 25, 2016, she quickly became a beacon of light in our quest to give the public a modern, adaptable and effective institution.

Her distinguished career as a public administrator in Quebec gave her insight into how Parliament works and what discussions need to be held in order to achieve results that, more often than not, are compromises, or steps on the way.

In March 2016, the Independent Senators Group was founded by myself and Senators McCoy, Demers, Wallace, Rivard and Bellemare. A few months later, we added several more members, allowing the Independent Senators Group, the first group without a partisan caucus, to be officially recognized in the Senate on December 2, 2016. Raymonde was part of that new cohort.

She was quick to appraise the situation and the modernization objectives. However, the real challenge was determining how to proceed. After a period of reflection, in September 2017, the ISG chose Senators Woo and Saint-Germain to steer our course, and a few years later, Senator Saint-Germain took over the reins as leader of our group. In short, Raymonde, you have been the cornerstone of our group's success and of our institution's independence.

Naturally, Raymonde and I were in agreement on what we wanted to achieve, but the "how" and "when" were a different story. We did get into some heated discussions, but she never shied away from confrontation. On the contrary, as a good leader, she absorbed it all, extracted the best points and forged ahead.

Raymonde, thank you from the bottom of my heart for your leadership, for your contribution to the modernization of the Senate, and for your friendship.

[English]

You are a class act.

[Translation]

You are a great lady. That has nothing to do with your size, of course.

Senator Saint-Germain, this is not the end of our conversations. Even though you have to retire from the Senate, I will always think of your 10 years here as a testament to your undeniable natural talents. You will always hold a special place in my heart.

Happy retirement, my friend. I look forward to hearing about your next chapter with your partner, Pierre, always at your side. With that new hip of his, he'll be able to walk as fast as you.

Thank you, my friend. Enjoy the ride.

Hon. Éric Forest: Honourable senators, speaking to mark a colleague's retirement is always a very delicate matter, but when that colleague is also a friend, it's an even greater challenge to do so succinctly.

When Raymonde is asked where her commitment comes from, she replies that it wasn't a single specific event that shaped her, but rather a series of small acts of solidarity she experienced during her childhood. That answer perfectly sums up her philosophy that great careers are often built on deep human values rooted in everyday actions.

For example, as a young girl, she and her family prepared Christmas hampers and delivered them through the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. That experience gave her both the joy of helping others and a deep sense of injustice at the inequalities in our society.

We're all familiar with her rigour. Raymonde chooses her words very carefully. When she speaks, we know that every word has been carefully considered and that every nuance matters. Her rigour has never been cold, and it is always accompanied by a willingness to listen, respect and kindness.

Raymonde can firmly defend a position, as she has demonstrated on many occasions, without ever belittling the person in front of her. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why she has earned the respect of colleagues across the political spectrum, both inside and outside this chamber.

She crossed paths with some remarkable people throughout her career. In 1986, she accompanied Mother Teresa during her visit to Quebec. She was struck by her humility and quiet strength.

• (1430)

She also met Queen Elizabeth II on six occasions.

Dear Raymonde, your legacy is far more than a list of accomplishments. It is also a way of serving. You have shown us that independence and collaboration are not mutually exclusive, that high standards can go hand in hand with kindness, and that true authority resides less in the prestige of a position than in the trust one inspires. For my part, I would above all like to thank you for your friendship, your candour, your advice and all those times when your presence made our work not only smarter, but also more human.

Retirement will no doubt be a new chapter. I wish you happy times with Pierre and your family. May it include plenty of reading, time spent on the shores of your beloved St. Lawrence River, the occasional ice cream, like in the old days, and lots of oysters. I'll even shuck some for you once in a while. Above all, I hope you take pleasure in reflecting on all that you have contributed to Quebec, to Canada, to the Senate and to everyone who has had the privilege of working alongside you.

Thank you, Raymonde, for your exceptional career. Thank you for your sense of duty. Thank you, quite simply, for always putting people at the heart of public service. Thank you and happy retirement, dear Raymonde.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Pierre Laurin, the husband of the Honourable Senator Saint-Germain; their sons Pierre-Guillaume and Louis-Thomas Laurin; their daughters-in-law Alex Lafleur and Soukayna Mouatadid; and Marie-France Maheu, a friend of the Honourable Senator Saint-Germain.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[English]

THE HONOURABLE RAYMONDE SAINT-GERMAIN

EXPRESSION OF THANKS

Hon. Raymonde Saint-Germain: Honourable senators, as well as very dear former senators the Honourable Mobina Jaffer, the Honourable Donna Dasko and the Honourable Brent Cotter, I'm very moved by your presence here today. I will try, in the coming days, weeks and months, to stay very humble after all the tributes I've been paid. Some placed me in a little trouble. Senator Housakos, I wonder what my two sons — and perhaps my husband — will do with your comparison with the Iron Lady. I know I'm in trouble.

Very dear colleagues, I still find it difficult to acknowledge — and even more difficult to contemplate — that I will be a retired senator as of tomorrow. The word “retirement” corresponds neither to my state of mind nor to my intentions. For some, it is a pleasant word that rhymes with having no schedule, sleeping in, reading, gardening and leisurely coffee. To me, those are all parts of a simple plan for a long weekend.

I see my husband nodding.

I will also take this opportunity to thank you for warmly welcoming my loved ones.

[Translation]

They were always there for me. Pierre, thank you for being by my side for more than half a century.

[English]

Imagine how patient this man is.

[Translation]

Thank you for your support and love. I love you. Pierre-Guillaume and Louis-Thomas, my beloved sons, I am so proud of the adults you have become, especially because you are such wonderful, kind people. I love you.

Thank you for giving Pierre and me the joy of welcoming your partners, Alex and Soukayna, into our family. I love you, my daughters-in-law. At the end of every road, we discover a new path, and I want to walk that path with you.

Thank you also to my friend Marie-France for being here today.

[English]

As I address you today, I am conscious of doing so as one of the senior members of this august chamber. That is something I have not quite grown accustomed to, either. Over the past 10 years or so, I've had the privilege of working alongside remarkable colleagues from all sides of this chamber — colleagues who are capable, dedicated and committed to serving the public interest. I've learned a great deal from listening to each and every one of you.

When I look back on these 10 years among you, I realize the most important lessons I will take with me are not about procedures or debates; they are about people, the trust we built and what enables an institution such as ours to function, despite our differences.

In that regard, certain individuals have marked my journey in a particularly meaningful way.

I would first like to acknowledge two Speakers: the Honourable George Furey, before whom I was sworn in in 2016; and our current distinguished Speaker, the Honourable Raymonde Gagné, who was then my sponsor. Both have carried out their duties in a manner that has consistently brought honour to the Senate, both through their skilful stewardship of our proceedings and through parliamentary diplomacy.

I also wish to acknowledge the Speakers pro tempore, the Honourable Pierrette Ringuette and the Honourable René Cormier. To both of them, I express my gratitude for their dedication to this institution. Bravo.

Bear with me, as I will be thanking many people throughout this speech, but I simply could not let this opportunity pass without acknowledging the exemplary work of the Parliamentary Protective Service, the Chamber Operations and Procedure Office and the Senate Administration generally. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to the teams of the Usher of the Black Rod and the Office of the Speaker of the Senate of Canada.

I wish to recognize the professionalism and dedication of all those who work behind the scenes to support us every day. I also offer a special word of appreciation to our interpreters, whose remarkable skill enables us to not only hear one another but to truly understand one another. Stoicism is one of their essential qualities. I have always been impressed by their remarkable ability to translate, with unwavering composure, remarks that they themselves probably never would have chosen to utter.

[Translation]

I also want to offer my heartfelt thanks to all the members of my caucus who trusted me for eight and a half years to represent them and look out for their best interests. I want to express my

gratitude to everyone who, at different times, worked devotedly by my side as members of the Independent Senators Group's leadership team. I salute the person who gave me my first opportunity, the first elected facilitator, Senator Yuen Pau Woo. I also send my greetings and gratitude to the Honourable Ratna Omidvar and Senators David Arnot, Bernadette Clement, Tony Dean, Pat Duncan and Chantal Petitclerc. My sincere gratitude also goes out to the capable staff of the ISG Secretariat.

My office was staffed with incredible, skilled professionals, many of whom were just cutting their teeth after recently gaining a solid university education. We learned a lot and shared many laughs together, always in an atmosphere of trust and respect. I am delighted that all of them are pursuing brilliant careers, mostly in the public sector and some in the private sector. I want to thank Étienne Arnoux Hébert, who I was able to rely on for over seven and a half years, Rania Abi, who was getting close to that record before my retirement got in the way, and Line Tessier, whose experience on Parliament Hill is exceptional.

• (1440)

I also want to acknowledge Alexandre D'Aragon — thank you for being here, Alexandre — Pascal Ferland and Nathalie Sergerie, who were with me during the first few years.

Over time, I have learned that institutions don't function solely on the basis of rules. They work mostly because of the women and men who choose to keep them alive.

When I began participating in discussions amongst leaders alongside Senator Woo, I quickly realized that it wasn't enough just to read the rules. It was also important to read between the lines, into that space where judgment, trust and honouring one's word are what matter.

[English]

Representing the members of the Independent Senators Group at the leaders' table has been one of the greatest honours of my time in the Senate. Over the years, I have had the privilege of negotiating and collaborating with Senators Peter Harder, Marc Gold, Pierre Moreau, Claude Carignan, Larry Smith, Don Plett, Leo Housakos, Scott Tannas, Jane Cordy, Pierre Dalphond and Brian Francis.

Barring exceptional circumstances, all of them respected their word, although, at times, some remained silent during our meetings. No word was spoken. Then one had to read between the lines that there was no agreement and anything was possible in that context. That is how I came to understand the playing field. We were not always of the same opinion, and that is perfectly fine, but in most cases, commitments made were commitments honoured.

I have enjoyed parliamentary sparring, which sometimes leads to scoring goals and, on occasion, scoring against one's own side. I also appreciated the sportsmanship that allows us to recognize good plays by the other teams and learn strategic lessons from them.

During those negotiations among leaders, I came to understand the full importance of the “notwithstanding” clause enshrined in rule 1-3(1) of the *Rules of the Senate*. It is, in my view, one of the most important provisions. It reads as follows:

Except as otherwise provided, any rule or part of a rule may, with leave of the Senate, be suspended without notice.

Who would have imagined that I would quote the *Rules of the Senate* during my farewell speech? Life has its surprises. This rule is fundamental because when used judiciously, it allows us to depart from rules that, if applied rigidly in every circumstance, would not necessarily serve either our interests or the public interest. Respect for the broader interests of the Senate must transcend silos and divisions between caucuses and groups.

In saying this, my purpose is to acknowledge that the negotiations among leaders in which I participated were generally characterized by that sense of responsibility and determination to serve the democratic interest. I retain both admiration and friendship for these experienced colleagues from whom I learned so much.

Let me share a confidence with you: Since the arrival of leaders Moreau and Housakos — great parliamentarians — I have found Senate sparring especially exhilarating, taking on the character of a high-level political figure skating competition. Question Period is increasingly held before a full and, indeed, overflowing chamber. Such is the result of rich parliamentary experience placed at the service of democracy.

Dear colleagues, as you know, this is not the first time I have had unlimited time to speak in this chamber. However, let me reassure you that I will honour the commitment I made in 2022 during our debates on Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts. At the time, I promised never to abuse the new filibuster power that the bill, once enacted, would grant me. Incidentally, I smiled when I learned that the National Assembly of Quebec — happy memories for my friend Pierre Moreau — had been encouraged to translate filibuster as procedural piracy. In France and Belgium, the term more commonly used is systematic obstruction. In all three cases, however, the practitioners are elected parliamentarians. It's some food for thought.

I had the privilege of witnessing a pivotal period in the Senate's history: Its evolution toward greater independence. I supported that evolution, and I continue to believe that it has strengthened our ability to fulfill our constitutional role. Independence, however, is neither the absence of responsibility nor the assertion of unlimited freedom nor is it synonymous with activism. Independence means, above all, the freedom to exercise informed judgment based on facts, the rule of law, the public interest and our constitutional mandate.

Over time, I've come to believe that independence is not defined by one's background before appointment but rather by the manner in which one exercises the office thereafter. Whether a person comes from academia, business, the community sector,

the public service or even political engagement, the essential principle remains the same: Serve the public interest, respect our constitutional mandate and exercise sound judgment in good conscience. Independence is not a label; it is a responsibility that strengthens the Senate when exercised with competence, rigour and openness.

This chamber is one of the finest reflections of Canada's diversity of backgrounds, expertise, languages, origins and life experiences. These diversities are our strength because they compel us to listen to things we might otherwise never have heard. That said, such diversity also imposes a responsibility upon us: the responsibility to resist silos and not turn our differences into boundaries. The greatest advances are born not from uniformity but from our ability to work together despite disagreement. It is the present and the future of our harmonious coexistence that must inspire us.

I have made very good friends here with whom I have shared many enjoyable moments redesigning the Senate, if not the country — and why not the world? They know who they are, and I know that our friendship will endure long beyond our time in this institution.

Before I conclude, I wish to tell you how much I would have liked to be among you when the Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament presents its report on Senate public bills. This right belongs to us indeed. We must exercise it with balance, discernment and relevance so that the Senate continues to add value through this avenue.

That added value is also reflected in the rigorous studies produced by our committees. More and more committees are returning to this work and devoting both time and resources to it. This balanced use of the tools at our disposal benefits both Parliament and the Canadians we serve.

[Translation]

Ultimately, all of this brings us back to what matters most. After 10 years with you, if there's one thought that I'll carry with me, it's this:

I want to conclude by leaving you with the image of a relay race in which we are all taking part. We each hold the baton for only a short while. We have a duty to carry it with integrity and then to pass it on to whoever comes next, and the baton must be in as good condition as it was when we received it. Debates come and go, but democracy endures. People come and go, but institutions endure.

• (1450)

What brings us together here is our desire to serve the common good. If our commitment is to have meaning, then it must bring about change for our country, for our democracy and for those who will inherit both.

I wish you continued success. *Minose.*

[English]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Ae Kyung Woo and Yoon Lee, representing the national Korean Canadian community. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Martin.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

KOREAN HERITAGE MONTH

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): First of all, Senator Saint-Germain, I want to thank you for your service and congratulate you on your retirement.

[English]

Honourable senators, I rise today with deep pride to celebrate October as Korean Heritage Month, marking our third annual observance since this chamber unanimously adopted the motion on June 4, 2024. Thank you for your support, dear colleagues.

On October 5, 2026, we gathered on Parliament Hill for our third annual Korea Day on the Hill. We began the morning with a powerful and moving tradition, raising the *Taegyeukgi* side by side with the Canadian flag. As those banners fluttered in the autumn air, they served as a living testament to the full arc of our shared history.

After a delicious lunch reception in the Senators' Lounge and a stop at the National War Memorial for a wreath laying to honour the Canadian fallen and those who served in Korea, everyone attended the finale of the day: a grand celebration of the National Foundation Day and Armed Forces Day of Korea and Korean Heritage Month in the Sir John A. Macdonald Building on the Hill.

A special thank you to Speaker Raymonde Gagné for being the guest of honour and delivering a beautiful, heartfelt speech.

We remembered the profound sacrifices of the Korean War, where brave Canadians fought shoulder to shoulder with Korean forces, forging an unbreakable bond born of courage and shared humanity.

That blood alliance during the war has blossomed over the decades into a vibrant comprehensive and strategic partnership of today. Our nations are bound together by diplomacy, thriving trade, cultural exchange and an enduring friendship between Canada and the Republic of Korea. Yet, the true heartbeat of this relationship is not just found in treaties or statecraft; it lives and breathes in our people.

From the very first Canadians who set foot on Korean soil in 1888 to the generations of immigrants who arrived with little more than a suitcase and a dream, Korean Canadians have woven themselves deeply into the fabric of our nation. From coast to coast to coast, they have built homes, raised families and strengthened our communities.

Korean Heritage Month is far more than a commemoration. It is a tribute to those who served and sacrificed their lives in Korea, the pioneers and pathfinders who came before us, a joyful celebration of the vibrant Korean-Canadian community of today and a sacred promise to carry this legacy forward for generations to come. Thank you. *Gamsahamnida*.

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 colleagues the Honourable Donna Dasko and the Honourable Brent Cotter.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

AMANDA TODD LEGACY SOCIETY

Hon. Katherine Hay: Senator Saint-Germain, my love to you.

Honourable senators, I'm sorry; my statement today may be triggering and hard. October 10 is World Mental Health Day. This year's focus is "Lived experiences heard: real voices, real change."

On October 10, 2012 — 14 years ago — 15-year-old Amanda Todd died by suicide. Hearing Amanda's lived experience is heart-wrenching, excruciating, criminal, preventable. In Grade 7, an online predator manipulated Amanda into sharing an image. Then he never let her go. He sent it to her classmates. He followed her to every new school — harassment, bullying, sextortion. For years, it found her wherever she went.

In September 2012, Amanda held card after card up on social media. One by one, she told her story. She never said a word out loud, yet it was a real voice asking for help, asking for change.

Five weeks later, on October 10, 2012, Amanda died by suicide. Since that day, Carol Todd — her mom, my friend — has turned profound loss into action. She has spoken across Canada and around the world about online safety, mental health and the importance of youth voices.

Carol's journey has been one of grief, resilience and determination. She has been open about what it means to lose a child to online harm. She uses that experience to reach families, educators and young people facing their own hardest day. She does this work to honour Amanda and to protect other children.

She worked tirelessly to bring the predator to justice. It took her 10 years. This heinous criminal was finally convicted in 2022. I did not know Amanda, but I know her mom, and she has

never wavered. We owe her a debt of gratitude. Her relentless advocating and telling of Amanda's story by launching the Amanda Todd Legacy Society are a tribute to Amanda and a pathway for hope through education and through the work to build a kinder, safer digital community.

In the months ahead, in the other place and in this chamber, we will study Bill C-34, the safe social media act. We must debate it carefully. It will be hard. We will hear hard stories. And let's be clear about what is at stake: our children and our young people and the online world they live in that harms. We have the power to change that. Amanda asked for help 14 years ago. Let's not let her — or countless other young people — down. Let's answer Amanda Todd.

Dear colleagues, thank you. *Chi-meegwetch*.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Kevin A. Ormsby and Kelly Straughan, representing the Canadian Arts Coalition. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Cardozo.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR NIGHT

Hon. Fabian Manning: Honourable senators, in my humble opinion, my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador is an extraordinary and unique place. We are blessed with a rich culture, a proud heritage, an eye-catching landscape and some of the friendliest and most hospitable people you will ever meet.

• (1500)

To give you a taste of what our province has to offer, I'm pleased to announce today on behalf of my Senate colleagues and Members of Parliament from Newfoundland and Labrador that, on Wednesday, October 28, at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, we will, once again, be hosting our Newfoundland and Labrador night, which is fondly referred to as "The Shed Party."

While I may be somewhat biased, we will bring the very best of Newfoundland and Labrador to you through some of our very talented musicians and storytellers, mouth-watering food and plenty of Newfoundland beverages to help wash it down — along with a full array of all things Newfoundland and Labrador.

For those of you who are not aware of what a shed party is, I advise you to refer to Chapter 56 of "Telling Our Story," which I delivered in this chamber on May 15, 2019. Please do not confuse a shed party with a kitchen party. That is another Newfoundland tradition, but there is clearly a difference.

A special treat this year will be the arrival of the mummers on Parliament Hill. The mummers are another long-standing tradition in Newfoundland and Labrador. There may be those among you who are asking yourselves, "What in the name of

God is he talking about? What are the mummers?" Once again, I advise you to refer to Chapter 50 of "Telling Our Story," which I delivered in this chamber on December 12, 2018.

I further advise you not to refer to a spell-checker, because it did not have a clue what I was trying to type in at the time, either.

While the mummers are purely a Christmas tradition in Newfoundland, we will be bringing that Christmas cheer to Parliament Hill in October. That may seem a little bit strange to some, but for those of us who were born and raised in Newfoundland and Labrador, every day is like Christmas.

I would like to advise you that we have some extraordinary door prizes as well, and we will not be asking any skill-testing questions.

Before I close, I want to give a sincere thank you to our ever-increasing number of sponsors, without whose continued support, bringing our shed party to the nation's capital would not be possible.

So, friends, mark your calendars: October 28. Cancel any previous engagements, postpone any meetings that you may have and make your way to the Sir John A. Macdonald Building on Wednesday, October 28, to enjoy all things Newfoundland and Labrador at our shed party, where there are no strangers — only friends that you haven't met.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Chief Doreen Arrowmaker, Chief Adeline Football, Chief Charles Nitsiza, and members of the Tlicho Government of the Northwest Territories. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Anderson.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

THE LATE LLOYD ROBERTSON, O.C.

Hon. Pamela Wallin: Honourable senators, with people who live their lives in the glare of the lights, you will often find a public persona as well as a private one. But on screen or off, Lloyd Robertson always said what he meant with conviction and heart. Lloyd passed away in August at the age of 92.

Lloyd's story is a metaphor for how to do it right. From humble beginnings in Stratford to North America's longest-reigning anchorman, he remained a gentleman. There were no warring factions in the newsroom because Lloyd always employed tact and respect when he disagreed or when someone got it wrong, and believe me, newsrooms are usually much nastier than that. Rather, there was always a gentle guiding hand, because, for all his success, Lloyd was, first and foremost, a mentor and the keeper of all that was good about journalism.

I know this personally. He took an aspiring young reporter under his wing and generously and willingly taught her about television — a pretty tough assignment. In the years since, I have watched him, generation after generation, showing and teaching reporters what he believed our job really was: to inform minds and provide context so that citizens can make wiser choices.

Charles Dickens once wrote, “What is meant by knowledge of the world is simply an acquaintance with the infirmities of man.” In other words, to be truly knowledgeable, we must recognize human frailty. That is exactly how Lloyd saw his work: the art of collecting and telling stories of the human condition. He did so with grace and compassion.

He insisted that the network tell the story of a young cancer victim who was determined to run across this vast country, and Lloyd hosted the first network telethon on September 7, 1980. There have been Terry Fox runs around the world on that day ever since.

Lloyd also changed the rules of the newsroom. When the CBC refused to let him write copy or play an editorial role, he sadly left and went to CTV, which afforded him the right to practise his craft as anchor and chief correspondent. All others since have followed that lead.

To his wife, Nancy, and their four daughters, who were his true touchstones: Know that Lloyd will always be remembered for the lives he touched and changed, the calm comfort he offered in times of crisis and for his decency, honesty and kindness.

Rest in peace, Lloyd.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of President Eva Clayton, Nisga’a Nation, and Chief John Jack, Huu-ay-aht First Nation. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Prosper.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

QUESTION PERIOD

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

SNOW CRAB FISHERY

Hon. Fabian Manning: My question today is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

On September 20, Prime Minister Carney and French President Emmanuel Macron held a meeting in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. It was a great show of unity and a combined effort to expand transatlantic cooperation. This meeting marked the first official visit to the French territory by a Canadian prime minister and the first visit by a French president in over a decade. All that was the good news of the day.

A day or two later, it was reported that French President Macron promised an exploratory snow crab licence to a fishing company in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. The licence involves a plan to harvest up to 1,500 tonnes of snow crab annually over five years along the outer edge of the Grand Banks continental shelf.

Federal Minister of Fisheries Joanne Thompson and Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Tony Wakeham have strongly condemned this unilateral announcement, asserting that the French lack the authority to grant access to resources off Canada’s continental shelf.

Leader, the issuance of this licence will prove to be detrimental to the crab fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador. Can you tell this chamber what actions the federal government is taking to ensure that this promise by President Macron will never become a reality?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, Senator Manning. It is a very important one.

I must assure you that the Government of Canada is always committed to defending the interests of the harvesters, families and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, who count on the snow crab fishery.

You are probably well aware that any discussion between Canada and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon concerning the fishery would go through official channels that you are probably very familiar with.

At this time, I can assure you that no such talks have taken place. I know for sure that Canada has been in touch with French officials and that no such permit has been issued by the French authorities. As far as the government is concerned, we will take into account, first and foremost, the interests of harvesters and fisheries here in Canada.

• (1510)

Senator Manning: Thank you, leader. Will you be able to inform us if these talks begin? Maybe we can ask the minister to inform us if the request is made from the French government to the Canadian government. At least then we can be in a position to prepare ourselves for that response if it does come.

Senator Moreau: Absolutely, senator. I underline once again that the first interest of the Canadian government is to protect our fishery community and all the harvesters and families who make a living from Canadian fisheries.

Again, there is no discussion between Canada and the French authorities concerning any change in that matter.

FINANCE

ALCOHOL EXCISE TAX

Hon. Jim Quinn: Honourable senators, my question, too, is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Why is the government continuing to impose an automatic escalator tax tied to inflation on wine, beer and liquor products when all other taxes require parliamentary approval? I note that the government used its discretion to limit the increase to 2% until 2028. Given the impact of American tariffs on the manufacturing of aluminum and the ban on selling alcohol to the United States, does this current escalator tax make sense? In our current fiscal environment, this tax has a direct impact on affordability for Canadians and the challenges already facing our distillers, brewers and vintners. Shouldn't all tax increases be subject to scrutiny by parliamentarians?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. Again, Senator Quinn, the government is well aware of the importance of ensuring affordability and all measures that should be taken to ensure Canadian businesses — small, big and family businesses — are protected from inflation.

As a matter of fact, the figures concerning inflation are quite good. Inflation has been under the target range of the Bank of Canada for more than one year now because of the measures that have been put in place by the government.

Senator Quinn: I was speaking about taxes being subject to the scrutiny of parliamentarians.

TRANSPORT

CAMPOBELLO ISLAND

Hon. Jim Quinn: My second question is to the government leader. Last week, a bonded vehicle going from mainland New Brunswick to Campobello Island was stopped and turned back by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, forcing it to take a ferry, which will stop running in a week. That ferry is a seasonal operation and the lifeline for the 780 Canadians who inhabit Campobello Island. Otherwise, they must go through the United States to get to and from New Brunswick. We have been speaking with the Minister of Transport's office —

The Hon. the Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt, senator, but time has expired.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I think you will want to raise that question with the Minister of Transport. I will certainly bring your question, even though it's not finished yet, to him. I will be available after Question Period if you want to bring me more information about this.

You also previously raised the question of inflation. The fact is that inflation is under control so far here in Canada, and we are very proud of that.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

CONFLICT IN GAZA STRIP

Hon. Farah Mohamed: Senator Moreau, Canada has repeatedly called for the protection of medical personnel in Gaza, yet the World Health Organization, or WHO, reports that more than 1,700 health care workers have been killed since October 2023, while Médecins Sans Frontières reports that more than 95 Palestinian health care workers remain detained without charge or trial by Israeli forces.

In July, the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry called for the immediate release of Palestinian medical personnel, whom it says are being arbitrarily detained. Has the Government of Canada specifically called for the immediate release of Palestinian health care workers being held without charge or trial, including Dr. Abu Safiya, a pediatrician and hospital director detained since December 2024?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, Senator Mohamed. I cannot comment specifically on the case concerning Dr. Abu Safiya, but I can assure you that the government has officially called on all parties, including Israel, to comply with the international law protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure and to facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access.

The government expects all detainees to be treated humanely, afforded due process and provided with necessary medical care in accordance with international law.

Senator Mohamed: Thank you for that, Senator Moreau, but the fact remains that 95 Palestinian health care workers still remain detained.

On July 19, Canada joined the U.K., the EU and other partners in calling on Israel to address the extensive use of administrative detention without formal charge and to uphold its obligations under international law. Specifically, given that the calls have been made, will the government now publicly call for the immediate release of health care workers being held without charge or trial?

Senator Moreau: I can tell you, senator, that I have been informed that the government, on a regular basis, has raised concerns with Israeli authorities, including regarding damage to international assistance projects and to the specific case that you are referring to.

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Senator Moreau, I want to share a heartfelt plea from Jean-Stéphane Bourque, a cabinetmaker in Beauce. Not only is he facing 50% tariffs and countertariffs, he's losing his temporary workers, because their requests for

extensions are either being denied or delayed by Employment and Social Development Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. He had this to say:

Artificial intelligence keeps systematically turning them down . . . and then they're told that they'll get an answer in seven or eight months, unless they move back home before then We have employees in tears and families being broken up.

Since they no longer have a work permit or money, they resign themselves to returning to their country.

These workers are not stealing jobs from anyone. The unemployment rate in Beauce is 2.9%.

What is the government waiting for to speed up decision-making at Employment and Social Development Canada?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Miville-Dechéne, I want to make it clear right off the bat that I checked and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada does not use artificial intelligence to make decisions on applications for temporary foreign workers. It is very important to make that clear. AI may be used, but not for decision-making purposes. Decisions are made by living breathing human beings.

Quebec and Canada have agreed to reduce the number of temporary foreign workers, but, as you know, the federal government is aware that, in some cases, particularly in rural areas such as Beauce, exceptions may have to be made for similar situations. I do not have any specific information about the company that you mentioned, but, if the company is eligible, it may be able to get an exemption to keep its temporary workers. In your question, there are some details that do not fit —

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

Senator Miville-Dechéne: And yet, that is what this entrepreneur is going through. I spoke to him at length. It's hard to reconcile this kind of bureaucratic treatment with the Carney government's "build Canada strong" slogan.

Beauce is a powerhouse of entrepreneurship in Quebec. I have a simple solution. Why doesn't Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada extend the work permits for a few months until Employment and Social Development Canada comes up with the necessary documents? Clearly, this is a problem, it's two —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator Miville-Dechéne.

Senator Moreau: I'll give you the best possible answer. If the company you mentioned — I don't have that information — is entitled to a rural extension measure, it can apply for one. The measure is designed to offset essential worker shortages in key sectors, which seems to fit the case you're describing. I'd be inclined to point the company in that direction.

[Senator Miville-Dechéne]

Quebec Selection Certificate holders can also apply to have their work permits extended while they wait for permanent residency. So, there are ways —

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

[English]

PRIVY COUNCIL

CANADIAN CLOUD INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Colin Deacon: Senator Moreau, Canada stores sensitive government data, from tax and health records to defence files. These data are commonly stored in foreign-owned infrastructure and, even when located in Canada, remain subject to another nation's laws. This is a quiet but serious vulnerability. A geopolitical disruption or unilateral decision could, overnight, cut off Canadians from critical services — a digital black swan that no Canadian authority could prevent or reverse.

Recent events show that we can no longer rely on foreign assurances about access to or control over our data. Does the government require its data to be backed up and recoverable on sovereign Canadian cloud infrastructure? If not, what plans does the government have to strengthen Canada's domestic cloud-based critical infrastructure serving federal departments and agencies as well as federally regulated sectors like banking?

• (1520)

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): There are two questions there. I thank you.

The government is expanding the AI Compute Access Fund by \$700 million so Canadian start-ups and smaller businesses can afford the computing power needed to turn their ideas into products. Through the Canadian Tech Growth Fund, the government is also investing \$500 million in growth capital to help promising Canadian technology companies compete, scale globally and remain anchored here. That's the answer to your first question.

To your second question, on your security concerns, the government uses approved public and private cloud environments, including a highly sovereign private cloud environment hosted in a Canadian data centre and managed by Shared Services Canada for sensitive workloads.

Senator C. Deacon: Thank you. There is an awful lot of good news in that. I am hoping we can bring the Competition Bureau in to help the department in running these funds to make sure they, in fact, are inclusive of new providers and high-growth companies in Canada. Federal programs are often designed in a way that really serves the biggest companies that can afford the biggest paperwork. I know that's what the Prime Minister wants to cut through. I hope that is the case. Thank you.

Senator Moreau: I am going to bring your suggestion to the attention of Minister Solomon. I know that you have a very good relationship with the minister himself, so maybe both of us could underline that suggestion to the minister.

JUSTICE

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE REVIEW COMMISSION

Hon. Denise Batters: In 2024, your government pushed hard for the Senate and our legal committee to pass Bill C-40 without any amendments because it was considered urgent to establish the Miscarriage of Justice Review Commission. The Minister of Justice then said that he anticipated it would take about a year to set up the commission. In fact, almost two years later, the commissioners have not even been appointed. Meanwhile, in the last year, Justice Minister Fraser ordered new appeals and trials for at least three separate cases where he suspects a miscarriage of justice occurred. Senator Moreau, it has been nearly two years. Why doesn't your government have the arm's-length Miscarriage of Justice Review Commission up and running yet so that the Minister of Justice and his officials don't have to handle each wrongful conviction case piecemeal?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Well, it is a question that is taken seriously by the government. At this time, I will raise the question with the Minister of Justice. I was talking to him as recently as yesterday. Unfortunately, I did not have the question at that time, or I would have raised it with him.

I understand your preoccupation, and thank you for raising the question.

Senator Batters: Senator Moreau, maybe you could add this to it. I tried to ensure the ongoing independence of the Miscarriage of Justice Review Commission with my amendment, supported by experts at our Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, but, once again, there was no time for thoughtful, reasoned amendments to make the bill better. As has now become commonplace, the Liberal government pushed the Senate and our committee to basically rubber-stamp the bill and do it quickly. Why did your government push through this flawed bill only to now delay justice for two years and counting for wrongfully convicted people and victims?

Senator Moreau: I disagree with some of your premises, Senator Batters. Whenever there is a time allocation motion here, it is not a motion of the government; it becomes, at the end of the day, a motion of the Senate. We are not ramming things through the Senate. We are discussing. We are dealing with the leaders at leaders' meetings. Once we table a motion, the Senate is the master of its own moves. So whenever there is time allocation or whenever there is time allocated to a specific question, it is a matter that deals with the Senate's authority, not the government's.

CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

INDIGENOUS CONSULTATION

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: Senator Moreau, this is from the southern Chiefs of Manitoba. First Nations have treaty, Aboriginal, constitutional and inherent rights that must be respected along with the Crown's duty to consult and the principle of the honour of the Crown. As the government advances Bill C-39, it is important that the definition and application of public interest do not result in First Nations rights and meaningful consultation receiving less certainty, clarity or protection than the development interests the legislation is intended to advance. If the government can establish a clear and predictable one-project, one-review, one-year process to provide certainty for major projects and investors, why can it not provide the same certainty, clarity and predictability for First Nations rights and the Crown's duty to consult?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for that important question, Senator McCallum. I rose many times in this chamber to underline the fact that the government is taking very seriously its constitutional duty to consult with Indigenous communities. No matter the bill, be it Bill C-39 or any other matters that concern Indigenous communities, the government's intention is to work in partnership with Indigenous People. As a matter of fact, in the major projects file, the government not only wants to talk and have discussions and consultation with First Nations, but it wants First Nations to be partners in those projects. That's the reason we had the discussion, for instance, on pipelines with the Government of Alberta to offer 10% ownership for the Indigenous community. We want to work hand in hand with Indigenous Peoples, no matter the question, either a bill or a major project —

[Translation]

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

[English]

Senator McCallum: Bill C-39 does not address the continued call by First Nations for shared decision-making powers and authority. Recalling that the Government of Canada recognizes that all relationships with First Nations Peoples need to be based on the recognition and implementation of their right to self-determination, including the inherent right of self-government, does the Government of Canada plan to introduce new funding dollars for First Nations?

Senator Moreau: You are very well aware, Senator McCallum, that I cannot give an answer to what the future funding from the government will be. It is the right day to ask that question because, in a few minutes, we will have Committee of the Whole with three ministers present in this chamber concerning Bill C-39, so you will have time to ask the question to the ministers then. Thank you very much for your concern.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Hon. Daryl Fridhandler: Media reports over this past summer revealed an internal directive provided to journalists at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, or CBC, regarding language surrounding the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. In the face of public outcry, CBC quickly reversed the specific directive that instructed journalists to avoid the use of the term “terrorist attack” and, instead, use the term “hijacking.” Given that the CBC receives more than a billion dollars annually in public funding, does the government believe Canadians have the right to know all editorial and language directives provided to journalists at their public broadcaster, and will it legislate for full public disclosure of those internal guidelines?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, Senator Fridhandler, and thank you for clarifying the fact that CBC did end up describing 9/11 as terrorism. Canadians know that 9/11 was the deadliest terrorist attack in history and a horrific memory for many Canadians, notably those who lost loved ones.

The Government of Canada unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms. There is no cause for events or ideology that justify the deliberate targeting of civilians. It would be inappropriate for parliamentarians or the government to get involved in the editorial line of the news agency. CBC/Radio-Canada holds high standards of journalistic integrity, and it is my understanding that CBC has a long-standing policy to avoid labelling specific acts as terrorism without attribution and that this has become a general journalistic practice to ensure journalistic neutrality when reporting on international acts of violence.

Senator Fridhandler: I reluctantly disagree. If the government will not prescribe the publication of these guidelines, what mechanism exists for Canadians to understand internal editorial directives at a publicly funded institution operating on their behalf? Senator Moreau, I see this just as essential as the labelling requirements on the food we consume. Essentially, how are we to know what is in the news we consume?

Senator Moreau: If I’m not mistaken, your colleague Senator Miville-Dechéne worked for Radio-Canada. Maybe she can guide you on what is going on inside Radio-Canada. As far as CBC is concerned, as I mentioned, I don’t think it would be wise for political involvement into the editorial standards of CBC/Radio-Canada.

• (1530)

JUSTICE

MONEY LAUNDERING

Hon. Colin Deacon: Senator Moreau, in 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that key provisions in the Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) and Terrorist Financing Act, or PCMLTFA, could not be constitutionally applied to lawyers, leaving provincial law

societies to police their professions. Since then, financing and leasing entities, title insurers, private bank machine operators and others must now report to FINTRAC. Lawyers who handle trust accounts, real estate closings and corporate structures still file no suspicious transaction reports.

The Financial Action Task Force report released last week called out this significant gap and noted that law societies had not assessed their sector’s risks, yet other jurisdictions managed this risk while respecting solicitor-client privilege.

Will the government commit to ensuring that lawyers face stringent reporting and oversight as expected of existing PCMLTFA reporting entities?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I will take your question under advisement and bring it to the Minister of Justice. I don’t know if he has committed himself to intervene with bar associations or with lawyers’ associations, but I will get back to you with an answer.

Senator C. Deacon: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

Can you also ask him to provide the rationale as to why the federal government would not require the legal profession to provide evidence that their self-policing is rigorous and has teeth? Additionally, why would the federal government not expect transparent reporting, such as how many lawyers the Law Society has investigated, disciplined or referred to police for money-laundering-related conduct last year?

Senator Moreau: I don’t want to commit myself too far — I’m a member of the Barreau du Québec and the Quebec bar — but my understanding is that all authority belongs to our associations and to the provinces. I’m not sure that it’s possible for the federal government to intervene in these matters, but perhaps I’m talking over my head here, and I don’t want to make that a habit, so I’ll get back to you with a more precise answer.

PUBLIC SAFETY

ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, this week, Iranian advocates and survivors are once again brought to Parliament Hill and are demanding action that this government promised but has never delivered. Iranian Canadians who fled IRGC atrocities in Iran still endure harassment, threats and surveillance right here on Canadian soil. It took the Liberal government years of begging to finally list the IRGC as a terrorist entity. Today, we see the same shameful action on enforcement. Out of hundreds of known agents currently in Canada, only one single deportation of an IRGC agent has been confirmed.

Why does your government continue to allow IRGC operatives to use Canada as a safe haven in order to launder money? Canada is not a Super 8 hotel.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): No, and I agree with you. Canada is not a haven for terrorists, terrorist groups or for anybody who wants to harm or interfere with the security of any Canadian, may they be originally from Iran, but that's not the case. The government takes very seriously its commitment to ensuring that our borders are safe and that proper investigations are made. Whenever criminal activity or something illegal has been committed, those cases are treated as a priority for the government.

That being said, we live in a society that obeys the rule of law. We have due process, and those processes are respected by the government, but we are acting on the safety of all Canadians.

Senator Housakos: Government leader, you must admit that there has been a systemic failure on the part of this government to recognize foreign interference. Look how long it took this legislation to pass the House and the Senate. An IRGC terrorist designation without enforcement and a foreign registry without compliance — the government is basically not fulfilling its obligations in terms of foreign interference and transnational repression here on Canadian soil.

Very simply, why isn't the government taking IRGC members who are living in Canada seriously and booting them out of this country once and for all?

Senator Moreau: As you're well aware, Senator Housakos, the government is moving forward with the foreign influence transparency registry. This registry is led by Commissioner Anton Boegman, whom we received in this chamber. The government has full confidence in the RCMP and CSIS, which play a crucial role in protecting the safety, security and prosperity of Canadians and Canada amid an increasingly complex national security threat environment.

NATIONAL REVENUE

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Government leader, you understand that I worked for years on overseas tax evasion and money laundering, and I have constantly been disappointed with the Canada Revenue Agency's lack of action and, indeed, incompetence on this file. The good news is the Prime Minister went outside the government and has appointed a highly qualified leader of the CRA, Heather Evans.

I'm wondering if you can make inquiries as to what new initiatives they're taking to address these problems. I'm also wondering if they're incorporating new technology, artificial intelligence and others, and if you could find out and report back.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): I would gladly do so, senator.

Thank you for providing me with all the documentation you've tabled lately with questions concerning the CRA. We are working on that file. Again, I will come back with answers as soon as I can. I will raise the question with the new commissioner and I'll get back to you.

I'm not aware if there is new technology, but I know the question is a very good one, and I'll bring you an answer on this as well.

Senator Downe: I look forward to that. As you know, advances in artificial intelligence are very helpful, particularly with money laundering, but also tracking overseas tax evasion. We all understand that, with the priorities of Prime Minister Carney, every dollar is needed, and every dollar that's lost to overseas tax evasion and/or crime with money laundering is a cost to Canadian society. I'm interested in what the CRA is doing, and I salute the new leadership there. I'm very optimistic about what they can do over the next months and years.

Senator Moreau: Thank you for your kind remarks, senator. I will get back to you. I can assure you that I won't miss the opportunity to get back to you as soon as I can.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 4-12(3), I would like to inform the Senate that as we proceed with Government Business, the Senate will address the items in the following order: Motion No. 91, followed by all remaining items in the order that they appear on the Order Paper.

[Translation]

THE SENATE

MOTION TO STRIKE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO STUDY SUBJECT MATTER OF BILL C-39 ADOPTED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate), pursuant to notice of October 1, 2026, moved:

That:

1. a Special Senate Committee be appointed to examine the subject matter of Bill C-39, An Act respecting certain measures to strengthen the economy, in advance of the said bill coming before the Senate;

2. if and when the bill is received and adopted at second reading, it be deemed referred to this special committee, with rule 12-10(2) being suspended in relation thereto;
3. the committee be composed of fifteen members, including three senators from the Opposition, six senators from the Independent Senators Group, three senators from the Progressive Senate Group and three senators from the Canadian Senators Group;
4. the chair of the committee be from the Opposition;
5. notwithstanding any provision of the Rules or usual practice, the committee be authorized to elect three deputy chairs, one from the Independent Senators Group, one from the Progressive Senate Group and one from the Canadian Senators Group, and if it does so:
 - (a) the reference to the deputy chair in rule 12-18(2)(c)(ii) be understood as referring to all deputy chairs of the committee acting together; and
 - (b) any reference to the deputy chair of a committee in any policy or guideline be understood as referring to all deputy chairs acting together, until the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration decides otherwise;
6. the quorum of the committee be four members;
7. the fifteen members of the committee be named by means of a notice signed by their respective leader or facilitator, or their respective designates, and filed with the Clerk of the Senate no later than 5 p.m. on October 7, 2026, failing which the leader or facilitator, the deputy leader or facilitator and the whip or liaison, if appropriate, of any party or group identified in paragraph 3 that has not filed the name of a senator with the Clerk of the Senate shall be deemed to be named to the committee, with the names of the senators named as members being recorded in the *Journals of the Senate*;
8. the committee's normal meeting time be on Mondays, and that the committee have the power to meet outside its regular time slot, including during sittings and adjournments of the Senate, with rules 12-18(1) and 12-18(2) being suspended in relation thereto;
9. the committee have the power to:
 - (a) report from time to time;
 - (b) send for persons, papers and records;
 - (c) publish such papers and evidence as may be ordered by the committee; and

- (d) appoint a member of the Government Representative's Office as a non-voting member to its Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, if it has such a subcommittee, even if that senator is not a member of the committee, with rule 12-12(1) being suspended in relation thereto;
10. notwithstanding rule 5-6(1)(e), one day's notice be required for any motion to adopt a report of this committee; and
11. following the presentation of its final report on Bill C-39, An Act respecting certain measures to strengthen the economy, or of a report recommending that the Senate not proceed further with the said bill, the committee expire.

She said: Honourable senators, I move the motion.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

[English]

COMMISSIONER FOR MODERN TREATY IMPLEMENTATION BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE

Hon. David M. Arnot moved second reading of Bill C-10, An Act respecting the Commissioner for Modern Treaty Implementation.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise as the Senate sponsor of Bill C-10, the commissioner for modern treaty implementation act. I support this bill because Canada needs a sustained, independent assessment of whether its federal institutions are honouring the obligations they have undertaken in modern treaties.

The House of Commons passed this bill on September 21, and it was received for first reading in this chamber on September 28. Bill C-10 would create an independent agent of Parliament, supported by a dedicated office, to review and audit federal implementation of modern treaties and report findings and recommendations to Parliament. Its immediate purpose is institutional accountability. To understand the importance of that purpose, however, we need to understand the place of treaties that have been made in Canada.

I come to this discussion as a senator, a former judge, a former treaty commissioner and a student of our constitutional and human rights traditions. Much of my professional life has been spent trying to understand what treaties mean and what it means to honour them. Treaties are complex, but when I spoke to Canadians about treaties during my tenure as a treaty commissioner, despite the complexity of treaties, there was a

simple question that always came up. The question was, "Is there hope?" People wanted to know whether there was hope for a better relationship and a better partnership between Canada and Indigenous Peoples. They wanted to know whether communities could achieve greater self-sufficiency and share in this country's prosperity, peace and opportunities.

• (1540)

My answer was that there is hope and that an important source of that hope lies in the treaty relationship itself.

Today, I want to draw an arrow from historical treaty making to modern treaties and from those treaties to the responsibility before this chamber. That arrow connects the promises that helped shape Canada with the institutions we need to honour those promises today. It also reminds us that treaty making remains part of our national life.

Treaty making did not begin with Confederation. Indigenous Nations had their own laws, systems of governance, diplomatic practices and traditions of alliance building long before Europeans arrived in Canada. They knew how to establish relationships with other peoples, negotiate reciprocal commitments and maintain those relationships over time.

Europeans brought their own diplomatic traditions. The treaties that followed arose from the meeting of peoples with different languages, interests and understandings.

At its simplest, a treaty is an agreement between peoples to undertake commitments to one another. In the Canadian context, treaties between Indigenous Peoples and the Crown helped establish how peoples would live together, how lands and resources would be used, and what each party could expect from the other. Their legal significance reaches beyond that of an ordinary contract. They create solemn obligations and enduring relationships.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 is an important part of that history. It was issued by King George III and recognized that Indigenous lands within its framework could not simply be occupied or acquired by private purchasers. This was causing a lot of trouble in the New England states. The king didn't want to have a free-standing army at his beck and call in British North America. So, this document established a process under which the Crown, through a public meeting with the Indigenous Peoples concerned, could acquire lands they were willing to make available. It's a Magna Carta for Indigenous Peoples because it recognized Indigenous Peoples as nations.

Indigenous rights and Indigenous diplomacy already existed; the proclamation acknowledged interests that the Crown was bound to respect.

As Canada developed, treaty making became central to its expansion. After Confederation and the transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada in 1870, which Canada bought for £300,000, the new Dominion sought to, first, secure its position across an immense territory; second, establish sovereignty against the threat of American expansionism; and, third, enable settlement and development, primarily to avoid conflict.

Between 1871 and 1921, the Crown negotiated the 11 numbered treaties in Canada. Those agreements helped provide the foundations for settlement, transportation and economic development across much of the West and the North. Treaties were a condition precedent to implementing Sir John A. Macdonald's national policy in 1873. The country's development depended on relationships with peoples who already occupied and governed these lands. The commitments made to them were part of the arrangements through which Canada took shape. They remain part of the country we have inherited.

First Nations leaders sought means to sustain their communities. That was the purpose of treaty making from a First Nations perspective: to protect access to livelihoods and to secure opportunities for their children. First Nations wanted education for their children and the tools to integrate into the new economy.

The treaties brought benefits to the newcomers as well as obligations to the Crown. Communities, farms, businesses and public institutions grew in treaty territories, and later generations inherited those benefits.

Treaties are a bridge to the future. In 1998, the Government of Canada and the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations agreed to 16 common principles that underlie the treaty relationship. They include mutual respect, mutual benefit and sovereignty of treaty. The treaty-making process contains within it the treaty principle of maintaining the honour of the Crown and the honour of treaty First Nations in maintaining the treaty relationship. Equally important was the conduct and behaviour of the parties to honour and respect the commitments made in treaties.

The relationship between the treaty First Nations and the Crown is one in which the parties have both benefits and responsibilities with respect to one another. The treaties created mutual obligations that were to be respected by the parties. To put this another way, treaties establish the requirement for political and economic certainty. These principles clarified then, as they state now, that we are all treaty people in this country.

When I said that we are all treaty people, I meant that the treaty relationship concerns the wider society as well as the Indigenous signatories. The rights held by particular treaty peoples are distinct. The responsibility to understand why the Crown must honour its commitments is shared by all Canadians. We should, therefore, be careful when treaty obligations are described as special favours, discretionary assistance or matters at the margins of public policy. The Crown made commitments in the course of building this country, and the numbered treaties were, in fact, the building blocks of Western and Northern Canada.

The fact that the benefits of an agreement have become familiar to one party does not make its obligations to the other party less important. Consider Alberta and Saskatchewan. When these provinces were created in 1905, major treaty relationships were already in place. Provincial boundaries did not create those relationships, and the establishment of provincial governments did not erase the Crown's commitments. Every square metre of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta is covered by treaty.

That history has a direct bearing on any discussion about rights and the foundation of our country and on issues that are being discussed today, including modern treaties. The treaties and the rights of Indigenous Peoples cannot simply be set aside. Treaty rights are part of the constitutional reality that must be addressed. Their significance does not depend on their popularity in a referendum.

The promise of the enduring relationship is expressed in language now familiar to many Canadians. The numbered treaties were meant to last "... as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow." When treaty commissioner Alexander Morris chose those words, he did so very much on purpose. He was acknowledging the cultures and understandings of the Indigenous Peoples with whom he was negotiating. He signified that those treaties and the relationships would last, in effect, in perpetuity. They weren't quick land sale transactions. Such words conveyed a relationship intended to extend well beyond the negotiators and their own lifetimes. Children born and unborn were part of the promise. The Crown's commitments were meant to survive the changes of office-holders and governments.

The honour of the Crown has long guided my thinking about the treaty relationship. It is a constitutional principle with legal consequences, and it speaks to fairness, integrity and good faith in the Crown's dealings with Indigenous Peoples. The duties it gives rise to depend on the circumstances, but its demand in treaty implementation is real: The Crown must attend diligently to the promises it has made.

Let me talk about the distance between the promise and the practice. Honourable senators, we must also acknowledge, honestly and without defensiveness, that the treaty relationship too often failed to find its rightful place in the Canadian state. Paternalistic and assimilationist policies must not be allowed to displace the relationship to which Indigenous leaders had agreed.

• (1550)

With respect to understanding and a shared future, treaties can be blueprints for harmony and frameworks for answering how peoples live together, share opportunities and sustain relationships. The commitments have to be understood in their own historical and legal contexts, but the need for a respectful partnership remains a pressing concern.

The treaty relationship is one in which the parties expect to resolve differences through mutual discussion and decision. That is a part of the agreement that was made in 1998 by Canada and the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations.

A country that benefits from treaty relationships must also accept responsibility for sustaining them and find ways of measuring their successes and weaknesses. Why? Because the treaty relationship is part of the bedrock of the Constitution.

With respect to constitutional recognition and modern treaties, treaties cannot be treated as ordinary policy commitments that a government may disregard when other priorities arise. Section 35 of the Constitution also expressly includes rights that

exist through land claims agreements or may be acquired through such other agreements. Our Constitution, therefore, recognizes treaty making as an ongoing means of establishing rights and relationships. It protects the rights arising from modern treaties as well as those from historical treaties.

The modern treaty era developed in the early 1970s. In 1973, the Supreme Court's decision in the *Calder* case recognized that Aboriginal title could exist as a legal right independent of a Crown grant. That decision helped prompt a federal policy for negotiating outstanding comprehensive land claims. The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, signed in 1975, is recognized as Canada's first modern treaty.

Modern treaties have since established detailed arrangements with Indigenous Peoples across the country. They can address land ownership, harvesting rights, resource management, financial arrangements, governance and self-government agreements. Their negotiated institutions can give practical form both to self-determination and to relationships within Canada's constitutional framework.

Modern agreements are generally more detailed, negotiated with legal and technical assistance and supported by specific implementation and dispute-resolution arrangements. Their carefully negotiated texts carry particular weight in interpretation. They are agreements in their own right, with their own partners and objectives.

With respect to moving from treaty promises to implementation, this brings us to Bill C-10. The bill is directed at the federal implementation of modern treaties. It does not create a commissioner for historical treaties, and we should be clear about the scope of this new commission.

The history I have outlined explains why purpose matters. It shows why a promise that helped establish an enduring relationship must be carried into the machinery of government.

Modern treaties are living instruments of governance and self-determination. Their value is tested when a community exercises a right, when a negotiated institution makes a decision and when federal institutions must work together in concert to fulfill their commitments. A treaty partner must live with the government's overall performance, even when responsibility is divided among departments and agencies.

There is, in my view, a compelling case for improving that performance. As a Treaty Commissioner, I worked to help parties understand one another and develop common understandings.

The commissioner proposed in Bill C-10 would have a different mandate: principally, to make independent reviews, undertake performance auditing and perform parliamentary reporting on federal implementation. That work can help us see whether Canada is living up to its modern treaty promises.

With respect to the implementation gap, Indigenous modern treaty partners have sought independent oversight of federal implementation for more than two decades.

The 2023 Collaborative Modern Treaty Implementation Policy, developed by the Government of Canada in concert with modern treaty partners, recognized the need for an independent, credible, effective and sustainable mechanism to hold the federal government accountable to Parliament. Bill C-10 is a legislative response to that commitment. Modern treaty nations have made clear that this is a practical, day-to-day matter of governance, economic opportunity and community well-being. This work is long overdue.

The bill was shaped through co-development with Indigenous modern treaty partners and the federal government. Their first-hand knowledge of implementation informed the design that we see in this bill. That history matters. It also does not relieve this chamber of its duty to scrutinize the text.

It means that we should listen closely to the people whose agreements are at issue and take care before altering a design the federal government and the modern treaty partners have co-developed.

As senators, we must approach the bill with both openness and rigour. We should ask whether it will improve outcomes or chiefly improve visibility; whether its mechanisms are sufficient; how they will work in practice; and how they will be experienced by the nations whose treaties Canada is bound to honour.

The evidence in the House of Commons revealed substantial agreement that implementation problems are very real and need a practical solution.

Bill C-10 would establish a commissioner for modern treaty implementation and an office to support the commissioner. The commissioner would be an independent agent of Parliament, similar to the institutional role of the Auditor General or the Privacy Commissioner. That independence is essential to ensure that oversight is free from political direction and findings are impartial, credible and transparent. Each of those offices has its own statutory mandate and powers.

Under this bill, the commissioner would assess the activities of the federal government institutions relating to modern treaties. The statutory definition covers section 35 treaties entered into by the federal Crown and Indigenous Peoples that came into force after 1974 and are, therefore, modern treaties.

The bill also includes related implementation agreements, including associated self-government agreements, within its implementation mandate.

The commissioner's mandate has three linked objectives: first, to assess whether federal activities strengthen relationships with Indigenous modern treaty partners; second, to fulfill Canada's treaty obligations and objectives, interpreted broadly and purposively; and third, to uphold the honour of the Crown through timely and effective implementation.

These are the bill's stated standards for assessment, not a new tribunal's power to decide treaty disputes among treaty parties.

The commissioner could initiate reviews and performance audits of federal activities, including matters referred by a minister or an Indigenous modern treaty partner. The commissioner would set priorities and methods independently. For a review, the commissioner must engage relevant treaty partners when determining its terms, procedures and methodology. Performance audits must follow generally accepted auditing standards.

The information power is substantial. Data gathering is essential to measurement. The commissioner would be entitled to relevant information from federal institutions and could require information, reports and explanations considered necessary for the mandate. Security and confidentiality rules govern its use.

That power can help reveal why an obligation has stalled across several departments. It has a power to obtain and examine information; it is not a power to order a department to implement a recommendation.

Why does the status of an independent agent of Parliament matter?

• (1600)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Pursuant to the order of October 1, 2026, I leave the chair for the Senate to resolve into a Committee of the Whole on the subject matter of Bill C-39, An Act respecting certain measures to strengthen the economy.

As mentioned last week, I want to remind senators that the ministers are here to answer questions on the subject matter of the bill and to remain within that scope.

The Honourable Senator Cormier will chair the committee.

BUILDING CANADA STRONG BILL

CONSIDERATION OF SUBJECT IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

On the Order:

The Senate in Committee of the Whole in order to receive the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy; the Honourable Steven MacKinnon, P.C., M.P., Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons; and the Honourable Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P., Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario; accompanied by at most one official each, to examine the subject matter of Bill C-39, An Act respecting certain measures to strengthen the economy.

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

The Chair: Honourable senators, the Senate is resolved into a Committee of the Whole in order to study the subject matter of Bill C-39, An Act respecting certain measures to strengthen the economy.

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

The committee will receive the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy; the Honourable Steven MacKinnon, P.C., M.P., Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons; and the Honourable Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P., Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario.

I would ask senators to please be clear on which minister their question is addressed to.

I would now invite the ministers to enter, accompanied by their officials.

(Pursuant to the order of the Senate, the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, the Honourable Steven MacKinnon, the Honourable Patty Hajdu and their officials were escorted to seats in the Senate Chamber.)

The Chair: Ministers, on behalf of all senators, welcome to the Senate.

As I have informed my colleagues, the question-and-answer period will be divided into 10-minute blocks. These blocks will be shared between two or three senators and will include time for your responses.

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

[Translation]

Hon. Steven MacKinnon, P.C., M.P., Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon.

It's a privilege to appear before this Senate Committee of the Whole today to speak further to Bill C-39, the building Canada strong act.

I was pleased to introduce the bill on September 21, and I'm very happy to have the opportunity to discuss it further with you today.

[English]

Honourable senators, there is no question that the world around us is changing. Global trade is being reshaped. Businesses are dealing with more uncertainty. Supply chains are under pressure. Countries are competing for investment, talent and market access.

Canada is responding. We are diversifying our trade, strengthening our economy at home and building new commercial relationships around the world.

We have what the world wants: an educated workforce, vast natural resources and access to markets around the globe. But that's not enough.

We must turn those advantages into real opportunities for people and businesses in our communities. For businesses to do that, they need clear rules, predictable decisions and reliable ways to get their products to customers. That is what Bill C-39 is all about.

Canada's transportation system is the backbone of our economy. Our roads, railways, ports, airports and warehouses have to work together to move goods efficiently.

Bill C-39 would strengthen our trade corridors by allowing important routes and geographic areas to be designated as national trade corridors with clear performance goals.

A national trade corridors council would help identify bottlenecks and improve coordination across the system. The objective is simple: fewer delays, greater reliability and lower costs. This is particularly important as we diversify our trade.

If Canada is going to expand exports, we need the infrastructure and systems to get Canadian products to new markets quickly and reliably. Our ports are a critical part of that effort.

Approximately 80% of Canada's trade by volume with countries other than the United States moves by sea. Bill C-39 would give port authorities greater flexibility to respond to changing trade opportunities while strengthening accountability and oversight and encouraging greater collaboration along trade corridors.

[Translation]

Let me be clear: These measures will not privatize Canada's ports. Our Canadian port authorities are independent, self-funded entities responsible for managing port lands on behalf of the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada retains ownership of port lands.

The changes in Bill C-39 would give port authorities the tools and flexibility they need to contribute to the Canadian economy.

The measures in the bill will also facilitate investment and project delivery by reducing unnecessary regulatory duplication. The “one project, one review” approach would help to better coordinate federal processes, clarify timelines and reduce the administrative burden while maintaining Canada’s rigorous safety and environmental standards.

[English]

We also need to build projects faster. The Major Projects Office will provide a single entry point for high-priority projects and help make federal approvals more coordinated and predictable.

Another important part of the bill is digitalizing trade. Too much of our trade system still relies on paper and requires businesses to provide the same information repeatedly.

Bill C-39 would support a “tell us once” approach and enable greater use of electronic trade documents. This means less paperwork, fewer delays and a more efficient trading system.

Finally, none of this works without the people who keep our supply chains moving. We need skilled workers, workforce development and greater labour mobility.

We also need stability in our transportation system so that disruptions do not ripple through the broader economy.

[Translation]

Canada has tremendous advantages. We have the talent, the resources and the market access the world wants. Now we have to turn these advantages into investments, projects, jobs and growth. That’s exactly what Bill C-39 would do. It would facilitate investment in Canada, accelerate project completion here and make it easier to get Canadian products to customers around the world.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, minister.

[Translation]

Mr. MacKinnon: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Minister Hajdu.

Hon. Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P., Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is an honour to be with you as Minister of Jobs and Families to highlight the labour components of Bill C-39, the building Canada strong act.

These components are key to strengthening Canada’s labour framework and protecting Canadian workers. They are also one part of a larger suite of complementary measures that, together, offer a comprehensive plan to simplify and advance Canada’s projects while diversifying our trade and attracting new investment.

Today, I will outline the labour components of the bill and how they will help strengthen labour relations in federally regulated sectors.

[Translation]

We know that a strong economy depends on a strong workforce and a good relationship between workers and their employer.

• (1610)

[English]

Workplaces with healthy labour relations have the stability and confidence to invest and grow. The labour components of Bill C-39 are designed to strengthen good-faith bargaining and worker protections in Canada’s federally regulated workplaces. The Canada Labour Code is the framework that supports workers and employers in these federally regulated sectors, such as interprovincial transportation, banking and telecommunications.

The framework and tools within it help 95% of federally regulated workplaces renew their collective agreements without labour disruption. However, for the other 5%, reaching a renewed agreement is much more difficult; for some, this presents a cyclical inability to conclude agreements without labour disruption. These cycles can be self-reinforcing, as relationships between workers and the employer often remain strained and the inability to resolve their disputes together further places at risk the next collective bargaining process. This is unfortunate because all parties claim and agree that the best deals are the ones they arrive at together.

We asked employers, workers and Canadians how to improve the tools that the federal government offers to parties to help them reach agreements together in a better way. We heard that, for the most part, Canada’s labour relations system is working well. However, we also heard that existing tools don’t always help to resolve the most complex and contentious disputes. That’s why Bill C-39 focuses first and foremost on strengthening the tools, supports and processes that help workers and employers find solutions together.

[Translation]

Many of the suggestions focus on the need to strengthen the parties’ accountability so that they negotiate fairly and transparently, while taking each other’s needs into account.

[English]

Bill C-39 responds to that advice and focuses on three key priorities.

First, we are modernizing collective bargaining with strengthened tools and additional supports. This means supporting earlier engagement in high-risk bargaining situations, helping rebuild labour-management relationships following disputes, adding supports for first collective agreement negotiations, providing more time for parties to work out their differences and reach an agreement at the bargaining table and laying the groundwork for expedited grievance arbitration and an administrative monetary penalty regime for bad-faith bargaining.

The federal government is also investing in the capacity of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service and the Canada Industrial Relations Board so that parties have timely access to the labour relations services they need.

Second, we will strengthen worker protections and help them adapt to modernized workplaces. We will increase the federal government's capacity to protect workers from wage theft, misclassification and workplace accidents. We will make it easier to reach the conclusion of a first collective agreement.

[Translation]

That also means protecting airport sector workers by maintaining their union representation and their collective agreement when the contract changes hands.

[English]

Finally, we will clarify section 107 of the Labour Code, defining clear requirements for the use of this tool of last resort.

It bears repeating that 95% of federal collective agreements are renewed without labour disruption. This means that for most workplaces, relationships are healthy and maintained well between collective agreements, setting up parties for continued success. The new supports and tools in Bill C-39 will help parties resolve disputes successfully even more often. However, for the small number of exceptionally difficult relationships that become deeply entrenched with repeated cycles of disputes, the new tools in Bill C-39 are designed to help these parties focus on transparent, solutions-focused bargaining.

The bill addresses one of the tools the minister has when negotiations have broken down and parties are at an impasse despite the new tools this bill provides. The bill places clear guardrails around the use of section 107, which permits a minister to refer a dispute to the Canada Industrial Relations Board —

The Chair: Thank you, minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P., President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy: Mr. Chair, it was so good that I was hoping she could continue.

Ms. Hajdu: It was scintillating.

[Ms. Hajdu]

Mr. LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, thank you for the invitation. I'm glad our colleague Patty is sitting between Steven and me. Steven and I seem to be wearing identical suits today, so if we were sitting side by side, it would have distracted honourable senators.

[Translation]

Thank you for having me. I'm very glad to be here with my colleagues.

I just want to use a moment of my five minutes to make a more personal comment. This is the first time that I have had the opportunity to appear before you since our colleague from New Brunswick, Dr. Rodney Ouellette, was appointed to the Senate. I have had the privilege of knowing him for a very long time. He is a scientist and a renowned doctor from our province who has done a great deal of research on cancer. I am very touched to see him here with us.

Canada is at a crossroads. The choices that we make today will have an impact on the strength of our economy and our ability to create opportunities for future generations. That is why the government is proposing legislative measures to build more efficiently. We also need to strengthen our transportation and trade systems, as well as the foundation for a fair and productive workforce, as my colleague just said.

[English]

Our history offers powerful examples of what happens when Canadians rise to the challenge of building big and building well. Past generations built projects that helped define this country. Strategic infrastructure, like our railway system or the St. Lawrence Seaway, expanded access to international markets and helped establish Canada as a trading nation.

The nation-building projects of the 21st century may involve critical mineral projects, traditional and renewable energy infrastructure, modern ports, trade corridors and emerging technologies. They have the potential to create jobs, strengthen economic security and resilience, support innovation and help Canadian businesses compete successfully in global markets. To capture those opportunities, Canada must be able to make decisions in a timely and predictable way.

Mr. Chair, one of the consistent messages we have heard from workers, communities, Indigenous partners and investors is that the federal approval processes can often be too lengthy and too difficult to navigate. While careful assessments, of course, remain essential, excessive delays can create uncertainty and discourage investment.

[Translation]

Our objective is clear: to make federal decisions about projects within a one-year time frame, naturally while continuing to meet strict environmental standards and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples.

[English]

We have heard from Indigenous Peoples, provincial and territorial governments, businesses, labour organizations, industry representatives and citizens from across our country. Throughout these conversations, a number of common themes emerged. Canadians want efficiency, predictability and economic growth that respects our environmental responsibilities. They want stronger supply chains, better infrastructure and good jobs. They want Canada to remain competitive while preserving the values that define us as a country.

We believe that Bill C-39 responds directly to those priorities. The government believes that we can create opportunities, strengthen our economy and build a country that's more resilient and better positioned to compete around the world for generations that follow. We believe that is at the heart of this legislation.

[Translation]

As I've often said, you have no idea how happy my colleagues and I will be to answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, ministers, for your remarks. We will now begin the question period.

Senator Quinn: Thank you, ministers, for being here today, and thank you for the leadership you, your colleagues and the Prime Minister are providing in securing Canada's place on the world stage.

My first question is for Mr. MacKinnon. Did you receive and have a chance to look over or be briefed on the report on labour reform that was completed by the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications and sent to your office by mine in June of this year?

• (1620)

Mr. MacKinnon: Thank you, Senator Quinn. I know you have a lot of experience in the port sector, and I want to say how much I value that committee's work and how important and inspiring it was in helping guide some thinking around the urgency to act.

That study made many important points, but none more important than the need for Canada to be a reliable, predictable trading partner. If we are going to attract investment and shippers, develop exports and have efficient supply chains, predictability lies at the heart of it. There are a number of other things I am sure we will also get into, but I thought that the report eloquently brought forward a number of those issues.

This bill is the response to that. This bill is the response of getting to collective agreements in a more predictable and, I dare say, systematic way, but it is also about surrounding the collective bargaining system with better facilities, more predictable logistics planning and more predictable capital investment planning in our supply chains and our transportation systems.

Senator Quinn: In that report, the Senate committee took a precise, surgical approach to identifying the need to prevent strikes or lockouts in only the marine and rail industries in those very few critical corridors that, if made inoperable, would cause serious economic hardships to not only the businesses directly involved but also the businesses across the country who receive the goods they sell to Canadians. However, the approach in the proposed legislation is very broad and does not prevent a strike or a lockout.

The Prime Minister is working hard on diversifying our trade corridors and trading partners, and one of the challenges that Canada has is our fractured international reputation as a reliable trading partner. That is directly related to the number of work stoppages that have occurred in the last number of years. Why would we not use a similar narrow, surgical approach to ensure disruptions cannot occur in the critical corridors of national economic interest serviced by railways and ports?

To be clear, that approach would only be limited to defined critical corridors specifically designated as in our national interest. Why did we not take that surgical approach, rather than a broad-based approach, that would prevent strikes or even the threat of a strike or a lockout from occurring and the damage that is done?

Mr. MacKinnon: You said two important words there: "national interest." This bill sets that out as a test that a minister — currently my colleague Ms. Hajdu but any Minister of Labour — would be able to consider should we get to that point. The point of this legislation is to balance what the Supreme Court tells us is a constitutional right to strike and the need to better support parties, particularly ones who, as you point out, senator, in some limited cases, are chronically unable to reach agreements without assistance.

How do we better support those parties, and how do we put measures in place before, during and after collective bargaining periods to avoid these conflicts altogether? Yes, we need to put guardrails, including a national interest test, around the decisions that any Minister of Labour would have to make subsequently.

Senator Quinn: Minister Hajdu, in the absence of a Charter Statement, are you able to provide clarity on the issues currently surrounding the right to strike and whether or not there is an unlimited right to strike? Will a Charter Statement be forthcoming? What are the reasonable limits in section 1 of the Charter on a right to strike?

Ms. Hajdu: My understanding is that, under the Department of Justice Act, a Charter Statement must be tabled for every government bill, so I look forward to the Minister of Justice's assessment of this legislation.

I would like to say that the Minister of Transport is exactly right. What we are attempting to do in this legislation, and I believe we will be successful, is to give people in those high-conflict situations, which you have clearly outlined — and I also appeared before your committee and thought your testimony was excellent there as well — the tools and, I would argue, the pressure to return the dispute resolution to the table. It cannot be

a constant cycle of parties unable to arrive at collective agreements with a constant expectation on either side that the government will resolve these disputes cycle after cycle.

This legislation provides a new way, in these very specific and very few cases, to disrupt the cycle of parties being unable to conclude a collective agreement and turning to the government for the resolution through a referral to the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

Senator Quinn: Just coming back to that answer, the reality is that the broad-based approach, as I call it, in this legislation, while making advances, still provides the opportunity to have the threat of a lockout or a strike, or, in fact, a strike itself before the government acts, with, again, damage being done where those critical corridors are already effectively shut down, even if it is for a day. Why wouldn't we take a more focused approach in those narrow examples of critical corridors that handle goods from ports via rail to businesses across Canada?

Ms. Hajdu: Thank you, senator. There are two answers. The first is that we have the constitutional right to strike in this country, and the second is the powerful role that the special mediator appointment creates.

I didn't have a chance to finish my speech, but if I had, you would have heard me outline the steps that occur in these situations, which will, in my mind, provide the transparency and the responsibility to parties, both unions and workers and their employers, to negotiate in good faith at the table. Because should the party choose to ignore the first report by the special mediator, then that report will automatically become public. That will shine a light for Canadians who are affected by labour disruption. It will also shine a light on the employer's behaviour, if that's the sticking point, or on the union's behaviour, if that's the sticking point.

That special mediator's report will be part of any consideration of section 107. When I explain that we believe these tools will create an even smaller number of parties that choose to resolve their issues through a strike or lockout, that's why I believe this will be effective in the regime that we are proposing.

Senator Quinn: Again, on the constitutionally protected right to strike, I understand from different conversations with witnesses and people in the legal profession that the right to strike is constitutionally protected, but it is not an absolute right. Is that wrong?

Ms. Hajdu: I'm not a constitutional lawyer, so I am not going to be able to argue the law effectively. What I can say is that we do believe that we need to respect the Constitution, but I also believe the government has a very important role in fostering industrial peace. I believe the measures and mechanisms within this legislation give the government new tools we have not had previously that, as I said, will drive the parties back to the table and put the onus on the parties instead of the government to resolve their disputes.

Senator Quinn: I will back away from that.

[Ms. Hajdu]

Mr. MacKinnon, given the terminals situated within a port fall under federal jurisdiction, can you explain why they are being declared to be "works for the general advantage of Canada," clause 212 in Division 2 of Part 2 of Bill C-39? Why are you using declaratory power if it is already federal jurisdiction?

Mr. MacKinnon: Sometimes, as you would well know, senator, some of the facilities fall in a grey area between federal and provincial jurisdictions. It happens. We wanted to remove that ambiguity.

The goal here is to make works for the purposes of improving our supply chains or improving our export capabilities or capacity easier in the spirit of project approvals —

The Chair: Thank you, minister. I'm sorry to interrupt. We will now go to our second block of questions.

[Translation]

Senator Youance: Welcome to the Senate, ministers. My question may be technical, but it has an important strategic component, and that's what I had hoped to hear you address, Minister LeBlanc.

Bill C-39 introduces major reforms to speed up the approval of major infrastructure and energy projects in Canada. This shortening of timelines is causing a lot of concern among environmental groups and for certain communities.

In your opinion, what benefits would follow from a combined strategic environmental and economic assessment process when implementing the measures set out in Bill C-39?

• (1630)

In other words, to what extent could such an assessment help anticipate long-term benefits more effectively, in order to find an acceptable middle ground between economic haste and environmental prudence?

Mr. LeBlanc: Thank you for the question. You're right; the way you framed it is entirely appropriate. The need to act faster means that federal authorities have to work together more effectively. As you may hear from my colleagues this afternoon, this in no way reduces our responsibility to assess projects against environmental standards or to fulfill our obligations to Indigenous peoples. Simply moving faster and recognizing that the times we live in require the country and the federal government. . . . I'll say the same to our partners in the federation, who, in many cases, are looking at how they can be more reliable partners so as to expedite these approvals properly. I think that, as you said, the way we reconcile those priorities is reflected in our commitment to act rigorously and in the fact that environmental standards have not changed, nor have our responsibilities toward Indigenous rights holders. We are committed to acting in a more coordinated manner across the federal government.

Senator Youance: By conducting such a strategic assessment at the outset, the government can establish clear sector-specific directives and pre-assess certain risks. I could go on about this: We could assess the cumulative effects across an entire region, scientifically validate trade corridors and regions of interest.

Would the government therefore be in favour of adding a formal strategic environmental and economic assessment mechanism to guide certain decisions made under this law and meet the objectives of this ambitious bill?

Mr. LeBlanc: That, again, is a question that helps pinpoint the exact objective of the bill that you are currently examining. In fact, one of the new things this bill does is provide the possibility of creating regional corridors. My colleague, Minister Steven, can tell you more about that. As you rightly pointed out, the bill will enable us to assess the cumulative effects, rather than simply looking at a given project, which may be very specific or technical, as you said, without considering the region's ecosystem and the cumulative effects. That is one of the benefits that we want to see come out of what we are proposing.

What's more, our colleague, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, has often spoken to us about this issue, which came up in several consultations. As you know, we did not come here with a bill before holding over 400 discussions and consultations with Indigenous peoples, provinces, territories and the general public. We even extended the consultation period this summer so that we could hear people's good suggestions. One of them . . . Oh, Mr. Chair, I had something really interesting to say. I was going to talk about the mitigation hierarchy.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sure you'll have the opportunity to answer another question.

[English]

Senator Coyle: Welcome, ministers. It's good to have you with us. You will have a chance to complete your answer because my question is along the same lines as the previous one.

Ministers, I believe everyone in this chamber has great appreciation for the pressure that our government must be under as you work on behalf of all Canadians to urgently grow and diversify Canada's economy in this context of serious disruptions outside our borders and, concerning, the threats of disruption within.

We know the stakes have never been higher; know that we are with you.

As was said in Minister MacKinnon's speech on Bill C-39, An Act respecting certain measures to strengthen the economy, the proposed legislation was inspired by the Prime Minister's ambitious goal for Canada to double its non-U.S. exports within the decade. It is very ambitious and very necessary, so we're with you.

The government says its goal is one project, one decision, one year, and that it changes how decisions are made but not the standards, and we're talking about standards here.

Picking up on that, it would be good for us to hear about that. Could you tell us specifically what the government will be doing to ensure that the existing national environmental standards are met, and what steps will be taken to ensure transparency on this — that's the second part of the question — for Canadians?

Mr. LeBlanc: This is, again, a fundamental question that was certainly discussed a great deal in our consultations. We talked about it a lot as a government before tabling this legislation, accepting the two premises of your question that transparency will be important in terms of reassuring Canadians that the government is acting in a rigorous, thoughtful way, and respecting institutions as important to this process, such as the Impact Assessment Agency, the Canada Energy Regulator and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

You see from the different parts of the law that one of the things we're doing is creating, as you said, one decision maker for the project.

For example, our colleague the Minister of Environment and Climate Change will be the decision maker. Her responsibility will be to receive advice and scientific evidence. The public participation process under any of these agencies doing these reviews has not been changed. Public participation remains. The independent agencies with scientific expertise and access to independent persons who can provide advice — all of that remains the same. We're simply saying that we can do things concurrently and not sequentially. Once you receive your permit from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, you don't then have to spend four months filling out different permits to get some authority from the transportation department under navigable waters and protections and then go to another government department.

We were accumulating snow in front of the plow at a level that caused investors to say, "This is a problem." Everyone is thinking of big projects, interprovincial projects, big mining projects and major ports. However, this applies to a small craft fishing harbour in my constituency where they're trying to obtain a permit to dredge the basin of the harbour so that 40 lobster fishers can get out before the season opens. Your chair, who is from the Acadian Peninsula, would know this very well.

I have a list of wards in his part of New Brunswick where you wait so long to obtain a permit that literally the lobster season has come and gone. These people, who are the economic lifeblood of these small communities, aren't able to prosecute their profession safely.

We've said, as a government, that they deserve better. We need to do the soil samples and build the containment cells so that there is no seepage into tidal water. All of that can be done at a speed that doesn't create an economic drag on these small projects. This encompasses all projects. We're all thinking of big projects and the Port of Montreal —

The Chair: Thank you, minister.

Senator Francis: Welcome, ministers. At a recent press conference, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak cautioned the federal government against fast-tracking Bill C-39, the Building Canada Strong Act, and urged it not to repeat the approach taken with Bill C-5, the One Canadian Economy Act.

• (1640)

Given that Bill C-39 is among the most consequential pieces of legislation introduced in recent decades, with implications for Indigenous rights and interests that could be felt for generations, will the federal government commit to ensuring that Indigenous Peoples are afforded adequate time and meaningful opportunities to raise concerns and propose amendments as legislation advances through both houses of Parliament?

Will your government also commit to being open to amendments that strengthen protections for Indigenous rights and interests, including measures to align Bill C-39 with Canada's obligations under the UNDRIP Act? That question is for all three ministers.

Mr. MacKinnon: I'll take the first stab at that, senator. I wish to point out that we had extensive consultations and, in fact, we extended those consultations in the past months. To illustrate the interest, which would confirm your point, we received 403 submissions from Indigenous groups, rights holders, stakeholders and others. Over 30 meetings were convened or held with First Nations groups and all of that during the engagement period.

Of course, we expect to hear from rights holders and national organizations as we continue through the parliamentary process. We will obviously carefully consider all of their feedback and advice. This process is truly at the core of what we're doing.

I would simply point out that, in the early days, Minister LeBlanc and I have experienced a lot of very positive feedback from rights holders when it comes to these processes, which now bring First Nations, titleholders and others into projects at their very beginnings. I think we both know that too often, in the past, these projects were conceived, developed, financed in many cases, with the procurement streams, employment streams and other things all conceived in one big package — and then the consultations began.

We are experiencing now, literally seeing someone from a First Nations community with big ideas, useful feedback and ways to shape a project. Minister LeBlanc and I have experienced this several times over the past year in the context of Bill C-5. We, obviously, very much hope that continues.

Mr. LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I just wanted something fantastic to add to the question.

[Translation]

Senator Henkel: Good afternoon, ministers. Thank you for being with us.

My first question is for Minister MacKinnon.

Minister, Bill C-39 aims to reduce red tape and allow businesses to make greater use of electronic trade documents. You've indicated that paperless trade could reduce business costs by up to 4.2%.

[Senator Francis]

SMEs account for nearly three-quarters of Canadian businesses that export goods. I'm not even talking about the ones that want to do so.

How will you measure whether these savings and simplifications will benefit SMEs, and not just large companies that already have all the necessary resources?

Mr. MacKinnon: I'm glad that you mentioned that passage of the bill.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Canada could boast about being a leader when it came to international trade and the way approvals were organized, or in other words, the ecosystem that existed between port authorities, the Canada Revenue Agency, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Department of Immigration and others. Today, we are, unfortunately, lagging far behind. There's no reason for that other than some laws that are preventing us from protecting or that are preventing a culture of data sharing between agencies, port authorities and other links in the supply chain.

Your question had to do with costs and SMEs. In my opinion, SMEs have a lot to gain from these measures, and I'll tell you why. Obviously, this should make things more convenient and efficient for the entire ecosystem. However, for an SME that wants to export, I believe that the paperwork, procedures and approvals required, along with the difficulty navigating all of that if they want to even consider exporting their goods or the results of their ingenuity, create too many barriers. I think that big companies are now able to deal with all of that. They simply hire people to deal with it. Now, with these measures, SMEs will be able to consider participating in international trade. We need them to do so.

Senator Henkel: My question is for Minister Hajdu. You can answer me in writing. Currently, the Canada Labour Code guarantees that anyone working for a federally regulated employer can take up to 10 days of paid sick leave per year, which they may take one day at a time. With Bill C-39, this guarantee will no longer apply to unionized employees whose collective agreement provides for a plan that is at least as favourable. What is your intention in referring some workers to their collective agreement rather than the Labour Code?

Senator Gerba: Welcome, ministers. My question is much more practical and concerns entrepreneurs from ethnoculturally diverse backgrounds. Assuming that Bill C-39 passes, Minister LeBlanc, what can you tell us about access to government procurement, to public procurement, for ethnoculturally diverse entrepreneurs, specifically Black Canadian-owned businesses, which represent 2.8% of businesses in Canada?

What specific measures will be put in place to enable these companies to access public procurement throughout the process?

Mr. LeBlanc: My colleagues may want to weigh in on that because it's a great question.

Senator, when you say public procurement, are you talking about government procurement?

Senator Gerba: Yes.

Mr. LeBlanc: As you're well aware, that is a priority for our government. Our colleague, Minister Lightbound, has pointed out a number of initiatives that specifically recognize the challenge that you've identified, and the now unacceptable circumstances surrounding access to federal contracts by groups that historically had difficulty gaining such access. You define the problem quite well.

We make no assumptions that a bill will pass. We don't come before the Senate or the House of Commons expecting that a bill will pass, so I'm not as enthusiastic as you are. We will let the bill make its way through Parliament.

We're already studying this matter, and will be pleased to do so with you and to benefit from your advice and ideas. We're already looking at the procurement side of things to find a way to correct a historical challenge that is no longer acceptable. I will ask our colleague, Minister Lightbound, the person responsible for this — I don't claim to have a clear view of these issues — to work with you on ensuring that when we're ready to implement the bill, we will do so in the right way.

• (1650)

Senator Gignac: Welcome to the Senate, ministers. Before I ask my question, allow me to commend your government's efforts to boost the resilience of our economy, and also your commitment to restoring Canada's reputation, which has taken quite a hit in recent years as a result of certain strikes.

My question is directed more at Minister LeBlanc, but you can decide amongst yourselves, and please try to answer in three minutes or less.

As a senator from Quebec and a former provincial minister of economic development, I would like to know more about the impact that your concept of trade corridors will have on provincial autonomy in the area of land development.

To put it simply, is there a consultation process with the provinces? Do they have a right to veto if they don't want the oil or gas pipelines you might want to build across their territory?

Mr. MacKinnon: Thank you for that question, senator. I will begin and then I will ask Mr. LeBlanc to pick up where I leave off.

There are two concepts of "corridor" in this bill. First, there are trade corridors that we intend to designate, plan and assess as a whole. Of course, we will consult with the provinces and all the many stakeholders when developing and implementing this concept. The intent is quite clear: We need to make the operability and planning of trade corridors a key concept in our legislation.

When it comes to what is often referred to as a "corridor," and I'm sorry if I've been using the two concepts interchangeably, we are indeed talking about the corridors planned for environmental approval. I will let Mr. LeBlanc take it from here.

Mr. LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, Senator Gignac's question concerns an area that our government is seized with, specifically collaboration with the provinces, which, as you pointed out and as you know very well, have specific responsibilities and jurisdictions that we want to respect. The provinces also want to be partners in diversifying our trade, as well as in the sustainable development of our economy.

I am also the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, and I'm very proud that we've signed cooperation agreements with eight provinces to avoid duplication. For example, if in the case of your province, where BAPE is recognized for its expertise and rigour, why repeat work or studies that have already been expertly done by your province?

In any case, we will try, and I hope that the new government elected last night will work with us to that end, because that is precisely what will enable us to develop the economy across the country in the right way, in a way that respects jurisdictions and benefits from the shared jurisdictions of our partners in the federation.

[English]

Senator C. Deacon: I want to echo the comments of my colleague and friend Senator Gignac in terms of the efforts of the government right now.

Minister MacKinnon, Bill C-39 would establish the National Trade Corridors Council to advise on regulatory barriers, supply chain coordination and governance modernization. It would, among other things, give the minister authority to make transportation regulations based on international standards.

I think this is a very good thing.

Will your council play a formal role in identifying and recommending which international standards should be adopted, and will there be a transparent process such as a public list of recognized standards so that industry can understand what applies and propose additions?

Mr. MacKinnon: That is a very good question, and I think it's great that you, Senator Gignac and myself are having this moment of being very excited over a national trade corridor and the attendant council.

I'm going to take us back, perhaps, to the rationale, which is that the country, for a long time, has tended to — it did not necessarily need to, but it has tended to — plan its transportation and supply chain network facility by facility. I dare say, there is a small element of "if you build it, they will come" transportation systems for their own sake rather than for underpinning a successful economy.

What has also occurred in this era of very high-tech logistics is — I would venture — that there are many private-sector players who know a lot more about the performance of Canada's supply chains than the Government of Canada does. It is for that reason that we want to consolidate information about the performance and efficiency of our supply chains.

There will be questions about competitively sensitive data and all of that, but we want to ensure that this data is used to plan a more efficient, reliable transportation system and supply chain network.

Senator C. Deacon: In the interests of time, though, minister, I really want to focus on the use of standards and that effort —

Mr. MacKinnon: I'm sorry. Standards?

Senator C. Deacon: Industry standards as being a way of regulating.

Mr. MacKinnon: You're talking about the international norm?

Senator C. Deacon: Yes.

Mr. MacKinnon: Yes. We are, obviously, a participant in the International Maritime Organization, or IMO, to take one example. We have conventions and standards adopted through the IMO, which are not always easy to import. Sometimes we want to recognize a world standard as opposed to engaging in the very laborious process of developing our own regulations, which, in some cases, simply mirror the international standard.

It is for that simplicity and efficiency that we've put this —

Senator C. Deacon: That's exactly what I want to try and get at. Given that international standards support efficiency and trade harmonization, might this approach become part of a broader effort to use consensus-based international or industry standards by default across Canada?

There is no use in having a regulatory framework that doesn't update rather than international standards that are regularly updated.

Mr. MacKinnon: It is absolutely in that spirit that we're moving in this direction, yes.

Senator C. Deacon: Fantastic.

In terms of Division 8, Part 2, which establishes — and we were speaking about this earlier — the Enabling Digital Trade Act, it gives legal recognition to electronic trade documents. This is great. This legal recognition is very welcome; however, the act applies only to federally governed documents, and many of the trade documents fall under provincial law.

If a shipment's paperwork is only partly digital, then most of the benefit will be lost. What is the government doing, or what has it done, to work with the provinces to help make sure that there is a full set of interoperable digital trade documents, and what progress has been made so far?

Mr. MacKinnon: We can't require provinces to do anything, but we will be working with every province — especially those provinces with ports — to ensure that the "Tell Us Once" principle becomes the norm. I think provinces will have a deep incentive to do that with proper information sharing and assurances.

This bill wants to take all of the kinks out of being able to do that at the federal level and across the federal ecosystem, including port authorities and other things. There are ports, senator, where the trucking function and truck arrivals — things that aren't even, really, necessarily federally regulated — are all contained in one digital ecosystem. We want very much to get there.

The world has come to expect this, the shipping industry has come to expect this, and we believe Canada must absolutely not only get there but leapfrog the rest of the world.

Senator C. Deacon: There may be lessons to be learned from what did and did not happen during the beneficial ownership registry because so many companies are provincial. There is some opportunity to improve and to put pressure on provinces.

Minister LeBlanc, I would like to ask you one quick question. If international standards are becoming part of the red-tape reduction solutions — which I think we're seeing here, and it's a great initiative — for federally regulated elements, what is the government's plan when it comes to provincial rules and standards that become a barrier? You're working very hard, I think, on this issue with the provinces and territories.

Is there a way that we could be using consensus-based standards as a tool to start hardening efforts to put in place —

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, senator. Unfortunately, I have to move to the next senator.

Senator Manning: Thank you. Welcome to our ministers here this evening. I will take the opportunity to thank Minister LeBlanc for his efforts in Washington over the past number of months. I don't necessarily agree with everything the government does, but I know it's frustrating at times, and we appreciate your efforts and congratulate you on the work. My question is for Minister LeBlanc.

Bill C-5 and the Major Projects Office were presented to Canadians as the solution to accelerate major project approvals, with a public commitment to a maximum two-year approval timeline. Your government now represents Bill C-39 as a means to complete federal reviews and decisions within one year.

What was missing from your original approach that makes this further legislation necessary? Can you identify the specific shortcomings that Bill C-39 will address and explain why those shortcomings were not addressed in Bill C-5?

Mr. LeBlanc: Thank you for the question. Thank you for your comments about the summer I spent in a hot and humid circumstance in Washington, D.C.

Senator, we were in this very chamber in June 2025 — a year and three or four months ago — discussing Bill C-5 which, as you noted, gave Governor-in-Council the opportunity to designate projects, put them on the schedule under the legislation as being in the national interest and benefit from a period of up to two years in which the conditions would be elaborated. It's a presumptive approval of the project. The conditions, within a maximum of two years, would be defined for the project to be

able to commence. That work, obviously, would be done with the normal review agencies, consultations with Indigenous groups and public participation. You know very well, senator, this in no way diminished that work, and it only applied to the projects that were designated under Bill C-5. Those are projects of national interest.

The Prime Minister was in Alberta last week. He identified the Pacific Link pipeline as exactly one of those projects. That's our first formal designation. There will be others over the next few weeks that will be important for the country within every region of the country.

What we did with this legislation is learned from the brief but insightful period we had where we realized that — and you would know this well, senator — the length of time to approve port infrastructure in your former district of the House of Commons within the great province of Newfoundland and Labrador would be two to four years in order to build a breakwater to protect some fishing harbour infrastructure. I come back to that example because many of us know those examples well. It applies to those small projects where you may need one or two federal permits, or it would apply to the more complex projects where there would be a myriad of potential federal permits required.

We think that the government can do a much better job of bringing a greater level of coherence to that process so that people who want to begin those important works for the economy of our country can do so in the right way while following all of the appropriate reviews and oversights.

It is an extension of Bill C-5, senator, but this will apply to projects both big and small and not just the small group that will be designated under the legislation that was adopted in June of last year.

Senator Manning: Thank you, minister. I recall our many conversations about small craft harbours in your role.

While these projects are important, as I know you are fully aware, my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Province of Quebec and the federal government struck a historic agreement in August of this year to replace the 1969 Churchill Falls power contract and further develop Churchill Falls and Gull Island. In August, I attended the announcement in St. John's and witnessed the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Premier of Quebec and the Prime Minister of Canada standing on the wharf in St. John's together as partners in this \$273-billion project. It was a historic day in our province. The deal resulted in thousands of jobs for trade workers in Newfoundland and Labrador and billions of dollars in procurement opportunities for our businesses, and that's just scratching the surface.

While there are some concerns with the possible delays due to the results of the Quebec provincial election last evening, my question to you today is related to taking this project from the August announcement to shovels in the ground. Can you explain to this chamber today how Bill C-39 will assist in making this project a reality and assist in having this project reach the status of national interest?

Mr. LeBlanc: Thank you. Senator, that is the perfect example of a project that is in the national interest. You identified the most significant investment in renewable, clean power in North American history. It was an iconic moment for your province and the Province of Quebec, and the Government of Canada was a partner. It will unlock a series of other investments within the Labrador Trough in critical minerals and in infrastructure that will help the economy of that whole part of Atlantic Canada.

Quebec is, by political definition, a province in Central Canada. Geography makes Quebec an Atlantic province as well. That agreement between the two premiers and the Government of Canada as a participant would be the perfect example of a national interest project.

Out of that, there will be individual proponents, such as Mining Project X and a railway, if my colleague wants to add anything. There are a series of infrastructure and resource development projects that will come from that historic agreement. The Gull Island project is one example, but there are literally dozens of other examples of projects. Some may very well get designated, senator, under Bill C-5 because that's the most effective way to bring them to a point of commencing work. We will work with the two provinces to figure out the best way to do that.

The proponents of the project would be Hydro-Québec and the Newfoundland and Labrador utility — there are a number of partners there. But there will be a series of other smaller projects that will flow from that historic decision, which would benefit from Bill C-39. The Government of Canada is saying if you need a permit under the Canadian Navigable Waters Act to bring a particular vessel to a new port that we're building on the coast of Labrador, you could understandably expect a permit within one year, and there would be better coordination of the federal authorities doing that work.

Senator Manning: As long as we all remember that it's Newfoundland and Labrador. My next question is for Minister MacKinnon.

Your government established the Major Projects Office following Bill C-5. Bill C-39 would now establish a separate transportation project office alongside the coordination role of the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. Although these bodies cover different categories of projects, what specific problem requires another office? How do we ensure that this structure reduces the administrative burden that we are all concerned about and gives proponents clear accountability for timely decisions?

Mr. MacKinnon: Yes. This is an example of actual streamlining. For all of those projects that fall outside of the impact assessment frame, Transport Canada proposes to put in place an office that would guide proponents. Think of a spur line, a short-line railroad or a port facility, which we spoke about earlier — something that does not rise to that impact assessment level but requires, nonetheless, regulatory treatment. We want to make sure we provide a service to shippers, railways, ports and anyone involved, frankly, in the federally regulated transportation ecosystem as a way to be guided through and enjoy this one-year approval.

Senator Manning: As a follow-up to that, Minister MacKinnon, Bill C-39 allows cabinet to designate regions of national interest, as we saw last week, and it expands the framework applying to projects within them.

What objective criteria would prevent these extraordinary powers from becoming a system where politically favoured regions receive different answers than others?

• (1710)

Mr. MacKinnon: If you are referring to the regulatory corridors, if you will, this would be based on a manifest interest in creating infrastructure: a fibre-optic network, an electricity distribution network, some other piece of energy infrastructure or, for that matter, a road.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, minister. The next 10-minute block will be shared by two senators.

Senator Forest: Thank you for being here with us today. My question is for Mr. MacKinnon, the Minister of Transport. Bill C-39 introduces measures that relax the domestic shipping requirements in Canada. The unions and the St. Lawrence Shipowners are concerned about the fact that foreign vessels will now be able to engage in coasting trade without a licence in response to a declared emergency without first verifying the availability of Canadian vessels. Will the government recognize that it is possible to strengthen trade corridors while protecting the Canadian fleet and Canadian jobs, since it seems to me that that is the goal you're trying to achieve?

Mr. MacKinnon: I agree with them. As those close to us tell us, with everything that is happening in the world today, senator, there are unforeseeable circumstances and risks that we cannot even imagine that could force the Minister of Transport to use emergency measures. That is exactly what is provided for in this bill. It is an emergency measure.

Senator Forest: Is there a way to set limits on these emergency measures to ensure that we first check to see if Canadian vessels are available?

Mr. MacKinnon: Obviously, I would welcome your suggestions on that. I guarantee that you will not be suggesting any situations that had me consider or plan to possibly invoke such emergency measures. Without limiting the minister's ability to enlist such measures, I'm entirely open to the idea of hearing your suggestions on that.

Senator Forest: I would be happy to share them with you, if I have any.

During Transport Canada's consultations on strengthening the one Canadian economy, the industry called on the government to take the unique features of the St. Lawrence Seaway into account. It said it was concerned about safety and environmental protection.

Can the government explain why its amendment to the Coasting Trade Act is necessary when the current system already provides mechanisms for fast-tracking applications, including in emergency situations?

Mr. MacKinnon: I'll get back to you with an answer to that question. However, the intention is the same as stated in my previous answer: We need to be able to act in emergencies or unforeseen situations; the integrity of the Coasting Trade Act will remain intact.

Senator Forest: Thank you. I yield the balance of my time to my colleague.

[English]

Senator Mohamed: Thank you, ministers, for being here. Bill C-39 is designed to accelerate projects that strengthen Canada's economy, and I applaud the ambition of this bill. However, accelerating projects does not by itself tell us who will benefit from the employment these projects are expected to create.

Minister Hajdu, what mechanisms will the government use to track the employment outcomes of these projects, especially the participation of young Canadians? How will you measure whether they are translating into sustained deployment and career opportunities for the next generation?

Ms. Hajdu: Thank you very much for your question. In fact, the entire focus of the work we're doing now is protecting and growing opportunities for Canadian jobs.

Over the past year, we have been working very closely with provinces and territories in many different areas. One of these areas regards a better sense of data: Who is actually employed, who has which skills and how do we accelerate access to skills training in high-value and highly needed sectors?

For example, we have launched four out of six sector alliances that bring together employers, trainers and unions to do a better job aligning and understanding, first of all, the need, the shortages, the transformation in specific industries and the skill shortages and to accelerate and better streamline training offered in provinces and communities across the country with what employers are saying they need.

That work will continue. Also, for each project, there are estimates about the number of jobs it will create. We are working very closely with a variety of partners, including unions, to ensure we have a very good forecast of the kinds of skills we need.

Finally, it always excites me to talk about Team Canada Strong, which is our government's signature investment in skilled trades training and apprenticeship completion — and, in particular, Red Seal apprenticeship completion. It is an \$8-billion investment. It is a partnership with provinces and territories, colleges, unions and polytechnics. It is intended to attract people to the trades and help them complete their apprenticeship journey. There are exciting things happening around the

digitization of apprenticeship supports to help them finally complete their Red Seal. We could talk about that more if you wish.

Senator Mohamed: Thank you for that. That's fantastic. However, I want to remind you that not every young person wants to pick up a wrench or a hammer.

My question is specifically around young people. I will use your wise and welcome words that employers, unions and workers need to find solutions together. Considering the jobs that should be created through these projects, I have an idea for you.

Will the government agree to a labour force employment plan to accompany these projects, one that is specific to young people and clearly shows the number of youths who will be hired and in what regions so young Canadians can hold the government to account and employers and unions can have tangible targets they can work toward?

Ms. Hajdu: Thank you very much, senator. It is a very important component of our plan to become better at understanding the granular data regarding what young people are experiencing — such as unemployment — in what areas of the country and what the barriers are.

We are always looking for ways to improve our capacity and share information with provinces and territories. As you know, we are not the only jurisdiction that supports training and employment for young people.

However, over the past year, we have seen increasing enthusiasm from ministers and other levels of government around working more collaboratively with the federal government to better understand the needs of youth.

We, as you know, have a number of different measures in place to support provinces and territories, including the Labour Market Development Agreements. We believe we can do a better job in terms of tracking the outcomes of those labour market agreements. These are the funds that we supply to provinces and territories to work with youth, in particular, but also all folks who are experiencing labour or work challenges.

Finally, we have a robust youth employment strategy that I think is one of the hallmarks of the success of the federal government in terms of supporting youth because it provides paid work experiences in a variety of sectors across the country. It is very evidence-based and focused on getting young people a foot in the door to a paid position. That has now been demonstrated to be one of the factors that lead to better employment outcomes over the course of their lives.

I look forward to working with you, senator, on doing a better job of tracking those investments and ensuring they land in the way that young people need them to.

The Chair: Thank you.

Senator K. Wells: My question is for Minister Hajdu. Previously, when you introduced Bill C-39, you stated, "As workplaces continue to evolve, our labour laws must keep pace to ensure . . . workplaces remain fair and safe. . . ." You also said that building a stronger Canada for all requires a strong, modern labour framework. I think we all resolutely agree with those statements.

The National Employment Equity Council held a forum two weeks ago with the theme of modernizing Canada's labour framework, which — as you indicated — is the promise of Bill C-39.

• (1720)

Minister, if this bill is the government's approach to modernizing Canada's labour framework, why were the recommendations from the 2023 Employment Equity Act Review Task Force not included in this bill? Additionally, are you open to possible amendments that would include those recommendations?

Ms. Hajdu: Thank you very much, senator.

I will just say two things. One, this bill is very focused on supply chain disruption, so the proposed changes to the Canada Labour Code in this bill are related to one of the challenges around predictable supply chains, which, as I said, in those very specific sectors and very specific cases, has to do with repeat conflicts between employers and their workers. It is meant to provide the additional supports necessary to help those parties improve their relationships, thereby arriving at collective agreements together and ending the cycle of repeated conflicts, requests for government intervention, government interventions and the continued fraying, if you will, of those relationships that are critical to all of the work that my colleagues have spoken about.

In terms of the employment equity piece, there is important work to do. I look forward to working with all interested parliamentarians on the next steps to modernize the Employment Equity Act. Certainly, it is something that we believe is critically important. Many of the investments we make in skills training are very specifically focused on people who are under-represented in the labour market, including people who are racialized, young people, people with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and women in specific sectors. We will continue that work together with parliamentarians.

Senator K. Wells: Thank you.

My follow-up question is related to the last part you mentioned. More specifically, can you talk about how the Government of Canada will ensure that Indigenous, 2SLGBTQI+, Black and racialized workers, as well as those with disabilities, will fairly share in the jobs that are coming from these projects and the overall promised prosperity that the Government of Canada is stating will come with the legislative changes included in Bill C-39?

Ms. Hajdu: Thank you. That is an excellent question and one that many people, both on the employer's side and on the workers' side, have been grappling with.

There are no easy solutions, but the investments the federal government has been making, in particular around under-represented groups in the trades, are starting to pay off.

[Translation]

Senator Audette: [Editor's Note: Senator Audette spoke in Innu-aimun.]

Thank you for being here.

Will the government acknowledge that the governance of corridors must include not only the Indigenous peoples who are directly affected by the projects but also those upstream and downstream who will feel the environmental, social and economic impacts?

I'm going to fire off a second very important question. How will you support our First Nations to reduce the pressure that our Indigenous nations, communities and governments are feeling when it comes to employability and training? There's been a lot of talk about consultations. How will you ensure that we do not end up in a situation like the one in Labrador and in Quebec where the Innu Nation doesn't have a seat at the table when it comes to major projects that affect our territory? You can answer in writing if you don't have enough time to answer, but I would like an answer to reassure those who are watching at home.

Thank you.

Mr. MacKinnon: I'll start, and perhaps Mr. LeBlanc will want to add to my answer.

First, I'd like to point out another section of the bill that talks about Indigenous advisory committees for port authorities. That's something we've never tried before. If you agree that everything eventually gets shipped through a port, then you'll see the importance of including First Nations at that stage.

The best way to answer your question is to reiterate what I said to Senator Francis. It's early days, I admit. However, including First Nations at the very beginning of the process, from the conception stage onwards — you talked about projects in northern Quebec and Labrador — will stimulate the creativity of local stakeholders, companies, and institutions of knowledge and training. These are often small communities, and folks there talk to each other. We are already seeing glimmers of inspiration regarding their involvement in the design process, which is not yet complete but which includes them from the start thanks to short timelines.

As a final quick point, you mentioned pressure. There's also pressure on the group coming in to talk about —

The Chair: Thank you, minister.

Mr. MacKinnon: I'm sorry. That was a good point.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: Good afternoon to all three of you, and thank you for being with us.

I have a fairly short and specific question. In Division 6 of Part 1 of Bill C-39, you're amending the Species at Risk Act by reserving the right to disregard the impact assessment if the conditions imposed on the proponent are not technically, economically and practically feasible.

What does this mean in practical terms for endangered species? Does it mean that they will be sacrificed if protecting them is too complicated?

I believe this question is for Mr. LeBlanc.

Mr. LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know that Minister MacKinnon will be able to add to my answer because, in some cases, certain species come to mind in a port context. British Columbia is one example, but it's an issue all across the country.

You're absolutely right, senator. I understand the importance of protecting species at risk. I acknowledge that you raised a technical aspect of the act, but I don't agree with your interpretation of the example you used. You suggest that protecting species at risk could be sacrificed on the grounds that the project is too complex for certain proponents. That is not at all what we have in mind.

On the contrary, we deliberately asked federal authorities to work faster, but to work with proponents from the moment they submit their application to ensure that the mitigation hierarchy is applied. Our colleague has often talked to us about this. It's a critical part of making good decisions.

Moreover, if I may, with respect to the consultations we conducted over the summer, as my colleagues will recall, the document released in May included a provision that would have completely exempted projects from the application of the Species at Risk Act. The House of Commons removed that provision from the bill you are currently considering in your pre-study. We listened and understood that very reasonable concern. We removed the government's ability to completely exempt projects from the application of that act. When the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada conducts an assessment, my colleague, the Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Nature, will have access to the data and the obligations created by the act. I can't imagine a situation where the decision would be made the way you have —

The Chair: Thank you, minister.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: Thank you.

[English]

Senator Robinson: Minister LeBlanc, my question relates to Division 2 and pertains to amendments to the Building Canada Act.

In this division, we see constant reference to "region of national interest," but the definition is vague. Theoretically, it can apply to any size of land anywhere. Then, in the bill, you also have conditions to allow for the pre-approval of certain

projects if listed in the region of national interest. Since 2001, Canada has lost over 5 million hectares of farmland, an 8.5% drop, or roughly the size of Nova Scotia.

• (1730)

Today, farms cover just over 6% of our country, yet that tiny fraction drives 7% of Canada's economy, bringing in roughly \$160 billion a year. What I don't see in this bill is the requirement for a federal agricultural impact assessment. With food security now so often mentioned in the same breath as national security — our Prime Minister has mentioned the importance of safeguarding our food security on several occasions — has the government been monitoring the loss of agricultural land and what impacts these proposed changes in Division 2 will have on agriculture, one of our key economic drivers?

Mr. LeBlanc: Senator, thank you for a very important question. Mr. MacKinnon may want to add something in terms of these regional corridors that you identified at the beginning of your question, but let me begin by recognizing that the government completely shares your concern about the economic and social importance of agriculture and the agri-food sector. My colleague Steven MacKinnon comes from Prince Edward Island. He and I talk often. My colleague Patty is from northern Ontario. We understand, the government understands, and Canadians understand the importance of protecting precisely the fragile economics of agriculture and agri-food in the country. Canadians understand the importance of food security.

As to the premise of the question, in the designation of a potential regional corridor, would the government consider its impact on agricultural lands and the ability of the men and women who earn their living and support their communities in this sector? Of course we would.

I can assure you, senator, that our colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has spoken to us — and I'm sure you've spoken to him as well — about the importance of when the government considers a designation, ensuring that the communities participate both in the consultation and in the conditions that would lead to a certain project being able to begin work. One of the critical partners in that conversation would be agricultural producers in a particular corridor where a project was being considered.

Perhaps, Steven, do you want to add something?

Mr. MacKinnon: This is where the importance of "one project, one review" comes in and the agreements with provinces to collaborate. As you would know, many provinces, including, as Mr. LeBlanc pointed out, my birth province of Prince Edward Island, my second home, which was New Brunswick —

[Translation]

Now, Quebec, which I've called home for 22 years, has agricultural reserves.

[English]

British Columbia has those, so these agricultural designated lands or areas would obviously come into the assessment process, if not the public consultation process that the act still very clearly lays out. Impacts on agriculture would be evaluated as they are today and would be considered as they are today, and a decision would be made based on the science and on the evidence.

Senator Robinson: Thank you, minister. As I expect you fully appreciate, Minister LeBlanc, agricultural land is a non-renewable resource. What we're seeing now is our producers being squeezed, and their margins so tight, and we've put them in a precarious position as far as their personal finances go. To have someone come along, a developer offering a price that is pretty attractive, I can't fault a producer for making the hard decision to maybe give up their family legacy and sell that land. In agriculture, we certainly see quite a bit of passion about land and being a steward of that land. I want to speak about how we're putting pressure on these producers to make that choice, as you've said.

When prime agriculture land is paved over for an urban expansion, housing or industrial use, the living and fertile soil beneath it is permanently lost. We do not get it back. A recent example comes to mind from Clearview Township in Ontario, where National Defence is planning to build a preliminary receive site for the Arctic Over-the-Horizon Radar program. I believe they've bought almost 300 hectares of productive ag land already and have plans to buy more. On their website, it says they require at least 1,500 hectares.

We find ourselves trapped in what I call Sophie's choice type of situation, having to choose between national security and food security. It's a slippery slope. Bill C-39 offers no clarity on how to balance the two, leaving us to wonder, without explicit legal guardrails, how do we protect our prime farmland from being permanently lost? How do we stop relying on financially marginalized farmers to continue to make that sacrifice to keep it in production?

Mr. MacKinnon: That's a very important question. Agriculture in Canada and the pressures that you describe are not only very real, but we have the National Food Security Strategy. We have identified food security as a national imperative.

In the transport sector, we are working very hard to secure our supply chains for food security in terms of import and export, which means increased refrigerated reefer capacity, which means expanding port facilities able to handle food and medicines, as well.

But land use, senator, is not, strictly speaking, a federal matter. It is largely, as you well know, a provincial matter. Agriculturally zoned land, should someone come and purchase that, that does not mean that they have the automatic ability to do with it what they want — develop housing or other uses, as you describe. That would go through a rigorous provincial land use in an unincorporated area, or, in a municipal area, that would go through a rigorous municipal land use process. In my home municipality of Gatineau, it's very hard to get agricultural land "dezoned," notwithstanding who the owner is or what their intention or motivation is for that land.

So I would —

Senator Robinson: Mindful of my time, respectfully, I would just like to say that, across Canada, you're right; it is a provincial area of jurisdiction. It's certainly an issue that the Senate Agriculture and Forestry Committee studied and reported back on in its soil report. It is definitely a crack of great concern that we do not want to see land continually fall through that crack because, if you consider my opening comment and my question, we rely on that percentage of land to drive \$160 billion of GDP.

I want to quickly ask my third question, and it is for you, Mr. MacKinnon. Thank you so much, fellow Islander; it's nice to see you. The amendments in Bill C-39 on the Canada Labour Code will keep our transportation infrastructure running and moving goods. How will that influence our trade relationships, reputation and aspirations?

Mr. MacKinnon: Great. I do want to make one quick point on land, though, which is that there is nothing in Bill C-39 that undermines or encourages, for that matter, agricultural land to be — pardon me?

Senator Robinson: I was looking more for a desire to drive profitability. In driving profitability in agriculture, we will protect agricultural land.

Mr. MacKinnon: Yes.

Senator Robinson: Yes.

Mr. MacKinnon: That is an important subject, just not one that this 250-page bill already can contain.

The Chair: Minister, we have to go to the next block. I'm sorry.

Mr. MacKinnon: Maybe in another senator's question I'll answer that one.

[Translation]

Senator Carignan: My question is for the Minister of Employment.

• (1740)

You're proposing to amend the Canada Labour Code, particularly one aspect of it that isn't getting a lot of attention right now, but that's starting to raise concerns in the minds of employers. The issue relates to previous contractors and, consequently, to business transfers and changes in service providers. The text in question can be found in subclause 310(1) of the bill, which amends subsection 44(1) of the Canada Labour Code. The effect of this amendment would be to preserve a union certification, or an ongoing certification process, when an employer decides to replace one service provider with another. In other words, if the outgoing provider is unionized, that bargaining relationship would carry over and apply to the new contractor. This provision is starting to raise concerns. After all, there is little point in changing contractors because of dissatisfaction with their performance if the result is that the very same employees continue carrying out the work. That is raising

concerns. What is the objective? I understand that this provision primarily concerns companies in the aerospace sector, for now, but I'd like you to tell us about your future plans.

[English]

Ms. Hajdu: During my two times as the Minister of Labour, the situation that workers found themselves in when the contract that they worked under was purchased by a new employer and they — in the past, prior to previous amendments to the Labour Code — lost their positions, their wages or their rights and started all over again, even if they had been working for that company for three, four or five years, was very distressing. The previous government took steps to protect workers in those situations. They did what is commonly called "contract flipping." I would argue that it is often driven by price. As anyone who has run an organization knows, labour is sometimes the only place where you can squeeze savings. The challenge is that these are the most vulnerable workers in the airport sector.

We repeatedly heard that workers should not lose their representation in these moments when their employer changes but their job does not.

[Translation]

Senator Carignan: Are you focusing primarily on airport operations or will this involve construction as well? This sector is particularly sensitive with respect to business transfers, dispositions and successor-related issues. That's why employers are wondering whether you're focusing exclusively on the operation of airport services, or potentially on related construction activities as well.

[English]

Ms. Hajdu: All the changes proposed in Bill C-39 are for federally regulated workers, and the construction workers building the airport would not be federally regulated. It is for people who work in the airline sector and transportation sectors that are interprovincial. Trains, trucking, telecommunications and banking are primarily the federally regulated sectors.

[Translation]

Senator Carignan: It's because subclause 310(4) states:

The Governor in Council may, on the Minister's recommendation, make regulations prescribing services, industries or locations for the purposes of the definition *previous contractor* in subsection (1).

For now, it seems to cover only the aerospace industry, but the prescribed industry could be expanded by an order-in-council. What are your intentions regarding the possibility of expanding the prescribed industries by an order-in-council? For the time being, the term "previous contractor" only applies to airports or anything related to the aerospace industry. As for paragraphs 310(1)(b) and (c), which have to do with prescribed services and prescribed industries, it will be you, the minister, or another minister who can determine what those industries are. Do you know what those other industries are at this point?

[Mr. MacKinnon]

[English]

Ms. Hajdu: It is only those covered by the Canada Labour Code, which would be, as I said, in federally regulated sectors. We have not seen this predominantly as an issue in other federally regulated sectors as of yet. I actually can't anticipate it happening in other federally regulated sectors, but this is an issue that has occurred repeatedly in the aeronautics sector, in particular, for very low-wage employees who are often the most vulnerable in that sector.

[Translation]

Senator Carignan: If I understand correctly, this is about operations in these industries, not the "construction" part? For example, this covers the operation of a train, but not the construction of a railway?

[English]

Ms. Hajdu: The Canada Labour Code does not cover construction workers. It covers federally regulated workers. This is very well defined, and the other workers are covered by provincial labour law.

[Translation]

Senator Carignan: Thank you.

[English]

Senator McCallum: Ministers, welcome to the Senate. My question is for Mr. LeBlanc. It comes from the Southern Chiefs' Organization, or SCO, in Manitoba, who would like the response in writing.

Bill C-39 is in three parts composed of 19 separate divisions, and the SCO has observed that there are several definitions identified in the act. However, there are no definitions of the Crown's duty to consult, nor is there a clear term defining consultation with Indigenous Peoples within the legislation. The conduct of the duty to consult as part of any one project, one decision and one-year process must reflect a distinctions-based approach that will explicitly and distinctly address and justify any potential infringements.

Grand Chief Settee from the Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak, or MKO, proposed that the Building Canada Act in Bill C-5 be amended by adopting the definition of "duty to consult" at Annex A of the updated guidelines for federal officials to fulfill the duty to consult. As of March 2011, the duty to consult is an obligation of the government as a whole. In *Haida* and *Taku River* and *Mikisew Cree*, the Supreme Court of Canada held that the provincial and federal governments have a legal obligation to consult when the Crown contemplates conduct that might adversely impact potential or established Aboriginal or treaty rights.

Every potential major project, trade and energy corridor or critical minerals development in Canada will be subject to the Crown's legal obligation to carry out their duty to consult in a manner consistent with the honour of the Crown.

Would the minister provide a written response about adopting clear definitions of the Crown's duty to consult and consultations with Indigenous Peoples to provide clarity and certainty on the government's ambition to advance reconciliation while achieving the objectives of Bill C-39?

The second question is this: When Prime Minister Carney and other ministers were interviewed last week about a sweeping bill to overhaul environmental and labour laws and rules, we learned that Bill C-39 removes what Prime Minister Carney sees as barriers to development in pursuit of his pro-growth agenda as a way to create certainty for investments in development projects. There will be no rules allowing companies to pay offset fees if their projects are in fish habitats, and construction can begin before a project is approved.

Minister LeBlanc, this goes against what the government is talking about in giving powers to First Nations and following due process. I remind the ministers that paragraph 13 of the schedule to the Manitoba Natural Resources Act, 1930, gives constitutional protection to the treaty promises of the Crown. The treaty livelihood promised to First Nations was given constitutional protection for the first time 52 years before section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. The Manitoba Natural Resources Act, including in paragraph 13 of the schedule to the act, forms a part of the British North America Act —

The Chair: Thank you, Senator McCallum. Your time has expired.

• (1750)

[Translation]

Senator Galvez: Ministers, thank you for being here to answer our questions.

[English]

My question is for Minister LeBlanc. We are in the third nation-building moment in Canada's history, and we know that we were very slow in building some things. However, the reason we were slow was not always because of environmental concerns or Indigenous people's rights. It was also due to a lack of investment, so let's agree on that.

Paradoxically and historically, in these other nation-building moments, reforms that intended to simplify the regulatory process brought new forms of fragmentation, and I can give you examples, but that's not the objective of my question. Major and small infrastructure projects affect — as you have mentioned — watersheds, biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, public health, Indigenous land use and fishers, et cetera. These interactions cannot always be understood through a single super-specialized regulatory agency or lens. Bill C-39 aims to give more powers to the regulatory agencies, which are hyper-specialized, not to mention energy-specialized in fossil fuels.

My question is: You mentioned the scientific need to answer all these cumulative impacts. How will scientific independence be maintained when a specialized regulator assumes greater

responsibility for environmental reviews? What additional scientific resources are you going to give these departments and agencies so that they can meet the shorter statutory timelines?

Mr. LeBlanc: Senator, thank you for the question. I would absolutely share the way you describe the challenge of attracting investments, including both foreign investment and domestic investment. You can think of institutional investors in Canada. We had the Maple 8 pension funds. Everyone's thinking of big and small examples of investors that are essential for many of these projects to proceed. In some cases, there could be public participation as well as the provincial and federal governments, but in many cases, you're right: Access to private investment, including foreign investment, is critical to being able to bring these projects to fruition. A simplified, more reliable and predictable regulatory framework is part of attracting that investment.

I'm saying in no way does it diminish the responsibility around oversight evaluation, and I think that was the second part of your very thoughtful question.

You may be thinking of the Canada Energy Regulator, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission or the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. This legislation sets up one decision maker as being ultimately responsible for doing the work with other federal agencies, provincial agencies and independent agencies, as well as public consultations. All of that process remains intact. We have not diminished or limited the ability of the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada to get advice from a specialist scientist at Fisheries and Oceans Canada or from the Canada Energy Regulator to benefit from work done with species at risk. Because there is one focus for a decision in a defined period of time, I would posit before you, senators, that this in no way limits the important work of all of the federal and other agencies, in many cases provincial and independent if you think of scientific advice, which is necessary to come to those decisions.

Simplifying the decision maker doesn't limit the factors or access to the advice in order to come to the decision.

Senator Galvez: Thank you very much for saying "at a given time and moment." What specific mechanisms will ensure for Canadians that environmental monitoring will continue after the project and will deliver the long-term economic benefits?

The Chair: Thank you, senator.

Senator Yussuff: Thank you, ministers, for being here. Of course, my question is for Minister Hajdu.

There are many measures in the section regarding how we can improve the collective bargaining process and help the parties reach an agreement. The objective is to reach an agreement. From my experience working with you or the guys sitting beside you, the objective has always been to find out how we get to that place. And there is no magic. I don't care what anyone tells you. There is no magic. Legislation is not magic; it's a guideline for how we can get there.

In the context of the ability of unions to bargain with their employers and reach a collective agreement, the unit had to struggle to achieve certain basic things that are now a

fundamental part of the Constitution of this country. The right to strike was established in 2015 in the Charter and so was the right to collective bargaining.

Here's what the Supreme Court said:

The right to collective bargaining and the right to strike are not separate rights operating in parallel. The Supreme Court says the strike leverage is part of what makes collective bargaining meaningful.

I want to say that there are really good provisions that have been brought forth in the legislation that you're putting forth here today. However, where it is disturbing — which I've heard from all my colleagues in the labour movement — is your ability to suspend the right to strike if there is an impasse. When that impasse occurs, there is no magic as to what will happen. You don't need a special mediator to tell you it is impossible for the parties to reach an agreement.

Let me give you one example.

You were the minister who intervened in the Air Canada dispute, and you said that the parties were at an impasse and this dispute wouldn't be resolved at the bargaining table. Yet, despite that statement, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, or CUPE, was ordered back to work under section 107, and within the short time of defying the section 107 order — less than two or three days — they reached a tentative agreement. I would say they reached a tentative agreement with the employer. My point is, again, the right to strike is leverage. We don't necessarily like it. Yes, it causes suffering to the nation and the public, but it is a fundamental right that is coupled with the right to negotiate.

Minister, in the context of the new power provided in the bill, how much time would workers be given to exercise their right to strike if the special mediator says there is no possibility of the parties reaching an agreement before you send it to the labour board to say you at least need to send the parties to mediation or arbitration to resolve the dispute?

Ms. Hajdu: Senator, I just want to thank you for your leadership in the labour movement and the assistance that you've provided many Ministers of Labour during high-conflict labour disputes. I acknowledge your experience and your wisdom in this space.

I also want to say that, first of all, what we have done is actually strengthen the ability of unions to strike without intervention pre-emptively through section 107. In fact, there were no guardrails on section 107 prior to the introduction of this legislation. A minister could use section 107 to refer disputes to the arbitration board prior to strike action commencing. A minister did not have to assess or provide any reason, really, to use section 107. Certainly, the minister did not have a publicly available report from the special mediator that will now be a required component of contemplating section 107. This new process is really designed on the advice of labour and employers. Both said to ensure that, as we are designing new measures for the Labour Code, we are not throwing out the baby with the bathwater. In other words, 95% of cases work out just fine without any government intervention, and those really don't need any new tools —

• (1800)

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

Ministers, on behalf of all senators, thank you for joining us today to assist us with our work on the bill. I would also like to thank your officials.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

[Translation]

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

[English]

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, the Committee of the Whole, authorized by the Senate to study the subject matter of Bill C-39, An Act respecting certain measures to strengthen the economy, reports that it has heard from the said witnesses.

COMMISSIONER FOR MODERN TREATY IMPLEMENTATION BILL

SECOND READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Arnot, seconded by the Honourable Senator MacAdam, for the second reading of Bill C-10, An Act respecting the Commissioner for Modern Treaty Implementation.

Hon. David M. Arnot: Honourable senators, this is part two on modern treaty-making, and I promise the next 10 minutes will be more important than the past 20.

When I was interrupted, I was talking about the need for an independent commissioner.

An assessment of federal conduct must be capable of reaching findings that a department or minister might not welcome. The commissioner must be able to select work, follow the evidence and report candidly without political direction over those judgments. That independence is essential if findings are going to be impartial, credible and transparent to treaty partners, Parliament and the public. Independence must also be matched

by expertise. The person appointed should understand the legal framework, the histories and the practical realities of modern treaty implementation.

The bill gives that independence practical form. The minister must consult Indigenous modern treaty partners before recommending a commissioner. Parliamentary leaders are consulted, and both houses must approve the appointment by resolution. The commissioner serves during good behaviour for up to seven years, with one possible reappointment, and may be removed for cause on the address of both houses.

The appointee's knowledge and experience of modern treaties must be considered. The commissioner independently sets priorities and determines the number and frequency of reviews, audits and briefings. Those safeguards matter more than that label alone. At the end of each review or audit, the commissioner must report on the method used, the findings and the recommendations. Affected federal institutions must receive relevant preliminary findings and recommendations, and they must respond in writing. Relevant Indigenous modern treaty partners may respond. Timely responses must appear in the final report that gives Parliament the findings and the parties' views together.

The final report, review or audit goes directly to the Speakers of the House of Commons and the Senate, being tabled within 15 sitting days. It then stands referred to a committee designated or established to review it.

Annual and urgent special reports follow a different route. They go to the minister, who must cause them to be tabled within 15 sitting days. The minister is responsible for tabling those reports; the commissioner is responsible for their content.

Parliament's role cannot end when a report is tabled. A committee can ask why a finding arose, what a department has done in response, whether a commitment appears in budgets or work plans and whether a treaty partner sees any changes. This is the value of reporting to the other place and to the Senate. Senators and members of the other place can ask probing questions and keep the government's conduct in view. If recommendations are ignored, the commissioner cannot impose a penalty. Parliament can still insist on an explanation and continue to test the government's response in public.

Why have a dedicated commissioner? Some colleagues will ask why the Auditor General cannot do this work. The Auditor General has a vital role, and it is examining treaty implementation at other times. Bill C-10 does not displace that office; it creates a dedicated agent of Parliament whose mandate is modern treaty implementation — which is very specific — with an express duty to engage relevant treaty partners and review and assess federal activity against the bills' relational and treaty objectives. The bill requires reasonable coordination with the Auditor General to avoid unnecessary overlap and permits appropriate information sharing. Similar institutional independence can coexist with different mandates.

Specialization alone is no guarantee of effectiveness, but a sustained view across institutions can expose patterns that a series of isolated files might conceal. The value of a new office will be measured in the quality of its findings, the trust it earns and what federal institutions do in response.

The bill also respects negotiated treaty machinery. It says that its reviews and audits are not substitutes for dispute resolution under a modern treaty or related agreement. Where a treaty or implementing law already provides a particular review or audit, the commissioner is not assigned responsibility for carrying it out, though the commissioner retains discretion to examine federal activity within the statutory mandate given to that person.

The bill does not promise treaty partners that the office will adjudicate their claims or take over their own processes.

I want to be direct about the central limitation: Bill C-10 does not give the commissioner binding remedial powers, impose fines or automatically require a department to act on a recommendation. The concern that Canada might produce another report and fail to change its conduct is serious, and I would not ask colleagues to dismiss it.

My answer is that this bill addresses a distinct gap. It gives modern treaty partners and Parliament a continuing independent account of federal implementation across government. It can identify the institution responsible, record its response and return to systemic problems over time. That is meaningful accountability, but it is not enforcement.

Treaty obligations remain binding in their own right. This bill neither weakens those obligations nor replaces legal remedies available elsewhere.

We should also judge the institution after it begins its work. The bill requires an independent review within five years and then every seven years thereafter, with consultation with modern treaty partners and consideration of changes to the mandate and powers. Parliamentary review is required within 10 years and every tenth year thereafter. Such reviews are opportunities to ask whether recommendations have led to action, whether the office has enough expertise and resources and whether stronger tools are required.

There is a further responsibility here for government. Independence on paper will mean little if the office cannot attract treaty expertise, undertake timely work or obtain practical access to information. A credible commissioner also needs departments prepared to answer candidly and act.

As senators, we should listen to the treaty partners, experts and affected institutions about whether the office can meet that standard in practice.

• (1810)

Now, here are four significant points I want to make. Number one, the bill is congruent with the principles of the federal Parliament's United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, or UNDRIP Act. Two, the bill is in concert with the duty to consult and, in fact, in my opinion, is a

model of best practices by the federal government working cooperatively and collaboratively with Indigenous People, and it has produced a very good model that has a chance of success.

Third, this act in operation, acknowledging the solid underlying treaty principles and working cooperatively and collaboratively, has an opportunity to reduce and perhaps eliminate the litigation that we see so often between treaty parties. That is something that is very important. That's sort of the fundamental ethos behind the office.

Four, with respect to building Canada strong, I was reminded this morning by President Eva Clayton of the Nisga'a Nation — this is important — that nearly 60% of the projects and transformative strategies being assessed by Canada's Major Projects Office have modern treaty intersections, making Indigenous modern treaty partners central to the projects of major national significance for our country. These four points reinforce the need for a modern treaty commissioner to be in place to keep treaty parties on track, both the federal government and the First Nations.

Honourable senators, in closing, when I was Treaty Commissioner, I told many Canadians that treaties are a bridge to the future, and I spoke of hope for a better partnership, hope for a better relationship, hope that communities would be able to shape their own futures and hope for the treaty relationship to find its rightful place in the Canadian state.

These hopes continue to matter. They require Canada to understand its history and to act on its responsibilities. The treaties made generations ago helped shape this country. Modern treaties continue the work of establishing rights, governance and enduring relationships within Canada. Each must be understood in its own terms; each deserves respect in implementation. Creating this commissioner would give Parliament an independent, continuing account of federal performance under modern treaties and an opportunity to insist on better follow-through.

I support Bill C-10, and I ask you, colleagues, to support it as well, to hear modern treaty partners during its study, hopefully in committee, and to give the new institution the scrutiny its purpose deserves. Its success will depend on expertise, independence, adequate capacity and a government prepared to respond. Our responsibility will continue when the commissioner's reports come before us.

At the beginning of this speech, I asked us to draw an arrow from the historic treaties to the modern treaties and to the decision before this chamber. The common principles that underlie historic treaties have direct application to modern treaties. Those principles should be the lens used to find common meaning and common purpose in the interpretation of modern treaties.

That arrow leads from the promises through which people sought to live together to their recognition in our Constitution and now to a practical measure for examining whether Canada honours its modern treaty commitments. It points forward to the relationship we intend to leave for generations yet to come.

The hope I spoke of when I was Treaty Commissioner is also here in this room with us right now. Our hearts hold the values that guide our judgment: respect for treaty peoples, good faith in the promises of the Crown and a commitment to justice. Our hands carry the responsibility of turning that judgment into parliamentary action.

Colleagues, the hope that I have spoken about ultimately rests in your hearts and hands. I support Bill C-10, and I ask you to take this step. My fundamental hope is that Indigenous People take their rightful place in Canadian society and that they enjoy the peace, prosperity and harmony that are the very essence of this country.

I ask that this bill, after second reading, be sent to the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples. I'm hoping that the committee will examine this bill and report it back, without amendment, so that it can pass at the very earliest opportunity.

Thank you, senators.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak as the critic of Bill C-10, an act respecting the commissioner for modern treaty implementation.

Modern treaties are an expression of the nation-to-nation, government-to-government or Indigenous-to-Crown relationship between the Indigenous signatory, the Government of Canada and, as applicable, a province or territory.

They are intended to further define and recognize the Indigenous land and resource rights of the Indigenous signatory and to meaningfully improve the social, cultural, political and economic well-being of the Indigenous People concerned.

At the same time, these agreements provide all signatories with a mutual foundation for the beneficial and sustainable development and use of Indigenous Peoples' traditional lands and resources.

The modern treaties cover 45% of Canada's total land and sea mass, 80% of Canada's North and over two-thirds of Canada's coastline, including adjacent marine shipping routes.

On October 27, 2025, Ms. Eva Clayton provided the following information on the history of Bill C-10 to my office:

Since its formation in 2003, the Land Claims Agreements Coalition, or LCAC, has been calling for an independent implementation and review body that would report directly to Parliament on modern treaty implementation. The federal government made a commitment to establish that body in Canada's Collaborative Modern Treaty Implementation Policy, which was adopted by the government in 2023.

Annex B of the Implementation Policy states:

B.1. Canada and Indigenous Modern Treaty Partners recognize that more work is required to ensure the federal government is held accountable to Parliament for its actions.

B.2. Recognizing that this is a priority for both Canada and Indigenous Modern Treaty Partners, Canada and Indigenous Modern Treaty Partners will co-develop, within the next 6 months, recommendations to put in place credible, effective, sustainable and independent oversight mechanisms to hold the federal government accountable to Parliament.

B.3. For certainty, recommendations arising from this co-development process will explore a range of options, including the establishment of a Modern Treaty Implementation Review Commission within the Office of the Auditor General, as well as the creation of a separate Agent of Parliament, with the purpose of monitoring and reviewing the federal implementation of modern treaties.

This led to six months of impressive and intensive collaborative efforts between the federal government and Indigenous modern treaty partners, resulting in a co-developed proposal for an independent oversight body, referred to as the commissioner for modern treaty implementation.

On May 2, 2024, the then Prime Minister announced the creation of that body.

The federal government and Indigenous modern treaty partners co-developed the legislation for that body, which was introduced in October 2024 as Bill C-77, an act respecting the commissioner for modern treaty implementation.

• (1820)

Unfortunately, Bill C-77 only received first reading. This was not because there was a problem with the bill. Parliament at the time was deadlocked. Bill C-77 died on the Order Paper when the House was prorogued.

The bill has now been introduced as Bill C-10. It is the same co-developed bill, which is why the Nisga'a Nation and others are not seeking any amendments — because they co-developed it. In other words, they support it as drafted.

On December 3, 2025, LCAC further provided the following information to my office:

Bill C-10 was co-developed by the federal government and Indigenous modern treaty partners across Canada. It is more than just another government bill; it is our bill as well. Indigenous modern treaty partners have advocated for an independent oversight body for modern treaty implementation for more than 20 years. Put simply, the Indigenous modern treaty partners fully support Bill C-10 as drafted.

The bill will improve Indigenous self-determination and autonomy. The full, effective and timely implementation can yield concrete socio-economic gains. A federal evaluation found that Indigenous people in self-governing communities will experience higher incomes, greater employment, better housing conditions and overall improved community well-being compared to those under the Indian Act system. Modern treaties are good for the economy and, therefore, good for all Canadians.

Modern treaties are constitutionally protected agreements that form an essential part of the constitutional framework of Canada and represent a distinct expression of reconciliation. They clarify

the land and resource rights, both of the Indigenous signatories and of the Crown, and are intended to improve the social, cultural, political and economic well-being of the Indigenous Peoples concerned.

When modern treaties are implemented well, Canada prospers. However, when modern treaties are neglected, Canada's credibility and integrity suffer. Bill C-10 will bring the necessary oversight and accountability within the federal system that has been missing for far too long.

Decades of unfruitful efforts to improve modern treaty implementation have demonstrated that the failures are not individual but structural. Federal public servants can only act within the mandates that they are given. Without political-level direction and accountability, even the best-intentioned public servants are left without the tools or authority to deliver results. The commissioner will ensure that parliamentarians and, through them, Canadians have the power to hold to account the highest levels of government, not just individual bureaucrats.

Over the years, the Auditor General has provided important reviews of various Indigenous issues, but performance audits of modern treaties have been few and far between. The Auditor General's broad mandate and scope limited to existing government programs also make that office ill-suited for the task. Modern treaties require continuous, comprehensive and specialized attention, which the commissioner will provide.

The commissioner will be an independent agent of Parliament, so there will not be another layer of bureaucracy; it will shine a light on performance rather than processes.

Fifty years after the first modern treaty was signed, implementation continues to fall short. Many Indigenous modern treaty partners continue to have no choice but to spend considerable resources and time forcing the federal government to honour commitments it made to them in their treaties. Governments of all stripes have tried to fix this issue internally, but while coordination between departments has improved, accountability has not. Modern treaty obligations remain unfulfilled, implementation uneven, results inconsistent, and trust fragile.

Importantly, implementation of treaties is and must remain a non-partisan issue. Modern treaties have been signed, and implementation challenges have persisted under both Conservative and Liberal governments. Systemic barriers, not ideology, are the cause of implementation issues. All political parties must remain committed to the full, effective and timely implementation of modern treaties, and each has a role to play in holding government accountable to the promises they made.

Colleagues, fully implemented modern treaties benefit all Canadians. They clarify the land and resource rights both of the Indigenous signatories and of the Crown. For Indigenous signatories, modern treaties offer new opportunities for self-reliance, political and economic development, as well as cultural and social well-being. They are the basis for building a renewed and positive relationship between Indigenous Peoples and wider Canadian society.

I fully support this bill going to committee to address the concerns that senators, the public and the modern treaty partners may have. Please support the Land Claims Agreements Coalition in their journey towards self-determination and implementation of their modern treaties.

Kinanâskomitinawow, thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

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 Arnot, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples.)

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Gold, P.C., seconded by the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson:

That the following Address be presented to His Majesty the King:

To His Most Excellent Majesty Charles the Third, by the Grace of God King of Canada and His other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY:

We, Your Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the Senate of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both houses of Parliament.

Hon. Yuen Pau Woo: Honourable senators, my response to the Speech from the Throne addresses three connected issues at the forefront of public policy: Canada's need to respond rapidly and decisively to changes in the world order, Parliament's responsibility to oversee the powers used in that response and the importance of regulatory practices that keep pace with a fast-changing world. This is not a speech about any one bill, but colleagues will recognize its relevance to legislation we have considered and will be asked to consider. I offer it not as a discussion of parliamentary procedure for its own sake but as a framework for our ongoing review of legislation.

• (1830)

We should equip Canadians to act decisively, strengthen our economic resilience, develop new markets and respond to technological change. However, giving government the capacity to act must not mean diminishing Parliament's capacity to hold it accountable.

Much of the legislation we pass gives ministers, departments and agencies authority to make regulations. We encounter this whenever we are told that a detail in a bill will be "sorted out in regulation."

However, our responsibility does not end when the bill receives Royal Assent.

The enabling legislation determines who may make regulations, on what subjects and within what limits. The Statutory Instruments Act, or SIA, provides the broader framework for examination, registration, publication and parliamentary scrutiny.

Delegation is necessary. Parliament cannot reasonably write every technical specification needed to implement legislation. However, the more we rely on delegated authority, the more important its oversight becomes.

That, colleagues, is the role of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations, or REGS, on which I have the privilege of serving as joint chair. Senators and members of the House of Commons work together, supported by specialist legal counsel.

Our ordinary scrutiny takes place after regulations have been made. The central question is not whether we would have chosen the same policy. It is whether delegated authority has been exercised lawfully and appropriately, with proper regard for rights, procedural requirements and clarity.

The committee seeks explanations, corrections and amendments. It can report unresolved concerns to Parliament and, in appropriate cases, recommend disallowance through the statutory procedure involving both houses.

Our work may not make headlines, but a low public profile and low attendance in the chamber tonight should not be mistaken for low constitutional importance.

Parliament can delegate the making of regulations. It cannot delegate its responsibility to oversee them.

That responsibility makes me concerned about a disturbing pattern in recent legislation: important new executive powers accompanied by provisions excluding particular instruments from the ordinary statutory framework for scrutiny.

Consider the Building Canada Act, which we just discussed. It excludes from the Statutory Instruments Act the orders that add projects to the national interest list, change their names or descriptions, or remove them. It also excludes the ministerial document deemed to constitute specified project authorizations.

The 2026 amendments to the Red Tape Reduction Act provide another example. Subject to conditions, ministers may grant temporary exemptions from statutory and regulatory requirements to facilitate testing in clean technology and financial technology. Orders made under that power are expressly excluded from the definition of a statutory instrument.

These laws contain other publication, reporting and accountability provisions. They do not remove all parliamentary oversight. However, those arrangements are not equivalent to preserving the ordinary, automatic referral of statutory instruments to REGS.

Why should a power to exempt someone from requirements Parliament has enacted be accompanied by an exemption from the normal mechanism for scrutinizing delegated power?

Why should the importance of a project diminish the importance of checking whether authority has been exercised properly? It's important to remember that REGS is not a pre-approval stage through which regulations must pass before taking effect. Its scrutiny follows their making. Removing that scrutiny does not reduce a step in an approval process.

A departure from the usual framework may sometimes be justified, but government should explain why it is necessary and demonstrate that the remaining safeguards are adequate.

A clause excluding an instrument from the SIA should prompt questions from every committee examining the bill and every parliamentarian asked to support it.

This is not about trusting or distrusting a particular minister. Powers can and will outlast the circumstances that prompted their creation and the governments that requested them.

Scrutiny is not red tape. It is part of the responsibility that comes with exercising public power.

Other parliaments offer useful examples of how to examine these questions before legislation is passed. In the U.K., the House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee examines bills for inappropriate delegation and inadequate parliamentary scrutiny. The committee's reports inform consideration of the bill while it can still be amended.

This committee does not replace Parliament's legislative judgment. They help parliamentarians exercise it by providing specialist assessments of the authority they are being asked to confer.

We should strengthen that function in our own Parliament. Government bills should come with a clear explanation of the powers being delegated, why delegation is necessary, what limits apply and how Parliament will oversee their exercise.

This was a question I would have asked the ministers if I had had time to do so.

This need not begin with creating another committee. We should examine how existing arrangements can be strengthened, with clear responsibilities, sufficient legal support and reports available in time to inform consideration of a bill's clauses. Scrutiny before powers are granted and scrutiny after they are exercised serve different purposes. Both are needed.

Honourable senators, protecting scrutiny does not mean resisting innovation. Parliamentary oversight should help government use new tools responsibly, not prevent it from doing so.

That brings me to incorporation by reference and the contribution that recognized Canadian standards can make to better regulation.

Incorporation by reference allows a regulation to refer to an outside document rather than reproduce its contents. The relevant requirements can thereby acquire legal force. For example, a regulation might require compliance with specified provisions of a technical standard rather than reproduce every specification.

The 2015 amendments to the Statutory Instruments Act expressly authorized incorporation by reference, subject to statutory limits. They also required incorporated material to be accessible.

Canada has an established standards system on which regulators can draw. A National Standard of Canada is developed by an organization accredited by the Standards Council of Canada. Why should government reproduce suitable technical work when it can responsibly use that work by reference? The opportunity is to devote regulatory effort to assessing what serves the public interest rather than repeatedly drafting technical specifications from scratch.

Recognition, however, is not a substitute for judgment. Government must decide whether a standard is suitable for the objective Parliament has authorized it to pursue.

The distinction is between drawing on outside expertise and handing over responsibility for public policy. We should welcome the former without accepting the latter.

That distinction explains REGS's longstanding interest in incorporation by reference and the question of "accessibility."

In June 2018, our former colleague Senator Joseph Day reminded this chamber of a basic principle: People expected to obey the law must have a reasonable opportunity to discover what it requires. He highlighted concerns about incorporated documents that had to be purchased, were difficult to obtain or were not available in both official languages.

On May 25, 2026, the committee accepted the government's response to this longstanding accessibility file and agreed to close it.

Counsel reported that Treasury Board had confirmed completion of its guidance in January 2025. Counsel had reviewed it and confirmed that it addressed cost, language and point-in-time access, which is the ability to consult the version applicable on a particular date.

The government has not adopted a statutory definition of "accessible." It maintains that a single definition would be too rigid for the different documents that can be incorporated. Instead, the guidance addresses circumstances involving copyright, cost, documents available in only one official language and difficulty obtaining earlier versions.

The committee accepted this guidance-based response as sufficient to resolve its request.

• (1840)

This is parliamentary scrutiny doing more than just identifying problems. The committee pressed for answers, examined the response and accepted a practical way forward.

The next step is to put the accepted approach into practice and build on it.

In 2024, Senator Colin Deacon and I hosted a workshop on standards in government rulemaking, bringing together standards organizations and regulators. Participants explored how standards could support more timely regulation and reduce unnecessary duplication.

Workshop participants argued that Canada was underutilizing these tools. Some told us that long-standing accessibility concerns and the committee's earlier positions had contributed to caution within parts of the public service. That is why the committee's May 25 acceptance of the government's response is so important. It provides officials with the confidence to use incorporation by reference responsibly.

However, I would go further. It is not just that incorporation by reference can be used in the flexible way that the government has proposed and the committee has accepted. It is also that regulators should systematically examine whether a suitable National Standard of Canada or another recognized international standard already exists before developing a new technical requirement.

Where a relevant standard exists, the published regulatory explanation should state whether it is being adopted, adapted or not used — and why.

That would not require regulators to accept standards that fail to meet Canadian needs; however, it would require them to assess existing technical work before reproducing it.

Our objective should be to use Canada's standards system effectively while avoiding unnecessary differences from suitable approaches used elsewhere.

The Cabinet Directive on Regulation already directs departments to consider incorporation by reference, including internationally accepted standards. It addresses accessibility, official languages and continuing review.

The task now is to turn encouragement into consistent, documented consideration, supported by the expertise and resources needed for sound decisions.

The Treasury Board has announced a review of the directive that includes considering stronger expectations to use existing regulatory approaches before developing uniquely Canadian solutions. I welcome that opening and have encouraged the President of the Treasury Board and his office to more deliberately consider the role of standards.

Greater use of standards must preserve public responsibility. Regulators should assess a standard's suitability and the inclusiveness of its development. Technical expertise matters, but so do the perspectives of consumers, workers, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and others affected.

We should work with the Standards Council of Canada and standards organizations to anticipate regulatory needs earlier, including language, accessibility and arrangements for revisions. Access must be practical. Regulators should maintain reliable inventories, provide clear directions to incorporated material, arrange access to relevant historical versions and meet applicable official language obligations.

There must also be a sustainable basis for developing and maintaining standards. Incorporated material may remain subject to third-party copyright; public access and intellectual property, therefore, need to be addressed together.

Government should work with standards organizations on licensing, translation and archiving arrangements that let people consult the requirements they must obey while supporting the organizations that produce them.

Regulations incorporating standards should remain subject to parliamentary scrutiny. Moving technical detail into an outside document must not become another route around accountability.

Honourable senators, these arguments belong together. Canada needs the capacity to respond decisively to a changing world. That calls for effective regulation, capable institutions and accountability, not a choice from among them.

The Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations' resolution of the accessibility file shows that scrutiny can accommodate practical solutions. That is very different from excluding executive instruments from the ordinary scrutiny framework.

For colleagues less familiar with the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations, its work deserves your attention and support. Its mandate deserves protection. When concerns remain unanswered, the committee needs both houses to support it.

When we examine bills, we should look beyond their promises —

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: I'm sorry, senator. Your time has expired.

Senator Woo: May I have two moments?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Woo: When we examine bills, we should look beyond their promises to the powers through which they will be implemented. What authority are we granting? What limits apply? What scrutiny are we preserving? What are we being asked to surrender? Those questions belong to every parliamentarian; they belong to all of us. Thank you.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator Batters, would you like to ask a question?

Hon. Denise Batters: I would, yes.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: You need to ask for more time to answer questions.

Senator Batters: We said five minutes.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: You said five minutes? I didn't hear that.

Senator Batters: Yes.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Go ahead, Senator Batters.

Senator Batters: Thank you.

Senator Woo, as you know, I also used to be the Joint Chair of the Scrutiny of Regulations Committee, so I absolutely agree that the committee is important and deserves our attention. Thank you for bringing that up as a major part of your speech today.

I looked back because I haven't heard much about the Scrutiny of Regulations Committee in the past while. I see in this Parliament, which is now about 18 months old, there have only been four meetings, and the last one was in late May. Of those four meetings, one was to elect the joint chairs last fall, and then there were three other meetings that were each about an hour long.

Why isn't your committee meeting more to deal with all this important work? The Scrutiny of Regulations Committee used to meet every second week for two-hour spans each time.

Senator Woo: It was the practice to meet every other week for two hours or as long as it takes to go through the agenda. We have a number of special problems in the current Parliament.

The first is that it is a joint committee, as you've observed. For a time, we did not have members from the House of Commons. We had to wait for our colleagues in the other place to fill their seats, if you will, before the entire committee could meet.

Second, we have, apparently, a lower priority when it comes to accessing committee rooms, and we share a Monday-morning slot with other joint committee meetings, notably those of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament. Technically, we alternate access to that room, and there are weeks when the designated slot given to us falls on a day when we don't sit or are in a break week and so on.

I can tell you, Senator Batters, that it is my intention — and I believe I have the support of all the committee members — to meet as often as we can to go through the large backlog of regulations that have piled up and require our scrutiny to ensure that they are consistent with the laws from which they emanate.

Senator Batters: I just looked up the Library of Parliament Committee, which is the joint committee you say you share time with, and they've only had two meetings in the past 18 months, so it doesn't seem like that's a problem. If this committee is actually important, could you please ensure that the government understands that it is important and that they need to have meetings more frequently to ensure the regulations are properly scrutinized?

Senator Woo: Thank you, Senator Batters. I hope you will advocate with your caucus as well to ensure that there is that advocacy, that push from the House side and from the Conservative Party, and that when seats are vacant, they are filled as swiftly as possible.

[Translation]

Hon. Amina Gerba: Honourable senators, four years ago, in 2022, I had the honour of giving my first speech in reply to the Speech from the Throne. At the time, I urged Canada to see Africa differently, not as a peripheral continent in our foreign policy, but as a leading strategic partner. Four years later, what progress has been made?

First, I had the honour of becoming your co-chair of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association, a position I still hold today. I want to thank you, dear colleagues, for putting your trust in me as a parliamentarian who, in 2022, was a rookie senator with no parliamentary diplomacy experience at all.

• (1850)

Canada's Africa Strategy was first adopted in 2025. The strategy aims to strengthen diplomatic, economic and human relations with African countries. Two high-level dialogues were held with the African Union in 2022 and 2024. A permanent observer for Canada to the African Union has been appointed.

[Senator Batters]

The posts of Special Envoy for Africa and the Sahel were created. Canada upgraded its office in Benin to an embassy and its office in Zambia to a high commission.

The President of the African Development Bank, Sidi Ould Tah, and the Secretary-General of the African Continental Free Trade Area, Wamkele Mene, were officially received in Canada. More recently, the Minister of Foreign Affairs took her first official visit to Benin and Ivory Coast.

In 2026, there were also moves to strengthen ties with Morocco, the announcement of direct Air Canada flights to Nigeria, and a meeting between Prime Minister Carney and the Nigerian industrialist Aliko Dangote, ranked by Forbes as Africa's richest man. These initiatives are to be commended, even if they've not yet yielded any concrete results.

In December 2026, the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade tabled a report entitled "Canada-Africa: Seizing a Strategic Opportunity." I am seizing this opportunity to recognize the tremendous work done by all members of this committee, which I am privileged to be part of and which is chaired by Senator Peter Boehm. During the course of this historic study, we spent 26 hours hearing from over 65 witnesses. The 21 recommendations set out in this report are unequivocal: Canada must fully engage in Africa or risk being left behind. I repeat: Canada must fully engage in Africa or risk being left behind.

[English]

One of the report's key findings is clear: Africa represents a strategic opportunity for Canada, yet our engagement has all too often been fragmented and inconsistent. That is why the report calls for a bold, coordinated and sustained approach.

The urgency is clear: While Canada debates, our partners are already building strategic economic, commercial and diplomatic positions across Africa.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, our major partners and competitors have launched ambitious initiatives. The European Union launched the Global Gateway Strategy and the Africa-Europe Investment Package, which includes about 150 billion euros in investments on the African continent. Japan, as part of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 8), has announced \$30 billion U.S. in public and private investments. France and Kenya co-hosted the Africa Forward Summit in Nairobi in 2026, which was chaired by the President of France. Investments in Africa announced at the summit amounted to 23 billion euros. In 2024, Italy launched the Mattei Plan for Africa, which funds projects and engages Italian businesses in strategic sectors in Africa. Even the United States recently extended the African Growth and Opportunity Act, or AGOA, until 2028 to maintain preferential access by several dozens of African countries to the U.S. market. China, however, remains Africa's largest trading partner and continues to grow its economic presence across the continent. The actions of major economic powers demonstrate Africa's key position on the world stage.

When His Majesty King Charles III opened this 45th Parliament, he said the following:

... by staying true to Canadian values, Canada can build new alliances and a new economy that serves all Canadians.

Honourable senators, I firmly believe that strengthening our partnership with Africa is also key to these new alliances. However, the figures show that we have begun to make progress, but there's still a lot of work to be done. According to the Office of the Chief Economist, trade between Canada and Africa reached nearly \$19 billion in 2025, representing an increase of 22.5%. However, it still accounts for less than 1% of Canada's total exports. In other words, despite the progress made, the potential remains largely untapped.

I sometimes hear it said that Africa doesn't yet offer a sufficient return to justify greater commitment from Canada. This assertion defies basic logic. No one diversifies their portfolio by investing only where they already have a presence. The Government of Canada has set a target of doubling Canadian exports to non-U.S. markets over the next decade. If we are serious about diversification, we must accept that it is a long-term endeavour. It is precisely against this backdrop that we must assess our presence in Africa.

Today, the continent's population exceeds 1.5 billion. By the middle of the century, in 2050, nearly one in four of the planet's inhabitants will be in Africa. Africa will by then have the world's largest labour force. Today, however, risk is often cited as a reason for inaction on the African continent. In Africa's case, this risk is often more perceived than real. We continue —

• (1900)

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator Gerba, I regret interrupting you.

[English]

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

Is it agreed to not see the clock?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Some Hon. Senators: No.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: I hear a "no."

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

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

• (2000)

[Translation]

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Gold, P.C., seconded by the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson:

That the following Address be presented to His Majesty the King:

To His Most Excellent Majesty Charles the Third, by the Grace of God King of Canada and His other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY:

We, Your Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the Senate of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both houses of Parliament.

Hon. Amina Gerba: Risk is often used to excuse inaction. In the case of Africa, the risk is often more perceived than real. Sometimes, we still look at the continent through the lens of old perceptions, even though Africa's economic reality has changed dramatically.

If the risk was as insurmountable as people claim, why would the European Union, Japan and France be announcing tens of billions of dollars in investments?

Other major economies don't deny the risk, but simply choose to manage it and work around it.

Across the world, governments and international financial institutions use surety mechanisms to reduce risks borne by private investors.

The Senate's report recommends that Canada strengthen its support for Export Development Canada, or EDC, to promote diversification by our companies in Africa.

The vastness of the African continent, with its 54 countries, is often used as an excuse for inaction.

Canada doesn't have to cover the entire continent, but it needs a presence somewhere. It needs to identify partner countries, priority regions and sectors where it excels, whether in agriculture, artificial intelligence, infrastructure, clean energy, education, global health or critical minerals. We have to make a choice.

The Senate report also recommends a multilateral approach to our relations with the African continent, including relations with the African Union and regional economic communities.

[English]

Honourable colleagues, while others are investing billions of dollars, Canada's economic presence remains modest. We have laid the foundation. Now, we must build for the long term. African countries are also looking for reliable partners, and Canada has an opportunity to be one. Our country has strong institutions, a stable business environment, recognized expertise and an enviable international reputation, but reputation alone is no longer enough.

[Translation]

One of Canada's greatest untapped assets is our citizens —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gerba, the time allowed for debate has expired. Are you asking for leave to finish your speech?

Senator Gerba: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted?

Senator Gerba: Thank you, honourable senators. One of Canada's greatest untapped assets is our citizens. More than one million Canadians trace their roots to Africa. They form a formidable bridge between our country and Africa, and they're eager to become more involved.

Honourable colleagues, I'd now like to highlight two concrete actions that will help accelerate the implementation of Canada's Africa Strategy.

First, the government must now secure funding for the Africa Strategy and adopt an implementation plan with clear timelines, measurable objectives and a system for monitoring results. The Senate report addresses that.

Second, I recommend that the government establish a Canada-Africa advisory council on business relations, modelled on the American, French and British examples, bringing together representatives from the private sector, the diaspora and Canadian and African business communities.

The council's mandate would be to identify business opportunities, pinpoint barriers to trade and investment and advise the government on measures to strengthen Canada's economic presence in Africa. When I rose in this chamber in 2022, some viewed Africa as a market of the future. In 2026, honourable senators, Africa has become a key player in today's global economy. Canada must acknowledge this and participate in Africa's economic transformation. Thank you. *Asanté Sana*.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[English]

Hon. Pamela Wallin: Honourable senators, I have given many speeches here in this chamber on the issue of advance requests, and I was disheartened to see, yet again, that there was no mention of this compelling issue in the Speech from the Throne. I am hopeful that announcements may be forthcoming, but I am also told that patience is a virtue, so bear with me this one last time.

[Senator Gerba]

An advance request is a written declaration allowing someone who is not facing imminent death but whose death is foreseeable due to an irremediable medical condition, such as Alzheimer's, to make an advance request that would allow them to ask to have medical assistance in dying, or MAID, administered if they reach a point where they are unable to give final consent.

Advance requests would help save so many from spending the last days of their lives in pain and suffering, unaware of their circumstances, saying and doing things they otherwise never would have, unable to feed themselves, taste, feel, understand or experience joy. All too often, what they experience is pain.

Colleagues, I believe it must be our personal right to make end-of-life decisions for ourselves and to do so in advance, making our wishes clear and relieving our families and loved ones of the burden of making these difficult decisions and choices in cases such as Alzheimer's.

It is also our responsibility as legislators to sort out the respective roles of governments, doctors, families and, most importantly, the individual, in choices about the end of our lives. It is a complex and deeply emotional issue, I know.

We deal with death in many forms every day of our lives: the death of a relationship, the death of innocence or the death of a loved one. These experiences are painful, but they may also help ready us for a peaceful end to our own lives and help us face that inevitability with some grace.

I have come to my views on this, in large measure, by watching my parents die in two very different but equally dreadful ways: my father to painful cancers and my mother to Alzheimer's. Their suffering was unnecessary and preventable. To be spared that inevitable fate was the only kindness they asked for when their minds were clear, but it was not to be. The laws denied them the right to be heard and the right to have their end dignified.

These painful journeys are taken by families every day in this country. Canadians with incurable or irreversible medical conditions suffer needlessly in hospital beds or care homes, and far too many are alone because their families are miles or countries away, and funds may be limited.

This is just wrong, and it is, quite literally, a fate worse than death. Without the possibility of advance requests for MAID, we have seen people with diseases like Alzheimer's take their own lives, fearful that if they waited, there would be no option, or worse, they would be left spending the last moments of their lives confused and afraid that they would lose consciousness and be forced to live on without awareness or with their faculties in some diminished state.

• (2010)

The truly brutal Catch-22 is that, right now, Canadians diagnosed with dementia or Alzheimer's are often denied the right to even request medical assistance in dying, or MAID, from the moment of their diagnosis, even though they are still symptom-free and able to make a sound decision.

But for any of us who have witnessed the slow descent into hell that is Alzheimer's, this is an uncivilized way to treat our loved ones. Many will likely spend their final remaining days with strangers who were once their loved ones and, perhaps most unfairly, with flashes of awareness that they are no longer who they once were. They will lose their dignity, their character, their personality and their choices.

Many of us have lived it or alongside it, and we are concerned about our own futures. We are asking the fundamental questions that are always the what-ifs of aging. We all fear the unknown in life, and it is the unknown about the end of life that is the greatest fear of all.

Alzheimer's is a likely diagnosis for me given my family history. I have no children or husband to advocate for me, so the decisions for my end of life fall with, well, who knows? But without the right to an advance request, I have no control or say — no choice — about my life's final chapter.

We have the right to ask for no extraordinary measures if we are in an accident or undergoing surgery, but we have no right to say that if we are sentenced to a life without function or awareness that we want to be able to ask for an end. No one who loses capacity unexpectedly should be forced to live the rest of their life in some "netherland." That's why we have do-not-resuscitate orders.

I see an advance request as exercising that same right. Our well-stated, well-documented decisions about our own lives should be respected and upheld, even after losing our conscious ability to reaffirm that decision in the moment.

Some believe this is an oversimplified understanding of the issue, but I disagree. I hope they will be able to understand that my basic human right to choose my fate and to allow my dignity when I reach my point of departure is a human right.

Some doctors may feel uneasy about advance requests. This is an important concern. But I am troubled that we have placed so much focus on safeguards for doctors that we have only created greater gaps in accessibility for patients. No one will ask them to do something that they feel is a breach of their oath, but they should be obliged to at least refer patients to someone who will respect the patient's wishes and the needs of that person.

But this issue has always been about choice for doctors and for individuals who want to have choices in life and choices about how it ends. As legislators, I believe we owe it to our families, our most vulnerable, our medical practitioners and, of course, ourselves to secure that right to a quality of life and to a quality of death where possible.

When we have worked hard to do and be our best and when we have carved out a good life, there is no reason why a life filled with dignity needs to be met with an undignified end.

As the old phrase goes, "Do not go gentle into that good night." Senators, I ask you: Please do not let us go gentle into this good fight for dignity in our final days. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

(On motion of Senator LaBoucane-Benson, debate adjourned.)

BILL TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL STRATEGY TO END ENERGY POVERTY

SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Mary Coyle moved second reading of Bill S-251, An Act to establish a national strategy to end energy poverty.

She said: Honourable senators, as we gather on this gorgeous day with a cool crispness in the air, here in the Senate Chamber on the unceded and unsundered lands of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, I rise to draw your attention to a matter of national importance: the matter of energy poverty.

According to Dr. Fatih Birol, Executive Director of the International Energy Agency:

The global energy system faces three major strategic challenges in the coming decades: the growing risk of disruptions to energy supply; the threat of environmental damage caused by energy production and use; and persistent energy poverty. . . .

Honourable colleagues, globally Canada is one of the largest energy producers and one of the largest consumers of energy. A cold climate with warm summers in southern latitudes, which are getting hotter, and a large geography with a dispersed population — historically, we have had comparatively affordable energy prices, even if we've seen that change more recently — and our relatively high standards of living all contribute to Canada's high energy intensity.

Canada's total per capita energy consumption is four times the global average, and we are in the top dozen countries globally on this measure. In other words, Canadians use a lot of energy.

Prime Minister Carney expressed his government's vision for energy in this way: "We will make Canada an energy superpower, drive down our emissions and diversify our export markets."

Prime Minister Carney's promise is to make Canada an energy superpower in both conventional and clean energy. This promise on energy is a central plank in the government's plan to grow Canada's economy and ensure a good life for Canadians.

Finance Minister Champagne said here in our chamber last week, "We are building a stronger, more independent and more affordable Canada."

Honourable colleagues, I'm sure we all want to see our country and our fellow citizens prosper. We can get behind the promise of inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

We all agree that the health and well-being of Canadians is of paramount importance. We know that citizens having opportunities for meaningful participation in our society and economy is key to a healthy democracy and that ensuring affordability is central to these outcomes and to the fundamental social contract between the government and Canadians of all ages — those in rural and those in urban communities from coast to coast to coast.

However, honourable colleagues, we also know that the antithesis of prosperity is poverty. And that poverty is an enormous burden for the people experiencing it and an enormous responsibility for those of us entrusted with ensuring we have in place the strategies, policies, programs and accountabilities to address it effectively.

• (2020)

So, colleagues, as we grow a stronger economy for Canada, it is important to ensure that the benefits of the growth and its intended prosperity are shared by all Canadians.

Honourable senators, energy poverty is one hidden — literally behind closed doors — not widely understood yet insidious and extensively experienced form of poverty in Canada.

Most people think of energy poverty as a problem experienced in the Global South, and it is.

Colleagues, I became aware of energy poverty when I started my international development career in Botswana 46 years ago. I was the Rural Industrial Officer for the Southern District of Botswana, and I was based in Kanye.

At that time and in that place, energy poverty was experienced by the majority of the population, and it was largely due to a lack of electricity and the practice of cooking using charcoal and wood.

Energy poverty in rural Botswana in the 1980s adversely affected access to education, access to health care, health outcomes and economic participation. I gave birth there, to my daughter Lindi, in a hospital without electricity. Fortunately, there were no complications.

Over recent decades, there have been great strides made in addressing energy poverty worldwide, yet today 1 in 12 people on earth still lack basic access to electricity, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and 1 in 4 people are still using wood, charcoal, crop waste and animal dung for cooking, with its associated adverse health impacts.

Canada has signed on to the United Nations Agenda 2030. Its Sustainable Development Goal 7 is “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.”

Even though this goal largely applies to the Global South, where energy poverty is still experienced by very large numbers of people, it also applies to industrialized countries like Canada.

So, colleagues, what does energy poverty look like in Canada? In Canada, it is estimated that 2 million households experience energy poverty. With an average household size of 2.4 in Canada, that means an estimated 4,800,000 Canadians are living in a situation of energy poverty. That's what I meant: hidden behind closed doors.

While there are a variety of indicators of energy poverty, a common one used by Efficiency Canada is when a household spends more than 6% of take-home income on home energy use.

Energy poverty is experienced by people in every province and territory of Canada, with Atlantic Canadians experiencing the highest percentages and people in Ontario experiencing it in the largest numbers.

Over the past four years, in my home province of Nova Scotia, the number of households experiencing energy poverty has ranged from 31% to 48%. That's a lot of households.

The high cost and usage levels of furnace oil are major contributing factors to energy poverty in Nova Scotia.

Dr. Mylène Riva, Canada Research Chair in Housing, Community, and Health at McGill University, is the lead author on the article “Energy poverty in Canada: Prevalence, social and spatial distribution, and implications for research and policy.”

According to Dr. Riva:

Energy poverty happens when “a household experiences inadequate levels of essential energy services in the home” . . . where energy services are those functions performed using energy, such as heating, cooling, lighting, cooking, washing, etc. While energy poverty relates to household factors such as low income, occupancy, and the needs and practices of household members, it is also caused by factors external to the household including the energy inefficiency of the dwelling and of appliances, the type of energy supply, and its cost. The capital expenditure needed to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling is what distinguishes energy poverty from poverty: while increased incomes can lift households out of poverty, it may not lift them out of energy poverty if they still cannot afford, or have no control over (in the case of renters), improving the energy efficiency of their dwelling. Thus, while related, energy poverty is not just a problem of low income.

Having said that, of course, lower-income households are disproportionately impacted by energy poverty.

Energy poverty is significantly higher in rural areas, with older adults and those living alone more at risk.

Research indicates that energy poverty in Canada varies by gender. It is more common among newcomers, renters and single-parent families.

The rate of energy poverty for First Nations households on-reserve is more than twice the Canadian average. Indigenous communities, particularly remote and northern communities, can face a combination of the following: higher energy costs because fuel may have to be transported over long distances; older or

inefficient housing causing increased heating requirements; housing needing major repairs, which is associated with substantially higher energy poverty; lower household incomes and higher overall costs of living; and greater reliance on diesel generation in some remote communities.

Honourable colleagues, energy poverty in Canada is having serious deleterious effects on our fellow citizens. It can have a negative impact on physical and mental health, with people facing tough choices over heating and cooling their homes or buying groceries and medications. It can also limit an individual or community's ability to pursue economic opportunities and take part more generally in society.

Colleagues, energy poverty sits at the intersection of affordability, housing, health, energy efficiency, economic security, social inclusion and reconciliation — all matters of importance to Canadians.

Therefore, honourable senators, I rise today to introduce Bill S-251, an act to establish a national strategy to end energy poverty.

Bill S-251 is a very straightforward bill. It has six pages, which I promise not to read to you, but I will speak to its main components this evening.

The bill defines energy poverty as:

... a condition in which a household is unable or at significant risk of being unable to access the energy services required ... to maintain adequate health, comfort, safety and participation in society.

This includes economic participation.

Bill S-251 will require the Government of Canada to develop a national strategy to end energy poverty, significantly reduce energy poverty in the near term and ultimately eliminate it.

The minister responsible is the Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature. This is because the Office of Energy Efficiency was moved from Natural Resources Canada to Environment and Climate Change Canada, effective July 30, if people were wondering about that.

Bill S-251 calls for establishing a national framework for understanding, measuring and addressing energy poverty.

It calls for bringing together federal departments, other orders of government, Indigenous governing bodies, experts, service providers and people with lived experience, with the minister establishing an advisory council to advise on the development, implementation and evaluation of the strategy.

The bill establishes accountability and transparency requirements, including — and this is something all of us are always looking for — regular reporting to Parliament on the strategy's implementation and effectiveness.

Those are the essential elements of the bill.

Honourable colleagues, I am very happy to report that Member of Parliament Bruce Fanjoy will be the House of Commons sponsor of Bill S-251. We have been working closely for the past few months and have been greatly assisted in our efforts by Efficiency Canada.

We have also been fortunate to have the support of my Director of Parliamentary Affairs, Sarah Thomas, and also David Groves, Senate of Canada Parliamentary Counsel, from the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel.

Earlier today, both MP Fanjoy and I spoke of our intentions to introduce Bill S-251 at the Canada Home Energy Justice Conference at Carleton University.

The conference brings together housing providers, utilities, Indigenous organizations, community leaders, policy-makers, business leaders, entrepreneurs, researchers and others focused on finding ways to end energy poverty in Canada once and for all.

• (2030)

And now here we are in the Senate Chamber, shining a light on the issue of energy poverty in Canada and introducing Bill S-251, a bill designed to address this often hidden form of poverty.

You might ask, though, "Doesn't the federal government already have policies and programs in place to deal with energy poverty?" The answer is a simple yes. The government does have some related policy frameworks and some important programs.

Last week, Finance Minister Champagne was in our chamber, as you will recall, for the Senate Committee of the Whole study on Bill C-38. While with us, Minister Champagne made reference to government measures related to affordability — you may recall this — fitting into an affordability pyramid. Remember that? That pyramid encompassed housing, food and transportation fuel. The government has not specifically addressed energy poverty as defined in Bill S-251 in this affordability pyramid, but it would certainly fit well in there.

The government's new strategy, *A National Strategy for an Electrified Canadian Economy*, is built on the idea that electricity can be a cheaper energy source than fossil fuels. While unveiling the strategy, Prime Minister Carney said that the goal is to lower energy costs for 70% of Canadian households.

Honourable colleagues, lowering energy costs is critical to addressing energy poverty. A well-informed and well-designed strategy to end energy poverty, such as the one called for in Bill S-251, would ensure that people and communities experiencing energy poverty would be prioritized and included in that 70% target.

Colleagues, Canada co-hosted the 11th Annual Global Conference on Energy Efficiency in Montreal in June, which resulted in the Montreal Action Plan. While addressing the immediate disruptions in conventional energy supply, of course, the Montreal Action Plan reaffirmed the commitment to collectively doubling the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030, and conference participants pledged to exploit the full potential of energy efficiency to build long-term resilience against future energy shocks.

The Montreal Action Plan states:

We commit to work collectively to help all people access the benefits of energy, including low-income households and other vulnerable groups, by implementing energy efficiency policies to alleviate hardship in the short-term and build long-term resilience.

At the Montreal conference, the Honourable Tim Hodgson, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, joined the International Energy Agency, or IEA, Ministerial Advisory Panel on Electricity Affordability. The panel is charged with identifying key policy solutions and key actions to strengthen affordable electricity globally — including in Canada — specifically for vulnerable populations.

Speaking at that same conference, the Honourable Julie Dabrusin, Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, said:

Energy efficiency is one of the most practical tools we have to lower costs for Canadians, and it does so while cutting emissions at the same time. That is the spirit of this conference: turning efficiency into lower bills, stronger competitiveness and a more secure energy future. Canada is ready to keep leading it, with partners here at home and around the world.

Honourable senators, the Montreal Action Plan, the IEA panel role that Minister Hodgson has taken on related to electricity affordability and the statement by Minister Dabrusin linking energy efficiency to energy affordability are well aligned with the purpose of Bill S-251, An Act to establish a national strategy to end energy poverty.

Colleagues, one recent legislative example of government policy priorities is Bill S-4, An Act to amend the Energy Efficiency Act. It was while studying this bill at the Senate Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources that my awareness of the potential uneven impacts of improved energy efficiency measures was heightened. It was really my aha moment, actually.

Bill S-4 is an important piece of legislation modernizing Canada's Energy Efficiency Act, updating energy efficiency rules to reflect modern technologies, support innovation, strengthen enforcement and encourage the responsible use of energy.

While the bill is not a direct affordability measure, one of its clear and stated intentions is to improve affordability, and it will for many Canadians. However, in committee we heard from a number of witnesses, including the First Nations Housing

Professionals Association, that the bill does not fully address the capacity to implement and maintain these new technologies. Housing conditions, workforce readiness and funding are also concerns there.

Tabitha Eneas, Chair of the First Nations Housing Professionals Association, said at the committee meeting:

First Nations communities are managing multiple overlapping pressures: aging housing stock, overcrowding, deferred maintenance, rising energy costs, rising construction costs, limited funding and limited capacity, and this all creates energy poverty.

At the same time, communities are being asked to transition to higher energy standards. This creates tension. . . .

The Senate Energy Committee included observations in its report on Bill S-4 that addressed the community readiness gap and acknowledged that improving energy efficiency standards alone will not completely address the issue of energy poverty and could even compound it. It called on the government to address energy poverty by implementing energy efficiency support programs to advance the uptake of energy-efficient appliances for low-income households.

Colleagues, it's that age-old conundrum where people and communities need to have the resources — they need to have the money — to make these investments in order to be able to save money over the long term. We all know that problem.

Yes, colleagues, the government has a number of programs to support Canadians in accessing energy efficiency technology and energy-saving upgrades. These are complementary to and are often implemented in coordination with programs of the provinces, territories, municipalities, Indigenous governments and organizations and utilities.

I will not list them all, but I will mention that the latest announcement on Friday, October 2 — just last week — of an investment of \$66.3 million through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund's Community Efficiency Financing and Sustainable Affordable Housing initiatives for 162 projects across Canada will help with efficiency, affordability and resilience. That followed the government's announcement at the Montreal conference in June of \$500 million, including \$300 million in federal funds to expand the Canada Greener Homes Affordability Program. We hear there may be more big announcements this week.

These government programs and policies are absolutely critical, and the point we are trying to make with the introduction of Bill S-251 is that what Canada needs is a comprehensive and coherent strategy to address and ultimately end energy poverty in Canada. The strongest national approaches to energy poverty that we see combine a clear definition of energy poverty, a robust measurement framework, targeted household and community supports, energy efficiency improvements and ongoing monitoring of progress.

Countries that have made energy poverty a sustained, explicit policy priority have generally moved beyond one-off assistance programs toward a combination of affordability measures, energy efficiency improvements, better data, measurable impacts and accountability — exactly what is proposed in Bill S-251. There are well-advanced experiences to learn from in the United Kingdom, the European Union, New Zealand and others.

Honourable colleagues, as I move toward concluding my remarks, I invite each of you to look into the issue of energy poverty in your regions and in your communities, because it is there, even if it is hidden. Let me know if you need any help because we're here to help you find that out.

As every one of us knows, it is our special responsibility as senators to know about and represent the interests of people in our communities, particularly those who may not have the loudest voices. While we would like to move Bill S-251 to committee as soon as is reasonable, I'd like to invite anyone who is interested to participate in the debate on the bill.

• (2040)

I have spoken with Senator Housakos and Senator Martin, Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, to help identify a critic for Bill S-251. I know they, their caucus mates and all senators care about the issues of energy affordability and access, which are so central to this bill.

Bill S-251, An Act to establish a national strategy to end energy poverty is a timely bill as Canada seeks to build a more prosperous, secure and resilient nation.

Bill S-251 makes lasting energy affordability a national priority.

Every reduction in energy poverty is a person with more room in their household budget, less stress, better health, a safer home and improved opportunities to participate in and contribute to their community and Canada's economy.

By calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy to end energy poverty, Bill S-251 is a move toward greater prosperity for all Canadians and for a healthier and more sustainable environment and a stronger Canada overall.

This is what a true energy superpower looks like. Thank you for your attention to this matter of national importance.

Honourable colleagues, I look forward to working with you to make sure that Bill S-251 moves forward.

Canadians are counting on us.

Wela'liog. Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

INTERNAL ECONOMY, BUDGETS AND ADMINISTRATION

THIRD REPORT OF COMMITTEE—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Loffreda, seconded by the Honourable Senator Pate, for the adoption of the third report of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration, entitled *Senate Budget 2026-27*, presented in the Senate on December 11, 2025.

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I move the adjournment of the debate for the balance of my time.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

AUDIT AND OVERSIGHT

ELEVENTH REPORT OF COMMITTEE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the eleventh report (interim) of the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight, entitled *Funding for the Internal Audit Function*, presented in the Senate on October 1, 2026.

Hon. Marty Klyne moved the adoption of the report.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise this evening to speak briefly to the eleventh report of the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight concerning funding for the Senate's internal audit function. Tabled in the Senate on October 6, this report makes a modest funding proposal to ensure the committee's function is performed properly, as I will explain.

This had already been read at the Clerk's table on October 6.

As senators know, the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight is responsible for overseeing the Senate's internal and external audits and reporting to the Senate on these activities in support of integrity, independence, transparency and meaningful resource allocation.

Your committee is of the view that, with appropriate resources, the Senate's internal audit function will deliver on its mandate. Its work will enhance the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of Senate operations and increase public confidence. Your committee is seeking \$40,000 in annual recurring funding for the Senate's internal audit function to execute the *Risk-Based Internal Audit Plan 2026–2029*. This plan was approved by your committee and tabled in the Senate in April 2026 through the committee's seventh report, which also laid out the planned rapid advisory engagements for the next three years. We found this quite intriguing. There has been some concern that the Audit and Oversight Committee independently oversees the work of

the Senate's internal audit function. The timing, selection and sequencing of the internal audit engagements are based on risk-based assessments that are prepared by the Office of the Chief Audit Executive and approved by the Audit and Oversight Committee.

Consultation with senators and Senate Administration is an important part of that process. However, the committee retains the authority to review and approve the final scope and timing of individual advisory engagements, including the rapid advisory engagements. The decision to undertake the engagement is the Audit and Oversight Committee's alone, with the final authority resting with the Audit and Oversight Committee and its external members. The committee approved the selection of this engagement now because intendant practices present a potential reputational risk for the Senate, as well as opportunities for cost and time savings for senators. Based on what we have learned so far, we believe it's an appropriate and worthwhile engagement. Moreover, this advisory engagement falls squarely within the committee's audit and oversight rights.

We're asking for \$124,000 to come from the budget of the Audit and Oversight Committee and be moved over to the budget of the Office of the Chief Audit Executive. That amount and the \$40,000 recurring funding would be enough for us to get through what we had promised we would do with the multi-year risk-based plan. We have four rapid advisory engagements. We're completing one now, and there will be three more to come. We would have enough, if the Senate sees fit, to grant the \$40,000 for the recurring periods. With the shuffle of the \$124,000 from the budget of the Audit and Oversight Committee to the budget of the Office of the Chief Audit Executive, we should be able to accomplish what we promised.

I would be happy to take questions before I have to close up on my 15 minutes, if anybody has any.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Klyne, I was wondering if you were finished speaking on this. You still have 11 minutes. There was a pause, so I wasn't sure. I'm just asking.

Senator Klyne: Thank you very much.

Absent this funding, planned internal audit work would need to be deferred or reduced, limiting independent assurance and insights into key areas. This could leave potential reputational and emergency risks unmitigated and unmanaged, potentially costing a great deal more in the long run. Honourable senators, the question before us is not whether oversight and assurance are important, but whether we will have the resources necessary for our internal audit function to be effective. Your committee has worked to keep this request as lean as possible, including through the permanent reallocation of existing funds. The result is a measured investment that will allow the Senate's internal audit function to focus on the areas of highest risk and greatest value in compliance with the *Senate Administrative Rules* and the unique and independent nature of the Audit and Oversight Committee.

The committee has worked to keep this as lean as possible. I want to let you know that the strong internal audit capacity protects this institution with proactive insight and tailored recommendations. It enhances credibility.

• (2050)

There are some things we need to look at, of which the current rapid advisory engagement is one. It's a survey that all senators are involved in. We need to look at that very closely. One might ask, "Why are you looking at this now?" First, we're looking at this now because there is no better time. Second, there are many issues that can be looked upon externally. As we know, we're trying to protect the reputation, but there are a number of people who would also like to look at what we put up on the websites. That could lead to some questions that we may not be ready to answer as a Senate, so it's very important that we continue with this rapid advisory engagement.

It's a good time right now.

I move that the report be adopted.

Hon. Denise Batters: Would Senator Klyne take a few questions?

Senator Klyne: How much time do we have?

Senator Batters: As much as you have.

Senator Klyne: How much time do I have to answer? Is my time over?

The Hon. the Speaker: You have seven minutes and 40 seconds.

Will you accept a question, Senator Klyne?

Senator Klyne: Yes.

Senator Batters: I would like more information. You spoke briefly about the \$40,000. I believe you said something about a senators' attendance system. You mentioned a survey that you said "... all senators are involved in." I don't know about this survey, so what is that survey and what is the \$40,000 for? Is it to review the senators' attendance system? If so, why is that necessary? We all get that sheet once a month. It seems like a very simple process. Why are there questions about it? Why does this cost \$40,000?

Senator Klyne: The \$40,000 is not for that engagement; it's for four others that we promised in the plan we brought forward to the Senate in April; also, we brought out our multi-year risk-based plan. We gave you the first — 2026-29. There are also the rapid advisory engagements. Part of that was that we would do four rapid advisory engagements. One of them is being conducted now and should wrap up soon.

On the approach to determine the need for the \$40,000 — I'm glad you asked — in spring 2026, the Audit and Oversight Committee approved the three-year internal audit plan, which identified four advisory engagements and one internal audit per year. The plan was resourced and costed by our external audit members and chief audit executive.

The advisory engagements will be conducted with in-house resources, consisting of a full-time chief audit executive and a part-time senior adviser — both on staff. The external audit will be outsourced to the private sector.

At the same time, the Audit and Oversight Committee budget was assessed, and all available resources were flagged for reallocation to the internal audit function. Based on this analysis, a shortfall of \$40,000 was identified. That informed the funding request that we have before you, which is \$40,000 recurring annually.

The \$124,000 we are also asking for would be moved from our Audit and Oversight Committee budget over to the office of the chief audit executive. After the four rapid advisory engagements, we have what I'll call bigger fish to fry to ensure we don't drop the ball on that. We need to start looking at some of the more important areas. We'll start with the tier 1s, and if we find any fissures or cracks there, we probably have more issues at the top to look at. However, with the recurring \$40,000 funding and the \$124,000 that we would move over, we're good to go for the next fiscal.

Senator Batters: You said that the \$40,000 is for four different things. What are those four things? How much is the senators' attendance system that you also spoke about?

Senator Klyne: That's the one I am most familiar with. The other ones were with the audit executive's office. He and his staff, along with the external members, have identified what the other three or four are. As a committee, we passed them. I haven't looked at where they are with those, but I'm sure they are too busy to throw those out. There will be other ones for the benefit of the Senate, its members and its offices.

(On motion of Senator Black, debate adjourned.)

THE SENATE

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

On the Order:

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

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

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, I move that further debate be adjourned until the next sitting of the Senate for the balance of my time.

(On motion of Senator Black, debate adjourned.)

VITAL ROLE OF IMMIGRANTS

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

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

Hon. Paula Simons: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Senator Loffreda's Inquiry No. 12, calling the attention of the Senate to the vital role that immigrants have played in shaping Canada's economic growth.

It would be easy for me to stand here as an Alberta senator and talk about the long history of the utterly essential roles that immigrants have played in the economy of my province, from the first fur traders and pioneer settlers through to the present day. However, that would be far too easy because Alberta stands at a critical inflection point. For my province, this is a time of reckoning, as our own government has embarked on a scurrilous smear campaign designed to scapegoat recent immigrants for Alberta's chronic planning failures and to incite a backlash against new Canadians. The leadership of my province has invented an imaginary immigration crisis — a crisis that simply does not exist. It has crafted five noxious referendum questions — questions that no one in Alberta asked for — to better convince ordinary Albertans that their newcomer neighbours are some kind of social or economic threat.

These questions are confusing on purpose. They are designed to create some kind of anti-immigrant hysteria and whip up a fervour of resentment against the very people Alberta needs to grow, prosper and thrive: workers, skilled professionals, investors, entrepreneurs, academics and artists. The questions are strategically designed to create an impression that immigrants, international students and temporary foreign workers are somehow stealing jobs and social services from "real Albertans." They propose to reduce the number of immigrants allowed into Alberta. They propose things such as denying education and health care to legal residents of the province until they have lived in Alberta for a full year, meaning that children of refugees and new arrivals will be robbed of their chance to go to public school. They create an utterly false impression that non-citizens are somehow voting illegally in provincial elections. The moral and the socially divisive implications of all of this are deeply disturbing.

• (2100)

Right now, in the spirit of Senator Loffreda's inquiry, I'm going to speak specifically to the economic risks of this kind of populist rabble-rousing. I want to thank Senator Loffreda for providing me with this timely opportunity so close to the October 19 referendum.

In this moment of existential crisis for the future of my province and my country, I want to call on any and all Alberta voters who happen across this speech online to defeat these questions, which are both socially toxic and fiscally disastrous.

First, let it be said that Alberta is not in the midst of some economic crisis or malaise. Thanks to high oil prices, the province is booming. The government is on track to post a budget surplus of at least \$2 billion. GDP is on track to be the highest in the country. Many of Alberta's key export sectors have been pretty well insulated from the full import of Trump's new tariffs. The result is that we actually have a labour shortfall in the province.

Despite having the highest employment rate in the country, Alberta has about 63,000 jobs sitting vacant. That means many employers are unable to find the workers they need, whether they are looking for convenience store clerks, construction workers, pharmacists, packing plant staff or software engineers.

The problem is particularly acute in rural areas, especially in the north of the province. I hear anecdotal reports all the time of restaurants that have had to severely limit their hours because they simply cannot find staff. There is a crying shortage of medical professionals in rural communities. Many of those towns rely on immigrant doctors, nurses, lab techs and health care aides to keep their local hospitals and extended care facilities open.

Nor is Alberta facing an immigration crisis. There simply is no flood of newcomers overwhelming public services. In the first quarter of 2026, Alberta actually saw negative immigration. Immigrants still arrived, but even more left, a net loss of 648 people. In the second quarter, there were 10,770 net international migrants to Alberta. That was still a 37.5% decrease from the second quarter of the previous year.

Overall, Alberta's population grew by just 1.52% last year. That was the lowest growth rate since 2021, during the COVID pandemic. Indeed, the last time Alberta's population had such low growth was in 2016, during a major crash in world oil prices.

So, this immigration crisis? It's imaginary.

But even if Albertans do manage to resist Danielle Smith's efforts to scapegoat and bamboozle, even if these xenophobic referendum questions fail, the damage will already have been done. By presenting itself to the world as an insular and intolerant province, we are chasing away the very workers, academics, investors, inventors, creators and entrepreneurs we need to continue to grow and prosper, the newcomers who don't just fuel our economy but enrich our communities and culture. It is so perverse and self-destructive.

Since the very first day the University of Alberta opened, the province's universities have relied on immigrant professors and graduate students to teach and research. Today, our major research universities need international doctoral and post-doctoral students if they hope to stay at the cutting edge of

medical, scientific and technological innovation. These are the people we need to boost our high-tech start-up sectors, the innovators who are turning academic research into new enterprises that, in turn, attract investment and create new jobs in engineering, biomedical research, AI, high-tech agriculture, et cetera.

According to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, 14% of all technology start-ups in Alberta have a new or very recent immigrant as their founder. Almost 40% of Alberta's tech founders come from visible minority backgrounds. By pandering to anti-migrant populism, we run the risk that newcomers won't choose Alberta. We also run the risk that long-settled immigrants and their Canadian-born descendants will opt to leave a province that no longer feels welcoming, inclusive or even safe.

Meanwhile, at a time when international investors wary of the unpredictability of Trump's America are looking to Canada as a stable place to invest, Alberta is chasing away potential overseas investment in real time by purposefully creating uncertainty about our future in Canada.

What more are we risking? Well, immigrant entrepreneurs are the backbone of the small-business economy. Over 36% of small- and medium-sized businesses in Alberta with paid staff are immigrant-owned. That's well above the national average of 23.7%. Indeed, 65% of business owners with paid staff in Alberta's food and beverage sectors are immigrants.

Think about where you live. Think about the small businesses that make a community vibrant and exciting and that make people want to live in a particular municipality or neighbourhood. Think about the number of newcomers who open restaurants, bakeries and butcher shops, or operate food trucks, introducing us all to diverse new cuisines and making our cities more cosmopolitan and delicious. Think about the new arrivals who open their own cobbler or tailor shops, corner stores, nail salons or pharmacies, making our lives so much more convenient and our neighbourhoods so much more walkable.

In major cities, immigrant entrepreneurs play a vital role in the cycle of urban renewal, breathing life back into aging strip malls and once-vacant main street storefronts. They are perhaps even more essential in smaller, more rural communities, where one or two new immigrant businesses may make all the difference between life and death for the economy and the vitality of an aging Prairie town.

Without immigrants and without temporary foreign workers, international students and people on temporary work visas, Alberta's economy risks stagnation. Where will we find the workers to build new pipelines, power lines, new homes, data centres and to staff daycare centres? Where will we find the people to develop our biotech and pharmaceutical sectors, to harvest our vegetables, perform our surgeries, conduct our symphonies and deliver our packages?

We can't let the anti-immigrant, anti-migrant rhetoric of the toxic Trump regime colonize our imaginations and trick us into thinking that Alberta has an immigration problem when it doesn't. We can't let fear and prejudice overwhelm common sense and enlightened self-interest.

Thank you again, Senator Loffreda, for allowing me this opportunity.

Thank you, *hiy hiy* and *mahsi'cho* to all the thousands and thousands of Albertans from across the political spectrum and from every kind of community who are mobilizing and fighting now to protect the reputation, the social cohesion and, yes, the economy of the province we so love and which I am so proud to represent in this chamber.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

(On motion of Senator Kingston, debate adjourned.)

THE SENATE

MOTION TO URGE GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH A FEDERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK THAT ENSURES PARITY BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION CARE AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Sharon Burey, pursuant to notice of February 24, 2026, moved:

That the Senate recognize:

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

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

She said: Honourable senators, it is an immense honour and privilege to bring forward this motion during Mental Illness Awareness Week, October 4-10, and close to World Mental Health Day, which will be on October 10.

On February 24, 2026, I rose in this chamber to draw the Senate's attention to two urgent realities: first, that the World Health Organization and the Canadian Mental Health Association have identified mental health parity as a critical objective for an equitable health care system; and, second, that persistent disparities in access to and coverage of mental health and substance use health care demand urgent attention.

Today, this motion calls on the Senate to urge the Government of Canada to establish a federal legal framework that ensures mental health and substance use health care are treated on an equal footing with physical health care.

• (2110)

As we address the challenges facing mental health and substance use care, we must acknowledge First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, who have stewarded these lands, and consider how cultural and historical contexts, including colonialism and systemic discrimination, continue to shape the mental health of Indigenous Peoples and marginalized communities across Canada.

[Translation]

I would like to sincerely thank my team, my Senate colleagues, the Library of Parliament analysts and the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and its staff for their research, advice and support. I also want to recognize the contribution of the workers, people with lived experience and community partners who met with me and encouraged this work. They include representatives from the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian Psychiatric Association, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Association of Social Workers, the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, the Chiefs of Ontario, the Native Women's Association of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and many other stakeholders.

[English]

Colleagues, many of you will remember that on June 19, 2024, I launched a Senate inquiry into mental health, substance use health and addiction parity across the lifespan. In September 2024, I convened a round table co-sponsored by my esteemed former colleagues Senators Kutcher and Seidman, and moderated by Dr. Paul Roumeliotis. I thank Senator Black for his speech in support of the inquiry, as well as my colleagues who intended to speak before prorogation and the subsequent election, which caused the inquiry to fall from the Order Paper. This motion allows us to continue that important work. It brings an issue of national importance to the forefront of our collective consciousness and invites us to work together on one of the defining priorities of our time.

In making the case for this motion, I want to take you back to the speech delivered by Prime Minister Mark Carney at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2026. That speech reverberated around the world. It set the stage for Canada to lead, not only in thought, natural resources, trade, energy, agriculture and artificial intelligence, but also in shaping a more peaceful, inclusive prosperity for all.

More recently, on September 8, 2026, I listened with great interest to the "Forward Guidance" video addressing the trade war and the challenging times in which we now live. The Prime Minister placed those challenges in a historical context and reminded us that we are masters of our own fate. We can embody our own values and live sovereignly in our own skin and in our own country. He spoke of resilience, strength and unity. To meet the challenges ahead and to prosper, we must build stronger, more resilient health and mental health systems together. That is precisely what this motion is about.

Investments in major infrastructure, trade diversification and other strategic initiatives are vital, but we cannot overstate the foundational economic importance of a mentally healthy workforce. Advances in artificial intelligence and innovation in health care, especially brain health, which encompasses mental health across the lifespan, can place Canada at the global frontier of the mental and brain health economy.

Mental health parity is an idea whose time has come. Indeed, it is long overdue. It has been a policy objective of many of the organizations and stakeholders I mentioned.

For more than 30 years, I have practised as a pediatrician specializing in children's learning, behavioural and mental health. I witnessed firsthand the long waits and the shortage of inpatient, outpatient and community-based services. I also saw the sometimes devastating consequences for children, adolescents and their families.

I remember a suicidal child who tried to jump from a moving car because of not wanting to go to school. We later learned that the child had a severe, previously undiagnosed learning disability. I remember a parent living with a substance use disorder who could not obtain child care and, therefore, could not attend outpatient treatment.

Today, we also know more about the effects of social media and online gambling on child and youth mental health, development and learning, as well as the risks posed by unregulated and untested chatbots.

In 2024, the Canadian Mental Health Association released its groundbreaking report *The State of Mental Health in Canada*. I was honoured to co-sponsor its launch here in the Senate, and many of you attended. The report asks a simple but powerful question: We aren't expected to pay for life-saving cancer care, so why are we paying for life-saving mental health care? I encourage you to read it.

In 1953, Canadian physician Dr. Brock Chisholm, the first director-general of the World Health Organization, coined the phrase, "Without mental health, there can be no true physical health." The World Health Organization defines mental health as:

... a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well and contribute to their community.

The stated objective of the Canada Health Act is to facilitate reasonable access to health services without financial or other barriers in order to protect, promote and restore the physical and mental well-being of Canadians; yet, the promise of equal regard for mental and physical well-being has never been fully realized. That is what this motion seeks to address and why it matters so deeply.

The evidence is clear: Mental health, brain health and physical health are inseparable. People with type 2 diabetes, for example, are twice as likely to experience depression as the general population. Among people living with depression, the risk of heart attack is more than twice that of the general population. Children with medical complexity face a heightened risk of neurodevelopmental and mental health conditions and rely more heavily on health and social services.

Our scientific understanding of early brain development and its effects on resilience, lifelong health, social well-being, education, justice and economic outcomes is equally clear.

Colleagues, since I first placed this motion on the Order Paper in 2025, an important new development has reinforced its central premise. In March 2026, the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, right here in Ottawa, announced a Canadian clinical practice guideline calling on clinicians to treat heart, brain and mental health conditions together rather than in isolation. That integrated approach — a whole-of-government, whole-of-society and whole-person framework — is at the heart of this motion and of the inquiry and round table recommendations.

The 2021 mandate letter to the then Minister of Health called for a permanent Canada Mental Health Transfer to increase the availability of mental health services and "... to ensure that mental health care is treated as a full and equal part of Canada's universal public health care system."

It is easy to lose focus amid competing crises at home and abroad, but clear, sustained policy and legislation can deliver long-term social and economic returns. Canada directs only 6.3% to 7% of health spending to mental health, compared with approximately 15% in France and 11% in Germany.

In 2017, the federal government demonstrated leadership by working with the provinces and territories to establish shared health priorities, dedicated funding, action plans, data collection and accountability measures. Colleagues, that funding is scheduled to end in 2027. Canadians deserve to know the government's long-term strategy for mental health and substance use health — one of those shared priorities.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information was tasked with reporting annually on indicators and outcomes under the agreement. Its October 2025 report was unequivocal: "Many Canadians with mental health disorders are not having their needs met."

• (2120)

We know that approximately 70% of mental health disorders begin in childhood or adolescence. In any given year, 6.7 million Canadians, 1 in 5, experience mental illness. By age 40, 1 in 2 Canadians has experienced or is experiencing a mental illness.

A 2026 CSA Group report entitled *The Economic Cost of Mental Health in Canada* estimates that poor mental health costs Canada \$180 billion each year. Much of that cost reflects reactive, downstream spending after problems have escalated and spilled into systems never designed to manage them, like housing supports, police, correctional services and emergency departments.

If Canada remains on its current path, the annual cost of poor mental health is projected to reach \$600 billion by 2050. That growing burden will further constrain productivity and Canada's long-term economic potential.

The report identifies two essential reforms: first, achieve mental health parity so that mental health receives funding, coverage and accountability equal to physical health; and second, reorient the system toward prevention by moving resources upstream.

The Conference Board of Canada reports that, without timely investment, the lifetime cost associated with just one cohort of children who develop anxiety or depression at age 10 approaches \$1 trillion. The Canadian Mental Health Association has further noted that, for every dollar invested in mental health, it can return between \$4 and \$10 to the economy.

Colleagues, this motion calls on the government to do what governments do best: provide federal leadership, collaborate on action, create durable policy and a legislative framework that reduces uncertainty, builds resilience and places mental and physical health on equal footing.

We know that health care delivery is largely a provincial and territorial responsibility. Any federal legislation must therefore be developed in consultation and cooperation with provinces, territories and Indigenous governing bodies, while respecting their jurisdictions and distinctions-based priorities.

In 2006, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology released its landmark report, *Out of the Shadows at Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada*. Twenty years later, colleagues, let us build on that important legacy.

Honourable colleagues, I urge you to add your voices to this debate and to support this motion calling on the Government of Canada to establish a federal legal framework that ensures mental health care and substance use health care are treated on an equal footing with physical health care.

To echo the Prime Minister, together, we can build a stronger, more resilient and more inclusive Canada. This is what the Senate does best: Through sober second thought, we call attention to urgent policy and legislative gaps and help chart a path forward.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO STUDY LIQUID BIOFUELS

Hon. Mary Coyle, pursuant to notice of October 1, 2026, moved:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources be authorized to examine and report on liquid biofuels in Canada, including, but not limited to:

- (a) biofuel technology;
- (b) Canada's Clean Fuel Regulations;
- (c) Natural Resources Canada's Biofuels Production Incentive;
- (d) the impact of Canadian legislation and regulations on domestic biofuel production;
- (e) the impact of legislation in the United States, such as the *Inflation Reduction Act* and the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, on Canadian biofuel producers;
- (f) the import of used cooking oil;
- (g) the economic potential of the Canadian biofuel industry;
- (h) the economic impact of biofuels in Canada's regions;
- (i) export opportunities for Canadian biofuels;
- (j) environmental impacts of biofuels; and
- (k) issues for industries that are seeking to adopt biofuels, such as shipping and aviation;

That the committee be permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit reports on this study with the Clerk of the Senate if the Senate is not then sitting, and that the reports be deemed to have been tabled in the Senate; and

That the committee submit its final report to the Senate no later than October 31, 2027, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings for 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

The Hon. the Speaker: Are honourable 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.)

THE SENATE

MOTION TO RECOGNIZE OCTOBER 23 OF EACH YEAR AS HUNGARIAN HERITAGE DAY ADOPTED

Hon. Charles S. Adler, pursuant to notice of October 1, 2026, moved:

That the Senate of Canada:

1. officially recognize October 23 as Hungarian Heritage Day in Canada; 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.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today to put forward a motion that the Senate of Canada recognize October 23 as Canadian Hungarian Heritage Day in Canada.

In this time of crisis for our country, I wrestled with the idea of bringing this motion forward. We have generational challenges to face, and I am, first and foremost, a Canadian. But I do believe adopting this motion is a recognition of what Canada has to offer the world.

This country has given me and my fellow Hungarian Canadians so much. In turn, our commitment to democracy and freedom has travelled back through these links to the land of my birth and has played no small part in seeing Hungary shrug off the efforts of authoritarians and totalitarians alike. They have learned lessons from us — good lessons — and I am proud of that.

The history of Hungarians coming to Canada goes back some ways. The first Hungarian to set foot in what would become Canada is believed to be Stephanus Parmenius from Buda, as in the town right beside Pest. Budapest is made up of the twin cities of Buda and Pest. He landed in what would become St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1583.

He is thought to be the first European to write poems here in Canada. That's not surprising to anyone who is Hungarian; poetry is a big, big deal. Hungary is a passionate country with passionate poetry.

Three centuries later, Hungarians began to arrive in waves in this country. The first were farmers and labourers. Initially, they settled in the United States, but then they made the wise decision to move north in the 19th century, setting up farming communities in what would become Pamela Wallin's Saskatchewan. Then, in the early 20th century, around 26,000 Hungarians arrived seeking opportunity after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Following World War II, roughly 12,000 came escaping communism. Then, following the Hungarian Revolution on October 23, 1956, Canada opened its doors to more than 37,000 Hungarian refugees. That was more than any country at the time relative to its population. Once again, Canada was punching above its weight, offering liberty, freedom and equality to refugees from communism. It was one of the largest refugee resettlement efforts to take place in Canadian history.

This cohort included my mom, my dad and myself. I was only two and a half. My father smuggled me out of communist Hungary in a backpack. For those Hungarians who escaped to Canada following the violence of 1956, we, for the first time, experienced what freedom looked like.

In a time before the internet and easy, borderless communication, this was critical. Stories poured back into Hungary of Canada and what Canada had to offer, how a government represents and works for its citizens and democracy and not for the self-interests of those in power.

While "goulash communism" was relatively freer than that of other Eastern bloc countries, it was still communism, far removed from the freedom and liberty we lived here.

For 30 years following the uprising of 1956, Hungarian Canadians pushed on the cracks that were forming in the Kádár regime. Given these connections across the Atlantic, in 1980, the first Canadian studies program opened at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Communism, of course, collapsed by the end of that decade, and on October 23, 1989, Hungary declared itself a republic, bringing forth a democracy that, while tested, has shown itself to be resilient.

Senate colleagues, I appreciate that I have asked if we could vote on this motion quicker than is customary. After meeting with the Hungarian Ambassador, Miklós Lengyel, earlier this year to discuss the upcoming seventieth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, it occurred to me this was a fine way to acknowledge our shared history, and I gave notice quickly after we returned. October 23 is only a few sitting days away, and as we know, we don't always get to this part of the Order Paper as much as we'd like.

• (2130)

As you've heard, October 23 is a historic day not only in the country of my birth but also for the over 340,000 Hungarian Canadians living here today. It's important because it marks the beginning of how this country swung open its doors for us seven decades ago and gave us the opportunity to freely build our lives and make this country our home. I will be forever grateful to this place, this country, this land and my home for welcoming me all those years ago.

I would respectfully request that my Senate colleagues join me in my gratitude by recognizing October 23 as Hungarian heritage day in Canada. Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Hon. David M. Wells: Honourable senators, I want to briefly say a few words about Senator Adler's motion on Hungarian heritage day in Canada.

I've had the great opportunity to visit Hungary a number of times. When I was a young man, I backpacked throughout Hungary prior to having kids and a real job. I remember one little village that I went to. I went there by train from Budapest, and the town was called Kőszeg. It was just a little town. Just outside the town, as we were pulling in by train, I saw a Petro-Canada gas station, and I couldn't believe what I was seeing in this little outpost in western Hungary. I've had the opportunity to play some hockey tournaments there, and I recently visited there during an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe mission for election monitoring. It was quite the spectacular event that happened during the most recent election when the whole country turned out with one voice.

I know the great contributions that Hungarians have made and continue to make to Canada, and I thank Senator Adler for mentioning — obviously, it was prior to Newfoundland and Labrador becoming part of Canada — that St. John's was the gateway for many immigrants who started their journey to a freer land. I will fully support Senator Adler's motion, and I encourage colleagues to do the same.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

(*At 9:33 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.*)

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