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The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Tuesday, December 10, 2024

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

Prayers.

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former Liberian President and Nobel Peace Prize winner. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Moodie.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

TRIBUTES

THE HONOURABLE NANCY J. HARTLING, O.N.B.

Hon. Raymonde Saint-Germain: Honourable senators, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today to pay tribute to our dear colleague Senator Nancy Hartling. Nancy and I were named to the Senate around the same time, and it has been a privilege to share these years alongside her.

Recently, as I was listening to her speech at second reading on Bill C-332, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (coercive control of intimate partner), I was touched by her empathy for and dedication to the defence of people, mostly women, suffering from injustices and violence. I was also touched when she mentioned that it would be one of her last speeches in the Senate. I felt at that moment that her speech was a perfect representation of who Senator Hartling is and what she stood for all her life.

Indeed, as a former social worker, she has always been a strong voice for disadvantaged people, especially families, as well as an ardent proponent of social justice and a fairer society.

It was also, I believe, a beautiful, full-circle moment, during which one of her final speeches echoed her maiden speech in this chamber, delivered on December 6, 2016. She then rose to pay tribute to the fallen women of the Montreal Ecole Polytechnique tragedy and spoke in a poignant way, denouncing this femicide as well as any violence against women. She was alerting us then, in her very first intervention, to what is an ever-growing phenomenon. From beginning to end, she will have been their voice in the Senate.

I also wish to take the time to personally thank Senator Hartling for the work she did in sponsoring Bill C-65, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (harassment and violence), the

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act and the Budget Implementation Act, 2017, No. 1, in 2018. This important bill set the stage for the work of the Senate Human Resources Subcommittee, which produced a new Senate harassment policy in 2021. If Senate employees feel safer going into work having a modern and robust harassment policy to protect them from abuse, they can commend Senator Hartling on her unwavering support.

At a moment when the country is suffering from many social problems, such as a housing crisis and a drug epidemic aggravated by a lack of mental health resources and support, we will miss her expertise and thoughtful advice.

Dear Senator Hartling, I know, however, that you will continue to be a leading force on these issues, even after your retirement from the Senate. As you have said in this chamber, once a social worker, you never stop being a social worker.

Senator Hartling, in my name and those of all your colleagues and friends from the Independent Senators Group, I wish you and your family the very best. You are cool, calm and respectful. Please know that you have only friends in this place.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the Government Representative Office to pay tribute to our retiring colleague, Nancy Hartling.

As you know, colleagues, Senator Hartling has been a fierce advocate for issues affecting women and families, founding the non-profit organization Support to Single Parents Inc., of which she was the executive director for 34 years. Senator Hartling was also a founding member of St. James Court Inc., an affordable housing complex for single parents, and was the co-chair of the provincial Minister's Working Group on Violence Against Women.

It was no surprise that shortly after her appointment to this chamber, Senator Hartling continued her advocacy, delivering her first remarks, as Senator Saint-Germain noted, by commemorating the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women, and calling on all of us here, and particularly on us men, to unite to enact change and end violence against women.

Again, as Senator Saint-Germain noted, Senator Hartling's work to improve New Brunswick and Canada continued by sponsoring Bill C-65, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (harassment and violence), the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act and the Budget Implementation Act, 2017, No. 1, which amended the Canada Labour Code to strengthen the existing framework for the prevention of harassment and violence, including sexual harassment and sexual violence, in the workplace. This legislation has had an impact on many Canadians and helped make our workplaces safer for all.

• (1410)

Senator Hartling, your advocacy and work have inspired so many, both within this chamber and outside of it. We were both appointed to the Senate around the same time — the fall of 2016 — and we joined the Independent Senators Group shortly thereafter.

During that time, I always appreciated and admired your openness, thoughtfulness, compassion and commitment to working collaboratively and by consensus. You always listened to all sides of an issue; that has been a hallmark of your time here, and it's something to which we should all aspire.

Let me come back for a moment — again, echoing Senator Saint-Germain — to your very first speech in this chamber, in which you said:

On my first day here on November 15, the Peace Tower was lit in purple. Today our flag is at half-mast, reminding us to eliminate violence. I believe I am in a hopeful place.

Senator Hartling, you have certainly made this a hopeful place, consistently pushing to make things better for women, families, New Brunswickers and all Canadians.

Once again, on behalf of my colleagues in the Government Representative Office, thank you for all you have done. We wish you all the best and a happy retirement.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to pay tribute to our departing colleague, the Honourable Nancy Hartling, as she prepares to take her official retirement from the Senate of Canada on February 1, 2025.

Prior to her career in the Senate, Senator Hartling was an advocate for socio-economic issues affecting families, gender equality, mental health and juvenile diabetes — to name but a few of the many important issues she has championed.

Appointed to the Senate in 2016, Senator Hartling has served on various committees, including the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans and the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights. Senator Hartling also served on the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, where we often sat side by side getting to know one another before committee sessions and between panels of witnesses. I know from our conversations how much she is looking forward to spending more time with her beloved family in her retirement. I'm still waiting for your answer to my question about the secret to your incredible youth.

In the chamber and beyond, Senator Hartling proudly served New Brunswick and continued her work advocating for, and being the voice of, the voiceless.

Senator Hartling, thank you for your dedication and service to Canadians as a senator for New Brunswick. I would also like to acknowledge Senator Hartling's family for their love and support throughout her years as a senator.

On behalf of the Conservative caucus, please accept our best wishes as you begin the next chapter of your life.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Scott Tannas: Honourable senators, I join my fellow colleagues in marking the departure of Senator Hartling from the Senate after eight years of service in this place.

When we pay tribute to our departing colleagues, we often note the big accomplishments in a person's career such as key positions they've held, notable awards and big-ticket legislative initiatives. Senator Hartling has had many of these throughout her professional career and here in the Senate. My fellow leaders have listed a number of these. I'd like to take a different path.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers lists six core values. I'd like to highlight two of those in relation to Senator Hartling. The association says that Canadian social workers' values include respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons and service to humanity. We've seen these values in spades during her time here. She has often advocated against gender-based violence and in favour of social equity through her numerous interventions in this chamber and in committee. This clearly demonstrates her commitment to these core values.

Of her 62 speeches in the Senate, 41 of them were Senators' Statements dealing with topics affecting Canadians every day, such as diabetes awareness, intimate partner violence and racism. However, societal changes do not happen overnight or with grandiose gestures. I'm hopeful that Senator Hartling will agree with me that true change can mostly occur only through small and frequent gestures and actions.

There's an ancient saying from the Chinese philosopher Laozi: "Great acts are made up of small deeds." I'd like to highlight some of Senator Hartling's smaller, impactful deeds that have had, and will continue to have, an effect and impact across Canada.

She made a difference when she spoke about the Senate and being a parliamentarian to Mr. Kieller's Grade 5 class at Columbia Park Elementary School in British Columbia. She inspired us by telling senators about the remarkable story of Rebecca Schofield, a young woman from Moncton who, while battling cancer, inspired the social media phenomenon of #BeccaToldMeTo, which encouraged people to perform acts of kindness.

Senator Hartling told us about the opening of the new hospice residence Albert House in Moncton, how palliative care can be taxing on hospitals and that there are better alternatives. She helped spread the word about supporting our health care and grocery workers during the pandemic and yelled out on Twitter to "stay the blazes home" on World Health Day in 2020.

Finally, I often saw Senator Hartling in the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, reach out to witnesses during her questioning to help them further explain their position or hone their arguments. I saw this time and time again, to the great benefit of those witnesses and the committee. She always applied her great skill with kindness and respect to help those individuals say what they needed to say, thereby amplifying their important impact on the work of the committee.

These small deeds lead, and have led, to great acts. They are also a sure sign of a great social worker and a great senator.

Senator Hartling, on behalf of your colleagues and friends in the Canadian Senators Group, we wish you a happy retirement. All the best to you in your future adventures.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard: Honourable senators, I am truly privileged to rise today, on International Human Rights Day, to pay tribute to Senator Hartling on behalf of the Progressive Senate Group.

As you have heard, Senator Hartling was appointed to the Senate as an independent senator for New Brunswick in November 2016, following quite an outstanding career focused on empowering families and addressing social issues.

Her work has always been grounded on principles of economic and social justice and human rights. She is a member of the Order of New Brunswick and received the Governor General's Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case for her community service. Her career in advocating for children's and women's rights carried through to her work in the Senate. My colleagues have spoken about that very well today.

In addition to her contributions in the chamber and in committees, her other contributions include serving as co-chair of the All-party Juvenile Diabetes Caucus and the Canada-Cuba Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group.

Working with Senator Hartling to bring awareness and attention to social work on the Hill has truly been a highlight of my time here. Senator Hartling, I have appreciated your kindness, compassion, friendship, allyship and deep commitment to human rights. I have learned a lot through watching your leadership in action.

As I was reflecting upon the opportunity and privilege to give this speech, I thought there was no better way to end than with a quote from you on leadership.

• (1420)

This is a quote from Senator Hartling:

Bold leadership means social and economic justice especially for girls and women. I believe collaboration, building partnerships and empowering others will lead to a more inclusive society with an improved quality of life for all Canadians.

Senator Hartling, thank you for your years of dedicated service to help improve the quality of life for all Canadians.

I want to thank Don, your family and your friends for sharing you with us. To say that I will miss you is an understatement. I will especially miss the look, the nod and the messages that you would send without words, the messages that didn't need words. I thank you for all of that, and I wish you the very best as you enter your next chapter.

Asante. Thank you.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Donald Kennedy, the Honourable Senator Hartling's spouse; Melissa and Marc Leblanc, her children; Anouk Julian, her granddaughter; as well as Melanie Phillips and Kathy Baragar, her sisters. They are accompanied by Rev. Dr. Shawn Redden, staff member Anthony Lamoureux as well as their spouses and family.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

THE HONOURABLE NANCY J. HARTLING, O.N.B.

EXPRESSION OF THANKS

Hon. Nancy J. Hartling: Well, good afternoon. It's almost like being at your funeral, but you're alive and listening to all of this.

I'm really pleased to be here today. It's hard. I remember Ratna saying you have to get ready for this, but you can't get ready for it. It's a whole new experience. Thank you to the leaders who said those kind words.

Raymonde, if I may, I remember you coming in, and you were just a ball of fire. She took on, after the bill went through, making sure our policies were updated on workplace harassment. I deeply appreciate that.

And Marc, your constitutional and legal advice, teaching and calm presence — and I was thinking, "You're retiring next year, right?" I can see you with your guitar. You're going to be playing "Raise a Little Hell" just to get all that out. Thank you so much for all you do for us.

Yonah, I've enjoyed sitting beside you because you're from B.C. and some of my family is from B.C., so I often feel close to you because you're close to where my children live. We had lovely, kind little conversations. It was always pleasant, and I appreciate that.

And Scott, we bump into each other at the hotel now that I'm staying there. He's always smiling and has lots of energy. I deeply appreciate your interest in the Indigenous Peoples Committee, the questions you ask and for bringing the last bill forward. You really care, and I think that's so important because we need allies who aren't Indigenous people to care about these issues. I appreciate that and your words.

Wanda, dear Wanda, I think we're sisters somehow. We have a lot of things in common. We've had a lovely relationship, and it's not ending here. I appreciate the things you work on that are so important to me as well. I know we'll keep our hearts and minds together in the future. I look forward to that.

Thank you all for your kind words. I didn't miss anybody, did I? Sometimes you're up here and you're like, "Oh, my gosh."

Anyway, I've prepared words of my own to tell you what I've thought about. Mine are more about the journey as a senator and what I've experienced, so for the people who are here — my family — you're not a senator but just so you know what your mom's been going through and what she did.

Honourable senators, thanks for your kind words and memories of my time spent in this place. I'll share a few of my memories at this time. It's been a great honour to represent New Brunswick, my home province, and Canada with all of you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your kind words. I'm going to share a few memories of that time with you.

[*English*]

When I came to Ottawa a little over eight years ago, it was exciting but terrifying. I said I was "terri-cited" because I was so honoured when I got that call from the Prime Minister. I thought, "Oh, my gosh." I said to the Prime Minister, "I've met your mother. I'm looking forward to meeting you." It was a shock to get that call and an honour to do this.

I made my way to Ottawa, and on November 15, I was sworn in with five unique colleagues: Senator Boniface, Senator Bovey, Senator Cormier, Senator Pate and Senator Woo. As all of you know, when you get sworn in, there's a unique bond that happens because they came in with you and you're in the newness. We've had a great journey, haven't we, friends? Yes.

We were only the second group to be appointed. We were pretty new in the game. There's a big process that happens, and we were in there trying to figure it all out together. We were in the other building, that building is so steeped in history. Imagine if those walls could talk, all the stories that happened there.

Then, the renovations happened there, so we came over here for the next four years, which has been very interesting. In the changing world, we had a pandemic. We asked ourselves, "How do we continue working?" We learned how to work remotely and even to vote with little cards at home. It's been a great experience, but I was glad to get back together after the pandemic.

As senators, we have to find a place to live, so I chose to get an apartment, and that was wonderful because you have a lot of comforts when you have an apartment. Now, I'm staying at a

hotel. It's okay too. I don't have to make the bed or clean, which is nice. I'm staying at the Château Laurier, which is a very interesting hotel. What's interesting is that it has a tunnel that goes underground, so in the wet weather you don't get wet. It's nice to go through that tunnel.

I found out a little history about the Château Laurier, and probably a lot of you know it. Just to share with you, Charles Melville Hays, the president of the Grand Trunk Railroad, was commissioned to oversee the construction. Sadly, I don't know if you know, but he died on the *Titanic*. I don't know if that says anything about the hotel, but the poor man, he never got to see it, and they never were able to have that opening with him. I thought, "Isn't that something?"

The Château Laurier has housed many people, and you can dig into the history if you have nothing to do. What's interesting is our prime minister from New Brunswick, R.B. Bennett, actually lived there for the five years he was prime minister. I thought that was interesting. It's worth checking out the hotel. I'm glad I had time to spend there before making the transition from my apartment to the hotel to home.

When I began my journey as a senator, I felt like I'd moved to a new country. I was thinking, "Oh, my gosh, a new culture, language, processes and procedures." It was quite overwhelming. Even finding the washroom was difficult. Fortunately, I spied a picture of our former speaker Muriel McQueen Fergusson near the women's washroom. She was always my beacon in New Brunswick, so I would step back and say, "Okay, Muriel, help me here. This is so new and different."

When new people came, the two things I told them were where the washroom was and where the food was. We get hungry after a time here, don't we? We eat a lot of cookies here. I think those comforts are things we need to make sure our colleagues know.

We were very fortunate when we came in because Heather Lank was the former principal clerk of the Senate. I don't know if you remember her, but she just retired. Every Wednesday, we had our tutoring session with her after session, and she would explain to us some of the rules and procedures, but the most asked question was, "Why does the Speaker say 'stand' all the time?" I think that's a question a lot of people have, isn't it? She was great. We'd sit here on Wednesdays, and she'd answer any questions we had. It helped us understand some of the things going on. I really appreciated that.

I want to thank all the committed people that make this Senate function at top-notch. There are so many people who make it work. I want to thank our Speaker Gagné. I know this is a new position for you, but you're doing fabulously and I'm so proud of you. You came in just a little before us.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[Senator Hartling]

Senator Hartling: Thank you so much.

Also, Senator Ringuette is amazing as the Speaker pro tempore. She has an institutional memory, and we all aspire to know what she does. She helps us. When we don't know something about a rule or something, she helps us with that. And she can sing like Edith Piaf. I don't know if you knew that about her. She has a voice like you wouldn't believe. Everyone has other talents besides what we do here.

• (1430)

I want to say a special thanks to Greg Peters, the Usher of the Black Rod. You have made my life so easy here when I've had guests. You have always welcomed them and taken pictures with them. You are so gracious, and I appreciate that. I do not think that you have missed a day, have you? Maybe one day for the Queen's funeral. He is here every single day, doing things behind the scenes for things that happen. The kids and other guests love you because of your incredible stories about the Queen's horses. I remember when my grandson Max came, you showed him your sword. He loved that. You made it fun for them. I appreciate all that you and your team do.

My gratitude goes to the leadership of our different groups in the Senate. You have all spoken in each group. Regarding the commitment of the leaders, I do not think people realize all that you do behind the scenes. The leadership of each group in our Senate, we need and aspire to the leadership of each group in the Senate. We thank you for your commitment. I personally thank you for that. It is so important.

I wish to thank the team at the table with Shaila Anwar, Chamber Operations, the translators and our pages. You are amazing. Look at all of these things you are learning here as you help us to do our job. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Then, of course, our Parliamentary Protective Service officers are incredible. If I am outside and someone approaches me, they are right there to make sure that I'm okay. We should never take them for granted. We know what happened here some years ago. We are safe here, and I appreciate that.

There are so many people who help us. From the cafeteria, the cleaning staff, the bus drivers — I cannot name them all — there are hundreds of people in our Senate family who help us every day. They are always smiling at us, and that is so nice. Thank you for that.

Honourable senators, we are more alike than we are different. Let me explain, because that might sound like a broad statement. I think we are alike in that we represent our regions and our country to work toward a better life for all of us. We study bills, sit on committees and attend many functions here in Ottawa and at home. We want to improve Canada, the country we all love. We are proud of being Canadian. That is where we find common ground, though we may not all come from the same place in everything we think and do. When we do not agree, we have debates and elections, but as a common ground, we love our country. We are proud of it.

I wish to tell you about one piece of legislation that I am very proud of. I do not know who was here that night. I know that Senator Petitclerc will remember "O Canada." That, to me, was one of the proudest, most exciting things that happened in the Senate. I thought, "Wow." In the English verses of "O Canada," they wanted to change the words to say, "all of us." Over 10 years, the bill did not pass — I think the man who brought the bill in died before the bill passed. I remember the evening when the vote took place vividly. After it passed, there was a lot of excitement after so many years on the issue of changing those words. When I hear that song now, I always remember that night. Those small changes, as Senator Tannas referred to, make a difference. Sometimes we think that they don't, but they do. It was very inclusive.

We have done other bills that were inclusive for Canadians, such as those regarding MAID, dental care and pharmacare. Those are good things we have done. I will not name all of the bills, because there are thousands, but I have learned a lot.

When we speak about "all of us," all of us have loved ones back home that share our lives, happiness and challenges, whether they are family or friends. During my time here, we have lost some dear colleagues, which has been very sad, as well as our own friends and family members. Loss and grief are difficult, both personally and professionally. They cause us to stop and reflect on those lives and our relationships.

Our Senate family is important to us, especially when we are sitting on those long days, as you know. We may share a chuckle, a tear, a hug or a libation — maybe one or two, maybe none. Many important bonds are formed in this place as we wrestle with those difficult pieces of legislation and decisions, both nationally and internationally.

And we all know what Thursday nights mean. What will happen on Thursday night? Will we have to change that flight? Will we sit late? Will the weather cooperate? Will we get home without cancellations or mechanical issues? There is always a flurry about what will happen on Thursday nights. I will always remember Thursday nights.

Many of us are friends here, and we have shared time and experiences, sometimes taking time to learn about one another, perhaps about our former lives, travels, pets and families, or maybe our hopes and dreams. I am very fortunate to have shared an incredible friendship with Senator Gwen Boniface through the last eight years. I'm not going to cry, Gwen. Thank you, dear Gwen. You helped me get through those eight years.

Our own families and friends are always waiting for us at home to share the journey with us, and we're comforted by that, even if we are only there for a weekend or a break. It makes our lives more pleasant to know that we have people waiting for us, even if it is just your dog. They are there, too. You can pet them or cuddle up with them. We appreciate that.

If someone asks, these are some things that I think you must be in order to be a senator: You must be flexible, nimble and creative. It calls for teamwork, problem solving and, more importantly, a sense of humour. That helps a lot. I appreciated the many individuals in this place, your uniqueness — even your quirks — and your knowledge on a variety of subjects. The

diversity of our Senate across the country, I believe, has given us a better understanding of Canadians and their unique backgrounds and experiences. Many of our debates are important, including diversity and wide-ranging depths of experiences on many relevant topics.

Today, many of my family members are here from across Canada, from Nova Scotia to B.C. It is wonderful to have this opportunity to share with you; because of geography, we do not always get to be together. I appreciate you making the journey here.

To my husband, Don, thank you for your love and support during these years. You always have my oranges and milk waiting for me. That is such a comforting thing. Thank you to my son, Mark, his wife, Jodie, my daughter, Melissa, and my granddaughter Anouk for being here. It means so much. I love you to the moon and back.

To my dear sisters, Melanie and Cathy, and Cathy's husband, Scott, and our dear brother, Jim, who was here for my swearing in, who sadly died too young in 2020. However, your spirit is with us, Jim, and we will never forget you. Thank you to our friend Sean for sharing my life passages too. Love — being loved — is essential. Thank you.

A special word of gratitude to Anthony Lamoureux. He has been with me for eight years as my staff, my friend and my family. We have grown together. We almost read each other's mind. Welcome to his partner, Alicia, and his precious daughter, Freya. Anthony, our time here will be finished, but not our relationship. We'll continue our connection in spirit. However, as you know, when senators leave, their staff don't have jobs. I am just saying that references are available by request.

My experience in this place has been life-changing and growth-producing. My committees were both intense and interesting. The Human Rights Committee and the Indigenous Peoples Committee were always very important to me.

I struggled to find a way to keep connected with my community and province around my Senate work, so I began producing a monthly newsletter called *News from the Red Chamber*, which features legislation that we're currently studying, our committees, events, new appointments of senators and retirements. It includes interesting facts about the Senate and the community, and it is well received. I believe that it created awareness. That is something that I wanted to do. Sometimes when you go to the Senate, some people will say, "What happened to her? Did she fall into a dark hole somewhere?" No, I'm here, and this is what we do. It is important to ensure we do that back and forth. I appreciate Brian Cormier from Bricor Communications in Moncton for his outstanding work.

For a moment, I wish to pay a tribute to the late Honourable Murray Sinclair, who died November 4, 2024. Senator Petitclerc made a great tribute last week. I appreciated that. Murray was the first person to call me when the appointment news came out. I appreciated that. I appreciated his life, and especially his work on truth and reconciliation as a commissioner. I believe that he has changed Canada's path and hopefully made us accountable for the very serious maltreatment of Indigenous people in residential

schools across the country. The effects of residential schools have deeply impacted many generations, and we must continue to work toward reconciliation, not just give it lip service.

He was a gentle giant, a teacher, a leader and one of the most influential people of this century. I am forever grateful for knowing him. Over the Christmas break, I'm reading his book entitled *Who We Are: Four Questions For a Life and a Nation*. I can hear his gentle voice in my head as he confidently speaks about these issues. It is wonderful to have had Murray Sinclair in our chamber with us.

• (1440)

Let's honour him through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, in his memory.

One more thing about Murray: He had a great sense of humour, if you remember. He came in one day and he told me that his granddaughter went to school and was asked what her grandfather did as a senator, and the granddaughter had his sense of humour and said, "He 'Senatizes' things." I remember when he said that. He could make us laugh. He could make us cry. He was amazing. I will never forget him.

Today, as Senator Bernard said, is International Human Rights Day, which is very important in these turbulent times. I am proud that the author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, John Peters Humphrey, was from Hampton, New Brunswick; he spent his early life there. The UN declaration that he created was adopted by the UN in 1948.

Growing up, John experienced adversity, including losing both his parents and having his arm amputated. He was bullied at school, and I think that was how he learned about what can be done to change people's human rights. He left Hampton to study at university, and in 1946, he was appointed as the first director of the United Nations Secretariat's Division for Human Rights. He authored the original draft that was passed by the UN General Assembly in 1948.

Clearly, it has been a life-changing document that continues to evolve as we explore the vast national and global challenges related to human rights. This document has been translated into hundreds of languages, and it is likely the most cited international legal document.

Let's continue moving forward on human rights issues worldwide. I'm honoured to do my tributes on this special day — special to me.

In closing, I wish to speak about Leonard Cohen. I believe he was one of the most significant Canadian poets, songwriters and performers of our time. His unique voice and lyrics captured many people's hearts and attention. Interestingly, on my first sitting day, November 15, 2016, some senators were paying tributes to him — I think it was Senator Housakos and Senator Petitclerc — because he had recently passed away. I remember seeing him perform in Moncton a few years before. He was amazing — with the energy he had and the agility, for his age, during his performance.

I learned of the difficulties of his life's journey through his music. He explored universal themes, like love, religion, power and death. He never stopped being creative during his most difficult challenges. He encouraged us to push forward and find our path. Therefore, his words from one of his masterpieces called "Anthem" seem fitting to quote as I leave this place:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in

My dear friends, even at this time when life can be and the world may seem dark and difficult, with flaws and hardships, try to find the crack where the light comes in so that future generations and all humanity will thrive.

Happy holidays! Peace be with you always. Until next time. Thank you, *meegwetch*.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

TRIBUTES ON RETIREMENT

Hon. Joan Kingston: Honourable senators, I rise today to pay tribute to a person who has been an inspiration to me since the 1990s: my sponsor here in the Senate, my friend and fellow New Brunswicker Nancy Hartling.

Senator Hartling is a strong advocate for women's rights and safety. She has had a stellar career that has spanned 50 years. She's a dedicated proponent of social justice and human rights, as you have just heard. As a registered social worker, she was the founder and Executive Director of Support to Single Parents Inc. for its entire 34 years, tirelessly serving families within the Greater Moncton area.

While working for another non-profit organization, Nancy Hartling recognized that there were no real supports in place for single parents. In 1982, she founded the organization to offer relevant life-changing programs to single parents. Her organization was the first to include single parent men as clients. She also helped create St. James Court Inc., an apartment complex for single parents in Moncton.

I will echo the words that Nancy spoke about another New Brunswick senator, Erminie Cohen, that apply equally to Senator Hartling. As a lifelong advocate for women and social justice, she is one of my "sheroes" — not heroes, "sheroes" — and mentors.

Nancy first met Senator Cohen here in Ottawa during the World March of Women 2000 in October that year. Thirty thousand women marched on Parliament Hill to end gender-based violence and poverty, including women from New Brunswick, mobilized by Nancy Hartling. As a result of her advocacy, she was asked to chair the New Brunswick Minister's Working Group on Violence Against Women. She also co-chaired the December 6 Committee from 1995 to 2001 and served on the board of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research.

Senator Hartling spearheaded a community development project using an anti-poverty approach to empower low-income women to gain skills to develop and operate co-operative small business enterprises or create other employment opportunities to become financially independent.

She has also been recognized with the Leadership Award of the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health and the YWCA Moncton's Women of Distinction Award. In 2011, she received the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case for her community service. She received the Order of New Brunswick in 2016 for her leadership role in advancing social and economic rights and opportunities for women in her community and across the province.

Nancy, your kind and compassionate leadership has left its mark on this place. All the best to you and your family as you begin your next chapter!

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Gwen Boniface: Honourable senators, November 15, 2016, was a wonderful day for me, as I entered this chamber. It was also a special day because I met a remarkable woman, the Honourable Nancy Hartling.

Over the last eight years, she has become my sister from a different mother. Nancy brought to the chamber her exceptional professional experience as a leader, an advocate for women living in poverty, as a mother of two wonderful children and a grandmother of her two great joys, Anouk and Max.

Nancy is a lifelong learner, earning her master's degree while raising her two children, but what I got to experience is the friendship with a beautiful and gifted human being. I am so grateful for her.

Nancy, as we all know, has a gracious and kind nature. She is also principled and tough. She draws her lines very distinctly, always clear on where her principles lie. Her judgment is impeccable. She reached out to newcomers to the chamber and always guided them to make them comfortable with this new and strange environment. She also injected her best advice to them: "Suffering is optional."

I believe women treasure friendships in a different way than men, and I will treasure this friendship for the rest of my life. Hanya Yanagihara, in her book *A Little Life*, wrote:

... the only trick of friendship, I think, is to find people who are better than you are — not smarter, not cooler, but kinder and more generous, and more forgiving — and then appreciate them for what they can teach you, and try to listen to them when they tell you something about yourself, no matter how bad — or good — it might be, and to trust them, which is the hardest thing of all. But the best, as well.

The Honourable Nancy Hartling is essentially that person. I will also concede that she is smarter and cooler as well.

My dearest friend, we have shared many things over the last eight years. We both lost our mothers, and we lost dear friends. We have experienced highs and lows, but there is no one, my friend, with whom I would have chosen to take this journey.

I will miss you every day in this place. Our adventures are not over. I wish you and Don all the joy in the world, but I know our friendship doesn't end here, because you cannot get rid of me that easily, my friend. You are the best. I love you and I wish you all the best.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, on November 15, 2016, the day we were both sworn into this illustrious chamber, I did not personally know our dear colleague Senator Nancy Hartling. Of course, I had heard of her through mutual friends and, like many of you, no doubt, I had read the bio notes associated with her appointment. Above all, as a New Brunswicker, I was delighted to be able to count on this new colleague with her impressive professional career.

Coming from a family of social workers myself, I immediately recognized a certain affinity for this woman of Riverview who has worked all her life for women's rights and in defence of the underprivileged and who bears a tremendous love for her community. **We began our duties on the same day and repeatedly discussed the meaning of this commitment, the role we could play here in this Red Chamber and the possible impact of our actions on the citizens of our province. Honesty has always been the guiding principle in our discussions, and when you talk to Senator Hartling, colleagues, you can be sure that she will answer with a frank and open heart.

• (1450)

It has been more than eight years since we first met, dear Nancy, and here we are, saying thank you and wishing you all the best as you pursue your life and your dreams.

[*Translation*]

Senator, during your tenure in the Senate, you served your community and your province with tremendous sensitivity and openness. I can assure you that your presence and contributions have enhanced New Brunswick's voice in this chamber. You've devoted your entire career to promoting equity, dignity and social justice. Your commitment to women, minorities, Indigenous peoples and the most vulnerable is a source of immense inspiration to all Canadians.

[*English*]

With generosity and integrity, you have often put yourself at the service of your colleagues, supporting them in the causes they have chosen to defend. You have supported the quest of Indigenous peoples and pursued your commitment to ensure that women in our society are respected and duly recognized for their contributions.

[Senator Boniface]

Each of us brings to this chamber a unique contribution, marked by our professional and personal life's path. Like some of our colleagues, dear friend, you certainly needed to have a great deal of courage and determination to face up to the difficult situations in your life. To your credit, you were able to transform these experiences into engines of action, which is why you are a source of inspiration to so many people.

On this international Human Rights Day, dear Nancy, you can retire from the Senate with pride and in peace.

Thank you for your wisdom.

One day you told me that you felt that you were an Acadian and that you were probably switched at birth. Nancy, I believed you then, and I still do. So, keep your sparkling eyes, your benevolent smile and your life force, which radiates to all those who have the privilege to know you and work with you.

Your friend forever, René.

Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Yuen Pau Woo: Honourable senators, I only found out a few minutes ago that I had a spot to pay tribute to the Honourable Senator Nancy Hartling. As a result, I will move that we delay her retirement by two to five years, maybe.

Of course, unfortunately, we cannot pass a unanimous motion of that sort, but I don't think we need to have a show of hands or a standing vote to understand that there is unanimous support for the sorrow we feel at missing a beloved and cherished colleague such as Nancy Hartling.

As you have already heard, I was part of the "Class of 2016," and you have probably noticed that a number of us from that class have paid tribute to Nancy. That is, in part, because she has been the glue that brought our "Class of 2016" together, year after year, to celebrate the anniversary of our appointment to the Senate.

I would say, though, that she is also a member of the cabal that enticed me to go to a Burmese restaurant and plied me with beer until I forgot that I had agreed to become a facilitator for the Independent Senators Group, or ISG.

You may not think of Senator Hartling as the sort of person who goes around plying people with beer, but I recently learned from one of her *News from the Red Chamber* newsletters that she was with her husband in Dublin going on what is called the Dublin Literary Pub Crawl. Now, I don't know if it was primarily on the literary side or the pub side, but I suspect it was a bit of both.

Speaking of her newsletter *News from the Red Chamber*, I don't know if you have had a chance to look at it. There is something retro about it — a newsletter talking about the work of our institution — but it is consistently uplifting, consistently non-partisan and consistently about how she loves this institution. It is so refreshing to receive a newsletter like that, month after month.

Nancy, you have been a cherished colleague to all of us, but you have also been a very good friend to me. You have been at my side, supporting me during challenging times for me and my family. I want to thank you for that.

You did that, not as a social worker — and you certainly have all of those skills — but as a friend.

To your family who are here — Don, your children and grandchildren — I want to thank you for letting us have your beloved wife, mother and grandmother for eight years.

Knowing what we know about her now — how wonderful she is — I am astonished that you allowed her to come here and spend eight years with us, but you can have her back now. We thank you from the depths of our hearts.

Nancy, I wish you a happy retirement. As Senator Boniface said, we're not done with you. We look forward to keeping in touch, and wish you a very happy and healthy retirement.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Thione Niang, social entrepreneur, author and farmer. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator Gerba.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL SAFETY ASSOCIATION

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, I feel bad for changing the subject, but let me say congratulations to Senator Hartling. We will miss you, and I wish you well.

Honourable colleagues, today I rise to highlight the vital work of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, or CASA, and the importance of farm safety for our generation and the next one.

Agriculture is at the heart of Canada's economy and cultural identity, yet it remains one of the most hazardous industries in which to work. Every year, over 60 adults and children lose their lives in agriculture-related incidents across this nation — a sobering reminder of the risks inherent in this essential sector.

CASA, established in 1993, has been a beacon of leadership and support in promoting health and safety in agriculture. This national, non-profit organization works tirelessly with partners across government, business and farming communities to provide the tools and resources necessary to make farms safer places in which to live, work and play.

CASA's mission is clear: to engage with community partners to promote safety and health in agriculture, ensuring that healthy Canadian farm communities thrive.

The vision of CASA — a safe and sustainable agricultural workplace, in which Canadian farm communities flourish — is one that we must all strive to support. This vision is not just about protecting the farmers of today, but ensuring that future generations can continue to work the land safely and sustainably.

CASA's initiatives such as the BeGrainSafe program, the mental health hub and Kids FarmSafe Week are critical in educating farmers, their families and their workers about the risks on farms and how to manage them effectively.

However, farm safety is not just about avoiding accidents; it is about fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect in our agricultural communities. CASA's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion ensures that everyone — regardless of age, gender, race or ability — has the opportunity to participate fully in the agricultural sector. By embracing these values, CASA is not only making our farms safer: it is ensuring that they are places where everyone is welcome and valued.

CASA's work is essential, and we all have a role to play in supporting their important work. Whether through sponsorship, donations or becoming a member or safety-day coordinator, there are many ways to contribute to the cause. By working together, we can ensure that our farms remain safe, healthy and vibrant for generations to come.

Honourable colleagues, I urge you to recognize the importance of farm safety year-round and to support CASA in their efforts to protect the lives and well-being of those who work so hard to feed our nation.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

• (1500)

THE HONOURABLE BRENT COTTER, K.C.

Hon. Marty Klyne: Honourable senators, today we honour a remarkable individual who has dedicated his life to public service and the betterment of this great country, Senator Brent Cotter.

Don't choke on that.

As our friend embarks on a well-deserved retirement, we reflect on a legacy built not just on hard work but on the values that define him — integrity, wisdom, a strong sense of justice and, of course, a deep love for Saskatchewan.

There's a generosity of spirit that makes Senator Cotter approachable and respected by colleagues from all political stripes. This is apparent in the way he chaired the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. He was firm yet fair, collegial and well-prepared, an example of judicious leadership to any chair.

Let's not forget his sense of humour. For those who have had the pleasure of sitting down with him, you know that Brent can deliver a quip as sharp as a Saskatchewan winter wind in February, and he's not too bad across the aisle either.

Senator Cotter has also been a tireless advocate for Indigenous communities. In his career in public service, he served as Saskatchewan's Deputy Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs where he demonstrated a deep respect for the history, culture and rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. His efforts to bridge gaps, build understanding and foster meaningful dialogue between Indigenous communities and the broader Canadian society have been a central part of his legacy. In this role, he championed initiatives for reconciliation long before this was a well-known concept. His ability to listen and approach these important issues with humility and empathy has earned him the respect of Indigenous leaders and colleagues alike.

A concrete example of his leadership was when he sponsored Bill C-51, enacting a self-government treaty recognizing the Whitecap Dakota First Nation. He shepherded this historic legislation through the Senate in record time and has followed the file since then with a keen eye. During a time when the need for true reconciliation and true partnership is more pressing than ever, Senator Cotter's contributions in this area stand as a testament to his unwavering belief in justice, respect and the shared future of all Canadians.

In conclusion, whether Senator Cotter was sharing a laugh with a fellow senator or rolling up his sleeves to find common ground, it's always clear Senator Cotter's work is driven by a commitment to making Canada a better place for all. Thank you. *Hiy kitatamihin.*

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

SENATE ETHICS OFFICER

CERTIFICATE OF NOMINATION AND BIOGRAPHICAL
NOTES TABLED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the certificate of nomination and biographical notes for the proposed appointment of James O'Reilly to the position of Senate Ethics Officer.

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—THIRTY-THIRD REPORT OF LEGAL AND
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Hon. Brent Cotter, Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, presented the following report:

Tuesday, December 10, 2024

The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs has the honour to present its

THIRTY-THIRD REPORT

Your committee, to which was referred Bill C-321, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (assaults against persons who provide health services and first responders), has, in obedience to the order of reference of Thursday, May 30, 2024, examined the said bill and now reports the same without amendment but with certain observations, which are appended to this report.

Respectfully submitted,

BRENT COTTER

Chair

(*For text of observations, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 3389.*)

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

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

INTERNAL ECONOMY, BUDGETS AND ADMINISTRATION

SEVENTEENTH REPORT OF COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Hon. Lucie Moncion, Chair of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration, presented the following report:

Tuesday, December 10, 2024

The Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration has the honour to present its

SEVENTEENTH REPORT

Your committee, which is authorized by the *Rules of the Senate* to consider financial and administrative matters and, pursuant to the *Senate Administration Rules*, to prepare estimates of the sum that will be required from Parliament for the services of the Senate, has approved the Senate Main Estimates for the fiscal year 2025-26 and recommends their adoption.

A summary of these Estimates is appended to this report. Your committee notes that the proposed total is \$139,258,436.

Respectfully submitted,

LUCIE MONCION

Chair

(For text of report, see today's Journals of the Senate, Appendix, p. 3399.)

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this report be taken into consideration?

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

[English]

THE SENATE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO RESOLVE INTO COMMITTEE OF
THE WHOLE TO RECEIVE JAMES O'REILLY,
SENATE ETHICS OFFICER NOMINEE

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

That, at 3:15 p.m. on Tuesday, December 17, 2024, the Senate resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole in order to receive James O'Reilly respecting his appointment as Senate Ethics Officer;

That the Committee of the Whole report to the Senate no later than 65 minutes after it begins;

That the witness's introductory remarks last a maximum of 5 minutes; and

That, if a senator does not use the entire period of 10 minutes for debate provided under rule 12-31(3)(d), including the responses of the witness, that senator may yield the balance of time to another senator.

SENATE ETHICS OFFICER

NOTICE OF MOTION TO APPROVE APPOINTMENT

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

That, in accordance with section 20.1 of the Parliament of Canada Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. P-1, the Senate approve the appointment of James O'Reilly as Senate Ethics Officer.

[Translation]

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE DAY BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Pierre Moreau introduced Bill S-291, An Act to establish Judicial Independence Day.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

• (1510)

PARLAMERICAS

GATHERING OF PARLAMERICAS PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK
ON CLIMATE CHANGE, JUNE 23 AND JULY 5, 2022

Hon. Rosa Galvez: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the ParlAmericas concerning the Sixth Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change, held by video conference on June 23 and July 5, 2022.

THE ESTIMATES, 2024-25

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE TO DEPOSIT REPORT ON STUDY OF MAIN ESTIMATES WITH THE EXCEPTION OF VOTE 1 WITH THE CLERK DURING ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. Claude Carignan: 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 permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit reports on its study of the Main Estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, with the exception of Library of Parliament Vote 1, with the Clerk of the Senate if the Senate is not then sitting, and that the reports be deemed to have been tabled in the Senate.

NATIONAL FINANCE

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO EXTEND DATE OF FINAL REPORT ON STUDY OF THE PRACTICE OF INCLUDING NON-FINANCIAL MATTERS IN BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACTS

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

That, notwithstanding the orders of the Senate adopted on Tuesday, February 6, 2024 and Thursday, May 9, 2024, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance in relation to its study on the practice of including non-financial matters in bills implementing provisions of budgets and economic statements be further extended from December 31, 2024, to June 30, 2025; and

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

[English]

QUESTION PERIOD

FINANCE

FISCAL UPDATE

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Leader, Conservative senators have asked you repeatedly about the convoluted two-month GST holiday that your fiscally irresponsible government came up with a few weeks ago. *The Globe and Mail* reported this morning that this tax trick, along with the idea of sending \$250 cheques to people making \$149,000 a year, was the brainchild of the Prime Minister's

Office alone. Minister Freeland's department finally viewed something as "fiscally unwise" and "making little economic sense." Finally, we're in agreement with the finance minister. They are at odds.

If the Prime Minister doesn't even have the support of his finance minister, then why should Canadians support him? It's time to call a carbon tax election, isn't it, leader? And answer the first question as well, not "no" to the second one.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): If you've read all the coverage, which I have, you will also note that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance expressed her support and, indeed, appeared before our committee. Our committee, under the chairmanship of Senator Carignan, held three high-quality and intensive meetings on this particular bill. It was passed by the committee without amendment. The debate will begin.

Senator Plett, you and your colleagues will have ample opportunity to make your views known. That's the answer to the first part of the question.

To answer the second part of the question, as witnessed by the failure of the non-confidence motion, only one of which your party seemed to — I guess they didn't want to lose three in a row. This government still has the confidence of the House.

Senator Plett: You have the confidence of Jagmeet Singh, and no one voted for him to be the prime minister.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer predicts that Minister Freeland has blown past her fiscal guardrail of \$40 billion. There are now media reports that the deficit projection in the Fall Economic Statement could hit \$62 billion, leader. If that figure is wrong — and I hope it is — will the government say so now and not wait until Monday?

Senator Gold: Senator, as we know and as you stated in your question, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance will be delivering her Fall Economic Statement on Monday. That's when I will know what the number is, and the rest of us in the chamber and Canadians will know.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Hon. Leo Housakos: Senator Gold, despite the significant financial burden that the GST places on new homes and the growing unaffordability of housing in Canada, your government, with the help of the Maserati Marxist Jagmeet Singh, voted against the Conservative motion to eliminate the GST on new homes under \$1 million. How do you justify maintaining this tax while housing costs remain out of reach for so many Canadians? The Trudeau government has relegated a whole generation of young Canadians to living in the basement of their parents' home. This common-sense Conservative measure would allow Canadian homebuyers to save up to \$50,000 and will spark construction of more than 30,000 homes and apartments across the country, but your Trudeau government voted against it. Why, Senator Gold?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Housakos, as I stated before — and I'll take the opportunity to state it again — you are quoting only part of what is at issue within the housing issues. Indeed, your leader, whom you follow so loyally, made a particular offer. What you have not mentioned — but which is in the public record — is his other statement to cut millions, if not billions, of dollars of investments that this government has brought forward to stimulate and help housing through a whole suite of measures. You cannot — well, you can and clearly do — quote selectively when it serves your purposes.

The fact is this government has invested seriously in a multitude of ways to address the housing question. The offer that your party made was not a serious offer, and it ignored all the programs that it would cut to the detriment of housing in Canada.

Senator Housakos: Senator Gold, if you have courage, call an election and see which leader the Canadian public would follow. Please don't talk to us about your GST tax tricks and the Mickey Mouse economics that your government is putting forward. Chrystia Freeland's appearance at our committee last week was a disaster. Now we know her own department advised against this. Our National Finance Committee here in the Senate did an analysis that shows that this tax trick will save Canadians a whopping \$4.50, my dear friends. How much is it ultimately going to cost Canadians in administrative costs to apply something —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gold, please.

Senator Gold: Senator Housakos, I stand by my answer. There is a serious program that this government has put on the table to deal with the housing crisis affecting so many Canadians, and your party is offering nothing but empty slogans, however well rehearsed.

JUSTICE

ONLINE HARM

Hon. Chantal Petitclerc: Senator Gold, last September, the World Health Organization signalled the consequences of social media use on youth development and long-term health outcomes. It calls for greater responsibility on the part of technology platforms.

Only weeks ago, the Australian government took action and now has a strict law adopted by Parliament that would ban access to social networks for those under 16 years old. The British government is considering following Australia's lead.

Senator Gold, there is a consensus that technology companies need to change the way they exploit children and teenagers. We know these platforms are designed to be addictive, and it's urgent to act to avoid damaging an entire generation.

Senator Gold, will the Canadian government respond to the World Health Organization's calls to strengthen the responsibility of social media platforms when it comes to the well-being of youth users?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, senator, for your question and for underlining what we have come to understand altogether belatedly in many cases and painfully: The manipulation of our habits through the ease of access to information and the algorithms that lurk undetectable in so many social media platforms have had a negative impact not only on youth but also, frankly, on too many of us in this country and elsewhere.

It is also regrettable that too many social media platforms too often pay, at best, lip service to regulating or policing their approach to feeding us what we already want.

• (1520)

The government is considering all options, but there are no plans to announce anything in the immediate term.

Senator Petitclerc: In March 2023, Prime Minister Trudeau said:

As a parent, I spend a lot of time talking to my kids about what's online and how they should try and, you know, go outside and play a little more sports and not get so wrapped up in their phones.

This is, of course, great. However, do you agree, Senator Gold, that individuals' parenting will not be enough to protect our kids and that we will need to do something as a government?

Senator Gold: Senator, I confess I don't know the answer, so I'm not going to assume. Legislation is certainly not the only tool. If there's any legislative intervention, the devil or God is in the details. Absent that in front of us, I hesitate to speculate. It's a social problem we must address in a holistic way.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

ARCTIC FOREIGN POLICY

Hon. Marty Deacon: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. On Friday, the government announced a renewed foreign policy for the Arctic. Included in this announcement was the intention to revive the position of Arctic ambassador, a role that ended in 2006 under the previous government.

Why does this government think this role is important at this time? Are you confident it will be maintained should a new government come into power?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. Let me begin by underlining that the Arctic foreign policy, which is a strategy focused on diplomacy, addresses the very real challenges and opportunities that Canada faces today and, notably, those that it expects to face in the coming decade. It gives Canada the diplomatic tools it needs to continue to assert its sovereignty, advance its national security interests and promote a stable, prosperous and secure Arctic for the people of the Arctic and our country.

I cannot speak to any future government's commitments, but a look backward in history shows that this office, or something equivalent to it, did once exist and was terminated under a previous government.

Circumstances have changed, and our understanding of the threats and challenges to our sovereignty in the Arctic have changed. I hope that all governments will take that seriously. It's an important part of our country, our identity and our sovereignty.

Senator M. Deacon: Thank you. Do you know when we can expect this office to be up and running with the new ambassador or the satellite sites that are to be opened up in Anchorage and Greenland?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question. I don't have a specific timetable, senator, but I am advised that work is seriously under way.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

CANADA'S WINE INDUSTRY

Hon. Robert Black: Senator Gold, jurisdictions across Canada continue to face interprovincial and inter-territorial trade barriers. In July 2017, the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, or CFTA, came into force with the goal of reducing and eliminating barriers on the movement of labour, goods, services and investments within Canada to establish an open domestic market.

A 2024 Canadian Federation of Independent Business, or CFIB, report entitled *The State of Internal Trade: Canada's Interprovincial Cooperation Report Card* provides an overview of the work done to date to reduce barriers. However, it also highlights that significant barriers remain, hindering businesses' ability to circulate goods and services across jurisdictions here in Canada. The report estimates that up to \$200 billion could be added to Canada's GDP every year.

Canada's wine industry is one example of a good that continues to be hindered due to interprovincial trade. Canada is capable of exporting wine to major global markets but unable to ship wine across this country. This inconsistency hampers domestic agricultural products.

Senator Gold, what are your government's plans?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, senator. International trade barriers have long been an impediment to economic growth, one which this government has tackled head on.

As you are aware, colleagues, in 2017, the government took leadership on this file through the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, and since then, the government has either narrowed or completely limited a third of the federal exemptions, which is providing Canadian businesses with more opportunities to grow and compete anywhere in this country. In 2019, five years ago, the government removed the remaining federal regulatory impediments to free internal trade in wine and other alcoholic beverages.

[Senator Gold]

The only remaining barriers — and they are numerous — fall exclusively within provincial and territorial jurisdictions. They can only be removed by the provinces or the territories.

Senator Black: Thank you. Senator Gold, the CFTA has not delivered what it was intended to. With B.C. dealing with a catastrophic loss of grapes in 2023 after back-to-back bad winters and Ontario now dealing with back-to-back oversupplies, it seems logical that the federal government would choose to help transport grapes across the country. The wine industry is unable to sell their products to other provinces, nor can they sell or share the grapes.

On behalf of the ag industry, I ask you this: Can you tell us how your government is supporting the wine industry?

Senator Gold: Senator, the Government of Canada is supporting industry as best it can within its areas of jurisdiction and within its capacity, but any remaining barriers to interprovincial trade in wine and/or other beverages are exclusively within provincial jurisdiction, and this problem must be addressed by provinces.

[Translation]

FINANCE

TEMPORARY TAX MEASURES

Hon. Pierre J. Dalphond: According to yesterday's papers, the Parliamentary Budget Officer indicated that the GST/HST holiday could cost up to \$2.7 billion. At a meeting of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, members were told the direct tax cost would be \$1.5 billion for the federal government and possibly \$1.2 billion to compensate the provinces that harmonized their sales tax.

Senator Gold, can you tell us whether any province has said that it will waive compensation? My understanding is that, of the \$1.2 billion, nearly \$1 billion would go to Ontario.

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

First, as the minister said, discussions are under way with all of the provinces and, according to the information that I have, those discussions have been productive and are ongoing.

To answer your question, I was told that Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island have already waived their right to compensation. As for the other provinces, discussions are still under way.

Senator Dalphond: I understand. Thank you for that answer.

Does that mean that the direct tax cost would be \$1.5 billion and there will be no compensation for the HST? Did I understand that correctly?

Senator Gold: As you know, we learned more about this in committee. There are agreements between Canada and the provinces, and under those agreements, there is a right to compensation, if revenue losses reach a certain level. For the moment, what I told you is accurate. You are correct, and the other discussions are ongoing.

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

CRIMINAL CODE AUTHORIZATION REGIME

Hon. Salma Atallahjan: Senator Gold, almost a year and a half has passed since the passage of Bill C-41. To date, 12 requests for authorizations under the authorization regime have been submitted, with 1 later being withdrawn. Despite this, no responses have been issued to applicants, who applied between four and seven months ago. The low number of applicants indicates an understandable reluctance among organizations to work in areas controlled by terrorist entities.

When will non-governmental organizations have the opportunity for written submissions and oral consultations for the government's comprehensive review of Bill C-41?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, thank you for your question and for reminding us of this important bill and the challenges it continues to face in realizing its premise, promise and potential.

I will make inquiries with the minister to find out what is expected with regard to the review. I hope that those interested parties who work so importantly and tirelessly on behalf of those seeking refuge will make their voices heard.

• (1530)

Senator Atallahjan: Senator Gold, during your government's period of inaction, programs have been halted or delayed, resulting in costs both financial and human. I have recently been approached by women who work for an organization that provides assistance to migrants and refugees, and they asked me about your government's plan to alleviate these costs.

How am I to respond to those questions?

Senator Gold: Again, senator, this government is working hard to achieve multiple goals in assistance to those who are seeking refuge and asylum, and it is doing so in partnership with international organizations, with international partners and here at home, obviously, in collaboration and consultation with provinces and territories.

I understand the challenges people are facing. Again, I applaud you for the work that you are doing on their behalf.

CRIME RATES

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Leader, a 20-year-old man was shot in the back and killed last Friday while doing his job as a security guard at an apartment building in Edmonton. His grieving loved ones deserve more than our condolences; they deserve answers and justice.

It appears that one of the individuals charged in this murder has a long history of violent crime. This includes forcing a woman into a trunk of a car at gunpoint in 2018. In 2022, it appears the RCMP charged him with multiple offences stemming from a robbery, including 16 counts of possessing a firearm while prohibited.

Shouldn't Canadians be told if this is the same criminal and, if so, Senator Gold, why he was out on the streets?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, I do apologize for not being able to answer your question. You have to provide Canadians with somewhat more information for me to answer that question.

I'm sorry; it is a terrible story that you have told, a horrible story for the victims and all. I do not know whether the person was out on the streets because he had served his sentence. I do not know if he was out on statutory release which is prescribed by law. I do not know if he was out on release because he was granted parole.

All I can do is offer my condolences and sympathies to the victims of his violent crimes. I'm not ducking the question, senator, but you can make a general point about crime. Crime is a serious problem for Canadians. If you want an answer, you have to provide me with the information so I can have a chance to answer it.

Senator Plett: I do not have to provide the information. Why doesn't your government find the information? You know the person I'm talking about; your government knows who I am talking about.

Canadians absolutely deserve to know if this is the same guy. You can find that out. They deserve to know if he was out on bail or another form of release when he killed a security guard.

Don't Canadians deserve a government that is focused on stopping crime and real criminals and finding out why they are out on the street instead of pulling stunts like promising to take more guns away from law-abiding Canadians?

Senator Gold: Senator, next time you want an answer from me, perhaps you could give me the courtesy of giving me an advance notice so I can perhaps have the answer in this chamber. I simply do not know the facts around this particular case, and you knew that when you asked me the question. But you have made your points, bravo.

[Translation]

JUSTICE

ONLINE HARM

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Senator Gold, I feel compelled to follow up on Senator Petitclerc's question.

I am extremely disappointed that the government is failing to address the acute mental health issues arising from too much exposure to social media. An entire generation is at risk. However, Bill C-63 contains only one measure to prevent sexual exploitation images from being posted on the internet, images that are already illegal.

Why not do more? Canada is lagging behind all of the major Western countries that are examining this issue. This is a really serious societal problem.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): I'm fully aware that this is a very serious societal problem. I disagree with the assertion that no one is giving it any thought, here or elsewhere. All I can say, colleague, is that there is currently no bill before Parliament dealing with this particular problem.

Once again, I commit to forwarding your questions and those of Senator Petitclerc, but for the moment, there is no such bill before Parliament.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: Then again, I'm the sponsor of a bill at report stage in the House of Commons that proposes to work on one small part of this rather pointed problem, to at least protect children from exposure to pornography. However, the government opposes the bill.

Senator Gold: I'm aware of your bill, which has been studied in the Senate. You're also aware of the government's response. The government isn't saying that the principle of the bill is unimportant or that it disagrees with it.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

IMPACTS OF FAST FASHION

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: My next question is about another topic.

The Retail Council of Quebec is calling on the federal government to impose penalties on Chinese platforms, such as Shein and Temu, that sell fast fashion and compete unfairly with Quebec retailers.

France's National Assembly unanimously passed a bill that will impose penalties equalling 50% of the value of the product and redistribute the funds to local sustainable clothing producers. What will our government do to restore healthy competition rather than letting fast fashion, which is polluting our planet, take over?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. The government launched a consultation to solicit feedback on the development of a roadmap to address plastic waste and create a policy for the textile and apparel sector, building on the early interest and engagement from key stakeholders in the sector.

The consultation document suggests a waste-management approach that keeps textiles and apparel in the circular economy for as long as possible. Prioritization will focus on the redesign, reuse, repair, and recycling of products over energy recovery and landfilling.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: I will come back to my main point.

Shein offers dresses for under \$10. How is that possible? Shein has already confirmed cases of child exploitation among its suppliers. An investigation also revealed that the Chinese fast fashion giant uses cotton from Xinjiang, where the Uighurs are put into forced labour.

Beyond our fine speeches on human rights, what meaningful action are we taking?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question. The Canada Border Services Agency is stepping up inspections, adding more detector dogs and using new emerging technologies to prevent the trafficking of drugs, firearms and illicit goods.

As the Minister of Public Safety, Dominic LeBlanc, said, the government is making the necessary investments in law enforcement agencies to ensure that they have the tools that they need.

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

NORTH AMERICAN AEROSPACE DEFENSE COMMAND

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Senator Gold, this past Friday, when responding to questions on Canada's newly released Arctic Foreign Policy, Minister Joly suggested it might be time to reconsider the 2005 decision not to join the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defense program. Russia has already used intermediate-range ballistic missiles with devastating impacts against Ukraine and is prepared to use them indiscriminately and has also mentioned intercontinental ballistic missiles.

• (1540)

The threat is real. As Russia is Canada's neighbour, we need to be realistic about defending ourselves, starting now.

When can we expect to hear about our government's way ahead on how we counter ballistic missile threats in Canada, in our Arctic, and in North America?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and, again, for underlining the strategic importance of defending our North from the increasingly challenging threats that it faces not only from our neighbour Russia but from other countries that have designs on our North.

This government has made historic investments and will continue to make historic investments in our defence and in that which is necessary for our sovereignty.

It will also continue to work in the context of NORAD and with our allies, including the United States, to defend Canadian sovereignty in the north of North America.

These are challenging times. I do not need to multiply the challenges, but this government is committed to doing everything that it can to protect and advance our interests, including our sovereignty and national interests in the Arctic.

Senator Patterson: Minister Joly rightly stated, "I think we have to be extremely realist with the threat towards the Arctic," and this includes the fact that China was not much present in 2005. We are also acutely aware of the current and incoming administration of our neighbours to the south in terms of our 2% NATO commitment.

As a proud and sovereign nation, we do not respond very well to being shamed into action. Will the government be proactive and push forward this review of our participation with the U.S. — or not — in some form of ballistic defence program?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question. I think the most honest and accurate answer I can give is this government is engaged now in a very serious exercise to address how it is going to work with its partner to the south on a range of issues that I need not elaborate upon.

As time unfolds, we will learn more about the steps that Canada, as a proud, independent nation, is going to take to remain a proud, independent nation.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 4-12(3), I would like to inform the Senate that as we proceed with Government Business, the Senate will address the items in the following order: third reading of Bill C-78, followed by all remaining items in the order that they appear on the Order Paper.

[Translation]

TAX BREAK FOR ALL CANADIANS BILL

THIRD READING—DEBATE

Hon. Lucie Moncion moved third reading of Bill C-78, An Act respecting temporary cost of living relief (affordability).

She said: Honourable senators, I have the privilege to rise today at third reading of Bill C-78, An Act respecting temporary cost of living relief (affordability).

The Senate's work on this bill has been particularly diligent and productive. I am pleased to build on that momentum today.

Bill C-78 seeks to address a very specific challenge. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, this bill is clearly consumer-oriented and the stated purpose is to make life more affordable in terms of consumer spending.

Total consumer spending per capita has remained low since the pandemic, which has prevented the Canadian economy from operating at its full potential. That is partly due to high inflation and high interest rates, which are inevitable consequences of supply chain disruptions. Such disruptions were first caused by the pandemic and then by global energy shocks resulting from Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. It may take time before the positive effects of lower interest rates influence the economy and consumer habits. According to the Bank of Canada, it could take 18 to 24 months before we see the effects of the lower rates on the national economy.

[English]

At the National Finance Committee, we heard about the productivity problem in Canada. David Dodge, former governor of the Bank of Canada, explained:

. . . our main problem in the country is that we have low productivity; hence, the real income that we as Canadians can earn, in fact, has really stagnated since the great financial crisis in 2010.

Our collective problem is to find a way to raise the investment to improve the productivity of workers and, hence, to improve their incomes and their ability to buy products. To do that, we need to make investments, both from the government's side, and that's investment in the capital services the government provides, such as transportation and so on, justice, everything, to complement private investment, which will provide workers with the additional tools they need in order to raise their productivity and, hence, raise their incomes.

I am glad that Bill C-78 is sparking discussion around productivity. This issue is complex and can be measured in different ways. Some economists have criticized the use of labour productivity as a sole indicator, which is output divided by hours worked, ignoring capital.

In an opinion piece in *The Globe and Mail* entitled “Canada’s productivity problem isn’t that big if we exclude oil,” an economics professor at McMaster University explains, “‘Productivity’ should refer to total-factor productivity (TFP), which measures output relative to inputs used (labour and capital).” When we exclude the oil sector, we do see that Canadian productivity has grown at the same rate as in the U.S.

Indeed, the federal government sees the importance of investing in productivity. The Budget 2024 contained key measures to increase productivity, such as massive investment in targeted artificial intelligence to help stimulate the development of AI infrastructure in Canada. The government also enhanced research support with \$3.5 billion in new strategic research infrastructure and federal research grants. We also saw investment in a new electric vehicle supply chain tax credit, support for Canada’s biofuels sector and many other key measures aimed at boosting research, innovation and productivity.

These strategic investments will not solve our productivity issues overnight, but with consistent and targeted investment in key sectors, we can trust in the long-term prosperity of our country.

In the meantime, however, Canadians continue to feel the financial burden of the past few years, and consumer behaviour reflects that sentiment. We know that this is having a very real adverse impact on the wider economy. Despite inflation having cooled and interest rates dropping, per capita consumer spending remains subdued, and the Canadian economy is operating below its potential capacity.

To address this very real challenge, Bill C-78 offers a solution. In short, it proposes to provide a two-month goods and services tax/harmonized sales tax, or GST/HST, break on purchases like groceries that are not normally tax-free, restaurant meals, drinks, snacks, children’s clothing and toys from December 14, 2024, through to February 15, 2025. As we have discussed, we note that there is a sound theoretical basis for this sort of support. Government interventions in the economy under the right conditions — for example, through measures like government support or tax reduction — can result in a positive shift within the economy and boost consumer spending.

• (1550)

The measures in the bill are also calibrated to meet the current challenges with respect to consumer sentiment lagging in relation to the broader range of economic indicators that are improving. This is because the measures are temporary and targeted to have a very muted impact on inflation. With inflation having cooled and interest rates dropping, they would thus support Canadian consumers and businesses in a way that is not going to stimulate inflation but will help Canadians make ends meet and continue driving economic growth.

[Translation]

We heard from representatives of Canada’s retail and food service sectors, who expressed their support for the temporary stimulus measures in Bill C-78.

[Senator Moncion]

[English]

The representative from the Retail Council of Canada, Karl Littler, Senior Vice-President, Public Affairs, concluded that:

... we support this policy initiative for a GST holiday and see some real and significant benefits to consumers and retailers alike. . . .

As Mr. Littler explained:

... even those who don’t sell the affected goods could see a benefit as these measures reduce pressure on consumers’ wallets . . .”

He added that, “That’s the demand-side benefit.”

He went on to explain that:

... there is another benefit to retailers, in cash terms Because these newly included goods are zero-rated, that means that retailers themselves will have a larger value of input tax credits. Those, in turn, reduce GST otherwise payable to government. That benefit is calculable and real to each retailer.

The representative from Restaurants Canada, Maximilien Roy, Vice-President, Federal and Quebec, was even more forceful in his support for Bill C-78. As Mr. Roy noted:

... Bill C-78 is more than a temporary measure, it’s a lifeline for a struggling industry and a catalyst for economic recovery. It’s good for businesses, good for workers and good for Canadians. . . .

Once again, Mr. Roy’s observations show that the positive ripple effect that occurs when money circulates within an economy leads to even greater economic spinoffs.

[Translation]

As Mr. Roy also pointed out, this could significantly impact the restaurant sector, and beyond. He told us the following, and I quote:

According to our chief economist, this tax break could generate nearly \$1.5 billion in additional sales for our industry during this period. That figure demonstrates the positive impact such a move could have, not only for restaurant owners, but for the economy as a whole.

[English]

All told, the witnesses we heard from were very helpful in providing real-world insight into how the stimulus included in Bill C-78 will benefit them.

Yes, it is true that we heard from some witnesses that the tax relief offered by Bill C-78 would place administrative burden on the businesses that would have to adjust the GST/HST on the goods specified in the bill. Their concerns were not related to the tax incentive created by Bill C-78 or its financial impact on businesses and the economy, but, rather, to the amount of work generated prior to after HST/GST adjustments. We also heard from these witnesses that the Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, has been active and proactive in providing increased support to businesses to help with the implementation of the proposed relief.

Some witnesses were also clear that the benefits for businesses in the wider economy would outweigh any administrative burden. As Mr. Littler from the Retail Council of Canada stated:

Those issues do not detract from the fact that the GST holiday will save consumers in the order of \$1.6 billion. We are under no illusion that we are the primary beneficiaries here. This is designed and delivered as a consumer measure, but we are major ancillary beneficiaries.

Those who sell newly zero-rated goods will have a customer base that finds all-in pricing on those goods more affordable. . . .

These views from representatives of the retail and restaurant sectors about how Bill C-78 will support the economy are also backed by the work of professional economists.

For example, following the government's announcement on November 21, 2024, of the GST/HST relief measures contained in Bill C-78, BMO Economics revised its growth forecast upward, reporting that ". . . the GST/HST rebate will drive additional spending. BMO Economics is boosting Q1 —" 2025 —" GDP growth from 1.7% to 2.5% . . ."

I wish to make a comment, colleagues. We are talking about \$1.5 billion more in sales just for the restaurant business. If you take the portion of HST and GST that is going to be part of the \$1.5 billion that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has identified, the sales will be even greater, so we have to consider the ripple effect that this will have. If customers are going to be saving \$1.5 billion in HST, how much in sales will that generate? We have to really consider the volume.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, all of this highlights what I clearly said at the start of my speech today: The Senate's work on this bill has been extremely thoughtful and productive. We noted that Canada is facing a slow recovery in consumer spending, even though inflation is back down to its target range, interest rates are stabilizing and overall economic conditions related to employment and growth are solid. We also noted that this obstacle to consumer confidence is preventing the economy from achieving its full potential.

We learned that Bill C-78 will temporarily increase aggregate demand at a time of year when Canadians are struggling with higher than usual expenses. This legislation will temporarily lower costs for Canadians, with an anticipated positive impact on the economy and consumer confidence.

We also know that this is the right measure at the right time. With the slowdown in inflation and drop in interest rates, Bill C-78 allows the possibility of supporting Canadian consumers and companies without fanning the flames of inflation. Instead, it will help Canadians make ends meet. The measure is limited and targets clearly-defined sectors, including some that are feeling the pinch of the current economic climate especially hard.

Representatives from the retail and restaurant sectors told us why they support the bill and how it would help not only their sector, but the economy as a whole. Some economists at major banks raised their growth forecasts for the Canadian economy following the announcement of this support. These are valid economic reasons to support Bill C-78.

As the government has made clear, the bill will give Canadians a little extra money at a time of year when they tend to spend more, to help offset the cost of the things they need. They'll be able to focus more on spending time celebrating with family and friends, and less time worrying about their finances.

It's also a way of acknowledging that the government is counting on Canadians to continue fuelling a strong economic recovery through to the end of this year and even into 2025.

• (1600)

[*English*]

I'd like to share with my colleagues a comment published in *The Globe and Mail* by journalist Shannon Proudfoot. She wrote:

But this week, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland appeared before the Senate finance committee to defend her government's two-month GST holiday. And because it was a Senate and not a Commons committee, the manner of working was completely different. It was not recognizably partisan and there were no histrionics or cheap games, just precise and technical questions seeking real answers.

She concluded her article, saying:

The senators on the finance committee, in their calm and careful questioning this week, performed a public service by playing it out for all to see.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank my honourable colleagues, who did an excellent job taking all aspects of Bill C-78 into account in their analysis. They have clearly understood the political and economic implications of this bill. They questioned its merits and feasibility. They assessed the economic aspects of the proposed new measures, both in terms of the financial situation of households and the economic impact on their respective provinces.

With this in mind, I encourage you to support Bill C-78 on behalf of Canadians who really need it.

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

Hon. Percy E. Downe: I wonder if the senator would take a question.

Senator Moncion: I will take all questions, senator.

Senator Downe: Thank you. Five days ago, Prime Minister Trudeau tweeted:

In under two weeks, you'll be paying less for groceries at the register. Canadians are getting a tax break — starting December 14.

How would the Prime Minister know how independent senators are going to vote?

Senator Moncion: That's a very good question. He presumed that senators would vote in favour of this bill. That's all I can say. I don't know what he was thinking at the time, senator.

Senator Downe: Don't you think it's an affront to the Senate that Liberal MPs are currently running ads indicating that we'll have a tax break on December 14 before the chamber has actually voted? If that's the case, are we not participating in a bit of a charade here, with people standing up with good intentions, giving speeches and making remarks? It's all a sham. Would you share that concern, given that there are public ads appearing across Canada saying that on December 14 we will have a tax break?

Senator Moncion: Thank you, Senator Downe. I'm disappointed that you feel this way about the work we do and that you see the work we do as a sham. This bill was not looked at in the House of Commons. It was sent to the Senate for a thorough review, which was done by the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance. The work that we did and do on every bill is important whether we vote for the bill or not. What we do here is extremely important for Canadians.

As the journalist said, we did the work diligently, and we asked good questions. That's where it ends. I find your other comments disappointing because the work we do here is important.

We often hear from the House of Commons that a certain number of people voted in favour of this or that. In this case, what we do here is extremely important, and together we will decide the outcome of this bill today or this week.

Senator Downe: You didn't answer my question. It's not coming from the House of Commons; it's coming from MPs running newspaper ads presuming what the Senate will do. How is that not a reflection on this chamber and on the people putting work into it, including all the members of the Finance Committee?

[Senator Moncion]

Senator Moncion: Senator, I don't necessarily agree with the comments that you're making, because for any bill we work on, we receive so much information from many people dictating how we should vote on that bill.

Bill C-78 is not any different. If the Prime Minister has decided that we should vote in favour of this bill, then it is his prerogative to say that. As with many comments we hear, the value we place on any of them depends upon how we receive them and how we choose to use them.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Clément Gignac: First of all, senator, I would like to thank you for your work and also for your diplomacy, not to mention your courage in sponsoring this bill, which is called An Act respecting temporary cost of living relief (affordability).

As you know, I no longer sit on the National Finance Committee, but I have been an observer at the meetings. The title of the bill is An Act respecting temporary cost of living relief (affordability), and the committee members came to the following conclusion based on the testimony they heard, and I quote:

... that Bill C-78 will not adequately meet the needs of Canadians struggling to afford necessities including food and shelter.

How did my colleagues come to that conclusion?

Senator Moncion: Thank you, Senator Gignac, for the question. I attended the committee's meetings. Inflation was discussed at length, and the rising cost of living over the past few years was also covered. Food and housing are probably the two most expensive and most important costs that Canadian consumers have to bear. Unfortunately, people have to eat, if not three times a day, then at least twice.

Although this legislation isn't a definitive solution to the affordability issue, it helps. It gives people a little more money at a time of the year when they spend more on food because they buy items purchased less often at other times of the year. The goal is to give people a little more spending money at a time that is potentially a bit harder for families.

Senator Gignac: Although I will be supporting this bill, I had a reaction to something you said. You said that the bill had been well thought out. I was a bit taken aback by that. Even though I told you privately, and I'm saying here and now, that I will be supporting the bill for all kinds of reasons, not necessarily economic, to your knowledge, in the last 30 or 40 years, has there ever been a tax measure that benefits some Canadians more than others, depending on the province where they live? In Ontario, people will benefit from a 13% rebate, since it has a harmonized sales tax. In Quebec, where we administer and collect the GST, and do everything for the federal government, people will save only 5%.

Since you said this measure was carefully thought out, have you ever seen a government bring in a tax measure like this that benefits Canadians in one province more than another?

Senator Moncion: Thank you for your thoughtful question, Senator Gignac. What I can tell you about that is that the senators who served on the committee reflected on Bill C-78. That is what I meant when I said it was well thought out. If you're asking me to look back at the past 40 years, I can tell you that we've had to pass bills while holding our noses. That often happens with private members' bills. There have been a whole host of private members' bills recently where we had to hold our nose and pass them. We do not need to look back as far as 40 years to see that.

Senator, I'm presuming that the committee members did their job. I was there. I will say that, on one side of the room, we had the "French connection," including some economists and former bankers, and on the other, we had the "other province connection." The questions that were asked were excellent and well thought out. I would add that those questions were almost always asked by women. Even the questions that came from the group were excellent.

• (1610)

Although this bill may make us uncomfortable for all sorts of reasons, it comes from the government and it seeks to help Canadians at a time where things may perhaps be more difficult.

[English]

Hon. Denise Batters: Senator Moncion, at the end of your speech, you were quoting from a Shannon Proudfoot column that was just written about this topic. I was surprised you quoted from it because it was actually quite devastating to the government. The column was titled "Chrystia Freeland answered Senate questions on the GST break. It did not go well." In the part that you quoted, you stopped just before this sentence, "It was, in short, a disaster for a government looking to claim thoughtfulness and coherence for this policy." Then it went on to quote a number of the very excellent questions that many senators had asked at that committee hearing that Chrystia Freeland appeared at.

In addition to the many concerns senators raised there, a lot of the discussion that has taken place about Bill C-78 has focused on the nonsensical nature of the choices the Trudeau government made for the so-called GST holiday. Things like dolls that children play with are in, but dolls that people display are out. What is deemed as "kids" LEGO is in, but seemingly almost identical "adult" LEGO — Star Wars or something like that — is out. Toy guitars are in, real guitars are out. Those are the kinds of choices that the Trudeau government made on this bill. How can you defend that by saying that's something that makes sense?

Senator Moncion: Thank you for the question. First, about the article, I took out of the article the portion that was praising the work that the Senate did and that the National Finance Committee did. I think it was important to commend my colleagues for the excellent work that they've done.

As for the choices that were made by the government, it was the government of the day's decision to make. We can discuss these things, we can agree or disagree, but at the end of the day, this is what we are working with, Bill C-78, and the ins and outs that have been brought into that bill. That's as far as I go on the questioning. These questions were raised at the committee, and senators seemed to be okay with the report that was presented.

Senator Batters: In an earlier part of your speech, you talked about Canada's productivity problem. What I'm wondering about is how this tiny and temporary tax trick helps that. You noted in your Bill C-78 speech — I think you said that this will help workers to raise their productivity. Isn't this actually a huge problem with Bill C-78? The Trudeau government's two-month GST holiday will force small business owners and the employees who work in these small businesses to spend a multitude of unproductive hours at this very busy time of year adjusting prices on potentially hundreds of items in their stores to try to conform with an ill-considered Trudeau government policy that seems to have been drawn up on the back of a napkin. Isn't that the case for small business in Canada?

Senator Moncion: Thank you for the question. As for the comment on productivity, it was with respect to the comment that was provided by David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada. It was related to the measure that he presented in the committee. The argument that I present in my speech is a different argument, or a counter-argument, where we're looking at productivity with removing the portion on the oil sector. Having a more accurate picture of our productivity and with the conclusion that this economist comes up with is that we have had productivity that is similar to the U.S.

As for the amount of work that is going to be generated for small- and medium-sized businesses, depending on the size of the business, it is a concern, the amount of work it is going to generate for the reprogramming of the systems to accommodate the sales tax and the benefit that is associated with it. It is a concern. It is the intention of the government to look into this situation — not at the moment, but down the road — to see how this is going to turn out at the end of the two months and see what can be done, if anything will be done.

The premise here is that most businesses will profit from this with the \$1.5 billion savings — the cost of the tax reduction from the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, that's just the GST and the HST. In some provinces, that's \$1.5 billion. I haven't even made the math to tell you how many sales are going to be generated to bring the \$1.5 billion in cost savings.

Hon. Marty Deacon: Will you take another question?

Senator Moncion: Yes.

Senator M. Deacon: Thank you very much. Perhaps this is a carry-on from the conversation we're having now. I've been trying to bring this into context. Over the weekend, perhaps not intentionally, I ended up meeting with a number of business owners.

It could be that this is something new and it's a bit of a panic because it's change or people trying to adjust to some short-term pieces, but the real piece I listened to was around the point of sale. You talked about it a moment ago. Especially the smaller businesses are saying, "You know what, our customers stopped shopping a week and a half ago, they're waiting for reduced prices on the 16th, I don't have staff, I can't staff up anyway, and now I think each transaction is going to take us two or three times longer." The one thing that also seems to dominate those conversations was, "Come February 15, will there be a program or helpline set up to help small businesses work through the steps and answer questions when they bring back the GST?"

Those things seem to be the concerns — whether they have the staff, the loss of income — not a gain — because of the pause in shopping right now at the busiest time of year, trying to work themselves through it and that policing at the end. I'm just wondering, through you speaking today and through the National Finance Committee, if there is any one of those for which you can bring comfort for folks going through this.

Senator Moncion: Thank you for the question, senator. We had officials from the Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, who were there. Since November 21, they've started answering questions, and they've been working with the different businesses on how this is going to work.

You might not have noticed, but Bill C-78 doesn't have any penalties or any sanctions within the bill, and that was made purposefully. We had people from the CRA saying that they're going to be working with different owners to work through all of the situations, and honest mistakes are going to be looked at. There seems to be a comprehensive framework that is going to be put forward. It's not the intention of the government to penalize, but it's the intention of the government to work with the business owners to make this project work.

Senator M. Deacon: I did read that penalty thing and I tried to express that. I don't know if it's coming off of COVID or other pieces, but there is concern about that follow-up.

As you had the conversations with the CRA and spoke with different folks, do you know if the small business folks or the folks not in huge businesses had a chance to be consulted when this bill was put together through your hearings?

Senator Moncion: Thank you for the question. It was a question that was asked prior. Without having been consulted, the government worked with the businesses from November 21 on different aspects of this bill. Without official consultations, work has been done with different businesses.

• (1620)

Hon. Jim Quinn: Would the senator take another question?

Senator Moncion: Yes.

Senator Quinn: Thank you, Senator Moncion, for everything that you've shared. I did have the opportunity to watch the finance minister's testimony before the committee. The committee did a good job. They were asking very good questions. I found the answers somewhat short or even evasive, I might say.

In my area of the world, for the three provinces in the Maritimes that have the HST, there was no consultation. The Province of New Brunswick — which is where I'm from — found out about it the evening before the announcement. Premier King in Prince Edward Island found out through a press release, and Nova Scotia was in the middle of an election. Given there was only minimal, if any, consultation with them and given the financial impacts, should the House not have had — whose members, as I understand, were also caught a little short by all of this, and possibly the cabinet members — their committee give that initial review of this taxation policy before it came over to the Senate? It seems the elected people should have had that opportunity. Would you agree? Why didn't it happen?

Senator Moncion: I find it difficult to agree or disagree because I'm not necessarily privy to how some of these things are worked out in government.

What I can say, though, senator, is that so far Newfoundland and Labrador, P.E.I. and Ontario have waived their portion of the HST. The federal government is working with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to find grounds for agreement and understanding on how they're going to work through this.

Senator Quinn: I understand there have been discussions with the provinces that you've mentioned, so there will obviously be some type of offset that will occur. In the case of New Brunswick, it's a \$70-million hit. In the HST agreements with the provinces, there's a 1% rider, if you will, that says if there's something that's above the 1%, it's an automatic ping; it's a legal requirement. That has not been respected by the government.

For those provinces that you mentioned, there must be a trade-off. Regarding New Brunswick, I can't comment on their discussions, but I can comment that there's going to be a tax hit of \$70 million in my province — a province with a population that isn't the wealthiest in Canada.

How do the provinces that don't get compensated deal with this with respect to their own taxation regimes? It's going to be paid for by taxpayers one way or another.

Senator Moncion: The threshold of 1% is still there, senator. It's going to be worked out within the thresholds that are in place. It's not a cost that is going to be assumed by the taxpayers — in the end, yes, with the loss of revenues from the HST, it does hit the government's financial statements. However, with the threshold, the provinces will not be out of pocket from this.

Senator Quinn: May I ask a last question?

Senator Moncion: You can ask as many as you want.

Senator Quinn: It's going to be my last one. I have other questions.

Similar to Senator Marty Deacon from Ontario, last week I had the opportunity to speak with a number of small business owners in my hometown of Saint John. There wasn't one of them who was happy, other than a few of the restaurant owners, potentially. Other small businesses are going to be spending up to \$1,000 to reprogram machines that are going to be in effect for two months, and then they will have to change it back again.

Should the small businesses that incur costs be compensated, or should there be a negotiation with them similar to what you're suggesting is happening with the provinces?

Senator Moncion: Thank you, Senator Quinn, for the question.

We know there are costs that are going to be incurred by small- and medium-sized enterprises, or SMEs, but there are also revenues that will be incurred. The government believes that most of these SMEs are going to be making more money through more sales than what it is going to cost them to program their systems.

Like I said earlier, at the end of the process, the government is going to be looking at this and will be having discussions on the different caveats that this bill has brought. There are no promises here, but there are discussions that will occur on this particular item.

Hon. Denise Batters: In a follow-up to an answer that you gave earlier, Senator Moncion, you said that Bill C-78 doesn't contain any sanctions for small business owners who are not properly remitting these tax amounts. I imagine the reason there aren't specific sanctions for this particular bill is because this bill is just amending the Excise Tax Act, where those sanctions are included for all remittances that must be made to the Government of Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency for those types of things.

I just wanted you to clarify that, because I don't want the people who may be responsible for remitting the correct amounts of tax thinking that the Government of Canada is giving them a free pass here regarding ensuring that they're not remitting the correct amounts.

Senator Moncion: Thank you for the question. This bill is not amending an act; it's creating a new section to the act. That is in the document that was provided when Bill C-78 was brought forward.

Hon. Colin Deacon: Honourable senators, I commend Senator Moncion for her service in sponsoring this bill. I'm the designated speaker for the Canadian Senators Group. I promise I won't be speaking for 45 minutes, but I appreciate having an opportunity to speak about this bill.

Honourable colleagues, this has been an incredibly tough few years for small businesses. Then as retail businesses entered what was likely going to be their busiest time of what could be a good year, Canada Post workers went on strike. A week later, on November 21, they were conscripted into delivering a two-month GST/HST tax break on a random list of products. This is no small task, as we've just heard.

When the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister announced the GST/HST holiday, the Prime Minister stated, "For two months, Canadians are going to get a real break on everything they do . . ."

He went on to say:

Our government can't set prices at the checkout but we can put more money in peoples' pockets. That's going to give people the relief they need.

In the Prime Minister's words, the initial announcement also included a \$250 working Canadians rebate "To help them buy the things they need and save for the things they want" Conversely, today, far too many Canadians are entirely focused on past-due bills, not on savings accounts. This proposed one-time working Canadians rebate is intended to provide 18.7 million Canadians earning under \$150,000 in 2023 with a \$250 cheque in early spring 2025.

When thinking of those who are struggling the most to afford groceries, I don't first think of those making \$150,000 per year. That almost includes most people in this room.

The next day, the Prime Minister stated that what families need is to be able to afford their groceries. He's right, and you will hear me repeat his important statement often during this speech, but there is no GST on groceries.

What was the genesis of the November 21 policy announcement? It's been reported, and not denied, that the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister did not consult with their cabinet or their caucus colleagues who are accountable to their constituents. They also didn't consult the Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, officials responsible for providing businesses with GST guidance and compliance. In committee, when I asked CRA officials if they'd been consulted, I received the blunt one-word answer, "No."

• (1630)

I gather that one or two provinces were given a heads-up, but most were not. Now there is an effort to shame the provinces into proactively participating. The Deputy Prime Minister repeated the word "proactively" in committee, but using that word in this situation I think is disingenuous at best.

In her *The Globe and Mail* column reporting on our National Finance Committee's excellent work, Shannon Proudfoot offered that this strategy is like, ". . . announcing unilaterally to your siblings that you've bought your parents a big-screen TV. . ." and ". . . they each owe you \$500 . . ." That would not have worked in my family.

Bill C-78 dubbed as a “tax break for all Canadians act” just includes the GST and HST pauses with amendments to the Excise Tax Act.

Who should receive the \$250 cheques is still being negotiated with the NDP. If passed, Bill C-78 will create a \$90-million hole in Nova Scotia’s budget months after the province announced several decisions to permanently reduce fees and taxes.

Under its HST contract with Nova Scotia, the federal government is obliged to reimburse the province if their unilateral decision reduces aggregate provincial revenues by more than 1% in a calendar year. Given that contractual obligation, I’m deeply troubled that this government is trying to strong-arm my province into taking responsibility for this federal decision.

Most disappointing is the fact that there was no consultation leading up to this policy announcement. Caucus was conscripted, federal departments were conscripted, businesses were conscripted and now efforts are underway to conscript the provinces.

Colleagues, here is why I am completely against Bill C-78.

First, there is no underlying logic to the random list of items selected for inclusion. The minister repeatedly stated in committee that the bill will eliminate GST and HST on groceries. However, there is no GST or HST on essential groceries only on more expensive prepared foods. When you consider the list and who will benefit the most, it is certainly not those who need the most help. The majority of items on the list are non-essential. Families who are struggling to pay for groceries will see little benefit. This contradicts the Prime Minister’s assertion that what families need is to be able to afford their groceries.

Second, the department responsible for Bill C-78’s implementation and compliance, the CRA, was never consulted. This is a serious mistake, and small businesses are the ones who will pay the price. Maybe not in penalties but certainly in GST or HST that is owing but not collected, and given that this is implemented over two different tax years, this is a risk in liability that will not go away anytime soon. Failure to consider implementation and compliance should be reason enough to reject this new policy or program.

Third, federal departments that are actively pursuing policy goals opposite to this announcement were not consulted. For example, consuming junk food and candy is neither recommended by Health Canada nor is it aligned with Bill C-252, a bill supported by this government and that is at third reading here in the Senate. The purpose of Bill C-252 is to reduce the consumption of unhealthy foods, particularly by children. Again, what families need is to be able to afford their groceries.

Fourth, this policy shows no consideration for small businesses who are being forced to implement this measure. Front-line staff will have to explain the randomness of the very specific list of

qualifying items to customers and deal with any resulting frustration. I have personally heard small business owners expressing real concern over customer backlash if they refuse to believe the unexplainable.

There is an inverse cost to small businesses. This is going to be very inexpensive to implement for large businesses. But they will have to do it twice for small businesses, and you are doing that as a one-off, often as a small mom-and-pop shop.

Fifth, the implementation of the required point-of-sale changes favour our largest retailers who have the systems, technical support and accounting expertise that enables them to make one central change and then roll that out nationally. Defending and explaining those changes to customers is easier because they have a national advertising campaign available to them. Defending their actions to the CRA is unlikely to resemble that facing small business.

As Senator Moncion said, yes, we did hear words like “reasonable efforts,” “honest mistakes,” “that a practical approach to compliance will be taken,” but they will still be responsible for the GST or HST that they do not collect if there is a mistake, and they will have to pay that for up to the next two years. This is a significant risk for them if they do not do it right.

Defending explaining the changes to customers in a big business is going to be much easier than it is for our smallest businesses. I wonder when we’re going to start to respect our small businesses more than we certainly are showing that we do.

Sixth, Canadians who will benefit the most from the GST/HST holiday are those who can afford to spend the most. Struggling families can only dream of being able to spend Finance Canada’s example of \$2,000 on qualifying goods such as children’s clothing, shoes, toys, diapers, books and video games, snacks for the house and restaurant meals. Struggling families are not the ones who will realize GST or HST savings over the two-month period.

Colleagues, when announced, this one-time GST or HST holiday was accompanied by a proposed one-time \$250 cheque for Canadians who earned up to \$150,000 of income in 2023. It excludes those who are retired or disabled and doesn’t include up to the top 5% of earners. That cheque is not targeted to those who need the most help. Quite the opposite. Again, what families need is to be able to afford their groceries.

Colleagues, this giveaway was not in the Liberals’ 2021 election platform. What was in that platform was a firm commitment to implement consumer-driven banking, otherwise known as open banking, by January 2023. Yet Minister Freeland has consistently and repeatedly delayed implementation despite extensive consultations starting in 2018 — over five years ago — with strong and enthusiastic support from the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy in 2019, unrelenting support from finance department officials, provinces, businesses, consumer groups and every other group that you could consider, except for Canada’s five big banks.

Why do I raise this now? What does giving consumers secure control over their financial data have to do with Bill C-78 and the announcement made on November 21? It matters because had Minister Freeland implemented that 2021 election promise, Canadians would already be saving an average of \$250 per person every year in the elimination of excess bank fees and costs.

This is the finding of North Economics when comparing the profits of Canadian banks to those in the U.K. where consumers do control their data. Consumers use their data to get cheaper loans, lower fees, higher interest on savings and a reduced risk of fraud. Their study found \$8.5 billion per year in excess profits in Canada's biggest banks. That is because, based on this study, open banking has not been implemented and our banks continue to use our data for their benefit, not for ours.

Fitch Ratings has just reported that Canada's biggest banks have benefited from a 13% year-over-year increase in revenues, and Saturday's *The Globe and Mail* reported that executive bonuses at Canada's biggest banks jumped 12% in 2024 to \$23.75 billion. Executive bonuses at Canada's biggest banks totalled \$23.75 billion in 2024.

If this government had fulfilled its 2021 election promise, Canadians would be benefiting from an average of \$250 per year in savings at no cost to taxpayers. The government's delayed action on its election promises has caused Canadians to pay some of the highest fees and costs globally, and this is especially detrimental to those in greatest need.

Colleagues, the decision we're debating is about the November 21 announcement and its initial representation in Bill C-78. It's not just about an estimated \$1.7 billion for the GST portion of that announcement but about the provincial HST portion of \$1.4 billion, because it will be paid by taxpayers whether the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister choose to honour the federal government's responsibility or not.

• (1640)

Surely, if we pass this bill, we are signalling our support for another \$4.75 billion to be given away in \$250 cheques. That is a total of \$7.85 billion. But now NDP leader Jagmeet Singh wants the \$250 to be delivered to all adults whose income is under \$150,000 and who did not earn employment income in 2023.

In 2022, according to StatCan, there were roughly 33 million Canadians 18 years of age or older earning less than \$150,000. That would mean about \$8.2 billion in \$250 cheques if Jagmeet Singh gets his wish. As a result, the total cost of the November 21 back-of-the-envelope announcement could reach over \$11 billion.

So what will this \$8-billion or \$11-billion expenditure do for Canadians? We know it does little for families who are struggling to afford groceries, but what is the opportunity cost of this policy announcement? What other major risks are we facing today?

To answer that, I reflected back to the first ministers' meeting in Halifax last July where the premiers predicted the future we now find ourselves in where our economic stability urgently

requires the federal government to see security and defence as an economic issue. They were unanimous in their belief that continuing to ignore our 2% NATO spending target could cause enormous harm to businesses, employment, communities and families.

In the words of Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew:

I want Canadians to see this as a national security thing. It's an investment in the Canadian Armed Forces, but I encourage Canadians to think about this also as an investment in trade. . . . If we're not meeting our responsibility to our NATO allies, it is going to have an impact on [the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement] renewal. It is going to have an impact on the relationship.

A few days after the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister made their November 21 announcement that we're debating today, president-elect Donald Trump posted his 25% tariff declaration, echoing the prediction of Canada's premiers.

Investing up to \$11 billion in junk food, beer, video games, Christmas trees and other giveaways rather than border security and defence could cost us dearly. If the incoming president does what he continues to threaten, January 21 will mark the beginning of a devastating recession for Canada, regardless of any retaliatory tariffs that Canada may impose.

In the words of former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge, in his testimony to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, ". . . it's candy today in exchange for future pain."

Colleagues, when the Prime Minister called me and granted me the honour of being appointed to the chamber, he made one request of me. You have heard me say it before. His request was this: "Challenge the government." He made a similar request to many of you.

We are the only parliamentary body to meaningfully consider this policy. We are generally deferential to spending bills in this body. However, when faced with such an ill-considered, decidedly unserious policy and this bill in the context of an increasingly dangerous world, awash with security risks and economic uncertainty, we cannot rest on tradition.

Remember the Prime Minister's announcement? "What families need is to be able to afford their groceries."

Bill C-78 doesn't help them. However, \$11 billion could go a long way towards demonstrating how seriously we take North American and NATO security and defence, potentially helping to avoid a devastating recession.

Colleagues, please consider what it might cost us if we endorse this ill-conceived bill. I know this is a money bill and it is the government's prerogative to spend money however they like. However, Bill C-78 has demonstrated such profound disregard for small businesses, such profound disregard for where we find ourselves today that I cannot support it, not in any way. Thank you, colleagues.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Batters: Senator Deacon, would you take a question?

Senator C. Deacon: Yes.

Senator Batters: Thank you for your speech and for outlining that very well. Near the end, you were talking about the necessity of challenging the government. I agree with you; it's a very important thing to be able to do.

In that respect, I wish to provide this as a correction to what was recently stated here by Senator Moncion. She indicated that she didn't believe that this bill did contain any reference to a previous bill or a bill that is currently in place dealing with sanctions, but, actually, as I pull up Bill C-78 — it's a very short bill — the summary of the bill says:

This enactment amends the *Excise Tax Act* in order to implement a temporary GST/HST holiday between December 14, 2024 and February 15, 2025 inclusively in respect of certain taxable supplies.

All the bill does is amend the Excise Tax Act to simply add a schedule to the Excise Tax Act to provide that ability for businesses to know exactly what is being provided with this "Temporary Zero-Rating," as they call it.

Given that — I know you have considerable experience in the business realm — wouldn't that be something then that the sanctions and all of that considered in the Excise Tax Act are actually what governs the sanctions and everything dealing with this issue?

Senator C. Deacon: I was trying to follow along with you. I will ask you to restate, if you could, the point of the question.

Senator Batters: My question is, isn't it true that this is actually an act which amends the Excise Tax Act? All that Bill C-78 does is add a schedule to the Excise Tax Act. As such, all the governing provisions of the Excise Tax Act govern what businesses would be governed.

Senator C. Deacon: Senator Batters, at this point in time, we've been given nothing other than a few statements of support for the fact that businesses will be treated with care. But, yes, at this stage, anybody I have spoken to has said to me that, yes, the penalties still stay in place. They may be waived, but they still stay in place. If you have not collected HST or GST that you should have collected, you will have to pay it.

Hon. Pamela Wallin: Senator Deacon, you used the word "random." I think all of us have been listening to the small retailers in our own areas. I've been inundated with stories: Sticker books are not included in this, but colouring books are. If,

in a gift basket, 90% of the goods are GST-free, then you can make the whole thing GST-free, but that has required many retailers to go in and repackage what's in the basket. This is time-consuming and costly.

There was another example given about model planes. With the glue included, it's GST-free, but if you buy the glue separately, it's not. This is insanity for anyone who is trying to run a store.

The thing that is troubling me — but I would have you comment on that as well, to follow up on Senator Batters' question — is that people are being told that if they've bought things before December 14 and they go to return them, then they will have to apply to the CRA for a refund and fight with the retailer about that. Shopping online is also now being restricted because delivery service infrastructure is being paralyzed by the postal strike. It seems that we will be in pre-Christmas chaos here.

Senator C. Deacon: I would summarize it this way: I heard Senator Moncion speak about the fact that there are thoughts that this will increase sales for business. I sure hope that's the case, but I have not met anyone who thinks that will be the case.

I am certain that for the largest retailers in the country, this won't harm them at all; they may absolutely benefit. But I am very concerned about the complexity that this brings to smaller retail businesses. It's not nearly that same complexity for restaurants. It might have an effect in January; there's a possibility of that. But if you can afford to go buy a meal in January at a restaurant, then a few per cent one way or the other will not make a difference.

I don't know. I hope that if this bill passes, it has an increase for small business because they sure need it. This is a devastating period for those who rely on shipping. This is very confusing. I do not think any of us understand how hard it is to manage all of these issues that you could not plan for as a small business.

• (1650)

Sometimes the burden becomes very heavy. This showed an utter disrespect for that at a time following many tough years, and this is a tough time of the year. They are already dealing with huge costs: Businesses committed to free shipping to encourage shipping of different items are now suddenly paying shipping costs that are two or three times more than what they budgeted for. This is a tough period. I hope the predictions that Senator Moncion mentioned are correct.

Senator Wallin: On the question of returns, I was in two different stores on the weekend and they were already starting to feel this because, of course, the government is advertising it, even though this has not been passed duly. But they are getting the returns now. They may have sales after December 14, but they are not new sales. They are the same sale. They have incurred the cost of returning, repackaging, refunding and then selling it again the morning of December 15.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: I did not hear a question. Senator Gold, please.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Would you take a question, senator?

Senator C. Deacon: Absolutely.

Senator Gold: Thank you for your speech. Senator, you made reference to reports suggesting that cabinet and caucus were not consulted on Bill C-78 but, most importantly, you have not mentioned the votes in the House. Would you confirm to us that cabinet, caucus and, indeed, a majority in the other place, which is the house of Parliament directly accountable to Canadians on tax measures, have indeed cast their votes to support this tax relief?

Senator C. Deacon: I am certain that is the case, Senator Gold. I would be intrigued — I do not know whether it was a whipped vote.

Senator Gold: I have a supplementary question.

Senator Deacon, do you believe that it is the role of the Senate to vote down and defeat tax policy duly passed by the other place, which embodies the principle of no taxation without representation and, indeed, our whole constitution?

Senator C. Deacon: Senator Gold, I completely respect your question. I know what I am suggesting goes against the tradition in this chamber.

However, I cannot explain how deeply, in my opinion, this goes against so many fundamental principles of good governance in how this was structured, coming out of the blue with a lack of consultation, with no appreciation of the effects this would have on intended groups in terms of implementation and no coherent logic to it, so I have chosen to vote against it. I do not know what my colleagues will do. I have made that choice because I cannot support a piece of legislation done up randomly at the last minute, it appears, without consultation, that conscripts so many groups that must be part of it. I find it deeply troubling.

Hon. Kim Pate: Honourable senators, as we consider Bill C-78 today, let's not lose sight of the fact that this is a time of year when we gather and celebrate all for which we are grateful and appreciative — a time that encourages us to reach out, especially to those who are struggling, homeless, hungry or otherwise marginalized by place or circumstance.

These short, cold days bring into sharp relief the differing realities for those who do not have the privilege of a warm home, a full belly or hope for the coming year. We must work together to address poverty and need. We cannot continue to leave so many behind.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness and particularly homeless encampments have increased significantly. Instead of being recognized for what they are, a symptom of Canada's systemic failure to uphold equality rights and the human right to housing for all, rhetoric and policy around encampments have become ever more cruel and punitive.

Despite federal commitments to reduce poverty by half by 2030, government data indicates that the number of people below the poverty line is rising. Unaffordable rents have left people to make impossible choices between food and shelter. More Canadians than ever are using and being turned away from overwhelmed food banks and shelters.

Official government statistics alone — that 1 in 10 people in our wealthy and well-resourced country are being abandoned to poverty — should impel us to action. Anti-poverty experts indicate, however, that in reality, the situation is worse: Closer to one in four Canadians are struggling in poverty, unable to afford food, shelter and other essentials for themselves and their loved ones. The rate of children living in poverty in particular is growing for the first time in a decade and with alarming speed.

When people are plunged into poverty, they must make impossible, unthinkable and unfair choices between food, heat, medicine, shelter and safety. They are abandoned to risks of health issues, crises, isolation, victimization and criminalization that those of us in privileged positions simply do not face.

The human, health and social costs of poverty, approximately \$80 billion per year, are exacerbated by the consequences of poverty for the health care system, the criminal legal system, our social support systems and our economy.

These costs are not inevitable. COVID-19 supports — and especially the federal government's CERB program — cut poverty in half during the pandemic. Canada has the ability to eliminate poverty, yet those with the power to make a difference have instead made a choice not to act.

The stated aim of Bill C-78 is to alleviate the cost of living for some, but it was not designed for those most in need. The Prime Minister says it is designed for ". . . hard-working middle-class Canadians . . ." This is a stark shift in policy from a government that earlier in its mandate set a clear, welcome and long-overdue expectation that the role of government is to help those who are being left behind.

Bill C-78 proposes a two-month break from GST/HST on certain items. If combined with the proposal announced by the government at the same time for one-time \$250 cheques for those with employment income under \$150,000 per year, we are looking at a cost of more than \$6 billion. That is far more than would be needed to cover the net annual cost of a guaranteed livable income, an approach that could begin to generate billions in downstream savings, improve health, prevent crime, allow people to rebound out of poverty and homelessness and create choice and hope.

At the National Finance Committee, witnesses did not pull punches when it came to the value of Bill C-78 from the perspective of addressing economic security and need.

David Macdonald of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives prescribed, instead of Bill C-78, increases to existing forms of basic-income-type measures, such as the GST tax credit or the Canada Child Benefit. He noted:

We already have programs of basic income for particular groups How can we change them to improve them, particularly to target people in the lowest poverty, and really try to reduce poverty rates?

Sylvain Charlebois, food security expert and professor at the Dalhousie University Faculty of Management, testified that:

Instead of just sending out cheques and submitting to the economy an influx of temporary capital. It is more important to stabilize the economy with a constant, predictable flow of revenues for households that need it. I would certainly prefer to look into a guaranteed minimum income.

Why is a guaranteed livable income for those in poverty deemed too expensive, yet Canada can afford to pay twice as much for minuscule one-time benefits to those with more income?

Why, via Bill C-78, does the government choose to feed narratives that portray fair and progressive taxation as a cause of economic insecurity rather than a means of funding the programs we need to redress it?

By framing the bill as rewarding those who are “hard-working” and “working hard to join the middle class,” the government fuels harmful myths and stereotypes that poverty can simply be overcome by hard work. We know, including as a result of research from the University of British Columbia, that navigating poverty — trying to care for yourself and your family with far too little and worrying about whether there will be a roof over your head tonight — can exhaust people’s cognitive bandwidth.

Poverty is not a test to be passed by the deserving. It is a cruel, exhausting and judgmental trap fed by systemic inequalities and which must be redressed via systemic solutions.

Why does this bill seem content to pretend otherwise? Why, as so many are struggling without adequate housing and food, does Bill C-78 focus on middle-income earners instead of those most in need?

• (1700)

Honourable colleagues, this holiday season, Bill C-78 will leave people out in the cold. We know that reducing poverty saves money and creates healthier, safer and more just and inclusive communities and, therefore, benefits us all. We know what to do to help those most in need to rebound out of poverty. We have the resources, tools and ingenuity to deliver meaningful solutions, such as a guaranteed livable income.

Especially at this time of year, I must again ask us all to consider and demand action.

Meegwetch. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Éric Forest: Colleagues, I’m pleased to speak to Bill C-78, which introduces a one-time, two-month tax holiday.

First of all, I’d like to stress something that the vast majority of people agree on: Canadians, particularly the most vulnerable members of our society, have suffered in recent months as a result of inflation.

Heating bills have soared, along with the cost of groceries. Whether one rents or owns, housing has become much more expensive. In this context, the government’s intention to offer taxpayers some respite is commendable. Unfortunately, a 5% tax holiday for two months on a limited range of products is not a substantive measure likely to have a significant impact on households.

When this measure comes to an end in March, the cost of essential goods, such as housing, heating, food and clothing, will be just as high as before.

What’s more, as Quebec Finance Minister Éric Girard pointed out, retailers, manufacturers and restaurateurs may absorb this benefit by raising their prices. He said:

It’s not clear that consumers will reap the full benefit either. Vendors may keep some of it. The drop in prices might not be as big as expected.

When professor Sylvain Charlebois testified at the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, he brought up a similar precedent: When the Harper government permanently lowered the GST from 7% to 5%, it didn’t have much of an impact on consumers.

Testimonies at the Finance Committee also shed light on the fact that temporarily reducing a tax is one of the worst ways to help citizens. For one thing, it creates a heavy administrative burden for merchants. They will have to reprogram their point of sale machines twice in two months. It costs a lot of money to do that and they’ve barely recovered from the pandemic. For another thing, a tax holiday doesn’t target the people who truly need it.

Low-income families will certainly appreciate paying less for diapers, for example, but generally, the more a person consumes, the more they will benefit from this measure. What’s more, professor Luc Godbout explained that the wealthiest 20% of households spend three times more at restaurants than the poorest 20%. So this help is regressive. In fact, those who need help the least will receive more of it.

While thousands of children aren’t getting enough to eat and shelters are overflowing, a 5% discount on gaming consoles, bottles of wine or beer seems to be a bad priority.

Instead of passing this complicated and poorly targeted measure, the government could have chosen to use existing tools, such as the GST credit, which actually targets low-income taxpayers. This system is already in place and the benefit could simply have been topped up, like Quebec’s Allocation famille, which is increased at the start of the school year to help with the purchase of school supplies. This solution has the added

advantage of allowing beneficiaries to decide how to use the money without any obligation to spend. Other options could include paying off a credit card, paying heating bills or buying medication.

Finally, I'd like to share the words of professor Luc Godbout, who criticized the improvised nature of this public policy. Allow me to quote him:

. . . let's not forget that the federal government still hasn't presented an economic update. While it may be acceptable, in certain situations, for a tax policy to add to the deficit — for example by wanting to fight climate change in the name of intergenerational equity — granting a GST holiday on soft drinks and potato chips clearly doesn't qualify.

The reasons provided should have been enough to abandon such a project; in short, I will tell you that the GST and HST holiday is a bad tax policy.

In conclusion, I don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I believe Canadians need a break from the tough times they've been through, some more than others. However, based on my most cherished values, and given the current budgetary context, my humble opinion is that public funds should be used to support the most economically vulnerable Canadians. I would have liked to see more carefully targeted, more substantive measures to help them. Strengthening the Competition Act to bring prices down by boosting market competition was one such measure. Unfortunately, Bill C-78 is not in line with that thinking.

Thank you.

Hon. Claude Carignan: Honourable senators, I'm rising today to speak to Bill C-78, An Act respecting temporary cost of living relief (affordability).

By way of introduction, I'll read the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance's observations and findings, which are set out in its twentieth report concerning its study of Bill C-78. The report states the following:

Your committee agrees, in principle, with the intended goals of Bill C-78 to "put more money back into the pockets of Canadians" to help them with the cost of living.

The committee feels, however, that this measure may fail to make a real difference for those who are facing affordability issues. The committee heard testimony given regarding the administrative burden that will be shouldered by certain small and medium enterprises, as highlighted by representatives from a variety of business organizations and tax experts. Moreover, provinces and businesses were not officially consulted on the proposed tax changes.

The committee brings to the attention of the government witness testimony emphasizing that Bill C-78 will not adequately meet the needs of Canadians struggling to afford necessities including food and shelter.

In other words, the committee noticed a disparity between the bill's intended goal and the means chosen to achieve it, namely a two-month GST holiday.

First of all, colleagues, I want to talk about how this bill was passed in the other place. The usual rules were suspended by two closure motions. Here's how Conservative MP John Nater, from Perth—Wellington, put it:

What is interesting about Motion No. 43 is that it is a guillotine motion that has itself been guillotined by a guillotine motion. This is a motion that would introduce closure on a motion that is about closure and stopping debate.

At the end of debate, the Speaker said that the bill was "deemed referred" to a committee of the whole, "deemed considered" in committee of the whole, "deemed reported" without amendment, "deemed concurred in" at report stage and "deemed read a third time and passed."

In other words, the bill was studied on the fly, debates were rushed, MPs were muzzled, and no witnesses were heard.

I'm pleased that our study of this bill will be more serious and befitting of our usual practices. In that sense, the importance of our role of providing sober second thought is only magnified tenfold. Our Standing Senate Committee on National Finance did remarkable work in a very short amount of time to organize its business. What's more, beyond the wonderful team that supports our committee and to whom I express my deep gratitude, I want to thank the committee members, or my Senate colleagues who truly did thorough and methodical work. My thanks also goes to all the witnesses who generously came to share their point of view with the committee.

• (1710)

An editorial in Saturday's *Globe and Mail* on the work of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance came to a very interesting conclusion:

[*English*]

The senators on the finance committee, in their calm and careful questioning this week, performed a public service by playing it out for all to see.

[*Translation*]

The committee identified many problems. There are so many problems with this bill that I could talk about them for several hours, so I'm going to have to check myself and get straight to the point.

I would still like to mention the problematic aspects of the bill that I won't have time to explore in my speech. Let me give you a list of what I won't be talking about. I won't be talking about the lack of consultation with the provinces, the absence of an economic statement when this bill will come to a vote, the impact of the bill on Canada's debt, the inflationary effects of the measure and the risks of increased consumer prices.

Some other aspects I won't be talking about include the disparity between the provinces, the costs to the provinces, the agreements between the provinces and the federal government, the measure's real and imaginary economic benefits, the discrimination involving religious items from different religions, the risk of error facing merchants in coding zero-rated items — and consequently, the risk of being found in default before the Canada Revenue Agency, all over two different fiscal years — the specific costs and impacts for Quebec, the counterproductive effects of the bill, and the cumbersome processes for merchants.

Lastly, I won't talk about problems with the CRA, which lacks resources to administer the measure and respond to merchants who run into problems; the impact on the provinces; and whether or not provinces with a harmonized tax will forgo the compensation they would be entitled to receive from the federal government. That amount is estimated by the Parliamentary Budget Officer at \$1.3 billion, which could be added to the total if the provinces don't waive compensation.

Now that I don't have to address these 16 flaws with Bill C-78, I have only 16 more to address in my speech.

First, let's look at the purpose of the legislation. In her testimony on December 4, Minister Freeland put it this way:

Inflation has cooled and interest rates are dropping, but we know that life is still hard for Canadians. That is why now is the time to give them a bit of help. Our government cannot set prices at the checkout, but we can give Canadians more money in their pocket to help them afford the things they need and save for the things they want.

Essentially, the goal of the bill is to put more money in people's pockets for two months, the duration of the tax measure in Bill C-78.

Regarding this noble objective, Senator Forest questioned the wisdom of this measure.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Honourable senators, it being 5:15 p.m., I must interrupt the proceeding. Pursuant to rule 9-6, the bells will ring to call in the senators for the taking of a deferred vote at 5:30 p.m., on the third reading of Bill S-230, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

Call in the senators.

[Senator Carignan]

• (1730)

[English]

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Pate, seconded by the Honourable Senator Boehm, for the third reading of Bill S-230, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the question is as follows: It was moved by the Honourable Senator Pate, seconded by the Honourable Senator Boehm:

That Bill S-230, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, be read the third time.

Motion agreed to and bill read third time and passed on the following division:

YEAS

THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Adler	MacAdam
Al Zaibak	Massicotte
Aucoin	McCallum
Audette	McNair
Bernard	McPhedran
Black	Mégie
Boehm	Miville-Dechêne
Boudreau	Moncion
Brazeau	Moodie
Burey	Moreau
Cardozo	Muggli
Clement	Osler
Cormier	Oudar
Cotter	Pate
Cuzner	Patterson
Dasko	Petitclerc
Deacon (<i>Nova Scotia</i>)	Prosper
Downe	Ravalia
Duncan	Ringuette
Forest	Robinson
Francis	Ross
Fridhandler	Senior
Galvez	Sorensen
Gerba	Varone
Greenwood	Wells (<i>Alberta</i>)
Hartling	White
Kingston	Woo

Kutcher
Loffreda

Youance
Yussuff—58

NAYS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Ataullahjan	Petten
Batters	Plett
Busson	Quinn
Carignan	Richards
Gold	Seidman
Harder	Smith
Housakos	Tannas
LaBoucane-Benson	Verner
Manning	Wallin
Martin	Wells (<i>Newfoundland and Labrador</i>)—20

ABSTENTIONS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Anderson
Dalphond

Klyne—3

TAX BREAK FOR ALL CANADIANS BILL

DECLARATION OF PRIVATE INTEREST

Hon. Toni Varone: Honourable senators, I, Toni Varone, note for the record that I believe I have a private interest that might be affected by the matter currently before the Senate. The general nature of the interest is my ownership of a hospitality enterprise. Thank you.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, Senator Varone has made a declaration of private interest regarding Bill C-78, and in accordance with rule 15-7, the declaration shall be recorded in the *Journals of the Senate*.

[*Translation*]

THIRD READING—DEBATE

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Moncion, seconded by the Honourable Senator Miville-Dechéne, for the third reading of Bill C-78, An Act respecting temporary cost of living relief (affordability).

Hon. Claude Carignan: I don't have any conflicts of interest, I've already bought my Christmas tree.

Regarding this noble objective, Senator Forest questioned the wisdom of this measure by pointing out that with a GST holiday, the purpose is to ensure that Canadians have more money in their bank accounts after the holidays.

• (1740)

Why force them to spend in order to receive government assistance? He wondered whether that was not a direct contradiction of the bill's purpose.

Senator Forest even said that he considered it paradoxical for people to have to spend more money in order to keep more money in their pockets. He saw it as an inconsistency between the goal, which was for people to have more money, and the means to achieve it.

Indeed, for a family to truly benefit from a two-month reduction in the GST, it would have to spend several hundreds of dollars to notice a difference. Would it end up with more money in its pockets? The answer is obvious.

On this matter, Luc Godbout, full professor and chair of taxation and public finance at Université de Sherbrooke was scathing. He said the following:

The way that the federal government chose to intervene, by modifying the way that the GST/HST is applied, is extremely surprising. Political jockeying has clearly prevailed over economic logic. If students had presented a hypothetical plan like that for training purposes, I would have been highly critical of its relevance, the means used to achieve the objective, the administrative burden placed on merchants and the inter-provincial issues involved. In my opinion, the measure is poorly targeted.

David Dodge, former governor of the Bank of Canada, took the same position. He told us the following:

[*English*]

Like Professor Godbout, in my view, the temporary reduction of GST on a range of items is a poor economic policy in both the short and the long run. In the short run, it entails very real adaptation costs, as Mr. Godbout just said, for both the government and businesses, which means the fiscal cost is likely to exceed the actual benefits to consumers. Also, as this fiscal cost is likely to be financed by increased borrowing, the benefit for consumers today simply will result in a reduction in benefits in future years as governments reduce services or increase taxes to manage the increased federal debt service charges.

[*Translation*]

In fact, the actual savings generated by this legislation are minimal. Sylvain Charlebois, professor with the faculty of management and agriculture at Dalhousie University in Halifax and scientific director of the Canadian Agri-Food Foresight Institute, told us that researchers at his university's Agri-Food Analytics Laboratory estimate that the average retail consumer will save about \$5 over two months.

This is an average per Canadian, based on the volume of sales and taxes collected by grocers.

To highlight more substantial savings, some people argue that the savings will be greater at restaurants. Again, that will depend on the province, since the tax holiday will differ from province to province, depending on whether the sales tax is harmonized or not.

Take the example of Ontario compared to Quebec. Since Ontario has a harmonized sales tax, the QST holiday will amount to about 13%. In Quebec, however, which has no QST but rather the GST on top of the QST, the savings will amount to 5%.

The average Canadian spends \$186 per month on restaurants. For a Quebecer, that would amount to \$18.60 over two months.

Of course, there's a good chance that Gatineau residents will be dining out in Ottawa from December 14, 2024 until the last Valentine's Day on February 15, 2025, at the latest. Heavy financial losses for Quebec restaurant owners are to be expected.

The minimal impact mentioned by Professor Charlebois will also be felt in other areas, including toy sales. Here's an example taken from an article published in the Saturday, December 7 edition of the *Journal de Montréal*:

Lucie Bourbonnais owns La Ribouldingue, a toy and game store in Vaudreuil-Dorion, Montérégie. . . .

Several retailers have already voiced their concerns and complaints about the federal measure, which particularly affects toy and game stores.

"We've been hit hard in my field," said Lucie Bourbonnais. "It means a huge amount of work for businesses like mine," she added.

She went to say the following:

"To give you an idea, we have over 20,000 active products in the system, so it's a big job for us."

Ms. Bourbonnais is convinced that this measure won't encourage Quebecers to buy games or toys at her store, because of the timing of the GST holiday.

She concluded with the following:

Most Christmas purchases are made a little earlier Purchases made after December 14 are actually just last-minute ones . . . so tax or no tax, they would have been made anyway.

To conclude on this aspect and as Senator Forest rightly pointed out, consumers are being pushed to spend more in order to take advantage of the GST holiday, which will leave them with less money in their pockets. That is going to have the opposite effect of the bill's objective.

Let's turn now to the government's choices to zero-rate some products and not others. First of all, this list is not exactly a shining example of clarity. I feel very sorry for small retailers

like Ms. Bourbonnais, who will have to figure it out themselves. They're in for a rough night between December 13 and 14. Let's look at a few examples.

Physical books are considered eligible if the printed books are among the most published, hardcover or softcover. How is the retailer supposed to know whether a book is one of the most published? There are also magazines and periodicals that have no more than 5% of their printed space devoted to advertising, supplied by subscription, if all the consideration is paid during the relief period and only for those magazines or periodicals that are delivered during the relief period. So the poor retailer will have to thumb through each magazine and calculate the percentage of space used for advertising. That makes no sense.

People are also trying to understand the logic of the product selection that appears in the list of tax exemptions. Christmas trees are included, but not the balls or decorations to adorn them. There is nothing sadder than an undecorated Christmas tree. The vision, the thinking behind it is still unclear. Pierre de Coubertin said, "Healthy mind in a healthy body."

The list of exemptions includes junk food, all sports equipment and anything to do with art, singing and music. Therefore, someone can be exempt when buying a fake guitar, but not a real guitar. A toy guitar will be tax-exempt, but if I want to give my child a real guitar, it won't be tax-exempt. I can have shoes for running, but not for dancing. All cultural and sporting products are excluded. Notebooks and coloured pencils are excluded.

I asked the finance minister who drew up this list. What is the logic behind not encouraging cultural or sporting activities and food that is healthy for children? Why choose these priorities? It gives the impression that this government favours junk food and video games over sports and culture.

• (1750)

This was the minister's response:

We needed to see what products were already defined in the tax code to make it easier for small and medium-sized businesses to implement this idea. We were guided by what was possible.

For clothing, diapers, things that children need, everything is well defined in the tax code.

In her reply, the minister seemed to defer to the famous tax code without really answering my question, which, on its face, underlined the absurdity of the government's list of items.

Fortunately, a Department of Finance official, the Director of GST/HST General Operations and Border Issues in the Sales Tax Division, confirmed the following in response to my questions:

As far as toys are concerned, it's true that new definitions have been drafted and are included in the bill. Ultimately, the government decides what is and isn't taxable. As the minister has already said, it was up to the government to decide whether a product was taxable or not.

. . . if an item is within the scope of the bill, it was a government decision. It's true that some definitions have been used before in certain cases, as I said earlier, and that makes it easier for some vendors already selling these products to implement the bill and it simplifies administration for the Canada Revenue Agency as well. Ultimately, however, the decision whether a product is taxable or not rests with the government.

So it was the government that decided to promote junk food over exercise, and it was the government that decided to promote video games over arts and culture. It's incomprehensible.

This makeshift list by the government is causing consternation among a lot of merchants. Dan Kelly, President and CEO of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, or CFIB, told a CBC journalist that business owners had called him in tears, trying to figure out which products were taxable and which weren't.

His association spent 10 days trying to get an answer for a recreational goods store owner on how to categorize the materials used to build a model airplane. These are decisions that small business owners have never had to make before. They have to get all that sorted out and ready in two weeks, during their busiest season of the year.

Another cause for concern is the impact that the GST holiday will have on items that are returned. According to Mr. Kelly, retailers could lose money if customers return items that they bought on a credit card before December 14 and then buy them back again during the tax holiday.

They will be losing money because retailers pay fees for every credit card sale. If customers return an item, then the retailer pays another fee to the credit card company, and if the customer then turns around and buys the same item back again, the retailer will have to pay the fee a third time.

Mr. Kelly indicated that a small business could end up paying more in credit card fees than it makes in profit on such items.

Another problem with Bill C-78 is that it will undoubtedly benefit the most fortunate members of our society. Professor Godbout stated the following:

If the objective is to help taxpayers, zero-rating certain products will generate much greater savings in absolute dollar terms for high-income households. If we look at household spending by income quintile — data available from Statistics Canada — the richest spend 7.5 times more on clothing for children under 14 than the poorest. When it comes to store-bought alcoholic beverages, the richest spend 3.3 times more than the poorest, and when it comes to restaurant meals, the richest spend 3.1 times more than the poorest.

Mr. Godbout also talked about the government's likely motivation for granting a GST holiday, and he also mentioned another measure that would have been fairer and more equitable to all citizens. When we asked him why the Liberal government

had opted for a measure that is so unfair to the poorest citizens, he said the following:

It's probably for visibility reasons, because they wanted to find a new way to help Canadians. Simply increasing the GST credit would have put money in people's pockets as well, but it could have been more precisely targeted at low-income households, and people would have the choice to spend it or not.

On that, Senator Moncion suggested an interesting hypothesis to professor Godbout. She wondered, rightly so, about the invisibility of using the tax credit that professor Godbout described on the GST and the HST as well as the invisibility of the carbon rebate. She suggested that these measures are invisible, or nearly, to Canadians, while on the contrary, a GST holiday on certain items was a great stunt for the government to pull.

Mr. Godbout acquiesced by noting the following:

When it comes to developing tax policy, sound, long-term economic and budgetary decisions should always take precedence over stunts. This tax holiday is not a substantive measure. We do not know who is going to benefit from it, nor to what extent. People are happy to hear GST holiday, but they do not know how much will end up going back in their pockets. I am not sure that Quebecers are aware that they will be getting less than Ontarians because the tax rates are different.

Honourable senators, in addition to the inequity it creates between the wealthiest and the least fortunate in our country, the bill also creates inequity between the citizens of the different provinces.

As I mentioned before, the tax holiday will vary from one province to another depending on the specific agreement each province has with the federal government. Professor Godbout had this to say about that situation, and I quote:

With regard to the consistency of the measure, to date, when the federal government has put in place ad hoc measures to help Canadian taxpayers, those measures applied uniformly across the country. In the case of the temporary GST/ HST holiday, people are being treated differently, depending on their province of residence. That seems hard to justify. In the provinces that charge GST, there is a 5% holiday, but in the other provinces that charge HST, the holiday varies from 13% to 15%.

Senator Gignac expressed to the Parliamentary Budget Officer his concerns regarding this inequity among residents of different provinces. He told the Parliamentary Budget Officer that this would create distortions, particularly in the Gatineau area. Senate Gignac said that, had the government decided to reduce the GST on everything by 1%, rather than eliminating the GST on certain items for one month during the holidays, this much simpler approach would not have affected the provinces, whereas the way things now stand, the government is messing with the tax base and that is going to create distortions.

It is obvious to our honourable colleague that some Canadians, depending on their province of residence, stand to benefit more from this measure.

As mentioned earlier, another option for achieving the bill's objective would have been to temporarily increase the GST credit for those who qualify, as has been done in the past. That would have been a much more targeted measure, but it would have been less flashy, which seems to be one of the government's underlying objectives.

Obviously, Professor Godbout is an advocate for this approach. Here is what he had to say about it:

Right now, hundreds of thousands of retailers are being asked to change their computer systems. It would have been easier to tell a single organization, the CRA, to immediately send all GST credit recipients — that's 11 million households — \$200 per individual or \$500 per couple. People would have received \$200, \$500 or the GST amount. The government could have chosen any amount it wanted. It could have said that anyone who received an amount last September is eligible to receive a certain amount of money that will be mailed out by the CRA right away.

It would have been much simpler and more effective to do it that way. It would have prevented the biases that were raised, such as the fact that a restaurant in Gatineau will have a 5% holiday, while a restaurant in Ottawa will have a 13% holiday. It would have prevented all sorts of issues. It would have been much simpler to manage. There would be no cost for retailers and no risk of them making a mistake when they change their computer systems. The measure could have been much more targeted. The richest households would not have received anything, but are they really the ones that the government wants to try to help with this tax holiday?

• (1800)

From another angle, the former governor of the Bank of Canada had some very interesting comments. He said, and I quote:

In short, senators, it is candy today in exchange for future pain.

But the long-run implications are even worse.

First, the premise of the GST is to have a broad base with as low a rate as possible. Chipping away at that base, even on a temporary basis, makes the tax a much less effective way to raise revenues that are needed for government programs. The results are that either all taxes increase or programs that support ordinary citizens have to be reduced.

Second, and perhaps even more important, our collective need today is to raise investment, not consumption. Without increased investment to give workers the tools they need to raise productivity and, hence, raise the incomes that they are capable of earning, we are condemning ourselves to stagnation or even a decline in our standard of living. By

opting for a tax measure that increases consumption, the government has [forgone] the opportunity to increase investments by an equal amount.

Moreover, in Quebec, the provincial government collects a 9.975% sales tax, the QST, and Minister Eric Girard has stated unequivocally that he will not forgo this revenue without compensation. This means that the citizens of the four Atlantic provinces will benefit from a 15% rebate, that is, the 5% GST plus the 10% added by their provincial governments, while this rebate will be 13%. None of the other three provinces that impose a provincial sales tax, namely Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia, have announced any intention to suspend it at the same time as the GST.

In Quebec, Finance Minister Eric Girard has confirmed that the Quebec government will not harmonize its sales tax with Ottawa's, arguing that this was an improvised measure by Justin Trudeau that will have no impact on the economy.

However, the Legault administration would have followed suit if the Quebec government had received full compensation from the federal government. The minister said, "It's a surprising and somewhat unexpected measure that is improvised." Mr. Girard then added that he would rather "take measures that have an impact on Quebec's economic potential."

Like Mr. Dodge, who says it's better to increase investment rather than consumption, Minister Girard now feels it's now up to the Trudeau government to defend its tax move. Let me read the quote:

"They have motivations that I do not share," he said. "What matters to us is the best interests of Quebec," the minister concluded.

This statement from Minister Girard is a good segue into reflecting on Bill C-78's political opportunism and electioneering.

Before I wrap up, I want to come back to a point that I made at the start of my speech. I told you that I wouldn't be talking about the federal government's lack of consultation with the provinces. Yesterday, however, something happened that gave me an opportunity to broadly highlight this lack of consultation.

Yesterday, December 9, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released his report on Bill C-78, which said that if the provinces do not waive the compensation required under their agreements with the federal government, this could end up costing up to \$2.8 billion.

Immediately after the release of the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, a spokesperson for the federal Minister of Finance encouraged all provinces to waive their sales tax on the same goods and services, as follows:

"We hope all provinces will join us and provide their share of tax relief for their residents over the holidays, as Ontario, P.E.I., and Newfoundland and Labrador have done. This tax break will help all Canadians in every province," said Katherine Cuplinskas in a statement.

The government is living on hope. Had it done things right and negotiated with the provinces in advance, then it would not have to be begging for the provincial governments' cooperation just days before the measure is set to be implemented. That is definitely not a smart way to manage the public purse or to respect the harmonization agreement that requires the federal government to consult the provinces before implementing this kind of change. Finally, in closing, I want to once again quote Professor Charlebois, who said the following:

In closing, the temporary suspension of the GST is a costly, ineffective, ill-advised measure that could create additional inflationary pressures while making life more difficult for retailers. If Ottawa really wants to help consumers, it needs to come up with more consistent long-term solutions.

It would be unfortunate if senators did not take into account the detailed and conscientious work of the Finance Committee, which gave Canadians, including experts, the chance to express themselves.

Honourable senators, I just gave you 32 good reasons to vote against this improvised, poorly targeted, deeply flawed bill, which is, quite frankly, just a ploy to win votes.

I know that some senators want to abstain. Honourable senators, we each represent roughly 400,000 to 450,000 people. These people are not asking us to abstain, and we were not appointed to the Senate to abstain. We were appointed to take positions, positions that are sometimes hard, but positions nonetheless.

I invite you to take a position for the 450,000 citizens you represent and vote against this bill.

[English]

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Would you take a question, Senator Carignan?

[Translation]

Senator Carignan: Yes, of course.

[English]

Senator Gold: Thank you. Senator Carignan, you and our colleagues might recall that the Conservative Party announced a similar policy proposal in 2021. At the time, then-leader Erin O'Toole stated:

December is going to be the end of a very difficult year for Canada, and we think Canadian families deserve a break.

Therefore, can you elaborate on what has changed since 2021? As someone who has served as Leader of the Government in the Senate, do you believe this chamber ought to give serious deference to the other place when it comes to matters of taxation policy?

[Translation]

Senator Carignan: You quoted an individual who was defeated in an election for making this type of proposal. He is no longer the leader of our party.

[English]

Senator Gold: Senator, I invite you to answer my question perhaps a bit more fulsomely. This was the position of the Conservative Party. You are a member of that party.

Do you not agree, senator, that this unelected chamber, which is constitutionally prohibited from passing money bills or imposing money costs as a matter of our Constitution, should show some deference to the elected house and the government of that house when it proposes tax policy measures?

[Translation]

Senator Carignan: Senator, if we were constitutionally prohibited from voting against the bill, we would not be seized with it now. We are seized with it, though, because we do have a constitutional role and we do have the ability to vote for or against this bill.

[English]

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I also rise to speak to Bill C-78, An Act respecting temporary cost of living relief (affordability). Before I go into my remarks, I just wanted to quote from Ivan Morgan. Ivan Morgan used to be a handler for our Prime Minister. And I want to read what Ivan Morgan has to say:

• (1810)

What a mess. Hopefully you aren't paying attention. Hopefully you are focused on more important things such as Christmas, family and the like.

I'm referring to politics in Ottawa. Strange goings on.

I ask this question only half in jest: Is our Prime Minister stupid? Like actually not smart? We have had many intelligent, accomplished prime ministers in the past. I am starting to wonder about our latest one. He's said and done some spectacularly stupid stuff over the past several weeks.

He was in Brazil recently to schmooze with rich and powerful people who worry about climate change. In an interview he basically said saving the planet is more important than feeding and housing your family. . . .

Next, he announces he is going to give people back some of their own money, paying working Canadians \$250. But not seniors. They aren't getting a cheque.

His opponents think he is evil. I wonder if he's just stupid.

Even if he is stupid, where are his handlers, his advisors, those hired to protect him from himself? (I used to be one.) Is there some sort of movement inside his circle to let people finally see him for who he is? Hang him out to dry, so to speak? . . .

And when planning to bribe the electorate with its own money, might it not be politically prudent to include seniors?

I was recently catapulted into official seniorism and believe me government pensions are pretty miserable. Some people may be living high on the hog, but I also know folks eating cat food in the dark.

I'll leave it there. He has much more to say, and I would encourage you all to avail yourself of that and read what else Ivan Morgan has to say about our Prime Minister.

Colleagues, the sponsor has already explained that this legislation will remove the GST or HST from a range of items for a period of two months. And, according to the Prime Minister, this means that “for two months, Canadians are going to get a real break on everything they do.” Colleagues, for two months, he says, we are going to get a break on everything we do.

But before you get too excited, I would like to remind you once again that this is the same Prime Minister under whom Canadians have seen the cost of living skyrocket. Food prices have risen 37% faster in Canada than in the United States. The cost of housing has doubled. Our GDP per capita is smaller than it was when he took office. We have the highest level of household debt to disposable income in the G7. Our health care system is in crisis, and our economy is struggling.

A recently released national report card of Campaign 2000 stated that between 2021 and 2022, child poverty jumped by 2.5 percentage points. This is the largest annual increase in child poverty on record. In the last two years, Canada saw 358,520 more children living in poverty than during the height of the pandemic in 2020. What a travesty, colleagues.

This means that across Canada today nearly 1 in 5 children are living in poverty, representing nearly 1.4 million children. Nowhere in Canada was spared. Child poverty increased in every single province and territory. The highest rate was seen in Nunavut, where child poverty increased by 6%.

Ontario also saw a spike of 3.5%. The percentage of children living in food-insecure households rose in 2023 from 24.3% to 28.5% — all under this Prime Minister, about whom Ivan Morgan is asking whether he is stupid.

Worse still, the depth of poverty for families, which means the gap between the poverty line and the median income of low-income families, increased by 42% from 2015. As a result of this, families that were \$10,050 below the poverty line in 2015 are now \$14,276 below the poverty line.

After nine years of Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh, there are now 2 million people lined up at food banks every month. In Ontario alone food banks had to handle 7.7 million visits in the last year, from over 1 million residents. This means there are

more Ontarians accessing food banks than the entire population of Nova Scotia. One in four Canadians have started skipping meals. There are tent cities all across the country, and there are crime, chaos, drugs and disorder all over our communities. But no worries, colleagues, the Prime Minister has a plan. He is going to borrow \$1.6 billion on behalf of Canadians and use it to give us all “a real break” on everything we do — our own money.

But don't forget that the Prime Minister made the decision to give away not only \$1.6 billion of federal tax money but also another \$1.1 billion of provincial tax revenue. This means that the actual cost is going to ring in around \$2.7 billion, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. And since there is zero plan in sight to repay that \$2.7 billion, it will begin racking up interest at an approximate rate of \$1 billion every 10 years until it is paid back.

Now, in return, Canadians will enjoy a few cents off a range of items for 63 days. From December 14, 2024, until February 15, 2025, the GST/HST will come off of “groceries and holiday essentials.” By “groceries,” the Prime Minister does not mean the usual vegetables, meat, grains, dairy products that Canadians typically buy to fill their cupboards, because those are already exempt. No, no, he means things like beer, wine, candies, potato chips, corn chips, cheese puffs, potato sticks, popcorn, snack mixtures, fruit bars, frozen yoghurt, doughnuts, brownies, prepared platters of food and more. Who drew up that list? What kind of an idiot?

The so-called holiday essentials are not things like prescription medicines, household cleaning supplies, cellphone service, internet bills, first aid supplies, furnace filters, snow tires, car repairs, electricity bills or gas for your car. They are things, however, like puzzles and board games, video game consoles or books — as long as it is not a colouring book, a cut-out book, a directory, an owner's manual or a magazine that is not purchased through a subscription.

It's essentials like toys that imitate another item, printed newspapers but not digital ones, printed books but not e-books, and let's not forget kids' stretchy socks, ties, belts, suspenders and hosiery.

• (1820)

Colleagues, I either need to cry or laugh. I'm not sure what this is, but how can anybody in this chamber — Senator Gignac — say, “No matter how silly this bill is, I will vote for it.” Then we hear the government leader say because the Leader of the Opposition who lost an election supported this, that's a good enough reason for us to support this idiocy.

Colleagues, we can vote against this stupidity, and that's what it is. This man is bankrupting us. He's bankrupting your grandchildren, and we're letting him get away with it. He has a lot of money. This is no problem for him. This was written on the back of a napkin, colleagues. This man sat down after he had one too many beers, and he wrote this on the back of a napkin.

Senator Housakos: Somebody wrote it for him.

Senator Plett: Somebody wrote it for him. According to Minister Freeland — and she's back and forth on this too — this is tremendous news for those who are lining up at the food bank, are struggling to make their mortgage payments or are already living in homeless encampments. How is this news for people living in homeless encampments?

After all, as she noted, things are much better than they appear and there is merely a disconnect between recent good news on inflation and interest rates and how Canadians are feeling about the economy. She is confident that this legislation will give them a boost out of the “vibeceSSION” in which we all feel ourselves stuck.

Colleagues, if you're not convinced, let me give you some reassurance. I did the math. The \$2.7 billion works out to \$1.05 a day for every single Canadian for 63 days straight. That's right, the “vibeceSSION” is almost over, colleagues — hallelujah — because for nine weeks the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance are going to let you and me hold on to an additional \$7.32 of our own money. This, in turn, is going to stimulate consumer spending and yank us all out of the doldrums.

There's just one little wrinkle I should note, however. This \$1.05 of daily savings per person will not be experienced evenly — not across the board. Since you have to spend money in order to save money, those who have more disposable income and spend the most will be the ones who save the most. In spite of the exaggerated talking points and enthusiastic sound bites, those who benefit the most from this plan are the rich — Justin Trudeau — and those who do not benefit at all are the poorest people, the homeless people eating from food banks. They receive nothing.

In 2022, when the government wanted to put money back into the pockets of Canadians, it chose to issue a special top-up payment under the Goods and Services Tax Credit implemented through Bill C-30. That legislation doubled the GST credit for six months.

Aside from the fact that we have repeatedly seen how this Liberal government uses fiscal policy to work against the Bank of Canada's efforts on monetary policy, at least that measure was more efficient at putting the money into the hands of those who needed it most. In addition to knowing exactly where the cash would end up, this approach would have saved retailers the time and expense of reprogramming their point-of-sale machines on December 14 and then again on February 15. The Canada Revenue Agency could have just made the necessary changes to their programming, and the automatic deposits would have shown up in bank accounts across the country.

Instead, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, small firms in sectors that will be required to make changes to accommodate the temporary tax holiday report many concerns. Of those who reported, 75% say it will be costly and complicated to implement the holiday tax trick. Small firms report a median of \$1,000 in additional costs to reprogram their point-of-sale systems to remove and then reinstate the tax, and 65% say that there is not enough time to implement the change. In addition, 71% say that big businesses and online giants will have an upper hand in benefiting from the holiday, and 68% say that it will be difficult to determine which items are temporarily

tax exempt. Of retailers of goods subject to the holiday, 66% believe that consumers will delay purchases, and 54% believe consumers will return products to repurchase during the holiday period.

Colleagues, this is an absolute joke. We have a finance minister who said last May, “. . . it would be irresponsible and unfair to pass on more debt to the next generations” She then proceeded to pass a budget that promised to add \$395.6 billion more by 2027-28 to the total amount of debt held federally. Then yesterday she doubled down. Listen to this: She's going to announce at least a \$40 billion deficit — the Parliamentary Budget Officer says it's \$46 billion; other sources say it's \$62 billion — on Monday. She says, “Our government is focused on delivering fairness for every generation. . . . And we are doing this in a fiscally responsible way.”

Tell me what part of that is fiscally responsible. Colleagues, I have been told here in the past that I cannot call somebody a liar; that it is not parliamentary language. I do not know how you can call anybody something other than a liar when they are clearly lying to Canadians. The Minister of Finance is a liar and the Prime Minister is a liar; there is simply no other way to express it. The regrettable truth is that the only accurate way to describe unparliamentary behaviour is to use unparliamentary language.

As I said before, common-sense Conservatives will vote against —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gold, please.

Senator Gold: With respect to my colleague, if I understood his words correctly, he acknowledged that he was using unparliamentary language because he disagrees with a policy choice that the Prime Minister made and is currently before this house. I would ask the senator to reconsider his words or ask you to take under advisement the breach of our Rules with regard to using unparliamentary language in this chamber.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gold, thank you for your comments.

• (1830)

I will read rule 6-13(1) on unparliamentary language: “All personal, sharp or taxing speeches are unparliamentary and are out of order.”

Senator Plett: As I said before, common-sense Conservatives will vote against this irresponsible, inflationary two-month tax trick, and I encourage you all to do the same, colleagues.

This Liberal-NDP government needs to be defeated and replaced with a common-sense Conservative government, under the very able leadership of Pierre Poilievre, as quickly as possible.

An Hon. Senator: It's coming.

Senator Plett: Canadians deserve better than Band-Aid solutions and empty promises. They deserve a government that understands their struggles and has the courage to make fundamental changes to restore Canadian prosperity.

Colleagues, I regret having to give such a despairing message at Christmastime; I really do. I didn't come up with this tax trick.

There are no Canadians who voted to have this government in place: a combination of the NDP and Liberals. Rather, 6 million Canadians voted for Conservatives more than for any other party. Be that as it may, nobody voted for this coalition. Nobody voted for Jagmeet Singh to be the Prime Minister of Canada.

This is what this government has left us with. For too many families, this is going to be a very difficult Christmas — probably the most difficult Christmas in their lifetime.

After my taxing language and after my comments, strange as it may seem, I want to take a moment and bring a little levity into this situation that we, as Canadians, find ourselves in because we will either cry or we will laugh.

Let me close my speech with a poem:

'Twas two weeks before Christmas, and all through the land,
The cost of essentials was way out of hand.
The families were nestled in hopes of relief,
But cost of their groceries still caused them much grief.

Then PM Trudeau sat upright in his bed,
“A measly tax cut that will make them forget!”
But housing had doubled, food prices had soared,
And budgets, once balanced, could stretch out no more.

The tax break, though touted, seemed fleeting and small,
For a few chips and doughnuts was no help at all.
“Cheetos and Cheezies!” the leaders proclaimed.
But medicine and gas? They're not part of the game.

When out on the streets, there arose such a clatter,
It was folks seeking warmth — survival did matter.
Away to the shelters, they flew like a flash,
But found only long lines and systems all trashed.

And what to their wondering eyes did appear?
A bookkeeping burden, confusion severe.
With small businesses groaning, their costs piled high,
To alter the taxes on goods they supply.

“Now puzzles! Now board games! Now stretchy kids' socks!
On books but not e-books, on belts and on frocks!
Subtract and re-add it! This holiday cheer
Will cost firms a fortune to juggle this year!”

The savings, though trumpeted, barely would show,
Sixty-three cents a day in the holiday glow.
“Five dollars a week for each person's plight
Will do nothing to help us through this winter's night.”

And so, with a sigh, the plan rolled ahead,
While households still struggled to budget their bread.
Yet hope springs anew, for change is in sight,
To steer us from darkness and into the light.

This Liberal-NDP pact must now end,
For Canadians yearn for some real common sense.
Under Poilievre's leadership, hope glimmers bright

For days of good fortune instead of dark night.

No more Band-Aid fixes, no more holiday cheer,
We need real solutions, both bold and sincere.
Let Trudeau return to the classroom's embrace,
And leave grown-ups to govern, to lead and replace.

So rise, fellow citizens, and seize this great fight —
For Canada deserves better. Merry Christmas, good night!

Hon. Leo Housakos: Would Senator Plett take a question?

Senator Plett: Certainly.

Senator Housakos: Senator Plett, thank you for sharing your views on what has become nothing more than a Liberal gimmick. In the case of this government, it has been nine years of gimmicks that have led us to historic debt.

We have a situation this year where the federal government is paying more in interest payments on the national debt than transfer payments to health care. Maybe you can tell us this: What are the repercussions to our health care system when that occurs, for example?

The second question I have is — and it is devastating to even ask this question; it is unbelievable when you think about it — in Canada right now, we're seeing unemployment creep up, which is the end result of nine years of bad fiscal management. Unemployment amongst young people in Canada is now creeping up to 14% or 13.9%, which is catastrophic.

Tell us a little bit about the impact on — in what was once upon a time the G7 — the young generation of Canadians who are saddled with debt and who are desperately trying to find jobs in a marketplace where unemployment is not 5% or 6% but, for young people, it is 14%.

Senator Plett: Thank you, Senator Housakos, and you are absolutely right.

First of all, regarding our health care system, again, we used to be the pride of the G7, certainly with health care. In every province, with the wait times we now have and the transfer payments, it is a complete gong show. It is a government that has lost its way.

When we look south of the border, even prior to their very positive election — just in case anyone wants to jump on me for this — things were going much better there than they were here. Certainly, they will continue, and they will do better yet.

We have a government that cannot keep up. We are now a joke across the G7. We are a joke to the president-elect when he is making comments about us being the fifty-first state, and we have a Prime Minister who is asleep at the switch and decides that giving us \$5 apiece here at a cost of \$3 billion — another \$3 billion to \$46 billion, so what?

Senator Housakos, the general impact is that my grandchildren as well as my great-grandchildren — and yours — are going to inherit a system where they will never know what existed, like you and I.

You and I, at least, remember some of the good times. They will never see that unless we have a very quick change in this government. Every day we have this government in power, it will make it that much worse for the next one.

Instead, we have comments like “Your leader somewhere supported something,” when that leader lost the confidence of his own caucus for the very reasons we are talking about.

That is what we have here with the leadership, both in the Senate as well as in the other place.

Senator Housakos: But at least we threw him out; they are keeping him.

Senator Plett: Right. Exactly.

Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard: Would Senator Plett take another question?

Senator Plett: Certainly.

Senator Bernard: Thank you, Senator Plett.

Thank you for outlining very clearly the reasons why you don't support this bill. I have been thinking about your speech and many others this afternoon, and I was thinking about Senator Pate's speech and her argument for a guaranteed livable income as one of the ways to address the hard-working poor, whom this bill does not address.

I would like to know, Senator Plett, do you support a guaranteed livable income?

• (1840)

Senator Plett: In fairness, Senator Bernard, I think we are discussing a GST trick here not a guaranteed livable income.

Certainly, if we get to debating a guaranteed livable income, I will be more than happy to put my comments on the record, but right now, we are debating a tax trick. We are debating giving away \$2 billion here over the next couple of days. If the \$250 deal goes through in a couple of months from now, that is another \$6 billion. The more we spend, the less money there will be for any kind of a guaranteed income for any of us.

Senator Bernard: Senator Plett, the question was “Do you support a guaranteed livable income?” not whether you would speak to it at a later date.

Senator Plett: Like I said, when we start debating a guaranteed livable income, Senator Bernard, I will put my opinion on the record at that time. Right now, we are debating this tax trick, which has absolutely nothing to do with the guaranteed livable income.

Hon. Colin Deacon: Senator Plett, would you take another question?

Senator Plett: Yes.

Senator C. Deacon: Like you, I'm not supportive of this bill. I see challenges that cause me to go against parliamentary tradition in a way that I do not take lightly.

I have to ask you a question I have been meaning to ask you for six-and-a-half years: Do you think that insulting people in this chamber and being aggressive in that manner actually helps win people over to your argument?

Senator Plett: Let me answer that with a question, Senator Deacon. Do you think insulting me here gets me any closer to being fond of you?

Senator C. Deacon: I'm sorry. I did not think that I insulted you, sir.

Senator Plett: I'm sorry. I didn't insult you either. I spoke the truth about the Prime Minister.

When somebody, Senator Deacon, tells an outright lie — when it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it is a duck. That is what I said.

The Hon. the Speaker: I wish to repeat the rule pertaining to unparliamentary language, “6-13. (1) All personal, sharp or taxing speeches are unparliamentary and are out of order.”

POINT OF ORDER

SPEAKER'S RULING RESERVED

Hon. Leo Housakos: Thank you for sharing the section in regard to taxing language, which we have all heard in this chamber on a number of occasions. To be clear, under no circumstances has this chamber ever had a list of unparliamentary language unlike the House of Commons. It is always at the discretion of this chamber.

Yes, you are not allowed to use taxing language in attacks or in debate. Under no circumstances does Senator Plett use any taxing language to insult any member of this chamber. Under no circumstances were words used by Senator Plett that in any way, shape or form called into question the integrity of anybody who participated in the debate.

What he did was read into the record a quotation of an editorial written in a legitimate news outlet. He addressed issues in regard to the current Prime Minister of Canada and how that Prime Minister comports himself. Nothing more, nothing less.

I think it is a little bit of a stretch that every single time we hear disparaging language about the behaviour of this Prime Minister, which is being used in the media on a regular basis, that somehow we call it unparliamentary language.

I think we stretch that rule and we take it to a level that I think is inappropriate based on the purpose of the rule, the essence of the rule and how debate has been conducted here through the years.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Because Senator Housakos has risen on a point of order, I am going to take the liberty of adding a view for your consideration, Your Honour.

I believe the Hansard will show clearly the words that Senator Plett said. I believe he was not quoting from an editorial with regard to the remarks to which I objected. I believe he called the Prime Minister a liar. That was not a quotation. I believe he called — and I stand corrected if I'm wrong, but I believe that he also attributed that to the Deputy Prime Minister.

I do believe that Hansard will show that Senator Plett acknowledged before he made those statements that he was not to call the Prime Minister a liar in this chamber. If I recall, I prefaced my requests for an apology, which I did not receive or for you to consider it, with that reference.

I will take another opportunity, perhaps, to speak to the Speech from the Throne to talk about civility and decorum and what I believe is the appropriate way to have serious political debate in this chamber. Frankly, I bemoan the tone that has crept into this chamber over the last while. I think it is dishonourable behaviour. It discredits this institution, but I digress.

I believe Hansard will show that Senator Plett was not quoting from an editorial or a newspaper, but was saying something which, in my humble, respectful opinion, is unparliamentary. I would ask you to take my remarks into consideration when you rule in this matter.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Plett?

Senator Plett: Well, I will be very brief.

I certainly agree 100% with Senator Gold about how unparliamentary language, unparliamentary behaviour, taxing comments and a dislike for each other has crept into this chamber. Senator Gold and I are entirely on the same page. I think the only difference is on whether it's this person's fault or that person's fault. I think we widely disagree on that.

Before we had this wonderful, reformed chamber, we went toe-to-toe with Liberals every day. They respected us. We respected them. We're the same people we were ten years ago before Senator Gold was here. We haven't changed.

Somewhere, something has crept into this chamber that isn't good. It was suggested that because of my tone of voice — it was suggested by one colleague — would that help me bring votes over to my side of the issue? I would choose to believe that a bad law or a good law would encourage us to vote one way or the other, not what somebody else thinks.

Because now we are admitting exactly what I have said about this chamber, that we vote based on ideas like, "Well, was it a friend? Was he kind? Was she the type of person that I — so I am going to base my vote accordingly." Why are we doing this, Senator Gold?

Well, Senator Gold, you decide to intervene the way you want to intervene. I will intervene the way I want to intervene.

I agree with Senator Gold.

Your Honour, I would strongly suggest that you encourage all sides to consider that maybe some of the old ways were not necessarily bad ways and that we managed to get along quite fine before this wonderful, reformed Senate.

The Hon. the Speaker: One last —

Senator Housakos: Your Honour, I wish to return to my point of order which has to do with the word "lying."

Senator Gold, it is unfortunate that you think that this place is creeping into a place that is not polite and so on and so forth and that we are challenging your sensibilities and attacking, in a pointed way, your Prime Minister, but that is not the debate here.

For me, it is simple, Your Honour, when somebody says untruths, we call them out on the chamber floor and we call them a liar or if somebody, for example, is doing something that is unscrupulous and we call it crooked, for example, those words are not listed anywhere in the Rules as being unparliamentary language in this chamber.

• (1850)

There has been a very wide interpretation of what is considered taxing language by previous Speakers throughout the years. We apply that rule when it comes to debate and behaviour between colleagues in this chamber. But when we are here to address things that are happening in public policy in the other place, at the executive level or in any other sector in society, I think there is a broad, flexible range of language that we are allowed to use that is applicable to certain behaviour.

When somebody behaves in a way where they say untruths, we call them liars. That is the point of order. I do not believe we have a list of unparliamentary language in this chamber as they have in the House. I think we have to apply the rules according to that premise.

Hon. Colin Deacon: To intervene quickly, I apologize to the chamber. I think I caused this discussion.

I was simply asking Senator Plett a question as to whether his strategy was effective. I wish to apologize to colleagues. I thought it was a reasonable question.

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you for bringing up this important question. I will certainly take this under advisement.

TAX BREAK FOR ALL CANADIANS BILL

THIRD READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Moncion, seconded by the Honourable Senator Miville-Dechéne, for the third reading of Bill C-78, An Act respecting temporary cost of living relief (affordability).

Hon. Jim Quinn: Would the senator take another question?

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

Senator Quinn: Senator Plett, earlier today, we heard Senator Gold use the phrase “no taxation without representation,” which usually deals with tax increases. Bill C-78 is dealing with a temporary but lower tax. Nevertheless, the other place spent little time on this taxation measure and in less than one day pushed it through without committee and little debate.

Do you agree that the elected chamber was possibly overzealous in spending so little time on this bill without any apparent thought and sending it to the Senate? This is the place where sober second thought is our principle.

We also heard today regarding those of us who were appointed by this government and had our discussion with the Prime Minister — and I have spoken about this before. The discussion was around looking at our policies and trying to improve them. If you we didn’t agree with them, we could vote against them.

If there are senators who believe that this is a flawed policy, then should we not vote against this policy as independent senators?

Senator Plett: Thank you, Senator Quinn. I will try to get this right.

First, yes, this was rushed through much too quickly. There is no question about that. There was a programming motion, and it was, “Bang, bang, bang, we’re going to vote on it,” and it sailed through. It was suggested to us that we do the same thing here, as a matter of fact, and that we vote on this tonight.

Hopefully, Senator Martin will adjourn the debate here in the next few minutes, and we won’t need to vote on it tonight so that we can contemplate this further, but it was suggested that we do the same thing.

Earlier, we heard our colleague Senator Downe ask the sponsor of the bill what she felt about the Prime Minister — I think he said “tweeting” — again, I don’t want to put words in his mouth, but about tweeting that this would become law on December 14, prejudging exactly what the Senate is doing. That is what the Prime Minister expects of us.

The Prime Minister expects wholeheartedly, full stop, for us over here to get this through by December 14, because that is what he promised to do.

Do I think that that is wrong? Yes. I think we have not only the right but the obligation to help save this country from what is happening here and need to vote against this. It is not a budget bill. We cannot defeat the government. The government will not fall if we turn this bill down.

Senator Quinn, if we think this is wrong, we must vote against it. Whether we like the person that delivers the remarks or not, we must vote against this very hurtful, harmful legislation.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY—DEBATE

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Gold, P.C., seconded by the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson:

That the following Address be presented to Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada:

To Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary May Simon, Chancellor and Principal Companion of the Order of Canada, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Military Merit, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, Her Majesty’s most loyal and dutiful subjects, the Senate of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious Speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Hon. Mary Robinson: Honourable senators, this item stands adjourned in the name of the Honourable Senator Plett, and after my intervention today, I ask for leave that it remain adjourned in his name.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: So ordered.

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): I don’t know whether this is appropriate, Your Honour, but this is a maiden speech. I would ask for leave, from this caucus, to allow Senator Robinson to start after supper, because we are going to see the clock in three minutes.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, it is now seven o’clock. Pursuant to rule 3-3(1), I am obliged to leave the chair until eight o’clock, when we will resume, unless it is your wish, honourable senators, to not see the clock.

Is it agreed to not see the clock?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Some Hon. Senators: No.

The Hon. the Speaker: I hear a “no.”

Honourable senators, leave was not granted. The sitting is, therefore, suspended, and I will leave the chair until eight o'clock.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

[*Translation*]

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

• (2000)

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 4, 2024-25

FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-79, An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

(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.)

[*English*]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Gold, P.C., seconded by the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson:

That the following Address be presented to Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada:

To Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary May Simon, Chancellor and Principal Companion of the Order of Canada, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Military Merit, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, Her Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the Senate of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious Speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Hon. Mary Robison: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne. Although you have seen me rise previously to ask questions, this will be my inaugural speech.

Since being sworn into the Senate in February of this year, I have watched the various debates in this chamber, learned from and reflected upon them. In these last 10 months, I have sat in on meetings of various Senate committees studying a host of topics and have engaged in enlightening conversations with many of you. Throughout it all, a thought has lingered in the back of my mind. Seeing my colleagues speak on and debate issues of importance to them has led me to ask myself what I hope to achieve in this honourable role. What issues do I hope to champion?

While the answer to my latter point seems obvious, the answer to my first point is not so easy. Those of you who knew me before I was sworn into this role know that I come from agriculture. Those of you who did not know me, know — at the very least — that I am here to represent my beloved home, Prince Edward Island.

What drew me to this place was my first-hand learning that, aside from our distinguished colleague Senator Black, this chamber lacked agricultural expertise. My journey here has been a long and somewhat colourful experience. Many times I questioned whether I was worthy of this path. Becoming a senator, for me, was my moon shot. I am overwhelmed with the incredible opportunity it presents.

Like most of my distinguished colleagues here, within my field of expertise my background is unique and my experience vast. I am proud to share that I have my feet firmly planted in agriculture, my province, my country and globally. I have had the honour of serving as president of the Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture. I was the first female chair of the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, the first female president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and vice president of the World Farmers' Organisation. I am excited to join you here and increase the representation of agriculture in the Senate by 100% — roughly.

Being here today, and having spent most of my life working in agriculture, is not something I planned or even anticipated. My family has been farming in Prince Edward Island for over 200 years. I remember my father strongly encouraging me and my siblings early on not to come home to the farm. He recommended that we seek careers outside of agriculture and that we find different, more stable paths. I recall that at one point he thought I would have a great life as a chiropractor in Daytona. For many reasons, today I am happy I resisted that idea. I now believe that his advice came from his first-hand experiences of

the stresses and uncertainties this industry far too often brings. Unless he intended to play a game of reverse psychology, it did not quite work out the way he envisioned.

After university, I had the good fortune to travel to and work in many different places. Eventually, I found myself feeling Prince Edward Island calling my name. I came home, joined the family business, found a supportive life partner, started a family and then looked around wondering what I would do with all my spare time. My grandparents and parents had long set the example of becoming involved to make the world a better place. This is how I found my way into agricultural politics.

By joining my local federation of agriculture, I found a group of forward-looking people, who were quick to put me to work. Very naturally, it became my goal to ensure that agriculture was not overlooked in federal and provincial policies. I did this while trying to find my place in the industry as a woman who wore — what in my family we call — both “clean boots” and “dirty boots”: dirty boots for doing the field work and clean boots for handling the ag business and policy.

I should note that being a woman in agriculture is not entirely unique, as there are many incredible women who have played and continue to play significant roles in leading agriculture to brilliant progress. However, my perspective may be worth noting, as women in agriculture have rarely — potentially never — been afforded a platform within the Senate to raise their voices.

This brings me to the next part of my speech: where to raise my voice. Coming from my former role as president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture — a lobbyist, no less — to my current Senate role, in which I now receive what seems like endless lobbyists, I’ve come to see that there is a real disconnect in how agriculture is defined in Canada, where it is headed and what it needs. As a child, I recall hearing one politician refer to farmers and rural Canadians as “the great unwashed.”

All too often, agriculture is considered its own separate industry, detached from all other things — unbothered, avoidant and perhaps evasive. Coming from the other side, I can tell you that this narrative is not all that different from the one applied to the Senate. We have heard recent comments in this place that the relationship between the Senate and agriculture is strained, and it has become uncomfortable to talk about it. This is so much so that I find myself in a unique situation: acting like a conciliator between two groups who should be working together but who have failed to invest in and understand each other and are, more often than not, failing to work together to make our country and world stronger.

• (2010)

When I read the Speech from the Throne, I noticed there was a single mention of farmers, and it was found in the general category of “Bolder climate action.” I agree that farmers have an important place in the climate strategy, but they can’t be pencilled in almost as if they were an afterthought. It saddens me that the Throne Speech did not speak more of the potential the sector has to be a natural climate-solutions provider and net carbon sink. I am certain, in time, I will have opportunity to speak more on these issues. Stay tuned.

Another point I have come to realize is that, as senators, we have been put in a unique situation. We represent our provinces and bring to light their regional perspectives and interests, all without having to face the uncertainty of our podium being taken away through an election.

Former Prince Edward Island senator Catherine Callbeck stressed to me that senators can dig deep, home in on matters of interest and carefully and thoughtfully debate them. I intend to make full use of this. It is certainly part of my mission in this chamber to highlight the amazing success of the many impressive components of our agricultural industry, as well as how the many fibres of agriculture intertwine with more of the fabric of Canada than you may consider.

Beyond the most notably recognized within the category of primary producers, those being farmers and ranchers, I will work to bring my colleagues an understanding of the less known players, like our fish farmers and ornamental farmers, as well as various marriages of technology, like solar grazing and robotic greenhouse operations. From there, I hope to help build understanding and appreciation of the boundless opportunities that exist beyond primary production and dive into value-added opportunities and how we can rack up internationally on that front.

The science, technology and market opportunities are mind-blowing. Ultimately, I want to crack open the door so you can all have the same sense of wonder at and pride in Canadian agriculture that I do.

I should stress that I do not need my honourable colleagues to become experts in agriculture. My aim in the next few years is to plant a seed in your mind, which I hope will grow and crop up every time we debate policy of any kind in this chamber. The next time we engage in deliberations, I hope you think, “I don’t know what the agricultural perspective is here, but I’m sure there is one.”

Now some fun stuff: agriculture trivia. How many of these things, I wonder, do my esteemed colleagues already know?

Do you know that Canada is the fifth-largest exporter of food in the world, that Canadian agriculture and agri-food employ one in nine people in our great nation and that, in 2023, they generated \$150 billion? That is about 7% of Canada’s GDP.

Do you know that the Canadian brand is viewed globally as sterling, representing high-quality, safe, nutritionally dense food that is sustainably produced? Do you know that the labour gap in 2022 — those 28,200 jobs we were not able to fill — left \$3.5 billion on the table with respect to our primary producers?

On that last point, consider the consistent trend of loss of value-added opportunities. Canada misses out on these each year as we are perennially unable to fill those jobs. Further, a 2017 report entitled *Unleashing the growth potential of key sectors* was released by the federal government’s Advisory Council on Economic Growth, chaired by Dominic Barton; it identified agriculture as an untapped key driver of long-term economic expansion.

I encourage you, if you haven't already, to take some time to consider how climate change will impact food production around the world and how Canada's abundance of natural-resource riches will increasingly play a vital role in supplying food to the world. Agriculture is Canada's Cinderella story waiting to be told. I would love to take each of you on a tour of some of the many farms and ag operations we have in this country. I would love for you each to experience the passion, commitment, collaboration, technology and drive of the agriculture community.

For my time here, my goals include having each of you realize that, on the agricultural stage, Canada is very much the envy of most of the world — and that we need to do more as parliamentarians to ensure our agricultural sector is on a level playing field with our international competitors, so we not only begin to better realize our economic potential but, as well, better fulfill our role: It might sound like an old cliché, but we need to do a better job of feeding the world. One outcome of a better-fed world is a reduction in conflict and unrest, leading to, unsurprisingly, fewer displaced peoples.

Honourable senators, I hope you will come with me on this next journey of mine and learn how our Canadian agri-food sector has the potential to achieve a plethora of great things. As I said previously — and this is something I will repeat again — while my perspective may not always be unique, I will aim for it to be worth noting. In fact, when we resume sitting in the new year, it should not surprise you to see me rise more often to take part in debate. I look forward to finding my voice in this chamber and engaging in thoughtful discussions with you, my honourable colleagues. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

(Debate adjourned.)

FINANCIAL PROTECTION FOR FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARMERS BILL

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Martin, for the Honourable Senator MacDonald, seconded by the Honourable Senator Seidman, for the third reading of Bill C-280, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (deemed trust — perishable fruits and vegetables).

Hon. Toni Varone: Honourable senators, I stand before you today to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to discuss at third reading Bill C-280, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (deemed trust — perishable fruits and vegetables).

Much has been articulated, and vigorous debate has ensued. While we may hold differing views, we are all united in the belief that we must strive for greater fairness for our farmers. The amendments I proposed in the Banking Committee were

thoughtful and crafted to address the inherent shortcomings of the original bill. Although they were defeated in this chamber, I respect the democratic process that governs our discussions.

Democracy in Canada is a testament to our institutional resilience. It challenges us, yet it enables us to consider and respect one another's perspectives, even when our passions lead us to heated exchanges.

• (2020)

As I advocated for the changes I believed would enhance Bill C-280 and yield better outcomes for our farmers, others in this chamber argued just as fervently for an unamended bill. Whether we deem it a commendable initiative that will fulfill its intended goals or a misguided one that threatens the delicate balance of our bankruptcy system, the discourse has unfolded through our cherished freedoms of speech and vote.

In light of the global events, we should take pride in this democratic privilege. The true essence of our nation lies not on the side of the ledger we occupy during a vote but in our ability to debate proposed amendments and exercise our voting rights freely. This is the principle worth safeguarding and celebrating.

My analysis of the original text of Bill C-280 remains firm. It has become increasingly evident that its provisions were inadequately defined, and I stand by my conviction that our farmers require genuine protection and that the bill as it was initially presented fails to provide that safeguard.

However, I'm faced with a dilemma: To vote against the unamended bill contradicts my personal commitment to advocating for farmers. Indeed, I maintain that the unamended bill would compel the Canadian farming industry to adopt a more assertive stance in meeting its challenges and proactively shielding itself from detrimental characters.

This is the only pathway to keeping our farmers out of bankruptcy court. For reciprocity to be ingrained in our trade relations with the United States, Canadian farmers must confront the structural deficiencies within this framework. This chamber may not be the stage for that discussion, but enhancing regulatory standards, addressing issues of credit attenuation and developing mechanisms for self-regulation are imperative for establishing a successful reciprocal agreement.

In conclusion, it's our duty to ensure that the voices of our farmers are amplified, their interests safeguarded and a framework established that recognizes their essential contributions to our economy. I will therefore cast my vote in support of the farmers.

Hon. Yuen Pau Woo: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak on Bill C-280, now before us for third reading, and to reflect on the implications of its passage without amendment.

The rejection of the committee report is regrettable, as it leaves us with an unamended bill that is deeply flawed. However, this fresh start provides clarity for our debate and compels us to carefully consider what we do with a bill that does not solve the problem it seeks to address, while creating a whole new set of problems.

Despite what proponents might say, Bill C-280 does not provide assurance of reciprocity with the United States in the treatment of unpaid claims of perishable fruit and vegetable suppliers. I don't doubt that the Americans would like to see Canada put in place a deemed-trust-like structure that would be equivalent to their Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act, or PACA, but as Senator Varone has pointed out, the differences between Bill C-280 and PACA are profound, and we are, at best, taking a stab in the dark with the bill before us.

The nod given to this bill from a few U.S. legislators who have not studied it in detail is far from a guarantee of reciprocity. It is true that the bill, as amended, would not have provided for reciprocity either, but Senator Varone was not promising that it would. He was trying to ameliorate a badly conceived bill and to reduce its harms.

If you are principally concerned about the issue of reciprocity, as is the intent of the bill, you will have been right to vote against the committee report, because the amendment would not have solved the reciprocity problem. But using the same logic, you should also vote against the unamended bill because it is also unlikely to provide reciprocity for Canadian fresh fruit and vegetable suppliers.

The best that proponents of the bill can say is that no U.S. authority has definitively said that the bill would not result in reciprocity. Some may argue that even in the face of uncertainty about American guarantees, we should nevertheless pass this bill because, well, a stab in the dark is better than not stabbing at all. But the trouble with stabbing in the dark is that you don't know who you end up hurting, and in the case of Bill C-280, there are a lot of innocent victims who could end up with financial knife wounds.

Under this bill, perishable fruit and vegetable suppliers would be prioritized over pensioners, workers in other vulnerable groups, including some farmers and fishers. Such prioritization fundamentally disrupts the hierarchy of obligations that must be balanced in insolvency cases. Bill C-280 upsets that balance, creating uncertainty in the credit market and, for reasons explained by Senator Cotter and others, will almost certainly result in costly litigation.

Creating a super priority for fruit and vegetable producers could result in higher credit costs all along the supply chain. Bear in mind that producers are not putting up homes or boats that the financial institutions can repossess and thus factor into their credit calculations.

Also bear in mind that the super priority given to suppliers only includes those for whom perishable fruits and vegetables:

... have been repackaged or transformed by the purchaser to the extent that the nature of the fruits and vegetables remains unchanged.

It does not include the extended supply chain of packaging, transportation, brokering, warehousing, advertising and other ancillary services that go into the delivery of fresh fruits and vegetables from farm to table, so to speak. Where is the fairness for those suppliers of goods and services?

It is bad enough that Bill C-280 would disrupt the social consensus on who should receive priority in the settlement of claims in situations of insolvency. It is even worse that we would be doing so without achieving the reciprocity that this bill seeks to attain.

If we pass this bill and it transpires that we are no further ahead in getting reciprocity from the Americans, what do you think will happen to Bill C-280? Do you believe a future Parliament will seek to repeal these provisions to restore fairness in the hierarchy of creditors? That's highly unlikely, in my opinion, since we know how difficult it is to get rid of ill-conceived or outdated laws.

If you thought the lobbying effort from the perishable fruit and vegetable sector was formidable on Bill C-280, wait until you see what happens if we try to unwind this law because it is not fit for purpose.

The question we should be asking in this third-reading debate is as follows: Why proceed with a flawed bill that has known collateral damage to other segments of society when we could instead address the reciprocity problem in a more systematic and organized way?

Some honourable colleagues have argued that we should pass Bill C-280 unamended because of the looming threat to market access that awaits us with the advent of Donald Trump's presidency.

In effect, the argument is that we should pre-empt the review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, in 2026 by proposing a bill to address reciprocity now, even if we are unsure of whether it will succeed. As with another deeply flawed bill, Bill C-282 on supply-managed industries, pre-emptive action through Bill C-280 would be a strategic blunder on our part. Why would we give up a bargaining chip before we must play it? Rather than rushing to implement a flawed measure, we should use the upcoming 2026 review as an opportunity to negotiate a comprehensive and definitive solution to the reciprocity issue.

Whereas we are currently operating on winks and nods from the Americans and a lot of second-guessing on our part, we could, in a formal review of the U.S.-Canada trade, put reciprocity squarely as an issue we both want to resolve and get our respective agriculture and finance authorities to work on. This would allow for a thoughtful and deliberate bilateral approach to solving a problem, rather than a unilateral action from a private member's bill.

For those of us who are against Bill C-280, adopting the report with an amendment to the bill might have been sufficient for the grudging acceptance of that bill at third reading. Critics of this approach would say that it is a disguised attempt at killing the bill.

• (2030)

I think of it, rather, as a conversation between the upper house and the lower house. The conversation will pause if an amended bill does not see the light of day in the other place, but the good faith ideas offered by the Senate — in this case, Senator Varone

and members of the Banking Committee — can live on in a future better version of the bill. That is an entirely legitimate act on the part of our institution, and one that should not be disparaged.

However, colleagues, that ship has sailed.

What we have before us is Bill C-280 in its naked glory. If we were mollified by the bill as amended, we should be horrified that it has reverted to its original form. For those who feel as I do, the only question left is whether we have the right to defeat it.

The answer is unambiguously “yes.” Our constitutional right to defeat bills is unqualified, even if it is guided by convention and tempered by practice.

I accept some version of the Salisbury convention, which requires us to hold our noses when approving flawed bills that respond to an election platform promise from the government of the day. I also accept that we should be very reluctant to defeat government bills that do not correspond to an election platform promise, subject to the usual constitutional caveats, of course.

The bill before us, however, is a long way from those two high-minded tests. Bill C-280 is a private member’s bill that slipped through the House of Commons, operating under the dysfunction of a minority government. It is precisely under these kinds of circumstances that our guard, on the one hand, should be heightened and our tolerance for defeating flawed legislation, on the other hand, should be lowered.

It is no secret that the other place is currently in a shambles. There is little legislative work taking place, and the debate on the floor of the House is a distasteful parade of name-calling, nasty asides and self-promotion. The government’s legislative accomplishments in the current Parliament are meagre at best, and the opposition is doing what it can to keep it that way.

Under these circumstances, it is my belief that the government is supporting some private members’ bills to pad its legislative accomplishments in the Forty-fourth Parliament, even when those bills have not gone through the rigour of departmental review. There is a certain desperation to this effort, and it is cynical at best.

Perhaps the government is counting on a future parliament to fix the flaws. Perhaps it is doing so with the expectation that a different government will have to deal with those flaws. That is cynicism squared, but we can at least say, in this instance, that the government and the opposition are willing partners in a danse macabre.

Do you remember what the Supreme Court said about the role of the upper house? It stated:

The framers sought to endow the Senate with independence from the electoral process to which members of the House of Commons were subject, in order to remove Senators from a partisan political arena that required unremitting consideration of short-term political objectives.

Colleagues, this is not just a reminder of how we are fundamentally different from the other place; it is also an admonition for us to be courageous in the discharge of our duties.

My point is this: While we should always be mindful of our role as a complementary chamber of sober second thought, the need for sober thinking in a dysfunctional minority Parliament is greater, not less, than in normal circumstances. And when it comes to private members’ bills that are patently flawed, even with government support, we are far away from the forbidden grounds of Salisbury.

Of course, if you think this is a good bill, you should vote for it, but if you think that it is deeply flawed, as I do, you should not hesitate for a minute to defeat it at third reading.

To recap, Bill C-280 will not solve the reciprocity problem. However, it will disrupt the balance of priorities in resolving insolvency and leave important groups of Canadians, including vulnerable Canadians, in the lurch. If we pass this bill, it will be very difficult to unwind, even if the promised reciprocity does not materialize.

There is a better way to negotiate reciprocity, which is through the upcoming review of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA, with the full participation of the relevant authorities in Canada and the United States. If you agree with this analysis, you should reject the fallacious arguments aimed at browbeating us into voting for this bill. On the contrary, you should take the only option we have left on this flawed bill, which is to defeat it.

Like fruits and vegetables, this bill has a limited shelf life, and we are coming to the end of it. Perish not our responsibility for good public policy; perish instead Bill C-280. Thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

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

Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Some Hon. Senators: No.

The Hon. the Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say “yea.”

Some Hon. Senators: Yea.

The Hon. the Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

Some Hon. Senators: Nay.

The Hon. the Speaker: In my opinion the “yeas” have it.

And two honourable senators having risen:

The Hon. the Speaker: I see two senators rising. Is there an agreement on the length of the bell? The vote will take place at 9:36 p.m.

Call in the senators.

• (2130)

Motion agreed to and bill read third time and passed on the following division:

YEAS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Ataullahjan	McCallum
Audette	McNair
Batters	McPhedran
Bernard	Miville-Dechéne
Black	Moreau
Boudreau	Muggli
Burey	Osler
Busson	Oudar
Cardozo	Patterson
Carignan	Petten
Cuzner	Plett
Dalphond	Prosper
Deacon (<i>Nova Scotia</i>)	Quinn
Deacon (<i>Ontario</i>)	Ravalia
Duncan	Richards
Francis	Ross
Gerba	Seidman
Gold	Senior
Harder	Smith
Housakos	Sorensen
Kingston	Tannas
Klyne	Varone
LaBoucane-Benson	Verner
MacAdam	Wallin
Manning	Wells (<i>Alberta</i>)
Martin	Wells (<i>Newfoundland and Labrador</i>)
McBean	White—54

NAYS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Arnot	Loffreda
Clement	Massicotte
Cormier	Mégie
Coyle	Moncion

Dean	Petitclerc
Forest	Ringuette
Fridhandler	Saint-Germain
Galvez	Woo
Gignac	Youance
Greenwood	Yussuff—21
Kutcher	

ABSTENTIONS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Boehm Pate—2

• (2140)

[*Translation*]

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TRADE
AND DEVELOPMENT ACT

BILL TO AMEND—FIFTEENTH REPORT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE COMMITTEE—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Boehm, seconded by the Honourable Senator Moodie, for the adoption of the fifteenth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (*Bill C-282, An Act to amend the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act (supply management), with an amendment and observations*), presented in the Senate on November 7, 2024.

Hon. Pierre J. Dalphond: Honourable senators, I’m certain everyone in this chamber has noticed that the sponsor of the bill, Senator Gerba, and the main critic, Senator Harder — who agreed during second reading to replace Senator Plett in this capacity — are both members of the same parliamentary group but are acting as the main spokespersons for opposing positions on the same bill. I don’t believe that has ever happened in the Senate. Indeed, until 2015, that would not have been possible in a Senate that has, since 1867, essentially been a duopoly between the Liberal and Conservative parties, which have alternated between the government and opposition positions, depending on election results. Not only has the current Senate broken this duopoly by having four parliamentary groups, but three of these groups are unaffiliated with any recognized political party. Like its original model, the House of Lords, our institution is evolving.

As leader of the Progressive Senate Group, I would like to thank Senator Gerba and Senator Harder for all their efforts to explain their reasons for taking opposing positions. They were able to put forward their respective beliefs in a spirit of mutual respect, which is such an important value. We all benefited from hearing different arguments that enriched the debate. I would also like to point out that the fact that the sponsor and the critic are members of the same group demonstrates the high degree of

independence of each of the senators in the Progressive Senate Group, a characteristic of which I am proud. I would add that this has never affected our group's ability to run smoothly or to have quality discussions.

I would also like to thank Senator Boehm for leading an in-depth study for the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Liberalizing market access and preserving a strong Canadian agricultural sector are complex issues that deserve serious consideration.

I will now turn to my reasons for voting against the report, not as leader, but as an independent senator from Quebec.

First, the fact that the Bloc Québécois has introduced a bill to protect supply management is not in itself a reason to reject it or delay its consideration. In other words, contrary to some of the comments I've heard, the separatist convictions of Bloc Québécois members should play no part in the careful scrutiny we give this bill in this place.

For the record, Bloc Québécois members are not the first to have introduced bills to protect supply management. In fact, the first attempt dates back to November 4, 2004, during the Thirty-eighth Parliament, with the introduction of Bill C-264, entitled "An Act for the recognition and promotion of agricultural supply management." It was introduced by the Liberal MP for Kitchener—Conestoga, Lynn Myers. This same bill was reintroduced in 2006, during the Thirty-ninth Parliament, by the Honourable Wayne Easter, a Liberal MP from Prince Edward Island.

In short, Bill C-282, like all other private members' bills, must be assessed on the basis of its purpose, content and impact, not on the basis of its author's constitutional views.

It is imperative that, as senators, we assume our constitutional responsibility of scrutinizing bills and, for those who, like me, support the current role of the Senate, that we do this independently from political parties and elected members. This is especially true for bills drafted by members who were unable to benefit from the expertise of the public service and have a draft drawn up by legal experts at the Department of Justice and an analysis done by the departments, the Privy Council Office and cabinet. On that, I agree with Senator Woo's comments. For this type of bill, the Senate must not hesitate to propose amendments that seek to sincerely correct material mistakes, to clarify any real ambiguities or to truly improve the attainment of the objective of the bill. The members in the other place must understand and respect that role.

Second, I am mindful of the level of support this bill received in the other place. I would remind senators that the Bloc Québécois members hold a small number of seats in the House of Commons, 33 out of 337 to be exact, or barely 10%. This means that no bill introduced by any Bloc member can reach the Senate without receiving support from at least 136 other members. At third reading, Bill C-282 received the support of 262 of the 313 MPs who participated in the vote, including the leaders of the Liberal Party of Canada, the Conservative Party of Canada, the New Democratic Party and the Green Party.

• (2150)

The fact that this bill received such broad support shows that it is seen to be in the interests of the entire country. I am also taking into account the fact that the bill had and still has cabinet's support.

In an October 4 letter to all members of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade and all the Senate group leaders, the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, the Honourable Mary Ng, said that this bill "was rigorously reviewed and debated by cabinet."

I also want to point out that, on November 20, the Prime Minister stated the following in the other place:

The reality is that the Senate is doing its job and is looking at the bill. We will not accept any bill that minimizes or eliminates the House's obligation to protect supply management in any future trade agreement. We have been very clear on that. No matter what the Senate does, the will of the House is clear.

The Prime Minister went on to say the following:

Mr. Speaker, I have often met with senators and will continue to do so. I want to be absolutely unequivocal and very clear about this: We will always protect supply management, whatever the opinion of the august senators.

Lastly, I take note of a letter dated November 26, sent to all of us and signed jointly by the ministers and members of every recognized party in the House of Commons, except the Conservative Party of Canada, which reaffirmed the need to pass the original version of this bill.

[English]

Third, I will vote no to this report because adopting it will send a message that this Parliament is strongly divided on the need to protect our supply management system.

In other words, adopting this report will send the signal to the U.S. negotiators, those other countries like the U.K. or Europe that the Canadian Parliament is not committed to protecting our supply management system, and that these countries could successfully insist on further concessions on access to the Canadian market for their dairy products, eggs, chicken and turkey.

In fact, adopting this report would put our country and our able negotiators in a weaker position than if no bill had been introduced in the House of Commons.

Fourth, I will vote no to this report because I believe that it is legitimate for a country — indeed, even a duty for every country — to adopt measures that protect, as far as possible, its ability to produce food locally for its citizens instead of becoming increasingly reliant on foreign sources.

As stated by the National Farmers Union, food sovereignty is a matter of national importance. By refusing to further open access to our market for dairy products, eggs, chicken and turkey,

Canada protects its ability to produce high quality sources of protein at home to feed Canadians instead of relying on foreign supply. As we saw during the pandemic, it is not desirable to depend on foreign imports for vital products.

As you know, further to the last negotiated trade agreements, about 18% of dairy products and 11% of chickens are now imported. Make no mistake, if new concessions are granted, the entire supply management system for dairy products will be at serious risk of collapsing. We will then lose an important sector of our food security.

Now moving to the fifth reason why I will vote no to the report, I see no difference, from a legal perspective, between adopting a stand-alone bill providing that the Government of Canada must not grant further access to foreign dairy products, eggs, chicken and turkey and amending the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act, as proposed in this bill. The purpose is exactly the same: To protect domestic sources of food and, thus, preserve a higher degree of food sovereignty. We need to restrict further foreign access to the Canadian market for these products — dairy products, eggs, chicken and turkey. This is what Bill C-282 proposes.

Incidentally, this doesn't mean that there shouldn't be improvements to the way the supply management system works within our borders. For one, I was shocked to see huge quantities of milk being thrown away every year. I am also concerned by restrictions that prevent innovation. But these issues must be dealt with via improvements to the supply management system in place within our borders. Further opening our borders to foreign products is not the solution to address these concerns. It is, however, a way to jeopardize our food autonomy.

[*Translation*]

Sixth, I will vote against the report, considering that my primary constitutional role when studying federal legislation is to represent my province. I cannot vote without taking Quebec's perspective into account when such perspective has broad consensus consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and our Constitution.

Supply-managed production accounts for 35% of agricultural revenues in Quebec. The largest agricultural group in Quebec, the Union des producteurs agricoles, or UPA, whose president I recently met, insists that the bill be passed without amendment. So too do the various processing company representatives who purchase supply-managed products and who told me how much they appreciate the reliability of high-quality, supply-managed products and their predictable prices.

I also note that the Government of Quebec considers supply management a pillar of Quebec's farm economy and of rural Quebec's vitality. Successive Quebec governments have underscored the need to protect supply management from outside pressures, especially during trade negotiations.

I would also like to point out that the National Assembly has adopted no fewer than six resolutions in favour of protecting supply management in international trade negotiations. I will quote the one from March 10, 2021, which was unanimously

adopted by the National Assembly, where there are several political parties with different agendas. The resolution reads as follows:

THAT the National Assembly recall that the agriculture sector plays a key role in Québec's economy and regional development;

THAT it reaffirm its support for the protection of the supply management system for egg, milk and poultry producers;

THAT it ask the Government of Canada to fully protect the supply management model under future international agreements.

Finally, I note that, according to an Abacus poll conducted in November 2023, 92% of Quebecers believe that local production by farmers operating under supply management is either a very good thing or a good thing.

In fact, the only Quebec political leader opposed to protecting supply management is Maxime Bernier of the People's Party of Canada.

• (2200)

[*English*]

For me, as a senator from Quebec, the choice is easy. I will vote against this report. Colleagues, I invite you to do the same exercise with regard to your province or the territory that you represent. For example, Ontario is the second-largest beneficiary of supply management. Indeed, in 2023, according to Statistics Canada, 22% of the total revenue in the entire agricultural sector in Ontario was generated through the supply management system.

In the Atlantic provinces, according to Statistics Canada, income from supply-managed products accounts for 76% of total revenues in the agricultural sector in Newfoundland and Labrador, 52% in Nova Scotia, 25% in New Brunswick and 16% in P.E.I. Supply management is considered vital for sustaining small-scale family farms in these provinces. The system ensures that these farmers receive fair compensation and that provincial consumers receive high-quality food for products locally produced. Protecting these farmers and consumers from the pressures of imported products fosters local economic resilience.

In British Columbia, in 2023, still according to Statistics Canada, 34% of farm cash receipts came from supply-managed products. It ensures that the substantial portion of B.C. farmers receive fair compensation for their products and continue to produce dairy products, eggs, chicken and turkey.

In addition, supply management aligns seamlessly with the ecological imperatives of our time, fostering shorter supply chains.

Incidentally, the same Abacus survey I referred to earlier shows that 94% of Canadians also consider it a good thing that food is produced by farmers within Canada's supply management system. This is a percentage even higher than in Quebec, at 92%.

To conclude, I end as I began: by affirming the need for continued respect and independence in this chamber. The time has come to vote on this report, and let us acknowledge our freedom to vote as we judge best for our province, territory or region.

Thank you very much. *Meegwetch.*

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Miville-Dechêne has a question. Would you take a question, Senator Dalphond?

Senator Dalphond: Yes, I'll take a few brief questions and try to give some brief answers.

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Throughout your speech, you tried to make us believe that those who are against the bill or those who have reservations about it are against supply management. However, you know full well that those are two different things.

People can agree with the idea of supply management but not feel that the bill is the best tool to protect supply management, given the risks that come with it. I can see a certain weakness in your argument.

Second, you refer to the 2021 resolutions protecting supply management, but the bill wasn't in play then. There have been other bills, and they are all part of the backstory.

Of course, supply management is a system liked by the vast majority of Quebecers, including me, because it has all kinds of advantages, but you are talking about everyone who is in favour of supply management. The Quebec government has not taken a position on Bill C-282, if I'm not mistaken. In fact, I have not heard anything of the sort. Therefore, you can't say there is unanimity in Quebec. There are different opinions, and you are perfectly entitled to your own, but I don't think you can claim that those who don't support this bill are against supply management.

Senator Dalphond: Thank you for the question and comments.

Supply management relies on three things. The first is the control of production, which prevents surpluses that will cause prices to drop; the second is pricing; and the third is the control of imports.

Controlling imports is key to the supply management system. If you lose control over imports, that is the end of the system. This bill addresses one thing: additional concessions on imports. It protects the third element that makes up the supply management system. Without that third element, there is no more supply management; let's not kid ourselves about that. Logically, all those in favour of maintaining the supply management system also have to be in favour of maintaining importation limits, because without that we would destroy supply management, our food autonomy and our food sovereignty.

[Senator Dalphond]

Up to 18% of Canada's dairy market production is now open to external markets. We know full well that there is a huge surplus of milk in the United States. Millions of litres of milk — gallons, as they call it — are destroyed in the United States. Wisconsin has excess milk production, so they want to have access to the Canadian market to send that excess milk here.

At what point will our system be weakened to the point of collapse? We are there now. All the farmers and all the organizations I met with say that 18% puts us in the critical zone. If we open up the borders even more, the system is finished. We can't say we support the supply management system but we have to open up the borders. The two are incompatible. We have reached that point. The last time that the borders were opened, we paid compensation to the tune of billions of dollars to the dairy industry and other sectors. We have to draw the line, and this legislation does that: no more concessions on imports.

Senator Miville-Dechêne: I have a supplementary question. During the last free trade negotiations — I attended a briefing about those negotiations with Chrystia Freeland — the negotiators did everything they could to protect supply management. You're right that concessions were made, for which there was compensation. We don't control 100% of the market. We control 82%. That doesn't mean the end of supply management.

People can decide that they don't like this. I know that it's hard for dairy farmers to live with this lack of assurance. However, that is how many other farmers and producers live. Canada has many different types of agricultural production, including grains. It seems to me that supply management is essential, but it exists in a Canadian context where it is not the only lobby. I think it is really important to try to strike a balance. However, I don't think that we can do that by saying that this bill is the only way to protect supply management, because the negotiators at the table have a mandate to protect supply management and they do everything they can. If all of this were to collapse because of different political factors, we will not be any further ahead, as you know.

Senator Dalphond: I don't know if you had a question or if it was more of a comment, but I can tell you one thing. The House of Commons adopted several resolutions calling on negotiators to not make any concessions. Despite the resolutions unanimously adopted in the House of Commons, concessions were made. This time, we've gone one step further and passed legislation to prevent the motions adopted in the House of Commons from being seen as nothing more than wishful thinking. In other words, yes, we are drawing a line in the sand, and the issue of market access in these four sectors will be off the table. Negotiators will have to talk about other things.

Last week, the President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture said it was too bad that certain groups within the federation, notably certain cattle producers associations, opposed the bill, but that the federation as a whole still supports it.

• (2210)

[English]

Hon. Leo Housakos: Honourable senators, I will be brief. I wasn't planning to intervene in this debate, but I will briefly. I find myself in the unusual situation of being on the same page as Senator Dalphond, I have to say. I will be voting against the report and the amendments.

I just want to highlight the following: I know there are a lot of difficulties with supply management. It's far from a perfect system, but it's far and away the only system we have that has given food security to our country. It has supported an industry that has been facing a lot of competition from a highly subsidized U.S. agricultural sector. We can't forget that. The Europeans, in a disproportionate way, subsidize their farming industry. The Americans do it as well. I think here in Canada, we have taken a different approach over many years. Yes, there have been some challenges from the perspective of the interests of the consumer, but by the same token, there has been, I think, a balance put in place.

Why was I compelled to say a few words? It is based on the questions that were being launched over by Senator Miville-Dechéne. I think we have to be very careful here. On a number of opportunities, the Americans have been trying to chisel down supply management. It's been a point of contention for them in a bunch of negotiations.

The review of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA, is right around the corner. We're going to be opening up a review of CUSMA with a Prime Minister who is in a deficient position right now vis-à-vis a president who is in a position of strength and a very savvy negotiator. He and the Americans are looking for any opportunity to find a crack in the Canadian side. We all know there's some political gamesmanship being played with Bill C-282, but at the end of the equation, if we show the Americans that we're ready to bend before we even start the negotiations, and if we show that we're ready to open up that crack because Parliament isn't homogeneously and unanimously behind a strong defence of our agricultural sector at the start of the negotiations, then we're dead before we get to the table. You always negotiate from a position of strength, not from a position of weakness.

I think we're doing a great disservice to those who will be reviewing CUSMA next year. In the past, Canada has shown ample capacity to negotiate against the best American negotiators, but never before have we, at the outset of a negotiation, shown a Parliament that's divided on this particular issue. That is what has happened. The House wasn't divided because they understand the political complexity. The Senate has been divided because, with all due respect, we have not been in compliance with the political complexity and we have not had an understanding of the political complexity.

I just wanted to share that point of view. That's why I will be voting against these amendments. Thank you very much.

The Hon. the Speaker: We just realized Senator Housakos had proposed the adjournment of the debate on this report.

You had lost your right to debate, and I just wanted to mention this. However, I realized it a little bit too late.

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Your Honour, you're going to have to cut off Senator Housakos on something else, then, because you allowed him to speak. Asking for forgiveness is always easier than asking for permission.

Honourable senators, finally, I get to speak to this bill. I've been accused of holding up this bill. All of Ottawa thinks Don Plett is stalling democracy, and I've been waiting and waiting. Finally, Senator Dalphond delivered his speech, which allows me to finally put my words on the record. I hope Mr. Perron in the other place is listening to this speech today and realizes that I rose at the first available opportunity to speak to this bill. This is, in fact, my first opportunity.

I want to commend Senator Dalphond Senator Housakos says he's not very often been on the same page as Senator Dalphond. I commend Senator Dalphond. I'm a leader of a caucus, and Senator Dalphond is a leader of a caucus where right beside him, there is somebody who has brought an amendment forward that very clearly creates a whole lot of problems for this bill. Right behind Senator Dalphond is the sponsor of this bill. Senator Dalphond has a dozen senators who are smiling and appreciating his leadership. Senator Dalphond, we need to get together, and you need to show me how to do this. You're doing a great job, Senator Dalphond, in keeping your group together.

Colleagues, I do want to intervene in this debate. I will also be brief.

First, I wish to offer a bit of context on the committee's work at clause-by-clause consideration. I do not normally attend the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committee meetings, but I did so on November 6 for clause-by-clause consideration. I had not been there for the debate; I admit that. I have opinions on the issues. I certainly have my opinions on supply management. I have said in the past that I don't think this is a supply management bill. This is an international trade bill. Nevertheless, I did not attend committee meetings until clause-by-clause consideration, which was my first and only meeting on Bill C-282.

I will be honest: I had one reason and one reason only for being present at that meeting, and that was in my position as an ex officio member of the committee because I am the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. Of course, the Leader of the Government in the Senate was there in his position as an ex officio member, keeping in mind this is a private member's bill.

Bill C-282 is not a government bill. If it were, I would firmly and totally have expected the Leader of the Government to be at committee to support the bill and vote in favour of it, but it is not. At the time, I did not think that Senator Gold should have used his right to vote as an ex officio member on this piece of legislation. In fairness, Senator Gold always informed me that he was going, giving me the opportunity to go there as well, so it's not that he ever blindsided me. I want to make that clear.

In his decision on the right of Senator Gold to invoke time allocation, then-Speaker Furey said that Senator Gold is the Leader of the Government party in the Senate. This was Speaker Furey's ruling when we challenged the fact that we didn't believe Senator Gold should be able to invoke time allocation.

This is why he should be considered the leader of a recognized party — which is what Speaker Furey said — which opened the door to time allocation. If he is the leader of a recognized party, that party is the government party which, of course, at this point is the Liberal Party of Canada.

Bill C-282 was introduced in the House by a member of the Bloc Québécois, not even by a member of the Liberal Party. Senator Gold could have made an argument that as the leader of the Liberal government in the Senate, he has a duty to represent the interests of the Liberal Party and its MPs by voting at committee, but Bill C-282 is a Bloc Québécois bill. It was not even a whipped vote in the House. Liberal MPs were free to vote their conscience, and some voted against the bill in the House.

Senator Gold wanting to inform us of a government position on a bill is one thing. There's nothing wrong with it. He voted just a half hour ago on a private member's bill, and he voted the same way I did, which in itself is a miracle. But for him to exercise his rights as an ex officio member of the committee on Bill C-282 is another thing, and it was, in my mind, not appropriate. Of course, under the Senate Rules, Senator Gold can attend any committee meeting and vote as an ex officio member, but he rarely, if ever, votes at committee on private members' bills or Senate public bills. That is why I felt I had to counterbalance his vote at the committee to make the point that Senator Gold's decision to vote on Bill C-282 was not consistent with his past practices and what I felt he should do.

• (2220)

In any event, Senator Gold's vote on the amendment would not have made any difference in the result of the vote on the amendment. I think it was 10 to 3, so I guess it would have been 9 to 3. Oh, no, I voted as well, so my vote would have been taken away also, making it 9 to 2. I'm a plumber, not a mathematician.

The second point I would like to make is that whether you support the amendment or not, our Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade played precisely the role of the Senate — to consider amendments to legislation in order to enhance and/or approve a bill. As I have said in the past, the Senate steps out of line when we reintroduce amendments that the House of Commons has already considered and rejected. That is what we saw in the past weeks on Bill C-275 and Bill C-280.

Of course, the argument is made that Bill C-280 wasn't ultimately brought forward as an amendment, but it was considered, and we all know that, and it was rejected. With Bill C-275, the amendment was put forward. In situations like that, I believe the House has ruled at least twice, and we should accept that.

Let me be clear: The committee amendments to Bill C-275 and Bill C-280 should have been rejected by this chamber because they had already been considered and rejected by the House.

With Bill C-282, however, the amendment was not previously contemplated. When I spoke on the bill at second reading on April 11, I made it clear that I fully support our system of supply management, but Bill C-282 is not a bill about the future of the supply management system. Senator Miville-Dechéne, I think, pointed that out. It is a trade bill, pure and simple.

At the end of my second reading speech on the bill, I urged:

... all of the committee members to give it serious, sober thought because, although it is well intentioned, I fear that it will not yield the outcomes that the sponsor is hoping for.

The members of the committee did study the bill carefully and, indeed, found it would have negative consequences.

I humbly suggest that things have changed dramatically since Bill C-282 was voted on at third reading in the House of Commons on June 21, 2023. We now have the benefit of knowing who will be in the White House when the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA, will be revisited, and we have a very good idea on how Bill C-282 will be perceived by our trade partners if it passes without amendments.

The Americans have made it absolutely clear that by adopting Bill C-282, Canada would send a very negative signal. In fact, one could argue that adopting Bill C-282 would be detrimental to our supply management system, which is the exact opposite of the objective of this bill. That is what I will have in mind when I vote on the committee report.

Would Bill C-282 in its original form be good for Canada as we embark on a difficult renegotiation of our trade agreement with our biggest commercial partner? More directly, is Bill C-282, in its original form, good or bad for our supply management system?

On January 20, there will be a new President of the United States. Within a few months, colleagues, Pierre Poilievre will be in power here in Canada. Say what you will. Like or dislike him.

Pierre Poilievre being in power within the next half year is almost but not quite as certain as Donald Trump becoming the President of the United States of America. He's already been voted on, so unless somebody shoots him between now and then, he will be the president.

I'm sorry if that was unparliamentary, Senator Gold.

Pierre Poilievre will be facing that U.S. administration in the review of CUSMA. I am 100% confident that he will be able to get the best possible deal for Canada. I am 100% confident that — as he said recently — he will fight fire with fire during these negotiations. I am 100% confident that Prime Minister Pierre Poilievre will defend our agricultural sector and stand by our supply management system.

When the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, was renegotiated, Justin Trudeau made a huge tactical mistake. As he always does in foreign affairs, he decided to use the opportunity to play to his base. He offered Donald Trump a new

deal with all kinds of nice left-wing talking points regarding Indigenous, labour, environmental and LGBTQ issues and all the nice things he could think of.

Of course, the Americans quickly threw that into the garbage, and Canada was left to try to save the furniture at the last minute, basically signing a deal that was negotiated between Mexico and the U.S. Trudeau made concessions on dairy products even though he promised he would not.

Justin Trudeau is an ideologue. Donald Trump is a transactional president. We need a Prime Minister who can actually negotiate with the U.S., not lecture them. We need a Prime Minister whose goal is to get the best deal for Canada, not get the deal that will be praised by left-wing academics in the U.S.

Thankfully, Pierre Poilievre will be there when the time comes to sit at the negotiating table.

Colleagues, I come from an agricultural community, so I deal with agriculture and the agricultural industry almost every day of my life when I am not here. I go to church Sunday mornings, and I have over here a dairy farmer — one of the largest dairy farmers in all of Western Canada. Over here, I have a turkey farmer. Over here, I have a grain farmer, a cattle producer and a hog producer. Every agricultural sector is represented in my community and in southeastern Manitoba.

I have the dairy people and the chicken people saying that we need supply management. I have the hog producers saying that we need a free market and don't need supply management. I have friends over here, and I have friends over there.

Colleagues, I stand with my friends. They don't come to me on Sunday mornings and say, "Why did you not support us?" They know we're doing our best for our country.

The supply management people understand that they can't have everything they want. The hog producers understand that we need to protect some of what we had, and we've done a wonderful job. We've done a wonderful job with previous Liberal governments. I've criticized this one because I just can't find much good in it.

We talked earlier about the former Liberal prime minister before the current one. I go to bed at nights and dream about Jean Chrétien being the Prime Minister over what we have now.

We've had these debates. We have supported supply management. We continue to support supply management.

Senator Dalphond challenged us to go to our provinces and speak for our provinces. I'm speaking for my province when I say that we cannot handcuff a Prime Minister. We cannot send somebody to the negotiating table with one hand tied behind their back.

• (2230)

Maybe I'm not a good poker player, so maybe I'm not bluffing well enough here. But I am in a quandary about how I vote because I do support both sides of this equation. I really do.

Earlier today, it was suggested that because I raised my voice and because I pushed too hard, that may be a reason why certain senators did not want to vote the way that I asked them or the way I suggested. For six and a half years, I had been encouraging how he would vote because of my temperament and my tone. So I will fool him and everyone else. I will not tell anyone how I'm going to vote, and that will really put you in a quandary.

Don't look so sad, Senator Gold. Put a little light in it. Please smile. It's 10:30. I'm going to adjourn the Senate very shortly, and you can go to bed, but right now I am going to speak for a while.

Colleagues, I will not be recommending that you vote one way or another on this committee's report.

My caucus in the other house split the vote 56 to 49 in favour of the bill at third reading. My caucus will again split their vote. I will be voting one way or another as well if and when we come to it. But our caucus here is free to vote the way they choose. I will vote the way I choose. This, like all votes in this chamber and in our caucus, is not whipped, because we truly are independent.

Thank you very much, colleagues.

Hon. Hassan Yussuff: Will Senator Plett take a question?

Senator Plett: There would be nothing that would thrill me more, Senator Yussuff.

Senator Yussuff: It is the witching hour, and we're into entertainment, so we might as well be entertained.

I was trying to follow your logic in your speech, and somewhere along the way you lost me; I have to be honest. I want to return to some of the things you said in regard to the renegotiation of NAFTA, which is now CUSMA.

I was involved in that process. At the time, I thought it was amazing to watch the country come together from coast to coast: premiers; the business community; the labour movement; the government, including the opposition in the House of Commons. There was no division in the country about what was at stake for the country and what was at stake for working people, the agricultural sector and the industrial sector across this country.

Correct me — and people can look at the record in regard to what was said once the negotiations were finished — but almost every newspaper, every sector of society thought it was an amazing outcome, given we were dealing with a president who basically said he was going to rip up the agreement. We succeeded in renegotiating to improve things, which people did not think was possible.

As I understand negotiations, it is a two-way street. It is not a one-way street. I am at a loss to understand some of the criticism you have of the renegotiated last agreement in terms of the success I believe we achieved as a country, not just from where I sit, representing workers and being on the NAFTA Council — and, by the way, working with some of your colleagues whom I consider good friends: Rona Ambrose, Mr. Moore and a number of others who were involved in that process.

What I recognize is here we are: When president-elect Donald Trump takes office, he is going to again reopen the agreement, and we will be involved in the process.

The fundamental question I wish to ask you is this: I do not know what the failure was that you were speaking about, but, equally, I think it is fundamentally important for us to come together as a country, both in this chamber and in the other place, to recognize the danger, because so much of our exports are dependent upon Canada being successful and continuing to have access to that market. I would be honoured to hear you enlighten me about what the criticism was of the success of the last agreement.

Senator Plett: The problem with these things at 10:30 in the evening is when the question is 10 minutes long, you forget what it was when you get to start.

You started off, Senator Yussuff, saying, “I didn’t quite understand you.” I have been accused of a lot of things in my life, but very seldom have I been accused of, “I didn’t know what you meant.” I’m usually pretty clear with what I mean, and I don’t think that I was that unclear this time. Nevertheless, let me try to deal with that.

I believe, as I said, that Prime Minister Trudeau basically signed a deal that the United States and Mexico had agreed to, and he came late to the table and was told to sign the document. I personally don’t think that we did that well.

If we want to go over the entire CUSMA agreement, I’m sorry I cannot do that with you, Senator Yussuff, in the amount of time that we have here or that you and I want to spend here. I’m simply going to say that I believe that our Prime Minister was late to the table, as I said quite clearly. He had three, four or five agenda items that the U.S. threw in the garbage. We have not gotten very far, for example, with softwood lumber in the last number of years. I would rather have somebody with a position of strength going in there and arguing if there, in fact, will be another agreement.

Having said that, let’s remember one thing. We also have a president-elect who basically is taking credit for negotiating the last agreement. It is his agreement. I am not sure what he is going to ask, but if we are going to change things such as supply management, that will give him pause.

He has threatened us with tariffs. He has made it abundantly clear to us that there are only two items we have to deal with. We have a Prime Minister who is not promising to deal with that, other than buying helicopters that we are going to get at some point after Donald Trump is out of office.

Senator Housakos: And a Prime Minister he calls a governor.

Senator Plett: Right. There are two things that the president-elect has asked for: Stop the illegal migration into the U.S., and stop the illegal fentanyl crossing the border — two things. We have not heard anyone.

You said that the media didn’t give us a lot of bad publicity. I hope you are not hanging your hat on what our left-wing media is saying. Our left-wing media is not criticizing him enough for the stupid GST tax trick that he is trying right now. Let’s not hang our hat on whether the media was positive or negative because the last thing I want to take to the bank is how our left-wing media feels about this Prime Minister.

Senator Yussuff: With all due respect, I don’t think *The Globe and Mail* is left-wing media, unless you and I are confused about the role of *The Globe and Mail*.

In fairness to the last agreement that was negotiated — I speak on behalf of all Canadians — I think that, fundamentally, we did a good job given what we were facing. We did not ask for the renegotiations. President Donald Trump asked for those negotiations.

We had to defend our access to the United States market, and, fundamentally, we did a good job. I don’t think that that is worth criticizing. We got there because we had unity in our country to ensure we were speaking with one voice and working together to achieve the greater objective.

Would you not say that is the same approach that will ensure that we have success whatever the president decides he wants to negotiate when we get to the table should he decide he wants to negotiate?

We actually had tariffs imposed on our steel and aluminum industries, which, at the end of the day, never traded badly with the United States. We didn’t subsidize our industry, yet we had tariffs imposed by the president of the United States on those industries. We successfully used those tariffs. Our aluminum and steel industries are the most modern in our country and employ thousands of men and women across the country.

I do believe sometimes that as much as we have to engage, it is only fair to recommend and to suggest that we did good negotiations for our country. We succeeded at it. Every premier in the country would agree that we were successful in the last negotiation, despite the fact that you don’t agree.

Senator Plett: I really did not even see a question in there, Senator Yussuff. You want to get into a debate on whether this was good. I’m saying it wasn’t. You are saying it was.

You said, “Well, don’t you think?” No, I don’t think. That is why I said what I said earlier.

You said, “With all due respect.” I will say the same thing, Senator Yussuff. With all due respect, I think we have a weak Prime Minister. I think that he needs to be replaced. I think we have a president-elect who has made it very clear that some things are going to change. Either we are going to change or we’re going to be left behind. They are our biggest trading partner.

• (2240)

Do we have some things that they want? Absolutely. This is not a one-way street and the president-elect knows that. But we need to have a position of strength.

I do not believe — you, Senator Yussuff, do believe — that we have a Prime Minister who has some qualities that you see in him that I just do not see. I would rather go by way of having Pierre Poilievre negotiating with Donald Trump than having this irresponsible “cabobble” that we have there right now negotiating with them. I’m sorry. I hope that draws that to a close.

(On motion of Senator White, debate adjourned.)

CONSTITUTION ACT, 1867

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Patterson (*Nunavut*), seconded by the Honourable Senator Tannas, for the second reading of Bill S-228, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (property qualifications of Senators).

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition) Your Honour, we have seen pained expressions on the government here dealing with this private member’s legislation. I really want our government leader to be in top shape tomorrow when we are dealing with government legislation again.

In light of that, and with respect to him and the rest of us who need to get some rest, I would suggest that we go home, come back tomorrow invigorated and ready to take on the world again.

Therefore, Your Honour, I move :

That the Senate do now adjourn.

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, on division.)

(At 10:43 p.m., pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate earlier this day, the Senate adjourned until 2 p.m., tomorrow.)

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