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The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Thursday, September 28, 2023

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

THE SUBURBAN

CONGRATULATIONS ON SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Honourable senators, I rise today to pay tribute to two important figures and community advocates in the English-speaking community of Montreal: Mr. Michael Sochaczewski and Mr. Beryl Wajzman.

Michael is the publisher of *The Suburban* — the largest English-language newspaper in Quebec — and Beryl is its Editor-in-Chief.

On September 15, Michael, Beryl and *The Suburban* were honoured at the 2023 Canadian Community Newspaper Awards in six prestigious categories, including winning the top prize for Best All-Round Newspaper, Best Editorial Page and Best Front Page for newspapers with a circulation of 17,500 and over.

For his part, Beryl received special recognition in two categories: Best National Editorial and Best News Story. The latter was for a piece that covered the debates of the Senate. Even prior to my appointment, I always appreciated *The Suburban's* coverage of national politics and the business of the Senate.

I've always admired Beryl's uncompromising commitment to journalism, his community engagement, his passion for reporting and commenting on the news and his loyalty to his readers.

This year also marks the sixtieth anniversary of *The Suburban*. For six decades, *The Suburban* has served our community and enriched the lives of its readership thanks to its reliable news coverage and journalistic integrity — something that Beryl and the Sochaczewski family are fully committed to.

Indeed, with a print circulation of well over 50,000 and a well-designed, user-friendly and up-to-the-minute website, *The Suburban* remains a source of information you can rely on for its high-quality reporting on local, regional, national and international issues, and its diverse opinion pieces and editorials.

I am sure all honourable senators will agree with me that having a strong, independent and reliable Canadian news industry is paramount to serving the public interest. It is the cornerstone of any democratic society.

Good journalism is under threat. Citizens have a plethora of options to choose from when it comes to how they consume their news. Many sources are unreliable, partisan, biased and factually misleading or misguided.

Thankfully, *The Suburban* — like many other newspapers nationwide — continues to uphold the highest and most important values associated with quality journalism: accuracy, reliability, independence and respect — both for the story and the audience.

Honourable senators, please join me in congratulating Michael Sochaczewski, Beryl Wajzman — its Editor-in-Chief — and the entire team at *The Suburban* for their journalistic excellence and for being awarded several prizes at the 2023 Canadian Community Newspaper Awards earlier this month.

Thank You.

NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, September 30 has been set aside to commemorate the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation — a day of deep significance for our nation.

The history of Indigenous peoples in Canada is a story of resilience, strength and profound injustice. For generations, Indigenous communities faced colonization, dispossession of land, forced assimilation and the horrors of the residential school system. These dark chapters in our history have left indelible scars that continue to affect Indigenous individuals, families and communities today.

For too long, the experiences and suffering of Indigenous peoples in Canada have been marginalized, ignored and even denied. The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation reminds us that it is time to confront this painful history, listen to the stories of survivors, learn from their wisdom and engage in meaningful dialogue.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is not just a date on the calendar; it's a mandate for change, a call for us to collectively acknowledge the truth of our past and work towards a better future.

It's a day to reflect upon the devastating legacy of cultural assimilation policies that separated Indigenous children from their families, languages and cultures.

It's a day to remember the thousands of children who never returned home from those schools, and to honour the survivors who have carried the weight of their trauma for generations.

This day is a testament to our commitment to acknowledging the painful truths of our past and working together to build a more just and inclusive future.

It is also a day of hope that reminds us of our collective responsibility to seek reconciliation. It requires us to confront the systemic injustices that persist today, such as inadequate access to clean water, housing and education in Indigenous communities.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a day of reflection, reckoning with our history and committing to a more just and equitable future.

Together, let us build a Canada where the wounds of the past are healed, the truth is known and reconciliation is not just an aspiration but a lived reality for all.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of members of the Survivors Circle of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Francis, along with his spouse, Georgina Francis; his daughter, Kateri Coade; and his granddaughter, Kiara Coade.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Hon. Brian Francis: Honourable senators, I rise today in advance of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, which is the direct outcome of the courage, determination and advocacy of survivors.

On this solemn day, Turtle Island is called upon to honour the Indigenous children who needlessly and senselessly suffered and died at Indian residential schools, Indian day schools and associated sites.

The government, churches and broader society told generations of us that we were less valuable, less worthy and less human. To them, we were savages who would amount to nothing. These, of course, are unfounded, racist and discriminatory beliefs. However, when forced to be ashamed of who we are and where we come from, it can be a lifelong journey to believe otherwise, especially when some still do not see us as equals.

Colleagues, I am proud to say that despite the atrocious ways Indigenous Peoples have been — and continue to be — treated, we have endured, persisted and survived. We have been here since time immemorial and are not going anywhere. While there is still progress to be made, I am hopeful for our future. I look up to my daughter, Kateri, and my granddaughter Kiara — who are here today — and I cannot think of a better legacy.

I know our children and grandchildren will help ensure that the true history of our shared country is never forgotten. It is they who will lead the work to help our people and communities recover, rebuild and prosper.

At the same time, colleagues, my heart is heavy, because after decades of fighting to be heard, believed and supported, survivors — along with our families and communities — continue to be subjected to the violence of indifference and denial. There are those, for example, who seek to reject, minimize and even ridicule what happened to Indigenous children while in the care of the state and churches, including their burials in unmarked sites. In addition, barriers — such as a lack of access to records and sites — continue to prevent families and communities from finding answers. These are some of the pressing issues that are undermining the ongoing search for truth, justice and healing.

• (1410)

Honourable senators, on and around September 30, I sincerely hope you will all take time to learn, reflect and participate in educational and commemorative activities. As an institution, we must take responsibility for our role in the past and ongoing harm inflicted on Indigenous people, and work every day to meaningfully address it.

Wela'lin. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[*Translation*]

MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL BLACK FILM FESTIVAL

Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie: Honourable senators, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to highlight the 19th annual Montreal International Black Film Festival, being held in person and online from September 27 to October 1, 2023.

It is an audacious festival that seeks to promote the development of the independent film industry and showcase films on the realities of Black people around the world. It is a new look on Black film that offers bursaries and awards of excellence.

The MIBFF, formerly the Montreal Haitian Film Festival, has become not only the most important festival of its kind in the country, but also a key player in cultural diversity in Quebec.

Congratulations to Fabienne Colas and her entire organizing team on this 19th annual festival. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[*English*]

COMPREHENSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE AGREEMENT FOR TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, a significant portion of my time as a senator has been dedicated to “AGvocating” for the interests of farmers, processors and producers throughout the country.

Over the past several months, I have spoken with many passionate farmers, producers and advocacy groups about concerns over the ongoing negotiations regarding the U.K.'s accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP. I share their concerns. With accession to the CPTPP, the United Kingdom will have unprecedented access to Canadian markets for pork and beef, while Canadian producers will be unable to send our high-quality products to the British markets. As a trading nation, this sets an unfair advantage for foreign markets. While the U.K. engages in some level of trade protectionism to control its domestic markets, Canada is putting its valuable food systems at risk by allowing foreign products to enter our market at an unfair disadvantage for our farmers. Equal opportunity is crucial for our producers to continue to export their products.

The Canadian Cattle Association and the Canadian Pork Council, as well as the Canadian Meat Council, have actively spoken about the implications that the U.K.'s accession without renegotiation will bring, and the falsehoods being adopted to justify non-tariff barriers to U.K. markets. Their main concern, colleagues, is the failure to accept Canada's meat inspection system, which is widely recognized around the world as one of the finest. The U.K. does not accept Canada's food safety and animal health systems and measures, and those non-tariff barriers limit access to the U.K. market. In addition, there is a lack of reciprocal tariff measures, which have allowed British beef and pork full access to the Canadian market without full reciprocity.

I urge my colleagues and the government to consider the implications created by the U.K.'s accession. I believe it is high time we address the non-tariff barriers that restrict global access to our high-quality food products. Canada continues to work diligently to put food on our plates — not just here at home, but around the world as well — and we must continue to protect our valuable food systems.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[*Translation*]

JOYCE ECHAQUAN

THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF DEATH

Hon. Michèle Audette: Hello everyone, *tshinashkumitin*.

Colleagues, I rise today to honour the memory of the late Joyce Echaquan, who left us three years ago. This Atikamekw woman, a mother, died under inhumane, abject conditions amid a barrage of racist, discriminatory and unacceptable slurs. Even the horrific video that made its way around the world in seconds proves it.

On September 28, 2020, the fate of our gentle warrior, Joyce Echaquan, could have taken a different turn. Had we done things differently, she might still be with us today.

In her report, coroner Géhane Kamel wrote that racism or discrimination may have played a part in her death. The coroner is calling on the Government of Quebec to go a step further. She

[Senator Black]

wants it to acknowledge the presence of systemic racism in its institutions, and work hard to eliminate the kinds of things that women like Joyce Echaquan experience.

In response, the Government of Quebec recently tabled Bill 32 on cultural safety. I have to say, we are fortunate to have Joyce's Principle in its entirety.

Canada is also committed to advancing the fight against racism and discrimination. I also understand that a bill on Indigenous health is being developed to fight racism and discrimination.

In my heart, I tell myself that when someone arrives at the hospital, they have the right to be treated with dignity, respect and without discrimination or racism. I'm eagerly anticipating the day that this bill is introduced in the other place and arrives here in the Senate, so that we can all honour Joyce's memory together, hers and the thousands of others who left without being heard.

I made a promise to her spouse, Carol, her mother, Diane, and an entire community. I promised to walk beside Joyce Echaquan, and I know many people here in this chamber will as well.

Thank you. I want to tell the family that I love them. Today is a difficult day, but we have a collective responsibility to ensure that all women, regardless of culture or background, are treated with dignity when they arrive at the hospital.

Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[*English*]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

HUMAN RIGHTS

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO DEPOSIT
REPORTS ON STUDY OF ISSUES RELATING TO
HUMAN RIGHTS GENERALLY WITH CLERK DURING
ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

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

That the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights be permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit with the Clerk of the Senate its reports on issues relating to human rights generally, if the Senate is not then sitting, and that the reports be deemed to have been tabled in the Senate.

[Translation]

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION CONCERNING THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH

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

That the Senate take note of:

- (a) the deteriorating humanitarian crisis occurring in Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of Azerbaijan's ongoing blockade of the Lachin corridor and increased military aggression against indigenous Armenian civilians in the region; and
- (b) the actions of the Aliyev regime as being dictatorial, and in violation of international law; and

That the Senate call on the Government of Canada:

- (a) to support the liberty of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and their right to self-determination;
- (b) to immediately impose sanctions against the Azeri regime;
- (c) to demand the immediate reopening of the Lachin corridor and the release of Armenian Prisoners of War;
- (d) to provide a significant aid package through NGOs to those Armenian people forcefully displaced from their indigenous land; and
- (e) to protect the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh through the presence of international peacekeeping forces.

• (1420)

[English]

QUESTION PERIOD

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

CARBON TAX

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Senator Gold, as Prime Minister Trudeau shows no sign of understanding how his inflationary carbon tax is hurting families all across our country, it is clear that he is not interested in listening to Canadians — or even to one of his own members of Parliament.

Senator Gold, a Liberal MP from Newfoundland and Labrador, Ken McDonald, said this about the carbon tax in an interview earlier this month: “We are punishing the rural areas of our country and the most vulnerable people in our society.”

He is right, leader. Why doesn't the Prime Minister understand this? Is it because he has never had to worry about how he will feed himself or wonder how he will pay for a roof over his own head? Is that why he won't axe the tax?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. The short answer is no. The longer answer is that the Prime Minister — and, indeed, this government — has shown considerable understanding and, more importantly, taken action to address the difficult circumstances that Canadians have been facing and continue to face across this country.

In that regard, as I have said on many occasions in this chamber and which bears repeating, the tax on carbon, on pollution, is one of a suite of measures — and the most efficient market-driven measure — to ensure that we can make the transition from our current economy to a cleaner and more sustainable economy, for the benefit of our generation and future generations to come.

Senator Plett: Obviously, you've gone to the same school of economics as Justin Trudeau. The budget doesn't balance itself, even if you and he believe that it does.

Leader, I will put this on the record because it is important. Liberal MP Ken MacDonald said that a constituent called him and said that she could no longer afford home heating oil. She said:

I go around my house with a blanket wrapped around me. The only time I get to have beef or chicken is if my niece or nephew invites me out to Sunday dinner.

Senator Gold, this is as a result of your regressive carbon tax. The MP tells this story to everyone he meets in the Trudeau government. He said:

At first, some people said to me, like, there's nobody living like that . . . And I said, “If you don't think people are living like that, you're not living in the real world.”

I would suggest that to you and to the Prime Minister as well, Senator Gold: If you don't believe that people are living like that because of this, you are not living in the real world.

Leader, I agree; the Prime Minister is not living in the real world. A year ago, 39 members of his cabinet spent over \$46,000 on catering for a three-day trip to discuss affordability — \$46,000 to discuss affordability. Is that an example of living in the real world, Senator Gold; yes or no?

Senator Gold: The story that the Liberal MP recounted is, unfortunately, a story that many Canadians could recount. It is not correct, however — whatever the perception is — to attribute it to the tax, any less so than it would be to attribute it to one

factor, whether it is world oil prices or other circumstances that have affected this family in terms of their challenge in meeting the cost of living.

The real world that we are living in — and that the government is committed to working in for the benefit of Canadians — is one in which this government will continue to make the necessary investments for Canadians, their households and families, and in terms of our industry and economy, so that we can continue forward on a path toward a better future.

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

IMMIGRATION STATISTICS

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Senator Gold, yesterday, in answer to a question from Senator Batters, I was surprised to hear you state that your government was in no way responsible for the current housing crisis that is having a major impact on Canadian families, particularly single-parent families.

In an article published in the August 25 edition of the *Financial Post*, Jack Mintz, a tax and urban infrastructure expert, said that the Liberals brought in more than a million newcomers in 2022 and are preparing to welcome over 1.2 million in 2023.

The combined total for these two years represents an increase of over 5.4% in the Canadian population, which is triple the average of the past 40 years. That makes Canada the country with the highest population growth in the G20.

As an August National Bank of Canada study shows, housing starts are currently only a quarter of population growth, compared to the historical average of 61%.

Senator Gold, with such an out-of-control immigration policy, do you still think that your government isn't responsible for the housing crisis?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. The Government of Canada has never denied that it has a role to play with respect to housing issues facing Canadians. I've always stressed that the Government of Canada is working and must work in partnership with the provinces and territories, as well as with private companies, to build more housing.

Regarding immigration, senator, Canada needs immigrants not only to continue enriching our culture, our society and our economy, but also, specifically, to fill a labour shortage that's affecting all sectors of the economy.

Regarding housing, as I stated yesterday, the government's policies are starting to bear fruit. As Michael J. Cooper, the President and CRO of a Toronto company, Dream Unlimited Corp, said his company is planning to build 5,000 additional units across Canada as a result of the elimination of the tax on rental unit construction.

[Senator Gold]

Similarly, Marc Lee, a senior economist at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, emphasized the importance of this measure and this policy, which is designed to help grow our housing supply.

Senator Boisvenu: Senator Gold, I wasn't referring to the role of the government, but to the cause. There's a big difference. The *Financial Post* has a drastically different opinion than that of the person you quoted. It predicts an increase of the price of housing and rental units in urban centres where a majority of immigrants choose to live.

It also predicts that the health care system will be under a huge amount of pressure. We already know that our hospitals and schools are bursting at the seams. Our roads can barely handle the traffic as it is right now.

Senator Gold, immigrants aren't the only ones who will be impacted by the lack of employment, health services and infrastructure. All Canadians are already feeling the effects of this out-of-control immigration.

Senator Gold, are you still convinced that the current housing crisis in Canada created itself?

Senator Gold: No. The situation is much more nuanced — frankly, everybody knows that, senator. There's no need to create a false dichotomy between both views. The bottom line is that Canada needs immigrants.

• (1430)

The Government of Canada's policy is based on consultations with the provinces and territories, which also need immigrants and labour to ensure the survival of many of their communities and even their economies. The government is trying to find the right balance between immigration levels and Canada's needs.

Furthermore, as you rightly pointed out, social and educational services are also needed in order to ensure that all Canadians, including immigrants, enjoy a decent quality of life in Canada.

[English]

CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Hon. Margo Greenwood: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

September 30 will mark the third National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. There will be no celebrations or festivities on that day. Instead, Canadians are called upon to reflect on the legacy of residential schools and contemplate how we can further the cause of reconciliation.

Indigenous peoples and Indigenous governments have been calling for the federal government to recognize Indigenous languages as official languages. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and parliamentary committees have stressed the importance of recognizing Indigenous languages as our first

languages and furthering the cause of reconciliation. In their Calls for Justice, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls said:

We call upon all governments to recognize Indigenous languages as official languages, with the same status, recognition, and protection provided to French and English.

Senator Gold, will the government heed this call and commit to recognizing Indigenous languages as official languages?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): While French and English are the two official languages recognized in our Constitution, as we all know, the reality is that there are over 70 Indigenous languages spoken across this country. Many of those languages, as we also know, tragically, are in vulnerable situations and need proactive protection.

However, a constitutional amendment is a complicated thing. That said, we can and must be lifting up, protecting and celebrating Indigenous languages. The government is committed to that and to supporting Indigenous languages as part of reconciliation efforts. Those have included the adoption of the Indigenous Languages Act and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, or UNDRIP. Also, for example, the government recently recommitted itself to advancing access to federal services in Indigenous languages, as laid out in the UNDRIP Act Action Plan from this past July.

This is and will remain a government priority.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Hon. Margo Greenwood: An estimated 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children were removed from their families and forced to abandon their traditions, languages, cultures and identities. Many children at Indian residential schools were physically and sexually abused, and thousands of children would never see their families again. The violence and intergenerational trauma perpetuated by the state and Church continue to live on for Indigenous peoples across Canada.

But the truth is challenged by the disturbing rise of denialism. Recently, residential school denialists attempted to dig up unmarked graves because they refused to believe that Indigenous children were buried there.

Senator Gold, what is the government doing to combat the rise of residential school denialism in Canada?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and for underlining the harm that denialism causes to families, communities and to our prospects for moving forward with reconciliation.

This is one of the issues that was highlighted by Kim Murray, the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools, who is working on this file, as you know. At her instigation, the Indigenous Peoples Committee has been dealing with this issue head-on by calling as witnesses groups she has identified as being less than forthcoming with records and information about residential schools.

Uncovering and sharing the full truth behind what happened is a critical piece of the work that needs to be done. This government will continue to support Indigenous peoples, communities, the search for the truth and the search for healing. Without truth, there can be no reconciliation, and a commitment of this government is to be standing side by side in this important work.

INDIGENOUS SERVICES

HEALTH CARE TRANSFERS

Hon. Pat Duncan: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, Canadians have recently seen increases in federal health care funding to the provinces and the territories. With these funding increases, Canada established certain benchmarks on a province-by-province, territory-by-territory basis. Canada has responsibility for health care for Indigenous peoples. As the former premier of Manitoba Gary Doer phrased it, Canada is the fourteenth province at the table when it comes to funding for First Nations health care.

Boutique programs like Jordan's Principle have been established to address some shortfalls in existing services.

My questions are these: Has there been an increase in funding for health care delivery for Indigenous peoples in Canada beyond the boutique programs? Also, Senator Gold, if there has been such an increase, are there benchmarks set to show the effectiveness or improvement of service delivery as a result of the increase in health care funding for First Nations peoples?

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

The government has taken action and is committed to taking action to foster health systems that are free from barriers, including racism and discrimination. This is a key commitment under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan, to which I referred in response to the previous question.

The government is investing funds to support communities, organizations and other health system partners in the development of measures to address anti-Indigenous racism in the health system. This includes measures such as anti-racism and discrimination training, tools and resources for health professionals, and a generation of standards.

To your question about funding, Budget 2022 provided \$4 billion over six years to ensure First Nations children receive the support they need through Jordan's Principle, and Budget 2023 provided an additional \$171 million. In February 2023, the government also reaffirmed its commitment to invest \$2 billion over 10 years through a new Indigenous health equity fund to address the unique challenges Indigenous peoples face when it comes to fair and equitable access to quality and culturally appropriate health care.

Regarding the latter part of your question, senator, as for metrics for evaluating progress, Indigenous Services Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada are working with Indigenous organizations, including the First Nations Information Governance Centre and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, or ITK, to advance the development of an information strategy that will identify gaps in health outcomes and indicators that can be routinely reported upon.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

CLEAN TECHNOLOGY INVESTMENT TAX CREDIT

Hon. Robert Black: My question today is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, I continue to be concerned about many ongoing issues that continue to create undue hardship in the agricultural sector. Recently, I met with Green Energy Trading Corporation to learn more about their attempts to positively impact sustainability efforts through the conversion of on-farm organic waste to renewable natural gas. That occurs using biodigesters, which are proven to be effective in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the reduction of reliance on commercial fertilizers. Moreover, digesters create additional revenue, improve manure management and increase overall soil health.

Unfortunately, biodigesters are very costly, and, as we've heard in the Agriculture and Forestry Committee meetings, purchasing farm equipment is a multi-year investment. New sustainable innovations are not always feasible options, especially for small-scale farm operations, and the issue is that dairy farmers can't secure financial loans to install biodigesters without using their farmland as equity. This creates yet another barrier to participate in sustainable agriculture programs and diversify their operations. Yet credits are not being extended to those who are actively trying to work on alternative solutions to help Canada meet our climate change goals.

Senator Gold, my question to you is this: Instead of taxing this important industry, will your government extend the clean technology investment tax credit to Canadian farmers who are actively trying to work on viable alternatives, such as biodigesters, to help Canada meet our climate change targets? Thank you.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and your expressed interest in what are, in fact, the five clean investment tax credits in Budget 2023, all aiming to support green innovation in Canada. For the moment, the new clean technology tax credits are focused on clean energy, manufacturing, hydrogen and carbon capture.

[Senator Gold]

• (1440)

In addition, Budget 2023 expanded the Clean Technology Investment Tax Credit — originally launched in 2022 — which was the subject of the government's wide-ranging public consultations from August to earlier this month. More generally, I've been advised that the government is committed to tripling the funding available for clean technology on farms — including for renewable energy, precision agriculture and energy efficiency. I will certainly bring the suggestion on biodigesters to the attention of the appropriate minister.

CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

Hon. Brian Francis: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

The survivors of St. Anne's Residential School have spent years fighting to reopen the claims filed under the Independent Assessment Process, which was established to resolve claims of serious physical, sexual or emotional abuse under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. However, the Government of Canada has spent millions to fight survivors in court and refuses to release documentation that could substantiate claims of abuse that were previously dismissed by adjudicators deciding compensation amounts.

In advance of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, I ask: Will the Government of Canada end litigation against survivors of St. Anne's Residential School and fully disclose all relevant documentation?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question; it underlines the fact that there is still a lot of work to be done on all sides. In that regard, I don't know the answer to your question, but I will certainly bring that preoccupation — an important question — to the attention of the relevant minister.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

CITIZENSHIP TEST

Hon. Salma Atallahjan: My question is for the government leader in the Senate.

Senator Gold, my office has yet again received disturbing reports regarding online citizenship application procedures.

A permanent resident cardholder applied for their citizenship online and was sent a citizenship test link. However, the instructions clearly stated that they could only complete this online test between 12 a.m. and 1 a.m. that night. Fortunately, the applicant was aware of standard procedure and was ultimately given 21 days to complete the test.

Many applicants have undoubtedly found themselves in this situation, which is unacceptable and applies unnecessary additional stress on applicants who are not aware of their rights. My question, Senator Gold, is: What is being done to rectify these mistakes?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, and that is a very disturbing story that you recount.

There are internal procedures for monitoring the performance of the processes that are in place. I hope that you are wrong and that not many people have been placed in that very uncomfortable situation.

Not having details of the file, I obviously can't comment on that. I'll certainly bring this matter to the attention of the relevant minister.

Senator Ataulhjan: Senator Gold, these mistakes do not end there. We have also heard reports of frequent errors in the system that lead applicants to believe their oath ceremonies have been scheduled, only for them to be cancelled at the last minute. These administrative errors can have important consequences on applicants' emotions and schedules.

Senator Gold, the citizenship process in Canada is lengthy, stressful and filled with administrative hurdles. Why do such administrative mistakes continue to happen?

Senator Gold: One would wish that we had systems that were completely error-free; that, alas, is clearly not the case. The relevant minister and his officials are responsible and diligent, and I'll bring this matter to their attention.

[Translation]

FINANCE

COST OF FOOD

Hon. Claude Carignan: My question is for the Leader of the Government. Leader, when Minister Champagne summoned the heads of the major grocery chains, he claimed that, thanks to him, prices would go down by Canadian Thanksgiving.

After the meeting last week, the minister's objective changed. He now wants price increases to keep pace with inflation. In other words, the minister is telling us that he wants inflation to keep pace with inflation. Senator Gold, in concrete terms, how much can Canadians expect prices to drop by Canadian Thanksgiving?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. Unsurprisingly, I don't have a precise answer to that. It's not up to the government to set prices, unless you're suggesting that the government take full control of the economy, which is not on the government's radar, nor on that of your political party.

For the first time, the minister successfully convened major business leaders in order to underscore how important it is that they step up and come back with a serious program to address the challenge of rising grocery costs for Canadians. Furthermore, as I said last week, other players in the supply chain, in the context of food prices, will no doubt be called upon by this government to give Canadians a little relief when it comes to the rising cost of groceries.

Senator Carignan: Well, that's not exactly what the minister pledged to do. He said he was going to lower prices. Clearly, Minister Champagne has no idea what he's doing. He even told us he was going to talk to his Japanese counterpart about Canadian grocery prices, as if Japan had anything to do with the prices people are paying at Metro or Provigo.

The minister is even talking about taxing grocers, as though adding a new tax would drive operating costs up and thereby lower prices. I get the feeling the minister is using smoke and mirrors to distract us. Mr. Leader, doesn't it seem as though the government is taking Canadians for fools?

Senator Gold: Frankly and respectfully, dear colleague, the minister has been consulting his counterparts in other countries and researching what's happening in France, England and elsewhere because he wants to find out what other countries are doing in response to the rising cost of living, a problem they all face. That is what the government and the minister are doing as they search for appropriate solutions to implement here in Canada.

As I already explained, the government is waiting for the major chains to respond before it decides what to do. They're waiting for them and for companies largely responsible for setting the price of eggs, milk and other foods to come back with an action plan. That's when the government will decide what to do.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Hon. René Cormier: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, section 3 of Nunavut's Inuit Language Protection Act states that public sector organizations active in the territory, including federal departments, agencies and institutions, must provide services to the public and have signage in the Inuit language.

However, during my trip to Nunavut last May, Languages Commissioner Karliin Aariak told me that federal institutions don't believe that they have to observe that section of the act. Legal experts already stated that Nunavut has to authority to legislate on matters of language on its territory, including with respect to federal institutions.

My question to you is the following: Considering the importance of the Inuit language for the development of the culture and identity of Nunavut's Indigenous peoples, how will the federal government make sure that federal institutions meet their obligations under this act?

• (1450)

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. The government completely agrees with the importance of providing services in Inuktitut.

Many federal departments provide services in Inuktitut and the government is in the process of broadening and strengthening its efforts pursuant to the Indigenous Languages Act, with the support of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. This work is supported by the significant investments that the government is making in this area, namely, \$840 million since 2019 to revitalize Indigenous languages across Canada.

There is a technical question about whether federal services are subject to the federal or territorial legislation, but that doesn't change the government's commitment to protect and promote Indigenous languages and Inuktitut in northern Canada and Indigenous languages across the country.

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

Senator Cormier would like to ask a supplementary question. Is leave granted?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Cormier: Thank you, colleagues.

During my visit to Nunavut, Ms. Aariak also told me that the federal Indigenous Languages Act lacks "teeth," especially when it comes to the role of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages.

The act was passed in June 2019, and it includes a five-year review of its provisions. Does the federal government intend to comply with its obligations relating to Indigenous peoples' right to governance and self-determination in this country?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question.

The Indigenous Languages Act is a historic milestone for those working to protect and promote Indigenous languages. Of course, we must continue to strengthen and expand these efforts. The statutory review will take place and, as part of that process, input from partners and Indigenous communities will be vital to determining how well the bill is achieving its objectives and where improvements are needed.

[English]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES ACT

BILL TO AMEND—MESSAGE FROM COMMONS

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons returning Bill S-222, An Act to amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act (use of wood), and acquainting the Senate that they had passed this bill without amendment.

[Translation]

CANADA EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE BILL

SECOND READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Moodie, seconded by the Honourable Senator Cormier, for the second reading of Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

Hon. Lucie Moncion: Honourable senators, I rise today at second reading of Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada. I welcome the arrival of this bill in the Senate because it delivers an essential blueprint for society that will allow Canadian parents, especially Canadian mothers, to access the labour market. For many mothers, accessing the labour market depends in large part on access to affordable child care.

[English]

The purpose of my speech is to shed light on the issues of equity in access to child care services for children belonging to official language minority communities. The enactment of this law is an opportunity to give ourselves the means to achieve our ambitions so that these children have access to early learning and child care services of equivalent quality to those of the English-speaking majority.

For francophone parents, access to French-language child care services is a question of language survival in the context of the steady decline in the demographic weight of francophones in Canada. For these parents, the transmission of the language — from early childhood onward — enables their children to enter the French-language education continuum. Serving as a vehicle for linguistic and cultural transmission, early childhood education and child care services contribute to the survival and vitality of official language minority communities from generation to generation.

[*Translation*]

Protecting linguistic vitality through early childhood education is also a matter of rights for these communities.

Access to child care services in the language of the minority is key to the implementation of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees the right to minority language education.

To give francophone children an equal chance at success, they must have access to educational services in French, beginning in early childhood. The early childhood learning environment prepares children for school by giving them the language skills that are essential to their scholastic and academic success.

The other side of the coin is assimilation. Before they even begin to speak, children who don't have access to child care services in their language are faced with significant pressure to assimilate that could compromise their chances of living in French.

Practically speaking, if these children end up in anglophone child care facilities because they don't have access to French services, their parents could end up sending them to an English school because they are worried that their child doesn't have the language skills they need to succeed in a minority language school. That's one of the factors that might explain why we are seeing the demographic weight of francophones in Canada dropping little by little.

Indeed, access to French-language education throughout the education continuum is a monumental challenge for many francophone parents in predominantly English-speaking provinces and territories.

In a 2016 report entitled *Early Childhood: Fostering the Vitality of Francophone Minority Communities*, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages highlights some of the important issues facing francophone parents. The report states the following:

Programs and services for young children have been developed with various systems of governance, funding streams and training for staff. As a result, families face a highly fragmented early childhood landscape of unconnected options, diverse eligibility criteria and payment requirements.

These comments from the commissioner suggest that the needs of francophone minority communities must be at the forefront in the development of a national system of early childhood learning and child care.

The legislative framework for this system should clearly include a commitment from the federal government to ensure solid core funding for these communities.

Let me give you a few figures to illustrate the disparities that currently exist in some provinces.

[*English*]

According to Statistics Canada's 2021 census data, we have 141,635 children aged zero to four who are French-speaking rights holders under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These children have a constitutional right to instruction in their language from early childhood. However, according to the Commission nationale des parents francophones, it's estimated that only 20% of these children are served in French, as there are about 29,000 of these children in French-language preschool daycare — it's a difference of more than 110,000.

In New Brunswick, for example, 1,900 daycare spaces were announced — only 300 of these are reserved for francophones. This figure represents barely 16% of the population, whereas New Brunswick's French-speaking population is around 30%. In Alberta, out of the 1,500 new spaces announced, only 19 are reserved for francophones — representing 0.013% of spaces for francophones, who account for 2% of Alberta's population.

This is a trend observed across Canada, from province to province and territory to territory. According to data from *Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Annual Report 2022*, there would be a shortfall of 36,567 French-language spaces to meet the needs of mother tongue French-speaking children in the province — not counting children whose first official language is French, but whose mother tongue is not French.

I propose to give you an overview of the bill as it relates to official language minority communities. It's worth noting that the first version of the bill tabled in the House of Commons makes no mention of official language minority communities or official languages. This touches Quebec as much as it touches everywhere else in Canada. Needless to say, I was disappointed that the official language minority communities must constantly remain vigilant so as not to be forgotten by governments, whether provincial, territorial or federal.

• (1500)

[*Translation*]

Is that due to a lack of knowledge or an oversight of children's language rights on the part of Employment and Social Development Canada, or a lack of collaboration between different departments, including Canadian Heritage?

I have in-depth knowledge of the modernization of the Official Languages Act, and I know that oversights like this one are, unfortunately, all too common within the government. We have to do better and expect better if official language minority communities are to be taken into account in legislation right from the start, when appropriate.

The bill was passed by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on May 2, 2023.

Thankfully, amendments made by the committee of the other place greatly improved the bill in that regard. These amendments reassured communities, but concerns still remain. The Commission nationale des parents francophones, or CNPF, and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, who speak for francophone parents in Canada, expressed their concerns about the legislation as it was passed in the other place, especially regarding the omission of official language minority communities, or OLMCs, in section 8.

Three amendments passed by the committee added mentions of OLMCs in the bill.

Clause 7 sets out the objectives of federal investments in the area of early learning and child care. An amendment was made to this clause by adding the words, “. . . and of children from English and French linguistic minority communities, that respect and value the diversity. . . .”

The second amendment adopted by the committee adds a paragraph to clause 7 that sets out the government's commitments. The new clause specifies that:

Federal investments in respect of early learning and child care programs and services subject to an agreement entered into with a province must be guided by the commitments set out in the *Official Languages Act*

The third amendment amends clause 11, which has to do with the appointment of members of the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care. The amendment specifies that official language minority communities must be represented on the council. Indigenous peoples were also added to this clause in the same amendment. It is rather strange that this was omitted.

This clearly shows the importance of a strong, unambiguous legislative text.

The government already has many obligations under Part VII of the Official Languages Act when spending money on early childhood education. Despite the lack of investments, the envelopes related to this act are usually given to the Department of Canadian Heritage.

As I said earlier, the first version of the bill did not include official language minority communities. OLMCs have fallen through the cracks at the Department of Employment and Social Development. That's why it's important to be cautious in drafting legislation to govern how the department manages its funds.

That makes me wonder if the text of the bill, with the amendments by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, is sufficient to ensure implementation consistent with the language rights of OLMCs under section 23 of the Charter and with the government's obligations under Part VII of the Official Languages Act.

Even though most of the bilateral agreements between the federal government and provincial and territorial governments include provisions designed to meet the needs of OLMCs, they're vague and don't include specific targets.

Official language minority communities know these agreements are fragile and temporary. These bilateral agreements are based on legislation that should be muscular and unambiguous.

These are the lessons we learned during our study of Bill C-13 to amend the Official Languages Act.

As far as implementing the act goes, the omission of OLMCs in certain sections can have an impact on programs rolled out by the government through the public service, policies resulting from the bill and the negotiation and implementation of future agreements with provinces and territories.

In terms of statutory interpretation, when considering a bill, legislators must also examine the interconnection between the actual text of the bill and how the courts may interpret it in the future. Statutory interpretation requires judges to take into account a series of weighted factors in order to determine the true or best meaning of an act's wording.

With the judicialization of language conflicts in Canada, legislators have to take this exercise seriously and make the wording as clear as possible and as close as possible to its true intention. We have to take a close look at the impacts of omitting to mention OLMCs, notably in clause 8, which codifies the commitment to maintaining long-term funding for early learning and child care programs and services.

Bill C-35 could be improved to better consider the needs of OLMCs. I hope that my colleagues on the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology will study this bill from the perspective of including official language minority communities, and francophones in particular.

I support sending this bill to committee as soon as possible.

Thank you for your attention.

Hon. René Cormier: I'd like to ask a question, if the senator would be so kind as to answer it.

Senator Moncion: Of course, Senator Cormier.

Senator Cormier: First of all, I'd like to thank you for that background information and for the concern you have shown regarding this important legislation for official language minority communities. I'd also like to thank you for making the connection with the government's obligations under the Official Languages Act.

You mentioned three additions that have been made. I'm referring to the paragraph that deals with commitments and the Official Languages Act. Under the heading "Funding commitments," as you mentioned, the bill states:

early learning and child care programs and services subject to an agreement entered into with a province must be guided by the commitments set out in the *Official Languages Act*

Obviously, you mentioned the challenges in bilateral relations between the federal government and the provinces. I'm from New Brunswick, and there's a major challenge in New Brunswick in terms of non-compliance with the Official Languages Act. You've given some very clear figures on the almost discriminatory situation that exists between anglophone and francophone communities. I would really love to hear from New Brunswick's decision makers, who can shed some light on their obligations and on how Bill C-13 will be respected, taking into account the obligations under the federal Official Languages Act.

Senator Moncion: Thank you for the question.

I completely agree with you, senator. It's important to hear from the people involved in those calculations because they can connect those dots for us — we're running out of time, and I don't know if senators want to give us a little more.

The Hon. the Speaker: Do you agree to give Senator Moncion more time to finish her response to Senator Cormier?

Hon. Senators: Yes.

Senator Moncion: Thank you, colleagues.

The group that deals with that sent us the dollar amounts and number of child care spaces, and, yes, we'll give you that information. We're going to ask the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology to invite those people because they really have a lot of information gathered from coast to coast to coast. These people, who are with the FCFA, will be able to provide guidance as we revise the act to ensure that it recognizes and enforces the rights of francophones outside Quebec and anglophones in Quebec.

I don't think I answered your question fully, but I believe that, as we study this matter, we'll monitor things carefully and some people will keep an eagle eye on the bill and its potential impact on francophone families outside Quebec and anglophone families in Quebec.

• (1510)

[English]

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill C-35, the Canada early learning and child care act as the official critic.

Let me begin by emphasizing the importance and need for early child care learning. As a mother and former educator, I intimately understand the critical need for accessible, high-quality child care.

In principle, I support Bill C-35 which aims to provide accessible, affordable and high-quality child care for all Canadian families. However, there are a few areas of concern that I wish to address as the critic of this bill.

Bill C-35 proposes to enshrine into law the principles contained in the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework and also makes reference to the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework as guiding principles for funding. Please allow me, colleagues, to talk briefly on both frameworks.

The Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework which:

. . . sets out principles to guide the Government of Canada and the governments of the provinces in achieving the vision of all children in Canada having access to quality early learning and child care programs and services that support their development and enable them to reach their full potential.

It is used as the basis for the Early Learning and Child Care Agreements that the federal government signed with each province and territory.

The second is the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, which was co-developed by the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples and:

. . . sets out the principles to guide all interested parties in achieving the vision that all First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families are supported by a comprehensive and coordinated early learning and child care system that is rooted in Indigenous knowledge, cultures and languages and led by Indigenous peoples.

While national frameworks can be useful as general guidelines, they can also overlook regional and local nuances.

In a country vast and culturally rich as Canada, a one-size-fits-all approach may not cater to the unique needs of each province, family and community, potentially leading to disparities in service quality and accessibility. It is crucial for the frameworks to be flexible to the different regional and cultural needs of all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

As we study this bill in committee, I think we need to ask ourselves three questions with respect to the importance of regional child care initiatives in promoting child development, supporting working parents and fostering local community growth.

First, does the bill address the importance of tailoring solutions to regional needs? Regional child care initiatives allow for customization of services to address the distinct requirements of local communities. They consider factors such as demographic composition, cultural diversity and economic conditions ensuring that child care programs are relevant and effective within their specific contexts.

Second, does the bill address accessibility and affordability? By focusing on regional solutions, initiatives can target areas with limited access to quality child care services with the aim to make child care more accessible and affordable for families, particularly those residing in underserved or remote regions, and help parents re-enter the workforce without sacrificing the quality of care their children receive.

Third, does the bill address the importance of community engagement and collaboration? Regional initiatives encourage collaboration among local stakeholders, including parents, educators and policymakers. This collective effort fosters a sense of community engagement and ownership in the development of child care programs, which leads to better outcomes for children.

As we inquire deeper into the nuances, the co-development of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, though commendable, raises some questions about the depth of this collaboration. Were all Indigenous communities equally represented?

The emphasis on being “rooted in Indigenous knowledge, cultures and languages” is significant, but there’s a risk of homogenizing diverse Indigenous cultures into a singular narrative. Recognizing diversity respects autonomy of Indigenous communities. It empowers them to shape their own education systems, ensuring that education aligns with their culturally unique values and needs.

While we grapple with the complexities of national frameworks and their implications for diverse communities, we must also turn our attention to the pressing challenges of demand and limited availability of early childhood educators.

Ontario’s Financial Accountability Officer has estimated that demand for child care spaces will outpace the current expansion plans by a staggering 220,000 spaces by 2026. This looming gap in availability is further exacerbated by a concerning decline in the workforce. According to Statistics Canada, employment in child care dropped by 21% during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to 3% among other workers across Canada.

An article from the *Early Childhood Education Report* showed the following key findings from recent surveys of staff working in licensed child care across Canada. In Alberta, 62% of child care centre operators had to recruit staff in the last two years, nearly 30% reported facing hiring difficulties and 6% had unfilled staff vacancies lasting over four months. In PEI, 82% had difficulty hiring staff with the necessary qualifications.

Among early childhood educators who resigned their position in Ontario, the majority sought other employment outside of licensed child care. This decline not only highlights the challenges in meeting the demand for more qualified personnel, but also underscores the importance of ensuring that our educators are valued and supported.

We must therefore ask ourselves whether Bill C-35 addresses the critical questions on how we adequately compensate a profession that historically receives lower wages compared to their counterparts in the K-12 system, which often discourages potential candidates from pursuing a career in the field.

Coupled with low wages comes the fact that early childhood education workers often receive inadequate training and professional development. The field requires highly skilled professionals who can nurture development. However, limited access to quality training and professional development opportunities can deter individuals from entering or staying in the profession.

Another fundamental aspect of Bill C-35 that warrants attention is the role of parents in their child’s upbringing. Parents, undeniably, form the foundation of a child’s world, shaping their perspectives, values and beliefs.

Parents are a child’s primary source of emotional support and attachment. The close bond formed during early years has a profound and lasting impact on a child’s sense of security and emotional well-being.

Parents instill essential social and moral values in their children. Through modelling behaviour, teaching empathy and setting boundaries, parents contribute to the formation of a child’s character and values. These early lessons lay the foundation for future relationships and moral decision making. Parents play a pivotal role in transmitting cultural heritage and social identity. They expose children to their cultural practices, traditions and values, fostering a sense of belonging and identity.

The introduction of mandatory conditions for child care centres to be eligible to opt in for the government program raises some questions. How will these conditions cater to the rich tapestry of beliefs and values that Canadian families hold dear? It’s imperative that any conditions set forth respect this diversity and do not infringe upon the rights of parents to guide their children’s moral and social development.

Every Canadian family should have the freedom to choose the child care that suits their unique needs. Canada’s strength lies in its diversity. What’s suitable for one family might not be for another due to varying circumstances.

• (1520)

In its current form, Bill C-35 appears to favour public and non-profit child care providers, potentially marginalizing the pivotal role played by private operators in the child care system. Private child care providers have, over the years, established themselves as vital pillars of support for a vast number of Canadian families. Their strength lies in their ability to offer a rich tapestry of diverse programs tailored to meet the unique needs, values and preferences of different families. These providers often fill gaps in regions where public services might be sparse or in areas that require specialized care. By potentially sidelining them, the bill risks creating a standardized child care landscape lacking the richness and variety that private providers bring to the table.

It's crucial that the legislation recognizes and values the contributions of private child care providers, which are largely owned and operated by female entrepreneurs. To quote my colleague MP Michelle Ferreri, critic of this bill in the other place:

Feedback from the Association of Alberta Childcare Entrepreneurs said that the majority of private child care in Alberta is operated by women, with a large number being immigrant women, and that the impact of this agreement and the intention of the federal government to prioritize the business model of child care rather than the affordability, accessibility or quality of care is having the opposite effect on women. It notes that we are seeing a women-led industry targeted and pushed out of business, and that women across our province are facing bankruptcy and losing their homes because they signed on to this agreement because they wanted and advocated for affordable child care.

They should not only be acknowledged but also be provided with equitable access to resources, training and support. Ensuring their inclusion and support is not just about fairness; it's about preserving the diverse, multi-faceted nature of child care in Canada, which is essential for catering to the diverse needs of Canadian families.

In the diverse landscape of child care services, the province of Alberta stands out with 67% of its child care being managed by entrepreneurs. These are not public institutions or not-for-profit entities but entrepreneurial ventures, many of which have been successful and effective in catering to the region's needs. This model, which has thrived in Alberta, is a testament to the fact that private enterprises can coexist harmoniously with public and not-for-profit sectors, delivering quality care.

Private child care providers offer a wide range of services, including daycare centres, home-based care and specialized programs. This diversity allows parents to choose the option that best suits their child's needs and their family's schedule, providing greater flexibility and convenience. Private child care centres may offer extended or non-standard hours of operation, making it more convenient for parents with irregular work schedules to access child care services.

For families with specific cultural or religious preferences, private child care providers can offer programs that align with these values and traditions, creating a culturally sensitive and nurturing environment.

The presence of private child care providers can stimulate competition and innovation in the child care sector, encouraging both private and public providers to continually improve the quality of care and programming they offer. It's crucial for the government to recognize and value the contributions of these private entities and ensure a balanced approach that doesn't inadvertently disadvantage a sector that has been instrumental in the province's child care framework.

Another concern raised by MP Ferreri in her third reading speech is in regards to the national advisory council. She said:

Conservatives put forth concrete amendments to the bill for the national advisory council to track data on the implementation of the child care program, including the availability of child care services, the number of families on wait-lists for child care places and any progress made in reducing the number of families on wait-lists. It is accountability and tracking. How do we measure success if we are not tracking it? . . . what happened to this amendment? It was voted down.

Adoption of such an amendment would certainly have improved the bill, and perhaps the committee or our chamber could reconsider this amendment.

Reflecting on the details of Bill C-35 and the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, it is clear that while the government's intentions to establish a national child care system are admirable, significant concerns need to be addressed. The proposed \$30-billion investment, although substantial, may not fully address the multi-faceted challenges of labour shortages, long wait-lists and the lack of available spaces. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's analysis further underscores potential shortfalls, with a notable gap between the number of subsidized spaces and the actual demand for a truly universal \$10-per-day child care policy.

Honourable senators, while Bill C-35 represents a significant stride toward a national child care system, it is imperative to approach its implementation with a critical lens, ensuring that the diverse needs of all Canadian families are met, that the workforce is valued and supported, and that the lessons from history guide our path forward.

With that, I wish to acknowledge the work of Senator Moodie, the sponsor of the bill in our chamber. I trust that Bill C-35 will receive careful and thorough study at committee. Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time.)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

(On motion of Senator Moodie, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.)

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION ADOPTED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate), pursuant to notice of September 27, 2023, moved:

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, October 3, 2023, at 2 p.m.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

CRIMINAL RECORDS ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SIXTEENTH REPORT OF LEGAL AND
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE—
DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the sixteenth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (*Bill S-212, An Act to amend the Criminal Records Act, to make consequential amendments to other Acts and to repeal a regulation, with amendments*), presented in the Senate on September 26, 2023.

Hon. Brent Cotter moved the adoption of the report.

He said: This report pertains to Bill S-212 introduced by Senator Pate some time ago in this chamber. I'll take a moment to give you background on the bill and its consideration at our committee.

• (1530)

This bill relates to the reform of the records suspension mechanism at the federal level, contained primarily in the Criminal Records Act. The consideration of this bill included four amendments at our committee, brought by colleagues at the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

Primarily, this bill constitutes a more streamlined — and in most cases, automatic — process by which criminal records are suspended. We often think of this as a pardon, although the real, technical structure in the bill is a record suspension. More specifically, the bill amends the Criminal Records Act to provide for the automatic expiry of a criminal record, with certain exceptions. In most cases, an individual's criminal record would expire automatically if they have had no further criminal involvement for a set period of time after completing their sentence. For indictable offences, that period is five years; for summary convictions, that period is two years.

In consideration of the bill, senators met eight times and heard from 28 witnesses — as well as the sponsor of the bill, Senator Pate — and I think we gave comprehensive consideration to the bill over an extended period of time.

To return to the description of the bill, as I said, it constitutes a primarily automatic process by which records are suspended. There are certain exceptions to that process that apply in circumstances when an individual is convicted of another offence during that waiting period I mentioned, or where there are outstanding charges against the individual — or the individual was under investigation for such charges — at the end of the waiting period, or where the record relates to the conviction for a Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 offence under the Criminal Code. These are sexual offences. In these cases, an individual would be required to apply to the Parole Board of Canada for a record expiry.

Just so that it is clear — under Bill S-212, an expired record is not erased but must be kept separate from other criminal records at the federal level.

I think other members here will speak in somewhat greater detail about the bill. The process I just mentioned — by which records are kept separate — is similar to the existing system. Furthermore, an expired record must not be released or shared without the approval of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

The bill was amended in four respects at our committee; two of the amendments are of substance, and two are technical in nature, realigning the numbering of sections. I won't speak to those. The more substantive amendments were along the following line and were proposed by Senator Pate. Given the expressions of concern that we heard from — among others — the policing community, with respect to access to information in the interest of justice or in the case of national security, under clause 11, the minister's approval to disclose an expired record is not required in certain circumstances for offences related to unpaid fines and victims' surcharges. The clause was amended to limit this type of disclosure to police only when it is in the interests of the administration of justice or the safety or security of Canada and its allies.

The second amendment allows for the definition of the circumstances where the release of an expired record relating to unpaid fines would be, again, in the interest of the administration of justice or the safety or security of Canada and its allies. As I said, the last two amendments were technical amendments.

I think this bill was given meaningful consideration, and I trust that in third reading here, it will receive the same treatment. Thank you, Your Honour.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

STUDY ON ISSUES RELATING TO SECURITY AND DEFENCE IN THE ARCTIC

SIXTH REPORT OF NATIONAL SECURITY, DEFENCE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE AND REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the sixth report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs, entitled *Arctic Security Under Threat: Urgent needs in a changing geopolitical and environmental landscape*, deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on June 28, 2023.

Hon. Tony Dean moved:

That the sixth report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs, entitled *Arctic Security Under Threat: Urgent needs in a changing geopolitical and environmental landscape*, deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on June 28, 2023, be adopted and that, pursuant to rule 12-23(1), the Senate request a complete and detailed response from the government, with the Minister of National Defence being identified as minister responsible for responding to the report, in consultation with the Minister of Northern Affairs, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs and the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

• (1540)

THE SENATE

MOTION TO URGE GOVERNMENT TO ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DIGITAL SOLUTIONS THAT TRANSFORM THE PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY EXPERIENCE OF CANADIANS—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Colin Deacon, pursuant to notice of March 29, 2023, moved:

That the Senate call on the Government of Canada to replace its outdated program delivery and information technology systems by urgently accelerating the implementation of user-friendly, digital solutions that transform the public service delivery experience of Canadians, and ultimately reduce the cost of program delivery.

He said: Honourable senators, surveys reliably report that most people would rather lose their wallets than their phones. Yes, I'm speaking about that device that I'm competing with right now for your attention.

Do you ever wonder why we call it a phone? Take a minute sometime to check your settings. Don't do it now, please, but when I did it, I found that, personally, I use my phone, my

mobile device, for 2% of the time. The other 98% of the time I'm benefiting from a diversity of conveniences that I could hardly have imagined a generation ago.

We get frustrated when things can't be done quickly or easily on our phones. When the Rogers network crashed on July 8, 2022, over 12 million Canadian citizens and businesses lost wireless and internet services. People couldn't call 911, businesses couldn't process payments, and other information services that we rely on, minute by minute, were suddenly gone.

These conveniences are always so accessible, we take them for granted. We constantly expect better, more reliable services in all facets of our lives, whether it's virtual banking, virtual medical appointments, collaborating on documents through the cloud, booking flights or ordering just about anything to be delivered directly to our doors. The organizations that provide the best, most trusted, most convenient services are the ones that succeed.

Conversely, when digital government services do exist in Canada, they're often complex, confusing and clunky. There's a wide and growing gap when comparing government services to the convenient digital experiences in other aspects of our lives. That gap is increasingly concerning to me because trust is earned when people believe in your motives and your abilities and respect what you accomplish when you apply those motives and abilities.

A positive experience fosters recurring use, word-of-mouth referrals and an enhanced reputation. I offer to you that to be credible and trusted, governments need to meet citizens where they are, not where they were. This reality demands that governments must start to deliver a level of convenience and service to citizens and businesses that they've grown to expect in our increasingly digital world.

That's my motivation behind Motion No. 107: to relay a sense of urgency to the government so that the ministers and public servants who desperately want to make these changes benefit from increased political support.

The Speaker has just read Motion No. 107 again to you. The tabling of this motion triggered a study on the part of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO, released about two weeks ago, on September 15. Over the next few minutes, I'll briefly review the state of digital government services in Canada, and then I'll review some of the PBO's findings and other issues that need to be managed if Canada is going to make progress in the delivery of digital government services.

Let's start with what is happening today. Canada is falling behind other countries in the race to embrace digital transformation. Despite having exceptional capacity with leading research programs, universities and companies, Canada is not a digital competitiveness leader. In the United Nations E-Government Survey 2022, Canada placed thirty-second, down from third a dozen years ago. Boston Consulting Group's e-government ranking suggests that Canada's digital government services are the lowest of 40 nations.

Unsurprisingly, ServiceNow found that 8 in 10 Canadians believe consumer companies provide better customer service than government, and 8 in 10 Canadians think navigating government services would be simpler with more digital tools. Canadians also identified that lengthy and confusing processes are high on their list of complaints.

Simply put, Canadians want better digital government services, and our governments are not keeping up as the rest of the world accelerates. But convenient access to government services is far from the only challenge. Limited technology investment increases cybersecurity risks and their incalculable costs.

In her annual report last November, Auditor General Karen Hogan raised concerns about the Canadian government's cybersecurity controls, highlighting inconsistent practices that may place sensitive information and digital infrastructure at risk of cyberattacks. She also highlighted that Canada's public servants are more hesitant to adopt new technologies than their global peers.

The last point was confirmed by Accenture when they reported that only 28% of public servants in Canada received cybersecurity and data security training — this despite 100 plus world-class digital and data courses available through the Canada School of Public Service that are supported by global technology leaders. Not enough of our senior public servants are insisting that they themselves and their teams prioritize this essential upskilling.

Convenient and secure digital services are becoming commonplace in other countries, even countries at war. You've heard me speak many times about Ukraine's Diia app. Regardless of where they are in the world, Ukrainian citizens use their mobile devices to access their most important credentials, like driver's licences and passports, as well as all of their most important government services. Today, more than 90% of Ukrainian adults interact with their government digitally, not because they have to but because they value the convenience and ease. This success was thanks to President Zelenskyy making the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine a political priority and recruiting both top technical talent and experienced policy and regulatory experts to the cause. Both skill sets are critical to ensuring progress.

We need to find a path forward, so let's look at the PBO findings. The PBO highlighted the need for greater transparency. Budget 2021 allocated \$1 billion to be invested in digital transformation over seven years. However, clear and insightful answers are difficult to find, such as how projects are being prioritized, how funding is allocated or what results and benefits are being achieved.

I found it concerning when the PBO observed that:

It is possible that some of this funding may be used to maintain existing systems rather than expand the digitization of government services.

It's very worrisome that the government's billion-dollar commitment might not be invested in digital transformation at all and could be consumed by the ever-increasing maintenance and repair costs of legacy systems. Simply, we have to learn how to

build reliable and convenient alternatives to our old clunkers before they finally fall apart. Transparency is crucial to tracking progress and establishing effective incentives.

• (1550)

Furthermore, the combination of security and convenience offered by a single, high-security log-in credential should be a priority. Currently, there are over 270 different log-in points to digital services in the federal government. This isn't just inconvenient, but it also increases the cyber breach risk by 270-fold.

I'm of the view that improvements in the quality and convenience of service delivery to Canadians should be the driving force behind the digitization of government services. Yet, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO, could not find any key performance indicators to guide improvements over time. Also, there's no analysis of expected cost savings compared to those actually achieved. Since departments don't track this information, they were unable to provide it.

Another recurring theme was that past practices block the adoption of best practices. To be fair, this problem is not limited to government. It's an issue within any large or long-established organization. Too often, a change-averse culture prevents the needed transformation and reinforces the status quo — we see this problem in the Senate. Costs continue to rise, but calls to make efficiency-enabling changes are rebuffed.

Amanda Clarke, Associate Professor of Public Administration at Carleton University, as well as a thought leader in this space, spoke about this problem during her appearance before the House Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates on November 17, 2022:

... very little has been done to hire and train public servants such that the government could make sensible, accountable and strategic decisions about technology.

She continued:

... leading digital-era governments are now aggressively hiring technologists. . . . [and] appointing senior leaders . . . who have a deep understanding of technology and its role in the policy process.

There are also structural barriers preventing transformation. To this end, the PBO offered that "Internationally, other governments have identified existing legislation as a potential obstacle to digital service delivery."

Canada's legislative structure enshrines the siloing of departments, which reduces the interoperability of government programs. This is frustrating for citizens and inefficient for government. To get around this problem, over the past decades, over a thousand highly specific data sharing agreements have been created between programs, agencies, departments and provinces. If government is to become more citizen-centric, departments need to be empowered to build a common software architecture that can deliver dramatically more convenient services for those citizens who choose to interact digitally with the government.

The PBO identified that the Privacy Act, the Financial Administration Act and the Access to Information Act need to be clarified if citizens are to be provided with the right to control the use of their personal data across departments and agencies, and between levels of government.

I would offer that Ottawa still faces another obstacle when it comes to digital transformation: the ghost of the Phoenix payroll debacle. Beginning with the earliest planning work in 2007, those who structured the Phoenix project ignored the software industry's agile and iterative development practices. Our National Finance Committee's 2018 report documented the issue well, but I'll highlight one point: The identified benefits of this investment were minuscule relative to the risks.

When issued in 2011, the \$310-million contract to create one centralized federal pay system was expected to save about \$70 million per year. In isolation, that sounds like a reasonable return, but the enormous project was destined for failure when you consider the complexity and risk. At the time, Canada had 290,000 federal employees governed by 105 collective agreements with more than 80,000 different pay rules, and a total payroll of \$22 billion per year. Experts report that if Phoenix had been broken into component pieces, with each being robustly tested and systematically scaled, the resulting problems would have been avoided.

I think the lessons of Phoenix have been learned. Consider the remarkable speed in which the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, or CERB, was designed, implemented and systematically scaled out to Canadians in April 2020 — at a time of enormous crisis in our country. It wasn't perfect, but it indicates that there are both leaders and practices within the public service that know how to avoid past mistakes and design new platforms.

In recent years, ownership of and responsibility for digital transformation has bounced between departments almost like it's being shunned. Clearly defining who has responsibility, authority and the resources to deliver digital government services to citizens is crucial to making progress.

Colleagues, to summarize, we need to prioritize end-to-end digitization of convenient and cost-efficient government services over the slower and more costly analog, paper and people-based services.

Success depends on increasing transparency — not just related to costs, but also to the savings and quantified improvements in service delivery. It depends on prioritizing best practices over past practices by enabling legislative, regulatory and policy changes necessary for ensuring that government services become citizen-centric. It depends on becoming comfortable with iterating our progress, learning from both successes and mistakes. Finally, it depends on empowering those ministers and public servants who are determined to transform the citizen experience.

Let me finish where I started: To be credible and trusted, governments need to meet citizens where they are — not where they were. This requires governments to deliver a level of convenience and service that citizens and businesses have grown to expect in our increasingly digital world.

Colleagues, I invite you to speak on this motion, and I ask for your support on this motion when it comes time for a vote. My hope is that we help empower the dedicated and talented public servants who desperately want to make this change, with the political backing that they need.

Thank you, colleagues.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator Miville-Dechéne, there are only 35 seconds left. Did you want to ask a question?

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechéne: Senator Deacon, would you mind answering a question?

[*English*]

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator Deacon, in order to answer the question, are you asking for leave for five more minutes?

Senator C. Deacon: Yes, please.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Yes.

An Hon. Senator: No.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Leave is not granted.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY INTERESTS AND ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Peter M. Boehm, pursuant to notice of June 20, 2023, moved:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade be authorized to examine and report on Canada's interests and engagement in Africa, and other related matters;

That the committee submit its final report no later than December 31, 2024;

That the committee have permission, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit reports on this study with the Clerk of the Senate if the Senate is not then sitting, and that the reports be deemed to have been tabled in the Senate; and

That the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings for 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

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

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for Senator Boehm, if he would take it.

Senator Boehm: Of course.

Senator Plett: Senator Boehm, many of us fondly remember Senator Fraser in this chamber — a good Liberal senator. I struggle with the “good Liberal,” but, nevertheless, I fondly remember her and miss her. She was always concerned about the finances. Again, it’s surprising, given her Liberal leanings. She always asked, “What is the financial impact? Is there travel involved in this?”

If you could, please give us an idea of what the committee is planning, whether there’s an African trip involved in this, or the kind of money involved. Thank you.

Senator Boehm: Thank you, senator. The committee will meet and determine what it should do. The plan is as sketched out in the language of the motion — to look at all aspects — and I imagine that as we discuss the aspects, we would look at all options, including whether travel might be required or not.

I would only add that this committee has not travelled very much. It’s undertaken the recent travel to Washington in the pursuit of a study last December, and more recently to Europe. Before that, the last time the committee travelled was before I joined the Senate, so it was in 2017. I don’t think ruling out travel is the way to go. Perhaps looking at it in the context of whether and how it makes sense, we will be looking at that. But there is no decision. If I could only add that, on our last travel — as you will recall, senator, with the guidance of the Subcommittee on Senate Estimates and Committee Budgets and the Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration Committee — we reduced the number of senators and we all flew economy class on that trip. We are mindful of costs, and we are mindful of whether this would be a necessity or not. Thank you for the question.

• (1600)

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

[Senator Boehm]

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO EXTEND DATE OF FINAL REPORT ON STUDY OF THE STATUS OF SOIL HEALTH

Hon. Robert Black, pursuant to notice of September 20, 2023, moved:

That, notwithstanding the order of the Senate adopted on Tuesday, April 26, 2022, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry in relation to its study on the status of soil health in Canada be extended from December 31, 2023 to December 31, 2024; and

That the committee be permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit with the Clerk of the Senate its report relating to this study, if the Senate is not then sitting, and that the report be deemed to have been tabled in the Senate.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO EXTEND DATE OF FINAL REPORT ON STUDY OF ISSUES RELATING TO AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Hon. Robert Black, pursuant to notice of September 27, 2023, moved:

That, notwithstanding the order of the Senate adopted on Thursday, February 10, 2022, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry in relation to its study on such issues as may arise from time to time relating to agriculture and forestry be extended from December 31, 2023 to December 31, 2025; and

That the committee be permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit reports on this study with the Clerk of the Senate if the Senate is not then sitting, and that the reports be deemed to have been tabled in the Senate.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

*(At 4:03 p.m., the Senate was continued until Tuesday,
October 3, 2023, at 2 p.m.)*

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