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The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Thursday, February 15, 2024

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

WOMEN'S HEART HEALTH

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Honourable senators, on Tuesday, February 13, Senator Burey and I wore red to celebrate Wear Red Canada. This annual event raises awareness about the importance of women's heart health. In the words of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, when it comes to cardiovascular health, "Women are under-researched, under-diagnosed, under-treated and over-dying."

Here are four startling facts: First, heart disease is the leading cause of premature death for Canadian women; second, women are more likely to die or suffer a second heart attack compared to men, yet two thirds of heart and stroke clinical research focuses on the male body; third, women are under-represented in leadership positions on cardiovascular clinical research trials; and fourth, cardiovascular disease kills more women than all forms of cancer combined, and yet only 44% of women recognize that cardiovascular disease is the greatest threat to their health.

Despite gaps in research, education and health care for women, progress is under way in Canada. Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting the Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences at St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg to learn more about their new Women's Heart Health Initiative. Dr. Lorrie Kirshenbaum and Dr. Inna Rabinovich-Nikitin are two health care leaders who advocate for greater diversity in medical research to improve women's heart health outcomes. Here in Ottawa, the University of Ottawa Health Institute and the Canadian Women's Heart Health Centre focus on sex- and gender-based research for the prevention, detection and management of heart disease in women.

Colleagues, did you know that 53% of women's heart attack symptoms go unrecognized? That is why more education on the signs, symptoms and risk factors of heart disease in women can truly save lives.

These statistics are not new. In 1999, 25 years ago, Health Canada released a document that acknowledged cardiovascular disease as a major cause of death and disability for Canadian women. These alarming statistics, and events like Wear Red Canada, help to raise awareness and promote inclusive heart health research. I invite you all to wear red on February 13 next

year, because when we realize that one size does not fit all when it comes to heart health, we will shape a better and more equitable future for women across Canada.

Thank you, *meegwetch*.

HEARTLIFE FOUNDATION

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, February is Heart Month, so I rise to shed light on an issue of critical importance: heart failure, a condition that affects over 750,000 Canadians and claims countless lives each year. I also wish to highlight the HeartLife Foundation, a national patient-driven organization that is dedicated to engaging, educating and empowering those living with heart failure, advocating for a better quality of life, necessary policy changes and raising awareness of this life-threatening condition.

The HeartLife Foundation, in collaboration with esteemed partners, has developed the National Heart Failure Policy Action Framework, a comprehensive action plan designed to navigate the complexities of heart failure care in Canada. This framework aims to introduce a patient-centred national standard of care, bridging gaps in our health care system and ensuring that every Canadian living with heart failure receives the support, treatment and dignity they deserve.

From province to province, there are tremendous gaps in access to proper testing and effective care, and little understanding of how the system is working for patients. The economic ramifications are staggering. It stands as one of Canada's most burdensome health conditions, with costs expected to soar to \$2.8 billion annually by 2030. Currently, heart failure accounts for \$575.2 million in hospital costs annually, not to mention the immeasurable human cost borne by patients and their families.

This disease is not just a medical crisis but a significant economic strain, underscoring the pressing need for the implementation of the National Heart Failure Policy Action Framework. The framework emphasizes early detection, multidisciplinary care and continuous evaluation, guided by the profound insights of patients and caregivers. International studies demonstrate that remote monitoring and multidisciplinary care can reduce heart failure-related hospital readmissions by 89% and costs by 63%. In Canada, these interventions could translate to a staggering annual cost savings of nearly \$600 million for newly diagnosed patients.

Honourable senators, I encourage you to get to know the HeartLife Foundation and their patient founders, as I have. Reach out and consider how we can transform the landscape of heart failure care in Canada, ensuring a healthier, brighter future for all Canadians living with this condition.

SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

Hon. Donna Dasko: Honourable senators, I rise today to recognize a grim anniversary. Two years ago from next week, on February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine. A Europe that had been at peace since the end of the Second World War now presents a threat to the free world and the entire international order.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the achievement of Ukraine's independence in 1991, Ukraine set out on a path toward democracy and an open society. Vladimir Putin despises this independent, Western-facing and democratic direction. His goal in invading Ukraine is to destroy this new Ukraine and return it to the dark days of authoritarian rule.

It has become clear over the past two years that if Putin can't have Ukraine, he'll try to make sure that Ukrainians can't have it either. Consequently, we see the destruction that Russia has perpetrated. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians have died or been injured since the invasion, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, estimates staggering losses on the Russian side — over 300,000 casualties, including 107,000 deaths — as, without remorse or regret, Putin uses his own citizens and other conscripts as cannon fodder.

In addition, the conflict has triggered a huge wave of displacement. One in four Ukrainians have been displaced from their homes by Russia's war. There's more: There have been violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international criminal law. A crime of aggression was committed when Russia invaded the sovereign nation of Ukraine with no justification, which is a violation of the United Nations Charter. In addition, there are war crimes, crimes against humanity and evidence of genocide.

Ukrainians have fought tirelessly over the past two years, and Western allies, including Canada, have provided essential military, financial and humanitarian support. In the past year, Ukraine has taken back control of its Black Sea shipping routes and successfully repelled Russian missile and drone attacks. Recently, the European Union, or EU, unblocked €50 billion in aid to Ukraine.

• (1410)

However, there are troubling circumstances as well. Last year's spring offensive by Ukraine achieved few gains, and Russia has ramped up its attacks and domestic production through support from countries such as Iran and North Korea — another axis of evil: Iran, North Korea and Russia. And there is the continuing drama south of the border as the U.S. Congress continues to stall an essential package of military aid.

This will be a critical year. Ukraine can be successful if it gets the support it needs to push back the current offensive. Colleagues, Canada must continue its steadfast support for Ukraine, and I, for one, know that Canadians are onside.

On Saturday, February 24, Canadians will rally in communities across this country in support of Ukraine in events organized by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. I will be there at Nathan

Phillips Square in Toronto. I hope that you, too, will show your support in rallies in your communities. Please let us stand with Ukraine.

Thank you, *d'akuju*.

OCEAN RANGER DISASTER

Hon. David M. Wells: Honourable senators, today marks a very sombre anniversary in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador. Forty-two years ago, in the early hours of February 15, 1982, the Ocean Ranger drill rig capsized and sank off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. Eighty-four people, mostly Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, died in the frigid waters of the North Atlantic.

The string of events leading to the loss of the Ocean Ranger started at 8 a.m. the previous morning, when the crew received a weather report stating that a strong winter storm, with potential waves of up to 37 feet, was forecast to pass over the rig's location later that day and night.

Even with the weather report, work on the Ocean Ranger continued. The Ocean Ranger continued to drill until later that afternoon, when it disconnected its drill pipe and retracted it for safety to weather the storm.

Later that evening, around 7 p.m., two other rigs in the area were reportedly hit by abnormally large waves. Throughout the evening, the rig experienced some damage due to the storm, but it did not appear to be anything serious, and later that night, there was no indication of significant problems.

However, in the early morning hours of February 15, the Ocean Ranger made contact to report that the rig was listing and called a nearby supply vessel on emergency standby to move in closer to the rig. Just after 1 a.m., the Ocean Ranger was sending out mayday calls. Sadly, the last communication from the Ocean Ranger that morning was sent to inform shore-based authorities that the crew was heading to lifeboats.

Rescue attempts were nearly impossible, as the violent storm continued to wreak havoc on dispatched lifeboats. Despite the sighting of flares and rescue attempts by MV *Seaforth Highlander*, the heavy seas and gale-force winds ultimately blocked any effort to rescue the crew.

Shortly after, the Ocean Ranger capsized. Although continued rescue efforts were made that night and in the days following, in the end there were no survivors.

A royal commission report explained that the sinking of the semi-submersible rig was due to sea water rushing through a broken glass port light and soaking an electrical panel, shorting out the ballast controls.

Since then, there have been significant improvements in the safety culture in the Newfoundland offshore. I was pleased to be part of these efforts, including being the Senate sponsor of the Offshore Health and Safety Act in 2014, shortly after my arrival to the Senate.

The oil and gas industry is the economic engine of our province, but it has not come without cost. That is why it is important today not only to remember all those lives lost that day in 1982 but also to understand the realities that offshore workers face when exposed to the elements at their place of work. The remembrance of the Ocean Ranger and its crew will continue to contribute to the safety of offshore oil and gas workers everywhere.

Thank you, colleagues.

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Ms. Nazila Ghanea, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator McPhedran.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Thank you to members of the Independent Senators Group for gifting me with some of their time today.

Honourable senators, I wish to bring to your attention two related human rights issues.

It is indeed an honour to welcome to this chamber Dr. Nazila Ghanea, the United Nations Special Rapporteur, or SR, on freedom of religion or belief.

To underscore their independence, UN SRs are unpaid, even though their work is arduous, requiring great skill and much time. Because she is clearly untiring, Dr. Ghanea does all of this while maintaining her full-time obligations as a professor of international human rights law at the University of Oxford, leading their master's-level program.

Special rapporteurs are independent experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, mandated to identify existing and emerging obstacles to the free exercise of human rights. Rapporteurs conduct international fact-finding missions, investigate allegations of human rights violations and develop reasoned and impartial recommendations for cooperation and conflict resolution.

We seem to be facing an alarming erosion of human rights protections across the globe. As Canada's Ambassador to the UN, the Honourable Bob Rae, recently stated:

So much work done by so many to centre humanity, strengthen institutions, and ultimately to build peace, is being lost more and more each day.

The work conducted by SRs counters this erosion. Their work strengthens the international rule of law, respecting human rights and dignity.

This leads me to highlight my second point of human rights — connected but closer to home.

Forty-three years ago yesterday, over 1,200 women from across this country — unwelcome, unpaid and largely uninvited — entered Room 200 of West Block and changed the constitutional course of this country. They came together because the Charter draft for the new Constitution was so weak, and they knew they had one last chance to make a major change.

This could not have happened on Parliament Hill were it not for the small number of women parliamentarians who came together across party lines and made sure they went through the proper procedures that we have to go through with our dear Black Rod. They did the same thing with the Sergeant-at-Arms.

In particular, I want to mention one of the very few women senators at that time, Conservative senator Martha Bielish. She went the extra mile. I was deeply involved in that conference and I can tell you that Flora MacDonald, Martha Bielish, Pauline Jewett and Margaret Mitchell were the parliamentarians who made it possible for women to meet on Parliament Hill.

There is a documentary entitled *Constitute!* that I recommend to you. There are two “notwithstanding” clauses. One is section 33, and many of you probably don't know that section 28 is the sex equality guarantee that comes directly out of that ad hoc conference. It, too, begins with the word “notwithstanding.”

Thank you so much.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

THE ESTIMATES, 2023-24

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (C) TABLED

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Supplementary Estimates (C), 2023-24.

[Translation]

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE NATIONAL
FINANCE COMMITTEE TO STUDY
SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (C) WITH THE
EXCEPTION OF VOTE 1C TO BE STUDIED
BY JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE
LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

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 the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance be authorized to examine and report upon the expenditures set out in the Supplementary Estimates (C) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024, with the exception of Library of Parliament Vote 1c;

That, for the purpose of this study, the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance have the power to meet, even though the Senate may then be sitting or adjourned, with rules 12-18(1) and 12-18(2) being suspended in relation thereto;

That the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament be authorized to examine and report upon the expenditures set out in Library of Parliament Vote 1c of the Supplementary Estimates (C) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024; and

That, in relation to the expenditures set out in Library of Parliament Vote 1c, a message be sent to the House of Commons to acquaint that house accordingly.

• (1420)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on December 7, 2021, Question Period will begin at 4 p.m.

[Translation]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

BILL TO AMEND—MESSAGE FROM COMMONS—AMENDMENTS

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons returning Bill S-202, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary

Visual Artist Laureate), and acquainting the Senate that they had passed this bill with the following amendments, to which they desire the concurrence of the Senate:

1. *Clause 1, pages 1 and 2:*

(a) on page 1, replace line 12 with the following:

“names reflective of Canada’s diversity, consistent with the principle that the primary official language spoken by the holder shall alternate and submitted in”;

(b) on page 2, replace line 16 with the following:

“phy, filmmaking and digital creations that reflect the diversity of Canada, including with respect to the languages in use and its ethnocultural composition.”.

Honourable senators, when shall these amendments be taken into consideration?

(On motion of Senator Cardozo, amendments placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

**ROMAN CATHOLIC EPISCOPAL CORPORATION
OF OTTAWA
ROMAN CATHOLIC EPISCOPAL CORPORATION FOR THE
DIOCESE OF ALEXANDRIA-CORNWALL**

PRIVATE BILL TO REPLACE AN ACT OF INCORPORATION—
MESSAGE FROM COMMONS

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons returning Bill S-1001, An Act to amalgamate The Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Ottawa and The Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation for the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall, in Ontario, Canada, and acquainting the Senate that they had passed this bill without amendment.

**BILL TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE AND THE
WILD ANIMAL AND PLANT PROTECTION
AND REGULATION OF INTERNATIONAL AND
INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE ACT**

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Klyne, seconded by the Honourable Senator Harder, P.C., for the second reading of Bill S-15, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act.

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, I rise today to support Bill S-15, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act.

I want to acknowledge that the land on which I am speaking to you today is part of the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin nation, a nation that has always had a unique and inspiring relationship with the animal kingdom.

As our former colleague, Senator Murray Sinclair, reminded us, and I quote:

In many Indigenous cultures, we use the phrase, “all my relations” to express the interdependency and interconnectedness of all life forms and our relationship of mutual reliance and shared destiny. When we treat animals well, we act with both self-respect and mutual respect.

Over the past few months, like most of you, no doubt, I’ve received numerous emails from Canadian citizens in favor of advancing this legislation.

Here in the Senate, we have debated at length the fundamental principles underlying the question of banning, subject to certain exceptions, the captivity of elephants and great apes, whether through this bill or another.

Essentially, the legislative proposal before us is based on the idea that the captivity of elephants and great apes, particularly for entertainment purposes, is a form of animal cruelty under the Criminal Code, subject to certain legitimate exceptions. By “great apes,” we mean chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans.

Bill S-15 reflects a deep respect for the dignity and physical and psychological well-being of these highly sensitive and intelligent creatures. Based largely on current scientific knowledge, this legislation recognizes that the captivity and breeding of these non-domesticated animal species for purposes such as entertainment constitutes a form of animal cruelty.

The preamble of the bill is clear in that regard, and I quote:

... the science establishes that certain animals, particularly elephants and great apes, should not, because of the cruelty it represents, be kept in captivity;

[*English*]

In a letter to the bill’s sponsor, Senator Klyne, 23 independent experts asserted that elephants are not suited to any form of captivity, as no captive facility can fulfill their basic biological, social, spatial and cognitive requirements and needs.

They have stated:

As specialists on elephant well-being, we can attest that public display facilities keeping captive elephants are no longer supported or justified by the growing body of science on their sociobiological needs. In these situations, elephants

endure conditions that are inadequate to meet their needs, as they lack essential components of wild ecosystems and inhibit expression of natural behaviours.

Studies have also demonstrated the harmful effects of captivity on great apes, particularly on their psychological state.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, just like the Ending the Captivity of Whales and Dolphins Act, Bill S-15 reflects the complexity of interactions between humans and certain animals in captivity.

Generally speaking, our relationships with animals are, for the most part, characterized by their function and the intrinsic value we ascribe to them. Consciously or unconsciously, we categorize the animals in our care based on how we use them.

For example, some animals supply food, others are pets, and still others are used for entertainment. Our relationships with and perceptions of them are complex indeed and influenced by many cultural, religious and social factors.

That being said, however we categorize them, we recognize that animals can feel pleasure and pain, and that we therefore have a legal and moral responsibility to minimize their unnecessary suffering.

Thanks to advances in our scientific knowledge, humans’ thinking about animals, particularly great apes and elephants, has evolved. Nowadays, no one can seriously claim that animals are mere automata as conceived by French philosopher René Descartes. Science teaches us that animals have interests and needs and can feel pain if those needs are not fully met.

• (1430)

[*English*]

Jeremy Bentham, an English philosopher and jurist, eloquently affirmed about animals that:

The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer? Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being?

It is notably on the basis of this principle that our Criminal Code provides for certain offences designed to remedy animal cruelty, confirming that, in legal terms, we have positive duties toward animals. At present, the Criminal Code provides for offences relating to the unnecessary suffering of animals, as well as those prohibiting the captivity of cetaceans, subject to certain exceptions.

While the provinces and territories may enact their own animal welfare legislation pursuant to section 92(13) of the Constitution Act, 1867, Parliament remains legally able to enact criminal laws that also affect animal welfare.

[*Translation*]

Bill S-15, which makes it an offence, subject to certain circumstances, to possess great apes and elephants that are kept in captivity, particularly for entertainment purposes, seems to reflect the same criminal law objectives as Bill S-203, which was passed in 2019 and will phase out cetacean captivity.

Both legislative measures criminally prohibit a practice that is considered cruel from a scientific and moral perspective, and they constitute a valid exercise of federal authority with respect to animal cruelty pursuant to subsection 91(27) of the Constitution Act, 1867.

In a letter sent to the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources on December 4, law professors asserted that passing Bill S-15 would indeed be a valid exercise of Parliament's powers to pass criminal laws in this area.

Honourable colleagues, Bill S-15 takes a critical look at our place and our role in relation to intelligent beings with social, cognitive and biological capacities that are similar to ours. Consider the chimpanzee, which shares nearly 98.8% of its DNA with humans.

Canadian jurisprudence recognizes that chimpanzees have the cognitive capacity to solve complex problems. British ethologist and anthropologist Jane Goodall showed through her research that chimpanzees exhibit many cognitive abilities that were previously thought to be unique to humans, including a form of rational thought.

Chimpanzees can feel a wide range of emotions, including happiness, sorrow, tenderness, jealousy, remorse and anger. They are highly complex beings with many abilities.

[*English*]

As our former colleague senator Murray Sinclair declared within this chamber, with his trademark sense of humour:

Chimpanzees live within complex societies, forming political alliances to achieve their goals — kind of like Parliament. Male chimps even fawn over infants when vying for power — kind of like parliamentarians. When disputes break out, diplomatic individuals will patch things up. Chimps, like humans, can be violent, but they also demonstrate cooperation and altruism, such as delivering food and water to elderly relatives. They have been seen saving others in danger and helping wounded birds. Chimpanzees grieve their dead.

[*Translation*]

During a Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association mission to Cameroon, I, along with the co-chair, our colleague, the Honourable Amina Gerba, visited Mefou National Park, a rehabilitation centre that is home to 320 primates, including 110 chimpanzees and 21 gorillas. The goal of Ape Action Africa, the organization that manages the park, is to address the immediate threats faced by gorillas and chimpanzees in Africa and to work with communities to develop long-term solutions to ensure their survival in the wild. They are doing amazing work.

During our visit, it was fascinating to observe these primates who are so closely related to us humans. We actually felt more like we were the ones being observed.

One of them looked at me with a particularly insistent gaze. Maybe my physiognomy evoked in him a strong feeling of kinship. Did I remind him of some distant cousin or long-lost brother? I couldn't tell, but he almost seemed to be inviting me to jump the fence and join him — which I would have happily done, colleagues, considering the beauty of the natural surroundings.

On a more serious note, it was impossible to remain unmoved by their living conditions and by the urgent need to protect these amazing creatures. We need to recognize that, now more than ever, human and animal cohabitation is crucial to our planet's future.

[*English*]

In his second reading speech, Senator Klyne also addressed the complex characteristics of the elephant — an altruistic, highly intelligent and emotional being. The way we treat elephants and great apes gives real meaning to the notions of dignity and respect. These animals, with their complex life forms, are not entertainment creatures. They deserve respect and dignity. It is also possible to entertain the public without using these animal species. With shows given since 1984, the famous Cirque du Soleil, a remarkable Quebec company, has enchanted over 33 million spectators without using animals.

I am, therefore, pleased to see that the use of captive elephants and great apes for entertainment purposes is not subject to an exception in this bill.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, despite the benefits that could be associated with the captivity of elephants and great apes, including the conservation efforts that Senator Klyne mentioned in his speech, their captivity should always be regarded as an impediment to their individual fulfillment.

Captivity may be a necessary means to a legitimate end, but it must never be considered an end in and of itself for these animals, an underlying principle of Bill S-15. To echo the essence of what our former colleague Senator Wilfred Moore said about Bill S-203, Bill S-15 is a form of “moral condemnation” of the captivity of elephants and great apes, regardless of their actual or potential benefits.

Colleagues, giving a voice to the voiceless in society is a guiding principle for our work in the Senate. Animals are no exception to this quest. I invite all senators to examine this legislation with empathy, respect and imagination for the benefit of such precious beings as great apes and elephants.

I really hope this bill will be studied in committee, so that the scientific and legal arguments surrounding this legislation can be examined more thoroughly.

Thank you.

Hon. Claude Carignan: Would Senator Cormier take a question?

Senator Cormier: Absolutely, senator.

Senator Carignan: An Australian study published in *Geo* magazine found that monarch butterflies, which are known for migrating 4,000 kilometres from Canada to their hibernation grounds in Mexico, have a different wing shape when bred in captivity. They are not as strong and lose all sense of direction. Should monarch butterflies be added to the bill?

Senator Cormier: Thank you for the question, senator. We must pay attention to more than just the animals specified in this bill. In fact, we must collectively, as a society, consider the issues that affect all animals on this planet.

The monarch butterflies I am lucky enough to see in my garden do go on this important journey. As citizens, we need to be increasingly aware of what's at stake. We need to acknowledge that the human race is not superior to the natural world around us. Perhaps the committee could study this question within the bill or in another context.

We must take into consideration all living beings on this planet.

Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

• (1440)

[English]

CANADA-UKRAINE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION BILL, 2023

SECOND READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Harder, P.C., seconded by the Honourable Senator Bellemare, for the second reading of Bill C-57, An Act to implement the 2023 Free Trade Agreement between Canada and Ukraine.

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak about Bill C-57, An Act to implement the 2023 Free Trade Agreement between Canada and Ukraine.

[Senator Cormier]

Canada's connections with Ukraine stretch far into our past and are very deep. In 1896, a federal program sought to settle the Prairies with Eastern European farmers by promoting Canada as the "Last Best West." Thousands of Ukrainians came to Canada to build a new life and fulfill their dreams. Fast-forwarding to 2024, at least 1.3 million Canadians now claim Ukrainian heritage.

But our relationship with Ukraine is not merely historical; it is also based on the strength of the human spirit and our collective commitment to uphold the principles of justice, liberty and human dignity. I am profoundly moved by the enduring friendship between Canada and Ukraine, a bond forged through shared values of freedom, democracy and mutual respect.

It is worth noting that Conservatives have a long history of supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and independence. The Conservative government of Brian Mulroney was the first, along with Poland's, to recognize Ukraine's independence, on December 2, 1991. Two years before that, former Prime Minister Mulroney appointed Ray Hnatyshyn as Governor General of Canada, the highest honour ever bestowed to a Canadian of Ukrainian origin.

The invasion of Ukraine by the Putin regime did not start in February 2022. Its origins can be traced back to 2014. At that time, former Prime Minister Harper spearheaded efforts to isolate Russia and impose sanctions in response to its aggression. The leadership exhibited by Canada under former Prime Minister Harper's guidance was widely acknowledged and played a pivotal role in fostering a consensus. As former Prime Minister Harper emphatically stated, "Whether it takes five months or 50 years . . ." our commitment to safeguarding the territorial integrity of Ukraine remains unwavering. When Vladimir Putin went to shake his hand at an international summit, former Prime Minister Harper refused and told the Russian thug to "get out of Ukraine."

As we know, Putin did not get out of Ukraine. On the contrary, in February 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine.

I must address the illegal invasion of Ukraine by the Putin regime, an act that stands as a stark reminder of the challenges we face in defending the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and international law.

It's crucial to recognize that Putin's war of aggression extends beyond Ukraine. His actions aim to undermine the very foundations of democracy, the rule of law and the pursuit of opportunity in the Western world. President Zelenskyy's warning resonates deeply; he said, "Moreover, it is dangerous not only for Ukraine, but also for all countries of the democratic world."

By weaponizing energy, Russia not only destabilizes regions like Europe, but also fuels the conflict in Ukraine, creating eternal suffering and instability. We must pay more attention to these warnings, take decisive action to counter Russian aggression and uphold the principles of democracy, peace and international law. We Conservatives will support Ukraine unconditionally; we will always stand with Ukraine.

But our support for Ukraine goes beyond mere condemnation of Russian aggression; it is rooted in a deep and abiding commitment to standing with Ukraine in its struggle for freedom, democracy and prosperity. From the earliest days of Ukraine's independence, Canada has been a vocal advocate for Ukraine's right to self-determination and consistently called for the protection of its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Canadians of Ukrainian origin, who make up a significant portion of our population, have played a crucial role in shaping our country's response to the crisis, mobilizing support within their communities and advocating for stronger action against Russian aggression.

In Canada, the Conservatives have been vocal champions of Ukraine, tirelessly advocating for robust measures to counter Russian aggression and support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We have called for increased military assistance to Ukraine, including the provision of lethal defensive weapons, to bolster its ability to defend itself against external threats. The Conservatives understand that Ukraine's fight is not just about its own sovereignty but also defending the principles of freedom, democracy and international law that are under assault from authoritarian regimes like Russia's.

One of the most significant milestones in Canada's relationship with Ukraine was the signing of the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement, or CUFTA, in 2016. Under the leadership of former Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper, Canada became the first Western nation to sign a free trade agreement with Ukraine, opening up new opportunities for trade and economic cooperation between our two countries. This landmark agreement has strengthened the economic ties between Canada and Ukraine, creating new opportunities for Canadian businesses to expand into the Ukrainian market and for Ukrainian exporters to access Canadian markets. CUFTA came into force on August 1, 2017.

Genuine free trade with Canada is crucial for Ukraine's economic development and prosperity, providing Ukrainian businesses with access to new markets, investment opportunities and technology transfer. By deepening our economic ties with Ukraine, Canada is helping to support Ukraine's economic growth and stability, creating new opportunities for job creation and economic development.

The Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement is not just about economics; it is also a symbol of Canada's unwavering commitment to supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and independence in the face of this Russian aggression. By strengthening our economic partnership with Ukraine, Canada is sending a powerful message of solidarity and support to the Ukrainian people as they strive to build a brighter future for themselves and future generations.

With respect to what is contemplated in Bill C-57, this modernization would build on the 2017 agreement.

In 2022, our trade numbers with Ukraine totalled a hefty \$420 million. That breaks down to \$150 million worth of goods heading out from Canada and \$270 million worth coming in. When we hashed out this deal during the Conservative

government's tenure, we intentionally structured it to initially give Ukraine a bit of a leg up. The idea was to start small and gradually expand, adding more items to the agreement over time.

Originally, our focus was mainly on trading physical goods such as cars and seafood. But as we progressed, we broadened the scope to include services as well, making the agreement more comprehensive. Since the inception of this deal, exports to Ukraine, excluding coal, have increased by approximately 28% between 2016 and 2019.

This upward trend highlights the mutual benefits of free trade for both parties. It is because of significant results like these that Conservatives support free trade in principle. They underscore the benefits of fostering open trade relations and the positive impact they have on economic growth and prosperity for both Canada and its trading partners.

With respect to the things we trade, we've been exporting products such as vehicles, parts, fish, seafood and pharmaceuticals to Ukraine, while Ukraine has been dispatching products such as animals, vegetable fats, oils, steel and electrical equipment to us. This presents a real opportunity for Canadian enterprises to up their game and tap into the burgeoning Ukrainian market.

So, as we think about the future trajectory of trade between Canada and Ukraine, it's evident that this initial agreement has laid a solid foundation. By sustaining this momentum and exploring new avenues, we can continue to foster growth and fortify the bonds between our two countries.

However, when we examine the complexities of international trade, particularly in the context of agreements with the European Union, we encounter a host of challenges concerning sanitary standards, particularly regarding the trade of beef and pork. These hurdles have become especially apparent in our ongoing talks with the United Kingdom, where Canadian producers encounter significant barriers to getting their products to market. Despite the passage of time, these barriers remain, largely due to strict regulations aimed at protecting public health and biodiversity. While these measures are undoubtedly important, they sometimes act as non-tariff barriers, complicating trade and disrupting the smooth movement of goods.

The process of resolving disputes related to these standards has been further complicated by some intricate arbitration procedures, which can often be cumbersome — and, in some cases, nearly impossible — to overcome. However, amidst these challenges, there is a ray of hope found in the provisions outlined in the current free trade agreement. These provisions commit to addressing such disputes according to the established guidelines of the World Trade Organization. This marks a significant departure from past agreements, like CETA, the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, where similar issues have remained unresolved, impeding trade and economic cooperation. Thus, the incorporation of these provisions in the current agreement is a positive step forward, offering the promise of greater clarity and efficiency in resolving trade disputes linked to sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

• (1450)

When exploring the landscape of Canada's energy opportunities, there is a crucial aspect: the provisions within the agreement pertaining to the phasing out of coal. This discussion sheds light on the noteworthy resurgence of coal consumption observed across Europe. This resurgence is not merely a happenstance but rather a deliberate response to reduce dependence on Russian gas imports, which, as we're all aware, directly funds Russia's ongoing military aggression in Ukraine.

What's particularly striking is the proactive stance taken by several European countries in seeking Canadian exports of liquefied natural gas, or LNG. That demand that has been readily met by the United States, evident in its recent investments in expanding LNG export facilities. Unfortunately, Canada has yet to capitalize on this burgeoning demand, resulting in missed economic opportunities and potential avenues for collaborative endeavours that could have propelled our energy sector onto the global stage. A Conservative government will take a much more proactive approach.

Colleagues, it's imperative to recognize the significance of establishing genuine free trade agreements, ones that prioritize fair economic exchange while upholding democratic values and international law. A robust free trade agreement serves not only as an economic tool but also as a bulwark against aggression and tyranny. It is a tool for fostering collaboration, prosperity and stability on the world stage.

Conservatives have negotiated over 50 trade deals. We are the party of free trade. Free trade between free nations is something we support 100%. We were the first western country to sign the free trade agreement with Ukraine.

Let me reaffirm: Conservatives stand with Ukraine tirelessly and unequivocally. The relationship between Canada and Ukraine is very important. We have 1.3 million Canadians of Ukrainian origin living in our country. Many of these individuals played pivotal roles in the development of Western Canada, contributing significantly to its growth and prosperity. Their presence enriches the social fabric of Canada, and their invaluable contributions to our nation must not be overlooked. Consequently, these strong people-to-people connections between Canada and Ukraine have been fostered, in part, by their enduring influence.

Conservatives stand with Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression. We stand with Ukraine in its pursuit of freedom, democracy and prosperity. We will continue to stand with Ukraine, shoulder to shoulder, as it charts its course towards a brighter and more prosperous future.

I strongly support this position. Putin's war of aggression is not just against Ukraine. His war machine attempts to undermine the Western consensus for democracy, the rule of law and the pursuit of a quality of opportunity, and we will not back down from standing with Ukraine.

[Senator MacDonald]

I will have more to say about this bill when it gets to third reading, especially the inclusion of an inappropriate and unnecessary carbon tax in the text of the bill. For now, I invite you, colleagues, to send this bill to committee for further study and to get it back here as quickly as possible. Thank you.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

An Hon. Senator: On division.

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

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

(On motion of Senator Harder, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade.)

[*Translation*]

**DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT ACT
EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT**

BILL TO AMEND—EIGHTEENTH REPORT OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE ADOPTED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Omidvar, seconded by the Honourable Senator Clement, for the adoption of the eighteenth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (*Bill S-244, An Act to amend the Department of Employment and Social Development Act and the Employment Insurance Act (Employment Insurance Council), with an amendment*), presented in the Senate on December 11, 2023.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

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

(On motion of Senator Bellemare, bill, as amended, placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[English]

CUSTOMS TARIFF

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Housakos, seconded by the Honourable Senator Ataullahjan, for the second reading of Bill S-204, An Act to amend the Customs Tariff (goods from Xinjiang).

Hon. Bernadette Clement: Honourable senators, I note this item is at day 15. I am not ready to speak at this time. Therefore, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding Rule 4-15(3), I move adjournment of the debate for the balance of my time.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Debate adjourned.)

• (1500)

[Translation]

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK ON SICKLE CELL DISEASE BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Mégie, seconded by the Honourable Senator Cotter, for the second reading of Bill S-280, An Act respecting a national framework on sickle cell disease.

Hon. Sharon Burey: Colleagues, I rise today to speak to Bill S-280, An Act respecting a national framework on sickle cell disease.

This national framework must include measures to increase awareness, address training needs, create a national research network and a national registry, ensure equitable access to neonatal screening and consider an analysis of the financial impact on patients and families.

[English]

I will be speaking as the critic of this bill and, colleagues, this is my first attempt at being a critic.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Burey: I want to thank my leadership team and my Conservative colleagues for facilitating this outcome. It is especially significant since this is Black History Month in Canada, and sickle cell disease affects largely — but not

solely — the Black community. Furthermore, February 29, 2024, is Rare Disease Day, and this coincides with the International Decade for People of African Descent now extending to 2028, as recently announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

It has garnered wide support from persons with lived experiences, advocacy organizations and the research and academic community, as outlined by the bill's sponsor, Senator Mégie.

I wish to thank Senator Mégie and her team for bringing this important bill forward, and for allowing us, as the Senate of Canada, to truly put into action and bring to life the words in our Constitution and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms — creating an inclusive Canada, where all its citizens can have the opportunity to live to their highest potential.

This bill continues the legislative path started by MP Kirsty Duncan when she tabled Bill C-221, which was meant to implement a comprehensive national awareness for sickle cell disease and thalassemic disorders, which only made it to first reading — and to Senator Cordy's introduction of Bill S-211 in this chamber, designating June 19 as National Sickle Cell Awareness Day. That bill received Royal Assent in December 2017. Thank you for that, Senator Cordy, and also for reminding us that it was the Honourable Dr. Jean Augustine who first spoke about sickle cell disease in the other place many years ago.

Senator Mégie has thoroughly discussed what sickle cell disease is, as well as its prevalence, complications, the lack of awareness and the lack of research funding. She has also reviewed important treatments that reduce hospitalizations and emergency room visits, and improve health outcomes and potential cures for the disease with gene editing and bone marrow transplants.

I also want to thank Senator Gerba, Senator Ravalia and Senator Cordy, as mentioned, for their insightful and supportive speeches.

I wondered what I could add to this already comprehensive review and compelling case for the need for such a bill, but I also wondered what questions I had on how the committee process might further shed light on this matter. This, colleagues, is how I believe I can fulfill my role as the official critic of the bill.

I decided, again, to look at my own community and dig into my own experiences as a physician — when, early on in my career, I treated a few children with sickle cell disease — and use this to infuse my inquiry.

I want to focus on the following: the development of new quality standards in Ontario; one serious and debilitating complication — stroke — and its prevention in order to show the importance of raising awareness; put this bill in a larger context regarding what this bill does for all Canadians, especially those living with hemoglobinopathies — genetic disorders — and rare diseases; and what could be considered during the committee process that might improve this bill.

Having not experienced the ravages of sickle cell disease in my nuclear or extended family, I, too, even though I trained as a pediatrician over 30 years ago, had limited exposure to the social, economic and psychosocial impact on patients and families — until I practised in my community of Windsor-Essex, and had a few of my own patients who had sickle cell disease. I saw the suffering, disparity in availability of comprehensive health services and lack of protocols, especially related to pain management in vaso-occlusive crises, as already has been discussed. There was a lack of coordinated psychosocial support, and a lack of awareness of the economic impact on patients and the acute on chronic disability experienced by many patients.

Today, Windsor-Essex County is fortunate to have two hematologists who have set aside time to care for patients with sickle cell disease and thalassemia within our community. Dr. Mohammad Jarrar, a pediatric hematologist/oncologist; and Dr. Andrea Cervi, an adult hematologist, both provide care to children and adults in our community, mostly through their private offices. I want to thank Dr. Jarrar for providing me with an update on care in the Windsor-Essex community, and the pending proposal to the Ministry of Health in Ontario to provide more comprehensive care clinics in smaller communities across Ontario. Dr. Melanie Kirby-Allen, co-director of the Hemoglobinopathy Program at The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, whom you met last week in the chamber, provided me with a medical update on sickle cell disease, and pointed me to the work of Health Quality Ontario which provides quality standards for care for various diseases across Ontario — in this case, sickle cell disease.

Sickle cell disease is one of the most commonly inherited red blood cell disorders. It leads, of course, to serious health conditions, including infection, stroke, organ damage and acute and chronic pain. It is most prevalent in regions of Africa, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and India, although the sickle cell trait is found in all racial and ethnic groups. As a result of global migration, there has been an increase in the prevalence of sickle cell disease among people of African, Arab and Indian racial/ethnic backgrounds in Canada.

About 3,500 people in Ontario and 6,500 people across Canada have sickle cell disease. According to Newborn Screening Ontario, the incidence of sickle cell disease in Ontario in some populations is about 1 in 400 compared to cystic fibrosis — another gene disorder — where it's 1 in 3,600. Of course, Senator Mégie spoke about the disparities in funding. This is something we will explore.

As well, I want to mention the health quality standards, which I alluded to in my opening remarks. This health quality standard in Ontario reflects the care that children, youth, adults and families should expect from health care providers, and the standard of care that providers are expected to adhere to.

There are eight such standards or quality statements about the care that patients and families should receive: care free from racism, discrimination and stigma; comprehensive assessments annually from an interprofessional team at a dedicated sickle cell centre; timely assessments of painful vaso-occlusive crises; treatment within 30 minutes of triage and 60 minutes of presentation; referral to a health care professional who's knowledgeable about chronic pain and sickle cell disease; psychosocial assessments and social supports; and a designated health care provider when transitioning from youth to adult services.

Colleagues, patients and families in the Windsor-Essex region still have to travel to London, which is two and a half hours away, and sometimes to Detroit in the United States, as it is only 30 minutes across the bridge or through the tunnel.

Unfortunately, little has changed in 30 years. This is not good information, but this is why this bill is important.

The hematologists in my community do not have the funding for an interprofessional team to be able to provide comprehensive care that is readily available in these specialized centres. Of course, this often leads to extended periods in emergency rooms, which are already overcrowded, and prolonged hospitalizations.

• (1510)

In my previous statements and speeches, I have noted that a national strategy or framework would allow for standards, sharing of best practices, research and collaboration across jurisdictions at the municipal, provincial, territorial and federal level. It would improve accountability, allow for the collection of data, improve research and help set better policies that could ultimately lead to cost savings and better outcomes. This national framework would give the federal government and Canadians data and an accountability framework necessary to ensure that Canadians receive value for the health care dollars spent.

I would like to salute the efforts of the Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario's president and chief executive officer Lanre Tunji-Ajayi and the Thalassemia Foundation of Canada's president Riyad Ebard for their tireless work in raising awareness and working to improve the lives of Canadians, especially those suffering from sickle cell disease and thalassemia.

Honourable senators, I have spoken about the situation in my community in Ontario and some health quality standards that have recently been developed. At this time, I want to focus on ischaemic strokes in childhood. Colleagues, the most devastating neurological consequence is stroke. The fact is that they are more common in children than adults, and the peak age for them to occur is between the ages of two to five years. This bears repeating: The peak age for strokes to occur is between two and five years, and the recurrence risk is up to 93% if untreated.

Thankfully, with newborn screening and early detection of stroke risk by transcranial doppler ultrasonography done in specialized centres, preventive treatment can be provided. This is one area where a national framework on sickle cell disease would be life-saving for many children across Canada. Many of these children would have cognitive and learning problems as a result of even micro-strokes, many of which go undetected.

As Senator Cordy noted in her speech, newborn screening is, however, not universally available across Canada. This is another reason for us to be able to move this bill forward so that, as senators, we have a role to ensure the universality principle and equitable access as outlined in the Canada Health Act.

Honourable senators, I want to share some thoughts on the broader implications of Bill S-280, An Act respecting a national framework on sickle cell disease. Connecting the dots, as it were. You are going to get used to hearing me say that. That is one of my favourite phrases.

Humans are 99.9% similar in their DNA. This means that what we learn from a single gene disorder like sickle cell disease will invariably help with the treatment of other genetic disorders. In a recent program, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry Jennifer A. Doudna noted that gene editing techniques like those used in CRISPR, having recently become available as a potential cure for sickle cell disease, may likely have therapeutic implications for other genetic disorders, such as Duchenne muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis, Huntington's disease and other rare disorders. Of course, I mentioned Rare Disease Day, which is on February 29.

I believe that my critique of the bill, which I will discuss below, will be explored during committee. My question to Senator Mégie was: Why was the bill specific to sickle cell disease and not inclusive of hemoglobinopathies or sickle cell disease and thalassemia, being the other hemoglobinopathy?

Hemoglobinopathies are a group of inherited disorders in which there is an abnormal production of the hemoglobin molecule. Both sickle cell disease and thalassemia have a different gene defect in the globin gene for hemoglobin, but are treated by the same clinicians.

She said to me there is a significant lack of awareness about sickle cell disease and, of course, there are the many acute and life-threatening unique features of sickle cell disease, including the frequent visits to the emergency room, pain medications and it being predominantly in the Black population and the acknowledged presence of anti-Black racism experienced in the health care system. This is one of the things we will be able to explore in our committee. Another area that could be more thoroughly explored is the economic and social impact of sickle cell disease on patients and their families.

In closing, I believe that the committee will investigate and explore ways that the bill could be improved and provide significant information to Canadians. It would be important to hear testimony from witnesses with lived experiences, advocacy organizations and the research community, including funding

agencies, government, philanthropic organizations, clinicians and experts who could provide analysis of the economic, financial, educational and psychological impacts.

I want to salute Senator Mégie for her tireless efforts in bringing this bill forward, and I urge you, dear colleagues, to vote to send this to committee for further study.

Hon. Bernadette Clement: Senator Burey, will you take a question?

Senator Burey: Certainly.

Senator Clement: Thank you for your speech, Senator Burey. You gave it like a veteran senator. It was a very good critic speech. And thank you to Senator Mégie for her excellent sponsorship work.

I want to come back to how you started the speech around Black History Month. You and I have something in common, we are people of Caribbean background and therefore we are among the folks most likely to inherit sickle cell anemia. You spoke of the stigma. I am aware in eastern Ontario of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Black Health through the University of Ottawa. They are doing a lot of awareness work.

I wonder if you could speak further about the stigma around sickle cell and what barriers the Black community would face because there is inherent racism in how we access services. I wonder if you could comment further on that.

Hon. Sharon Burey: Thank you so much, Senator Clement. This is a very important point. I want to return to something that Senator Cordy mentioned in her speech when it was the Honourable Dr. Jean Augustine who spoke about sickle cell disease and everyone said, "What is that?" not knowing that it affected so many Canadians.

The lack of awareness is one of the reasons why there is so much stigma associated with it. We spoke of the vaso-occlusive crisis, which are painful events when you come in and you are thought of as a drug-seeking person so you are stigmatized and not given appropriate pain medication. We already know from many research studies that when racialized people go to the hospital asking for pain medication, their pain score is thought to be not as relevant as someone from another ethnic group.

We know there is a lot of work to be done. I think that having this bill to raise awareness will help to decrease that stigma. It will also allow people to talk about it — I'm talking about people who are suffering from sickle cell disease — so that it will be able to enter the conversation. We all know about mental health and how, for a long time, we know that it came out of the Senate in *Out of the Shadows at Last*, the mental health report that was so important. Talking about it brings things out of the shadows. That is what is really important.

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie: I sincerely thank Senator Burey for agreeing to be the critic for this bill. I am truly happy about that.

Before I answer your question, I would like to ask you one myself.

When health care professionals are taught about the different hemoglobinopathies, including sickle cell disease, is sickle cell disease the only one that's covered, or are all the other ones included as well?

• (1520)

[English]

Senator Burey: Thank you, Senator Mégie. In medicine, we learn of all the hemoglobinopathies. If you remember, a hemoglobinopathy is a disease related to the hemoglobin as they are a part of it. We learn about thalassemia disorders, and you will see that most clinics are called “hemoglobinopathy clinics,” but they service kids who have sickle cell disease and thalassemia.

Interestingly, there are different kinds of sickle cell disease. Senator Mégie alluded to that. There is one where you have the SS trait or one where you have the SC. You will have one where there is sickle cell and thalassemia, and then another one where you have sickle cell Punjab disease, so we learn about all of those things.

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Mégie, do you have another question?

Senator Mégie: I just have a comment, if that's okay.

The Hon. the Speaker: Technically, you should be asking a question, but you can make your comment.

Senator Mégie: That's the reason I talked to you about that when you asked the question. It's because we know that we're going to talk about it anyway. That's why I didn't include it in the bill.

We met with an expert recently. Did you think to ask her the same question about why we're only talking about one disease? Do you know what she thinks about that?

[English]

Senator Burey: No, I have not asked Dr. Melanie Kirby-Allen about having the stand-alone with just sickle cell in that framework. I will ask her that question, and I believe we will be able to explore this further in the committee process.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

[Senator Burey]

NATIONAL SECURITY, DEFENCE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE OPERATION, APPLICABILITY AND FUNCTIONALITY OF THE EMERGENCIES ACT—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Tannas, seconded by the Honourable Senator Osler:

That the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs be authorized to examine and report on the operation, applicability, and functionality of the *Emergencies Act* in a modern context, as well as the robustness of parliamentary supervision it provides for and its interaction with the rules and procedures of the Senate; and

That the committee submit its final report no later than September 28, 2023.

Hon. Scott Tannas: Honourable senators, I note that this item is at day 15. I am not ready to speak at this time. Therefore, with leave of the Senate, notwithstanding rule 4-15(3), I move the adjournment of the debate for the balance of my time.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Debate adjourned.)

LIFE OF GORDON PINSENT

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Manning, calling the attention of the Senate to the life of Gordon Pinsent.

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): With leave of the Senate, this item being at day 15, I would like to move the adjournment of the motion in the name of Senator Manning for the balance of his time.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Debate adjourned.)

[Translation]

INTERNAL ECONOMY, BUDGETS AND ADMINISTRATION

MOTION TO AMEND CHAPTER 2:06 OF THE *SENATE ADMINISTRATIVE RULES* ADOPTED

Hon. Lucie Moncion, pursuant to notice of November 21, 2023, moved:

That the *Senate Administrative Rules* be amended in Chapter 2:06 by adding the following after section 14:

“Disclosure of video footage

14.1 Despite anything else in this Chapter, the person responsible for the Senate’s corporate security, or their designate, may, upon written request, disclose Senate-controlled video footage recorded for security purposes to the House of Commons, the Parliamentary Protective Service or to a law enforcement or intelligence agency operating under the jurisdiction of the Government of Canada or a province or territory if that footage does not depict a senator or a Senate proceeding or disclose confidential or privileged information or an individual’s personal information beyond their location, appearance and activities at a particular time.”; and

2. That the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel be authorized to make any necessary technical, editorial, grammatical or other required, non-substantive changes to the *Senate Administrative Rules* as a result of these amendments, including the updating of cross-references and the renumbering of provisions.

She said: Honourable senators, this motion simply proposes to make consequential amendments to the *Senate Administrative Rules*, or SARs, to authorize the director of corporate security or their designate to release Senate-owned video footage to third-party security or law enforcement entities.

[English]

As Senate-owned video footage is considered a record under the *Senate Administrative Rules*, permission from the Internal Economy Committee is currently required to release it. The proposed amendment will streamline the approval process and allow corporate security to release upon request video footage to trusted third-party entities, provided that the footage does not depict a senator or Senate proceedings or disclose confidential or privileged information or an individual’s personal information beyond their location, appearance and activities at a particular time.

[Translation]

Since June 2022, the Corporate Security Directorate has been operating under a temporary exemption granted by the Internal Economy Committee allowing the disclosure of Senate-owned video footage in these specific circumstances.

This change to the SARs will allow for effective information sharing in connection with security incidents or investigations and the submission of evidence in court proceedings.

This motion aims to ensure the continuity and efficiency of our corporate security practices.

Thank you for your attention.

[English]

Hon. Marty Klyne: Senator Moncion, will you take a question?

Senator Moncion: Yes.

Senator Klyne: I want to understand this. If I wanted to tweet a great speech of my fellow Senator Cormier, would I have to go through — no? Because it was awesome.

Senator Moncion: No. It’s the cameras that are outside of the building, in the precinct.

Senator Klyne: Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

CANADIAN FLAG AS PART OF CELEBRATING NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA DAY

INQUIRY—DEBATE

Hon. Andrew Cardozo rose pursuant to notice of February 13, 2024:

That he will call the attention of the Senate to the Canadian flag as part of celebrating National Flag of Canada Day.

He said: Honourable senators, it is indeed an honour to launch this inquiry on the Canadian flag on Flag Day, co-sponsored by senators Salma Atallahjan, Jane Cordy, Lucie Moncion and Rebecca Patterson. I’m delighted that other senators will speak to this subject today and in the days ahead. You will hear a series of short speeches on this topic.

• (1530)

Colleagues, this morning as I walked here to the Senate building, I stopped by the Centennial Flame and marvelled at the flag atop the Peace Tower. I thought of the ceremony that

happened on February 15, 1965 — 59 years ago. Then, Lester B. Pearson was Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker was leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, Tommy Douglas was the leader of the New Democratic Party, Réal Caouette led the Cr ditistes and Georges Vanier was the Governor General of Canada.

I will add that the late former senator Landon Pearson, the daughter-in-law of former Prime Minister Pearson, talked about watching the ceremony with a brood of Pearson grandchildren in the Prime Minister's office, which was then in the East Block. It was a cold February morning, a lot colder than today.

Getting a new flag had not been easy. Pearson had a deep belief that we needed a made-in-Canada flag that had no colonial ties. He said:

I believe that today a flag designed around the Maple Leaf, will symbolise and be a true reflection of the new Canada.

In 1964, Pearson proposed this publicly at the Royal Canadian Legion convention in Winnipeg, where he really walked into the lion's den — in fact, the lion's jaws. The Legion, although an extremely patriotic group, did not want to see the flag changed.

[*Translation*]

A committee of MPs subsequently held more than 35 meetings and received more than 3,500 submissions from Canadians.

The Pearson pennant featured three maple leaves with narrow blue bars on either side. The version that was approved was designed by historian George Stanley.

[*English*]

The first flag was sewn by Joan O'Malley from November 6 to November 7. She literally sewed it overnight, and is only one of two women to appear in the history of the Canadian flag.

Interestingly, the other woman is Margaret Konantz, one of very few women MPs at the time, a Liberal MP from Winnipeg of M tis ancestry and the only Indigenous person to play a key role in the development of the flag.

The flag was approved on December 15 by the House of Commons after an incredible and not necessarily harmonious debate. The final vote took place at 2 a.m. after a six-month debate.

It then came here to the Senate for a vote. It was approved in the House of Commons on December 15. Are there any guesses as to when it was approved in the Senate? It was approved on December 17. Sober second thought was rather quick.

I think Senator Moodie might have been disappointed because, at best, they would have had just a Committee of the Whole, with no committee examination.

I'm sorry if that was too soon.

[Senator Cardozo]

At any rate, the Queen gave it Royal Assent on January 28 in London, an occasion that was attended by both Pearson and Diefenbaker, which is important to note because Diefenbaker had been totally opposed to the new flag. However, once it was passed, he was present for the Royal Assent.

The occasion wasn't overly joyous, however, because the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were in London for the state funeral of Winston Churchill. Churchill had died on January 24; during the week between his passing and his funeral, our wonderful flag received Royal Assent.

It is fitting that we had a more joyous occasion here on February 15, the day that the new Maple Leaf flag was officially raised on Parliament Hill for the first time. The Maple Leaf has become a well-recognized symbol around the world, one that Canadians can wear with great pride. We often hear that other people wear it on their backpacks to pass as Canadians, because they are better accepted that way.

At home and abroad, it means so much to so many. It's certainly a possession of great pride for every new Canadian when they take their oath of citizenship. That is certainly something I can attest to.

I have two thoughts: First, while the flag inspires great pride for most Canadians, this feeling is not necessarily as prevalent among Indigenous people, as the flag does symbolize the Canadian state and, in some ways, colonialism; it is a state that has not always been kind to Indigenous people and a flag that sometimes flew atop residential schools.

Second, more recently I've become concerned that the Canadian flag has been adopted by people who want to see governments removed by undemocratic means and feel an unlawful extended occupation of our nation's capital and harassment of innocent citizens are fair forms of civil disobedience — people who fly it in protest, sometimes upside down or defaced.

In my own way, I want to say on the record that our Maple Leaf flag symbolizes us as a country, a people and a society, and we must respect and defend it. It is the flag of one of the best countries in the world, a country that reaches for the top and, unlike most others, is willing to examine its imperfections and work to overcome them. That is the genius of the Canadian state and the enormity of Canadian society.

Thank you.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, Senator Cardozo, for launching this inquiry and giving us the opportunity to say a few words.

Honourable senators, according to statistics released from the 2021 Census, those born before 1965 make up less than one third of the Canadian population. This means that 71% of Canadians have only known the red maple leaf as the symbol of our country. As we know, February 15, 1965, was the day that the simple yet majestic flag, stark red on bright white, flew for the first time.

[*Translation*]

The debate for or against a new Canadian flag to replace the British Empire's Union Jack and Canada's Red Ensign was heated and passionate. As Senator Cardozo mentioned, Lester B. Pearson decided in 1961 that Canada needed a new flag and made that promise part of the Liberal Party platform. The Liberals' arrival in power in 1963 marked the start of a fierce debate over the flag.

[*English*]

As our colleague has mentioned, the opposition Progressive Conservative Party, under the leadership of John Diefenbaker, opposed a new flag. The Progressive Conservatives wanted to retain the Red Ensign. Debate raged on to the point that former Prime Minister Pearson kept Parliament in session through the summer of 1964. Finally, a special flag committee was set up, and members were given six weeks to come up with a new design.

The committee held 35 lengthy meetings and — again, as noted by Senator Cardozo — reviewed more than 3,500 submissions, including one submission from an eight-year-old Ontario student, who is now a proud member of our Government Representative Office team. That was not the one that was selected, unfortunately.

Senator LaBoucane-Benson: Not me; I was not yet born.

Senator Gold: It was not Senator LaBoucane-Benson.

I will continue and am happy to share that.

After much discussion and some shenanigans on the part of both major parties, the red maple leaf on white with red borders was chosen by the committee. However, it wasn't until after 250 speeches in the House of Commons and the invocation of closure on the part of former Prime Minister Pearson that, in the early hours of the morning of December 15, 1964, the red maple leaf became Canada's flag and Canada's pride. The Senate provided sober second thought and, two days later, gave its approval as well.

• (1540)

Today there are very few of us, perhaps not in this chamber, but beyond, who remember the great flag debate. I hope I speak for all of us when I say that seeing the red Maple Leaf flying atop the Peace Tower, on the uniforms of our Armed Forces, carried by our athletes during the Olympic Games or sewn on the backpacks of young Canadians seeing the world — of which I was one 50 years ago, hitchhiking through North Africa and Europe with my guitar in hand, without a patch, but happy to see the patch because I knew that I could connect with my fellow Quebecers and Canadians — in all of those manifestations brings a sense of pride and gratitude — gratitude that we live in one of the greatest countries in this world. Thank you once again, colleagues, and thank you, Senator Cardozo.

Hon. Denise Batters: I have a brief question, if Senator Gold would accept.

Senator Gold: Of course.

Senator Batters: I wanted to bring a little more history into this. I was not sure if you or our colleagues are aware that those flag hearings that took place in the mid-sixties — and that was before I was born — took place in the Senate, in Centre Block, in a hallway in a room there. I think it was Room S-256 or S-156. I'm not sure of the exact room number. Yes, 256, I believe. But that is where those flag hearings took place. I did not know if you knew that.

Senator Gold: Thank you for that. No, I did not know. That is my answer to your question.

Again, it is nice to be connected to a part of our history, even if some of us were not yet born.

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan: Thank you, Your Honour.

Honourable senators, I rise today to speak on the fifty-ninth anniversary of the Maple Leaf flag, and I thank Senator Cardozo for initiating this inquiry.

I have had the pleasure of calling Canada my home for over 40 years, and I have always felt a special kind of pride when I catch a glimpse of the Canadian flag during a trip aboard, a pride that I have shared with my daughters, who were both born here.

For example, during a trip to my hometown, my eldest daughter — who was very young, about five at that time — and I came across a scratched-out board where we could make out a Canadian flag. My daughter was squealing with delight to find a piece of her Canadian home in Peshawar, northern Pakistan. "Canada, Canada," she was screaming. At this stage, we had a young gentleman who was my father's driver — chauffeur, whatever you want to call it — and he joined her, "Canada, Canada." They were shouting together. He went home later and complained that he had a headache because my daughter had been screaming, "Canada, Canada" throughout the ride, neglecting to tell my mother that he had joined her in screaming, "Canada, Canada, Canada." I can tell you that as we were driving, people were looking at us, wondering what was happening in that car.

Last year, while in London, we were roaming across the city with my extended family, and all of a sudden, someone screamed, "Look, Canada, Canada." Sure enough, there was the Maple Leaf, a little piece of home.

Our flag has been a symbol of friendly ties between countries. It has even been the subject of "flag-jacking." I learned that term when I was doing some research for my speech today. There is a term called "flag-jacking," originating in the 1990s, where travellers would wear another country's flag to appear to be from a favoured nation, and guess which favoured nation it was? It was Canada. We all remember where travellers, especially Americans, would sew the Canadian flags onto their backpacks so that people would think that they were Canadians. This practice became so commonplace amongst Americans that Mark Bowden, a body language expert, provided humorous tips on how to pass yourself off as a Canadian in 2013.

To this day, I will never forget climbing the steps to Centre Block as a new senator and catching a glimpse of the Canadian flag. It would stir emotions every time as it not only represents our country, but also who we are and the respect that it sparks.

Honourable senators, when I see our Maple Leaf flag wherever I am in the world, I feel a sense of pride, comfort, security and, above all, love. Thank you.

Hon. Jane Cordy: Thank you, Senator Cardozo, for initiating this inquiry on our flag. It is a great opportunity for all of us.

Honourable senators, many of us take for granted the idea that the flag represents the same thing to everyone. Prior to working in Ottawa, the Canadian flag was not something I thought much about.

When I first arrived in Ottawa after being appointed to the Senate, I must admit there was a certain excitement and a great sense of pride in seeing the flag, our Maple Leaf, on top of the Peace Tower. Knowing that I was here to represent my province of Nova Scotia as part of Team Canada was pretty special.

I must add that I still pinch myself and feel that same pride wash over me when I travel internationally on government business and I see our flag, whether on embassies or at NATO meetings or at meetings with people from other countries. In seeing that flag, I am also reminded of my father who fought in Italy during World War II. That connection for me is very emotional and very sentimental. That is what our flag means to me.

Honourable senators, symbols allow people to go beyond what is known or seen, creating linkages between otherwise different concepts and experiences. The flag, in many respects, exemplifies this. We do not all have the same experiences or feelings toward the flag and what it represents, but our flag does create a linkage and a context that inspires conversation. At the very least, I hope this is the case. I hope conversations, particularly around reconciliation, can be had and that we allow space for the differing emotions surrounding the flag.

May Flag Day inspire a look inward to examine what, if anything, Flag Day means to us as individuals and why it may mean that, while understanding that those sentiments are not necessarily shared.

I would like to finish my comments by quoting Tareq Hadhad, a Syrian refugee living in Nova Scotia, who, with his father, started a chocolate business called Peace by Chocolate in Antigonish. If you have never tasted their chocolate, I suggest that you do so. Here is his quote:

Forever the Canadian flag will be associated in my memory with a welcoming sign I saw after I came to this country that said: "Peace for you in Canada." Our flag has always meant hope and home to me. Whenever I saw it during my whole journey, I felt safe and free. Now, wherever it flies, I know I will meet the kindest people on the planet.

[Senator Ataulhajan]

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucie Moncion: Madam Speaker, colleagues, I rise to speak to Senator Cardozo's inquiry to mark the National Flag of Canada Day, which is today, February 15.

A symbol of Canadian identity, the red maple leaf on the Canadian flag is well known and recognized around the world.

As we celebrate our magnificent flag, it's important to recognize its power beyond Canada's borders. This multi-faceted flag also embodies Canada's commitments to international relations and global diplomacy.

The Canadian flag plays a crucial role in the imaginations of people and governments around the world. As a symbol of Canadian values and our commitments to diplomacy, peace and cooperation, it serves as a backdrop for exchanges with other nations that share common goals and challenges, or for more contentious dialogues aimed at protecting the interests of Canadians.

In Canadian law, the living tree doctrine refers to a method of constitutional interpretation that recognizes that the Constitution is a living, evolving document. It allows constitutional rules to be interpreted in light of the evolution of our society.

Similarly, the Canadian flag is the visual representation of a society that is reinventing and transforming itself with the passage of time.

The Canadian flag carries a complex history and encourages reflection, inviting us to look carefully at the lives and experiences of those around us. This reflection serves as a guide for our societal aspirations and a springboard to our future.

• (1550)

If we want our flag to truly be representative of an evolving identity, it is our duty to contribute to building a collective consciousness that faithfully reflects everyone's experiences and aspirations. We need to carefully consider the values and founding principles that transcend Canada's image through its flag, by consciously and concretely getting involved in supporting decolonization, francophone minority communities, vulnerable and poor communities, gender equality, gender-diverse and sexually diverse communities, and efforts to welcome and help new immigrants. This list is not exhaustive, of course, but it includes some important societal issues. Our flag symbolizes all these ideals and aspirations and stands as a reflection of our commitment to building a better society.

As a world leader on fundamental rights, Canada has a duty to be consistent and responsible in the choices it makes, both domestically and internationally. The Canadian flag acts as a unique vector for spreading messages of international peace, cooperation and diplomacy and as a symbol of our country's steadfast dedication to these crucial values.

On this National Flag of Canada Day, let's take a moment to reflect on our past, our present and a future in which Canada inspires other nations to build a better, more peaceful and inclusive world. Let's proudly and respectfully celebrate our national flag.

Thank you.

[English]

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to the inquiry drawing attention to the National Flag of Canada Day.

To respond to Senator Cardozo, I will take this from my own experience as a veteran, and maybe it will help to understand why there was pushback when we looked at changing the symbol that so many Canadians have fought and died under.

As a veteran, I have to say, I never know whether I can truly put into words what the flag means to me, but I am going to give it a try because that's what we do here.

I spent 34 years wearing the Canadian flag, the Maple Leaf, on my shoulder to uphold the values and what it represented — not only to Canadians but to people from around the world who were often in peril. For me, it was a symbol of pride, protection and belonging to something greater than myself, of service and of duty.

For those people I encountered, often in some pretty dire circumstances, it was seen as an easily recognizable symbol of hope and expectation. Senator Ataullahjan, you will recognize this next statement. Many Canadian Armed Forces members, including myself, can recount stories when deployed in conflict areas where the refrain “Canada, Canada, Canada” was called after us as we went about our business trying to create the conditions so that peace and security could prevail. It was not because of our uniforms. It was because, in accordance with international law, the Canadian flag — both visible and muted — was everywhere. It is what it came to represent.

Throughout my career, the Canadian flag has been an integral part of my identity. I have worn it proudly across this great nation and to many places around the world, including the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Afghanistan and many other countries. The flag has been ubiquitous throughout my adult years, flying proudly in all its red-and-white splendour wherever I have served, but you have to understand, not in active conflict areas because, believe me, it draws unwanted attention to our soldiers.

It is under the Maple Leaf that Canada's sailors, soldiers and aviators serve. The Maple Leaf features on the ensigns of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Air Force. The Maple Leaf has primordially represented one of the most important symbols of our military, reinforcing the fact that, first and foremost, we serve and protect Canada and Canadians.

While it is certainly interesting for me to think about the patriotic impact of the flag, I have seen the power of that symbol on Canadian military personnel and allied soldiers as well. I have directly experienced and have heard stories shared by other Canadian Armed Forces military nurses and medical personnel in conflict zones as far away as Somalia, the Balkans and Afghanistan. I share a story with you about the palpable feeling of calm and release that has been experienced by wounded or ill Canadian or allied soldiers once they saw the flag on our shoulders or on the walls around us and when they realized that they were finally safe and that there was hope.

I want to continue the story of why the Canadian flag is so meaningful to me and perhaps why there was pushback when we first chose to change it. You only have to watch the news during the Afghanistan years or as recently as the downed Cyclone helicopter off the coast of Greece in 2020 to know that Canadians who choose to serve the flag may come home carefully draped in that very same flag after paying the ultimate price.

Senators, you don't have to look far to see that the maple leaf that adorns our flag is, in fact, all around us in this very chamber. We see all 12 of the maple leaves that are indigenous to Canada on the floors, and we see our flag on the wall. I draw that link because we must never forget that we are all serving Canada in our own way.

I am so proud of our flag. It will forever be a symbol of hope, peace, order and service to this great country. Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[Translation]

Hon. Chantal Petitclerc: Honourable colleagues, I came to know and love our flag when I became an athlete. As a Canadian, my flag represents my country, my history, with its failures and successes. As an athlete, it represents even more: my extended athletic family.

[English]

I will never forget the first time the Canadian flag was raised for me — August 1996 in Atlanta. I had beat the odds, winning the 100-metre race 900ths of a second in front of the American favourite. This was my first gold medal and the very first time that I would have our flag raised just for me. Colleagues, indulge me in bragging a little.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Petitclerc: Allow me to describe that moment for those of you who have never made it to an Olympic or Paralympic podium, like myself and Senator McBean.

There you are. You cross the finish line exhausted, excited, in shock, really. After years of dedication, hard work and discipline, you've made it. You are filled with adrenaline, just going through the motions in a dream: the victory lap, the media zone, the doping control, getting into your podium uniform and getting briefed on protocol. It is a bit of a blur. The reality of it all has not sunk in yet.

Finally, they take me to the middle of the stadium, pronounce my name, have me up on the podium, and then silence. I hear the first notes of our national anthem, and I watch the Maple Leaf rise very slowly. I remember I took a deep breath, and my eyes filled with tears, and my heart burst with joy and pride. There I was, staring at my flag, representing Canada, feeling the power of a whole country and feeling grateful for this flag and for what it represents — for this country, where I was able to go from a small town, a 13-year-old girl lying on the ground at our farm after my accident, then being included and supported all the way to that podium.

Colleagues, I had quite a few other occasions to watch this flag being raised for me, and I can tell you, it never gets old. Every single time I felt proud and grateful, and it was pure magic. Happy Flag Day!

• (1600)

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the Senate will now proceed to Question Period. The minister will take her seat and we will then proceed.

QUESTION PERIOD

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on December 7, 2021, to receive a Minister of the Crown, the Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, appeared before honourable senators during Question Period.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, we welcome today the Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, to ask questions relating to her ministerial responsibilities.

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.

[Senator Petitclerc]

[English]

MINISTRY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Welcome here, minister. Minister, Canadians were dismayed last fall when a new directive was released substituting public prayers for the fallen at Remembrance Day ceremonies with “spiritual reflections.” A week or so before Remembrance Day, the new policy was walked back. The Chaplain General said:

... any chaplain who participates in a Remembrance Day ceremony this year can propose a spiritual reflection or opt for the practice of recent years.

The “practice of recent years,” minister, meant prayers.

The new directive was put under review, but we still don’t know if it will apply to Remembrance Day ceremonies this year or the years ahead. Minister, what is the current status of this directive?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you so much for that question, Senator Plett. First and foremost, let me be clear that the directive was put forward by the Chaplain General of the Canadian Armed Forces and not the government. The directive was put forward to ensure that the prayers and all services would be very inclusive.

I — like I’m sure many senators — have attended many Remembrance Day services during that week, and all of the events that I attended had prayers very much included within those services. However, the Chaplain General also wanted to make sure that multi-faith types of groups, organizations and individuals could also see themselves within the ceremony.

Once again, I think that overall the Remembrance Day services, as always, were very well done this year. My experience was that prayers were still very much involved in the services.

Senator Plett: That doesn’t even start answering the question of what the current status of the directive is.

I understand the Chaplain General promised a committee would be formed to review the new directive on public prayers at Remembrance Day ceremonies. Minister, has the review begun? Has a committee been formed? If so, did you appoint the committee members? If not, who did? Who are the committee members and what is their mandate?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Once again, with respect to the prayers, it’s very clear that in no way did the government of the day instruct the Chaplain General with respect to the directive that was brought forward. That directive was provided by the Chaplain General himself.

With respect to the work that was done with respect to the committee, I can come back to you with respect to the committee members. I don't have their names in front of me, but I would be more than pleased to come back and provide that to you.

KOREAN WAR VETERANS

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Minister, my question for you today is concerning our Korean War veterans and their legacies of service and sacrifice during the Korean War, which is Canada's third-bloodiest war.

As you are aware, next year will be the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Korean War years — June 25, 2025, to July 27, 2028. Minister, what will Veterans Affairs Canada do to honour this milestone seventy-fifth anniversary for our deserving Korean War veterans?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you very much, senator, for that very important question, and thank you again for meeting with me this morning. I look forward to continuing a working relationship with respect to the area of commemoration and especially our Korean War veterans.

With respect to the seventy-fifth anniversary, the Department of Veterans Affairs will again look forward in planning a commemorative event, more than likely both national and also internationally, as we did for the seventieth event. I can guarantee that our office will certainly be working in close cooperation with respect to the ambassador and also your office in order to make sure that we can meet the needs of our Korean veterans. Once again, last year, we had some very successful events to commemorate the sacrifice of the men who served, and we look forward to being able to plan those events again.

Five years from now or four years from now sounds like a very long time away, but we certainly recognize when we plan these types of events we have to start planning early. Again, I commit to you in making sure that contact will be made.

Senator Martin: Thank you for that. As you know, our veterans are in their late 80s, 90s and some in their 100s because they served in World War II as well. The key to the legacy is to ensure the war is no longer forgotten and the next generation learns about it in schools and other places.

My supplementary is: How will Veterans Affairs Canada ensure that the Korean War is no longer forgotten and long remembered through some of the educational initiatives you have?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Thank you again for that very important question. I think commemoration in education is paramount, and it's up to all of us to ensure those stories are not forgotten. Our commemoration events that take place are not only for veterans

but for all Canadians. We have to ensure, once again, that our school-aged children, that all Canadians are fully aware of the sacrifices of men and women.

For myself as a fairly new Minister of Veterans Affairs, I certainly have two priorities. Number one is ensuring that veterans receive the benefits and services they are entitled to and that they're well taken care of. Commemoration, for me, is another important area. We do a lot of work at Veterans Affairs Canada with respect to commemorating the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War, and that has to continue. Regardless of whether our veterans are getting older, we have to make sure those stories continue on. We cannot forget.

Furthermore, as well, when it comes to our modern-day —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[*Translation*]

PROCESSING OF DISABILITY BENEFITS APPLICATIONS

Hon. René Cormier: Welcome to the Senate, minister.

In February 2023, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Thériault, asked your department to take prompt action to ensure that processing times for francophone veterans' applications for disability benefits were the same as for anglophones. Shockingly, the commissioner noted in a preliminary investigation report that, for the 2022-23 fiscal year, the average wait time for French-language applications was 40 weeks, compared with 32 weeks for English-language applications.

How has your department addressed this unacceptable disparity, and can you confirm whether this problem has now been resolved?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you very much for that important question, Senator Cormier.

Again, I want to thank you for your hard work on Bill C-13, which has now become law, and on the amendments made to Bill C-35.

Like many of you, I think the processing times for applications from francophone veterans are totally unacceptable. I am pleased that the Department of Veterans Affairs has taken the necessary steps to ensure that these applications are reviewed as quickly as possible.

The department has hired more francophone and bilingual staff to make sure that the work is being done. I can tell you that French-language applications are now being reviewed faster than English-language applications, but that being said, we must continue the work and keep an eye on these applications to avoid reversing the trend.

TRAINING FOR EMPLOYEES

Hon. René Cormier: In June 2022, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs released a report recommending that your department provide all its employees with training on the LGBT purge in order to educate them about the unique trauma experienced by veterans who were victims of this institutional discrimination.

Minister, where do things stand in terms of the delivery of this training and what practical impact will it have on your staff and the victims of the purge?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Another very important question. Thank you very much, senator. The Department of Veterans Affairs has implemented training to ensure that all departmental staff receive training on the issue of gender-based analysis plus and gender equality. That work is ongoing.

• (1610)

Last year, the Department of Veterans Affairs set up a forum for LGBTQ2+ veterans because we wanted to hear about their needs, the challenges they face and the work that needs to be done to support them. I'm very pleased to say that I was able to meet with the Rainbow Veterans of Canada so that we can get a clear understanding of the issues. We will continue to work closely with the LGBTQ2+ community.

[English]

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

Hon. Iris G. Petten: Minister, my question is to you in your capacity as the Minister of Veterans Affairs. In November, I made a statement in this chamber on the repatriation of the unknown First World War soldier from Northern France. The soldier's remains will be reinterred in a specifically designed tomb at the Newfoundland National Memorial in St. John's to represent Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who served in all branches of the military.

What is your department doing to support the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to facilitate these important remembrance actions?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you again for that important question. When I became the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I had an opportunity to be briefed on a number of files. This was one of those files that I became quickly aware of. We certainly recognize that the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador wants to see the repatriation of an unknown First World War soldier from Northern France to be returned to Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Commemoration Branch of the Department of Veterans Affairs is working to make sure that is going to become a reality.

We also recognize that Newfoundland and Labrador became a part of our federation in 1949. That is a really important meeting, and they want to make sure that repatriation occurs. The department is working closely with our colleagues from the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Hon. Iris G. Petten: The former Minister of Veterans Affairs' mandate letter states that a primary responsibility is to ensure that the government fulfills its obligation to support our veterans and their families. Part of this must include supporting the education and awareness of the actions of our veterans throughout history. What is your department doing to support such awareness campaigns?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: The commemoration part of the work that we do at Veterans Affairs Canada is really important to highlight the work that has been done by our Canadian Armed Forces and our veterans, both nationally and internationally. That commemoration work is very useful in order to make sure that we educate our young people. Just this week, for example, I attended many schools, and we did Valentines for Vets — not only were we preparing valentines, but we were also doing a bit of education for our young children. They were just so proud to take part in these types of activities, and they were eager to learn about the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform.

WOMEN VETERANS

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Thank you, minister. My question is going to focus on research for veterans who are women. You'll notice that I didn't say "women veterans" because we don't say "men veterans," so it's veterans who are women. Dr. Maya Eichler from Mount Saint Vincent University has recently completed a scoping report on the needs of women veterans. She came out with a clear call to develop a strategic life cycle of research from their service in the Canadian Armed Forces through to being veterans together. Are you aware of this report, and, if so, what do you plan to do to address the findings?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: I am aware of the report. We certainly recognize that the experiences of men and women within the military, and as they transition out, are very different. Their needs are very different as well. Making sure that all policies, services and programs have a gender-based analysis lens within our department is a top priority for me. Having been the former chairperson of the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, when it comes to GBA Plus, it is something that I know very well. As a department, it is not just lip service. We have to make sure that work is done in order to ensure that our veterans, either men or women, receive the treatment that they need. More research needs to be done within this area.

We certainly recognize that the injuries that both men and women can sustain — as a result of the work that they've done — can be very different. Once again, the department has to make sure that those needs are met when it comes to those whom we serve.

Senator Patterson: I will come back to GBA Plus in a future question. We know you've started the working group within the department. I'm looking at women's health specifically. I'd like to know where we are with the progress of the committee and, in particular, I'm going to go back to this: Without data, we know nothing. Where are we with the progress on developing a research program for women veterans?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Once again, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done with respect to that area. I'm certainly not going to say that everything is perfect and all under way, but we certainly recognize that there is a real need to make sure we have that clear data. If we want to effect change, we have to effect change with the data that supports it. Again, that is work that we continue to do with respect to the officials within the department. The officials have certainly recognized that the minister is very eager, and we certainly want to see results in this area.

TRAGEDY IN NOVA SCOTIA

Hon. Jane Cordy: Thank you, minister. I'm asking this question on behalf of my colleague Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard.

Minister, seven years after the Lionel Desmond tragedy, we now have the Desmond Fatality Inquiry to lead the way to healing for this community. My question today was not covered by the inquiry.

The murder-suicide occurred in the Borden family home in Guysborough — the family home of Shanna, Lionel Desmond's wife. The Borden family relives this nightmare in that house every single day. As human rights advocate Rubin Coward aptly stated, "Nobody can heal in the environment where the harm took place." The Borden family is pleading for help, minister, to move out of this house. Does Veterans Affairs plan on helping this veteran's family?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you so much for that question. The tragedy that happened on January 3, 2017, in Upper Big Tracadie, Nova Scotia, is nothing short of an absolute tragedy. The community, the province and the country as a whole are devastated.

As a result, the Province of Nova Scotia launched an inquiry, and, just last month, we received the recommendations of that report. The judge in question prepared a 572-page report that I have reviewed, and that our department continues to review. There were three appointed recommendations, if you will, for Veterans Affairs Canada. Our department will continue to review that and also work collaboratively with the Province of Nova Scotia.

Senator Cordy: Thank you very much. The follow-up is mine, minister, in case Senator Bernard is listening.

Minister, the inquiry didn't address the family home because it was outside its mandate. I know you talked about everything that was reported, but that was not within its mandate.

Shanna's parents still live in the house, but they want to leave because of the memories. It's also challenging to sell the house because of the stigma. Compassion is needed for these survivors.

Lionel Desmond's case fell through the cracks. Please help the family find some solace by giving them a new place to live. Can your department allow this request for the family so that it, too, doesn't slip through the cracks?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Again, I certainly want to recognize the devastation that the Desmond family continues to endure. This is, as I've indicated, nothing short of a tragedy for everyone that's involved.

With respect to the report, we are closely going over the recommendations that have been brought forward. I have also asked my officials to follow up with the family with respect to the situation at hand.

PROCUREMENT PROCESS

Hon. Leo Housakos: Minister, your government has stated that all contracts with GC Strategies — the company at the heart of "ArriveScam" — have been suspended since November. But yesterday, Senator Gold stated it was the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, that requested all contracts to be halted. Does that sound like it's in regard to CBSA only, or does CBSA have a say over contracts in other departments?

He also stated that pending the outcome of a review, contracts with this company could be suspended. Is it "could be" or is it "already are"? Senator Gold also stated that while contracts with CBSA had previously been suspended, it is only now that this applies government-wide. Which is it? Is it now, or was it in November?

Perhaps you can clear up some of the confusion by telling us if Veterans Affairs or National Defence is still doing business with GC Strategies. If not, when were the contracts and work suspended? What date? How were you informed of the suspension of the contracts? Has the work they were doing been outsourced, or is it now being done in-house?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Once again, senator, thank you very much for that question. I will certainly have to get back to you with respect to the details that you're looking for. I certainly don't want to lead the house astray. I would prefer to provide you with the proper information, and we can certainly do so in the very near future.

Senator Housakos: Thank you, minister. Regarding the gravity of the situation, and what the government has said about contracts with GC Strategies being stopped, it's amazing that you wouldn't know, minister, about your two departments in question.

• (1620)

Considering the Auditor General's scathing rebuke of the recordkeeping and basic management practices of the department involved, I fail to see how these same people are best suited to be investigating themselves.

Can you tell me who is conducting the review of contracts in your departments? When does that review begin, and when is it expected to conclude? Will your government refer all contracts with GC Strategies to the RCMP and Auditor General for a proper investigation by the AG and the RCMP?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much, senator. Again, as I've indicated, I will certainly get back to you with respect to the details you are looking for. I do not want to lead the House astray, and I want to ensure we provide you with the proper details. I will ensure that is done in the very near future.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Thank you, minister.

Minister, just before Christmas, a committee in the Nova Scotia Legislature heard how the cost-of-living crisis has led to homelessness for some serving members of the CAF posted in Halifax. The Nova Scotia executive director of the Royal Canadian Legion told the committee that active military members are:

. . . "living rough" in tents, out of their vehicles, couch surfing, and sometimes engaging in interpersonal relationships for the purposes of securing housing, "which often at times makes them victims of domestic violence."

This is quite a serious epidemic, as he described it, and it needs to be tackled.

Minister Blair seems to be in denial of all of this. The National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman says it's true. The executive director of the Royal Canadian Legion of Nova Scotia says it's true. I live in Dartmouth-Cole Harbour. There are tent cities everywhere.

What is the Government of Canada going to do about safe and affordable housing for the men and women currently serving —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, senator. It is time for the answer.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Once again, the whole issue of housing is a top priority for our government. We continue to make historic investments to ensure that there will be sufficient housing for young people in our communities.

As Minister of Veterans Affairs, I can tell you that we've made some exciting investments in recent years to ensure that housing will be available for our veterans.

For example, we invested over \$80 million in last year's budget, and over the next few months, we will be making announcements regarding the various community groups that have received grants. These groups will be able to offer veterans the additional services they need, such as mental health and addiction services.

We continue to work to resolve this situation, because we recognize that it is urgent.

[*English*]

Senator MacDonald: I'll make sure to tell those people in the tents that.

My understanding is Veterans Affairs has a small group of people who are commissioned to identify Canadian war victims in Europe through DNA testing. Now I understand that Veterans Affairs has decided they're going to discontinue this program and let it go. I'm wondering if you can tell us why.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: We continue to do work with respect to that very important area and the area of commemoration. With respect to repatriation and the rest of it, it always continues, and as I've indicated to the comment earlier, we will continue to support the initiative, be it in Newfoundland and Labrador and in other areas as well. We continue to work in close collaboration with DND in order to make sure that work continues. It's very important. Again, I'm very happy to continue to proceed with respect to the work that's being done in that field.

[*Translation*]

STAFF OF THE NON-PUBLIC FUNDS

Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie: Minister, thank you for being with us today.

Staff of the Non-Public Funds have been on strike for a month. These folks deliver vital programs and services to veterans and their families. They are asking for fair wages, uniform pay scales and stable employment.

Could you give us an update on the ongoing negotiations?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: First, I'm aware of what's going on with the strike. In recent months, I had the privilege of visiting a number of military bases across the country and I saw first-hand that people were on strike.

I think negotiations will take place at the bargaining table. We want to make sure that employees end up with an acceptable contract, considering the important work they do for veterans across the country.

Once again, I hope that these negotiations will continue, since the bargaining table is the best place for both parties to get satisfying commitments.

[English]

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR VETERANS

Hon. Mary Coyle: Two weeks ago, Judge Paul Scovil released the final report of the Desmond Fatality Inquiry into the tragic deaths of Afghanistan War veteran Lionel Desmond; his wife, Shanna; their 10-year-old daughter, Aaliyah; and his mother, Brenda, in Upper Big Tracadie, Nova Scotia, very close to where I live.

The first of the 25 recommendations calls upon the Province of Nova Scotia to advocate with the federal government for case workers to be assigned to each veteran transitioning out of the Canadian Armed Forces. Minister, will you heed this recommendation and ensure that case workers are assigned to all veterans transitioning out of the CAF, particularly those with trauma, so that people like Lionel Desmond don't fall between the cracks again?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Absolutely. Once again, the incident that happened in Upper Big Tracadie, Nova Scotia, was a tragedy. The family members and community continue to be deeply affected by this.

I have reviewed the 572-page report prepared by the judge in question, and I have read it word-for-word very carefully. My department continues to look at the three recommendations, one of which was asking that a case manager be assigned to the members who are transitioning out of the Canadian Armed Forces. Once again, we will be continuing to work and have contact with the Province of Nova Scotia and also do a deeper dive with respect to the recommendations.

This is work that I take extremely seriously. We certainly want to make sure that our members whom we are serving are receiving the help, assistance and the support they need. Again, I look forward to continuing that work. We'll have more to say with respect to the recommendations in the next few weeks to come.

TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

Hon. Mary Coyle: The inquiry also states that Lionel Desmond was unable to join a transitional program into civilian life until he was formally released from the Canadian Armed Forces. This delayed access to resources that he needed in order to be healthy and successful in civilian life.

Minister, why does Veterans Affairs Canada require an official release from the Canadian Armed Forces before starting the process of helping veterans transition back into civilian life? Why not be proactive?

Could you tell us when in the next few weeks we might have answers to these questions?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you again. It is a very important question.

We have to recognize that when it comes to the work being done right now when it comes to Canadian Armed Forces members who are exiting the forces, we certainly want to make sure that transition when they become veterans in civilian life is done as seamlessly as possible. That is why I'm working with Minister Blair in order to make sure we can make that as seamless as possible.

We certainly followed the inquiry very closely as it was going on. Some changes have been made with respect to Veterans Affairs. I will give you an example: When individuals are asking for mental health services, we want to make sure they have timely access to service and won't have to go through the evaluation process, if you will. If someone is asking, they will receive the services.

Over the past two years, 16,000 veterans have applied for those types of services, and we've been able to make sure they have had them as quickly as possible.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR VETERANS

Hon. David Richards: Thank you for being here. In a way, my questions have been answered, but I'm going to ask them again, I guess.

The rate of suicide among former military members is significantly higher in proportion to the general public. For women veterans, it's a staggering 50% higher, and for men, it's upwards of 30% higher. It would be good to know that Veterans Affairs is serious about addressing some of the underlying problems of despair among veterans, such as PTSD, lack of housing and feelings of alienation from the society they were sworn to protect.

Can you tell me if there are any new and significant programs in Veterans Affairs you might be considering to address these problems?

• (1630)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you so much for that very important question. You are right; when it comes to access to mental health services, and when we looked at the rates of suicide amongst veterans, they are higher than the national average. As a result, we want to make sure those proper services are put in place.

That is why, as I indicated, two years ago we made the change with respect to Veterans Affairs Canada that when veterans were applying for mental health services, instead of having to go through the evaluation process, the adjudication — if individuals are asking for those services, it is evident there is a need immediately. So why are we making them wait?

From there, what we did is we made that change immediately. If someone is asking for the mental health services, they will be approved and be able to access those services immediately. Again, as I have indicated, over the past two years, 16,000 veterans have applied and received those services. They

have been fast-tracked. Again, we have to be there for our veterans in their time of need and not make them wait when they need psychological services that are required.

With respect to housing, significant investments have been made. In Budget 2023, we announced an \$80-million amount to address veterans' housing. Within the next few weeks, we are going to be awarding the contracts to the different groups that will be providing those services, rent supplements and wraparound services to make sure we can set up our veterans for success.

Senator Richards: Many of our former military rely upon medication to see them through their day-to-day struggles. Over time, their lives are put in danger by the very opioids they are prescribed. A multitude of veterans have come forward to me and others as advocates of psilocybin and MDMA, saying that the benefits of these two psychedelics far outweigh any benefits from prescribed drugs. Some have gone as far as South America to acquire them, saying it is what has kept them alive in their time of need. May we see some serious research into the advantages of these two drugs?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Again, a very important question that you ask. I believe you were one of the senators who spearheaded the research in that very important area.

We have to recognize — and I think we all recognize — that our collective understanding of traumatic stress injury has certainly evolved over the years. As such, our treatment approach has evolved as well.

Having been a former social worker in my previous life, I worked with many individuals who suffered from post-traumatic stress injuries, and many of them chose different therapy mechanisms, be it psychosocial, be it pharmaceuticals, et cetera.

We also recognize that psilocybin is an area of great interest at this point in time. There is some research that is being conducted. In fact, last week I was in Hamilton at the Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence, and I was speaking to Dr. Ramesh Zacharias. We were talking about a number of issues, but I also talked about the research that's being done in the area of psilocybin.

PROCESSING BACKLOG

Hon. Marty Klyne: Minister, welcome. Thank you for the segue into Budget 2023, which directed all federal departments to reduce spending by 3% over the next five years.

In addition, Minister Anand announced last August that all departments must provide solutions by October for cuts to reduce government spending by \$15 billion.

This results in an apparent contradiction, as the same budget provided further funding to increase Veterans Affairs Canada staffing to address the long-standing backlog and wait-time crisis. Yet, at the same time, the department is being required to reduce overall spending by 3% over the next three years.

Can you please clarify how these cuts are applied and what the effect will be on existing programs as well as new and backlogged applications?

[Ms. Petitpas Taylor]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: That's a very good question, and thank you so much. Let me be very clear. There will be no programs and services that will be cut for veterans and their families. The cuts that we have brought forward are in the area of executive travel and contracts. Through Veterans Affairs Canada, over the past eight years, we have invested more than \$11 billion in additional services and benefits for veterans and their families. In no way will those programs be cut at all through the departmental review.

I also want to indicate that with respect to the work that continues, we will ensure, again, that the programs remain in place. We also have to keep in mind that over the past number of years, as I have indicated, we have seen a significant increase in the investments made with respect to services and benefits.

In fact, the Department of Veterans Affairs has seen a 61% increase in the level of applications, and we have had to hire additional staff. Once again, the spending review will in no way affect that. Last year, we received additional funding in order to make sure that we could maintain those positions at Veterans Affairs Canada, as we want to deal with the backlog that we had.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Hon. Marty Klyne: Thank you, minister.

We know that post-traumatic stress and other operational stress injuries are significant issues for Canadian veterans and that mental wellness is necessary for living a fulfilling life, with supportive relationships and rewarding employment. Furthermore, we know that veteran homelessness or suicide is usually preceded by deteriorating mental health and relationships and often by addictions. Effective mental health treatments are severely lacking for veterans.

What is the ministry doing to provide quality and timely mental health treatment to our veterans, and how long is the backlog? Will your department please eliminate artificial cut-off dates that arbitrarily distinguish veterans on whether they were injured before or after 2006?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: There is a lot to that question; I will do my best to answer it as quickly as possible.

Again, with respect to the access to mental health services, as I have indicated, we certainly recognize that when veterans are asking for mental health care — let it be addictions or mental health — we want to make sure that those services are put in place immediately. That is why when it comes to the evaluation or adjudication of those files, we want to make sure they are approved immediately. We made that change two years ago.

As I have indicated, more than 16,000 veterans have benefited from that. We need to make sure that we treat the veterans where they are at and when they want the services. That is exactly what we've done.

It has made a significant difference as well with respect to the backlog. I am pleased to say that as of December we're at the 5,000 mark with respect to the backlog of cases. We recognize as a department we will always have a backlog, just with some complex cases that we —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Minister, I have submitted written questions to the Senate's Order Paper which have remained unanswered for several years. For example, I have a question about a court argument made by the Trudeau government in 2017 that it did not owe a duty of care to Canadian Armed Forces members. That question has been on the Order Paper since March 30, 2021, almost three years.

I also have a question concerning the pay raise given to a former chief of the defence staff after misconduct allegations were made against him. That question has been on the Order Paper since April 20, 2021.

Our Leader of the Government in the Senate, Senator Gold, continues to tell us that he sends these questions somewhere into space, and the answers never manage to find their way back here. As Associate Minister of National Defence, could you tell me why I would not have received answers to written questions for three years?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Once again, senator, I am more than happy to take this back and to do some queries for you on your behalf. I have been the Minister of Veterans Affairs now for the past six months. The Order Papers that I have received have been addressed, and I'm more than happy to follow up on the matter and get back to you.

Senator Plett: Thank you very much for that commitment, as well as the commitment that you made earlier to me and to Senator Housakos. We will certainly wait for your reply.

I have a number of other questions on the Order Paper that remain unanswered, so I will put them on the record here as well today, minister: the Royal Canadian Navy's readiness, the Kingfisher aircraft procurement and the workforce targets across the Canadian Forces.

Minister, will you commit to providing the answers to all of the long-standing questions I have raised with you today, and would you ensure, Madam Minister, that the answers will be tabled here in the Senate Chamber?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: I am absolutely committing to making sure that I follow up on your Order Paper questions.

[Translation]

STAFF OF THE NON-PUBLIC FUNDS

Hon. Claude Carignan: I'd like to follow up on Senator Clement's question about the ongoing strike. What impact is the strike having on processing times for pending applications? What tangible steps have you taken to avoid further delays?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: If you mean the issue around claim processing, the Department of Veterans Affairs has of course hired new staff members.

Senator Carignan: I mean the effects of the strike, right now.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Once again, senator, we always expect delays when a strike is in progress. We're not going to bring in other workers to replace striking workers. It's important for these workers to sit down at the bargaining table —

• (1640)

The Hon. the Speaker: The minister has the floor. You have the floor, minister.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Once again, as I said, it's very important to ensure that both parties are present at the bargaining table. It's extremely important that the parties come back to the table and that this communication continues.

Once again, yes, we recognize that strikes cause delays. However, the government wants to ensure that the negotiations continue so that workers get a fair and equitable contract.

Senator Carignan: I will repeat my question. What kind of delays are we talking about right now? Are we talking about a few years? What tangible measures have been put in place to reduce those delays?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Again, the people who work in those offices, behind the scenes, take on a full workload. We're not going to replace these people, who do important work. Employees need to be at the bargaining table because that's where they will get better results. We want to make sure the employees get a fair and equitable contract.

[English]

MENTAL HEALTH

Hon. Marty Deacon: Hello, Minister Taylor. Thank you for being here. In response to Senator Richards, you alluded to being aware of the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee report entitled *The Time is Now: Granting equitable access to psychedelic-assisted therapies*. It contains one recommendation and some very compelling testimony from veterans globally and experts in the field. The recommendation is that Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence, in collaboration with Health Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and applicable provincial and territorial authorities, immediately launch and fund a large-scale research program on

psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy for treating those mental disorders and other conditions identified as potential therapeutic targets for these types of interventions.

We're still working through the adoption and requesting a government response, but what are your office's thoughts on and response to this recommendation?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: As I indicated, our collective understanding of treating post-traumatic stress injuries has certainly evolved over the past number of years. We recognize that treating different types of mental health conditions has evolved and different treatment types are available.

With respect to psilocybin matched with psychotherapy, we recognize that there is a lot of interest. I know that through the Senate but also through some veterans that I have met with.

With respect to the work that is being done, last week I met with Dr. Zacharias, Medical Director of the Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans in Hamilton. I asked him about the research that was being done in the area of psilocybin. He indicated that with respect to the work that he and his colleagues do at the World Health Organization, a lot of international research is being done in the area. I think before we can do anything, though, we have to make sure we have that scientific data in order to ensure it is an appropriate treatment for the men and women who are seeking it. Again, more work needs to be done in this area.

I also recognize that there is some research being done in this area in Canada. I believe a doctor in Toronto — Dr. Wagner, if my memory serves me well — is doing some clinical trials in this area. However, a lot more work still needs to be done in order to better explore the possible benefits of this therapy.

CRITICAL INJURY BENEFIT

Hon. Marty Deacon: In 2015, the government created Canada's Critical Injury Benefit, a tax-free lump sum payment for Canadian Armed Forces members who meet specific criteria, including suffering from ". . . severe and traumatic injuries . . ." from a ". . . sudden and single incident . . ." that ". . . immediately caused a severe impairment . . ." It has been reported that accessing this benefit has been really challenging, with wait times of well over a year for a decision. In one instance, a veteran was denied this benefit because it couldn't be proven that a single incident led to his PTSD.

Do you think this benefit is working as intended? Why are such long wait times being reported?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you so much for that question.

We've seen the issue of the Critical Injury Benefit in the media — I have noticed different clippings over the last six months, since I have been the Minister of Veterans Affairs. However, what we also have to keep in mind is that Veterans

Affairs has a number of different programs that our veterans are entitled to: compensation programs and awards, psychosocial programs, rehabilitation programs and so on.

With respect to the Critical Injury Benefit, we certainly recognize that the number of people who qualify for that program is probably minimal. However, in the winter of 2023, the department updated the language with respect to the qualifications of that benefit, because we want to make sure people understand what the eligibility criteria are in detail.

[*Translation*]

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Thank you for being with us, minister.

[*English*]

I am familiar with the Veterans Affairs Commemorative Partnership Program, and I have no doubt that you share my view that it's important for us as a society to honour our veterans, commemorate our rich military and peacekeeping legacies and engage with Canadian youth in the hopes of instilling in them a sense of pride and respect for our Armed Forces.

There is currently a recruitment challenge among the Canadian Armed Forces. Are there specific educational programs in place at Veterans Affairs that would help fuel a sense of pride and, perhaps, make the Armed Forces a more attractive career choice for Canadian youth?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you so much. Yes, like you, I feel that the Commemorative Partnership Program through Veterans Affairs Canada is a very important initiative that we undertake both nationally and internationally.

With respect to your specific question about helping recruitment, I believe you are absolutely right. As the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I certainly see the work we do with respect to commemorating our elderly veterans who served in the First World War, Second World War and Korean War. However, we must do a better job of commemorating our modern-day veterans as well, which will also encourage younger Canadians to join the Armed Forces.

Therefore, we've undertaken initiatives to make sure that more work is done in that area. I hope we are going to see increased excitement from our younger generations with respect to joining Armed Forces. At this point in time, on average, about 8,200 members of the Canadian Armed Forces are retiring each year. We have to make sure we do our part in recruiting new members. I think that commemoration is certainly a way forward. I look forward to continuing that work.

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for that answer. As you mentioned, many initiatives exist to educate future generations of Canadian youth about the history of wars and conflicts and Canada's contributions to maintaining and protecting peace and security. One such initiative that comes to mind is the International Forum for Peace, Security and Prosperity, a great

Canadian initiative. Can you speak to us more specifically about your department's work in engaging with youth and whether you are familiar with this forum?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: I am familiar with the forum but certainly cannot give you a dissertation on it. I have certainly met with some individuals who have taken part.

With respect to the engagement of our youth, it is absolutely a priority. Just this morning, I met some individuals who are involved with the Royal Canadian Air Force Association. They talked to me about the different types of programs that exist out there, such as the Cadets Program. We really have to roll up our sleeves and make sure our young people are more involved and informed with respect to the different opportunities and programs that exist.

Again, if we want to recruit and retain members of the Canadian Armed Forces, we have to make it appealing to them and reach them where they are. All of these types of programs and initiatives are absolutely beneficial for our younger population.

GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Thank you. I will go back to our Gender-based Analysis Plus, or GBA Plus, conversation. We often hear from veterans about their inability to access benefits that they feel they need. Again, I will focus on veterans who are women, who come from equity-seeking groups and certainly who are from our 2SLGBTQI+ community, because their needs are distinct.

We know we need data. However, in order to acquire it, we must ask the right research questions to begin with. Can you please tell me what Veterans Affairs is doing to create a specific GBA Plus sex-and-gender-based analysis tool that works for veterans so that we can capture things such as occupational exposures and reproductive issues, et cetera?

• (1650)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you so much. Once again, this is certainly an area of great interest to me and to the department. We want to make sure that veterans get the help and support they need when they are accessing benefits.

Earlier today, a senator had asked about the delays that were happening with respect to applications for benefits. Not only were francophones affected by the delays in treatment but also women veterans — I will use that term, apologies. We saw that there was a delay in those applications as well.

Why is that? History has shown us that we have a lot more men who were in the Canadian Armed Forces who became veterans. Assessing and evaluating those files came naturally. They knew that if you jump out of a plane, your knees will probably be impacted. When it comes to women veterans, I think we all can agree that our anatomy is very different and the injuries that we sustain in our bodies are very different.

As a result, Veterans Affairs Canada put in place a dedicated team of individuals who adjudicate the files for women veterans. Again, we have to ensure that gender-based analysis is done, but also that we think about those different types of medical conditions.

That is just one example of the work being done at the department. There is still much work that needs to be done, but we are well on our way to ensuring that we can properly provide services to our female veterans.

SUPPORT FOR VETERANS

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: We know that the way the system is set up to look for benefits, which are insured benefits that veterans get, is siloed: You have a physical condition; you have a mental health condition.

In modern science, we also know that it is rare that one doesn't have a mental health component that is somatized through physical ailments, certainly with all of the conditions of service around that.

What are you doing in order to deal with the people coming to you with their first claim being for a physical injury, but they have a mental health challenge as well and need to connect with mental health services? How are we breaking down those silos so that we automatically offer access to mental health services along with physical support?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you so much for that important question.

Work continues to evolve in this area. As you have indicated, it is difficult to look at health issues or mental health issues in silos. Oftentimes, one affects the other. We want to ensure that our veterans will have access to the care that they need.

Often, there must be a multi-pronged approach when it comes to that care. It is not a one-size-fits-all. When adjudications are made with respect to these different types of claims, it is important to ensure that we have a holistic approach.

When it comes to our female veterans, we have a dedicated team. We have seen a lot of progress in that area; however, we must continue to do that work in order to ensure that we provide the proper services to those who have served our country.

TRAGEDY IN NOVA SCOTIA

Hon. Rodger Cuzner: Thank you. It is good to see my friend and former colleague.

I, too, would like to weigh in on the Desmond inquiry and the recent study that was tabled.

In December 2015, Corporal Lionel Desmond had his firearms licence revoked after he had been arrested because of a domestic dispute with his wife.

Five months later, in May of 2016, his licence was reinstated, even though he was in a federally funded care program. Through the inquiry, the staff said that at that particular time Desmond had been mentally unstable.

My question is about the chain of communication and the gaps — or, as referred to by Senator Patterson, silos — in the transition of the information from Veterans Affairs caseworkers to mental health workers to front-line workers. Did you see that before the inquiry was tabled?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you so much, Senator Cuzner, for that question.

I will reiterate that what happened in Upper Tracadie, Nova Scotia, is nothing short of a tragedy. Our heart goes out to all the families and community members who have been impacted by this tragedy.

As indicated, the judge in charge of the inquiry published a lengthy report. Three recommendations were made that were specific to Veterans Affairs Canada: first, that a case manager be assigned to veterans transitioning out of the Canadian Armed Forces; second, that individuals diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or other health issues be provided a copy of their health records, to be ingested into the Nova Scotia records; and finally, to improve the transfer of health records into each other's records database. We recognize that sharing of information and health records has been flagged with respect to the inquest and inquiry.

My department is doing a deep dive with respect to these recommendations and looking forward, in the weeks to come, to providing more details with respect to that.

I want to add that shortly after the inquiry report was launched, I reached out to the Province of Nova Scotia because, again, there are recommendations on both sides — on behalf of Veterans Affairs but also on behalf of the Province of Nova Scotia. We want to ensure that we do all we can to prevent any such tragedy from happening again.

Senator Cuzner: Thank you very much. I apologize for having to be scolded by the Speaker.

Madam Minister, Recommendation 12 states that they want to ensure that front-line professionals in multiple systems — such as health, mental health and mental health education professionals, social services and people in the justice system — are up to date on current information, particularly with respect to intimate partner violence, and that they are developing risk assessments and risk plans going forward.

The study would have brought all of this to light, but there must have been discussions within the department about these gaps in information. Were there steps being taken prior to the study?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Once again, thank you so much, Senator Cuzner.

With respect to your question, first of all, I want to be clear that we certainly followed the inquiry very closely. We did not wait for the results of the inquiry to come forward with the report. As such, some changes have been made at Veterans Affairs Canada. One example is with respect to mental health services.

Again, we have to make sure that we do a deep dive with respect to these recommendations, indicating that we want to do all we can to prevent this type of tragedy from happening. Sharing of information is certainly a key component with respect to the recommendations and something that we will have to look at very closely.

SPECIAL DUTY SERVICE

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): This question is on behalf of my colleague Senator Elizabeth Marshall from Newfoundland and Labrador:

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the Canadian Armed Forces joined the largest coalition of power since World War II, entering an active combat zone alongside coalition partners. CAF members played an important role in this conflict, especially in air and naval operations, demonstrating the dedication and distinction of these Canadian troops.

Despite these facts, Veterans Affairs Canada has denied these veterans the respect and compensation they deserve. Although they have served in an active combat zone, your department designates them as “special duty veterans” rather than “wartime veterans” — entitling them to fewer benefits and a lower commemorative standing than other veterans.

Minister, why won't the government change Persian Gulf veterans' service status from “special duty” to “wartime service”?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thanks so much for that question.

I want to be clear: Being designated as “special duty service” does not minimize, in any way, shape or form, the contributions or bravery of those who served in those missions.

However, since I have been minister, we have heard from many individuals asking us to take a look at that particular area. The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in the House of Commons has tabled a motion to conduct a study in that area. I have been advised that there is quite a bit of interest in that area, and I think the situation merits a study.

Senator Martin: I'm not minimizing their service and duty in any way, but, as you say, it deserves a study.

Also:

[English]

Our coalition partners have recognized that Persian Gulf War veterans engaged in wartime service. The Canadian government has refused to follow suit. Why are we not doing what other countries have already done for those who served in the Gulf War?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: Once again, that is why we have asked and tasked the Veterans Affairs Committee in the House of Commons to do a deeper dive within this area.

• (1700)

It is also important to keep in mind that it is not just for that conflict. We should be looking at all conflicts so that we don't find ourselves in this repetitive cycle for future conflicts. I'm looking forward to seeing the work of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, or ACVA, and the recommendations that I'm sure they'll be bringing forward.

[Translation]

CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Welcome, minister. Last August, the newspaper *La Presse* obtained a copy of a memo from your department showing that the cost of reimbursing veterans for medical cannabis had surged. Some 6,000 veterans are being reimbursed for seven grams of cannabis per day, while the average for very ill people, according to Health Canada, is two grams per day. I certainly understand that veterans are suffering, that many of them saw combat and that they need relief. Even so, have you solved this intriguing mystery?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you once again for this important question. The health and well-being of veterans and their families are at the core of the programs and services we provide across Canada. In order to help veterans who have been advised by a physician to take cannabis for medical purposes, we implemented a reimbursement policy. It is up to physicians, not us, to send a copy of the prescription to Veterans Affairs, which then issues the recommendation. According to departmental policy, it is perfectly true that we reimburse veterans for the costs they incur for this.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: I understand your general policy, but my question was more specific. How is it that 40% of veterans who use cannabis need a average daily dose of seven grams, when Health Canada normally recommends two grams?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: To answer your question more specifically, as of March 31, 2023, there were 5,760 veterans approved for reimbursement in excess of the three-grams-per-day limit. In 2022-23, the program exceeded \$167.6 million in reimbursements. In 2023, Veterans Affairs Canada conducted an internal audit of the program and identified areas for improvement. These are being discussed with health experts and other partners. No changes to the program are being proposed at this time.

VETERANS

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Minister, I would like to add a statement on the Persian Gulf conflict. Around 400 ground troops were part of one Canadian field hospital in the Royal Canadian Regiment, of which I was a member, so I promise you I will put that over here.

Second, I want to follow up on the point about determining what is conflict versus what is war. It brings up two points.

One point is that we lost 158 people in Afghanistan. I do believe that was a conflict. We lost quite a number in the Balkans, Somalia and Rwanda. The most important part of this next study is to look through conflict with a different lens than the impact it leaves on those who have survived those events. That's my statement.

My question to you is this. What is a veteran? A veteran in many people's eyes is someone from World War I or World War II and what that represents. One of the biggest barriers to accessing veterans' benefits for retiring modern military people is that they do not identify through that or get through the door. What can VAC do —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, senator.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Thank you so much for that question. First and foremost, many Canadians, when you ask them about their perception of a veteran, will say they think of someone at Remembrance Day events with a walker or in a wheelchair at the nation's capital. But I think we all recognize that when it comes to the definition of a veteran, there is a lot more. Sure, we have our senior veterans, but we also have our modern-day veterans.

We have to recognize that, in Canada, we have more than 450,000 veterans. How do we identify veterans? Well, the simple definition is someone who has completed basic training and is honourably discharged, they qualify as a veteran.

I'll share with you this anecdote from Christmastime with my family. We have a new benefit for veterans; they will have a free pass to our national parks this year. My nephew is a veteran, having served in the Canadian Armed Forces for five years. I just made the comment to him, "Look, you will qualify for the national parks pass." My nephew looked at me and said, "Well, Ginette, I'm not a veteran" and he had served five years in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Again, we must do a better job identifying these veterans and making sure they self-evaluate and see themselves as veterans. We must ensure they know what services they are entitled to. We still have some work to do in that area, but, again, that is something with which I'm absolutely seized.

NATIONAL MONUMENT TO CANADA'S MISSION
IN AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Salma Atallahjan: Minister, in 2014, former Prime Minister Harper promised to have a monument erected to pay tribute to the commitment and sacrifice of Canadians in helping rebuild Afghanistan. Following a juried competition, Team Daoust's design was selected. The jury's decision was later overruled by the federal government. This decision was justified by responses from veterans and the general public through an anonymous online survey. However, the jury had consulted these survey results and remained firm that Team Daoust's submission was the best option. This sets a dangerous precedent on surveys being the most reliable instruments. For example, 35% of the respondents were from Ontario and only 2% were from Saskatchewan.

Minister, how does this government justify breaking its own government procurement rules?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence: Again, thank you so much for that question. With respect to ensuring that we erect a monument in commemoration of our Afghanistan veterans, it is an absolute priority and the work is under way.

As you've indicated, Veterans Affairs Canada had conducted a questionnaire or survey, which was sent out through the My VAC Account to make sure that veterans and their family members would be aware of it.

To our great surprise, more than 12,000 Canadians responded to the survey. Most were veterans themselves or family members.

Through the survey or questionnaire, it was very clear that the large majority of veterans themselves had selected the Stimson monument because they felt it better represented the sacrifice, the loss of the veterans in question.

Veterans Affairs Canada at the time made the decision to listen to veterans and moved forward with the Stimson monument.

At the end of the day, we are erecting this monument, and we want it to be meaningful to those who served. That is why we made the decision to respect the wishes of the veterans.

Senator Atallahjan: Minister, Canada's combat role in Afghanistan ended in 2011. The last of our service members left in 2014. Why is it taking so long for a monument to be erected to honour our veterans from Afghanistan? We are in 2024 now.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor: It's a very good question and a valid question. We have to keep in mind that, back in 2014, a site had been chosen for the Afghan monument. The veterans of the day were very dissatisfied with the chosen location. The veterans at the time had indicated that the chosen site would flood in the springtime and would probably not be accessible in the wintertime.

When we formed government, the first thing we did was choose another site. From there, the consultation process began for choosing the concept. We are hoping that within the very near

future, we will see the construction of that monument. As you've indicated, it's been a long time. We certainly want to do all we can to commemorate those who lost their lives and to thank the men and women who served within that mission.

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Honourable senators, the time for Question Period has expired.

[English]

I am certain you will want to join me in thanking Minister Petitpas Taylor for joining us today.

[Translation]

We will now resume the proceedings that were interrupted at the beginning of Question Period.

[English]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CANADIAN FLAG AS PART OF CELEBRATING NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA DAY

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Cardozo, calling the attention of the Senate to the Canadian flag as part of celebrating National Flag of Canada Day.

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Inquiry No. 20 and join other colleagues to speak about the Canadian flag.

I thank Senator Cardozo for initiating this inquiry. It was 59 years ago today, on February 15, 1965, that our flag was raised for the very first time on the Peace Tower. I still pinch myself when I walk up the Hill and look up at the flag. Serving as a Canadian Senator — I'm sure you would all agree — is the privilege of a lifetime, and I do not take this work lightly.

• (1710)

My love affair with the Maple Leaf — not the Toronto Maple Leafs — goes back many decades.

Join me as we travel back in time to September 1972.

I had just turned 10 years old the month before, and spent the greater part of the summer playing with friends — soccer, the beach and street hockey — and enjoying two months of homework-free evenings. But all good things must come to an end.

Going back to school that year also coincided with a major international event in Montreal.

It was on September 2 — at the iconic Montréal Forum, just a few blocks from my childhood home — that the puck was dropped on the 1972 Summit Series. As an avid hockey fan and wannabe hockey superstar, the Summit Series was the ultimate sporting event. It was two hockey superpowers facing each other in an eight-game series, with games in both Canada and the Soviet Union.

No trophy, no medals and no cash prize — it was all about bragging rights and claiming the title of best in class.

What a disappointment, however, when our Canadian squad fell 7 to 3 to the Soviets at the Forum. Thankfully, two days later in Toronto, Esposito, Cournoyer and the Mahovlich brothers, one of which is a former colleague of ours, found the back of the net and tied the series 1 to 1.

When the series eventually moved to Moscow, Canada was trailing behind the Soviets. We lost game five, but came back roaring in games six and seven. The series was tied. Game eight would crown the winner.

It was September 28. It was do-or-die time.

For the occasion, my entire school at Sainte-Rita's was gathered in the school gym to watch the game live on this small black and white TV. The puck dropped at noon — our time.

I remember it like it was yesterday: the excitement, the hype, the pressure and the pride in watching Canada's best, adorning the maple leaf on their sweaters, as they represented us on the world stage.

For those old enough to remember, you will recall that Canada was trailing 5 to 3 by the end of the second period. Our boys only had 20 minutes left.

During the intermission, I was telling all my friends not to worry, and that Canada would win — being an optimist from a young age. I'm not a betting man, but my good friend — one of my best friends — who was very skeptical and mocking my optimism, challenged me to a friendly wager. I could not refuse. We had to keep the gym morale positive. We bet a quarter — my bus fare home — that Canada would make a comeback.

Two minutes into the third period, Esposito made it 5 to 4. With seven minutes left, one of my childhood idols, Yvan Cournoyer, tied it. We all know what happened with 34 seconds left in the game. I'm not going to yell, but Paul Henderson — the goal of the century.

The entire gym rose to its feet. We cheered. We hugged. We cried. And we proudly waved our small Canadian flags. And, of course, I also pocketed an extra quarter that afternoon, which is worth so much more today.

People were in the streets celebrating, waving their flags and singing the anthem. For days and weeks, that feeling of pride intoxicated me.

In fact, that pride in our nation, which is represented by the Maple Leaf, has never left me. It's with fond memories and a feeling of great pride and belonging that I look back on this moment in my life. And at the heart of this episode was Canada's flag. Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

Hon. Mary Coyle: Honourable senators, as I rise today — on National Flag of Canada Day — here in this chamber, located on the unceded and unsundered lands of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, I am sensitive to the fact that we are discussing the flag of a country born out of the colonization of Indigenous peoples. It's a flag which no longer carries the specific iconography of one of the colonizing nations, but a flag that nonetheless represents a country which is — still today — a work-in-progress in terms of its relationships and reconciliation with the original peoples and the decolonization of this bountiful territory we share.

When former prime minister Lester B. Pearson launched his quest for a new flag for Canada, he was looking for a flag which would represent a nation coming of age — a flag of a more mature and sophisticated nation, a flag of a nation which had participated valiantly in two world wars, a flag of a more diverse nation, a flag of a nation about to turn 100, and a flag that Canadians could rally around and be proud of when they celebrated the centenary and flocked to the ultimate national coming-of-age extravaganza, Expo 67 in Montreal.

Colleagues, change is hard for many people, and changing a flag from the one that Canadians fought under in both world wars — many of whom were still alive in 1965 — was particularly difficult, especially for a minority government to pull off.

Colleagues, each one of us has our own memories and experiences of the Canadian flag, with its red borders and its bold stylized red maple leaf against the white square centre. The maple leaf has many associations, from the Indigenous peoples who had discovered the food properties of maple sap, to the historical usage on Olympic and military uniforms, to coins and the song composed by Alexander Muir for Confederation entitled "The Maple Leaf Forever."

Some of us remember — yes, we do — the great flag debate, and some of us were born into a Canada where our current flag had been flying over the Peace Tower for some years.

Today, I just want to share a few short stories of my own experiences of the Canadian flag.

When I was a young schoolgirl, I became aware of the great flag debate because my elementary school bus driver used to express his own strong opinions on the bus about his preference for a beaver to be the dominant symbol on the new flag. Little

did I know at the time, there were, in fact, thousands of designs, including one with the four Beattles on it, sent to Ottawa by Canadians who had strong opinions like my bus driver. There were hundreds of speeches made in Parliament — most arguing against the final design. With a good design, a Herculean effort and the leadership of some key people, the bill to adopt the new flag passed the House of Commons with a vote of 163 to 78, and passed the Senate with a vote of 38 to 23.

When I moved to Antigonish in 1997, my awareness of the flag's origins grew. The daughter of George Stanley — the man who designed our flag — Laurie Stanley-Blackwell, was a history professor at St. Francis Xavier University. Her father had been the dean at the Royal Military College of Canada. Her husband, John Blackwell, has written extensively about the story of our flag and the many people involved in the design and parliamentary consideration.

That flag, with its beautiful and strong simplicity, was a source of pride for my 12-year-old self when I visited Expo 67 and was exposed, for the first time, to the amazing diversity of the world — and to see my country, Canada, in the midst of that international cultural richness on display.

It was an awakening for me in my own coming-of-age period of life.

It was, therefore, no surprise that I proudly affixed that flag to my backpack the first time I travelled through Europe at age 17. Thank goodness the parliamentarians before us didn't choose the "Maple-Spangled Banner," a Canadian take on the Star-Spangled Banner, which had 10 stars representing the 10 provinces in the middle of the maple leaf. One thing we young Canadian travellers were trying to do was distinguish ourselves from the Americans.

In more recent times, I was so proud to share in the joy and pride of the large group of new Canadians — among them was my friend Tareq Hadhad, CEO of Peace by Chocolate, from my hometown of Antigonish — at their Canadian citizenship ceremony at Pier 21 in Halifax. Our Canadian flag was a symbol of safety, freedom and opportunity for the new Canadians who waved it proudly that day. Colleagues, I must admit that since the occupation of our parliamentary area and downtown Ottawa by the so-called "Freedom Convoy," and the profane ways some people defaced and used our Canadian flag as their symbol, it has taken me some time, honestly, to be able to see our flag the way I used to.

Having said that, colleagues, I hope it is now time to start the process to move past that divisive and polarized period, and to reclaim the Canadian flag for all Canadians. It is an iconic and beautiful national symbol. Hopefully, by next year, the sixtieth anniversary of our flag, we can all wave them in that very Canadian way, not boastfully, but with humility, pride in who we are and hope for whom we are committed to still become. *Wela'lioq*. Thank you.

[Senator Coyle]

• (1720)

Hon. Andrew Cardozo: I have a question for Senator Coyle, but first I would like to congratulate everyone for their great speeches, which have been thoughtful and uplifting. I would also mention that I will keep the inquiry open for at least another week. Thank you, Your Honour and the Black Rod, for having more flags around the building today. I'm trying hard to come up with a question I'm going to ask Senator Coyle.

Thank you for speech. I wonder if you would share an example of how the flag was accepted or otherwise commented on by fellow travellers in Europe or elsewhere when you were travelling with the flag.

Senator Coyle: Well, by the time I travelled to Europe at 17 years old, my bus driver wasn't travelling around Europe, so he wasn't disappointed there wasn't a beaver on it. As many in this room — and I notice that Senator Cuzner has a Canadian flag on his backpack; I saw that today that he was carrying it in this chamber.

I noticed two things, really. It was a way for Canadians to connect as we travelled and met up with each other from different parts of Canada. It was also to start conversations with fellow travellers from other parts of the world. I never saw anyone using the Canadian flag who wasn't Canadian. I think there may be some urban mythology out there about that, and not to put down anyone else.

It was just such a source of pride. I do think that the reason we got that flag just before the centennial year was that there was just such a boost, such a feeling of confidence and pride in our country, and that was shared by all of us who met on the road.

(On motion of Senator White, debate adjourned.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I ask for leave of the Senate to suspend the sitting to await the message from the House of Commons with the sitting to reassemble at the call of the chair after a 15-minute bell.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: So ordered. The sitting of the Senate is suspended.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

[Translation]

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

• (1830)

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-62, An Act to amend An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying), No. 2.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION ADOPTED

Leave having been given to revert to Government Business, Motions, Order No. 155:

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate), pursuant to notice of February 14, 2024, moved:

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Monday, February 26, 2024, at 6 p.m.; and

That rule 3-3(1) be suspended on that day.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

(At 6:38 p.m., the Senate was continued until Monday, February 26, 2024, at 6 p.m.)

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