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The Honourable GEORGE J. FUREY,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, December 15, 2021

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

[*Translation*]

Prayers.

ACADIAN REMEMBRANCE DAY

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

OTTAWA INNER CITY HEALTH—MANAGED OPIATE PROGRAM

Hon. Vernon White: Honourable senators, I, as well as others, have spoken on the problem of addictions and, in particular, the impact accidental overdoses were and are having on that vulnerable sector. With the ever-increasing distribution of fentanyl and carfentanyl by criminal organizations that manufacture counterfeit drugs, the death rate has exploded. Understanding that fentanyl is 100 times stronger than morphine, and carfentanyl up to 10,000 times stronger, illegal drug manufacturers using things like cement mixers to make their illicit product care little, if at all, about quality control.

As I have said here previously, the result is 17 to 20 deaths daily in Canada by overdose. There has been a success story to which we and the government should pay attention. With deaths growing exponentially beginning around 2017, Ottawa Inner City Health decided that drastic measures needed to be taken. They started a managed opiate program, based on European research, requiring a major shift in their programming.

They introduced a program with the option of opiate substitution being offered, including methadone, Suboxone or, in conditions where the addict is unable to or incapable of managing either of these, opiate management was introduced.

Opiate management means this option is used to: keep an opiate user safe during their removal from street drug use; stabilize them while bringing them into an opiate replacement therapy program; and, oversee their use of pharmaceutical opiate replacements under direct medical supervision instead of continuing their use of toxic street drugs. Working directly with medical staff, the drug-using client is provided the correct dose of a combination of Dilaudid and HYDROMORPH Contin. Clients work closely with nurses and doctors to arrive at a correct dose.

The results have been impressive. Clients are able to remove themselves from street drug use and a highly dangerous lifestyle. Many of the participants have since been housed successfully, moved on to school or even employment. The program is a highly structured treatment regime and many find themselves shifting to other programs, such as methadone, as they recover. Importantly, we hope that programs such as this alternative therapy is one that the federal government will adopt as a best practice and expand across the country. I want to speak today about their success and bring some light to the great work they do. I congratulate and thank Wendy Muckle, Dr. Jeff Turnbull and their team for their work.

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, December 13 was Acadian Remembrance Day. Every year, on the same date, the Acadian community mourns as it remembers one of the darkest days of the Great Upheaval, which occurred from 1755 to 1764.

On December 12 and 13, 1758, two British ships, the *Violet* and the *Duke William*, sank in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, taking with them many Acadian families who had been deported. Nearly 3,000 Acadians from Île St-Jean, known today as Prince Edward Island, were forced off their land and put on ships bound for Europe, and 750 of those men, women and children drowned or died from sickness.

Somewhere between the New World and Europe, their voices were swallowed up in the depths of the sea, taking with them the hopes and dreams of an entire people. These were the voices of the French Acadians that the conquerors of the time wanted to silence forever, voices that, with the help of the Mi'kmaq people, had been singing, praying and making their existence known in the lands of Acadia, now known as Nova Scotia, since 1604.

Charles Lawrence, the British governor responsible for the Deportation, planned to wipe out the Acadians' social and cultural identity. However, he misjudged this resilient people, who were able to defy the odds and return decades later.

The voices that were believed to have been silenced forever at the bottom of the Atlantic have emerged stronger and more empowered than ever. Now they are claiming their place here in Canada and have gained recognition around the world.

On Wednesday, November 24, 2021, in Paris, France honoured one of Acadia's most vibrant voices. Accompanied by a delegation of scholars, artists, business people and activists, Acadian author Antonine Maillet, the first Canadian to be awarded the prestigious Goncourt prize, was promoted to the rank of Commander of the French Legion of Honour in recognition of her body of work. The gathering reaffirmed the unbreakable bond uniting Acadia and France.

The honour bestowed on Ms. Maillet also reminds us that, here in Canada, more than 257 years after the Deportation, the Acadian people must carry on fighting to ensure respect for the French language, one of our country's official languages, within our institutions and governments.

On November 24, accompanied by the French President, Antonine Maillet planted an oak tree in France. Centuries earlier in America, Acadians were left with nothing. The oak tree symbolizes Acadians' attachment to their original homeland.

That same day, an inflatable boat carrying Iraqi Kurdish migrants sank in the English Channel off the port of Calais, killing 27 and injuring two. One person is still missing.

History keeps repeating itself, colleagues. As 2021 draws to a close, let's stand in solidarity with all those uprooted and displaced peoples who are suffering a fate similar to that of the Acadian people, and let's take action together to put an end to these inhuman tragedies.

Thank you.

SUPPORT FOR JURORS

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Honourable senators, I rise today to thank you for passing my bill, Bill S-206, last week.

As I pointed out in my speech at second reading, there has been an increase in the number of criminal trials across Canada. As a result, more and more citizens are being called upon to put their lives on hold in the service of justice.

Jurors are often put through a difficult experience without any psychological support. Even worse, they are forced to remain silent, which only compounds the trauma they experience.

• (1410)

Jurors are left to fend for themselves, plunged without notice into the macabre world of crime. They are sequestered and must deliberate for days. Then they are sent home with no support or assistance to resume their normal lives. For many of them, however, life will never be the same.

I was deeply moved by the testimony from our colleague, Senator Moncion. She made me more aware of the significant constraints imposed on jurors as part of their duties.

Honourable colleagues, when the Senate moved second reading of Bill S-206 so it could be referred to committee, my heart went out to all the witnesses who would have had to come back to share their painful experience with jury duty.

I am very glad that you agreed with me that bringing back former jurors to testify yet again about their painful and disturbing experiences would be inhuman. They have already fulfilled their civic duty and met their responsibilities as jurors, and that was more than enough.

As I trusted your judgment, I decided to move that the bill be read the third time and sent to the other place. Since then, I have received many positive messages and, honourable senators, on behalf of the jurors of Canada, I would like to thank you for agreeing to third reading of Bill S-206. Your professionalism, your sensitivity and your sense of duty will allow many jurors to once again find that inner peace that is so well deserved.

The Senate of Canada has set a good example by fulfilling its main mission of listening to and being at the service of Canadians.

[Senator Cormier]

In closing, I want to wish you a happy holiday season with your families. I wish you all happiness, health and, above all, time with your children and grandchildren. I know that they are only on loan to us for our lifetimes and that life can take them away without warning. Love them.

Thank you.

[English]

OVARIAN CANCER CANADA

Hon. Terry M. Mercer: Honourable senators, this past fall, my wife, Ellen, and I, along with our children, Michael and Lisa, and our grandchildren, Ellie and Oliver, once again participated in Ovarian Cancer Canada's Walk of Hope in Halifax. It is one of the many communities across the country where the walk takes place. We participated by walking in our neighbourhood, as COVID protocols were in place. To date, the walk has raised over \$30 million to provide the much-needed support for patients; increased awareness, especially for early detection; and funding for the critical research to fight against ovarian cancer.

Many of my honourable colleagues, family and friends have donated to this cause that has been so dear to us for years on end. We are very thankful for that. This year was especially meaningful for my wife, Ellen, as she celebrated 25 years since her surgery in her fight against ovarian cancer. Ellen is one of the lucky ones and we are so lucky to still have her with us.

We are so proud every year to participate in the walk in support of her and all women who have been diagnosed — and have not survived — with ovarian cancer.

According to Ovarian Cancer Canada:

Thousands of women are living with ovarian cancer in Canada. It is estimated that this year 3,100 Canadian women will be newly diagnosed with this disease. Ovarian cancer is the 5th most common cancer for women and is the most serious women's cancer.

Honourable senators, through everyone's kindness and generosity, Team Ellen Mercer raised about \$3,000 this year. We have consistently broken our records every year, and we are truly thankful to everyone who has donated. With everyone's help, we can defeat this horrible disease. While I may be retiring from this place in May, I will continue to support Ovarian Cancer Canada's Walk of Hope, so you have not heard the last of me just yet.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season with family and friends. Thank you.

TRIBUTE TO TEACHERS AND COACHES

Hon. Stan Kutcher: Honourable senators, today I rise to recognize the impact of those teachers and coaches who have made a difference in the lives of their students through their encouragement, realistic, yet demanding expectations, and mentorship.

I imagine that many, if not all of us in this chamber can think back on our earlier lives and identify one or more of these ordinary Canadians who have done extraordinary things. I would even hazard to guess that many of us in this chamber owe a debt of gratitude for the advice, support and mentorship that we have received. Indeed, some might say that without that relationship in our early years we may have walked a different and perhaps less fruitful path.

We know that some of our honourable members are teachers by profession and they have taught young people at many different stages in their educational journey, especially in junior high and secondary school — that time of life when some of the most important influences on what a young person could be are present.

So I would like to signal my appreciation to Senators Cordy, Deacon and Martin, who have no doubt had substantial influence on the lives of young people.

This reflection was brought forward when I received an email out of the blue from the person who was my gym teacher and track coach in secondary school, Westdale Collegiate Institute, in Hamilton, Ontario.

Let me be clear: I may have been a star athlete in my own mind, but the reality is quite different than that fantasy. I did okay, but I would never have been confused with any of our country's champions — a far distance from the world-leading athleticism of our own Senator Petitclerc.

The email came from Bob Chapman, one of my cherished teachers and a track coach. Our team was a small squad of pretty good runners that he would drive around much of Ontario for weekend track meets in his rusty old green Rambler. He would be at the school early in the morning to supervise strength training; made himself available at lunchtime if anyone needed to talk about anything; and spent every weekday evening for nine months, encompassing all the seasons of cross-country, indoor and outdoor track, putting us through our paces.

I will never forget his prescient observation, one that he would make quite frequently; so frequently, indeed, that it became a credo that many of my teammates and I kept with us for the rest of our lives. Just when we felt there was no more gas left in the tank, he would say, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” And we did.

So, Bob, to you and every other teacher and coach, thank you for being an ordinary Canadian who is doing extraordinary things and enriching so many lives.

QUEBEC—BILL 21

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan: Honourable senators, as many of you are aware, last week just 15 kilometres from where I currently stand before you, a Grade 3 teacher in Chelsea, Quebec was told she can no longer be allowed to teach because of the attire she chose to wear.

Bill 21 is discriminatory and racist. Instead of ensuring the equality of all people in the province of Quebec, it creates two distinct classes: those who may pursue their career regardless of their faith and those who may not.

I understand this is a provincial law, but I cannot in good conscience as a racialized person and as a human rights advocate, remain silent while fellow Canadians are being blatantly targeted. As a representative of a community, I must be a voice for the silenced.

This secularism bill, under the guise of separating state from religion, prohibits certain persons from wearing religious symbols and therefore disproportionately affects women by limiting their sense of agency. Let me remind you that this bill was originally meant to only affect police officers, correctional services officers and judges. It was then extended to teachers. Who will be next?

We have already seen the rise of Islamophobia during the pandemic. By creating this second-class citizenship, this secularism bill normalizes the “othering” of visible minorities.

Honourable senators, the removal of Fatemeh Anvari has upended the lives of children who, until last Thursday, only saw Ms. Anvari as a teacher, regardless of her hijab. As one of these students wrote in a letter to Ms. Anvari, made publicly available:

It's not fair that you can't teach. I actually think your hijab is awesome and you're the best teacher ever.

These students are now being taught that as a hijab-wearing Muslim woman, she is unfit to teach. While Ms. Anvari continues to work at the school outside the classroom on a literacy project advocating for inclusion and awareness of diversity, I call upon you, my fellow parliamentarians, to remember these values as well. Thank you.

• (1420)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE 2021

DOCUMENT TABLED

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the *Economic and Fiscal Update 2021*.

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

REPORT PURSUANT TO RULE 12-26(2) TABLED

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 12-26(2) of the *Rules of the Senate*, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which deals with the expenses incurred by the committee during the Second Session of the Forty-Third Parliament.

(For text of report, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 173.)

[English]

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

REPORT PURSUANT TO RULE 12-26(2) TABLED

Hon. Brian Francis: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 12-26(2) of the *Rules of the Senate*, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, which deals with the expenses incurred by the committee during the Second Session of the Forty-Third Parliament.

(For text of report, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 174.)

CRIMINAL CODE CANADA LABOUR CODE

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND REPORT OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE ON SUBJECT MATTER TABLED

Hon. Ratna Omidvar: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, which deals with the subject matter of Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code.

(Pursuant to the order adopted December 2, 2021, the report was placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration later this day.)

[Translation]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE 2021

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I give notice that, two days hence:

I will call the attention of the Senate to the Economic and Fiscal Update 2021, tabled in the House of Commons on December 14, 2021, by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., and in the Senate on December 15, 2021.

[English]

ETHICS AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST FOR SENATORS

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO MEET DURING SITTINGS OF THE SENATE AND HOLD HYBRID OR ENTIRELY VIRTUAL MEETINGS UNTIL MARCH 31, 2022

Hon. Brent Cotter: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-5(j), I move:

That, until March 31, 2022, the Standing Committee on Ethics and Conflict of Interest for Senators be authorized to:

- (a) meet even though the Senate may then be sitting, and that rule 12-18(1) be suspended in relation thereto;
- (b) hold hybrid meetings or meetings entirely by videoconference; and

That for greater certainty the provisions of subparagraphs 20 to 22 of the order adopted by the Senate on November 25, 2021, concerning hybrid committee meetings apply in relation to meetings of this committee, including meetings held entirely by videoconference.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

QUESTION PERIOD

FINANCE

CANADA'S INFLATION RATE

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for Senator Gold, the government leader in the Senate.

Canadians are starting to learn that the Trudeau government has set a record — a record that had stood for more than 18 years. Unfortunately, that record is an inflation rate of 4.7%, which is making gasoline, furniture, food and clothing very difficult for middle-class and particularly poor Canadians to be able to manage. Furthermore, Canadians are learning that, this fall, food costs in this country are at the highest levels they've been in many years.

While the inflation rate has grown to 4.7%, the average income for Canadians over that same time period has only grown by 2.8%, making it difficult for Canadians to stretch their paycheques to get the bare necessities. It's becoming unaffordable for Canadians to survive.

My question is very simple, government leader, especially given the fact that the financial statement tabled yesterday clearly said to expect higher inflation in the future, so the government not only has a solution but they're quite pessimistic about what's around the corner. My question is this: How much more does the Trudeau government think the average Canadian family can afford to pay going forward?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question.

The Government of Canada is very concerned and mindful of the rise of the cost of living to all Canadians and is focused on measures to soften the impact of those increased costs. It remains focused on issues of affordability and the cost of living.

Canada was fortunate that we entered the pandemic in a strong fiscal position. It allowed the government to take the measures necessary to help us through that. The government has put forward a prudent plan that sets out a new fiscal anchor, and it is committed to reducing the federal debt as a share of the economy over the medium term and to unwinding the deficits from combatting COVID-19.

In addition, the programs and plans around early childhood learning and child-care policies are important policies that will help Canadians weather the economic storm as they are implemented and rolled out.

Senator Housakos: Government leader, your government's inflationary deficits and tax increases are having an impact on the daily lives of ordinary Canadians. Last week, I raised the question right here in this chamber about the cost of food for families. The average cost is a \$1,000-a-year increase for middle-class Canadian families to provide food on their tables, which we all agree is a necessity in this country.

We also learned today that housing prices are at a record high of 25% this year, yet the economic update yesterday only said the Trudeau government's work on housing affordability is ongoing and that they will take action next year. So clearly, this is not a priority for the government.

How could the government look at Canadians with a straight face and say inflation is a priority when, in the financial statement and in the Speech from the Throne, we didn't have any semblance that this government is willing to address spending and high taxes in this country and those two things are combining for an off-the-chart inflation rate?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question.

It is not the case that the government is not doing anything; it is quite the contrary. For example, the renewal of the Bank of Canada's mandate of 2%, with additional criteria that the bank can consider, is one, but only one, indicator of the seriousness with which the government approaches the issue of inflation.

Again, it is important to remind us all, as most of us know, that the inflation we are experiencing and the cost of living is not exclusively or even largely a function of monetary policy, and it might not even be largely — certainly not exclusively — be a function of the investments that this government made with the support of all parties and members in this chamber to combat the pandemic.

It is a global phenomenon that Canada is grappling with, as are other countries.

• (1430)

Canada remains on track. The government is confident that its plan will help us through this period, mindful as it is of the burden and increased costs on Canadians, as you have quite properly mentioned.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

CANADA-BULGARIA RELATIONS

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the government leader in the Senate. As co-chair of the Canada-Bulgaria Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group, I am well aware of the strong ties that have developed over the past 55 years of diplomatic relations between our two countries. However, there is no Canadian embassy in Bulgaria. Currently, the mission for the region is in Bucharest, Romania. Bucharest is 464 kilometres away — a seven-hour drive — from Bulgaria's capital, Sofia. That is a one-hour non-stop flight, or four-and-a-half hours with a connection. This can be very inconvenient for Canadians and Bulgarians needing emergency consular assistance or passport services while in Bulgaria.

Leader, given that we are the only G7 country that doesn't have an official presence in Sofia, Bulgaria, what is the Government of Canada's position on establishing an embassy there? Is this something that your government is actively considering?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. I will make inquiries and be happy to report back when I get an answer.

Senator Martin: Thank you for making that inquiry. As we mark this fifty-fifth anniversary, I think that, at a minimum, what should be done — if it is not being done already — is a feasibility study. If there are details on the feasibility of establishing a Canadian embassy in Bulgaria, that would be very helpful. Leader, would you also check whether such a study has been conducted and, if not, is this something we could request at this time?

Senator Gold: I will certainly be pleased to pass on your recommendations when I make the inquiries.

[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

SENATE APPOINTMENTS

Hon. René Cormier: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate, but if I may, I'd like to first wish happy holidays to all of my colleagues in the Senate and all the staff. I wish you a healthy and safe holiday season.

Since 2016, Senate applications have been reviewed by an independent advisory board. This independent and non-partisan body is mandated to:

... provide non-binding merit-based recommendations to the Prime Minister on Senate nominations.

In establishing a list of candidates, the board members seek to support the Government of Canada's intent "to ensure representation of ... linguistic, minority and ethnic communities in the Senate."

On May 27, 2021, in response to a question I asked the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, the then President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, he told the chamber, and I quote:

We recognize the importance of making sure these communities are properly represented as senators are appointed. The Prime Minister is absolutely willing to do that. . . . I am confident that we may see other Acadians appointed to the Senate, and that they will not just come from our province of New Brunswick, but from other provinces as well.

However, Nova Scotia has had no Acadian representation in the Senate ever since the Honourable Gérald Comeau retired on November 30, 2013, a first since 1907. Newfoundland and Labrador, meanwhile, has never had a francophone Senate representative. Prince Edward Island has no Acadian representation, and Northern New Brunswick, a region often forgotten by our elected officials, has been without a Senate representative since Senator Paul McIntyre retired.

Given the exceptional expertise of many Acadians in Atlantic Canada, and considering the number of Senate vacancies, when does the Prime Minister plan to recommend senators from the Acadian and francophone communities of the Atlantic provinces to the Governor General of Canada?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, Senator Cormier. As we know, the Senate has a long history of defending official language communities. I applaud the efforts and the activism of our predecessors and of our colleagues in this chamber who carry that torch, including several representatives from the Maritimes.

The Government of Canada seeks to appoint outstanding people to the Senate, while reflecting our country's diversity. The government is also following through on its commitment to build a more effective, more independent and less partisan Senate. Part of that commitment involves the process that you mentioned, namely the independent, non-partisan advisory board that makes recommendations to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister then presents his recommendations to the Governor General.

I have been assured that the independent appointment process is working well and that we need to wait for the results of the next cycle to find out who will be appointed from the Maritime provinces.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

NATIONAL CHILD CARE PROGRAM—OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, my question has to do with francophone affairs. Today, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada and the Commission nationale des parents francophones said they were:

... aghast to learn that there are hardly any measures for the Francophonie in most of the agreements signed with the provinces and territories for the national child care program.

If that is the case, can the Government of Canada guarantee that the new version of the bill to modernize the Official Languages Act will include key provisions to promote the inclusion of strong language clauses in federal-provincial agreements?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. The government is working with its provincial and territorial partners to support the vitality of official language minority communities, while respecting their areas of jurisdiction. That is why every Canada-wide bilateral agreement signed so far with the provinces and territories, apart from Quebec, includes provisions to protect and respect the rights of official language minority communities based on the specific priorities and context of each jurisdiction.

I am told that the government is aware of the issue of linguistic provisions. It is working closely with its partners and OLMCs in order to ensure that the bill to be tabled in this Parliament meets their needs.

[English]

• (1440)

HEALTH

COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

COVID-19 PANDEMIC—RAPID TESTING

Hon. Stan Kutcher: Honourable senators, my question is for Senator Gold. The federal government has distributed millions of rapid tests across Canada and has recently announced that more will be coming. This is good. Rapid tests are a useful tool that Canadians can self-apply to help decrease the spread of COVID. This is especially important with the rise of this most transmissible variant.

In Nova Scotia, thanks to the great work of our public health leaders and our rapid test guru, Dr. Lisa Barrett, over 2 million tests in a population of 1 million people have been distributed. They are free and provided in community settings, as well as workplaces, schools, shelters and outbreak areas. Over 3,400 volunteers have helped put them together, including our very own Senator Colin Deacon.

Will the Government of Canada continue to make sure, as long as they are needed, that there is a rapid test supply being procured to keep provinces and territories adequately resourced and that locations, such as Nova Scotia, that have demonstrated successful deployment and outbreak containment through asymptomatic testing will continue to receive them?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. Following the economic statement, the government is committing \$1.7 billion to continue supporting provinces and territories in securing rapid testing supplies that they need to keep our citizens safe and healthy.

I've also been advised that the government has already authorized 24 of these tests, and we can expect more to be authorized as the technology develops. I have been further advised that the government has ordered over 35 million tests for all provinces and territories. I'm also told that the government has deployed a large number of tests to provinces and territories and has shared guidance as to how they can be used effectively. This will increase our ability to detect, track and address outbreaks of COVID-19 variants in Canada.

Senator Kutcher: Senator Gold, sadly, the widespread availability of free rapid tests has been uneven across the country. Does the federal government have any thoughts about how to nudge those jurisdictions that have fallen behind in making these tests widely available?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question. Indeed, each province is sovereign within its jurisdiction as to how it will deploy the tests provided and supported by the Canadian government. The Government of Canada is in regular contact with the Minister of Health and with his provincial counterparts, and I am confident that this issue is a regular part of the agenda for these meetings.

Hon. Jane Cordy: Senator Gold, my question this afternoon is a follow-up to my questions from November 25 regarding the vaccination status of Canadians and their ability to travel, particularly to the United States. Although, with the news we received this week, I am guessing there will be a lot less travel across the country and certainly across borders.

We know that, as of early November, the United States government approved mixed vaccinations for entry into their country, so my question relates to the mixing of vaccinations. From the outset of the national vaccination rollout, the federal government recommended and encouraged mixing vaccinations to get as many Canadians fully vaccinated as soon as possible for the protection of public health. I believe this was a positive approach because many Canadians were vaccinated in a relatively short period of time.

Like Senator Kutcher, I'm particularly proud of my province of Nova Scotia for their vaccination efforts and for the ease of access to testing there. Nova Scotians, as Senator Kutcher said, can pick up free rapid testing kits at vaccination sites, at testing sites, at libraries and even at their local liquor store. It should be like this across the country.

But back to the mixed vaccinations, which is what my question concerns — some Canadians who have mixed vaccinations are left uncertain. Information is not easy to find and can be confusing or contradictory. Only last week, the EU expressly recommended the use of mix-and-match vaccinations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration in the United States have approved mixed vaccinations. However, this summer, the World Health Organization issued a warning against mixed vaccinations.

There are far too many uncertainties. Understandably, Canadians are confused and worried. Senator Gold, I wonder if you can give us assurances that the federal government will alleviate Canadians' anxieties regarding mixed vaccinations, particularly in light of the increased spread of the new variants of COVID.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, thank you for raising this question.

The government understands, empathizes and sympathizes with those Canadians who may find themselves unsure of what rules they will be subject to when they seek to travel to the United States or elsewhere. The Canadian government will continue to use its best efforts to provide as clear information as it can to Canadians, and that will continue notwithstanding that the rules are changing rather quickly, not only here in Canada — and Canadians have to be mindful and attentive to those changes as they are announced — but also in many other countries. Each country, like Canada, has the sovereign right to define for itself the rules of entry. It is a complicated and frustrating situation for those who are contemplating travel.

I do want to remind the chamber and those who are watching that I believe the Canadian travel advisory will be — if it has not been already — resurrected, advising Canadians to avoid non-essential travel. That may be cold comfort for those who have already made plans. The fact is, we all have to do our part. The Canadian government will do its part to provide as clear information as it can under the circumstances.

Senator Cordy: Thank you. That was a good message for Canadians — that we should avoid travel if possible — in light of what's happening. We understand that things can certainly change in a heartbeat, because one week we're congratulating ourselves on how well we're doing and the next week we're discovering that travel will be limited if not non-existent.

Senator Gold, I guess my question then would be: Is Canada working with other countries to help develop uniform global guidelines? Because, as you rightfully said and I said earlier in my previous question, there are differences in international organizations on what they think about mixed vaccinations, and most people try to follow the laws and the rules — which, I guess, are more important than the laws — so what are the rules? And what are the guidelines? I'm curious to know if we're sharing our information and our guidelines with international health organizations. Are they sharing their knowledge and their best practices with us?

Senator Gold: Thank you. I will answer as accurately as I can.

I know that our government is in constant contact with many of its partners internationally and many international organizations from whom we receive information and to whom we impart information. I assume there is a degree of sharing of information, certainly, between Canada and its partners to the south and other allies. I do not know the particulars, however, of how deep or broad those consultations and collaborations are.

I may make inquiries to that effect, but, again, I would caution all of us to try to keep an eye on Canadian government websites and information that comes from our government. That is probably going to be a quicker way to understand what rules we are subject to than waiting for my answer and for the response to my inquiries, which I will happily make.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

CANADA-U.S. TRADE

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Senator Gold, we noticed last week that two Canadian ministers informed U.S. officials that if certain trade irritants were introduced in the United States — I am referring here to the Buy American electric vehicles tax credit — the Canadian government would take trade action against those measures.

I'm wondering why the Canadian government hasn't taken any action against the trade irritant that has already been introduced regarding the ban on P.E.I. potatoes?

[Senator Gold]

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. With regard to all of the trade issues that Canada and the United States have to deal with, I do understand that the potato issue is of special importance to Prince Edward Island and its farmers, processors and the community.

The measure was taken by Canada as a short-term measure to ensure that Canada and Prince Edward Island potato farmers were not exposed to more severe and potentially pernicious actions. Canada remains committed to defending the interests of the Canadian agriculture industry, whether it be in Prince Edward Island or elsewhere, whether it is softwood lumber or other issues and will take necessary measures when it is appropriate to take them.

Senator Downe: Senator Gold, we appreciate the support. Prince Edward Islanders appreciate all the kind words we hear about the concern being expressed, but we wonder why there is no action.

We're hearing about a potential issue that may become a trade irritant — which is important to Ontario and important to Canada — but that has not happened yet, while we are currently suffering under a trade irritant that is already in place and the Government of Canada has not sent similar letters or indications of what trade response it will take to that action. You talk about potato farmers and potato workers. We also send 5,000 transport trucks a year with potatoes to the United States. This has a significant impact across our economy in Prince Edward Island, similar to the impact any ban on electric cars would have in Ontario. Why the different standard? Rather than reassuring words, Prince Edward Islanders would like some action — and we would like it now — from the Government of Canada.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question. The impact of trade irritants on Prince Edward Island transporters, producers and all associated is as preoccupying to the Government of Canada as the impact on the auto industry in Ontario or the forestry industry throughout this country. Different problems require different responses. The Canadian government is not remaining inactive; it is simply using the tools and the channels appropriate in each specific case.

HEALTH

COVID-19 PANDEMIC—TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Honourable senators, my question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. My question to you is in the spirit of the holiday season.

According to the World Organisation for Animal Health, there have been few reports of pets spreading COVID-19 to people. The Public Health Agency of Canada tracks and analyzes research and case reports from around the world on COVID-19 and animals. However, Senator Gold, we have it on good authority that one of the most widely travelled and famous characters in the world is planning to take to the skies very soon.

This individual travels in close connection to reindeer, and it is reported that he will access the interiors of thousands of homes while occupants are sleeping.

• (1450)

Senator Gold, can the government provide any assurance that there is no risk to Canadians with the impending international visits by Santa Claus and his reindeer?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, thank you for your question, though for reasons many of you will appreciate, my family has never been graced with visits in this season. However, it is not the case that I am indifferent to the situation you describe. Indeed, I have been known to be a bit jealous waking up in the morning, knowing that my friends down the block were unpacking presents and I could only stare wistfully at my tottering dreidel on the mantelpiece.

With regard to your question, although COVID has been found in white-tailed deer — indeed, in my province — there is apparently no known transmission from deer to humans. I am hopeful that this provides some reassurance to those who are looking forward to a Christmas surrounded by family and presents.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator McPhedran: I wish to thank Senator Gold for his assurances and wish everybody the best of the season.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

ACCESS TO HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND NETWORKS

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Honourable senators, with respect, I have a more important question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate in the few precious minutes that we are allotted for this privilege each day.

Senator Gold, the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the need for much better connectivity for all Canadians. From education to health care, connectivity allows those living outside urban cores access to high-quality public services. An important part of the government's commitment to connecting every Canadian to high-speed internet is the next spectrum auction. The spectrum auction will be useful in connecting northern, rural and remote communities. It is a public good auctioned by our government. It should be used for the betterment of Canadians, not left to sit without connecting vast parts of our country, which is unfortunately often the case. For various reasons, not all carriers are deploying their spectrum to connect communities.

So with respect to the next auction set to take place in 2023, Senator Gold, what actions will the government take to ensure that carriers build the infrastructure needed to deliver wireless internet when they buy spectrum, instead of not deploying their spectrum and even, in some cases, holding on to spectrum and then selling it at a profit years later?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and for raising the very important issue of connectivity, which the pandemic has made even more acute and obvious to all Canadians. The government is committed to a regime within which all Canadians have access to affordable, quality internet connectivity, and we will be mindful of that commitment as we approach the next auction. The issue that you raised has been much in the news. The government is aware of it. I have no information at this juncture to share with regard to the government's plans. I will make some inquiries and endeavour to get back to the chamber when I have an answer.

Senator Patterson: Senator Gold, I am referring to northern, rural and remote communities where competition is the key to affordable services. To that end, the government has, as you have just done, touted the merits of expanding connectivity to rural and remote Canada and fostering competition in public policies. Yet, despite the government's policy statements, much of the spectrum is not being used for these communities, leaving them without connectivity, never mind competition.

Is the government considering other policies in the coming auction to ensure that all those willing to build wireless internet networks have enough spectrum to build and help these rural and remote communities get the connectivity and competition they deserve?

Senator Gold: With regard to what other plans the government may have, I will certainly make inquiries and report back.

[Translation]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 4, 2021-22

THIRD READING

Hon. Raymonde Gagné (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) moved third reading of Bill C-6, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022.

She said: Honourable senators, I move that the bill be read the third time.

[English]

Hon. Elizabeth Marshall: Honourable senators, I will be very brief, but I wanted to highlight some of the issues that I raised yesterday — just to make them clear — of the challenges that we faced when we were reviewing Supplementary Estimates (B), which supports Bill C-6, the supply bill. As I mentioned yesterday, the Supplementary Estimates (B) document is a very difficult document to read, especially if you want to look at the relationship to the budget and the public accounts. We go from

the Main Estimates to the budget to the Supplementary Estimates (A), (B) and (C). Then after the fiscal year, we look at the public accounts and try to match it all up.

We are just trying to trace the money from one document to the next, and we're often relating information in each of these documents even to another fiscal year. Therefore, it would be very helpful if Treasury Board would undertake an initiative to make the estimates document easier to review and understand, especially as it relates to the budget and the public accounts. They started a project about three or four years ago, and then they stopped. However, it was a worthwhile project, so I think they should initiate that project again.

Yesterday, Senator Gagné mentioned the chart that was included in Supplementary Estimates (B). Treasury Board should really try to improve that chart, because it looks like there is some information missing. If the information there isn't logical, then certain parts of the Supplementary Estimates (B) document is suspect. Treasury Board really needs to go back and take a look at that reconciliation.

Also, I think the Treasury Board Secretariat should consider — if they are not going to initiate a project or even if they do — speaking with parliamentarians who use the estimates documents to obtain their views as to what's helpful and what they have problems with. I can think of a couple of suggestions that would be very easy to implement and would be very helpful to parliamentarians when they do their review of the supplementary estimates.

The second issue that we had a problem with was the public accounts. The government didn't release the public accounts for last year until yesterday, so we waited almost nine months for the public accounts. We didn't have the benefit of that document when we reviewed Supplementary Estimates (B) and Bill C-6. The tabling of the document was really late. I think that was the latest time the document has been tabled since, I think, 1994. The government needs to do something to speed up the tabling of the public accounts.

The other document we were waiting for was the Departmental Results Reports. We didn't have the benefit of those reports when we reviewed Supplementary Estimates (B). Also, last year Minister Duclos sent us those reports around — I think — December 7. This year, we have to wait until January 30 to receive them.

The government needs to look at all those documents and make sure they get them out on a timely basis. These are accountability documents, and they should be tabled in a timely manner so parliamentarians can do their jobs.

The final issue that we had problems with was that the time to review the Supplementary Estimates (B) was too short. We had a short sitting of three or four weeks, but the process to review the Supplementary Estimates (B) document was too rushed. We had to rush our witnesses to get follow-up information to us. Some information we haven't received yet. The process we used this year is what I call "how not to review Supplementary Estimates (B) and the appropriation bill."

[Senator Marshall]

• (1500)

Senator Dupuis asked a question about my speech yesterday, and I don't know if she wants to ask about it today. I was able to obtain what I think is the question, and I want to talk about it briefly. This was regarding a comment I made about there being no standing parliamentary review mechanism in place for statutory expenditures. She wanted to know what I would suggest.

The best response I can give Senator Dupuis is I haven't reached a definitive recommendation yet, but I do have a few suggestions. This was an issue that the Parliamentary Budget Officer had identified in his report on Supplementary Estimates (B), and I briefly discussed it with him. I'm still thinking about it, but I think that in the interim we should look at the mandate of the Finance Committee to consider whether we should include a review of statutory expenditures, or maybe the Senate could give the Finance Committee an order of reference to study statutory expenditures. That would be an option.

When I spoke about statutory expenditures, I was speaking about them in relation to each supplementary supply bill, but the issue is broader than that. Some of these statutory expenditures are approved by statutes that were passed decades ago. I think the legislation around Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement are dated. I think it would be worthwhile if those expenditures were looked at in the context of the old legislation.

The Canada Child Benefit is a more recent benefit, but there have been changes even to that benefit over the past number of years. That is a payment under the Income Tax Act. So we would benefit from going back and looking at the legislation and seeing if those programs now fit with society as a whole.

With regard to looking at the statutory expenditures, I don't know what's in the *Standing Orders of the House of Commons*. I wouldn't dare tread on the Standing Orders of the other place, but that is also an area that we could look at and discuss with our colleagues in the other place.

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Dupuis, do you wish to speak or ask a question?

Hon. Renée Dupuis: I would like to ask Senator Marshall a question if she doesn't mind.

[English]

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Marshall, will you take a question?

Senator Marshall: Yes.

[Translation]

Senator Dupuis: Senator Marshall, thank you for answering the question I asked yesterday, which didn't make it through the Senate interpretation systems.

With respect to the answer you provided today, do you think not only that the mandate of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance should be revised to address the specific issue of statutory expenditures, but also that a Committee of the Whole could delve into the whole question you raised yesterday, which is an extremely important question about government accountability? Do you think a Committee of the Whole could be one way to achieve that?

[English]

Senator Marshall: I sometimes find the Committee of the Whole beneficial, but I find it is not a replacement for the work that's done by individual committees. I don't know if that answers your question.

When we're in the Finance Committee, we can drill down and ask the officials to provide additional information. When you're in Committee of the Whole — I shouldn't say it's a one-night stand — that's your chance. If you don't get what you're looking for, you're out of luck. When you're in a standing Senate committee, you have the opportunity to ask several questions and ask for additional information.

[Translation]

Senator Dupuis: If I've understood the spirit of your proposal correctly, Senator Marshall, are you saying that a Committee of the Whole would not replace the work of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, for example? It could even study the matter after the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance does the groundwork. If I've understood correctly, are you saying that there could be two parallel ways of getting the answers to the questions you're asking?

[English]

Senator Marshall: To be honest with you, I don't see Committee of the Whole addressing any of the issues or concerns that I've raised or expressed.

Hon. Pat Duncan: Honourable senators, I respectfully address you from the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

I want to thank the Senate staff who support the National Finance Committee, our own parliamentary staff who assist in our efforts and our colleagues working with our able chair, Senator Mockler. I appreciate the wisdom, skills and talents each of you bring to our discussions.

There is a great deal to discuss in these Supplementary Estimates (B) 2021-22. My learned and valued colleague Senator Marshall has spoken to many of them. I would like to join with her particularly in expressing my deep concern that, unlike several provinces and the Yukon, according to their financial administration acts, these entities must table their public accounts by October 31 each year.

We have yet to see the Government of Canada's public accounts. As Senator Marshall has said, we saw them yesterday. Having previously been the Yukon's finance minister, I can recall this legislated provision very specifically and this time

frame for the requirement to provide this information. We have yet to receive a satisfactory answer as to why the Government of Canada took so long to provide this information.

Honourable senators, Senator Pate addressed the lack of progress, initiative or response to a guaranteed livable income. Opportunity has presented itself more than once over this past year for Canada to work with Prince Edward Island and perhaps the Yukon to implement a basic income guarantee. I and many others are disappointed the government has not seized this opportunity to address poverty in Canada and make real, visionary change in the circumstances of Canadians.

My learned colleagues in the Senate remind us that we are here to represent our regions, minorities and to serve Canada. I noted some of the items in Bill C-6 that my colleagues have addressed that affect my region and Canadians. I noted that there is a great deal that could be discussed.

One of the items that has not been mentioned in speeches on these supplementary estimates includes additional funding for tourism in Canada. This funding is welcomed throughout our vast country, particularly in rural Canada, since every community in our country has a tourism element.

I would like to commend the government on the additional \$25 million in the supplementary estimates for tourism in Canada. One of the wisest pieces of advice I've heard, and I have passed on to my own children, is to see your own country first. I'm pleased that Canada is supporting one of our hardest-hit sectors and encouraging Canadians to explore this vast, beautiful land.

• (1510)

I could go on at length about tourism funding and the benefits to this industry, however, I would like to leave further details on the value and importance of tourism to other learned colleagues, notably one of our newer colleagues, Senator Sorensen, from Banff. I look forward to hearing from her in the future.

The National Finance Committee has as its guiding principles, transparency, accountability, predictability and reliability. I would like to focus my remaining time in this short address on an accountability of sorts — the line items in the Supplementary Estimates (B) 2021-22 that focus on climate change and the North, the Yukon specifically.

Honourable senators are aware that the North and the Arctic are experiencing the effects of climate change more than anywhere else. The Yukon is not spared. The Yukon government, in its *Our Clean Future: A Yukon strategy for climate change, energy, and a green economy*, outlines the territory's climate action plan. Some of the main commitments are to reduce Yukon's greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, heating, electricity generation and other areas by 45% by 2030; to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the Yukon's mines per unit of material produced; to generate 97% of the electricity on the Yukon's main grid from renewable resources by 2030 on average; to ensure the Yukon is highly resilient to the impacts of climate change by 2030; and to build a sustainable green economy.

I'm pleased to see and welcome the inclusion of \$25 million of federal funding toward these initiatives in these supplementary estimates.

In addition, the government is providing \$13 million toward hydroelectricity and grid interconnection projects in the North in these supplementary estimates. This is a much-needed step to ensure that northern communities have access to reliable and clean energy supplies. These supplementary estimates also include funds for a line item to transition diesel-reliant Indigenous communities to clean energy.

Canadians and senators might be familiar with the CBC's "The National" that showcased the solar project in Old Crow, Yukon. This is an initiative of the Vuntut Gwitchin, a self-governing Yukon First Nation, the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Development Corporation. This is just one initiative.

The White River First Nation in Beaver Creek, Canada's most westerly community, on the border with Alaska, plans to build a solar farm with battery energy storage. Currently, this community is entirely reliant on diesel energy. Other solar-generating systems have been installed by working with Champagne and Aishihik First Nation and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation near Dawson City. Transitioning to renewable energy sources is particularly important for small communities which are currently reliant on expensive and environmentally not-so-friendly sources of energy, such as diesel. These renewable energy projects are not only good for the environment and help reduce Yukon's carbon footprint, they provide Yukon communities self-determination when it comes to their energy needs and are a potential source of revenue when they are able to sell excess energy back to the Yukon Energy Corporation.

Yukon's First Nations — those with self-government agreements and those without — municipalities, the Yukon government and Yukoners, with Canada's financial assistance, including the money in these supplementary estimates, are taking real, concrete steps to develop local, renewable and clean energy technologies to reduce our carbon footprint and to address climate change.

By sharing this information with colleagues addressing the supplementary estimates, I hope to have provided you with a sense of accountability for these funds. This positive co-operative fiscal relationship is just one small snapshot of the government-to-government working relationships between Canada, the Yukon and Yukon First Nations.

Colleagues, while I briefly addressed only a few elements of the supplementary appropriations bill, Bill C-6, I do recognize there is more to discuss, and I look forward to an opportunity to do so in the future. However, in this very short time, I do want to express my gratitude for having had the opportunity to share these few points with you.

As a former finance minister and a former leader of the official opposition in a legislature, I recognize the importance of the supplementary estimates, and I would particularly like to commend Bill C-6 to my colleagues to ensure we pass this important piece of legislation as soon as possible to ensure the timely release of these funds that are so important to Canadians.

Thank you again for the opportunity to work with my colleagues on the National Finance Committee and to work with all of you in the Senate.

Mahsi'cho. Gìnálchìsh. Thank you so much for your time today.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

An Hon. Senator: On division.

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

JUDGES ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—ORDER WITHDRAWN

On Government Business, Bills, Second Reading, Order No. 1, by the Honourable Marc Gold:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Dalphond, seconded by the Honourable Senator Cordy, for the second reading of Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Judges Act.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I ask for leave that the order for second reading of Bill S-3 be discharged from the Order Paper and the bill withdrawn.

The Hon. the Speaker: If you are opposed to leave, say "no." So ordered.

Senator Batters, do you have a question?

Hon. Denise Batters: Yes.

The Hon. the Speaker: With leave of the Senate, can we revert to a question from Senator Batters? If you are opposed to leave, please say "no."

Senator Batters, your question.

Senator Batters: Thank you. Senator Gold, I just wanted to know what the reasoning was for the withdrawal of this particular bill.

I was the critic for the Judges Act in the spring when it was first brought in, and I raised the concern at the time that it did not have a Royal Recommendation and was being brought forward and introduced in the Senate. Is that the reason it's being withdrawn at this point?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question. Although the government remains convinced that we had precedence on our side for introducing both Bill S-2 and Bill S-3, as we did with the appropriations clause given the statement of the Speaker in the other place, the Government of Canada decided the most efficient and responsible way to move Bill S-3, the Judges Act, forward is to introduce it as a C-bill with a Royal Recommendation in the House of Commons.

The Hon. the Speaker: For clarity, Senator Gold is asking for leave to withdraw.

Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon Senators: Agreed.

(Order withdrawn.)

(At 3:19 p.m., pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on November 25, 2021, the Senate adjourned until 2 p.m., tomorrow.)

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