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Tuesday, March 22, 2022

The Honourable GEORGE J. FUREY,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

HONG KONG WATCH

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, last week, Hong Kong Watch, a U.K.-based organization dedicated to monitoring and exposing threats against Hong Kong's basic freedoms and autonomy, was itself threatened under the draconian national security law imposed on Hong Kong by the Chinese communist regime. In addition to using this law to block Hong Kong Watch's website in Hong Kong, Beijing is threatening the organization, of which I am a patron, with a fine and the imprisonment of its Chief Executive, Benedict Rogers, for telling the world the truth about what is happening in Hong Kong.

This organization is not based in Hong Kong, yet the Chinese regime feels very comfortable threatening them and threatening Mr. Rogers, a British citizen, just as the Chinese Ambassador to Canada felt very comfortable threatening Canadian parliamentarians in late 2019 because of a motion I brought forward, along with Senator Ngo.

As Lord Patten of Barnes, the last British Governor of Hong Kong and a patron of Hong Kong Watch commented:

This is another disgraceful example of Mr Putin's friends in Beijing and their quislings in Hong Kong trying not only to stamp out freedom of expression and information in Hong Kong but also to internationalise their campaign against evidence, freedom and honesty.

Lord Alton of Liverpool, a patron of Hong Kong Watch and one of the parliamentarians sanctioned by China, said last year:

This represents a significant escalation in the Chinese Communist Party regime's attempts to silence dissent well beyond its borders . . .

Hong Kong Watch's Chief Executive, Benedict Rogers, himself said:

By threatening a UK-based NGO with financial penalties and jail for merely reporting on the human rights situation in Hong Kong, this letter exemplifies why Hong Kong's National Security Law is so dangerous.

We will not be silenced by an authoritarian security apparatus which, through a mixture of senseless brutality and ineptitude, has triggered rapid mass migration out of the city and shut down civil society.

I echo all of these statements, and I remind everyone of the growing threat from the communist regime of China right here in Canada. Hong Kong Watch has trustees, patrons, staff and volunteers here in Canada, so these threats should very much be a matter of interest to this chamber and to the Canadian government.

I call on this chamber and the Government of Canada to join me in expressing support for Mr. Rogers and everyone involved in Hong Kong Watch and to make it clear that the draconian national security law will not be used to threaten or intimidate Canadians or anyone else on Canadian soil, nor anyone else involved with Hong Kong Watch anywhere in the world.

Thank you, colleagues.

EXPRESSION OF THANKS

Hon. Scott Tannas: Your Honour, I wanted to express our appreciation to you for your discretion in allowing an exception to the rules that are currently in place to permit us to welcome a distinguished guest to the chamber gallery.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of our former colleague the Honourable Douglas Black and his wife, Linda Black.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

INDICATORS OF WELL-BEING IN QUÉBEC

Hon. Diane Bellemare: Honourable colleagues, today I want to share a very interesting initiative based in my province, Quebec. This is a project called Indicators of Well-Being in Québec, and it was unveiled in January by members and partners of the G15+ collective.

The G15+ collective is made up of 15 economic leaders from the union, social and environmental communities who have taken unprecedented steps to support Quebec's economic recovery efforts. The group includes the Conseil du patronat du Québec, Fondation, the Institut du Québec, Équiterre, the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec and the FTQ.

I applaud this concrete example of social dialogue. This kind of dialogue moves ideas and major social undertakings forward. After all, by speaking to one another, we can understand one another.

The collective explains its work on the indicators of well-being as follows:

Gross domestic product (GDP) and job creation are no longer enough to evaluate the well-being of Quebecers.

I agree. They are no longer enough. We also have to talk about all the elements that go into what we call the social wage, and other things too.

• (1410)

I would also like to take a moment to point out that the Senate Prosperity Action Group, an informal group in which I participated along with several other colleagues, also proposed a series of key performance indicators for building sustainable, inclusive and shared prosperity in Canada.

In Quebec, the indicators will be updated annually and will take into account the impact of the pandemic. The data is also available online.

The collective is calling on policy makers to make well-being more central to their actions by linking well-being indicators to government budgeting and strategic planning, and to align methodologies through high-level federal, provincial and territorial collaboration in order to properly measure the well-being of Canadians.

Honourable colleagues, that statement was written prior to February 24, 2022. As I reread it, it occurred to me that peace in this country, and in the world, is a necessary condition for the pursuit of collective well-being. War can never improve the fate of humanity.

I urge everyone to support the approach proposed by the collective for the benefit of all Canadians and, consequently, to pursue dialogue and social peace.

Thank you, *meegwetch*.

2022 PARALYMPIC GAMES

Hon. Chantal Petitclerc: Honourable senators, we experienced some proud and joyful moments during the Beijing Paralympic Winter Games, which were held from March 4 to 13. Team Canada won 25 medals, including 8 gold. This goes down as Canada's second-best showing ever at a Paralympic Winter Games, the best being at the Pyeongchang games in 2018.

These Canadian athletes include the incredible Brian McKeever, who took home 3 gold medals, bringing his career total to 16 gold medals. Yes, sad to say, he beat my personal record. All joking aside, I want to congratulate Brian. He is a legend, an outstanding athlete who has been inspiring us for many years and who has already committed to sharing his talent and expertise with our aspiring athletes.

[English]

The week before the Paralympic Games in Beijing, Russia began attacking Ukraine — a situation that troubles all of us and continues to trouble everyone worldwide. Let us take a moment

to recognize the resilience of the Ukrainian team and athletes who came to the games to compete, and inspired all of us by winning a total of 29 medals and finishing in second place overall.

Before the games, Ukrainian Paralympic Committee President Valeriy Sushkevych told reporters it was a miracle for this team to be there. He said:

Not coming here would have been taking the easy option. . . . Our presence at the Paralympics . . . is a sign that Ukraine is and will remain a country.

That, colleagues, is the power of the Paralympic movement: beating all odds, making a difference, inspiring those around us, showing the world that we can overcome anything with strength and humility and proving that, in the end, human courage will prevail. *Meegwetch*. Thank you.

[Translation]

THE LATE PHILLIPE BÉLANGER

Hon. Pierrette Ringuette: Honourable senators, I rise today to inform you that Philippe Bélanger, a young Senate employee, passed away on March 2. He was just 40 years old. Philippe drove our shuttle buses and always greeted us with a beautiful smile.

A native of Edmundston, Philippe lived life to the fullest through his love of and appreciation for nature. He loved climbing, hiking in the woods, downhill skiing, snowboarding and other outdoor activities.

A snowboarding accident when he was younger nearly cost him his life, but thanks to the exceptional dedication of his father Bertrand, a physiotherapist, and his mother Lise, a nurse, Philippe recovered, and he was more determined than ever to make every second of his life count.

In June 2019, Philippe informed us that he had been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. It was sad news, but Philippe was determined to beat this disease, and he diligently participated in clinical trials in Montreal. He remained positive up until a few months ago. During that time, Philippe travelled with me from Gatineau to Edmundston several times to visit his parents and friends. The trip was definitely hard on him, but he shared his deepest thoughts with me, always with a smile. I so enjoyed those times and especially his company.

He enjoyed those visits, but he always looked forward to returning to his little daughters and his wife, Martine, his treasures.

Phillipe left us far too soon, but his memory shall remain with us always. As the song by Angèle Arsenault goes, there is a star for you, there is a star for each and every one of us. Thanks to his parents' devotion, there is indeed a star for Philippe, a star that will always shine brightly for us.

Honourable senators, please join me and Senator Mockler in extending our sincere condolences to his wife Martine, his two young daughters, Marguerite and Clémence, his parents, Bertrand and Lise Bélanger, and his sisters, Josette and Martine.

This is a sad occasion. Thank you.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LA FRANCOPHONIE

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, every year on March 20, we celebrate the International Day of La Francophonie, and we remember that, according to the Observatoire de la langue française, there are more than 300 million French speakers living on five continents.

We remember that the French language is the fifth most spoken language in the world — or the sixth, according to some — as well as the fourth most used language on the internet, and that 59% of those who speak French on a daily basis live in Africa.

Every year, we reaffirm the importance of this language for Canada's economic, diplomatic and cultural relations. We celebrate it in all its forms, not just to defend the language and cultural rights of a minority, but to recognize it for its true value, as one of our common languages in this country, one of our two official languages enshrined in Canada's Constitution.

We celebrate its international significance and its universal, inclusive and unifying nature as a national treasure to be cherished. We remember also that the Francophonie is not just the French language. It is also an institution that Canada belongs to and that is dedicated to promoting political, educational, economic and cultural cooperation among the 88 member countries of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

The theme of the 2022 International Day of La Francophonie is "La Francophonie of the future," and it seeks to highlight the Francophonie's support for youth and their aspirations, because by 2060, dear colleagues, more than 700 million human beings will live in francophone countries, and three quarters of them will be under the age of 30 and live in Africa.

Where do things stand in Canada? Why is there still so much to do to ensure that all Canadians get a chance to learn French? Why is it still so difficult to work and receive services in French in Canada? Why do some Canadians still believe that protecting and promoting the French language takes away from other linguistic realities?

There is still a lot of work to be done to help the French language and the francophonie thrive in Canada.

When we study Bill C-13, An Act for the Substantive Equality of Canada's Official Languages, which would modernize the Official Languages Act, we will have the perfect opportunity to work on this and plan for the future.

On March 20, we also celebrate the International Day of Happiness, and, on March 21, we mark World Poetry Day.

Dear colleagues, I want to leave you with the beautiful, vivid words of Acadian poet Jonathan Roy:

I am a network of people
connected through blogs and community radio
together, minds open
my people, sharing

and down the road
at a fleeting feu de joie or tintamarre
we would chat to one another, about one another
in a language as passionate and majestic
as we are
I speak as one
French, Chiac, Acadian, Acadjonne
and a thousand other colourful languages
that we, together, have yet to name
but that, with a twinkle in the eye,
we understand all the same

Thank you.

• (1420)

[English]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

CERTIFICATE OF NOMINATION AND
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES TABLED

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the certificate of nomination and biographical notes for the proposed reappointment of Joe Friday to the position of Public Sector Integrity Commissioner for a term of 18 months.

DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY

FIRST REPORT OF SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE DEPOSITED WITH
CLERK DURING ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. Gwen Boniface: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on March 3, 2022, the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on March 22, 2022, its first report (interim).

PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

NOTICE OF MOTION TO REAPPOINT INCUMBENT

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That, in accordance with subsection 39(1) of the *Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act* (S.C. 2005, c. 46), the Senate approve the reappointment of Mr. Joe Friday as Public Sector Integrity Commissioner for a term of 18 months.

[Translation]

**HIS EXCELLENCY VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYI,
PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE**

ADDRESS TO MEMBERS OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF
COMMONS—MOTION TO PRINT AS AN APPENDIX ADOPTED

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-5(j), I move:

That the Address by His Excellency Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine, to members of both Houses of Parliament, delivered Tuesday, March 15, 2022, together with all introductory and related remarks, be printed as an appendix to the *Debates of the Senate* of this day and form part of the permanent records of this House.

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.)

(For text of speeches, see Appendix.)

[English]

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Jim Quinn introduced Bill S-240, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (definition of income).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

JANE GOODALL BILL

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Marty Klyne introduced Bill S-241, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (great apes, elephants and certain other animals).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

[Translation]

NATIONAL FINANCE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY
MATTERS RELATING TO FEDERAL ESTIMATES GENERALLY
AND OTHER FINANCIAL MATTERS

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

That the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance be authorized to study matters relating to federal estimates generally and other financial matters, as described in rule 12-7(5); and

That the committee submit its final report no later than April 14, 2024, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

[English]

QUESTION PERIOD

FINANCE

AGREEMENT WITH NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the government leader in the Senate. Government leader, this morning we saw the Prime Minister of Canada go before the people of Canada to try to defend the indefensible. Late last night, we saw that there was a deal negotiated by Prime Minister Trudeau and the NDP in order to essentially create a majority government, which is, without a doubt, an unprecedented power grab.

We know full well that in the last election the NDP received 17% of the vote. We also clearly know that this is not the agenda that the people of Canada have embraced. How can the Prime Minister justify this?

Over the next three and a half years, the NDP has agreed to unequivocally support four budgets, and we already have a government in place that has been spending money like a drunken sailor. Now we have a clear indication that they will continue down that path and more.

Today, while the Prime Minister stood before the Canadian public trying to justify this majority coalition government — which the people of Canada clearly did not choose only six

months ago in a general election — there was not a single figure attached to how much this deal between the NDP, the Liberals and Prime Minister Trudeau will cost taxpayers. Can you explain to us what the exact number is — the cost to taxpayers — for this power grab coalition between the NDP and the Liberals?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. This is not a coalition arrangement, as the Prime Minister made clear. I cannot answer your question because it remains to be seen what the government will bring forward in terms of its budget and what programs it will introduce. I would simply say that, as the Prime Minister announced, it's the position of this government that this introduces a degree of stability and allows Canadians to benefit from a degree of coherence and stability in their government going forward.

Senator Housakos: The only one to benefit from this is the Liberal government that got a minority mandate and are trying, through negotiation and deals with the socialist NDP, to turn it into a majority government. The only one to benefit here, let's be clear, is the Liberal government.

I have previously raised the affordability crisis impacting Canadian families in this place. Inflation, as you know, government leader, is at a three-year high, and it will remain sky-high under an NDP-Liberal coalition government. The NDP-Liberal coalition government will be a high-spending, high-tax government with no regard whatsoever for the deficit or the cost of living.

Government leader, let's be clear, we have a 30-year high in inflation. We have challenges for single mothers and middle-class families to be able to feed their children due to just inflation. We see these difficulties every time a Canadian goes to the pump in order to fill their car or truck to go to work. We see the cost for young Canadians when they go out there to try to become first-time home buyers and the difficulty they are having in this country.

• (1430)

This NDP-Liberal coalition will further impact the daily lives of these Canadians because the NDP has given you a blank cheque until 2025, yet, the government leader in the Senate can't tell us the exact figure of costs and how much this coalition is going to cost Canadian taxpayers.

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question. The issues of affordability that you raise are serious ones. We are all concerned about it, the government and I'm sure all opposition parties. It's a serious question. However, it does not assist in dealing with serious questions by continuing to misrepresent the nature of the understanding that has been reached by the government and the NDP.

Honourable colleague, you have used the term "coalition government" on many occasions. It's simply not the case. Talking points aside, it's not helping Canadians understand what needs to be done to address the serious issues of affordability that you quite properly mention.

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Claude Carignan: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Government Representative, as you know, section 2 of the Access to Information Act states that the purpose of the act is to, and I quote:

... enhance the accountability and transparency of federal institutions in order to promote an open and democratic society and to enable public debate on the conduct of those institutions.

My office submitted an access to information request to Public Safety Canada on February 11. This week, we received a reply informing us that the department would get back to us within 195 days, by September 22, 2022, but I don't even know if I will get a detailed answer.

Government Representative, do you think that it is right to have to wait 195 days to get an answer in a society that calls itself free and that seeks to be transparent and give access to information?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question and for highlighting the importance of transparency within our government institutions.

Openness, transparency and accountability are our government's guiding principles. I have been told that the government is currently reviewing its access to information process. This is an opportunity to see how access to information is working for Canadians, to explore the possibility of improving proactive disclosure, to improve services and to reduce the wait times you're talking about.

I have also been told that the government is eager to release an interim report, which it should be in a position to do very soon. It will use the \$12.8 million invested in Budget 2021 to improve access to information.

Senator Carignan: Government Representative, the mandate letter that the Prime Minister gave to his Minister of Public Safety states, and I quote:

Canadians continue to rely on journalists and journalism for accurate and timely news.

Of course, I myself, not a journalist, submitted the access to information request, but I expect a journalist would have to wait just as long. Do you think it is reasonable to wait seven months to get timely information? Is that reasonable and timely?

Senator Gold: As I said, the government is doing its best to improve the process and wait times, which we know have been issues for some time.

[*English*]

FINANCE

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE AGREEMENTS

Hon. Rosemary Moodie: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, today, Ontario is the only province that has not reached a bilateral agreement with the federal government on child care.

A few weeks ago, in response to Senator Omidvar's question, you clarified for us that there was no deadline for the province to sign such a deal. However, Senator Gold, despite there being no deadline, the end of the fiscal year, March 31, is rapidly approaching. Can you confirm that if Ontario does not sign by the end of the month, the province could lose over \$1 billion in funding? If so, would there be a way for the province to recuperate this funding?

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

The government recognizes the importance of reaching a deal before the end of the fiscal year to ensure that Ontario families have access to all the funding allocated for them to help make their lives more affordable.

I'm advised that Ontario has submitted a first draft of its action plan demonstrating how it would use federal funds to implement affordable, accessible, high-quality and inclusive child care across the province. The submission of the first draft of the action plan has allowed for negotiations to move to the next phase where officials can work to ensure the plan meets federal objectives on space creation, affordability, data and reporting, workforce supports, inclusivity and quality within the parameters of the funding allocation for Ontario. I'm advised that Minister Karina Gould remains optimistic they can work together to secure a deal that will deliver for Ontario families and children.

Senator Moodie: Senator Gold, from what I hear from stakeholders, Ontario is looking to include commercial and unlicensed child care providers as eligible for federal funding. It is my understanding that this may be a significant source of some of the disagreement between the provincial and federal governments and perhaps an obstacle to progress in these negotiations.

Has there been any other province that has sought to include commercial and unlicensed providers in their bilateral agreement? Would Ontario be unique in this way, Senator Gold?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question, senator.

Before an agreement can be signed, my understanding is that provinces and territories must demonstrate through their action plans how they will achieve \$10-a-day child care by 2026. I am advised that the agreements with provinces and territories do not stipulate any specific approach when it comes to existing providers. All licensed providers will be part of the Canada-wide

system. Any system transformations are led by the provincial governments using funds from the federal agreement as outlined in their action plans.

Honourable senators, it's important to retain existing licensed spaces and providers. As the federal and provincial governments work to build this system together, we need every high-quality space that we have. The government's goal is to ensure all licensed providers and the families they serve are supported.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

LEADERS' DEBATES COMMISSION

Hon. Donna Dasko: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, in 2018, through an order-in-council, the government established The Leaders' Debates Commission, which is charged with organizing one leaders' debate in each official language during each federal election period. The Leaders' Debates Commission is required to provide to the Minister of Democratic Institutions a report no later than five months after the day on which a general election is held. Subsequently, the minister is to table the report in Parliament.

February 20 marked five months since the last federal election. As you may recall, there was much controversy surrounding the format and questions of the last federal leaders' debate. I have initiated a Senate inquiry on this topic but have been delayed in speaking to it. I am hoping to use the report of The Leaders' Debates Commission to inform my speech. I know that I'm not the only Canadian who is interested in this report.

Senator Gold, when can we expect to see The Leaders' Debates Commission's report?

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

As highlighted, The Leaders' Debates Commission was created to make the debate process predictable, reliable and stable. Before its creation, party-leader participation was determined in an ad hoc way behind closed doors. The commission will continue to serve the purpose of improving Canadians' knowledge of the parties, their leaders and policy positions. I'm advised the report will be tabled soon.

Senator Dasko: Senator Gold, given there is no current Minister of Democratic Institutions, is this delay in part because there is no minister in place to deal with the report?

• (1440)

Senator Gold: Thank you for your supplementary question. I'm advised that the commission's calendar of activities is independent from the naming of a Minister of Democratic Institutions, so the answer is no.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

[Translation]

ANTI-RACISM SECRETARIAT

Hon. Wanda Elaine Thomas Bernard: This question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. Senator Gold, yesterday was the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The Prime Minister released a statement affirming the government's commitment to creating a country that offers equal opportunity. He highlighted that the government recognized the United Nations' International Decade for People of African Descent or UNDPAD. In 2019, the government announced the launch of an initiative called Building a Foundation for Change: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy for 2019–2022. We are now at the end of this time frame that was set out to build a foundation for long-term action, and only have two years left of UNDPAD.

Senator Gold, what are the next steps for the Anti-Racism Secretariat?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, senator, for the question. Building a Foundation for Change: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy for 2019–2022 will invest \$4.6 million to establish a new anti-racism secretariat that will lead a whole-of-government approach in addressing racism. I'm advised that that secretariat will also work with the government to address the effects of discrimination, including leading federal institutions to identify gaps, to assist in developing new initiatives and to consider the impacts of new and existing policies, services and programs on communities. The secretariat will publicly report on outcomes in addressing racism and discrimination, and contribute to work being undertaken by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat towards a more diverse and inclusive public service. The government remains committed to working with provinces and territories and to continue to engage in work with non-government partners, Indigenous peoples and other communities to identify and develop further areas for action.

Senator Bernard: Senator Gold, I have heard from many African-Nova Scotian community members that funds from the Black Entrepreneurship Program have been challenging to access. What funds have been released to date, and what is the breakdown by province of organizations that have received this funding?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the supplementary question. To date, I'm advised that \$8,126,726 has been distributed and the average loan size is \$88,302. As for the breakdown of organizations by province that have received money, I will make inquiries with the government and report back to this chamber.

JUSTICE

RIGHTS OF VICTIMS OF CRIMINAL ACTS

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: My question is for Senator Gold. Domestic violence is a scourge that kills too many women in Canada every year. The numbers in Quebec reached a record high in 2021. Since 2008, 26 women have been murdered. For the vast majority of them, this occurred in the context of domestic violence. Many women are forced to hide, flee their homes, leave their jobs and change their lives, even though they are the victims.

Since Justin Trudeau came to power, the Government of Canada has not taken any action to protect these women. Despite numerous calls for help, your government refuses to listen, choosing instead to introduce bills like Bill C-5, which will reduce sentences for abusers convicted of domestic violence. It is incomprehensible.

Senator Gold, I asked you back in December to engage in discussions with the Privy Council Office on my Bill S-205 to prevent femicide in Canada. Did you get any answers from that office regarding a government bill that would include the same measures as the ones in my bill?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, colleague. I'm still waiting for a response from the government on this.

Allow me to correct you, however. It is false to say that the government has done nothing on this file since coming to power. On the contrary, the government has allocated \$100 million to women's shelters, centres for victims of sexual assault, and other support organizations for victims of gender-based violence across Canada. Budget 2021 sets out an additional \$200 million to support organizations that combat gender-based violence.

Senator Boisvenu: Senator Gold, it is time to stop hiding women and start protecting them. Last week, Quebec passed Bill 24, which will require men who are convicted and receive a sentence of less than two years to wear an electronic tracking device. However, with this law, we now have a two-tiered justice system where there will be better protection for Quebec women and no protection for Canadian women.

As a former parole board member, do you think it is right that Quebec women who experience domestic violence are better protected than Canadian women who experience domestic violence?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question. As a Quebecer, I am proud of the measures that our province has taken to better protect women. It is a testament to the calibre of the Quebec society that we belong to.

As I said, I am still waiting for a response, but I can assure this chamber that protecting women is a priority for the government, and that will not change.

[English]

CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Hon. Rose-May Poirier: My question is for the government leader in the Senate.

Information released last week from the Canadian Real Estate Association showed housing inflation rose by 3.5% in one month and by almost 30% year over year, which is a new record. Housing inflation in my province is worse than the national average. According to the Canadian Real Estate Association, home prices in New Brunswick increased by almost 6% between January and February. In the Moncton area, home prices have increased by over 35% in one year and by a staggering 110% over the last five years.

Leader, many Canadians, especially our youth, believe they will never be able to afford their own home. Nationwide, the cost of homes has doubled under your government. Why hasn't the Trudeau government brought forward a credible plan to deal with housing affordability?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. The government has taken and will continue to take measures to address this important and troubling issue for those seeking housing.

In the Throne Speech, the government outlined initiatives to increase housing supply and to support Canadians looking to buy their first home. This includes a housing accelerator fund to speed up the construction of new housing, a flexible first-time homebuyer incentive and a rent-to-own program to help renters become homeowners.

The government is moving forward on its annual 1% tax on the value of non-resident-, non-Canadian-owned residential real estate, and I'm advised there will be additional measures in the upcoming budget.

Senator Poirier: A report on housing affordability released last summer from the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that the two main programs of the Trudeau government's national housing strategy spent less than half of what they were supposed to during the course of their first three years. The actual support for low-income households is 15% lower than it was prior to the start of the National Housing Strategy. CMHC's community housing units are 42% lower than before the National Housing Strategy because the Trudeau government allowed operating agreements of 183,000 low-income community housing units to lapse.

• (1450)

Senator Gold, this is a record for your government according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. How can the Trudeau government continue to claim they are taking housing affordability seriously?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question.

The government does take housing affordability seriously. I won't repeat what I have said, but the government has committed to a plan to help, amongst others, renters become owners. It is involved in an investment of \$1 billion in loans and grants to develop and scale up rent-to-own projects. The government will also create a tax-free, first home savings account, allowing Canadians under 40 to save \$40,000 and withdraw it tax-free to put toward their home purchases. These are some of the measures that the government will take to ensure that every Canadian has a safe and affordable place to call home.

JUSTICE

CONVERSION THERAPY

Hon. Mary Coyle: Honourable senators, my question is to the Government Representative in the Senate. Senator Gold, on December 7, 2021, this house passed Bill C-4 banning conversion therapy. The law came into force on January 7 of this year, 2022.

On March 3, a CBC "Marketplace" investigation published an article raising questions about just how effective the ban on conversion therapy has been in the age of virtual therapy. They mention that several life coaches in the U.S. are still offering their conversion therapy services online to Canadians. What is the Canadian government doing to address this dangerous practice and to protect Canadians and Canadian youth in particular?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, senator, for the question. It is the position of this government that conversion therapy is a cruel and degrading practice causing serious physical and mental effects on those who undergo it. It can go so far as inducing suicide. With the passage of Bill C-4, the practice is now a criminal offence and the new offence extends to persons that advertise conversion therapy practices, services or treatments whether in print material or, indeed, electronically.

While the Minister of Justice, as you know, does not have the authority to initiate criminal investigations as this is an inclusive power of the province, the federal government stands with LGBTQ2S Canadians and all who are opposed to any form of so-called conversion therapy.

Senator Coyle: Senator Gold, could you tell us then what the federal government is doing to monitor the effectiveness of this new law?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question. The law has only been in force for a very short while, as you mentioned, senator. I will have to make inquiries as to what processes may be in place to monitor its implementation.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Honourable senators, my question is to the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, I was pleased to attend the world's largest annual women's human rights conference at the UN last week, CSW66. As I sat in the grand hall of the General Assembly, I asked myself what more Canada could be doing to support Ukrainians who are fighting to save their democracy because there's a stranglehold on the UN Security Council by the vetoes of its permanent members Russia and China.

As you know, Senator Gold, 141 countries supported the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine last week. Only four countries voted against. My question to the government today is geared to what more Canada can do through Ambassador Bob Rae's effective and respected presence in the UN General Assembly.

Since the Security Council is inaccessible and ineffective, will the Government of Canada act on the authority of the UN General Assembly to mandate peacekeeping operations at the request or with the consent of Ukraine and continue Canada's distinguished history, including the idea of the Blue Helmets at the time of the Suez crisis, by leading — as suggested today by the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy and the Honourable Allan Rock — an initiative now at the UN General Assembly to assemble and deploy peacekeepers to protect humanitarian corridors in Ukraine?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question and for reminding us, if we needed reminding, of some of the challenges that the United Nations system imposes on the democratic countries seeking to work together to address, in this case, atrocious crimes against humanity. Canada will continue to work with its allies to do whatever it can and will participate and play whatever roles are appropriate for it to play, with its allies, to address the plight of Ukrainians being attacked and killed by Russia.

With regard to the specific question, I will make inquiries. Whether I'm able to report back will be a function of the nature of the discussions and the confidentiality that may be attached, but I will certainly make inquiries.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the time for Question Period has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Salma Atallahjan moved second reading of Bill S-224, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons).

She said: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill S-224, which aims to facilitate the conviction of those charged with human trafficking-related offences. This bill will amend the Criminal Code's definition of exploitation in human trafficking offences so that the Crown is no longer required to prove a reasonable person in the victim's circumstances feared for their safety or the safety of someone they know. This will put the onus on the perpetrator rather than the survivors.

Bill S-224 is not a partisan bill. It's about protecting young, vulnerable Canadians from predatory criminals who exploit their hopes and dreams for personal gain. Our judicial process currently has low rates of prosecution for human trafficking. It's traumatizing for survivors and puts the burden of proof on victims.

The current definition in the Criminal Code suggests that a person is exploited only if fear was a driving factor in their exploitation. Here I quote:

... a person exploits another person if they cause them to provide, or offer to provide, labour or a service by engaging in conduct that, in all the circumstances, could reasonably be expected to cause the other person to believe that their safety or the safety of a person known to them would be threatened if they failed to provide, or offer to provide, the labour or service.

• (1500)

However, as I will demonstrate today, human trafficking is more complex and can only be defined by the perpetrator's actions rather than the victim's experience.

By amending the Criminal Code to reflect the international definition of "trafficking in persons" as outlined in the Palermo Protocol, we enable the Crown to efficiently convict human traffickers. The Palermo Protocol views human trafficking as having three distinct elements: the act, the means and the purpose. Human trafficking is defined as the act of recruiting, transporting, harbouring and receiving a person by means of coercion, abuse of power or deception for the purpose of exploitation. This is not reflected in our Criminal Code.

The Palermo Protocol was adopted in 2000 at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations and has 117 signatories, including Canada. Yet, 22 years later, this is another example of Canada's promises without concrete action. This bill proposes to remove the element of fear to reflect the international definition of trafficking in persons as outlined in the Palermo Protocol.

In its current form, the Criminal Code puts the responsibility on victims or survivors to provide compelling testimony to prove the validity of their experience. This small yet powerful change will allow the Crown to convict human traffickers. I stand here today for human trafficking survivors, for their families, for young, vulnerable Canadians and for those who are currently being exploited in plain sight.

As such, Bill S-224 is not a partisan bill: It's about protecting young, vulnerable Canadians from predatory criminals who exploit their hopes and dreams for personal gain.

This is an important bill. Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery that is on the rise worldwide with an estimated 40 million victims. It is a practice that relies on abuse and coercion to exploit young victims for sexual purposes or work. Traffickers will approach victims in various ways, either by convincing them that they are a potential friend or boyfriend, contacting them on social media, posting ads for jobs or even threatening or kidnapping them. They will promise money, clothes, work, education or financial aid for their family. Victims often do not realize that traffickers don't have their best interests at heart.

In Canada, the geography and layout of the highways makes it easy for traffickers to avoid detection by law enforcement and maintain control over their isolated and disoriented victims. Although there is a popular belief that victims of human trafficking are brought into the country, most victims are young Canadian women. Almost half of them were found to have come from another city in the same province, and 60% of all victims come from Ontario.

Traffickers use transport corridors to haul their victims along the Trans-Canada and the 401 highways. Many willing customers can be found near oil patch work camps in Alberta, and traffickers exploit the province's online sex markets. In Ontario, the practice is so commonplace on highways 11 and 17 that you most likely have crossed paths with a rental car in which a trafficker and his victim were travelling from Sudbury and Thunder Bay through northern Ontario towards Winnipeg.

As I have mentioned, traffickers often recruit their victims with false promises, but can also use threats and violence to break them. It is heartbreaking to hear how they exploit vulnerability by aiming for young people dealing with homelessness, substance abuse, addiction, trauma, abuse or violence.

Among the most at-risk groups are women and girls, new immigrants, children in the welfare system, persons living with disabilities, LGBTQ2+ and migrant workers. These are Canadians already falling through the cracks.

The most vulnerable are Indigenous children who live with the impact of hundreds of years of ongoing trauma. In 2014, Indigenous people made up 4% of the population but accounted for half the trafficking victims. Recruiting young Indigenous girls is so commonplace that many survivors have described men waiting at Greyhound bus stations at night and approaching them,

promising a place to stay and safety. One Indigenous survivor explained that by the age of 16, she believed it was okay to be beaten by men.

Traffickers will also use their victims to do their dirty work and recruit other vulnerable individuals, often promising them a way out. This shows the extent of manipulation, fear and gaslighting victims face on a daily basis.

Alternatively, social media has unfortunately made recruiting young Canadians and children much easier. Pedophiles can reach out to as many as 100 children per hour on popular apps like TikTok and Instagram.

Leaving such exploitation requires courage, dedication and, often, outside help. Many survivors work tirelessly to help victims escape their traffickers. However, many victims fear or distrust law enforcement, and it can take up to 18 attempts before permanently leaving human trafficking. To make matters worse, it can easily take up to two years before an adult realizes a youth in their life is being sexually exploited. This is what happened to Clementine, a teenage girl in Montreal who was exploited for a year before her parents noticed strange behaviour and worrisome scars on her body. Although she had wanted to leave many times, a trafficker's threats to kill her family and dog made her stay.

So it's not surprising that human trafficking is known as low risk with high reward among traffickers. It has generated about US\$32 billion annually for perpetrators, and very few cases have been successfully prosecuted in Canada. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, less than 8% of perpetrators charged with human trafficking have been prosecuted.

Also, too much responsibility is put on the shoulders of people who have endured unimaginable things. Most survivors do not identify as victims as a result of manipulation and gaslighting. They can believe their trafficker cares for them. We owe them the necessary help and care. Instead, they must prove that they fear for their life on the stand, often only a few metres from their trafficker. Victims are usually the only evidence against traffickers. Without their testimony, the Crown has no case. Testimony shows that the fear-based model is the biggest issue when dealing with convictions and that the experience is more traumatizing than being forced to work in the sex trade. They must relive their nightmare during the preliminary hearing and then at full trial.

During the cross-examination, it is common for the defence lawyer to twist their words and call them a liar. We all remember a federal court judge in Alberta who asked a victim, during a sexual assault trial, "Why couldn't you just keep your knees together?" This, as you can imagine, can lead to survivors recanting or simply dropping charges. According to the current Criminal Code, the offence rests more on a victim's ability to perform on the witness stand rather than on what the perpetrator has done. Hence, human trafficking charges are often dropped,

and traffickers are charged under related crimes such as prostitution-related offences, kidnapping, assault, sexual assault and sexual exploitation. This is not justice. This is certainly not a way to prevent, suppress and punish perpetrators of trafficking in persons.

Before I conclude, I must highlight the wonderful work done by MPs Carrie and Viersen to put an end to human trafficking in Canada. I would like to thank them both for their hard work on the original private member's bill on human trafficking, which I now have the privilege of introducing in the Red Chamber.

Honourable senators, 22 years ago we agreed — along with 116 other nations — to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Yet, the onus remains on the victims to prove fear. Colleagues, I ask you, how does a person prove fear?

This bill aims to remove one obstacle in the prosecution of human traffickers. With a simple modification to the Criminal Code, victims and survivors will finally be able to find greater justice and hopefully the safety they require to heal and rebuild their lives.

• (1510)

Honourable senators, by removing this barrier — the element of fear — we will finally be able to tackle bigger challenges in human trafficking in Canada. This is the first crucial step to putting an end to this horrible practice in our country. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Thank you, senator. I congratulate you on this very important bill.

In 2015, we adopted Bill C-452, introduced by Ms. Mourani in the other place, and sponsored by me here in the Senate. This bill cracked down on people involved in human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of minors. One of the clauses of this bill, proposing harsher sentences, was never implemented by Mr. Trudeau because he felt that this clause was inhumane for traffickers. Bill C-5, which we will one day study in this place, would decriminalize kidnapping. Doesn't it seem as though this bill contradicts what the government has done to combat human trafficking?

[*English*]

Senator Ataullahjan: Thank you, senator, for your question. I agree, I remember that bill. I don't know why the government would do what they have done. We need to stand up and make sure that people who inflict crimes or kidnap young women and subject them to sexual assault do get their due punishment.

Hon. Kim Pate: Would you take another question?

Senator Ataullahjan: Yes.

Senator Pate: I was surprised to hear your answer to that question. Could you point me to the provision in Bill C-5 that actually decriminalizes kidnapping?

Senator Ataullahjan: Sorry, Senator Pate. I don't have that answer for you; however, I can look it up and provide that for you.

Senator Pate: Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Miville-Dechêne, debate adjourned.)

HEALTH-CENTRED APPROACH TO SUBSTANCE USE BILL

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Gwen Boniface moved second reading of Bill S-232, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for the decriminalization of illegal substances, to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

She said: Honourable senators, the mechanics and much rationale for this bill were previously described in my remarks to Bill S-229, the current bill's predecessor. Please regard my remarks today as an extension or second chapter of that speech.

I think it is most appropriate to begin second reading of Bill S-232, the Health-Centred Approach to Substance Use Act, from where I left off with Bill S-229: with the headlines. I will restrict these headlines to only the beginning of 2022.

"Saskatchewan sees record high overdose deaths in 2021;" "I watched the opioid crisis from the front lines. I'm glad I'm leaving;" "Paramedics in B.C. responded to nearly 100 overdoses a day in 2021;" "Half of people who died from opioids in 2020 sought health care in the month before;" "Yukon declares substance use health emergency after 4 deaths in 1st week of January;" "Sudbury area continues to deal with an increase in opioid overdoses and deaths;" And finally, just from today: "Three drug overdoses reported within an hour in Mississauga."

Senators, this issue isn't going away. Since I last spoke on this in May, the numbers of overdoses and deaths we are seeing in this country are getting higher. We have seen some progress. There was some movement in party platforms during the election: the NDP has long called for decriminalization; Conservatives pledged funding for a thousand residential drug treatment beds and promised to treat the opioid epidemic as a health issue; the governing Liberals have promised a comprehensive strategy addressing problematic substance use, which is akin to what can be found in Bill S-232.

This strategy can also be found in the new portfolio of the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions mandate letter, though there is no mention of decriminalization. Addictions generally were only mentioned in passing in the Speech from the Throne, which is worrisome. Though progress is being made, these are, in my estimation, baby steps rather than the much-needed strident steps.

Bill S-232 contains two notable advancements from Bill S-229: the inclusion of the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions in the consultation process, and a reference to the unanimous recommendation to decriminalize personal possession of substances from the Expert Task Force on Substance Use.

As a reminder, Bill S-232 does namely two things. It mandates conversations between the federal government, the provinces and the territories and other stakeholders so that the federal government can report to Parliament with a national strategy as to how best tackle the epidemic of substance use. The second thing it does is remove the criminal sanctions from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for simple possession, also known as decriminalization.

It is important to remember this: The way the bill is drafted, decriminalization comes into force on a day to be fixed by order of the Governor-in-Council. If this bill receives Royal Assent, decriminalization will not suddenly become the law of the land. As stated in the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police report of 2020:

It will be key in a Canadian context that treatment facilities are established and operational ahead of decriminalization and have the capacity to take in individuals diverted through police contact.

It would be prudent to ensure that the national strategy is completed and reported to Parliament before decriminalization takes place. The supports need to be in place first, then decriminalization can happen. Bold actions need to be taken. Honourable colleagues, this is about saving lives. I would submit that most every senator in this chamber has been affected by addiction, be it a family member, a friend or a colleague. If not, you know someone who has.

Colleagues, there is a difference between legalization and decriminalization. I want to be very clear on this point. They must not be used interchangeably. Legalization is the removal of all penalties for possession and personal use of substances, which are replaced by a regulated government regime to access and use said substances. Decriminalization removes only the criminal penalties for possession and use, but other administrative penalties may still apply. With decriminalization, all other substance-related criminal penalties, such as drug trafficking, would still be fully enforced under the criminal law.

Polling out of the Angus Reid Institute released in February 2021 shows that support for decriminalization is trending upward. Across the provinces, there is 59% support for such a proposal. The majority in all provinces except Saskatchewan and New Brunswick were supportive of these measures, but even those two provinces were close to 50% in favour. Interestingly, the results also show that those 55 years or

older were likely to support a tough approach, while those 18 to 34 were more supportive of decriminalizing all illegal drugs and least likely to support the tough approach.

This discrepancy is easily explained. In 1966 — 55 years ago — the popularization of the War on Drugs approach of the Nixon era picked up steam beginning in the 1970s.

• (1520)

Over time, “the war on drugs” approach has been dying out; it has been labelled a failure and that a new approach is needed. That is what our younger generation is picking up on instead.

The rising support from the younger generation means that decriminalization will eventually become public policy. The purpose of Bill S-232 is to ensure that necessary steps are in place before decriminalization occurs. A strategy, with the full collaboration of provinces and territories, would ensure a smooth process with significant supports in place to address this epidemic.

The Prime Minister has acknowledged publicly that experts on these issues have been calling for decriminalization and that the government is looking at “where to do that, if to do that, and how to do that in partnership with the provinces” and also that:

It’s not going to be the federal government doing something without making sure that there are the supports on the ground in municipalities [and] in the provinces.

A national strategy outlining a consultative process with provinces is what is before you today, colleagues.

It is prudent that the Prime Minister mentioned municipalities. Municipalities are creatures of the province, and more often than not, it’s the municipalities bearing the brunt of the current epidemic. It’s the community perspective that is shining light on these issues.

When you picture a substance-use disorder, do you think about Toronto or the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver? What if I told you that some of the highest per capita numbers for drug-toxicity deaths take place in my health unit of Simcoe Muskoka — yes, honourable colleagues, beautiful and serene Muskoka — or that Timmins, Sudbury and Dryden, Ontario, are experiencing the worst numbers of opioid overdoses and deaths they have ever seen? Those are the types of communities now being affected by the rampant abuse of fentanyl and the more potent carfentanil. This is no longer just a big-city problem.

Data collected by the Chief Coroner of Ontario show a rising number of opioid-related deaths in northern Ontario. Public Health Sudbury & Districts reported 105 deaths in 2020. Algoma Public Health, which includes Thunder Bay, totalled 53 opioid-related deaths, up from 17 in 2019. Data from last May suggest that:

Sudbury’s per capita deaths by opioid is the highest in Ontario, with over 50 per 100,000, with North Bay, Thunder Bay, Timmins and Sault Ste. Marie close to, or over 40 deaths per 100,000.

Christian Provenzano, the mayor of Sault Ste. Marie was quoted in a CBC article saying:

The reality of my community and many communities in northern Ontario, is that the health care infrastructure does not exist and is not being invested in by our other levels of government.

He continued by saying:

We can't continue to rely on the health care infrastructure that addressed mental health and addiction issues five years ago, 10 years ago and 15 years ago.

In Timmins, the 2019 death rate from opioids was second to Sudbury at almost 47 per 100,000, four times the Ontario average and twice as high as the City of Vancouver. Long-term emergency room doctor at the Timmins hospital Dr. Chris Loreto had this to say about services to treat people with substance use:

We didn't have a formalized way of treating people with substance abuse. We termed them 'addicts,' and we just sort of said there were no resources available for their treatment.

So we just sort of babysat them, gave them something for their anxieties, and then sent them on their way.

Unfortunately, a lack of treatment options is commonplace in Ontario's north for those in need of help. As of January 2020, there wasn't a single detox bed at the Timmins hospital. Fortunately, there are now two beds, thanks to persuasion of Dr. Louisa Marion-Bellemare. She and her colleague Dr. Julie Samson started a treatment strategy in Timmins involving active engagement in the community, with outreach workers offering services to people who use drugs. The doctors will pick up and drive them to the hospital to administer Sublocade, a treatment to control the intense cravings experienced by opioid users. Sublocade is a monthly injection that delivers extended release of buprenorphine, which reduces withdrawal symptoms without causing euphoria or sleepiness. The normal protocol is a daily, non-injectable dose of buprenorphine for a week or more and then start them on the injectables, but patients would not wait the week and would drop out of the program. Beginning with the injectable Sublocade is a first in Canada and has helped 130 patients in one year.

Even Dryden, Ontario's smallest city, isn't immune. With a population of only 8,000, Dryden's homeless population reached almost 70 in 2018. There is no homeless shelter, no safe consumption site, no detox centre and no permanent cooling and warming spaces. Police Chief Doug Palson said that people were in the streets at all hours, whether it's 30 degrees in the summer or -30 degrees in the winter. Since no residential treatment centre exists in Dryden, any treatment referral for someone wanting help means travelling hundreds of kilometres away, the closest place being in Thunder Bay or Winnipeg. This presents barriers to access, including transportation, long wait lists and severing the support network somebody may have in the community.

In the past five years, calls for emergency medical services have increased 25%, and there has been a 60% increase in mental-health and addiction-related calls. Dryden had one third of all overdoses reported in the Kenora District last year, despite having only one tenth of the region's population.

Chief Palson admits that:

The majority of these issues are not crime issues. . . . They're not even something that police should be directly involved in, unless there's a safety issue.

In Dryden, the police are the only social service response available 24-7. Dryden does have a mobile crisis team, but it is unable to operate on a 24-7 basis.

Sarah Kennell, the National Director of Public Policy with the Canadian Mental Health Association, has said that the Dryden story is one she hears all the time and that it is a story being experienced in towns and cities right across our country. This, along with the pandemic, also adds to burnout, anxiety and depression, leading to many health care workers leaving the profession altogether.

I read a great piece in *The Manitoulin Expositor* entitled "Out of the Shadows: An in-depth look at Manitoulin's opioid crisis." I recommend this piece to anyone interested in this issue, especially at the community level. Opioid-related deaths on Manitoulin Island, which has a population 14,000, have more than tripled during the pandemic compared to 2018-19 data, from two deaths to seven in 2020. Paramedics on the island fear that the death statistics may even be higher, including cases where opioids contributed but were not necessarily the main cause.

Paul Myre, the Chief of Paramedic Services with Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB, confirms this. He stated for *The Expositor*:

(Our statistics are) not the total picture, as there are several sudden cardiac arrests that cannot be 100 percent attributed to an overdose as the cause due to a number of variables, but would be considered highly suspicious. Sadly, my assumption would be that the picture is much more grim than the one painted below with that specific data set. The (younger) age of some of the sudden cardiac arrest patients leads me to suspect something other than a cardiac event

In the Sudbury and Manitoulin areas from 2020 to 2021, there were four times more drug-related deaths than deaths caused by COVID-19, without adjusting for the potential opioid deaths Mr. Myre suspects.

Just like smaller communities, Indigenous communities have been experiencing much the same. Six Nations in Ontario, for example, saw over 50 suspected overdoses in 2020, resulting in three deaths. There has also been a "noticeable increase of fentanyl and methamphetamines," and overdoses, generally, were up in 2021 compared to the preceding two years.

Opioid-related deaths among Ontario's First Nation people jumped 132% during the pandemic alone. British Columbia's First Nations Health Authority reported that Indigenous people accounted for nearly 15% of all drug toxicity deaths in 2020, although they represent only 3.3% of the province's total population. Over 250 Indigenous people died in 2020, a 120% increase from 2019.

In Alberta, the Kainai Nation, also known as the Blood Tribe, reported 117 opioid poisonings in their community in just the first eight months of 2021. Provincial government data in 2020 identified that First Nations people represented 22% of all opioid-related deaths, despite only making up around 6% of the population of Alberta.

• (1530)

While this issue is not just a big-city problem — smaller communities and Indigenous communities are feeling its effects — big cities are reeling with tragedies every day because of the opioid epidemic. Ontario's Big City Mayors — a collective of Ontario's 29 mayors with populations of 100,000 or more and representing nearly 70% of Ontario's population — released a policy paper recommending decriminalization of simple possession as a main takeaway. The paper was unanimously backed by the 21 mayors who voted on it.

I had a conversation with Burlington Mayor Marianne Meed Ward on the issue and this report. Mayor Meed Ward was a co-chair of the Big City Mayors Mental Health Working Committee that helped to shape the policy paper. She told me:

Addiction is a mental health and public health issue, not a criminal one. We will not solve these challenges through the criminal justice system. Our residents who struggle with addiction deserve treatment, not jail time and a record. We can take a step toward acknowledging that reality through decriminalization. That, in turn, allows us to focus our resources and efforts on solutions to the actual problem we are dealing with.

Mayor Jeff Lehman of Barrie, Chair of Ontario's Big City Mayors, was also supportive of this policy paper. In our exchange, he stated:

The opioid crisis is in many ways as severe a public health emergency as COVID-19. Residents of my city and of communities across the country are struggling and dying, and our municipal resources can't begin to keep up with the number of people who need help. This is a national emergency and it requires a shift in our thinking as a country and as a society . . .

Municipalities are doing the groundwork in this losing battle. They see the crisis at eye level, and they know the people involved — both the people who use drugs and the caregivers. I always pay attention when the community perspective is on the table. They understand the issues intimately. It's best if we don't ignore their call.

Colleagues, I focus on Ontario to shine a light on the province I represent, but the issue of substance use is certainly not geographically isolated. It is prevalent in every province and territory from coast to coast to coast.

British Columbia, and Vancouver specifically, are often seen as the epicentres of substance use and overdoses in Canada. B.C. is experiencing new records in emergency services calls and overdose numbers. The BC Coroners Service reported that in October 2021, 201 deaths were related to substances — the highest of any month on record — and that there were more deaths in the first 10 months of 2021 than in all of 2020.

Deaths occurred in all age groups and in every local health area in the province. This is not just a Downtown Eastside issue in Vancouver. Honourable senators, we are talking about an average of six deaths per day in British Columbia. Approximately 8,500 deaths have occurred in B.C. since the province declared a public health emergency in 2016. Toxic drugs are now the most common cause of unnatural death in the province, and the leading cause of death among those aged 19 to 39. The problem in British Columbia is only getting worse with inconsistent de facto decriminalization and a meager safe supply program.

The Prairies have also seen an upswing in drug toxicity deaths. Alberta set a new record in 2021 for substance-related deaths. In 2020 they saw a total of 1,351 deaths — a record at the time — and the first 10 months of 2021 surpassed that total by over 20. September and October each saw 150 deaths.

Saskatchewan has also seen new record highs for substance-related deaths in 2021, eclipsing 2020 numbers. The Saskatchewan Coroners Service has counted 464 deaths that are either confirmed or suspected. A suspected death is a death where the evidence points to an overdose, but a toxicology report or autopsy hasn't yet been completed. Considering the 2020 numbers stood at just under 330 deaths, we can predict that 2021 was the worst year on record for Saskatchewan.

The trend of record-breaking death rates continues with Manitoba with an 87% increase between 2019 and 2020. If that isn't telling enough, there was a 44% increase in substance-related deaths in the first six months of 2021 than the same period of 2020. While the data has yet to be finalized, Manitoba is on pace to break that 2020 record in 2021.

For quite some time, Quebec was an anomaly in Canada as far as opioid-related deaths were concerned. In 2018, Quebec ranked second from the bottom among Canadian provinces and American states — only 2.5 per 100,000, or roughly 200 deaths in total. In 2019, this number doubled to over 400 deaths, and 2020 saw nearly 550 deaths. Montreal saw a 50% increase in opioid-related deaths from 2019 to 2020. I have been unable so far to locate 2021 numbers at this time, but, if the previous three years are any indication, Quebec may be trending in the same direction as all the provinces to its west.

East of Quebec, however, is not seeing the same dramatic upward trends at this time, although the outlook is not optimistic either. Nova Scotia, for example, saw the highest number of opioid-related deaths back in 2012 with 67, while 2021 has only seen 45. The years in between have been up and down, depending on the year. The data for all substance-related deaths, not just opioids, has been steady since 2018 at nearly 100 deaths per year.

New Brunswick saw 82 substance-related overdoses in 2020 — 19 more than in 2019. In both years, over 50% of those deaths were opioid related. Additionally, in the fourth quarter of 2020, they reported 16 deaths, which is the highest number in a single quarter and more than double the quarterly averages from 2016 to 2019. The first overdose prevention site in Moncton, named ENSEMBLE, had 200 visits in its first 18 days of operation. This is a place where people's drugs can be tested and used in a safe environment and where conversations around detoxification, rehabilitation and health care can be initiated with the staff.

Colleagues, this overdose prevention site was needed, as evidenced by the number of visits: 200 visits represent 200 potential lives saved.

It wasn't until late 2018 that Prince Edward Island emergency departments could even screen for fentanyl. Accidental opioid-related deaths in 2019 numbered five, and none of those deaths involved fentanyl or a fentanyl analogue. On the other hand, 2020 saw eight accidental opioid-related deaths, with half of those involving fentanyl.

While these numbers may seem low at first blush, this is a statistically substantial increase from 2019 to 2020. Unfortunately, 2021 data on opioid-related deaths isn't available at this point. What we do know is that fentanyl has made its way to the Island.

Newfoundland and Labrador doesn't have much information to draw from — or at least that we were able to find for 2021 — but in the first three months of last year, the province had five apparent opioid deaths. In comparison, 2020 had 24 and 2019 had 18. Just this past December, there were three overdoses in a short span in Harbour Grace, Newfoundland. Front-line workers are worried this trend will continue as fentanyl trickles into the province.

Honourable senators, I have spoken in detail to some of the challenges Ontario municipalities face, but what about our territories? Is there solace in the North? Fortunately, Nunavut cases are so low at this point that the data is suppressed. In the Northwest Territories, government data indicates there is only one apparent opioid-related death in 2019, three in 2020 and two in the first six months of 2021.

Yukon, on the other hand, is facing immense challenges. Their opioid-related death rate is one of the highest in the nation at 48 per 100,000, according to their chief coroner Heather Jones. This is two and a half times greater than the national average. There were 21 opioid-related deaths in the first 11 months of 2021, which amounts to more than 1 in 5 deaths investigated by the Yukon Coroner's Service. Most frightening is that each of these 21 deaths involved opioids and various forms of fentanyl.

Colleagues, the devastation appears to be inescapable. This isn't just a West Coast problem anymore. It has reached the East Coast, the North Coast and everywhere in between. Now is the time to address this problem as it hits so close to home — so close, in fact, that it's in each of our backyards.

• (1540)

Our dedicated first responders have certainly noticed the uptick in calls related to drug toxicity and it's wearing them out. While it's generally the paramedics or police people think of as responders to a substance overdose response, it's increasingly the fire departments having to respond.

I read a very interesting first-person submission to the CBC last month which detailed former Calgary firefighter Dan Scheurman's experience dealing with opioids. He had to learn how to administer NARCAN — a type of nasally administered Naloxone — in the off chance of coming into contact with those who are experiencing an overdose.

As he explains it, in the beginning:

After the patient was handed off to EMS we'd return back to the firehall, waiting for a big fire or other "real firefighter" emergency where the cavalry was needed.

Firefighters did not see this as a substantial part of their duties.

As Mr. Scheurman goes on to explain, "... overdoses became an increasingly significant part of the job." Accidental exposure to the substances became an increasing concern.

He tells of a particular incident where his team responded to a call and found a lifeless body at the bottom of a public stairwell surrounded by needles. He and his partner had to contort themselves to lift the person, trying to avoid an accidental puncture from the needles.

Once the paramedics arrived and administered Naloxone, the person came to, but having heard the sounds of sirens in the distance, the individual leaped up and sprinted off for fear of reprisal. If a person refuses treatment, there's nothing they can do.

Mr. Scheurman signs off the article by stating:

As I retire after 13 years of service and pivot into a new career, there is plenty I'll miss about firefighting. All the crews. Firehall life. Being at the centre of catastrophic events and feeling like our interventions were meaningful.

But leaving the front lines of the opioid epidemic is one of the things I'm most looking forward to.

Senators, I bring this first-hand account to you to demonstrate that the epidemic has far-reaching consequences. It's not only those who use substances who are feeling the effect, but also those people whose job it is to help them.

The work of our EMS and police during these trying times has been very challenging. According to *The Globe and Mail*, paramedics and medical dispatchers in British Columbia responded to over 35,500 overdose calls in 2021 alone, a record; this is a 31% increase over 2020. Senators, that's 97 overdose calls on average each and every day.

The president of Ambulance Paramedics of British Columbia, Troy Clifford, acknowledges that they knew the numbers were going up because paramedics would see it on every shift, but they didn't realize the extent. He also raises another important issue facing paramedics. He states that the opioid epidemic takes a heavy toll on them, that:

The numbers of our members off and in treatment because of psychological injuries is incredible, and the opioid epidemic is definitely a significant part of that.

Colleagues, if our first responders aren't optimally able to help those they serve due to psychological injuries, how can we expect those in need to fare any better? Anxiety, depression and burnout are becoming more commonplace amongst first responders, especially with the perpetuation of the pandemic.

The current obstacles are Sisyphean without the necessary plateaus and perches to stop that rock from rolling back down the hill.

I would be remiss if I did not mention some of the effects of the opioid epidemic on policing. In many instances it is the police who are the first contact of those in a crisis situation involving substances. I'm sure every former officer in this chamber has their own stories of devastation. I know I do.

It isn't easy to police substance use and people who use drugs. Officers want to help those in trouble but at the same time have to balance the needs of the community. As the presence of substances increases in a community, so do community safety risks.

Our colleague Senator White had a column in the *Ottawa Citizen* last fall in which he wrote:

When I worked as the police chief in Ottawa, I saw first-hand the impact the illegal drug trade had on the community — not just the drug trafficking itself but the impact of that drug trade on the community as those affected by addiction participated in ever-increasing criminal activity to address their dependent substance use. Often their offences were considered minor — by the police and the community — but as the drug trade grew so did the number of offences and community impact.

Senators, these minor offences are largely property crimes like theft. What they gain from stealing can be used or sold to obtain more substances, and the cycle continues.

The Public Prosecution Service of Canada established a directive in the summer of 2020 that alternatives to criminal prosecution for simple possession be sought in all but the most serious instances. And while I applaud the PPSC for making reference to the health effects of substance use in its directive, this form of de facto decriminalization hasn't found the balance between protecting those who use drugs and community safety.

I understand the reasoning behind the directive, and much of it has to do with the significant delays in the court system. It's an attempt to move more serious and violent crimes through the system in a timely manner while weeding out the non-violent and petty crimes. In fact, 85% of drug possession charges in Ontario were either withdrawn or stayed in the year after the directive was put in place.

Of course, prosecutorial discretion plays into this process, but so does police discretion. Even before a charge moves before the court, the police will determine, based on evidence and circumstances, whether to even proceed with the charge.

Unfortunately, this high level of withdrawal or staying of charges by the prosecution communicates to the officers that their efforts are unnecessary and perhaps their efforts are better focused elsewhere; after all, police use their discretion based on the law and the guidance from the Public Prosecution Service of Canada to determine which cases to move to the next stage of the judicial process.

Without the proper diversions from the criminal justice system to actually help people who want and need it, we are doing nothing but preserving the status quo.

Dropping charges for simple possession on people who rely on non-violent petty thefts to feed their substance addiction does not make a community feel safer and does a disservice to the trust in policing. It's a revolving door.

Chief Constable Mike Serr of the Abbotsford Police Department has indicated that someone whose drug habits cost them \$100 a day would need upwards of \$1,000 worth of goods to sustain that habit. A better avenue would be community supports and treatment programs for diversion purposes, including safe supply, all of which could be discussed in a national strategy consultation.

Senators, I am encouraged by the increasing support across the country to move on a health-centred approach to substance use. We have heard the numerous medical and health associations and organizations call for a health approach and decriminalization.

But more recently a prominent Canadian leader in addictions and mental health has joined the call. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, or CAMH, released a statement on September 29, 2021, calling for the complete decriminalization of currently illegal substances.

Policing has come around to the idea of decriminalization, which was previously a hard sell. Not only has the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police come out in favour of decriminalization, but so have many provincial cohorts, including British Columbia and Ontario.

There is expert support for decriminalization in Canada, and progress is being made at different jurisdictional levels as evidenced by the applications for exemptions from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act submitted by both British Columbia and Toronto.

The Public Prosecution Service of Canada directive and Bill C-5 before the House of Commons both include a de facto decriminalization regime federally. But none of these are enough to combat the substance-related death rate we are currently seeing.

A comprehensive federal approach is absolutely necessary. The piecemeal approach won't solve a pan-Canadian problem. A national crisis deserves a national response. Federal legislation is required to eliminate the criminality attached to substance use.

The Mayor of Chatham-Kent, Darrin Canniff, understands the importance of a federal approach. Mayor Canniff is a proponent of decriminalization and the second co-chair of the Ontario's Big City Mayors Mental Health Working Committee.

About the importance of a national strategy, here is what he said to me:

(Municipalities) desperately need federal guidance and funding to bring the issue under control. It will take the full weight of the federal government to bring resources and expertise to this issue. Expecting municipalities to deal with and solve something of this nature without significant federal assistance is unrealistic. We need a national strategy to bring a unified approach using the most comprehensive knowledge base, expertise and funding available. We're willing to be on the front lines in this battle but, without the support of Ottawa, it's a fight we can't win.

He calls for a "unified approach," senators. This is a baseline of necessity in each province, territory and municipality. Not all jurisdictions' strategies will look the same, nor should they. Needs differ depending on where you are.

• (1550)

But setting a federal baseline and unifying the strategy interprovincially, rather than provinces and municipalities going at it alone, just makes good sense. This call has been echoed by other municipalities. Mayor Lehman of Barrie, while working at the community level, has an innate ability to see the big picture. He said:

Every progressive change that has built a more just society in Canada has ultimately happened only because of leadership from Ottawa. Canadians need our parliament to be our moral compass and change the way we treat addiction in our society — from treating it as a crime to treating it as an illness.

Honourable senators, treating substance use as an illness rather than a crime brings much-needed humanity to this issue. After all, each one of these deaths is more than a mere statistic. These are people. There are thousands of lives lost every year. This translates into tens of thousands of relationships — family, friends, partners — who are themselves caught in a whirlwind of despair.

At the introduction of my remarks today, I suggested that every senator in this chamber has likely been affected by addiction or knows of someone who has been affected. I know this to be true because you all know me, and I have felt that despair of losing a loved one, and I promise there are others.

Senators, recall my analogy to Sisyphus. It's not only people using drugs struggling to push the rock up that hill any longer. There are extra hands pushing from all sectors of society. The effort is getting a little bit easier with each set of hands, but it is imperative to keep the momentum going for the rock to climb. All they can do is continue to push. Fortunately, we, as legislators, don't have to push the rock from underneath. Instead, we have the tools to keep the rock from tumbling back down the hill altogether.

Because you see, honourable senators, ultimately we create that hill and we can shorten that hill, for that hill is Parliament. Thank you, *meegwetch*.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Boniface, there are a number of senators who wish to ask questions. Will you accept questions?

Senator Boniface: Of course.

Hon. David Richards: Thank you very much, Senator Boniface. I agree that any medical protocol would help. I also agree with decriminalization, but I'm wondering if it will actually solve the problem. I don't think it will. Methamphetamine will still be methamphetamine. Fentanyl will still be fentanyl. It has ravaged our communities in New Brunswick. People who begged their family members to get help, who promised them the sky and the world if they could get help and turned their backs on them.

We know what addiction does. I don't think there is any quick fix here, and I know you would know that. In the long term, if we don't criminalize the selling of these drugs, the decriminalization of using them will not do that much. I hope it does, but I'm just not sure that it will. Maybe I'm too much of a cynic, but I know what alcoholism does in our country. I know the disastrous effect of that on family life, and I wonder if you might comment on that.

Senator Boniface: Thank you, Senator Richards, for the question. It is a complex issue, and you are absolutely correct that the complexity of the issue makes for a multitude of things. Let me step back and clarify a couple of them.

The bill calls for a national strategy. We have much interesting and good work being done across the country. It's just very ad hoc. It's usually funded locally or funded on a limited basis, and we're not gathering the information we need on it. Firstly, that's really an important point — that we actually look at what's

happening in Canada and where Canada may be a leader on some of this. I refer you to my comments about the City of Timmins and the difference they found in a short period of time just by changing strategy.

The second important thing on decriminalization is the shame and stigma attached with the criminal process, and Dr. Jeff Turnbull, who heads Ottawa Inner City Health, spoke on this a couple of times when I've been in his presence. Again, as the firefighter I quoted from Calgary said, you don't get to follow up when you're in the call because they are gone as soon as they hear the sirens.

What would really be helpful is taking a look at the good work being done. If you look at the Portugal experience, which some of you may be familiar with, one thing they found in the long term — Portugal's policy has been in place since the 2000s — is when you shift the thinking that it's a health issue and not a criminal law issue, for young people coming up they start to see it as a health issue. They start to see it in a different light, and you don't get the same propensity to use drugs. In fact, Portugal has found that they have been able to reduce drug use as a result of their approach. It's a very comprehensive approach and appears to work in Portugal. Other countries, Switzerland and Norway, are carrying out many initiatives. There are many ways we can look at it. This is a tough issue, and it would be unfortunate for government to back off from a tough issue just because it's tough.

Hon. Yvonne Boyer: Thank you, Senator Boniface, for sponsoring this really important bill, and thank you for telling us all about it today and how devastating opioid poisoning is, in particular with Indigenous peoples. We see they are suffering from many needless deaths. I believe there are many reasons why, but the legacy of colonialism and intergenerational trauma are the main reasons we see these problems today. It seems to me that government responses have been inadequate so far.

How do you think reconciliation might help address these horrific issues, and how would it fit in with the national strategy of which you spoke?

Senator Boniface: Thank you, Senator Boyer, for the question, and particularly for the reference to reconciliation. You will see in the bill itself, in terms of the national dialogue that needs to take place, it's very specific on including Indigenous communities. This is fundamental because, as you would know better than I, this goes to a very key public health issue. If we want to have healthy communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we have to ensure that we can help deliver that. There is nothing better in terms of reconciliation than addressing the issues around public health in Indigenous communities.

It's a really important message that needs reinforcement, and I thank you for reinforcing it. Dr. Turnbull speaks passionately about this. It is often people from Indigenous and BIPOC communities generally who are most seriously impacted by this issue and are among the groups that find it most difficult to get the services they need. So it's crucial in terms of how we see each other from a humanity perspective, and if the reconciliation process isn't about humanity, I don't know what it is about.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Boniface, your time has expired, but there are a number of other senators who would like to ask questions. Are you asking for five more minutes to answer a few additional questions?

Senator Boniface: With the permission of the chamber, yes.

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

An Hon. Senator: No.

The Hon. the Speaker: Did I hear a "no?"

If honourable senators are opposed to leave, please say "no."

An Hon. Senator: No.

The Hon. the Speaker: I hear a "no." I'm sorry, Senator Boniface. Leave is not granted.

(On motion of Senator Wells, debate adjourned.)

• (1600)

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Pierrette Ringuette moved second reading of Bill S-239, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (criminal interest rate).

She said: Honourable senators, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

I am happy to finally introduce my bill to lower the criminal interest rate. I have spoken on this topic many times before. I am optimistic from the support I have received in the chamber, but alas, the bill has not passed.

The first time, the bill made it to committee, but then there was an election. The second time, it made it through committee, with amendment, but then another election. I also tabled it in the spring of last year, but, of course, there was another election. So let's see if we can do it this time before another election.

Let us talk about the bill. The bill will revise section 347 of the Criminal Code that currently sets the criminal interest rate at 60%.

This legislation will set the following interest rate limit at 20% above the Bank of Canada rate, which is currently 0.5%. It would be a 20.5% maximum interest rate; after that it would be a criminal interest rate.

I have tied it to the Bank of Canada rate so that the limit will move with general interest rates and remain relevant to current markets as they change over time.

The criminal interest rate was first put into place in 1981. At that time, 40 years ago, the bank rate was at 21%. Now the rate is at 0.5%. Why should the Bank of Canada rate fall so low while interest rates paid by Canadians remain so high? It does not have to be that way.

This new rate limit of 20% over the Bank of Canada rate will leave almost all normal financial transactions alone. It is above the vast majority of credit cards, mortgage rates and standard loans. Since the bank rate will not likely go lower, and in fact will likely rise soon, there is no danger of this new limit falling below those standard rates. Almost every major bank credit card is 19.99% or less. However, it would affect the excessive outliers, such as late charges from phone and cable companies — look at your monthly statements — instalment loans, high-interest credit cards, et cetera.

Many instalment loans, lines of credit, et cetera, that are being offered by some companies are also heavily involved in payday loans.

Fairstone advertises instalment loans at 26.99% to 39.99%; easyfinancial advertises unsecured instalment loan rates starting at 29.99%; Money Mart advertises at 29.90% to 46.90%; Loans Canada ranges from 2.99% to 46.96%; and Capital Cash loans are at 59%.

You wonder where that number comes from?

There are also some store-branded credit cards that have high rates. For example, The Home Depot card is 28.8%, as are other store cards.

[*Translation*]

These loans often target the financially vulnerable. They are even advertised not as last-resort loans, but as easy cash, and there is no mention of whether or not people can make the payments. Even the companies' names focus on that aspect, as in the case of easyfinancial. These companies say that no credit check is required, that it's easy money and so forth. They downplay the costs while giving the impression that they grant loans out of the goodness of their hearts.

Late fees would also be covered by this bill. For example, companies such as Rogers and Bell charge 42.58% interest for late fees. After 31 days, Alberta Utilities Commission charges an interest rate of 30% plus the prime business interest rate taken from the Bank of Canada website.

Most financial instruments would not be affected, but we can target those that I, like many of you, would consider to be excessive.

The purpose of this bill is not to criminalize legitimate financial activity, but section 347 of the Criminal Code is where the maximum interest rate is set and is therefore the most productive place to lower interest rates. Section 347 is currently

used in civil contract disputes; it is not used as a criminal matter. This amendment would force down the interest rate, not cause arrests.

[*English*]

I will quickly address the issue of payday loans, which is quite different.

This legislation does not hit standard payday loans, although I do see them as a problem as well. Payday loans were carved out of section 347 in 2006. This placed regulation of small short-term loans — that is, loans under \$1,500, no longer than 62 days — into the control of the provinces.

So they do not have to offer loans under this limit, recognizing that short-term loans require a higher fee in relation to an annualized interest rate.

Colleagues, the provinces vary in how they regulate. Generally, it is around \$15 per \$100 borrowed for up to \$1,500 for a two-week period. Annually, that is an interest rate of 391%. In Quebec, they just won't license any loan lender that charges more than 35%, effectively banning payday loans. They are the only province that does that in this entire country.

• (1610)

Honourable senators, we also made a mistake in 2006, when we agreed to the provinces regulating the payday loan industry. It was a mistake that Parliament made. It was a mistake the Senate made in agreeing to that part. I do wish that we will find a way to rescind that decision.

Payday loan companies have been busy and have expanded into loans that would fall under section 347 in regard to longer terms and larger amounts of money. Currently, they should be covered under the criminal interest rate, but there is a major lack of enforcement. My goal is for this bill to send a strong signal that we will not tolerate these excessive rates. Enough is enough.

In the last few weeks, colleagues have risen in this place to talk about how difficult it is for families with the inflation rate. The inflation rate has not yet gone down. How do you think that a normal family — some making a minimum wage that has not increased — can make ends meet, buy groceries, put gas in their car to go to work and buy medication for their kids? We rise in this place and we say it's awful; inflation is awful for what it's doing to our most vulnerable. I do hope you understand that this bill is not aimed at any of us. This bill is aimed at those who are in dire need. Unfortunately, banking institutions do not necessarily have open arms to help them along when they are in need. But we have other institutions, like easyfinancial, which more than welcome them.

Some may say this will affect access to loans for many vulnerable people, but it isn't a good thing for the vulnerable to have access to loans that they cannot pay back with these extreme rates and fees. I grant that this is a concern, so I will note that there are options, such as current low-cost borrowers, like Borrowell, with an average APR around 11% to 12%, not 59%, and home equity loans with rates around 10%. You have to ask yourself this question: If this business entity makes a profit with that amount of interest charged, how can we accept other entities coming to the Senate Banking Committee and saying that if they cannot charge 49%, they will have to close up shop? How can we accept that?

There are also secure credit options for building credit scores. Recently, Canada Post and TD Bank joined forces in a pilot project to offer Canadians in rural and unbanked areas small dollar loans through the post office at competitive rates, between 6.33% and 16.03%. This will provide Canadians across the country accessible, reasonably priced loans. The market test from the pilot project included over 200 post offices in select locations and aimed to gauge demand and impact on underserved communities. Canada Post has informed me that the pilot has been very successful at providing accessibility to key customer segments, with approximately 80% of those who received loans having no credit or credit scores below the national average. With the pilot recently completed, I am very excited to see how this progresses. I strongly encourage Canada Post and TD in making this a nationwide program. For the first time in more than 19 years in the Senate, I will thank and congratulate a bank. They earned it. Thank you, TD, for initiating this pilot project with Canada Post.

While many argue that high rates are the cost of accessibility, there are clearly companies that are able to operate with these lower rates. Also, I do not believe that the answer to this concern is to just throw our arms up and say that the financially vulnerable must pay extremely high rates because they are risky. We should be concerned and look at the issue of loan access for our most vulnerable. A previous version of the bill had been amended with a higher rate, and I disagreed with that rate. While I hope to have a fruitful discussion around the specific rate as we proceed, I will support 20%. The 20% covers the vast majority of existing options from mortgages, credit cards, lines of credit, government rates, et cetera. It particularly allows for the most common of these credit cards to continue unaltered, with a standard rate of 19.99%, so 20% plus the bank rate adjustment hits the right spot. I could also be persuaded to get it lower. That's up to all of you.

These companies are all able to operate with rates at and well below this new limit, and in fact these rates have changed very little in light of the plunge in the bank rate over the last 10 years. Consumer debt is a growing problem in Canada, and the pandemic has made it even worse for too many Canadians. According to MNP, 6 in 10 Canadians are at least somewhat likely to borrow more before the end of this year; and 3 in 10 say the pandemic worsened their credit, their debt, or increased the debt burden on either themselves or their family. The number of Canadians who report being insolvent sits at its highest level since 2017, at 30%. Overall, consumer debt now stands at \$2.08 trillion, which is up 0.62% from last quarter and up 4.78% from the first quarter of 2020.

[Senator Ringuette]

• (1620)

Over the course of the pandemic, the Canadian government has borrowed at historically low rates, while Canadians themselves have continued to amass debt under what are extremely punishing interest rates for too many. The government has been using these funds to help Canadians, but this measure will help Canadians help themselves, and it does not cost the government a penny to do it — not one penny to help Canadians.

People do not take on debt lightly. They are often forced to through matters out of their control, be it an unforeseen medical expense, the loss of a job, a car breaking down or, perhaps, a global pandemic. This is a matter of fairness. It will help the most marginalized. It will help them not by paying off their debts but by giving them the opportunity to do it themselves. This is a hand up, not a handout.

I look forward to a lively debate, and mostly, I look forward to your support. Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Duncan, debate adjourned.)

SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE FEDERAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Kutcher, seconded by the Honourable Senator Boehm:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology be authorized, when and if it is formed, to examine and report on the Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention, including, but not limited to:

- (a) evaluating the effectiveness of the Framework in significantly, substantially and sustainably decreasing rates of suicide since it was enacted;
- (b) examining the rates of suicide in Canada as a whole and in unique populations, such as Indigenous, racialized and youth communities;
- (c) reporting on the amount of federal funding provided to all suicide prevention programs or initiatives for the period 2000-2020 and determining what evidence-based criteria for suicide prevention was used in each selection;
- (d) determining for each of the programs or interventions funded in paragraph (c), whether there was a demonstrated significant, substantive and sustained decrease in suicide rates in the population(s) targeted; and

- (e) providing recommendations to ensure that Canada's Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention and federal funding for suicide prevention activities are based on best available evidence of impact on suicide rate reduction; and

That the committee submit its final report on this study to the Senate no later than December 16, 2022.

Hon. Denise Batters: Honourable Senators, I rise today to speak to Senator Kutcher's proposal for the Senate Social Affairs Committee to study the Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention according to the specific criteria he lists in his motion. These include an evaluation of the framework's effectiveness; an examination of rates of suicide in Canada as a whole and in unique populations; a report on funding and the evidence-based criteria for the selection of each initiative under the framework; the evidence of a "demonstrated significant, substantive and sustained decrease in suicide rates in the population(s) targeted;" proposed recommendations to ensure the framework and federal funding for suicide prevention activities are based on suicide rate reduction; and a requirement that the committee report be sent back to us in the Senate no later than December 16, 2022.

One of Senator Kutcher's primary concerns with the current Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention seems to be that he is seeking to know the quantifiable, scientific effectiveness of the activities that have been implemented as part of the framework. However, I can't help but notice that the content of this motion is somewhat similar to two studies Senator Kutcher published before his arrival in the Senate. The first, from 2016, was entitled "School- and Community-Based Youth Suicide Prevention Interventions: Hot Idea, Hot Air, or Sham?" and the other, from 2017, is called "Suicide Prevention: Doing the Right Thing Is Not the Same as Doing Something." Both studied popular suicide prevention programs, and both concluded that those particular programs could be ineffectual and, in some cases, even harmful. I assume it is these types of programs Senator Kutcher had in mind when he requested that the Social Affairs Committee evaluate programs used by the government as part of the Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention.

I'm not sure, though, because throughout his 15-minute speech, Senator Kutcher didn't refer to any specific examples. He spoke vaguely about, as he put it:

... those who use the anguish of suicide and the pain and suffering of others to sell, promote or initiate activities, programs or products that they claim will prevent suicide but do not.

He also said:

We would like to be assured that the interventions that are being put into place have robust and solid evidence that they worked prior to them being applied.

There are no examples in his motion, either. Even when I gave Senator Kutcher the opportunity to explain what suicide prevention interventions the Trudeau government has

implemented under the federal framework since taking power, he was unsure, saying that he couldn't speak on behalf of the current government and any actions that they have taken.

I found that a curious response for a senator who is a psychiatrist and who even serves as a mental health advisor to the Trudeau government from time to time. I also remember seeing Senator Kutcher on TV as one of the few guests at Rideau Hall for the swearing-in of the Trudeau government's new Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. Surely, if anyone were aware of what this government has delivered on mental health, it would be Senator Kutcher. If he's drawing a blank, it doesn't say much for the Trudeau government's record of results in mental health and suicide prevention over the last six and a half years.

Since we don't know what the Trudeau government has implemented, it's unclear what the Social Affairs Committee would be studying. Senator Kutcher says, "We need to know." But that's the thing: we don't. The motion is too vague to give the committee sufficient direction to know where to begin.

As Senator Kutcher stated in his speech:

We would not condone spending large amounts of taxpayers' money for interventions that had little or no evidence of effectiveness.

Still, the question remains: Has any significant money been spent on suicide prevention interventions by this Trudeau government?

Unsurprisingly, the framework's biannual progress reports from the Trudeau government are scant on detail — in fact, embarrassingly so. The two cursory reports that have been posted online so far use the same template and throw a few phrases into each section. This is far beneath what an issue as serious as suicide prevention deserves.

Of course, taxpayers' money should be spent wisely, and of course, data and follow-up are important factors to evaluate the effectiveness of suicide prevention interventions. But we must not lose sight of common sense either. The purpose of creating the Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention was to give provinces and regions the ability to share best practices with one another — to not have to reinvent the wheel every time. Some of those ideas might be established programs or activities, but others could be relatively straightforward and low cost. For example, when the bill creating the framework was originally studied, one idea that was proposed at the time was limiting the number of Tylenol pills sold in one container. It's a simple idea but one that could actually save lives. I don't think any of us would require a lot of empirical data or prolonged committee study to understand that. I would hate to see Senator Kutcher's motion squelch simple ideas like that one by bogging them down in bureaucracy and red tape, resulting in unnecessary delay when instead these ideas could already be in place, saving lives.

Senator Kutcher made the argument that suicide is an emotional topic, but said that, "Robust scientific study, using appropriate design methods and analytics, is needed to measure rates of suicide reduction." I submit we must also be careful not

to distance ourselves, through the detachment of academia, from the human element at the heart of suicide. At its core, we are dealing with people's lives and deaths.

Senator Kutcher said in his speech that he's met with family survivors and they have looked to him for answers about why a loved one's suicide has happened and rarely could that question be answered. I disagree. Here's the answer in 90% of suicides: mental illness. Survivors of family suicide need desperately to hear that answer so that they do not forever wonder whether there's something else they could or should have done.

As many of you know, I am myself a family survivor of suicide. My late husband, former member of Parliament Dave Batters, struggled with issues of depression, anxiety and addiction. In 2008, while still a sitting parliamentarian, Dave chose to go public with his struggle with mental illness. It was revolutionary at the time. The stigma around mental health issues was huge. For public figures — particularly for politicians — mental illness was potentially a career-ender. There was no Bell Let's Talk Day yet. The Senate's groundbreaking Social Affairs Committee report on mental health had been published only two years earlier.

• (1630)

Throughout his illness, Dave and I experienced firsthand the shortcomings in the mental health care system. The gaps were many, and they were exceedingly painful. Tragically, Dave died by suicide in June 2009 — two weeks short of his fortieth birthday.

In the spirit of Dave's openness about his struggle with mental illness, I issued a press release about his suicide. While significant stigma still existed around the discussion of mental illness, suicide was even worse: a taboo. Dave's death moved that public discussion forward, out of the darkness.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper gave an important address at Dave's funeral, speaking not only about Dave personally but also about the indiscriminate nature of depression and anxiety. He said:

Depression can strike the sturdiest of souls. It cares not how much you have achieved, nor how much you have to live for.

Prime Minister Harper's speech was unprecedented in addressing the issue of mental illness and suicide publicly and openly. In fact, I know of psychology professors who actually had their students read that speech in relation to discussions of mental health awareness and suicide prevention.

In the years that followed, I became involved in mental health advocacy and fundraising, particularly in the area of suicide prevention. Still politically involved and still close with many of Dave's MP colleagues, I supported member of Parliament Harold Albrecht's private member's bill to create the Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention. I knew that such a framework was one way to help address some of those gaps we had experienced in the mental health care system and where regions could effectively share their ideas and best practices in suicide prevention with other regions across Canada.

I testified before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health in favour of Mr. Albrecht's Bill C-300 in March 2012. His bill was ultimately passed by Parliament in December of that same year, and the Harper government went to work to implement the Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention.

I was part of the Conservative government caucus in the first few years that Mr. Albrecht's bill was being implemented. I had frequent conversations with my caucus colleagues, including the Minister of Health, about the Federal Suicide Prevention Framework. As such, I knew the work they were putting in on this file.

By the time the Trudeau government took office in 2015, the Federal Suicide Prevention Framework had been established to the point where that government should have been able to just take the ball across the goal line. Yet seemingly they have not. When I look at what the Trudeau government has done on suicide prevention in the last six and a half years, it appears not much has been happening. Even their mental health adviser can't tell us for sure.

I can tell you what the government has been up to during that time, though. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's crowning legacy "achievement" has been to legalize marijuana in Canada. While its legalization might be popular in some circles, the frequent use of marijuana is bad for mental health, increasing the risk of addiction and other mental health problems over time and potentially developing or worsening depression and anxiety. Research shows that these detrimental effects are especially of concern for young people under the age of 25, whose brains are still developing.

The other significant change this Trudeau government has made in the realm of mental health is to expand assisted suicide to include people who have mental illness as a sole underlying condition. In fact, it was the very sponsor of the motion before us today, Senator Kutcher, who recommended the legislative change to do that.

Senator Kutcher said in his speech on the motion before us today that the government should only fund suicide prevention programs that achieve "significant, substantive and sustained decrease in suicide rates. . . ." Well, do you know what doesn't help achieve "significant, substantive and sustained decrease in suicide rates?" Legislating suicide into a state-offered option for those enduring psychological suffering and offering suicide as a rational choice for the treatment of mental illness. That is what this Trudeau government has done for suicide prevention. That is a travesty, honourable senators.

The number of people who have accessed assisted suicide since its legalization continues to climb. Nearly 8,000 Canadians received medically assisted deaths in 2020, which was up 17% from 2019. That number was up 26% from the year before that. And none of those numbers yet incorporates the most recent and significant change: that of removing the near-death requirement and expanding access to those with mental illness as a sole, underlying condition. I expect, between the widening of the criteria to access MAID and the detrimental impact of the pandemic on Canadians' mental health, we will continue to see the number of people seeking assisted suicide climb significantly.

Earlier this month, I was dismayed to read a tweet from the British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society, which illustrated the very scenario I had feared at the time this chamber expanded the assisted suicide criteria to include individuals not near death. It read:

Closed our GoFundMe Page today. We were to use the funds to try and assist a lady with disabilities who was not at end of life, but who chose MAiD rather than suffer due to lack of supports. We raised \$270 dollars, \$270 freakin dollars, she died by MAiD on Feb 23, she was 51.

Leaving Canadians with inadequate supports to meet their needs and then giving them the “option” of assisted suicide leaves them no options at all. That is the legacy of this Trudeau government.

I’ve spoken at length on the issue of assisted suicide during our debates on the issue before, so I don’t want to pursue it further now, except to say that the experience has made me leery of trusting the Trudeau government’s definition of whose “evidence” is considered adequate and whose hand-picked “experts” are selected to do the peer review.

Suffice it to say, while I appreciate Senator Kutcher’s quest for transparency from this Trudeau government — good luck; we’ve been trying for years — I do think the government should be providing much of this information already via its mandated Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention biennial report. The Senate’s Social Affairs Committee shouldn’t have to go begging for it. That the government is not proactively forthcoming with this information raises questions about the sincerity of their commitment to mental health and suicide prevention.

As I mentioned earlier, suicide prevention isn’t just an abstract academic exercise. It’s not just something you tweet about twice a year on Bell Let’s Talk Day or Mental Health Week. Suicide prevention is vitally important. It is about the saving of lives. That’s why I am concerned that the scope of this study, by focusing on this — what I believe to be a flawed motion — may itself be flawed and may do more harm than good.

Senator Kutcher’s motion asks us to study the effectiveness of the Federal Framework on Suicide Prevention, which hasn’t even yet been fully implemented by the Trudeau government. He’s putting the cart before the horse.

I would be all for the Social Affairs Committee studying the subject of suicide prevention in general. And by all means, yes, let’s encourage the Trudeau government to fully implement this framework. But the motion before us could actually undermine the Federal Framework on Suicide Prevention — and I would hope that none of us would want to do that. To what end, honourable senators? So we have to tear it down and start from scratch yet again?

After six and a half years of inaction from this Trudeau government, we can’t afford further delay, especially when, potentially, the cost is paid with the lives of vulnerable Canadians. That is why I will not support this motion. Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Patterson, debate adjourned.)

[Translation]

THE SENATE

MOTION PERTAINING TO SECTION 55 OF THE CONSTITUTION ACT, 1982, AS AMENDED—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion, as amended, of the Honourable Senator Dalphond, seconded by the Honourable Senator Cordy:

That the Senate:

1. recall that, despite the commitment found in section 55 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* to have a fully bilingual Constitution, as of today, of the 31 enactments that make up the Canadian Constitution, 22 are official only in their English version, including almost all of the *Constitution Act, 1867*; and
2. call upon the government to consider, in the context of the review of the *Official Languages Act*, the addition of a requirement to submit, every 12 months, a report detailing the efforts made to comply with section 55 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, today I rise as an independent senator from New Brunswick to speak to Senator Dalphond’s Motion No. 15. I am mindful of the fact that I am speaking to you shortly after the International Day of La Francophonie, which took place on Sunday. Before I proceed, I would like to acknowledge that we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people, and I am sincerely grateful to them for welcoming us here.

First of all, Senator Dalphond’s motion reminds us that the Canadian Constitution, which is the supreme law of our land, is not fully bilingual, despite section 55 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

In fact, official versions of some of the constitutional texts that lay the foundation for our Canadian Confederation in the Constitution Act, 1867, exist only in English.

This motion calls on the federal government to consider adding to the Official Languages Act a requirement to submit periodic reports detailing efforts made to comply with section 55 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

Section 55 reads as follows:

A French version of the portions of the Constitution of Canada referred to in the schedule shall be prepared by the Minister of Justice of Canada as expeditiously as possible and, when any portion thereof sufficient to warrant action being taken has been so prepared, it shall be put forward for enactment by proclamation issued by the Governor General

under the Great Seal of Canada pursuant to the procedure then applicable to an amendment of the same provisions of the Constitution of Canada.

[English]

Simply put, colleagues, Senator Dalphond's motion seeks to give effect to constitutional commitments already enshrined in the Constitution Act, 1982. In a sense, this motion also highlights the need to implement the work undertaken by the French constitutional drafting committee in 1990, which drafted a French version of all the constitutional texts referred to in the schedule to the Constitution Act of 1982. At this point in time, the remaining step in implementing section 55 of the Constitution Act of 1982 is to officially adopt these texts as alluded to in Senator Dalphond's speech on this motion.

• (1640)

The Constitution could be considered the bedrock of our parliamentary system, colleagues. Therefore, with this motion we have an opportunity to collectively affirm our commitment to uphold and respect the Constitution. This is why, again as an independent senator representing New Brunswick, I support this motion.

[Translation]

On February 19, 2021, the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages at the time, the Honourable Mélanie Joly, tabled a reform document entitled *English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada*, which contained a series of measures to strengthen the Official Languages Act.

In her introduction, the minister pointed out that the French language was in decline across the country and that concrete action was needed to achieve substantive equality between our two official languages.

It is important to remember that substantive equality means that, depending on the circumstances, a linguistic minority could be treated differently from a linguistic majority so that the former receives the same quality of services as the latter.

It should be noted that adopting a fully bilingual Constitution was not one of the concrete measures mentioned by the federal government in its reform document. This is confirmed by Bill C-13, An Act for the Substantive Equality of Canada's Official Languages, which was recently introduced in the House of Commons. In its current form, this bill does not contain any clauses related to the implementation of section 55 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

François Larocque, an eminent professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa, has already pointed out the following, and I quote:

The long road to achieving substantive equality begins first and foremost with minimal respect for formal equality, or parity. The enactment of the French version of Canada's constitutional texts is a matter of formal equality and fundamental justice for French-speaking Canadians.

[Senator Cormier]

In other words, ensuring compliance with section 55 of the Constitution Act, 1982, is fundamental to achieving substantive equality of the two official languages, which will remain an unattainable ideal if the constitutional commitments set out in section 55 remain unfulfilled.

[English]

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, during its exhaustive examination of Canadians' views about modernizing the Official Languages Act — including a short study on the official languages reform document — received input from stakeholders on how this act could be a vehicle to address the ongoing omission to adopt a fully bilingual constitution. Indeed, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages has received briefs and heard testimony from La Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, La Fédération des associations de juristes d'expression française de common law, The Canadian Bar Association and eminent jurists — notably Professor Larocque — who all agreed on one central premise: the Official Languages Act must recognize the need to implement section 55 of the Constitution Act of 1982.

In the context of our current debate on the motion before us, their recommendations bear some consideration.

[Translation]

Although the committee did not officially recommend measures in connection with section 55 of the Constitution Act, 1982, in its final report on the modernization of the Official Languages Act, it did make a good point regarding the non-compliance with section 55, which I think is worth sharing:

... the English version of these texts is still the only one that has the force of law. This has an impact on the interpretation of language rights by the courts, since judges cannot apply the shared meaning rule to both versions. The Senate Committee therefore calls on the federal government, in the context of modernizing the Act, to take the lead and follow up on implementing this constitutional obligation.

Professor Linda Cardinal, holder of the Research Chair in Canadian Francophonie and Public Policies at the University of Ottawa, and Professor Larocque concluded that the enactment of the French version of the Constitution is a matter of moral justice for Canada's francophones.

That said, a fully bilingual Constitution would not only serve francophones in this country, but would also serve the interests of all Canadians, including us, as parliamentarians.

Knowing that constitutional texts are official in English only, how can we carry out our role as legislators correctly and thoroughly?

Explicitly making reference to the Constitution Act, 1867, our former colleague, the Honourable Senator Serge Joyal, eloquently said the following, and I quote:

... when senators and members of Parliament need to refer to the Constitution, the supreme law of the land, they can only use or refer to the English version, even though a Department of Justice translation is available. This is also true for anyone else who must refer to or quote from the 1867 Act.

If Canada wants to live up to its status as an officially bilingual country, it must respect the commitment in section 55 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*...

How can Canada claim to defend the equal status of the two languages when its constitution is in English only?

Far from being a symbolic measure, Senator Dalphond's motion embodies the idea that it is important to recognize and respect bilingualism and the linguistic duality of our country.

[English]

Colleagues, I support the overarching objectives of this motion, which simply asks the federal government to — at the very least — consider this important issue in the context of modernizing the Official Languages Act, an initiative that is currently underway in the other place. Although the Senate and its Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages will presumably undertake this valuable independent work in the foreseeable future on the proposed Bill C-13, I nevertheless feel bound to give voice to this motion that raises a key constitutional issue for our bilingual country — one that has remained unresolved since the patriation of the Constitution in 1982.

[Translation]

Thank you for your attention.

(On motion of Senator Wells, debate adjourned.)

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Simons, calling the attention of the Senate to the challenges and opportunities that Canadian municipalities face, and to the importance of understanding and redefining the relationships between Canada's municipalities and the federal government.

Hon. Éric Forest: It is my pleasure to rise today to participate in the debate started by our colleague Senator Simons to draw the attention of the Senate and Canadians to the challenges and opportunities that Canadian municipalities face and to the importance of understanding and redefining the relationships between Canada's municipalities and the federal government.

[English]

I wanted to take this opportunity to speak about the renewal of the relationship between the municipalities and other levels of government, as this issue has been at the heart of my political engagement for 40 years.

[Translation]

I will begin by saying that it may seem paradoxical to discuss the role of the federal government in Canadian municipal affairs, because local government falls under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provincial government, giving rise to the oft-heard expression that cities are creatures of the provinces.

No doubt you know that I shudder when I hear this expression. First, because it is extremely paternalistic and disrespectful and devalues municipal democracy, but also because it is not quite accurate from an historical perspective. In the history of human development, cities appeared before empires, countries and provinces.

• (1650)

The first municipal institutions in Quebec were founded in Quebec City, Montreal and Trois-Rivières during the French regime, long before Confederation in 1867, under which the provinces were given exclusive jurisdiction over municipal institutions.

[English]

In fact, it would be more correct to argue that municipalities create countries and provinces.

[Translation]

I apologize for that historical aside. Getting back to the federal-municipal relationship, I think it's important to note that this relationship is not static and has evolved quite a bit over the past few decades. This is important to note, because I often hear people say that nothing can be done and that it would be impossible to rethink the nature of federal-municipal relationships without triggering a difficult round of constitutional negotiations.

Formally recognizing the role of municipalities in the Constitution would be ideal, but let's be realistic. Given that it is virtually impossible to amend the 1982 Constitution, I think we should focus our efforts on changes that we can make outside the scope of the Constitution.

Over the course of my 40 years in municipal politics, I witnessed many attempts to redefine the federal-municipal relationship. I'd like to demonstrate that changes to this relationship are possible.

First, we need to recognize that the federal government has shown renewed interest in urban issues in recent years.

One such example is the recognition of the central role that municipalities play in our economic development. The economist and urbanist Jane Jacobs did a wonderful job of demonstrating that in the 1960s, saying cities create the wealth of nations.

Paradoxically, the national policies that are imposed on cities can end up curbing their vital activities. This truth stands the test of time and knows no geographic bounds.

In Canada, 80% of the population is concentrated in urban centres. No so-called national government can claim to have control over the economy unless it mobilizes our cities as economic drivers.

To paraphrase an old saying, what's good for cities is good for the country — and vice versa.

Moreover, municipalities' expenses have increased considerably in recent decades, partly because of responsibilities downloaded onto them by higher levels of government, but also because of the social changes some cities have been dealing with for some time.

Our colleague, Senator Boniface, did a great job explaining the situation when she talked about problems related to opioids and the municipalities' responsibilities in that regard.

The pandemic has also made it clear that municipalities play a vital role in all aspects of human activity.

Cities have stepped up to facilitate vaccination. They have had to reinvent how they deal with homelessness. They have contributed to public health efforts since the start of the crisis. Montreal even stepped in for the federal government to better handle international travellers.

Clearly, no so-called national government can claim to be in control of public health, the fight against homelessness, mental health issues, welcoming immigrants, fighting climate change and more without mobilizing cities and municipalities.

Federal government involvement in municipal affairs is not a new phenomenon. As early as the 1920s, the federal government implemented national programs to improve housing conditions by providing loans and grants to cope with waves of mass immigration. Yes, we are experiencing a housing crisis at the moment.

It is also important to remember that, during the Great Depression, the government created a loan program to enable municipalities to upgrade their infrastructure and stimulate job creation.

In the 1950s, as the suburbs grew, the federal government supported municipalities by creating programs to improve water and wastewater infrastructure. In the 1970s, the federal government even established a Ministry of State for Urban Affairs to foster cooperation between the three levels of government. The ministry had a short life, however, as it existed for less than nine years.

The weak economy, the fiscal crisis, the federal government's refocusing on its own responsibilities, and the particular dynamics of federal-provincial relations on the eve of the Quebec referendum dampened the federal government's interest in municipal issues for a time.

What a shame.

It was not until the Liberal Red Book in 1993-94 that a proper infrastructure program reappeared. Originally intended as a temporary two-year program, it expanded greatly as the federal government's finances improved.

Under the Paul Martin government of 2004 to 2006, we saw an interesting attempt at establishing closer collaboration between the federal government and the municipalities with the launch of Canada's New Deal for Cities and Communities. This new deal was a real attempt at establishing:

. . . a national urban policy aiming to transform federal-local relations by involving municipalities in public policy development.

This policy was based on three pillars: first, provide municipalities with predictable, long-term revenue streams; second, establish multi-level collaboration mechanisms for area-based policy making in the larger urban centres; and third, introduce an urban lens to assess and improve federal activities in cities.

Unfortunately, this promising experiment ended abruptly with a change in government, but several worthwhile initiatives survived, from the sharing of gas tax revenues — an excellent initiative — to the full GST rebate and the inclusive cities initiative.

There is no denying that the need to review the federal-municipal relationship stems primarily from budgetary pressures, because the current financial situation of the municipalities is untenable. In 1955, municipalities owned 22% of public infrastructure in Canada. Today, municipalities are responsible for nearly 60% of all public infrastructure in Canada.

The revenues did not follow, however. In fact, the federal contribution to municipal budgets fell from 23% in the 1990s to 17% in 2005.

I was unfortunately unable to obtain updated statistics, but it is not difficult to imagine that the trend has continued, if not accelerated.

Municipalities' current tax regime is based on property taxes, which represent more than 70% of their revenues. In the 1970s, the reason for this association was that the role of municipalities was basically limited to providing property-related services such as firefighting, wastewater treatment, and road maintenance.

This premise no longer corresponds to today's reality, given that municipalities are now involved in all aspects of the organization of our societies.

When I was president of the Union des municipalités du Québec, we published a municipal white paper entitled "L'avenir a un lieu," about the place of municipalities in the future. It called for the municipal taxation system to be adapted to take the municipalities' current responsibilities into account and for municipalities to finally be recognized as local governments.

The idea of requesting a constitutional amendment was set aside.

It would have been too easy for higher levels of government to latch onto this as a pretext for not making changes. I believe that the strategy we proposed in the white paper is still valid and that only two things are required to revisit the federal-municipal relationship.

First, all levels of government must acknowledge that municipalities are local governments, which means that they are in the best position to address various issues. Once this has been generally acknowledged and there is a new division of responsibilities, we can review the tax base of each level of government. Like it or not, I think that a new division of responsibilities can be done through administrative agreements.

Seeing as Quebec and Ottawa have managed to come to an agreement on the transfer of responsibilities regarding immigration and skills training, for example, I don't see why we couldn't come to an agreement to assign municipalities some responsibilities that, I should point out, some already take on. The municipalities would receive more revenue in proportion to their increased responsibilities, and this would allow all levels of government to contribute to wealth creation, while focusing on environmentally friendly choices and social cohesion.

I'm not deluding myself. I know that this will involve some difficult discussions, but we've been sweeping problems under the rug for too long.

We unfortunately need to acknowledge that the provinces and Ottawa are just fine with the status quo because it gives them a fiscal advantage.

However, for the future of our country, we must be mature enough to consider this in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. This principle will help us determine which level of government is best suited for and most efficient at providing a given public service most cost-effectively.

I'm choosing to be positive here, in spite of the challenges. I suggest that we build on the progress made in recent years. I note, for example, that the Gas Tax Fund, renamed the Canada Community-Building Fund, is working quite well. It is a cornerstone of federal infrastructure programs and is framed by federal, provincial and territorial agreements that provide municipalities with considerable flexibility and predictability.

• (1700)

Another good example of a tripartite agreement is that Toronto, Canada's top destination for immigrants, is a signatory to the Canada-Ontario-Toronto Memorandum of Understanding on Immigration and Settlement.

In the category of positive experiences, we could also include various urban revitalization projects that are led by tripartite organizations. Some examples that come to mind include the Corporation du Pôle des Rapides, which manages the revitalization of the Lachine Canal in Montreal, and Waterfront Toronto, where the relationship between Ottawa, the provincial government and the city has been institutionalized.

If we can agree on a piecemeal basis on how to share responsibilities in order to better serve Canadians, I am confident that we can achieve this with a more ambitious project.

In closing, I want to thank Senator Simons for raising this important debate. Now is the time to get this done. We have a moral duty to work together to modernize our institutions and create an effective environment for delivering quality public services at the local, provincial, territorial and national levels to serve the fundamental interests of Canadians.

I see a clear path to renewing the relationship between the municipalities and the higher levels of government. All it will take is a bit of political will.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator, you have a minute and a half remaining. Would you agree to take a question?

Senator Forest: Certainly.

[*English*]

Hon. Paula Simons: In my home province of Alberta, there has been a dispute in recent days where the province wished to make it impossible for cities to maintain mask mandates. One of the members of Jason Kenney's government said of municipalities:

Municipalities are children of the province. If the children get not aligned, maybe it's time for someone to get spanked. . . .

[*Translation*]

Senator Forest: This is a great illustration of the situation we are in.

I believe that when we look at pandemic-related issues, the people of Alberta or Calgary, or any city really, are the same people who turn to their municipality first to call for the adoption of measures that affect their daily lives. In that case, it is truly the cities that can take the pulse of their population and adopt appropriate measures.

The situation you mentioned is an anecdote that clearly shows the connection between the municipalities and the provincial governments.

Thank you for your question.

(On motion of Senator Duncan, debate adjourned.)

[English]

ETHICS AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST FOR SENATORS

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO MEET DURING SITTINGS OF THE SENATE AND HOLD HYBRID OR ENTIRELY VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Hon. Judith G. Seidman, for Senator Cotter, pursuant to notice of December 14, 2021, moved:

That, for the remainder of the current parliamentary session, 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 it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO MEET IN CAMERA FOR THE PURPOSE OF ITS STUDY OF BILL S-210

Leave having been given to revert to Motions, Order No. 54:

Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer, pursuant to notice of March 2, 2022, moved:

That, notwithstanding rule 12-15(2), the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs be empowered to hold an in camera meeting for the purpose of hearing witnesses and gathering specialized or sensitive information in relation to its study of Bill S-210, An Act to restrict young persons' online access to sexually explicit material.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

[Translation]

SENATE'S SELF-GOVERNANCE

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Marilou McPhedran rose pursuant to notice of December 2, 2021:

That she will call the attention of the Senate to parliamentary privilege, the *Ethics and Conflict of Interest Code for Senators* and options for increasing accountability, transparency and fairness in the context of the Senate's unique self-governance, including guidelines on public disclosure.

She said: Honourable senators, as a senator from Manitoba, I acknowledge that I am on Treaty 1 territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

I also want to acknowledge that the Parliament of Canada is located on the unceded, unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

[English]

Honourable senators, I rise today to be the first speaker in the Forty-fourth Parliament to inquiry 6, which calls the attention of the Senate to parliamentary privilege, the *Ethics and Conflict of Interest Code for Senators* and options for increasing accountability, transparency and fairness in the context of the Senate's unique self-governance, including guidelines on public disclosure.

Before speaking today, I sought feedback from a range of experts including retired senators and I am grateful for their time and attention to this issue. As one said to me, name the elephant in the room, and so I will. Honourable colleagues, please be assured that my inquiry is addressed to all senators, and it's not intended in any way to target a particular senator.

It may be recalled that I have introduced similar inquiries in each session since being appointed to the Senate, long before I resigned from the Independent Senators Group in October 2021.

Both the Senate and the House of Commons are equipped with ethics codes which, although similar, are nonetheless distinct and separate policies. Beyond the fact that the Senate code manages to be 20 pages longer than its Commons counterpart, the codes are largely similar in content but there are significant differences that make the Senate's code less demanding.

For one example, income thresholds for disclosure are under \$1,000 for House members and under \$2,000 for senators.

A second example is that Senate disclosure provisions apply mostly to the senator and their spouse, whereas the House provisions cast a wider net to include income of family members.

Another is that their code's purpose section explicitly requires MPs to:

(b) demonstrate to the public that members are held to standards that place the public interest ahead of their private interests and to provide a transparent system by which the public may judge this to be the case

But section 1(b) of the Senate code does not include such a clear and unequivocal statement of purpose.

As a fourth example, the House code articulates a third principle that the obligations under the code ". . . may not be fully discharged by simply acting within the law. . . ." Again, the Senate code contains no such reference.

There is also a significant difference between the two houses in that the mandated five-year review of the MPs' code — which is occurring now — is being conducted in public by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. In presenting his report to the review committee, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner stressed that his recommendations for changes:

. . . aim to safeguard public trust in the integrity of the House of Commons and its Members, and in their endeavour to fulfill their public duties with honesty all while upholding the highest standards.

• (1710)

Recently, I sent a non-confidential letter — not my first such letter — to all members of the Senate Standing Committee on Ethics and Conflict of Interest for Senators. Today I seek to ensure that some key points in that letter are on the public record for the consideration of all senators, because we are all responsible, collectively and individually, for our ethical conduct and for upholding the honour of our institution and our titles.

Honourable colleagues, is this really a responsibility we should be farming out to a Senate committee, no matter how honourable and principled senators on that committee may be?

In my letter, I proposed that Senate self-governance would benefit from clarifying amendments and a consolidation of interpretive commentary to our ethics code to provide greater guidance in relation to extra-parliamentary activities, and I provide several suggestions for both process and content for further study.

Today I would like to highlight several opportunities for a more fulsome review than addressed in recent Conflict of Interest Committee reports, namely the seventh report in the Forty-second Parliament, released in 2019; and the second and third reports in the second session of the Forty-third Parliament, released in 2021.

Honourable colleagues, we would all benefit from clear amendments to the ethics code and guidance regarding the code's application to extra-parliamentary activities. In doing so, it is likely that public skepticism of the Senate and its members could be reduced.

The ethics code, the Conflict of Interest Committee's directives and the Senate Ethics Officer's interpretation of the ethics code in recent inquiry reports make it clear that the ethics code applies to senators' extra-parliamentary lives. However, some senators' awareness of the code's application outside the context of their senatorial duties seems to be quite limited.

It seems reasonable that we all want an ethics code that balances between allowing senators to be community and social leaders while prohibiting situations that would cause substantial public doubt in our ability to serve Canada in the public interest.

Section 2(1) of the ethics code sets out a requirement that "Senators shall give precedence to their parliamentary duties and functions over any other duty or activity"

More broadly, section 7.1(1) of the code provides that "A Senator's conduct shall uphold the highest standards of dignity inherent to the position of Senator."

Arguably, then, no action we take in public or private can be isolated or shielded from the added authority and responsibility we carry every day as members of the upper chamber.

Indeed, in a March 9, 2017, SEO inquiry report regarding disgraced former senator Don Meredith, it was specified that while 7.1 does not ". . . invite a free-standing analysis of whether certain conduct merits moral condemnation . . ." it certainly does, however:

. . . require an evaluation of whether alleged conduct (a) undermines the standards of dignity inherent to the position of Senator, such that, for example it impacts a Senator's professional reputation, integrity or trustworthiness, or (b) may have an adverse impact on the reputation of the office of Senator or the Senate as an institution.

These 2017 criteria have been restated in subsequent SEO communications, such as the March 19, 2019, SEO inquiry report regarding former senator Lynn Beyak. As well, a published opinion by the SEO, prepared at the request of distinguished former senator André Pratte, issued April 10, 2019, conclusively held that these criteria were clearly applicable to all matters that arose in relation to a senator's "outside activities," such as ". . . being a director or officer in a corporation, association, trade union or not-for-profit organization . . ." — those words being direct quotes from section 5(c) of the ethics code.

In particular, Mr. Pratte is to be commended for openly sharing the SEO's opinion, which took the view that section 5 of the code limits outside activities to those that can be undertaken while fulfilling senators' other obligations under the ethics code, including with respect to maintaining the public's confidence in the senator's integrity.

Colleagues, the Senate Conflict of Interest Committee has the mandate to consider, on its own initiative, all matters relating to the ethics code, so I have requested action on eight points of inquiry, and that they be placed on the Conflict of Interest Committee's agenda for the Forty-fourth Parliament, and that they remain on Conflict of Interest's agenda until each point has been examined openly and thoroughly by the committee, including by way of one or more public hearings for which any

senator can suggest witnesses to be heard and information to be examined and reported on in a public report from the committee in response, to be tabled in the Senate without delay.

Please allow me to summarize my eight points of inquiry as follows. Regarding consultancy arrangements, one would be that the Conflict of Interest Committee conduct a comprehensive comparative review of ethics codes for parliamentary bodies guided by the Westminster model regarding parliamentarians entering into consultancies, whether by formal contract or informal agreement for any payment in money or compensation of any kind from government departments, corporations, organizations, individuals or any other entity based in Canada or in any other country, to identify amendments to the ethics code regarding (a) what form of public disclosure should be required; and (b) whether those parliamentarians should be voting on legislation covering topics that they have consulted on and received compensation in any form for such consultation.

Regarding board memberships and advisory boards, the second is that the Conflict of Interest Committee conduct a comprehensive comparative review of ethics codes for parliamentary bodies guided by the Westminster model regarding parliamentarians being paid and/or compensated and/or rewarded in any manner as board directors or advisers of for-profit or not-for-profit corporations or of any government corporations or other organizations, individuals or any other entity based in Canada or in any other country, to identify possible amendments to the ethics code regarding (a) what form of public disclosure should be required; and (b) whether those senators should be voting on legislation covering the industries or topics that they have consulted on and/or from which they received compensation in any form.

The third is regarding business dealings among senators: included in the comprehensive review addressing the issue of disclosure by senators who are business partners or in any way engaged together in business activities geared to making a profit, receiving compensation in any form over and above their Senate salaries.

Another is regarding parliamentary privilege and accountability regarding the SEO's authority and function under the ethics code to address if there is a need to provide for a check and balance within the SEO function: Conflict of Interest should examine parliamentary privilege, as it is applicable to the SEO, through a lens that would allow for meaningful scrutiny over the SEO operations, thereby increasing accountability without undermining the essential functioning of the office or duties of confidentiality to people involved in an SEO investigation.

Number five is that Conflict of Interest should assess and report publicly on the extent to which the SEO may claim parliamentary privilege to create a cloak of confidentiality and privilege over administrative and procedural practices or operations that do not breach confidentiality promised by the code, because parliamentary privilege is not without limits.

My next point is to investigate whether a needed check and balance would be provided by adding procedural rights for non-parliamentarians impacted by SEO inquiries.

Number seven would add a mechanism for error correction. As such, in reviewing possible amendments to the ethics code, Conflict of Interest should consider how to implement an effective appeal process within the ethics code, as the SEO's rulings are not subject to judicial review while acting under a recognized category of parliamentary privilege.

Number eight is with regard to commentary to increase understanding of the Senate ethics code: Some ethics codes compile and include commentary accompanying the codes' dispositions. This commentary serves as an educational tool and as an informational resource.

• (1720)

The Code of Conduct for Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories contains detailed commentary accompanying its provisions. Similarly, the Canadian Judicial Council's Ethical Principles for Judges contains detailed commentary.

Honourable senators, we are here to serve Canada and are generously paid from public funds to do so. Is it not reasonable for the public to expect that the absolute and unique self-governance granted to the Senate of Canada, entirely funded by public money, should meet the highest threshold for good governance with clear, enforceable standards of accountability and transparency?

In my letter to the Standing Senate Committee on Ethics and Conflict of Interest for Senators, I set out the points shared with you today in more detail. Now I invite all senators to consider and respond to these points, or to speak to any other matter related to the code, including current interpretations of what conduct should or should not be protected by parliamentary privilege. This is your opportunity to decide what aspects of our unique self-governance merit further contemplation by contributing to the exploration in an open, transparent and collegial manner in the public interest. Thank you, *meegwetch*.

(On motion of Senator Pate, debate adjourned.)

(At 5:22 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.)

APPENDIX

Address
of
His Excellency Volodymyr Zelenskyy
President of Ukraine
to both Houses of Parliament
in the House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa
on
Tuesday, March 15, 2022

His Excellency Volodymyr Zelenskyy was welcomed by the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, by the Honourable George J. Furey, Speaker of the Senate, and by the Honourable Anthony Rota, Speaker of the House of Commons.

[English]

Hon. Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): Your Excellency, President Zelenskyy, Prime Minister, Speaker Furey, party leaders, honourable parliamentarians, distinguished guests, *mesdames et messieurs*, welcome to this extraordinary event, a joint address to Parliament by His Excellency Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine.

I thank all those who have made it possible for us to hear from President Zelenskyy today, whether here in the chamber or by video link.

[Translation]

I now invite the Prime Minister to address us.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Esteemed parliamentarians, friends and colleagues, good morning and thank you for being here today to welcome a courageous and exceptional leader.

[English]

President Zelenskyy, on behalf of parliamentarians and all Canadians, it is an honour to welcome you to our House.

Mr. President, Volodymyr, you are a friend. Canadians and Ukrainians are friends, and they have been for a long time. Our people share deep historical ties. In the early 20th century, a massive wave of Ukrainian immigrants came to Canada. Many of them settled in the Canadian Prairies. They worked the land, they built churches distinguished by their beautiful spires and they helped shape Canada in significant ways.

[Translation]

Today, there are 1.4 million Ukrainian Canadians in our country. This is the second-largest Ukrainian diaspora in the world. Whether as farmers, scientists, community leaders, athletes or frontline workers, Ukrainian Canadians continue to make a tremendous contribution to our country.

The friendship between Canada and Ukraine is based not only on this shared history but also on our shared values.

[English]

Volodymyr, in the years I have known you, I have always thought of you as a champion for democracy. Now democracies around the world are lucky to have you as our champion.

Your courage and the courage of your people inspires us all. You are defending the right of Ukrainians to choose their own future and, in doing so, you are defending the values that form the pillars of all free democratic countries. Freedom, human rights, justice, truth and international order are the values you are risking your life for as you fight for Ukraine and Ukrainians. Beyond that, you are inspiring democracies and democratic leaders around the world to be more courageous, more united, and to fight harder for what we believe in. You remind us that friends are always stronger together.

With allies and partners, we are imposing crippling sanctions to make sure Putin and his enablers in Russia and Belarus are held accountable. Today, in line with our European Union partners, I can announce that we have imposed severe sanctions on 15 new Russian officials, including government and military elites who are complicit in this illegal war.

[Translation]

Canada will continue to support Ukraine by providing military equipment as well as financial and humanitarian assistance. We will be there to help rebuild Ukraine once the aggressor is repelled.

[English]

In Canada, we like to root for the underdog. We believe that when a cause is just and right, it will always prevail, no matter the size of the opponent. This does not mean it will be easy. Ukrainians are already paying incalculable human costs. This illegal and unnecessary war is a grave mistake. Putin must stop it now.

[Translation]

Vladimir Putin's blatant disregard for human life is absolutely unacceptable. Canada continues to demand that Russia stop targeting civilians and that it end this unjustifiable war.

[*English*]

Ukrainians are standing up to authoritarianism and, as parliamentarians united in this House today and all Canadians, we stand with you. As friends, you can count on our unwavering and steadfast support.

Now it is my great privilege to introduce to you all the President of Ukraine, our friend, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

H.E. Volodymyr Zelenskyy (President of Ukraine): [*The President spoke in Ukrainian, interpreted as follows:*]

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister, dear Justin, members of the government, members of Parliament and all distinguished guests and friends, before I begin, I would like you to understand my feelings and the feelings of all Ukrainians, as much as is possible, over the last 20 days of the full-scale aggression by the Russian Federation after eight years of fighting in the Donbass region. Can you imagine that at 4 a.m. each of you started hearing bomb explosions, severe explosions?

Justin, can you imagine you and your children hearing all these severe explosions, the bombing of airports, the bombing of the Ottawa airport, in tens of other cities in your wonderful country? Can you imagine that?

Cruise missiles are falling down on your territory and your children are asking you what is happening. You are receiving the first news as to which infrastructure objects have been bombed and destroyed by the Russian Federation, and you know how many people have already died. Can you only imagine? How can you explain to your children that a full-scale aggression just happened in your country? You know this is a war to annihilate your state, your country. You know that this is a war to subjugate a people.

On the second day you receive notifications that huge columns of military equipment are entering your country. They are crossing the border. They are entering small cities. They are laying siege, encircling cities, and they start to shell civilian neighbourhoods. They bomb school buildings. They destroy kindergarten facilities, like in our city in Sumy, in the city of Okhtryka. Imagine that someone is laying siege to Vancouver. Can you just imagine that for a second and all of the people who are left in such a city? This is exactly the situation that our city of Mariupol is suffering right now. They are left without heat or hydro, without a means of communicating, almost without food and water. They are seeking shelter in bomb shelters.

Dear Justin and dear guests, can you imagine that every day you receive memorandums about the number of casualties, including women and children? You have heard about the bombings. Currently, we have 97 children who have died during this war. Can you imagine if the famous CN Tower in Toronto was hit by Russian bombs?

Of course, I do not wish that on anyone, but this is the reality in which we live. We have to contemplate and see where the next bombings will take place. You have your Churchill Square. We have our Freedom Square in the city of Kharkiv. We have our Babyn Yar, the place where victims of the Holocaust were buried. These have been bombed by the Russians.

Imagine that Canadian facilities have been bombed similarly to how our buildings and memorial places are being bombed. A number of families have died. Every night is a horrible night. The Russians are shelling us from all kinds of artillery and tanks. They are hitting civilian infrastructure. They are hitting big buildings.

Can you imagine a fire starting at a nuclear power plant? That is exactly what happened in our country. In each city they are marching through, they are taking down the Ukrainian flags. Can you imagine someone taking down your Canadian flags in Montreal and other Canadian cities?

I know that you all support Ukraine, and we have been friends with you, Justin, but I would also like you to understand and I would like you to feel what we feel every day. We want to live and we want to be victorious. We want to prevail for the sake of life.

Can you imagine calling your friends, friendly nations, and asking them to please close the sky, close the airspace, please stop the bombing? You ask them, "How many more cruise missiles have to fall on our cities until you make this happen?" In return, they express their deep concerns about the situation, when you talk to your partners. They say please hold on, hold on a little longer.

Some people are talking about trying to avoid escalation. At the same time, in response to our aspiration to become members of NATO, we do not hear a clear answer. Sometimes we do not see obvious things. It is dire straits, but it also allowed us to see who our real friends are over the last 20 days, as well as the eight previous years.

I am sure that you have been able to see clearly what is going on. I am addressing all of you. Canada has always been steadfast in its support. You have been a reliable partner to Ukraine and Ukrainians, and I am sure this will continue. You offered your help and assistance at our earliest request. You supply us with military assistance and with humanitarian assistance. You have imposed severe sanctions.

At the same time, we see that unfortunately this did not bring an end to the war. You can see that our cities, like Kharkiv, Mariupol and many other cities, are not protected like your cities are protected, like Edmonton and Vancouver. You can see that Kyiv is being shelled and bombed, and Ivano-Frankivsk. It used to be a peaceful country with peaceful cities, but now they are being constantly bombarded.

What I am trying to say is that we all need to do more—you need to do more—to stop Russia to protect Ukraine, and by doing so to protect Europe from Russian threats. They are destroying everything: memorial complexes, schools, hospitals, housing complexes. They have already killed 97 Ukrainian children.

We are not asking for much. We are asking for justice, for real support, which will help us to prevail, to defend, to save lives, to save life all over the world. Canada is leading in these efforts, and I am hoping that other countries will follow suit. We are asking for more of your leadership. Please take a greater part in these efforts, Justin, and all friends of Ukraine, all friends of the truth. Please understand how important it is for us to close our

airspace to Russian missiles and Russian aircraft. I hope you can understand. I hope you can increase your efforts and you can increase the sanctions so they will not have a single dollar to fund their war effort. Commercial entities should not be working in Russia.

Probably you know better than many other countries that this attack on Ukraine is nothing less than an attempt to annihilate the Ukrainian people. This is the main objective. It is actually a war against the Ukrainian people. It is an attempt to destroy everything that we, as Ukrainians, do. It is an attempt to destroy our future, to destroy our nation, our character.

You Canadians know all this very well, and that is why I am asking you to please not stop your efforts. Please expand your efforts to bring back peace to our peaceful country. I believe that you can do it and I know that you can do it. We are part of the anti-war coalition, and jointly I am sure that we will achieve results.

To our Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, this is a historical moment, and we need your support, your practical support. We hope that with your practical steps, you will show that you are part of more than Ukrainian history. Please remember that this is a practical, modern-day history of Ukraine. We want to live. We want to have peace.

I am grateful to everyone in the Parliament of Canada who is present and to every Canadian citizen. I am very grateful to you, Justin. I am grateful to the Canadian people, and I am confident that together we will overcome and we will be victorious.

Glory to Ukraine. Thank you to Canada.

[Applause]

Mr. Speaker Rota: Thank you, Mr. President.

I now invite the Hon. George Furey, Speaker of the Senate, to say a few words.

[Translation]

Hon. George J. Furey (Speaker of the Senate): Good morning, President Zelenskyy, Prime Minister Trudeau, Chief Justice Wagner, Speaker Rota, fellow parliamentarians, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. President, it is a great honour and privilege for me to thank you for your very powerful and inspiring words.

[English]

On behalf of all senators, members of the House of Commons and indeed on behalf of all Canadians, please know, Mr. President, that Canadians stand with you. We know what is at stake. You are battling for your people, for your country and for all of us who believe in peace and democracy, in truth and justice. You are battling for all of us who stand against tyranny, lies and the horrific war crimes that have been committed against the Ukrainian people.

There is a word in the Bible, one word, that expresses so much of the courage that you, Mr. President, and your fellow Ukrainians are showing the world. In the original Hebrew, the word is “*hineni*”. Literally, it means “here I stand”. It was said by the great Old Testament leaders when called upon to lead their people. It is a statement of stepping up to leadership in the face of overwhelming odds. It is clearly what you are saying, Mr. President, by your actions, and it is what all Ukrainians are saying in this terrible time of crisis. The world is witnessing a Ukraine united more than ever in common cause to secure its place among the family of nations. As Prime Minister Trudeau has made clear by his words and actions, Canada stands with you.

I know I speak on behalf of all Canadians when I express our admiration for the leadership and courage you have demonstrated as the Ukrainian people struggle to repel a brutal and illegal invasion. You have shown the world that Ukraine will not cower, will not falter and will not be defeated. The heart and soul of Ukraine are strong. Canada recognizes your fortitude, your resilience and your strength of purpose. Canada stands with Ukraine and her many allies in the pursuit of a swift and peaceful resolution to this conflict. This resolve rests upon our shared commitment to democracy, to human rights and to the sovereign equality of all nations.

For Canadians, Ukraine is permanently woven into the fabric of our culture. Ukraine, simply put, is family. Mr. President, to you and the people of Ukraine, please be assured of our solidarity in the days and weeks ahead.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. President, for your great strength and courage.

[English]

We thank you once again for your courage and determination in the face of this horrific onslaught and for your inspiring words to Canada and indeed to the world today.

Slava Ukraini.

Mr. Speaker Rota: Thank you, Speaker Furey.

[Translation]

Mr. President, most of us can only imagine the hardship, sorrow and fear that the people of Ukraine are enduring as their nation is attacked and its very existence threatened.

[English]

The extraordinary courage and defiance that Ukrainians are demonstrating in defending their country and their way of life is an example to all freedom-loving people, and it is clear that many of our fellow citizens are drawing strength from your own determination to repel the invaders and protect your homeland.

You are not just the president anymore; you have proven to be a great leader of your nation. As Ukraine continues to fight for its freedom, please know that you are not alone, and that you will not be left behind. We will be there with you. We may be distant

cousins in terms of geography, but Ukraine is woven into the very fabric of Canadian society, thanks to more than a million Canadians of Ukrainian descent.

In an interview you gave two years ago, you said, “We must remember the heroes of today, heroes of the arts, heroes of literature, simply heroes of Ukraine. Why don’t we use their names—the names of the heroes that today unite Ukraine?”

To the people of Ukraine, to your friends in Canada and around the world, you, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, are one of those heroes.

Heroyam slava.

[Translation]

Mr. Zelenskyy, on behalf of all parliamentarians, thank you for addressing the people of Canada and for showing us the true meaning of courage, freedom and patriotism. May we prove worthy of the friendship between our peoples and our countries.

Slava Ukraini.

[English]

I now invite the Hon. Candice Bergen, interim leader of the official opposition, to address us.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by first and foremost stating on behalf of my Conservative caucus our complete admiration and respect for the people and the nation of Ukraine.

To President Zelenskyy, let me express to you how much I admire your courage and your sacrificial leadership at this critical time in Ukraine’s history. The kind of leadership that you are showing, sir, is very rare, and it serves as an inspiration to all of us who are elected. You are the leader of Ukraine for such a time as this, and we remain indebted to you.

[Translation]

President Zelenskyy, I thank you for your leadership in this war against your country and for defending democracy. The official opposition stands with Ukraine. It is our duty. We will also be there when this conflict is over to help you rebuild Ukraine. Your courage inspires us.

[English]

The images that we are seeing from Ukraine, as you described them, President, are heartbreaking and painful. We see families huddled in bomb shelters, the ruins of a children’s hospital and a maternity ward, the elderly who are trying to find their way to safety, but there is also inspiration as we watch ordinary people, men and women of all ages, defending their homeland.

We are witnesses to the strength and the defiance of Ukrainians standing up for their freedom, their independence and their sovereignty. Ukrainians are not just fighting to defend themselves; let us be very clear. They are defending all of Europe because Putin’s brutal attack on Ukraine is an attack on all of us. That is the lesson history has taught us and one we cannot ignore.

[Mr. Rota]

It is why we must help the people of Ukraine in every way possible. Canada has the largest number of people of Ukrainian descent outside of Ukraine and Russia. For a century, they have enriched our communities and our culture, especially in the Canadian Prairies, which is where I am from. Canada and Manitoba, in particular, share ties with Ukraine that cannot be broken. Now, almost 1.4 million Ukrainian Canadians are watching what is happening. Their hearts and their souls are reaching out, hoping, praying for the nation and the people of their forebears.

This war of naked aggression has revealed Vladimir Putin for what he really is: a warmonger and a violent predator with no regard for human life and suffering. He has crossed lines that after two world wars we thought would never be crossed, and he has shaken the rules-based order that has kept millions safe since 1945. Every day he tells the world lies and then he proceeds to kill innocent and vulnerable Ukrainians, including women and children. While on his rampage he continues to threaten the world, saying if he does not get his way he will use the worst extremes possible. It is sickening to watch.

Putin must be brought to justice. He must be held to account for his crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court at The Hague. This is not just a war against Ukraine. It is a war against the free democratic world. We must stand with Ukraine. It is not a choice; it is a moral duty.

Canada was the first country to recognize Ukraine’s independence from the Soviet Union. Now it is time to honour that legacy. We must do more together with our allies to secure Ukraine’s airspace. We need to protect, at a minimum, the airspace over the humanitarian corridors so that Ukrainians can seek safe passage away from the war zones and humanitarian relief is allowed to reach those areas under siege.

Canada must do whatever it can to cut through any red tape and welcome Ukrainians who are fleeing, although we all know that what Ukrainians want most is to be able to live in their home nation, free, sovereign and peaceful.

President Zelenskyy, I want to reassure you that Canada will be a safe haven for Ukrainian citizens who choose to come here until the battle is over. While they are in Canada, we will cherish them, care for them, provide for them purpose and hope, and when it is time, they will return to their beloved Ukraine and their families. This is our pledge to you.

To the people of Ukraine, let me conclude by saying simply that Canadians support you today as you face Putin and his reckless empire building. Conservatives stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine and we will continue to support you when this terrible conflict finally ends and you rebuild your homes and communities. Your courage, your faith and your fortitude in the face of adversity are an inspiration to all of us.

Slava Ukraini. Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the heroes. Keep fighting. Keep believing. Keep hoping.

Mr. Speaker Rota: Thank you, Ms. Bergen.

[*Translation*]

I now invite the leader of the Bloc Québécois to address us.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Belœil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, esteemed colleagues, and, especially, Mr. President, it is difficult for me today to express myself in simple words, which cannot convey or express all the sadness, indignation and anger roused by the dirty war inflicted on your great nation and your great people.

It is also difficult for me to admit to a certain powerlessness to do much more than express our compassion and our desire—which is only a shadow of your own—to awaken from this nightmare that haunts our television screens every day.

Of course, the Quebec nation—I believe it is safe to say—is overwhelmingly behind you, behind your people. Of course, we have asked that Canada act in the only viable way, together with the free countries of the world and with major international organizations, including economic, military or humanitarian groups. Of course, we are also calling for increasingly severe economic sanctions to ensure that this senseless attack is brought to an end from within Russia itself and through balanced negotiations.

We are strongly urging the Canadian government to reduce the barriers to welcoming refugees from Ukraine. There are people, families and Ukrainian nationals in both Quebec and Canada who want to welcome these refugees. We must also put in place a humanitarian bridge between your nation and our nations.

It was difficult to hear your call for more weapons. You are entitled to these weapons. You need them. The Quebec nation is a peaceful nation. The Ukrainian nation is a peaceful nation. I think it is with a heavy heart that you ask for these weapons. Your people have the right to defend their loved ones. They have the right to defend their land. Yes, we need to get more weapons to Ukraine and quickly.

We realize this is far too little, every time a man, woman or child is killed, or every time a hospital, day care, school, park or even a single flower is destroyed. Every single time we are reminded that we have done too little, too late, in some respects.

Mr. President, I like to think that we cannot judge a people by its leader. I believe that the people of Russia are the first victims of the dictator in the Kremlin, but there are leaders, officials, governors, who do speak on behalf of their people. There is no doubt that you are one such leader.

You have managed to turn one of the enemy's biggest weapons against itself. The Kremlin's powerful, vicious and malevolent deception and disinformation machine was designed to promulgate a false narrative rewritten by the dictator to serve his own ends and for his own personal glorification.

You, on the contrary, took a simple, honest and courageous approach to force the hand of the entire world, to make everyone across the globe see what is happening to your people and, in doing so, you have managed to get the help that you might otherwise not have received, and you must still ask for more.

Mr. President, what we cannot do is experience the brutal reality of this vile war. That is the cruellest thing of all. We cannot sit in dark basements as the walls rattle from the bombs being unleashed on your cities and towns. We cannot know what it is like to worry about your loved ones or be unsure of the future. We cannot know what it is like to dread a rebuilding that will last at least a generation or to be afraid.

There is little we can do to allay the deep fear the children of Ukraine are feeling, and we are so sorry about that. Mr. President, your enemy does not have the heart, the courage, the strength or the dignity to overcome the bravery of the Ukrainian people.

You, President Zelenskyy, will be victorious. Freedom will be restored, and Quebec, in its own humble way, will celebrate with Ukraine.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker Rota: Thank you, Monsieur Blanchet.

I now invite the leader of the New Democratic Party, Mr. Jagmeet Singh, to speak to us.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): I want to thank President Zelenskyy. We heard his words today. We want to thank him for his courage, his inspiration and his resilience. We want to thank the people of Ukraine for their courage and resilience.

He asked us to imagine what it is like to wake up at four in the morning to bombing. He asked us to imagine what it is like to explain to children what is going on. Why are we being bombed? Why are we being attacked?

He asked us to imagine what it would be like to lose 97 children to a war. He asked us to imagine what it would be like in our major cities and places in our country, such as Montreal, our capital city of Ottawa, or Toronto or Vancouver if tanks rolled into these cities. He asked us to imagine what it would be like to see bombs fall on our homes, on our cities, our communities, our schools, our hospitals. He asked us to imagine that, and frankly, we cannot imagine that in a city in Canada. It is unimaginable.

But we have seen the horrors unfolding in Ukraine. We have heard the words of President Zelenskyy. We have spoken with Ukrainian Canadians who share with us the pain that they are experiencing right now, not knowing if their loved ones are going to survive the night. We have heard from families that call constantly, asking if people are okay and still alive. It is unimaginable for us. He asked us to imagine what it is like, and to please help. He asked for more help. He acknowledged that so far Canada has been a strong ally, but he asked for more help, and we must answer that call. Canadians stand with Ukraine and will answer that call to provide as much help as possible in this time.

Canadians want to do more. We heard from President Zelenskyy that sanctions are important, and we want to increase those. We know that is one of the most important things we can do. We know that President Putin does not care about the people

and he does not care about his country, but he does care about his wealth. We know the way to attack Putin. The way to make sure that he feels the pressure of the sanctions is to target him where it counts, and that is to target the wealth that is held by his allies and oligarchs. We are on that path and we need to continue to apply the most severe of sanctions possible to specifically target President Putin and his wealth.

We know that we can provide humanitarian help. Canada has done its part and needs to continue to do that. We need to welcome Ukrainians who are fleeing this crisis and seeking refuge. We need to provide humanitarian help on the ground and continue to provide that support.

[Translation]

President Zelenskyy asked us to imagine the horrors of this war. He asked us to imagine this war happening here, in Canada. That is unimaginable. He also asked us to increase assistance to Ukraine, and we must make that happen. We must increase sanctions. We must answer the call from Ukrainians. We will do so.

[English]

I think about the words that we have heard from President Zelenskyy and the speeches that he has given, and I think about the moments of courage that we have seen reported from everyday Ukrainians standing up to this violence, standing up to this flagrant aggression by President Putin, which is something that we clearly and firmly denounce. We see in those moments incredible courage, and I struggle to find the words to describe it.

I think about something my mom always taught me, a phrase in Punjabi, which is *chardi kala*. I always misunderstood what it meant. She said that it means “rising spirits in the face of difficult odds,” and I cannot think of a more fitting phrase to describe the courage of Ukrainians and the courage of President Zelenskyy. I cannot think of a more fitting moment to describe *chardi kala*, rising spirits, as it defines optimism. In the face of one of the largest armies in the world, Ukrainians are saying, “We will not back down. We will not give up.”

We are so incredibly inspired by them for their fight for democracy, for their fight for freedom, and we stand in full solidarity. We wish for their *chardi kala*, their rising spirits and their defining optimism to continue, and we will be with you every step of the way.

Mr. Speaker Rota: Thank you, Mr. Singh.

I now invite the House leader of the Green Party, Ms. Elizabeth May, to say a few words.

[Translation]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, President Zelenskyy. I am honoured to rise and speak to this extraordinary and historic moment. I also want all my esteemed colleagues here in the House to know that we stand united.

[Mr. Singh]

The Green Party of Canada is part of a big Green family spread out around the world, in 80 countries. A few days ago I received the following letter from the president of the Green Party of Ukraine, Vitaly Kononov:

[English]

He writes, “Dear Green Friends! We are writing to you from bomb shelters, from our home Ukraine, which is mercilessly attacked and bombarded by Russian forces since the fateful day—February 24, 2022. Ukrainians are indiscriminately hit, collateral damage amounts to total destruction of cities, many civil and social infrastructures that have no relevance to the military are destroyed, thousands of civilians dead and injured. Millions are fleeing their homes. Ukrainian army and civil defense volunteers have taken up arms and are fighting for the survival of Ukraine. And they are successful to a great extent. But, missile and bomb attacks by air are causing greatest damage. We are helpless. We have no weapons to counter air attacks. We appeal to you for support. Please urge your governments to help protect our sky by having a no-fly zone. For the sake of world peace and security, for democracy and resolution of conflicts through peaceful means and for a rules-based world order, please help Ukraine!”

It broke my heart to write our dear colleague in Ukraine that all elected Greens around the world have come to the same conclusion, that a no-fly zone would risk a wider war and even a nuclear war. We know these reasons are solid, even though they ring hollow, but we must use every tool and I fear the tools we have in front of us are inadequate to the task. President Zelenskyy, we do not want to let you down. We fear that we may inevitably let you down, but we will find every tool we can find, and where there are not adequate tools, by God, let us invent them.

In 1956, during the Suez crisis, not yet prime minister, Lester B. Pearson, a Canadian, invented UN peacekeepers. We love ourselves here in Canada and although we are an insignificant country in the massive geopolitics of superpowers we sometimes get good ideas. We need to invent something now that is effective to stop the war, to stop Putin, to save Ukraine. We have to use every single idea, every single sinew, every muscle. We must not relent for one single second.

We have seen illegal wars. I have lived long enough to see many illegal wars based on lies, in Vietnam, in Afghanistan and in Iraq, with too many innocent lives lost, and now, never again, not one more Ukrainian child. Please, God, stop the bombs. Please let us have a ceasefire. Please leave a pathway for Vladimir Putin to make it to a negotiating table and find peace.

How do we stop lies? We stop them with the truth, and the truth is the courage of the Ukrainian people. The truth is the courage and the unexpected reality of you, President Zelenskyy, an honest-to-god democrat, a human being, a *mensch*, a man of such moral courage that the world is inspired.

We must not let you down because God knows you will not let us down. We must do more. We know this. You are, as our Prime Minister just said, a champion of democracy. May we be worthy to stand by you. May we find the ways that make it meaningful that we stand with you.

Not one more lost life, please, God. Not one more mother in Russia who weeps for a lost son in an immoral and illegal war. I thank the brave Russians who have faced jail just to go out on the streets and say, "Stop the bombing. No more war."

I close with this. President Zelenskyy, what I want and what I pray for, and I pray for you constantly and for Ukraine, is that you come here in person, that we invite you and we see you here as the president of a country at peace, of a free, democratic and victorious Ukraine.

Please come here so that we can hope that, in your eyes, we remain worthy to be called your friend.

Mr. Speaker Rota: Thank you, Ms. May.

[*Translation*]

Again, I thank His Excellency President Zelenskyy for addressing us today. I know that we will not soon forget this exceptional man.

[*English*]

I would also like to thank all parliamentarians and all our distinguished guests for having attended either in person or by video link. This historic joint address to Parliament will continue to be that, a historic event.

Thank you. *Dyakuyu.*

[*Applause*]

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