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The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, October 18, 2023

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

THE LATE HONOURABLE JAMES BARTLEMAN, O.C.

Hon. Gwen Boniface: Honourable senators, on August 14 we lost a great Canadian. The Honourable James Bartleman lived an extraordinary life, which began in my home region. He was born in Orillia and was a member of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation.

He spent his formative years in Port Carling, in the Muskoka Lakes region. His Honour benefited from the love and attention of his parents, who made sure their children were proud of their heritage and valued education.

A part-time job as a teenager cutting grass resulted in an unlikely friendship between him and a seasonal resident, who not only encouraged but subsidized his university education. That hand-up led him on an inspiring 35-year path of public service and advocacy.

James Bartleman's impressive career began at Foreign Affairs, where he held diplomatic posts in the EU, NATO, Israel and Cuba. He also served as High Commissioner to South Africa and Australia and made history when he was named Ontario's first Indigenous Lieutenant Governor.

As viceroy, he used the platform to champion Indigenous child literacy. I had the privilege to participate in one of his initiatives: a simple idea to collect donated books and provide them to remote First Nations communities. Well, 2 million books found their way to children in Ontario, Quebec and Nunavut.

His Honour also shone a light on mental health at a time when most suffered in silence. He bravely spoke out about his depression and PTSD, which were brought on by a brutal attack he endured while serving Canada in South Africa. Those efforts to reduce the stigma were recognized when he received the Dr. Hugh Lafave and the Courage To Come Back Awards.

James Bartleman received many other accolades including 13 honorary degrees and the National Aboriginal Achievement Award in Public Service. He was also named an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Despite all of that, he never strayed from his roots and the values his parents cherished. Chief of the Rama First Nation Ted Williams reflected:

He was a man of the highest integrity, he was a champion for the underprivileged and he was an inspiration for the First Nation community.

That alone is a legacy worth celebrating.

Please join me in sending condolences to his wife, Marie-Jeanne; and his children, Anne-Pascale, Laurent and Alain.

Meegwetch, thank you.

PERSONS DAY

Hon. Judy A. White: Honourable senators, I rise today to recognize the ninety-fourth anniversary of Persons Day in Canada, in which we are celebrating the landmark decision that allowed women increased participation in public and political life, including the right to serve as senators.

Today we honour the determination of the "Famous Five," whose statues are fittingly standing beside the Senate of Canada Building. The Famous Five consisted of Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby and Henrietta Muir Edwards. They were accomplished legal experts, politicians and activists from Alberta.

In 1927, they asked the Supreme Court of Canada to answer a simple but essential question: "Does the word 'Person' in section 24 of the *British North America Act* . . . include female persons?"

After five weeks of debate, the Supreme Court decided that the word "person" did not include women.

Despite this setback, the Famous Five were not deterred. They took their case to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council of Great Britain, which was then Canada's highest Court of Appeal.

In 1929, the court ruled that:

The exclusion of women from all public offices is a relic of days more barbarous than ours. And to those who would ask why the word "person" should include females, the obvious answer is, why should it not?

In addition to long-term implications, this decision had immediate impact, as Cairine Wilson became Canada's first female senator, appointed just four months later. I'm happy to say that we have come a long way since then, as we sit in a gender-equal Senate.

I would be remiss, though, if I didn't note that this court ruling, although historic in advancing women's rights, excluded many, such as Indigenous and racialized women.

Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the subsequent generations of women who continued the fight of equality, respect and justice in Canada, while reminding ourselves that this work remains unfinished.

Accordingly, let me take this opportunity to highlight the Governor General's Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case, established in 1979 to continue recognizing individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the goal of equality for women, gender-diverse people and girls in Canada. Every year, several recipients are chosen from across the country, from a multitude of disciplines, and celebrated for their dedication to equality in this country. I offer heartfelt congratulations to this year's representatives and thank them for their invaluable contributions.

Wela'liog, thank you.

[*Translation*]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of my son, Tristan Fréchette.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Maxime Langlois. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator Boisvenu.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

BOLO PROGRAM

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Honourable senators, almost a decade ago, a security company invited me to participate in a consultation on the creation of an organization aimed at protecting the public from dangerous criminals. The Bolo Program was subsequently created in 2018.

The Bolo Program is an unprecedented initiative that encourages citizens to be on the lookout for Canada's most wanted. In fact, that is what Bolo stands for: "Be On The Lookout."

Created in 2018, Bolo amplifies priority wanted notices from police services across the country. We are talking about individuals wanted for the most serious crimes like murder, attempted murder and procuring. Even after the courts issue Canada-wide arrest warrants, these suspects try to elude the authorities in order to escape from our justice system and, as is all too often the case, to make additional victims.

In collaboration with police services and Crime Stoppers, Bolo launches amplification campaigns for priority wanted notices. By any means necessary, Bolo strives to make sure that as many citizens as possible are on the lookout for these fugitives and can report them to the authorities. Bolo never interferes with police investigations.

Bolo also offers significant rewards of up to \$250,000 to encourage citizens to be especially vigilant and submit tips to the authorities. Bolo campaigns don't cost Canadian taxpayers a dime. The program is the main activity of the private foundation of Stéphan Crétier and his wife. Mr. Crétier is the founding president of well-known international security firm Garda. He is passionate about security and wanted to give back to communities by making them safer.

• (1410)

Since 2018, Bolo campaigns have put the faces of 57 dangerous fugitives in the spotlight, racking up close to 350 million impressions among Canadians across the country. The program's amplification campaigns have generated almost 1,000 tips to police services, enabling them to advance their investigations and, most importantly, apprehend 19 of these dangerous fugitives.

Recently, the Bolo program was awarded the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police's 2023 Policing Partnership Award.

Maxime Langlois has been in charge of the Bolo program since its inception. Maxime has a background working for organizations such as the United Nations and INTERPOL, the International Criminal Police Organization, and has built partnerships with the largest police services and Crime Stoppers programs in the country to make our communities safer.

Honourable senators, please join me in congratulating the Stéphan Crétier Foundation for its strong sense of social engagement and for this well-deserved recognition of the Bolo program's undeniable success.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[*English*]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of participants of the #LeadLikeAGirl program by Developing Young Leaders of Tomorrow, Today. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Jaffer.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

PUBLIC LIBRARIES ACROSS CANADA

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, I rise today in the Senate Chamber to speak about a valuable part of many Canadian communities: our libraries.

Here, in Ontario, Public Library Week is October 16 to 20, and I am honoured to rise today to speak on the importance of our libraries.

For generations, libraries have served as rural hubs for access to information and technology. In modern times, they are places for gathering by bringing people together to educate, to inform and to grow our abilities — not just as individuals, but as a collective.

I'm proud to continue to support rural communities here — in the Red Chamber — and a significant part of that is supporting the institutions that connect us all.

Libraries continue to work diligently to support Canadians from all walks of life. They teach us, foster community engagement and provide access to the greater world around us. I think it's important, colleagues, that we remain diligent in our support of these valuable gathering places.

According to the provincial pre-budget submission by the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and the Ontario Library Association, many rural locations struggle to pay for or are unable to afford many high-quality resources available in larger cities. This particularly affects those in smaller, rural, remote and First Nation communities.

People living in communities of less than 5,000 have access to less than half the e-books and less than one third of the online databases as those living in areas like Toronto, Ottawa or Montreal — despite accessing them twice as often per capita as people in large urban communities.

For nearly 25 years, funding to libraries at the provincial level has nearly stagnated, creating a reliance on federal and municipal funding in the face of increasing costs and inflation.

We must continue to advocate for the maintenance and growth of these valuable spaces that guarantee every Canadian access to information, knowledge and community engagement.

I thank our many librarians throughout Ontario, and from coast to coast to coast, for their diligent work supporting Canadians — offering valuable learning opportunities and support for people throughout this country.

I hope that my honourable colleagues will join me in celebrating the many benefits that libraries give to Canadians, especially those in rural communities, and that here — in the Red Chamber — we can continue to speak about the value of these highly regarded institutions.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Larry Cerqua, Chair of the Canadian Real Estate Association. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator Oh.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

ROMÉO SAVOIE, C.M.

Hon. René Cormier: Colleagues, Acadia and Canada have lost one of their greatest artists — a pioneer of modern art and a visionary in contemporary art — the architect, poet and painter Roméo Savoie. For over 60 years, this remarkable artist drew inspiration from these three professions to create a masterful body of work.

Born in Moncton, Roméo Savoie worked as an architect from 1959 to 1970, designing and building 50 or so landmark buildings in New Brunswick.

He left that profession in 1976 to devote himself to his artistic and literary endeavours. He would go on to produce more than 4,000 paintings and present roughly 100 exhibitions over more than half a century, in addition to publishing five collections of poetry that undeniably paved the way for generations of artists.

Looking at his work, both visual and literary, we appreciate its universal appeal, while recognizing that Roméo Savoie remained deeply attached to his Acadian culture. His predilection for abstract painting forces the viewer to confront his works head-on, to dialogue with them, and to celebrate them for the mysteries they contain.

For this creator, art is a process by which the artist transforms himself and transfers the knowledge he gains from that experience to his work. His existential quest is reflected not only in his painting but also in his writing. It is easy to see that his relationship with his art is a life lesson for everyone who knew him.

Reflecting on his artistic process, he once said:

Stop and look at a particular thing and try to understand the meaning of beauty, the meaning of a flower, a twig, a cloud, you see. Spend time doing that, and you will understand the meaning of life a little better.

Roméo Savoie received numerous accolades, including the Order of Canada. Today, his work can be found in the art banks of the Canada Council for the Arts and the New Brunswick Arts Board, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris, and the collections of many universities and banks.

Thanks to the Canada Council Art Bank, I have the great pleasure to have in my Senate office in East Block his painting *Venezia*, a work as enigmatic, luminous and profound as Venice, the city that inspired it.

Speaking about his occupation, Roméo Savoie once said:

Being in the world of creation, creating something for others, what we call beauty, is a gift that I received from somewhere.

It is our turn, dear Roméo, to recognize one of the magnificent gifts that life gave us, and that is you, your talent, your work, your unwavering commitment to art, and your immeasurable love for Acadia. Today, Canada is richer thanks to your time on this earth.

Rest in peace, dear friend.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[*English*]

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Trevor Reed, Professor of Law at Arizona State University. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator Boyer.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

THE HONOURABLE LARRY W. SMITH

Hon. Percy Mockler: Honourable senators, I rise today to call attention to the outstanding contribution of someone who sits among us today, someone who is a real team player and a great Canadian.

The word “team” is very apt, because Senator Larry Smith has always been a standout member of the teams he has belonged to throughout his professional career, across the country, whether with the Montreal Alouettes or the Canadian Football League.

At a recent game in Montreal, the Alouettes paid him a glowing tribute as a new inductee in the builder category of the Canadian Football Hall of Fame, class of 2023.

As you may recall, about 50 years ago, our friend Senator Smith hoisted the Grey Cup, a feat he had the pleasure of repeating a few years later.

His leadership role in this sport clearly shows that Senator Smith is a real builder and a great proponent of professional football in his city, Montreal, in his province and in his country, Canada. Through his sport, he has set an example for others to follow.

• (1420)

It is undeniable: Senator Smith has always taken our youth’s athletic and personal development to heart. His primary goal is to promote team spirit and educational success for our young people. They needed him then, but believe me, we still need people like Larry Smith to motivate our youth.

I witnessed this first-hand as a minister in Bernard Lord’s government in New Brunswick. I saw Senator Smith’s impact and influence. He was instrumental in organizing and securing the 2003 Canada Winter Games, held in two northern New Brunswick cities: Bathurst and Campbellton. I can attest that this event had a major impact on northern New Brunswick and on young New Brunswickers as well.

[*English*]

He has always demonstrated passion and focus on the New Brunswick youth. I had the honour to serve in this Senate under his leadership. In my book, Senator Smith, you represent friendship and commitment.

As I conclude, I would be remiss not to recognize his outstanding, successful financial campaign as the chairman of the Old Brewery Mission in Montreal in 2003 to 2004. Senator Smith’s mission was — and still is — to end the cycle of homelessness, just like the Old Brewery Mission in Montreal.

[*Translation*]

Honourable senators, I would like to recognize our friend, Senator Larry Smith, for his legacy and for the mark he has left on the history of Canadian football. As we say in Acadia, *vous avez gagné vos épaulettes* — you’ve earned your stripes.

Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AFFECT THURSDAY SITTINGS FOR REMAINDER OF CURRENT SESSION

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

That, for the remainder of the current session and notwithstanding any provision of the Rules, when the Senate sits on a Thursday, it stand adjourned at the later of 6 p.m. or the end of Government Business, as if that time were, for all purposes, the ordinary time of adjournment provided for in rule 3-4.

[English]

ADJOURNMENT

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, October 24, 2023, at 2 p.m.

[Translation]

QUESTION PERIOD

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on December 7, 2021, to receive a Minister of the Crown, the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement, appeared before honourable senators during Question Period.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, today we have with us for Question Period the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement. On behalf of all senators, I welcome the minister.

Honourable senators, let me remind you that during Question Period with a minister the initial question is limited to 60 seconds, and the initial answer to 90 seconds, followed by one supplementary question of at most 45 seconds and an answer of 45 seconds. The reading clerk will stand 10 seconds before these times expire. Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate, senators do not need to stand. Question Period will last 64 minutes.

[English]

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

ARRIVECAN APPLICATION

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Minister Duclos, the ArriveCAN app has been a fiasco from the start, and the more we learn about it, the worse it gets. Your government used ArriveCAN to divide and punish Canadians needlessly. It caused chaos at the borders. The cost to taxpayers spiralled from \$80,000 to at least \$54 million, minister. The RCMP is now investigating the shady contracts behind ArriveCAN. The Trudeau government hid this fact from the Auditor General and

from all Canadians. The only reason we know about the police involvement is because of a whistle-blower to *The Globe and Mail*.

Why was the RCMP investigation hidden, minister? What is the total amount that this app has cost Canadians? How much, minister?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Madam Chair, I would like to begin by congratulating you on your new role as Speaker of the Senate, as a Franco-Manitoban. We are proud that you are the Speaker of the Senate, and we look forward to collaborating with you over the coming months to ensure the Senate's full cooperation and ability to work in service of Canadians.

[English]

Regarding the question that you asked, let me expand the scope a bit. Let us remember the importance of having fought so hard for the health and safety of Canadians during a time in which we were facing the largest public health emergency of over a century, as well as the biggest economic crisis since the 1930s. We had to invest significant resources in order to, in part, make sure that Canadians and other people who needed to come into Canada for essential reasons — in many cases, to deliver food, medicine and the types of goods that Canadians depended on — could travel safely and conveniently through the border. We did that mindful of the fact that tens of thousands of lives had been saved because of the efforts of the Canadian government — and, more importantly, because of the efforts and the commitment of Canadians.

Senator Plett: Eight years of Justin Trudeau — not worth the cost. “How much?” was my question, minister. Last week, just as the Auditor General was beginning her testimony before a House of Commons committee regarding ArriveCAN, Liberal and NDP coalition MPs voted to shut it down. Minister, who gave the order to shut down the meeting? Was it you? Were you or your office involved in this direction? What is your government so desperate to hide, minister? What are you hiding?

Mr. Duclos: I appreciate and value the question very much. I welcome some of the key words that you mentioned: the cost and the opportunity. The cost in lives — if not having fought for Canadians — would have been hundreds of thousands more people dying from the pandemic.

• (1430)

The economic cost would have been billions of dollars, with hundreds of thousands of additional jobs lost because of inaction. It's true — as you're suggesting — that, had we been governed at that time by a Conservative government, things would have been very different. Hundreds of thousands more people would have died, as I just said, with billions more in economic costs, but that was not the situation. We invested in Canadians, supported them and had full confidence in their ability to be vaccinated and follow public health advice.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Welcome, minister. My question is also on “ArriveScam.” It’s the same one I asked your colleague Senator Gold last week, but I’m hoping to get a somewhat more relevant answer from you. “ArriveScam” saw Canadians unlawfully detained and unconstitutionally fined as much as \$8,500, then threatened with more fines — as much as \$750,000 — if caught breaking quarantine. It was bad enough when we thought these fines were paying for your government’s complete failure in awarding this outrageous \$54-million-plus contract, but, minister, what assurances can you give me that Canadians weren’t being unlawfully detained and forced to pay these outrageous fines so that friends of Liberal insiders could line their pockets? Will your government do the right thing, minister, and please cancel the outstanding fines associated with this fraudulent app that many thousands of Canadians are saddled with?

Mr. Duclos: I take objection with the word “failure.” I think most Canadians listening to us today wouldn’t consider their work and efforts, and the efforts of the federal government, to have been a failure. The estimates from experts suggest that had we not done anything, 700,000 people would have died of COVID-19; instead, the actual death toll is 70,000. Estimates suggest that had we not achieved the highest vaccination rate of all comparable countries — and done so the fastest — we would have lost a billion dollars to economic costs every day from additional delay.

I’m not going to insist on that because these are figures that Canadians understand well. When we speak about failures, I think we have to be honest and modest at the same time. Honest about the tremendous challenges that Canadians face and modest in the sense that, yes, the efforts of the Canadian government made a big difference; but more importantly, it was the faith, support and hard work of all Canadians that made the biggest difference in these terrible times.

Senator Housakos: Based on the polling of Canadians, they seem to think that your government has been a monumental failure.

Minister Duclos, as my colleague Senator Plett mentioned, there is now an RCMP investigation into “ArriveScam” involving very serious allegations of forgery of documents, such as CVs and invoices. Minister, at a time when we’ve seen an unprecedented increase of more than 30% in government outsourcing of contracts, what assurances do Canadians have that the minimum due diligence is being exercised? Who is responsible for something as simple as verifying CVs and conducting proper reference checks? If we can’t have confidence that’s being done, minister, how can we have confidence that contracts are being awarded properly?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: You’re absolutely right about how important confidence is, and that’s why the skilled and experienced public servants at the Canada Border Services Agency, the CBSA, are currently reviewing that contract. It was a complex contract. It includes several dozen contracts and it was complex for all kinds of reasons. Many of those contracts had

nothing to do with developing the software; they were for providing advice to public servants or Canadians. We know that 125,000 Canadians had to cross the border every day, and many of them were people who had to bring prescription drugs, food and essential goods into the country. The CBSA’s experts are currently reviewing many components of that contract, and we have confidence in them.

FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Minister Duclos, thank you for being with us today. I’d like to explore a topic I first raised with you in December 2020, when you appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance.

It has to do with the government’s real estate portfolio and its commitment to advancing the Office Long Term Plan, or OLTP. You’ve been tasked once again with studying this issue.

I know the Government of Canada wants to offer greater flexibility and agility by providing options for hybrid work environments that meet operational requirements and promote productivity. That’s a big mission to manage when you’re also looking to reduce the government’s real estate footprint. Are you in a position to provide us with an update on this matter?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you very much. This gives me the opportunity to address a very important issue that many Canadians are concerned about. We’re in the midst of a housing crisis, similar to ones we’ve seen in other periods of Canadian history, including when veterans returned after the Second World War and following the baby boom in the early 1960s. We need to do everything we can to address it, and that includes, as you mentioned, making federal land or buildings available to Canadians, municipalities and non-profit organizations.

One way to do this is through the Federal Lands Initiative, which represents roughly \$200 million from 2017 to 2026. So far, about half of that amount has already been committed for a total of 3,950 units that are completed, soon to be completed or under construction. About half of those units are affordable housing that will go to families, seniors or individuals in need of safe, affordable housing.

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for the answer.

Last week, public servants from your department appeared before our committee, and we discussed the real estate portfolio. We learned that you want to accelerate your plan so that it’s carried out over 10 years rather than 25. They explained that there are many issues to consider. It’s not as easy or as cheap as people think to convert office space.

Once the government’s real property needs have been carefully assessed, do you think we’ll be able to sell some buildings and convert others into affordable housing?

Mr. Duclos: Thank you. The answer is yes on both counts. The first “yes” is because we have already been doing that for a few years, and the second “yes” is because we need to do it faster. To summarize, in order to make federal land and buildings available more quickly, we need to deal with challenges

primarily involving coordination between departments. Departments control 75% of federal buildings and land, and only about a quarter of those fall under my department's jurisdiction.

Second, if we want to make this land and these buildings available more quickly than municipal bylaws or tools allow, as is the case here in Ottawa, then we need to work closely with the municipalities.

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

NATIONAL SHIPBUILDING STRATEGY

Hon. Éric Forest: Welcome to the Senate, minister. In April 2023, the injustice done to workers in the Quebec City area was redressed when the government announced that Davie would be added to the National Shipbuilding Strategy.

Of the \$840 million announced to modernize the Davie shipyard, \$519.2 million came from the Government of Quebec and \$320 million came directly from Davie itself. Ottawa did not contribute a single penny. A spokesperson for Public Services and Procurement Canada was quoted in *Le Journal de Montréal* as saying:

... all of the Government of Canada's strategic partners in the National Shipbuilding Strategy (NSS) must self-finance the infrastructure investments required to establish the capacity to build the ships included in their work package.

However, on August 9, the government announced that it would be giving Irving Shipbuilding Inc. \$463 million to expand and modify its shipyard.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: The fact that this question comes from you is very significant, since you, along with many others, worked on getting Davie added to the National Shipbuilding Strategy. Many people know that and are grateful to you.

That being said, over the next few years, a major national maritime hub will be established in the Quebec City area. This hub will have a considerable impact from both a technological and a purely industrial standpoint. It will change the lives of tens of thousands of workers and give contracts to about 1,300 service providers. We know that similar shipbuilders, such as Irving and Seaspan, faced some issues in the early 2010s. Every one of them, including Davie, has had to pay for their technology and production upgrades themselves. That's what happened in the other provinces, with support from the provincial governments of Nova Scotia and British Columbia. As you pointed out, that's what happened in Quebec in the spring. The assistance provided to Irving Shipbuilding a few months ago was, as you and we both noted, targeted funding to build combat ships in a way that wasn't foreseen in the early 2010s. It's a necessary improvement to reduce costs and delays for the incredibly difficult construction of those 15 combat ships.

• (1440)

Senator Forest: Thank you.

[Mr. Duclos]

All things considered, it's hard to argue that there's a level playing field for Davie workers, given that Davie itself is paying for its modernization with no help from Ottawa and that a lot of money went to Irving Shipbuilding.

Mr. Duclos: We're talking about two different things. One is upgrading and the other is support that had to be provided because National Defence's requirements changed between the early 2010s and now. Davie's upgrades, like those of the other two shipyards, were paid for independently by the shipbuilders themselves in every case, with support from the three provincial governments. That support is necessary because National Defence changed its parameters in recent years, and the goal of that funding is to ensure the ships can be built quickly and efficiently.

AWARDING OF CONTRACTS

Hon. Jim Quinn: Thank you for joining us this afternoon, Mr. Duclos.

[English]

When bidders respond to tender requests, they respond to technical and other requirements as outlined in the tender and submit their cost for delivery of a service and a product. Our process is such that the lowest qualified bid wins the contract. However, far too often the qualified bid with the lowest price has been underbid to the point that "extras" or "work arisings" result in a final price that far exceeds the price submitted in the bid. What steps can the government take to reduce the risk associated with underbidding?

Mr. Duclos: I will answer in two ways. First, the importance of making sure the parameters of these contracts are monitored and enforced following their adjudication, and the second piece is about the fact that more and more there are parameters in the procurement process that extend beyond the price. These parameters also include the importance of supporting a greater diversity of suppliers, such as Indigenous-owned or -led businesses, businesses owned or led by communities, by women, by younger entrepreneurs, and also, obviously, making sure that our procurement process is supportive of the importance of protecting the environment and the health of Canadians.

If I can go back briefly — because I know time is always too short — to your first question on the integrity of the process, I can assure you that it is my responsibility and the responsibility of my officials to make sure that when a contract is awarded, the requirements that the businesses signing those contracts accept are followed up on and enforced if it is necessary to enforce them.

Senator Quinn: Thank you, minister. As someone who has been involved in many contracts in government, I'll come back to examples in other jurisdictions where the lowest bidder and highest bidder are put aside, they look at the average, and anybody that is qualified can be awarded the contract at the average or below.

Can the government not look at other jurisdictions to see how they reduced the risk of underbidding in order to win the contract and then catching up with extras and work arisings? It's a very specific question.

Mr. Duclos: That is a very important point and suggestion. In fact, it's linked to a recent investment of about \$87 million for the modernization of the procurement process to use tools, some of which you're alluding to, that are now available through better access to information, better sharing of information and better use of that information to enforce contracts in a manner that needs to be done. This is, obviously, something that wasn't possible just a few years ago without the technological and informational development that we've seen in the recent decades, but it's more than that. It's also making sure that those contracts are fulfilled and support other requirements that are now demanded for social and environmental reasons.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Amina Gerba: Welcome to the Senate, Minister Duclos.

Studies have shown that Black entrepreneurs have to overcome a large number of obstacles and face systemic discrimination when developing a business venture.

One of the main obstacles they face is access to the federal public procurement process. Having been an entrepreneur myself for two decades, I've seen how important it is to have access to the public market. In particular, we know that public procurement can make the difference between staying small and going multinational.

Minister, your department has put initiatives in place to diversify its suppliers. Can you tell us what has been done specifically to ensure that Black entrepreneurs have access to government contracts?

Mr. Duclos: Thank you very much, Senator Gerba. This gives me the opportunity to complete my answer to the previous question posed by another senator.

To answer quickly, you seem to be familiar with the plan to increase the diversity of supply chains in Canada. This plan was launched about two years ago, and one of its sub-components focuses on support for businesses owned or managed by Black entrepreneurs in this country. The plan also includes a pilot project through which a dozen or so procurement opportunities have already been created.

As you correctly stated, this initiative is designed not only to help these entrepreneurs participate fully in growing the economy, in a dynamic perspective that prepares them for larger contracts down the road, but it also brings greater competition to the procurement process, which you alluded to earlier. The more competition there is, the more diversity we have among suppliers. The better the government's terms of reference are, the higher the quality of the services offered to Canadians will be.

Senator Gerba: Thank you, minister.

The government set a mandatory minimum 5% Indigenous procurement target.

Are you considering a similar target for Black-owned businesses?

Mr. Duclos: That is a very good question. You correctly referred to the 5% target for contracts offered to Indigenous-owned or -led businesses. We know that Indigenous Canadians make up about 5% of Canada's population and that they are often underemployed. They also often live in areas where considerable investments are needed to improve the quality of life of the Canadians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who live there. We are inching closer to that target. Official numbers will be out in early 2024, and we will see what they look like. We might extend these targets to other groups who are too often excluded from procurement processes.

ICEBREAKER FLEET

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Welcome, minister.

The response that I received recently from your government regarding the procurement of icebreakers confirms that it is now practically impossible for the Trudeau government to meet its objective of getting a single polar icebreaker in service by 2030.

Your government told me that contract negotiations have not even begun yet, whether it be with Davie or Vancouver.

Why did your government not place any real importance on your own deadline of 2030, and why didn't it rigorously and diligently take the necessary steps to meet that objective?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you. I am going to both correct and confirm what you said.

It is incorrect to say that no action has been taken and that no contract has been entered into or discussed with Seaspan, which has been part of the strategy since 2011.

• (1450)

I would be pleased to give you more information about the positive progress being made at this shipyard on the construction of the polar icebreaker.

As for the Davie shipyard, we are obviously talking longer term because it was unfairly and inappropriately excluded from the first National Shipbuilding Strategy in 2011 by the government of the day. Everyone in Quebec and elsewhere in the country is delighted that this mistake was corrected a few months ago. Naturally, we have to work with the shipyard in its current condition, after it was excluded from the first strategy.

We are working very well with the Davie shipyard. Its staff are dynamic and their suppliers' association is amazing. It travels across the country and around the globe promoting the importance of investing in Quebec City, in Quebec and in Canada, for projects like the construction of the icebreaker they will eventually receive.

Senator Boisvenu: What is the budget for purchasing this polar icebreaker?

Mr. Duclos: The current budgets for both are estimates. Obviously, things are a little further ahead at the Seaspan shipyard than at the Davie shipyard. You would have to invite the minister responsible for the Canadian Coast Guard to provide more details once they become available.

[English]

REHABILITATION OF 24 SUSSEX DRIVE

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Minister, in May, the Trudeau government said it would finally bring forward its plan — by this fall — on the future of 24 Sussex Drive. Today is October 18, and we have still not seen this plan.

In February, your department provided me with a written answer which shows that since 2016, your government has spent over \$800,000 of taxpayers' money trying to figure out what to do with 24 Sussex Drive. Eight long years, with over \$800,000 spent, and there's still no plan, minister.

Are you going to bring one forward this fall, as promised? If not, are you just going to keep spending taxpayers' money without making a decision?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: First, in regard to the timeline, my predecessor — whom you would know — did say that we are looking forward to the fall to provide Canadians, and the Senate indirectly, with an update on what the plan is for official residences, including the official residence of the Prime Minister.

Second, 24 Sussex Drive is currently being worked on. Asbestos is being removed, and the integrity of the building is being protected. Whatever the final decision may be, the building will be there. It won't be in its current shape because it's not safe — for the reasons that I just mentioned — but it will be available for the use that Canadians will want to make of it.

Senator Plett: Again, eight years of Justin Trudeau — just not worth the cost.

Canadians are having trouble paying their mortgage and keeping a roof over their heads. Yet, your government has taken all the time and money in the world to make a decision on 24 Sussex Drive, and still hasn't done so. It's easy to do when you have unlimited taxpayers' dollars at your disposal — isn't it, minister?

What is the current total amount that you've spent to come up with a plan? I would suspect it's more than \$800,000 by now, minister. What is it? How much?

Mr. Duclos: I just spoke to the work that is being done on 24 Sussex Drive. I also spoke about the timeline, as we've already mentioned.

May I also briefly speak to the National Housing Strategy which is, perhaps, more relevant to the majority of Canadians. This is a strategy that has helped over 2 million Canadians since it was put into place in 2017. It is the first-ever national housing strategy — one for which Canadians have been waiting a long time.

Almost 120,000 new units have been built, and more than that amount have been renovated to help support community housing tenants — in the order of tens of thousands of people — who otherwise would not, in 2023, be able to receive support from the federal government.

PROCUREMENT PROCESS

Hon. Ratna Omidvar: Thank you for being with us, minister.

In 2018 to 2019, I was the Senate sponsor of Bill C-344, which amended the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act, and required your department to consider the provision of community benefits in its procurement processes: jobs, business opportunities, et cetera. The bill fell off the Order Paper because the election was called in 2019. Subsequently, then-Minister of Public Services and Procurement Carla Qualtrough wrote to me saying that, notwithstanding, she would consider a policy ensuring that public benefits were considered in the procurement process.

Can you give me an update on this particular aspect of procurement?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you again for that great question.

In regard to community benefits, they include both the social and environmental benefits of using procurement as an important public policy tool.

In regard to social benefits, we've already spoken about the importance of supporting various groups whose relative exclusion in the procurement process harms Canadians who are from those groups, but it is also harmful to the overall competitiveness of procurement processes.

When more providers and suppliers are included — including women, Indigenous Canadians and Black-owned or Black-led businesses — everyone benefits. That is the first piece, and the second piece is green procurement.

This is a good statistic: Between 2005 and 2023, investments in properties and federally-owned buildings decreased the level of greenhouse gas, or GHG, emissions by 60%. Now, in 2023, we have 60% less GHG emissions than in 2005 because of the non-economic impact of investments in our communities, so these are important aspects as well.

Senator Omidvar: Thank you, minister. Am I hearing you say that you are actively considering community benefits in the awarding of government procurement programs?

Mr. Duclos: The answer is yes. An example of that is the 5% target that all departments, including my department, must achieve when it comes to supporting Indigenous-led or Indigenous-owned businesses.

[Translation]

AWARDING OF CONTRACTS

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechéne: Hello and thank you for being here with us, minister.

Government procurement has reached nearly \$22 billion a year. That is a lot of money. Some companies that are making efforts to incorporate recycled items and, more generally, to accelerate the transition to a circular economy are complaining that your procurement process doesn't include incentives for this.

I know that the government has a policy on green procurement, but I gather that these criteria are not always enforced. Is that right? Is it just one criterion among hundreds of others, or is it a priority?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you for the question, senator.

The answer is yes and no. It is indeed an important criterion, but it's not the only one. Among all the criteria that public servants and the people managing these contracts have to take into account, there are others as well. The environmental impact of our procurement process is key — increasingly so — because we know that we can't keep going in the same direction, from an environmental point of view, because we will hit a wall. We saw the preliminary impact over the past few months in Canada and Quebec.

However, there are other important criteria, such as social inclusion, social participation and obviously efficiency, which, as I was saying, is sometimes improved and supported by other criteria. Again, the social inclusion criterion broadens participation in the procurement process. It supports greater competition in these processes, which means better results for the Canadian government and for Canadians.

Senator Miville-Dechéne: I understand what you're saying, but there is a policy. A future government could repeal or modify that environmental policy.

My question is, do you think these criteria on the environment and the circular economy should be enshrined in the Financial Administration Act to make them a priority — a real priority — and a requirement in government procurement?

Mr. Duclos: That is a very interesting suggestion, but I would need to discuss it with the Minister of Finance, who is likely the one responsible for this legislation.

• (1500)

As you pointed out, this way of dealing with procurement processes is based on regulations or policies. In both cases, it's easy to make changes. It is easy for future governments to change policies. If we want to ensure that the way we're currently

addressing Canadians' environmental concerns will continue in the future, it might be worth considering other ways of doing things.

APPROPRIATION OF LAND

Hon. Jean-Guy Dagenais: Hello, minister. In 2020, Public Services and Procurement Canada acquired a parking lot in Old Montreal to build a new building for the Federal Court and its prosecutors. That lot cost \$7 million for 150,000 square feet of office space, plus the construction bill. Can you justify this project to relocate the Federal Court, which is already located in another building in Old Montreal? It certainly doesn't make sense, especially at a time when the President of the Treasury Board is calling for \$15 billion in cuts to government spending.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you, Senator Dagenais. I don't know enough about this issue. It falls more within the purview of my colleague, the Minister of Justice. I could ask him to contact you.

Senator Dagenais: Delays and bureaucracy are two factors that sometimes slow down the procurement of equipment for our Armed Forces. Those delays have cost Canadian taxpayers a fortune since this government came to power. Why doesn't Canada have a procurement department exclusively for Department of Defence requirements, like Britain does, with experts who know what they're doing, instead of sometimes granting contracts to consultants?

Mr. Duclos: Again, thank you for the question. The mandate of Public Services and Procurement Canada, my department, is exactly that. The department was created to make the procurement process easier for the government as a whole. There are people in my department who are experts in military procurement and who work closely with experts at National Defence and suppliers of necessary services. As you correctly suggested, we have to make sure that, in Canada as in the rest of the world, those processes are properly managed and deliver the best results for Canadians while taking into account economic, environmental and social impacts. There may be, as you suggest, better ways to do this, and I'm open to hearing about them.

PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCT

Hon. Andrew Cardozo: Minister, thank you for being with us as the new Minister of Public Services and Procurement. Congratulations on your appointment.

[English]

Through your various portfolios, you have become known as "Mr. Fix It," so I look forward to you being able to fix the issue I want to raise with you. My question is regarding the future of Wellington Street and your responsibilities in the National Capital Region.

There has long been a vision to develop the street into a pedestrian area to enhance the space in front of our important temple of democracy, to turn it into a people friendly plaza that highlights and celebrates our rich history. There is also an important aspect of parliamentary security to making such changes.

The unlawful occupation by the convoy in early 2021 highlighted for us that leaving this space open to cars and trucks was a bad idea, and this highlighted that we badly need to do something positive with this area.

I believe there have been discussions between the Government of Canada and the City of Ottawa —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, senator.

[*English*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you very much. That was a great question, and I would have liked to have listened to it completely. Maybe your second chance will make that possible.

You pointed to the right elements: first, safety; second, the precinct versus the city; and third, the important work with the City of Ottawa.

It has been clear over the last few years — and it is increasingly clear — that the safety of parliamentarians, including senators, must be at the centre of the conversation that we're having with the City of Ottawa on the future of Wellington Street. It is also true that as we see the enhancement and modernization of our parliamentary facilities, we are moving from a precinct to a parliamentary city. That's good news, I think, for most Canadians. We've seen the beneficial outcomes of this in other countries of the world.

Finally, you are quite correct to point out the important relationship that we need to have with the City of Ottawa. I will meet with the mayor quite soon, and I look forward to reporting on the outcome of that meeting.

Senator Cardozo: I still have 45 seconds. I want to suggest a few other ideas to liven up the National Capital Region: create a state-of-the-art science and tech museum downtown; put a portrait gallery in a decommissioned office building; build an arts district and an art studio in the ByWard Market, centred around the National Gallery; and a new graffiti museum.

On 24 Sussex, can you just take that and throw it in with the renovation of Parliament Hill and have the joint all-party committee take care of that, take the politics out of it and make that all happen? Your comments, please.

Mr. Duclos: I think we all value your taking the politics out of such debates. Politics plays an important role in public life, but sometimes it doesn't do such a great job. Taking the politics out of the vision and the actions around the National Capital Region is, I think, an excellent idea.

[Senator Cardozo]

I am looking forward to hearing more from you on that short list of things we can do with our social, physical and historical environment in which we have the fortune of working in almost every day.

REVIEW OF PROCUREMENT

Hon. Rose-May Poirier: Thank you, minister, for being here. Minister, the Trudeau government never proactively disclosed that consulting firm Accenture is running the Canada Emergency Business Account, or CEBA, loan program for small businesses. Accenture received contracts worth at least \$208 million. These contracts were kept from parliamentarians and from the Canadian taxpayers, and were revealed to *The Globe and Mail* through access to information.

As the procurement minister, do you believe this procurement was open and transparent? Could you also tell us the current total of these contracts?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you very much. Your question is both fair and legitimate. I will be glad to come back to you with the details that you are seeking. I don't have these details with me, but I would be glad to do that with the assistance of my officials.

Senator Poirier: Could you also then inquire as to whether there are other contracts like this waiting to be discovered? You can provide assurance to Canadian taxpayers that there are no other contracts also being withheld by your government?

Mr. Duclos: I believe, like most of us, I suppose, that an open and transparent government is fundamental to our democracy and also fundamental to the ability of our governments to do the right thing. Whatever we can do to support your legitimate interests in such contracts and any other ones, we would be glad to do that, and we will be supportive of the work that needs to be done to provide you with accurate and important information.

MANDATE LETTER

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Minister, two years ago, one of your predecessors was tasked in her mandate letter from the Prime Minister with the following: continue the modernization of procurement practices; renew the Coast Guard and navy fleets; ensure the ongoing delivery of defence procurement; resolve outstanding Phoenix pay system issues; rehabilitate 24 Sussex; replace the Alexandra Bridge, plus build an additional crossing on the Ottawa River; ensure a minimum of 5% of the total value of federal contracts for Indigenous businesses.

Minister, you have not received your mandate letter. Is it because it would only be a copy-and-paste of the old one since nothing has been done on the other one since the last election?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you. Your question is, again, fair, and it will require a long answer. Let me, therefore, point to just two things that you briefly mentioned.

The National Shipbuilding Strategy, I just mentioned earlier the great and long-awaited progress we have been able to make, including the Davie shipyards as the new third shipyard in the new National Shipbuilding Strategy. This is a significant step which will lead to faster delivery of ships that the Coast Guard and other organizations require, at a lower cost, at a higher speed and with greater outcomes for Canadian industry.

On the 5% Indigenous procurement target, I spoke to that earlier. A number of departments have already exceeded that target; others need to work harder. We look forward to posting and revealing the global estimate toward the beginning of 2024.

• (1510)

Senator Plett: Minister, the mandate letter wasn't given to your immediate predecessor. It was actually given to the Public Services and Procurement Minister before her, two ministers ago. No progress was made on any of these issues in two years.

What do you think you can deliver in the next two or possibly even one year before we have a common-sense Conservative government led by Pierre Poilievre?

Mr. Duclos: I rarely come to this place, and I find it a bit amusing that I would hear things that I believe you could make more nuanced and rational. I know we are driven by other interests outside this room, but I suppose, Senator Plett, that you could do a slightly different job if you were not driven by the interests of the Conservative leader in the other place.

[Translation]

AWARDING OF CONTRACTS

Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie: Hello, minister. Earlier, you answered Senator Gerba's question about the content of your mandate letter, which talks about 5% of the total value of federal contracts being held by Indigenous businesses.

I did not quite understand whether you set any targets for Black communities, but you will need to have targets in order to measure these communities' progress and determine whether the objectives have been met.

I am not sure whether you mentioned targets for these communities.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you for that excellent question. Let me be a bit more clear. There is a clear target of 5% for Indigenous-owned or -operated businesses. We look forward to sharing the initial results of those measures in early 2024.

Similarly, in 2021, we also implemented a plan to diversify the procurement process to increase competition in the awarding of such contracts. Since 2021, there has been a pilot project that has made it possible to help Black-owned or -operated businesses

enter into 12 procurement contracts with the Canadian government. The purpose of the pilot project is to determine whether the process is working well, so that we can assess the results it achieves in terms of job creation and identify the challenges that these businesses have perhaps had to face since the pilot project began. We will then see how we can move forward. We could set specific targets for certain groups, including Black-owned or -operated businesses.

Senator Mégie: Thank you very much.

FORCED LABOUR AND CHILD LABOUR

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Minister, starting on January 1, 2024, federal institutions and departments like yours will be subject to the new Fighting Against Forced Labour and Child Labour in Supply Chains Act, formerly known as Bill S-211. I was the sponsor of this bill, along with your colleague, MP John McKay. The new act requires the government to report on risks of modern slavery regarding the goods it purchases and on the measures it is taking to mitigate those risks.

My question is quite simple: Are you ready?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Great question. We still have some work to do, because the bill was passed after several attempts, thanks in large part to your work, senator. It was a difficult process over the last couple of years. There were some setbacks in terms of parliamentary procedure at some points.

The good news is that the bill finally passed. Now, we have to make regulations. Thankfully, MP McKay, whom you mentioned, is discussing it and working on it as hard as you are. With all the work that you're both doing, we should be able to do what's left to be done.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: You have not been the procurement minister for very long. Based on what you have seen, are our supply chains contaminated? Are you aware of any products made by forced child labour that Canada has procured around the world?

Mr. Duclos: As you said, I am relatively new and there may be things that have escaped me over the past few weeks. I will confirm with my department and my senior officials the answer to your important question.

What I know right now is that we have not received — or at least I have not received — useful or clear information on the fact that some of our procurement processes have led to or supported child labour or labour done in unacceptable conditions here at home or elsewhere in the world.

[English]

ARRIVECAN APPLICATION

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition):

Honourable senators, I will ask another question with no rhetoric on my part and no criticism of the ArriveCAN app. I hope, minister, you can give me an answer without telling me how much good it did or how many lives it saved.

I have a simple question, minister. We have a cost of at least \$54 million. If you cannot answer me today, can you commit to telling me how many dollars and cents the ArriveCAN app cost Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Thank you, that's a great question. The answer will come from my colleague at the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, the agency that needed to design, implement and support that application. In that \$54 million to which you referred, there is a series of contracts whose services and value went well beyond the design of the application itself. It was essential, as we said earlier, to make it possible for tens of thousands of Canadians to cross the border at a time during which it was also important to protect the health and safety of millions of Canadians.

Senator Plett: Let me just ask this, minister: Will you commit to getting the answer from the CBSA for us? It is easier for you to get than for me to get. If you can get us that answer in writing, I will accept that.

With you and your government constantly telling us how transparent you are, I would appreciate you to be transparent with us now and give us the answer to the question I asked you.

Mr. Duclos: Very good. You are an important parliamentarian and you have important duties to do. Therefore, I will make it easier for you to have access to that information by using whatever tools I have to support your important work.

FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Minister, we discussed the government's intention to reduce real estate holdings. We know there is a plan that you will do so over 10 years, but that seems to be a long time. Is there any intention or effort to do it in a shorter time frame? We're talking about homelessness in Canada and housing affordability — concerns that are major and important to Canadian citizens and communities. Is there any possibility of making that a little quicker than 10 years?

Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Yes. You are right, it must be done in an expedited manner. This being said, we have made a lot of progress in the last few years. I look forward — in fact, it will come quickly — to participating in a public event where we will take stock of what we have done, what we are currently doing to expedite and facilitate the use of federal lands and buildings and what the longer-term plan for Canadians is.

We know that to fix the housing crisis, we need quick and substantial actions in the short term but also investments in the longer term. We are in a world where the demographic changes will not stop. We have an aging population, smaller households on average, and the needs of Canadians and our seniors are also changing. This requires different types of housing units and locations in a manner that is protective of their safety and the health of their environment. It must be a longer-term plan, but it also has to be, as you said, a quick, expedited plan to support housing for Canadians.

• (1520)

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for that. Do you see any difficulty in converting some of that office space into homes for those who need housing? Office space can be very costly. Has any analysis been undertaken to study that issue and the problems that might arise?

Mr. Duclos: A great question, and the answer is yes. We will be more open and forthcoming in the short term, but to be more useful now, the Canada Lands Company, my department — Public Services and Procurement — and other departments over the last few months have conducted an analysis of which federal buildings it would be easier and faster to convert into residential buildings. There are some buildings, including here in Ottawa, that it would make no sense to convert into residential buildings, but there are other buildings that could be quickly converted. Again, I look forward to making that more transparent.

[Translation]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Jean-Guy Dagenais: Minister, on Monday, Caroline Maynard, the Information Commissioner of Canada, accused your government and its institutions of systemically obstructing access to information requests. Let's not forget those purchases of equipment and vaccines when you were the minister responsible. There are also a lot of questions about certain contracts awarded by your new department.

Did you feel you were the target of the commissioner's accusation, and what will you do to establish some degree of transparency?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Every minister should feel targeted, and every minister, including me, has a role to play. It's very clear that my employees have to facilitate and accelerate access to information. I also remember when I was Treasury Board president, I had greater responsibility for coordinating and facilitating access to information. I had regular discussions with the commissioner. That's now Ms. Anand's job. My department needs to do better. I don't remember if my department is doing better than others, but whether it is or not, we need to pay attention to this issue, especially at a time when access to trustworthy, credible information is so important to strengthening people's confidence in our institutions.

GUY-FAVREAU COMPLEX

Hon. Jean-Guy Dagenais: I'd like to ask a question as a Montrealer. When are you going to put the Guy-Favreau Complex in Montreal up for sale? There seem to be a few problems with this building.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: That's a great question. I will have to get back to you in more detail. I'm a little bit stumped. I want to make sure I can give you a straightforward answer in the near future.

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

Hon. Clément Gignac: Thank you for being with us, minister. The world is changing, with a great deal of geopolitical tension. You are responsible for procurement for the Government of Canada. How are you integrating the national security aspect to ensure that our country is not dependent on supply chains, and above all to make our telecommunications and military infrastructures less vulnerable to countries that could be hostile to us, should tensions escalate?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: Your question, Senator Gignac, is both sombre and important. It's true that we have been feeling for some time that humanity isn't necessarily moving in the right direction, and certain dangers come along with that in terms of using and sharing information amongst countries that share the same values.

My colleague from National Defence, my colleague from Public Safety, the President of the Treasury Board and I have a mandate to work together, including with our partners abroad, to recognize that the longer this goes on, the more important it will be to protect the security of Canadians and our allies in an environment that increasingly demands a collaborative approach. I could go into further detail, but this is the most useful thing I can say for now.

Senator Gignac: Are you willing to draw inspiration from the United States and go so far as to exclude companies doing business in hostile countries from public tenders, since this is the case in the United States, with transport equipment, for example? We know that the Chinese are well versed in facial recognition, for example. Whether we are talking about China or other countries that are hostile to us, would you be prepared to exclude certain countries, as the United States does in its public tenders?

Mr. Duclos: The answer is yes. I'll have to get back to you on the details of certain countries. Obviously, there are some countries that we already know can't participate in these procurement processes, but there are others for which this is becoming increasingly obvious.

FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

Hon. Éric Forest: Minister, when it comes to the major challenge of renovating and converting federal government buildings, are the municipalities partners that you're counting on

to develop a strategy? The municipalities have an enormous responsibility when it comes to increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: The answer is yes for all sorts of reasons. First of all, the municipalities are in the best position to determine which federal lands and buildings could be converted so that they are more useful to the community. Second, local politics are important, and it's hard for the federal government to implement conversion projects without getting public buy-in. Municipal officials are the ones who are most likely to accomplish that.

Third, municipal bylaws must be adapted to support the conversion process. In the coming weeks, you may see some action being taken by the federal government, but especially by the Government of Quebec and the municipalities, whose participation is necessary to facilitate this conversion.

I want to close by saying that you will have heard about a housing agreement being signed between the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec, namely the \$900 million that has been released. This announcement is great news because it will make it easier for us to work more quickly and effectively with the municipalities, while respecting the jurisdiction of the Government of Quebec. The agreement will address these issues, among other things.

[English]

ARRIVECAN APPLICATION

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Minister, back to the "ArriveScam," clearly, we now know that the RCMP is investigating, and we know the RCMP doesn't open investigations lightly. If they are investigating, it is because they think something criminal has happened or, at bare minimum, something fraudulent or inappropriate.

Have you taken the mitigating steps to make sure this occurrence does not reoccur in the near future?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: In this chamber, as in the other chamber, there are many people with legal training and lawyers. I am not one of them. I know, however, that it is presumptive and it may not be appropriate to presume the intentions or the actions of the RCMP. The RCMP is independent of the federal government, so to try to interpret what they may be thinking or doing is outside of the scope of parliamentarians.

This being said, I've shared information that you knew already, which is that my colleague responsible for the Canada Border Services Agency has had his officials look into the matter through a process that I think we can have confidence in.

Senator Housakos: Minister, we all know there have been huge overrun costs when it comes to managing this project. That's number one. We do know, as parliamentarians, that in itself raises red flags.

We also know that when the RCMP opens an investigation, at bare minimum, there is a suspicion of wrongdoing.

Again, what steps have you taken, as a minister who has just gotten into the ministry, to make sure you get to the bottom of this before we wait for an RCMP report or an Auditor General's report? What pre-emptive steps have you taken to look into this case and give us assurances that this will never reoccur?

Mr. Duclos: Thank you. First, the RCMP is independent; second, the RCMP is not under my control; and, third, when you speak about costs, let us remember the cost — the health, safety and economic costs — that COVID-19 put on the shoulders of Canadians. This contract involved many more things than designing the application. However, designing the application was essential to ensuring the movement of hundreds of thousands of Canadians and foreigners every day, and protecting them while their health and safety were at stake.

• (1530)

MILITARY PROCUREMENT

Hon. Jim Quinn: Minister, I have a quick question. Minister Blair, with his Department of National Defence, or DND, portfolio, says a billion dollars is going to be taken out of that department. However, we have men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces who are tasked to respond here at home, and also increasingly in different locations around the world. Can we have assurance that the government and your department will not interfere with — will promote, in fact — the procurement of necessary equipment? I ask because the Canadian Armed Forces have an equipment issue.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement: You have my assurance. Equally importantly, you have the assurance of my colleague Minister Blair. The fact that the defence budget is now \$26 billion and three years from now will be \$39 billion speaks to this. Yes, there might be savings to be found in all departments — including mine — but for the DND, \$26 billion to \$39 billion in three years is, I think, a significant demonstration that we're taking the needs of the DND seriously.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the time for Question Period has expired. I am sure you will join me in thanking Minister Duclos for being here with us today.

Thank you, minister. We will now resume the proceedings where we left off.

[Senator Housakos]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Gerba, seconded by the Honourable Senator Klyne, for the second reading of Bill C-282, An Act to amend the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act (supply management).

Hon. Éric Forest: Hon. colleagues, I wanted to rise to speak to Bill C-282 because I have concerns about the supply management system that governs milk, poultry and egg production in Canada.

[*English*]

It's important to note that the bill, which was passed with the support of MPs from all political parties represented in the House of Commons, even received the backing of the Prime Minister, the leader of the official opposition and the ministers of International Trade and Agriculture. In itself, this is no mean feat.

[*Translation*]

The sheer scale of the support from the House of Commons and cabinet should be enough to convince us to send this bill to committee to be looked at closely.

Bill C-282 is fairly simple, after all. It amends the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act to add the protection of the supply management system to the minister's responsibilities.

Bill C-282 adds supply management to the list of directions the minister must take into account in the conduct of foreign affairs, particularly regarding international trade, in order to increase the Government of Canada's bargaining power at international negotiating tables.

As you know, supply management was weakened by three recent trade treaties. Despite promises to the contrary by successive governments, workers in supply-managed sectors were impacted by additional import quotas.

Some commentators claimed that this bill ties the hands of negotiators. I would argue that it provides a framework for their future mandates and ensures that parliamentarians and Canadians have a right to know what's going on before their hands are tied.

• (1540)

Bill C-282 will make it so that negotiators can't finalize agreements that involve supply management without Parliament's approval.

Some legal experts, like our own ever-vigilant colleague, Senator Dupuis, have suggested that Bill C-282 may infringe on the Royal Prerogative, the idea being that the Crown must give explicit consent when giving up one of its prerogatives.

I don't claim to be an expert on the Constitution or parliamentary law. That's why I invite you to consult the research report that constitutional expert Patrick Taillon contributed to. It's entitled *Le consentement royal aux projets de loi touchant la prérogative royale sur les affaires étrangères*, or Royal Consent for bills affecting the Royal Prerogative in matters of foreign affairs. He writes that the bill is compliant because it doesn't prevent the minister or the executive from exercising their prerogative in matters of international trade. Rather, the bill creates parameters for this.

If the government wants to give something up, all it has to do is check with Parliament before committing itself. Trade agreements need parliamentary approval anyway.

There are several mechanisms in place to ensure that bills respect the prerogative of the Crown. However, at this stage, if the Prime Minister of Canada has given his consent and the government itself has not contested this fact, it would be inappropriate for the Senate to delay or block a bill that has been passed by the House of Commons, when it was supported by the head of the government, the leader of the official opposition and Parliament. Otherwise, this bill would not have made it to the Senate.

The next legitimate question is this: Why protect supply-managed products rather than other products like beef and forest products, for example?

It's important to first recognize that supply-managed products are special because they're essential to our food security and therefore must be protected from uncontrolled competition.

The supply management program was created in 1972 as a result of overproduction and market anarchy. The Canadian government gradually introduced this system to protect producers and consumers from excessive fluctuations in production and prices.

Note that Canadian processors support supply management because it has a positive effect on price and supply stability.

Furthermore, I also want to point out that giving one product differential treatment is not exactly out of the ordinary in international trade. We are already doing that for culture because we recognize that cultural products are not like other products.

Thanks to the leadership of Canada and France, the cultural industry has been exempted from international treaties, particularly through the WTO. Let's not forget that the WTO allows member countries to protect a certain number of tariff lines. Every country can do that, and most do. It is a right.

It is necessary and worthwhile to note that the Americans have a supply management system for the sugar industry. In addition to controlling imports, production and pricing, they even set up a program for turning sugar into ethanol to use up surplus production and support their producers.

The example of American sugar clearly shows that products intended for export and those intended for the domestic market can coexist and be part of the same negotiating mandate.

Some agricultural sectors want to play the game of total market liberalization and try to compete with our neighbours by focusing on low-cost products. That is fine, but dairy, egg and poultry producers should also be able to protect their own marketing method. One industry should not take precedence over another.

Every time we talk about protecting supply management, we hear people in certain circles say that we should get rid of it and let competition play out.

This debate was recently revived at Canada's Competition Summit in Ottawa, when some participants linked food inflation with supply management.

First of all, it is important to realize that food prices in supply-managed sectors have evolved in the same manner as all other food products.

The consumer price index for dairy products, for example, rose more slowly than food products as a whole in Quebec over the past five years, increasing by 14.7% over five years, compared to 16.7% for food products as a whole.

Second, it is often argued that ending supply management would be good for consumers. The somewhat simplistic reasoning behind this argument is that opening up the Canadian market would benefit consumers because milk from the U.S., which is not subject to supply management and costs less to produce, would retail for a lower price.

It is important to note that even if consumers see higher prices for supply-managed products, the difference is not necessarily due to supply management.

A study by economist Daniel-Mercier Gouin comparing the retail price of milk in Toronto, Quebec City and Washington showed that the price of milk and cheese was similar in Quebec City and Washington, where there is no supply management, and a lot lower in Toronto, where there is a supply management system.

This seems to show that supply management has no significant impact on retail pricing. The profit margins all the way down the processing and distribution chain have a much bigger impact.

I urge you to resist the temptation to imagine that eliminating supply management would benefit consumers. You have to realize that, around the world, agriculture is supported either by consumers or by taxpayers.

Just look at the American model that is so dear to those who want to dismantle supply management. The Farm Bill adopted by Congress in 2018 allocated \$867 billion over 10 years. The 2023 version is set to reach an astronomical \$1.4 trillion over the next 10 years, including more than \$221 billion to support commodities such as corn, wheat, soybeans and sugar, but also the dairy industry.

A study by business consultants at Grey, Clark, Shih and Associates estimated that the U.S. government provided US \$22 billion in subsidies to the U.S. dairy sector in 2015 alone.

When people complain that the price of milk is unduly subsidized by Canadian consumers, I say: What about the support that American taxpayers provide when it comes to the price of American milk?

Since the complete elimination of direct production subsidies in the 1990s, Canadian dairy farmers have been proud to derive most of their income from the market. It's a regulated market, to be sure, but one where producers' prices are set transparently and with due consideration for farmers' production costs, unlike certain subsidies that sometimes "reward" less efficient businesses.

Supply management deserves to be protected if only for its economic impact for this country.

Supply management accounts for \$30.1 billion in GDP and 339,000 jobs across Canada. However, supply management in a country like Canada is also a matter of regional development and land use.

This is why supply management is particularly relevant to me. It's an issue that's close to my heart, since I've been working in regional development for over 45 years.

As you know, Canada and Quebec are vast lands with a relatively low population density. Land use is the cornerstone of regional economic development, and supply management helps in that regard because it allows dairy farmers to operate in most regions, whether in Saint-Hyacinthe, in Gaspé or in Abitibi.

Food processors pay a single price to farmers, which means that dairy, chicken, turkey and table egg farms don't have to be close to processing plants and large consumer markets to be profitable.

That is how the supply management system contributes to regional development. Supply-managed producers employ local workers. They purchase local goods and services. They send their children to school, go to the post office, use the ATM and stop by the corner store, often helping to sustain these services in smaller communities.

[Senator Forest]

Simply put, they are important actors in the regional socio-economic ecosystem.

[English]

To allow for the erosion of supply management is to weaken our regions.

• (1550)

In conclusion, I invite us to set aside our preconceived ideas. The debate is not about the relevance of supply management.

[Translation]

That is a red herring, because as long as our trading partners subsidize their agriculture, we'll have to support our farmers one way or another to maintain our food sovereignty.

The real issue Bill C-282 raises is this: How should we respond to what producers and processors are asking of us? They have witnessed the erosion of supply management over the past 10 years, and they feel their government abandoned them and sacrificed them during the negotiations on the last three major agreements.

This is about economic nationalism in response to competition from some of our trading partners.

The point is this: The main goal of Bill C-282 is to clarify future negotiating mandates for our representatives and to ensure that Parliament has its say right from the start of trade agreement negotiations, which have a major impact on our regions.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gerba, do you have a question?

Hon. Amina Gerba: Thank you for your speech, Senator Forest. Thank you for pointing out that the U.S. government also has a supply management policy, because a lot of people don't know that.

We often hear that supply management is a policy that should be eliminated because it has no place in international trade and it is a subsidy in disguise.

Can you expand on that?

Senator Forest: Thank you for the question.

I am very honoured to get a question from the sponsor of the bill. It is true that we have seen many countries do the same thing the United States is doing with sugar, for example. It has a supply management policy. It even implemented a subsidy for turning surplus stock into ethanol. Every country has the right to protect certain tariff lines, and many countries use that practice.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gerba, did you want to ask a supplementary question?

Senator Gerba: No.

(On motion of Senator Housakos, debate adjourned.)

[English]

STUDY ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES TO FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS PEOPLES

TWELFTH REPORT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES COMMITTEE AND
REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the twelfth report (interim) of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, entitled *On the Outside Looking In: The Implementation of the Cannabis Act and its effects on Indigenous Peoples*, tabled in the Senate on June 14, 2023.

Hon. Brian Francis moved:

That the twelfth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, entitled *On the Outside Looking In: The Implementation of the Cannabis Act and its effects on Indigenous Peoples*, tabled in the Senate on June 14, 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 Health being identified as minister responsible for responding to the report, in consultation with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Minister of Indigenous Services of Canada and the Minister of National Revenue.

(On motion of Senator Housakos, debate adjourned.)

FOURTEENTH REPORT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES COMMITTEE
AND REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE—DEBATE
ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the fourteenth report (interim) of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, entitled *Honouring the Children Who Never Came Home: Truth, Education and Reconciliation*, deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on July 19, 2023.

Hon. Brian Francis moved:

That the fourteenth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, entitled *Honouring the Children Who Never Came Home: Truth, Education and Reconciliation*, deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on Wednesday, July 19, 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 Crown-Indigenous Relations being identified as minister responsible for responding to the report, in consultation with the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada and the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

(On motion of Senator Housakos, debate adjourned.)

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO EXTEND DATE OF FINAL
REPORT ON STUDY OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S
CONSTITUTIONAL, TREATY, POLITICAL AND LEGAL
RESPONSIBILITIES TO FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS PEOPLES
—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Brian Francis, pursuant to notice of September 26, 2023, moved:

That, notwithstanding the order of the Senate adopted on Thursday, March 3, 2022, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples in relation to its study on the federal government's constitutional, treaty, political and legal responsibilities to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and any other subject concerning Indigenous Peoples be extended from December 31, 2023 to September 1, 2025; and

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

(On motion of Senator Housakos, debate adjourned.)

(At 4 p.m., pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on September 21, 2022, the Senate adjourned until 2 p.m., tomorrow.)

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