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Wednesday, June 4, 2025

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,  
Speaker

## CONTENTS

(Daily index of proceedings appears at back of this issue).

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## THE SENATE

Wednesday, June 4, 2025

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

Prayers.

### BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

**The Hon. the Speaker:** I would like to remind all honourable senators that the vote for the election of the Speaker pro tempore is under way in the senators' workstations and will conclude one hour after the adjournment of the Senate today, provided that any senator who was waiting at that time has had an opportunity to vote.

## SENATORS' STATEMENTS

### THE LATE NORMAN MARK HISCOCK

**Hon. Fabian Manning:** Honourable senators, today I am pleased to present Chapter 88 of "Telling Our Story."

The 2025 East Coast Music Awards, or ECMAs, took place from May 7 to 11 in St. John's, Newfoundland. It was a five-day non-stop musical celebration showcasing and recognizing the best of our East Coast talent. It was a week to celebrate and honour the top Atlantic Canadian musical artists from the past year.

Once again, the host city of St. John's outdid itself, and the thirty-seventh annual ECMA week was a tremendous success. I want to congratulate all those involved in making it so.

Sadly, this year's celebration had a grey cloud hanging over it, with the sudden and untimely passing of one of our province's most talented and prolific musicians, Mark Hiscock.

On May 6, one day before the opening of the ECMAs, Mark passed away at the young age of 53. Mark was a mainstay of the musical landscape of Newfoundland and Labrador and a founding member of the well-known and much-loved folk group Shanneyganock.

The band, which was formed more than 30 years ago as a musical duo along with Chris Andrews, is well known and much loved for their many songs and tunes steeped in our province's long history of storytelling. In 2020, Shanneyganock received a lifetime achievement award during the East Coast Music Awards Gala.

At a very young age, Mark began playing the button accordion, and, through his talent and passion for the instrument, he became one of the best that our province has ever produced.

Apart from being a member of the band, Mark also had a solo career, released his own albums and worked with other artists. He has left an incredible mark on our province's music industry.

In a CBC interview, fellow band member Chris Andrews, who was with Mark when he passed away, summed up Mark's legacy very well when he said:

Mark was a very kind, gentle person. He liked everybody. He loved music. . . . He loved Newfoundland. He loved the accordion and music, and he loved his life and his family and his wife. You know, [he] was a happy man, and it's just so sad at this great stage of his life, he was taken away.

Friends, I ask you to join with me in expressing our sympathies and condolences to Mark's wife, Kelly; his son, Daniel; his parents, Norman and Linda; and all his family, friends and fans.

On many occasions, I had the privilege to be in Mark's company, a true patriot of and a great ambassador for Newfoundland and Labrador. He was indeed a kind, gentle and humble human being.

I will conclude with the words of a famous song which Mark performed many times, called "Fiddlers Green."

Now I don't want a harp nor a halo, not me  
Just give me a breeze and a good rolling sea  
I'll play me old squeeze-box as we sail along  
With the wind in the riggin to sing me a song  
Wrap me up in me oilskin and jumper  
No more on the docks I'll be seen  
Just tell me old shipmates, I'm taking a trip mates  
And I'll see you someday on Fiddlers Green

Rest in peace, my friend.

[Translation]

### HON. FLORDELIZ (GIGI) OSLER

#### CONGRATULATIONS ON OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

**Hon. Sharon Burey:** Honourable senators, it is a great honour for me to rise today to congratulate our esteemed colleague, Senator Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler, on receiving the 2025 Outstanding Achievement Award from the Asian Women of Winnipeg. The celebration of this achievement comes at a very opportune time since June is Filipino Heritage Month in Canada.

[English]

This honour was also bestowed on International Women's Day and reflects not only Senator Osler's exceptional service to Canada but also her enduring commitment to equity, inclusion and transformative leadership.

The Asian Women of Winnipeg is an organization founded to empower, educate and elevate women across Manitoba. Its mission is rooted in values we all hold dear: mutual respect, diversity and equality.

Filipino Heritage Month is an occasion to highlight the achievements and experiences of the third-largest Asian community in this country.

Born in Winnipeg to immigrant parents from the Philippines and India, she has forged a path that continues to inspire women of all backgrounds. Senator Osler is an internationally renowned surgeon and a dedicated advocate for health and health care. From her groundbreaking work in medicine as the first woman surgeon and the first racialized woman to serve as President of the Canadian Medical Association to her current leadership in this very chamber, Senator Osler has continuously broken barriers and then built bridges for others to follow.

She is also the chair of our Canadian Senators Group, where she brings precision, attention to detail and an excellent skill set she has brought from her career as a surgeon. She reminds us that leadership isn't just about personal achievement. It's about changing structures so that others can thrive.

As I've said before, when we throw off the shackles of caste and class, we can liberate our minds and experience, as Canadians, the totality of Canadian history, what it means to be Canadian, what it means to truly unleash the potential and promise of this great country.

In recognizing Senator Osler's remarkable achievements during the Filipino Heritage Month, we also acknowledge its broader importance in shaping the future of a strong and prosperous Canada.

Gigi — Senator Osler — your voice, your work and your unwavering advocacy enrich not just this chamber but this country. It is an honour to call you both a colleague and a friend.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[Translation]

#### VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of members of the board of directors for Médecins francophones du Canada. They are accompanied by the President, Dr. Nader Habib, and the Executive Director, Ms. Nicole Parent. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Mégie.

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

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

• (1410)

#### MÉDECINS FRANCOPHONES DU CANADA

**Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie:** Honourable senators, today, I am very pleased and proud to welcome a delegation from Médecins francophones du Canada.

I want to extend a warm welcome to the executive director, the chair and the members of the board of directors who are here with us today: Dr. Hélène Boyer, Dr. Paolo Antunes and Dr. Samuel Serfaty.

Médecins francophones du Canada is a century-old institution born from the vision of Dr. Michel-Delphis Brochu, a passionate Quebecer. In 1900, he launched an ambitious project to bring together francophone doctors from all across North America. His goal was to ensure that these doctors received the same scientific and professional recognition as their anglophone colleagues, while remaining committed to their French language and culture. Two years later, in 1902, this vision became a reality with the founding of the Association des médecins de langue française de l'Amérique du Nord, with Dr. Brochu as the first chair.

For over a century, this organization has tirelessly defended the rights of francophone doctors, provided them with continuing education, networking and professional development opportunities, and actively contributed to the health and well-being of francophone communities across the country.

Over and above the services it provides, the organization's deeply rooted values deserve recognition: respect for the needs of its members, patients and partners; integrity as it honours its commitments and its mission; collaboration based on the power of teamwork and partnership; and dedication to achieving its goals despite the obstacles.

The organization's history is also marked by decisive battles, such as the fight for the Montfort Hospital, which was slated for closure in 1997. I had the privilege of chairing the association from 2014 to 2016. It was an enriching experience. Helping francophone doctors practising in a minority setting deliver services in French to patients who need them improves the quality of care and strengthens communication and trust, especially in highly emotional situations.

I would therefore like to extend my warmest thanks to Médecins francophones du Canada for its leadership, its essential work and its dedication to serving the health care needs of the francophonie. Thank you for carrying this torch so high, and welcome to the Senate of Canada.

[English]

### VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Genevieve LeBlanc, Meags Fitzgerald and Jessica Nichols, who are here to mark the beginning of Pride Season. They are the guests of the Honourable Senators Wells (*Alberta*) and Wilson.

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

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

### PRIDE SEASON

**Hon. Kristopher Wells:** Honourable senators, we have just witnessed the first time that drag performers have been introduced in the Senate of Canada. It is truly a very fitting way to begin the start of Canada's Pride Season.

The history of the word "drag" has interesting origins. Some people believe the word originated with Shakespeare, with drag serving as an acronym for "dressed as a girl" during a time when women were not allowed on stage. Others believe the word originated from a time in theatre when large colourful dresses would literally drag across the stage.

Whichever story you believe, drag is most certainly an incredible and long-standing art form. Today, drag represents an important form of community building in the 2SLGBTQI+ community, and it's a hugely popular cultural expression on television, including shows like "Canada's Drag Race," as well as Canadian works like Darrin Hagen's book *The Edmonton Queen* and his play *The Empress & the Prime Minister*, and, of course, there is Michel Tremblay's groundbreaking 1973 play *Hosanna*.

Drag, whether on stage, on screen or in the community, continues to make a powerful statement about equality in the way that it playfully challenges stereotypes and assumptions about gender and identity. Importantly, like all great works of art, drag makes us reflect, laugh and sometimes even cry.

As we mark the start of this year's Pride Season, sadly it is our drag performers and gender-diverse communities that are under heightened attack. We are witnessing a deeply disturbing trend of anti-trans and anti-2SLGBTQI+ prejudice and discrimination taking place globally, in the United States and, yes, even here in Canada. This populist wave of so-called gender ideology is not just about harmful rhetoric; it is fundamentally about dismantling the hard-won progress that countries like Canada have made over decades.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of Canada's legalization of same-sex marriage. This achievement is a standing matter of pride for our country and shows us all what can be accomplished through the work of advocates, allies and champions. This momentous change was led by countless individuals who, conversation by conversation, helped to open hearts and minds so that in the end, love won.

If history tells us anything, it is that we can never rest in the defence of the progress that we have made, and we can never stop the work of building a more just and inclusive society.

Honourable senators, last week we were reminded by a different King that Canada is the sovereign nation of the true north strong and free — free to love whom we love, free to be who we are and free to live proudly in a country where we can fully express ourselves.

This Pride Season, I hope I speak for all my honourable colleagues when I say that we stand on guard and we will always defend diversity and the fundamental rights and freedoms that Canada is built upon.

To all Canadians from coast to coast to coast, I wish you a happy summer filled with Pride, love, laughter and hopefully a colourful drag performance or two.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

### COMBATting ISLAMOPHOBIA

**Hon. Salma Ataullahjan:** Honourable senators, today I rise to remember the Afzaal family whose lives were brutally cut short by a terrorist attack in London, Ontario, four years ago. On that day — June 6 — three generations of a family were lost, with only the nine-year-old son surviving. And the terrorist's only motivation was his hate for Muslims.

The Muslim community was very badly wounded by this tragedy. At the time, there was an outpouring of grief and condolences from all over Canada. We all described the killing as horrific. The country mourned with us.

But that wasn't the end of the Islamophobic attacks; they continue to this day. Just this year, in March, Elshimaa Abdelhafiz, a mother of three, walked into the library to study. There, in the middle of a public space in broad daylight, she was met with hate. A stranger, screaming abuse, poured liquid on her head and tried to set her on fire.

Her young daughters asked, "Why would someone want to hurt our mother because of what she wears on her head?" Today, I ask every Canadian: Please do not see the hijab as a threat. The hijab should not be seen as a provocation. Some Muslim women choose to wear it, and it is within their rights to do so.

This is not just one isolated incident that I speak of. In recent weeks, someone tried to set fire to a Muslim family's home. Cars were vandalized in the parking lot of a mosque. Such attacks have become commonplace.

Honourable senators, Muslim lives and pain are non-negotiable. Hate-fuelled attacks like this must be met with relentless protection and uncompromising prosecution. Islamophobia is not a matter that affects only one community; it concerns all of us because it runs counter to the principles of respect, fairness and inclusion that define our country.

In the face of fear, Elshimaa chose to focus on the strangers who stepped in to help and who showed her compassion and courage. These strangers remind us of who we are as Canadians. We are compassionate and courageous people, and Islamophobia strikes at the heart of our shared Canadian values. It is a test of our resolve.

Today, honourable senators, I stand up and speak against Islamophobia and all forms of religion-based hate. I urge you and every Canadian to do the same. Let us be remembered in this chamber not for silence but for courage. Thank you.

• (1420)

### ITALIAN REPUBLIC DAY ITALIAN HERITAGE MONTH

**Hon. Toni Varone:** Honourable senators, I stand today to commemorate Italian Republic Day and Italian Heritage Month by honouring the first Canadian of Italian heritage to be named to this esteemed chamber.

Some 50 years ago, in the hallowed halls of the Senate of Canada, a new voice emerged, a voice that resonated with passion, gratitude and an unwavering commitment to the rich tapestry of Canadian society. The appointment, by prime minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, of senator Peter Bosa to this esteemed chamber marked not just a milestone but a profound contribution to the discourse on national unity.

With eloquence and grace, Senator Bosa articulated in his maiden speech to the Senate a vision for Canada that celebrated both its diversity and its shared identity. As he spoke, his experience as an immigrant informed his perspective.

Having arrived in Canada in 1948 from Friuli, Italy, he shared his fascination with how people from diverse backgrounds could coexist harmoniously, overcoming the historical grievances that had divided them in Europe. Through this lens, he presented Canada not merely as a country but as a living organism nourished by the multitude of cultures that contributed to its vibrancy.

His reflections on learning English from a Scotsman at the Aviano Air Base in northern Italy illustrated the intimate connection he forged with the very fabric of Canadian identity. Senator Bosa's journey was emblematic of so many newcomers who have found a sense of belonging in this great nation.

Senator Bosa was my friend. I followed his path and the path of another great senator of Italian heritage, senator Consiglio Di Nino. They were from opposite ends of the political spectrum, but both shared a path of goodness and a mutual respect for each other. I had the honour of serving alongside both of them during the formative years of what is now the largest Italian philanthropic community of organizations, Villa Charities.

Senator Bosa always spoke about the pivotal role of multiculturalism, a policy he championed as essential for fostering unity in a pluralistic society. He argued that multiculturalism should not be perceived as a divisive force but, rather, as a means to enrich Canada's cultural landscape. Emphasizing that it serves all Canadians, he urged everyone to

embrace this shared identity that transcends individual ethnic origins. In his mind, multiculturalism was not merely a policy; it was a profound principle that granted dignity and belonging to everyone, reinforcing their commitment to Canada's future.

Senator Bosa's insights resonated deeply with me when he often highlighted the importance of recognizing all cultural contributions as part of the collective Canadian identity. He always spoke emphatically about the need for inclusiveness, advocating that understanding and acceptance of differing backgrounds lead to a stronger, more united nation. His call for respect and appreciation of each culture was not just a plea for tolerance; it was a vision for collective progress in a world often plagued by division and conflict. Senator Bosa championed a Canada wherein differences were not just tolerated but cherished.

Ladies and gentlemen, this was some 50 years ago. With June being Italian Heritage Month, I am honoured to be able to reflect on the indelible legacy of senator Peter Bosa.

*Grazie. Thank you. Meegwetich.*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### ADJOURNMENT

#### NOTICE OF MOTION

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

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, June 10, 2025, at 2 p.m.

[Translation]

### L'ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

#### ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMMEMORATION OF THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE, APRIL 6-7, 2024—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Éric Forest:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) concerning the participation of Francis Drouin, Member of Parliament, President of the APF, at the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Commemoration of the Rwandan Genocide, held in Kigali, Rwanda, from April 6 to 7, 2024.

MEETINGS OF THE APF PRESIDENCY, APRIL 22-26, 2024—  
REPORT TABLED

[English]

**Hon. Éric Forest:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) concerning the Meetings of the APF Presidency, held in Paris, France, and Luxembourg, Luxembourg, from April 22 to 26, 2024.

MEETINGS OF THE APF POLITICAL COMMITTEE AND  
WORKING GROUP ON REFORMING THE APF CONSTITUTION,  
APRIL 27-30, 2024—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Éric Forest:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) concerning the meetings of the APF Political Committee and Working Group on Reforming the APF Constitution, held in Luxembourg City, Luxembourg, from April 27 to 30, 2024.

REGIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE AFRICA REGION OF THE APF,  
MAY 28-29, 2024—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Éric Forest:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) concerning the Thirtieth Regional Assembly of the Africa Region of the APF, held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from May 28 to 29, 2024.

SESSION OF THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY OF EUROPE,  
NOVEMBER 11-13, 2024—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Éric Forest:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) concerning the Thirty-sixth Session of the Regional Assembly of Europe, held in Pristina, Kosovo, from November 11 to 13, 2024.

MEETING OF THE COMMISSION ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS OF THE APF AND ECONOMIC  
PARLIAMENTARY SYMPOSIUM, APRIL 2-4, 2025—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Éric Forest:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) concerning the Meeting of the Commission on Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs of the APF and Economic Parliamentary Symposium, held in Budapest, Hungary, from April 2 to 4, 2025.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### GLOBAL AFFAIRS

#### CANADA-CHINA RELATIONS

**Hon. Michael L. MacDonald:** Senator Gold, my question is simple, but it is urgent.

As all Canadians know, Beijing has retaliated against Canada's new tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, EVs for short, by targeting our seafood exports, a move that directly threatens thousands of jobs in Nova Scotia and across Atlantic Canada. Our many fishing communities, which have absolutely nothing to do with the EV industry, are caught in this crossfire. Coupled with protections, policies and tariffs from the U.S., the fishing industry now finds itself with restricted access to its two largest markets. The U.S. tariffs are at 10%, but the Beijing tariffs are at 25%.

Why should Atlantic Canada be penalized because of bad business decisions made in Ottawa?

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you for your question and for underlining for those in this chamber and those who are watching the impact that these tariffs are having on the fishing sector in your province and region, as it is in many other areas — the agriculture sector, canola and others — upon which Canadian businesses and families depend.

This government has been very clear about how it is going to approach its relationship with China. It will always, at all times, act in the best interests of Canadians to defend their national interests and to deal with and engage with China in a pragmatic, focused way, based upon creating a different and sound basis for areas where we can work together when it is in the Canadian interest.

In this respect, the government is engaged with its counterparts to evaluate how best to proceed in what has been and will remain a very complicated relationship with a country that is asserting itself in the world in ways to which we must respond in a very careful, mindful and diligent manner.

**Senator MacDonald:** Senator Gold, these tariffs are a retaliation by China towards us because of our position on tariffs.

Did the government consider the consequences of Chinese retaliation before imposing a 100% tariff on Chinese EVs? We're hearing that these multi-million dollar investments in electric vehicle battery plants, which were used to justify these tariffs, are already facing delays and uncertainty. We don't know if the one in Quebec will even occur, and Stellantis has stopped all of its production and progress.



Was it worth risking key export sectors like seafood and agriculture to protect an EV strategy that may not even materialize?

**Senator Gold:** The whole structure of international trade — and, therefore, by extension and by consequence, international relationships — is in turmoil as a result of actions that no Canadian government or Canadian political party or leader ever desired, but it is upon us. This government is focused with laser attention on navigating through these difficult times in this rapidly changing world. Canadians should have confidence that this government, which enjoys the support of millions of Canadians and was working carefully with premiers, the territories and provinces, with Indigenous leaders and business and union leaders, will chart the best course forward for Canada.

• (1430)

Time will tell, but the government is focused and determined to serve Canadians through this and chart a course through these very challenging times.

## FINANCE

### FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

**Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Senator Gold, your government is planning the largest debt issuance in Canadian history, surpassing even the issues held during the pandemic, at a time when foreign investors are fleeing our bond market and borrowing costs are already surging. Yields on 10-year bonds have jumped more than 50 basis points since April, yet the government refuses to table a budget until the fall, months after the fiscal year began.

Investors, analysts and ratings agencies are all sounding the alarm: lack of transparency, fiscal uncertainty and an overreliance on foreign demand that is now vanishing. Canadians are staring down higher mortgage rates, weaker investment and mounting national debt, all without a credible fiscal anchor in sight.

Why is this government risking Canada's financial stability by issuing record debt into a shaky bond market with no plan and no budget, while foreign investors pull back and confidence collapses?

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you for your question and for underlining the importance of proper transparent and responsible management of our economic affairs in this turbulent time. The government has been very clear that it will introduce a budget in the fall.

To have introduced anything even in form resembling a budget now — with all the uncertainty and changes happening literally day by day in terms of the tariff structures to which we are being subjected, the developments in the bond market caused largely by actions in the United States, the tariff policy in particular — would be an irresponsible and meaningless exercise.

The Prime Minister was elected with a mandate to guide Canada and help transform our economy in this difficult time, and Canadians can expect that this will remain a priority and a focus and can look forward, in the fall, to getting a proper and accurate picture through a budget when the information and the situation stabilize.

**Senator Martin:** Leader, the longer the government hides its budget, the worse this gets. Bond markets are reacting now, not in the fall. Foreign creditors are watching and withdrawing.

Does the government seriously expect Canadians to believe it can borrow record amounts, delay accountability and still protect our economic future? Or is this delay just a cover-up for spending plans it knows the markets and Canadians cannot afford?

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for your question. As I have said, it would be irresponsible and misleading to provide, at this juncture, a projection; it would be an irresponsible and misleading exercise to do other than what the government is doing now, which is to work assiduously with premiers, leaders in business and industry and Indigenous leaders to chart a course forward.

As we all know from the meetings that have been held and will be held, this government is focused and will remain focused on economic matters in the best interests of Canadians.

## ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### CARBON EMISSIONS

**Hon. Mary Coyle:** Senator Gold, as you know, growing Canada's economy, fighting climate change and keeping up with the global trends in decarbonization are national imperatives. Canadians embrace the urgency to build more national projects and make industries more competitive. At the same time, they want to be reassured that our government is still committed to meeting its climate commitments. Canada's Net-Zero Advisory Body says that "... decarbonization is a unique opportunity to increase economic prosperity and jobs, as well as human and environmental health."

Last year, the government announced a greenhouse gas emissions reduction target for the year 2035 of 45% to 50% below 2005 levels. By 2023, Canada's emissions had only decreased by 8.5%.

Senator Gold, is the government still committed to meeting the 2035 target and the climate targets as set out in the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act, passed in this chamber in 2021?

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you for your question, senator. The government remains committed to its goals and is making investments that will drive emissions down, drive new economic growth across Canada and open new export markets with like-minded countries that share our values and want and, indeed, need what we have to offer.

As the government works to build a stronger Canadian economy, it will not lose sight of the choices that these actions will have on future generations, on our environment and on humans and species that depend upon a healthy environment. This government will always be mindful of the long-term sustainability of its plans for economic growth and for a healthy environment for generations to come.

**Senator Coyle:** Thank you very much, Senator Gold. I do hope we will be able to make those actual commitments, the numbers that have been laid out.

I was pleased to hear the Speech from the Throne reference the COP15 biodiversity commitment to protect 30% of the world's lands and waters by 2030, with a promise by the government to create new national parks, new national urban parks and new marine protected areas.

Senator Gold, would you be able to elaborate on the government's plan and timeline for these exciting new conservation initiatives?

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for underlining this government's commitment to continue to protect larger areas of our natural, marvellous country, whether on land or in the marine environments. Unfortunately, I'm not in a position to comment or provide information about the timetables for that work, but I have confidence that this work will be done seriously and with urgency.

## GLOBAL AFFAIRS

### SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

**Hon. Stan Kutcher:** Senator Gold, today, along with Senators Dasko and Simons, I attended a remembrance ceremony for Ukrainian children killed since Russia's full-scale invasion. Over 630 innocent children have died and over 2,000 have been injured. That's 16 children killed or injured every single day.

What is Canada specifically doing to stop Russia from killing these innocents? Why is Canada not helping close the skies to Russian missiles and drones that are directed towards civilian targets? Specifically, will Canada step up to lead the creation of Sky Shield?

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you for your question and for reminding us of the devastation of this illegal war initiated by Russia against Ukraine.

Canada stands resolute in its commitment to support Ukraine as it defends its independence in the face of Russia's brutal aggression. The government's commitment to Ukraine will endure, as this government has made clear.

My understanding, senator, is that at the Munich Security Conference, the G7 foreign ministers underscored their commitment to work together to help achieve a durable peace and a strong and prosperous Ukraine and reaffirmed the need to

work together to develop robust security guarantees to ensure the security of Ukraine, to end the war and to prevent the war from returning.

**Senator Kutcher:** Thank you very much, Senator Gold. I just can't help but notice that guarantees don't save lives.

Over 700,000 Ukrainian children have been reportedly stolen by Russia. This, as we know in this chamber, is genocide. In February 2024, Canada announced that together with Ukraine, we would be leading an international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children stolen by Russia. I understand that since then, only about 1,000 have been returned. What specific steps is Canada now going to take to improve on this dismal result?

• (1440)

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for your question. With regard to the coalition, colleagues should know that since it was announced, 41 states, as well as the Council of Europe, have joined the coalition with a collective commitment to bring Ukrainian children home. My understanding is that the invitation to join remains open to any country wanting to help with this important mission and that the Montreal Pledge is a road map to find practical solutions for this important work. My understanding is that there are now over 50 — approximately 53 — countries and multilateral organizations that have signed this pledge, and Canada hopes to continue to participate in this important work.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

### USE OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS

**Hon. Robert Black:** Senator Gold, as you're aware, the Liberal government has made clear their intention to build more housing to solve Canada's housing crisis. However, along with the agricultural industry, I'm concerned that these commitments will be fulfilled by building homes on prime agricultural land that is already becoming scarce across this country. Although it may seem convenient to build on these lands, using up more farmland will weaken our ability to remain a food sovereign nation and feed our country, let alone the world.

We are rapidly losing prime farmland to urbanization and the development of housing and infrastructure. Once the farmland is gone, it's gone. Our land is valuable, and we need to protect it. Senator Gold, could you please explain how the government intends to fulfill their promises for housing while also prioritizing the protection of these diminishing agricultural lands we need to feed our country?

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you for your question. It is an important one. As I have said on many occasions, this government has a serious and multipronged plan to do its part to get more homes built, whether that's building affordable homes in the role of a developer, cutting GST for first-time homebuyers or cutting municipal development charges in half for multiunit builds. That initiative builds on the Housing Accelerator Fund and agreements with nearly 200 communities across this country.

Having said all of that, senator, as you know, the protection of agricultural lands is a critically important issue for the health and well-being of Canada and our economy, but land use designation falls within provincial jurisdiction, with the exception, of course, of Crown land. This is an issue all levels of government are seized with, and the federal government is doing its part within its jurisdiction. Thank you for raising this question.

**Senator Black:** Thank you, Senator Gold. I understand the need to build homes and infrastructure to support our growing population. However, such development should not affect the ability to produce food, fibre and fuel. Will you ensure the government takes into account and prioritizes the protection of prime agricultural land and the inherent health of our soil in all future development plans?

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for your question and also, if I may, for the important work that the committee which you chaired did regarding the importance of soil health for our environment and our economy.

Again, please forgive the constitutional lawyer in me underlining that this is largely a matter of provincial jurisdiction. I certainly will bring these concerns to the attention of the minister so that the federal government also keeps this in mind as it pursues its work in this area.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

### CANADA POST

**Hon. Marty Klyne:** Senator Gold, I'm delighted that Bill C-2 fulfills the government's election promise to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act, allowing police with a warrant to search items in the mail for fentanyl and other contraband as they can with private couriers. This change has been a proposal of Senator Dalphond since 2022 with Bill S-256, supported last year by our Legal Committee. Our committee made an amendment to enable Indigenous nations to authorize Canada Post to conduct screenings of mail for illegal drugs coming into their territories. This request came from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Mushkegowuk Council, representing 70 First Nations. This change is not in Bill C-2. Will you please raise the potential inclusion of the screening measure via an amendment with the government?

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you for your question, for your advocacy and for underlining the work of Senator Dalphond as well as the Legal Committee when it studied Senator Dalphond's bill in the previous Parliament. Yes, I will certainly raise this with the minister at my earliest opportunity, and sometime thereafter, when the bill arrives in the Senate, we'll have an opportunity to address it as well.

**Senator Klyne:** Under Bill C-15, adopted in 2021, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, or UNDRIP, action plan requires the government, in consultation with Indigenous peoples, to take all measures needed to ensure that the federal laws comply with the declaration. This includes the Canada Post Corporation Act. Self-determination, of course,

includes reasonably preventing the flow of contraband into communities. Will you please raise this aspect of the potential amendment as well?

**Senator Gold:** Thank you again, senator, for your question. The government is indeed committed to the action plan to which you refer. It will continue its partnership with Indigenous peoples to ensure a smooth rollout of that, and I'll add it to the issues I will raise with the minister.

[Translation]

## FIREARMS CONTROL

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

During consideration of Bill C-5, Chief Inspector David Bertrand of the Montreal police force, or SPVM, stated the following in committee:

... there's an increased presence of firearms among young people.

... eliminating mandatory minimum sentences would have an impact on the public's perception of the seriousness of these crimes and, at the same time, lead to a trivialization and even a sense of impunity ...

Honourable senators, two years later, in Laval alone, 40% of cases of armed violence now involve minors, teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17, who are recruited by armed gangs. Will you finally recognize that the soft-on-crime policy, particularly Bill C-5, has failed to protect Canadians and repeal those provisions?

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you for the question. It is clear that the issue of guns and violence in our communities is a major and legitimate concern in this country. The government is of the opinion that the time has come to increase the number of officers at our borders. A significant increase in the number of RCMP officers is an important response to this issue.

At the same time, the government announced in its election platform other measures to ensure that the Criminal Code can be amended to better protect Canadians.

**Senator Housakos:** Honourable senators, Statistics Canada has reported that violent gun crime was 22% higher in 2023 than it was in 2018, and 55% higher than in 2013. Senator Gold, how can Canadians trust the Liberal government to fight gun violence when it axed mandatory minimum sentences for gang-related offences, like the use of firearms to commit crimes, possession of a weapon obtained by a crime, discharging a firearm with criminal intent or armed robbery?

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for the question. Colleagues, the difference between the position of this government and the position of the official opposition in the other place has been clearly apparent for quite some time.

The government will continue to focus on taking meaningful action on the ground to protect Canadians and prevent the importation of firearms from the United States to Canada. That's a big problem at our borders and we'll be able to allocate more resources to it. We'll continue to take a pragmatic approach so that we can better protect our communities.

• (1450)

[English]

## FINANCE

### FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** Again, my question is for the government leader in the Senate.

The 2025-26 Main Estimates highlight a concerning trend in how the federal government is spending and managing. Nearly half of all government expenditures now require annual parliamentary approval — up sharply from roughly one third a decade ago. This growth in voted spending signals a heavy reliance on short-term programs rather than stable statutory frameworks. Canadians see the consequences — less predictability, more bureaucracy — and there is growing difficulty for provinces and stakeholders to plan with confidence.

Leader, why is your government prioritizing temporary, often narrowly targeted initiatives over the long-term fiscal stability and planning that Canadians deserve? Canadians got a new Liberal Prime Minister, but it seems like he's still embracing old Liberal habits.

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** You'll forgive me if I return the compliment by saying there's some rather old Conservative talking points embedded in your question.

It's a serious question: How does the government manage our affairs, and how does the Canadian government navigate itself? This government has been crystal clear about its focus on major projects of national importance to help build this economy into one of the strongest, if not the strongest economy in the G7. More important than where we rank among countries will be the services and the advantages that it will provide to Canadians.

The work is only now beginning, but it's beginning with rapidity and urgency. By working in partnership with premiers, stakeholders, Indigenous leaders and business and union leaders, this government is focused on long-range projects that will build better jobs — indeed, better careers — for generations of Canadians. That's what Canadians expect from this government, that's why they elected this government and that's what this government will do.

**Senator Housakos:** Senator Gold, I don't want to get into a match here about who is using talking points better. The bottom line is that the opposition is asking very legitimate questions about planning, stability and transparency when it comes to finances. We should not delegitimize that by calling them "talking points."

Government leader, a jump in voted spending was understandable during the pandemic — we were even cooperative — but one would expect the numbers to return to normal after these programs were discontinued. Instead, the trend has worsened.

Why is the government governing with stopgap measures and reactive budgeting instead of providing the steady, responsible and transparent financial stewardship that Canadians have the right to expect and which they had in the past, once upon a time?

**Senator Gold:** I never have, I never will and I did not — in my response — call into question the legitimacy of those questions. I think Hansard will show that I validated the importance of the questions. It's simply that this government is focused on moving Canada forward through bold and important measures that will provide, if successful, a structural impetus toward a sustainable and stable economic future for all Canadians.

## CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

### EXTERNAL REVIEW PROCESS

**Hon. Paul (PJ) Prosper:** My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Senator Gold, on July 8, 2024, then-minister Diane Lebovillier from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or DFO, announced that an external review would be undertaken in response to two young Mi'kmaw fishermen who said they were mistreated and left stranded with no shoes in a March 2024 incident involving DFO officers. The three Mi'kmaw members of the review panel were cleared through the OIC process; however, they have not been contracted.

Senator Gold, when will the government fulfill its commitment to reconciliation and transparency by launching this external review?

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you for your question, senator, and for your advocacy on this. It was and remains a very troubling incident, and the government is taking steps to address it.

I do not have a specific timetable for the launch of the review, but I have been advised that the work is ongoing.

**Senator Prosper:** Senator Gold, my last official conversations with DFO and Crown-Indigenous Relations regarding this were that DFO would tender the third party to execute the review, while Crown-Indigenous Relations would oversee the contract to avoid a potential conflict of interest.

Can you tell us if that contract has been tendered and confirm who will be overseeing it? Thank you.

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for the question.

At this time, I'm not aware, frankly, whether the tender has been awarded, but I'll certainly raise this issue with the minister in the days to come.

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## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### 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 His Majesty the King:

To His Most Excellent Majesty Charles the Third, by the Grace of God King of Canada and His other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY:

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

**Hon. Iris G. Petten:** Honourable senators, I rise today to give my first speech of the Forty-fifth Parliament in response to the Speech from the Throne.

On May 27, 2025, we gathered here in the chamber to witness His Majesty King Charles III deliver the Speech from the Throne, making it the first time in nearly 50 years that a reigning monarch has done so in person. Canadians from coast to coast celebrated this historic occasion, which reaffirmed the enduring ties between Canada, the Crown and our like-minded partners.

As a proud Newfoundlander, this occasion also held a deeply personal significance for me. Newfoundland and Labrador has had a long and close connection to the United Kingdom and the monarchy. We are Canada's youngest province, having joined Confederation only 75 years ago — a milestone we celebrated just last year. Many of our residents still alive today were born in Newfoundland when it had the status of an independent British dominion — one that was famously loyal to King and country.

In fact, I'm sometimes mistaken as someone from England because of the way I speak. Traditional Newfoundland and Labrador English dialects carry the distinct linguistic legacy of our ancestors, drawing heavily, in my case, from the southwest of England — particularly Dorset and Devon in the West Country — and in others, like Senator Manning, from southeastern Ireland. Our unique linguistic heritage serves as a living reminder of our deep historical ties to the British Isles.

It was a profound honour to be the first senator to swear allegiance to His Majesty King Charles III just three days after his coronation in 2023. To mark his ascension to the throne, I wanted to celebrate in a way that brought my community together: with high tea at the Canon Richards Tea Room in my hometown of Port de Grave. The event was made even more special by the contributions of residents who donated teacups and saucers to mark the occasion. It was at this same tea room where I had the privilege of presenting my King Charles III Coronation Medals to deserving community members.

This is another connection I want to highlight. The cover page of this year's Speech from the Throne features an image of Gros Morne National Park, one of Newfoundland and Labrador's most iconic landscapes. The photo was taken by Canadian photographer Jake Graham, and it beautifully captures the natural environment of our province bringing a piece of Newfoundland and Labrador into the art of national political life.

• (1500)

Colleagues, the Royal Family have been regular visitors to my home province, and many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can share personal stories of meeting a royal. The last time King Charles III visited Canada was in 2022, and Newfoundland and Labrador was part of his itinerary.

During that visit, while on a walk with a friend to the historic fishing community of Quidi Vidi, I happened to come across Their Majesties — the King and Queen — enjoying an ice cream. It was a delightful moment which the community embraced wholeheartedly, and the proprietor named ice cream flavours in their honour and, inspired by Prince Charles' love for Welsh cakes, created a blueberry, jam, graham crumb and soft serve sundae.

To many Newfoundlanders, this close connection with the Crown seems very natural. As a schoolchild in Port de Grave, we would sing *God Save the Queen* on Fridays to finish every week. In St. John's, where I live today, reminders of the Royal Family are everywhere on the public buildings and monuments. The main stadium in the town, called Memorial Stadium in honour of those who served, featured such a large portrait of the late Queen Elizabeth II above the upper level concourse that at hockey games or concerts the main meeting point was known as, "Let's meet up by the Queen."

The bond between Canada and the Crown is equally long-standing and deeply rooted. It is a history that includes chapters of darkness and difficulty, which we must never overlook. But it is also a history that includes remarkable stories of strength, resilience, hope and ties that can never be forgotten.

On my last trip to London, I visited the Canada Gate and the Newfoundland Gate, both of which are located directly across from Buckingham Palace in The Green Park. Standing there, at the entrance to a beautiful royal park created by King Charles II in 1660, you are near the Canada Memorial which pays tribute to the more than 100,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders who made the ultimate sacrifice, again reminding us of the close bond of our two countries and the tremendous price we have proudly paid to uphold our collective values.

As a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, I am acutely aware of what it means to hold both a distinct regional identity and a broader national one. While our province was the last to give up its independence to join Confederation, that decision — though deeply complex — reflected a belief that having an individual identity and being part of a greater national identity can and do coexist.

His Majesty acknowledged this beautifully in his Speech from the Throne when he said:

... I have always had the greatest admiration for Canada's unique identity, which is recognized across the world for bravery and sacrifice in defence of national values, and for the diversity and kindness of Canadians.

These words remind us of who we are as Canadians and as members of a diverse and resilient federation. They remind us, too, of the living history we carry and the future we continue to shape together.

Thank you.

**Hon. Judy A. White:** As a proud First Nations senator, I rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

I am both proud and privileged to sit in this honourable chamber among esteemed colleagues in a place where voices from all walks of life shape the future of this country.

But on the day of the Speech from the Throne, as I looked across the room and saw so many Indigenous leaders present, adorned in their traditional attire and regalia, standing tall in our cultures and identities, the pride I felt was taken to a whole new level. Their attendance was more than symbolic; it was powerful. It was a moment that affirmed our presence, our resilience and our rightful place in the fabric of this nation.

I am constantly reminded that it is both a privilege and a profound responsibility to sit in this chamber, a place that for far too long did not reflect the full diversity and strength of the peoples who call these lands home. And yet, here we are, all 12 of us. The circle is beginning to close, and the voices of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples are being heard in spaces where we were once forbidden and silenced.

Our presence is a reminder that Indigenous peoples are not on the margins of Canada's story; we are central to it. We are treaty partners. We are rights holders. We are nation to nation. Despite attempts to remove us, we are here, standing proudly on this land which we have stewarded since time immemorial.

Therefore, it is imperative that Indigenous peoples, as rights holders and as distinct nations, are present at the Speech from the Throne. These ceremonies are not merely historic formalities; they are constitutional obligations which require us to reaffirm the relationships at the foundation of this country. Treaties were not one-time events of the past. They are living agreements built on mutual respect and ongoing dialogue.

Some treaties between the Crown and Indigenous nations were initially entered beginning in 1701 and are colloquially categorized as historic treaties. But this does not mean that they can be historicized, or that they are old documents which somehow hold lesser impact on Indigenous peoples today. Treaties represent continued commitments and unequivocal assurances of rights to lands and other benefits for Indigenous peoples. They are active agreements that exist in continuity and must consistently be upheld.

Treaties represent respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples that Canada must reaffirm with the opening of each Parliament through the Speech from the Throne.

Therefore, the presence of Indigenous peoples in the chamber during moments like the Speech from the Throne is not just ceremonial, it is constitutional. It is a reminder that Canada was built not in isolation but in partnership with First Peoples, and that partnership demands recognition, inclusion and a voice at the highest levels of governance.

We acknowledge that this response is delivered from the lands of our ancestors, lands that have sustained our nations for millennia.

The Speech from the Throne and my comments today are taking place on the unceded, unsundered territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people, who continue to face the systemic, colonial violences that have followed the colonization of this land. It is important to recognize that these lands were never surrendered to the Crown, and we must recognize our responsibility as stewards of this land, its waters and all our relations.

The Speech from the Throne acknowledged Indigenous peoples and affirmed that any vision of a shared future must include us.

This recognition is appreciated. However, we remind the Crown and its representatives that genuine reconciliation requires more than symbolic gestures. It demands the full implementation of free, prior and informed consent as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is not merely a moral imperative; it is an international standard that affirms our sovereignty and our right to determine what happens on our lands and to our people.

True freedom — freedom grounded in justice — demands the full recognition and implementation of this principle. The Government of Canada defines free, prior and informed consent as:

... processes that are free from manipulation or coercion, informed by adequate and timely information, and occur sufficiently prior to a decision so that Indigenous rights and interests can be incorporated or addressed effectively as part of the decision making process . . . .

• (1510)

This is not a suggestion. It is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative stemming from a standard that is enshrined in international law and integral to our commitment to UNDRIP. It is a path forward that upholds Indigenous sovereignty and fosters genuine partnership.

Yet, as many colleagues who join me on the Indigenous Peoples Committee will recall, time and again we hear from Indigenous people who have experienced violations of their right to free, prior and informed consent. On countless occasions, Canada has failed to conduct proper consultations with Indigenous peoples and treated consultation like a checkbox rather than a meaningful process of dialogue and co-development.

References to the true north being strong and free were echoed in this chamber, but for many First Nations, this land has not been free; it has been stolen. Our consent has been ignored, our voices have been silenced and our laws have been dismissed. The land has been occupied and divided, too often without our consent and at great cost to our communities, cultures and future generations.

First Nations have been exploited throughout this country's history. Colonization dispossessed Indigenous nations of our territories, suppressed our governance systems and attempted to erase our identities. True freedom means liberation from the legacy of colonialism. It means the return of lands, the recognition of our laws and governance systems, the honouring of treaties and meaningful partnerships rooted in equality and respect.

Today, colonial harms continue in different forms through the over-incarceration of our people, the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, the degradation of our lands and the denial of our inherent rights. In this new era filled with patriotism, affirmations of Canada's sovereignty and discussions of nation building, we must not forget the ways in which the darkness of our past bleeds into the present. We must remain steadfast and clear-eyed in our commitment to true and meaningful reconciliation. If we are to be clear-eyed, we must be prepared not only to recognize these truths, but to act on them with courage and conviction.

Now I would like to highlight something from my culture. In our culture, the Mi'kmaq have a principle called two-eyed seeing, and I would like to compare it to being clear-eyed, which His Majesty King Charles III invoked in the Speech from the Throne. Two-eyed seeing is a guiding principle coined by Elder Albert Marshall. It refers to the ability to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and from the other with the strengths of Western knowledge while using both eyes together for the benefit of all. Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall of Eskasoni, Nova Scotia, describes it like this:

Two-eyed seeing teaches us to recognize the value in multiple ways of knowing. One eye sees through Indigenous ways, rooted in relationships, land, and spirit; the other through Western scientific perspectives. The goal is not to choose one or blend them into a single view, but to respect and use both where they're strongest.

This means that we are invited to learn to see the world from both Indigenous and Western perspectives rather than merging the two into a single lens. Two-eyed seeing respects the distinct strengths of each and emphasizes the importance of co-learning. It encourages mutual respect and the integration of Indigenous wisdom and scientific understanding to address complex modern problems, particularly in environmental stewardship and health.

Similarly, "clear-eyed" typically refers to a mindset or perspective that is realistic, honest and unclouded by illusions or wishful thinking. It emphasizes facing reality directly, acknowledging complexity and making decisions based on evidence, clarity and emotional detachment.

During the Speech from the Throne, His Majesty spoke of the duty to be clear-eyed about the past and the present, and he invoked a vision of unity, responsibility and healing. We affirm that such clarity begins with truth — about the dispossession of Indigenous lands, the ongoing impacts of colonization and the need to uphold Indigenous rights not just in word but in action.

The clear-eyed approach emphasizes the need to move beyond romanticized narratives and see the world and history as they truly are, with their challenges and contradictions. It is a call to recognize difficult truths and act responsibly, especially in relation to heritage, the environment and social justice. In this chamber, he emphasized that we must be clear-eyed given that the world has become a more dangerous and uncertain place, with Canada facing challenges that are unprecedented in our lifetime.

In a world marked by complexity and historical reckoning, the call to view issues with clarity and humility has never been more vital. Two distinct yet philosophically aligned frameworks — His Majesty's notion of being clear-eyed and the Mi'kmaq principle of two-eyed seeing — offer complementary ways of approaching truth, reconciliation and progress. Both frameworks encourage balance and humility. Where clear-eyed vision seeks truth

through unflinching honesty, two-eyed seeing builds wisdom through dialogue and the respectful coexistence of differing worldviews. In this way, they can be seen not as oppositional but as complementary, each calling us to greater awareness, responsibility and care in how we live and relate to others.

If we are to move forward together as nations, not as subjects, we must indeed be clear-eyed. We must see the past for what it was, the present for what it is and the future for what it can be. This will require courage from the Crown and all levels of government to go beyond acknowledgement and toward justice.

The Speech from the Throne is a moment to set a course and state the government's priorities. Let it not be another missed opportunity. Let it be the beginning of a new chapter, one that finally honours treaties, respects Indigenous jurisdiction and embraces a truly shared future built not on the foundations of an empire but the principles of partnership, peace and Indigenous resurgence.

Honourable senators, reconciliation is not built on good intentions alone. It is built through actions that restore balance, honour treaties, return lands and uphold Indigenous jurisdiction. It is built through the recognition that First Nations are not stakeholders — we are rights holders and nations. The Crown, through the Senate, has a responsibility to uphold this truth.

The future we envision — a shared one — is not a future in which we are assimilated or managed, but one in which we stand as equals, Indigenous nations and the Canadian state walking side by side, each with our own laws, cultures and responsibilities.

It is not enough to be seen. It is not even enough to be heard these days. The presence of our voices must result in concrete actions. We must ensure that the substance of reconciliation matches the ceremony, that words lead to action and acknowledgements are followed by accountability. Let this not be another chapter of words without change. Let us begin a new era, one grounded in respect, responsibility and the shared understanding that justice for First Nations is justice for all.

As Parliament sets its priorities for the coming session, let us be clear-eyed and practise two-eyed seeing in advancing justice, equity and self-determination for Indigenous peoples. Whether it be through policies on housing, clean water, education or true implementation of UNDRIP, we have work to do. Let us rise to meet that work with courage and humility. Let us never forget the image of Indigenous leaders, proud in their traditions, standing where we have always belonged — at the centre of power, culture and possibility in this country.

(On motion of Senator LaBoucane-Benson, debate adjourned.)

• (1520)

## THE SENATE

### MOTION TO AFFECT SENATE AND COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS FOR REMAINDER OF CURRENT SESSION—DEBATE

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate)**, pursuant to notice of June 3, 2025, moved:

That, notwithstanding any provision of the Rules, previous order or usual practice, for the remainder of the current session:

1. with effect from the time the Senate adopts a report of the Committee of Selection concerning the membership of committees or the adoption of this order, whichever comes later, when the Senate sits on a Wednesday, it adjourns at 4 p.m., as if that were the ordinary time of adjournment provided for in the Rules, unless it has been suspended for the purpose of taking a deferred vote or has earlier adjourned; provided that if a vote is deferred to a Wednesday, or to later that same day on a Wednesday, it takes place at 4:15 p.m., with the Speaker interrupting the proceedings immediately prior to any adjournment, but no later than 4 p.m., to suspend the sitting until 4:15 p.m. for the taking of the deferred vote, with the bells to start ringing at 4 p.m.;
2. when the Senate sits on a Thursday, it sit at 1:30 p.m.;
3. the Senate invite any minister of the Crown who is not a member of the Senate to attend the Senate, at least once every second week that the Senate sits, during Question Period at a time and on a date to be determined by the Government Representative in the Senate, after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition and the leaders and facilitators of all recognized parties and recognized parliamentary groups, and take part in proceedings by responding to questions relating to their ministerial responsibilities, subject to the rules and orders then in force, subject to the following conditions:
  - (a) neither senators when asking questions, nor the minister when answering, needs stand;
  - (b) the Government Representative in the Senate, in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, and the leaders and facilitators of all recognized parties and recognized parliamentary groups, determine the minister to appear during such Question Period;
  - (c) at the beginning of Orders of the Day, the Government Representative in the Senate or the Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate inform the Senate, as soon as possible in advance, but no later than the sitting day that would precede the day on



- which the minister would appear, of the time and date for Question Period with a minister, and the designated minister;
- (d) if a standing vote would conflict with the time for Question Period with a minister pursuant to this order, the vote be postponed until immediately after the conclusion of Question Period;
  - (e) if the bells are ringing for a standing vote at the time for Question Period with a minister pursuant to the terms of this order, they are interrupted for Question Period at that time, and resume thereafter for the balance of any time remaining;
  - (f) senators are limited to one minute for any main question, ministers have up to one minute and thirty seconds to respond to a main question, senators have up to 45 seconds to ask one supplementary question, and ministers have up to 45 seconds to respond to this supplementary question; and
  - (g) the Question Period last a maximum of 64 minutes;
4. during any other Question Period, main questions and responses are limited to one minute each, followed by a maximum of one supplementary question per main question, with these supplementary questions and responses being limited to a maximum of 30 seconds each;
  5. the Committee of Selection is a standing committee;
  6. the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs is composed of 12 senators, in addition to the ex officio members, provided that if members have been named to the committee before the adoption of this order, the additional members be recommended by the Committee of Selection;
  7. without affecting any authority separately granted to a committee to meet while the Senate is sitting:
    - (a) committees scheduled to meet on a Tuesday be authorized to do so as of 6:30 p.m., even if the Senate is then sitting, provided that the Senate has completed Government Business for the sitting; and
    - (b) other committees that are meeting on government business be authorized to meet on Tuesdays as of 6:30 p.m. or the end of Government Business, whichever comes later, provided that a majority of the whips and liaisons have given their approval and subject to capacity and the availability of necessary resources; and
    - (c) for greater certainty, the authority granted to leaders and facilitators, or their designates, under section 3 of Chapter 5:03 of the *Senate Administrative Rules* be, subject to capacity and the availability of services, unaffected by the provisions of this order;
  8. joint committees be authorized, as far as the Senate is concerned, to hold hybrid meetings or meetings entirely by videoconference, with the following provisions applying in relation to any such meeting:
    - (a) all members participating count towards quorum;
    - (b) such meetings be considered to be occurring in the parliamentary precinct, irrespective of where participants may be located, subject to subpoint (d)(i);
    - (c) the committee is directed to approach in camera meetings with the utmost caution and all necessary precautions, taking account of the risks to the confidentiality of in camera proceedings inherent in such technologies; and
    - (d) subject to variations that may be required by the circumstances, to participate in a meeting of the committee by videoconference senators must:
      - (i) participate from a designated office or designated residence within Canada;
      - (ii) use a device and a headset with integrated microphone provided by the Senate and authorized for videoconferences with interpretation;
      - (iii) be the only people visible during the videoconference;
      - (iv) have their video on and broadcasting their image at all times, unless the meeting is suspended; and
      - (v) leave the videoconference if they leave their seat, unless the meeting is suspended;
  9. any Senate committee be authorized to appoint senators who are not members of the committee to its subcommittees, other than its Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, provided that, for greater certainty, no member of the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight may be appointed to a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration under the terms of this order, and vice versa; and
  10. the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources be authorized to appoint the Legislative Deputy of the Government as a non-voting member to its Subcommittee on Agenda

and Procedure, if it has such a subcommittee, without, for greater certainty, the limitation in point 9 applying;

That the Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament:

1. be authorized to examine and report on the inclusion of provisions relating to Question Period with a minister into the *Rules of the Senate*, including recommendations for amendments; and
2. submit its final report no later than December 18, 2025; and

That a message be sent to the House of Commons in relation to point 8 of the first paragraph of this order, to acquaint that house accordingly.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to government Motion No. 5, which implements a number of pragmatic adjustments to the way this chamber operates and shall operate, were this motion to pass, for the remainder of the current session.

This motion is a comprehensive package that introduces and refines procedural practices, many of which the chamber has followed in recent years, and implements an agreement reached by the collective Senate leadership including myself, Senator Housakos, Senator Saint-Germain, Senator Tannas and Senator Francis.

I'm very pleased to say that throughout this entire process, including in its conception, its drafting and ultimately in its presentation here in this chamber, all of my leadership colleagues were involved and provided their input. It is in this spirit that we have this motion before us. It is in that same spirit I hope we may have it adopted today.

I wish to turn now to the substance of the motion and outline for the benefit of you, my colleagues — including the newer senators — the elements contained in government Motion No. 5.

The first two provisions would affect the Senate's sitting schedule. This includes returning to the normal 4 p.m. adjournment time for Wednesday sittings, including for any deferred votes scheduled that day to occur at 4:15 p.m. However, these elements will only take effect once the Senate has adopted a report from the Committee of Selection concerning the composition of committees. Once implemented, the 4 p.m. adjournment will accommodate committees scheduled to meet on Wednesday evenings.

In addition, the Senate would start sitting at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday sittings, instead of 2 p.m. This is in keeping with the practice that was followed during the Forty-second Parliament and it is designed to maximize our time in the chamber on Thursdays.

Second, the process for ministers' Question Period will be re-established. This has been an important innovation in previous Parliaments. It has enabled senators to pose questions to ministers directly on their portfolios with regard to their

responsibilities. It would follow the model previously used, while addressing a conflict that arose with standing votes or the ringing of bells during the scheduled time for ministers' Question Period to ensure that it can proceed as planned.

In addition, the Standing Senate Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament will be authorized to examine the model for ministers' Question Period, and make recommendations to the Senate on potential amendments to incorporate this practice within our Rules.

Hitherto, colleagues — those who have more recently arrived — we have only accomplished ministers' Question Period through sessional orders of the type that I'm proposing today.

These tweaks to the procedures for ministers' Question Period were in direct response to concerns raised by some of my Senate leadership colleagues. It will enable the committee to determine how the process could work going forward while maintaining a system I know many senators have benefited from over the years.

Third, for regular Question Period, the motion would re-establish time limits from the previous Parliament with main questions and responses limited to one minute each, followed by a maximum of one supplementary question per main question with the supplementary questions and answers limited to 30 seconds each. This is to ensure that the 30-minute period is used efficiently while maximizing the number of questioners who can participate.

Fourth, as we have done in the past number of years, the motion would deem the Committee of Selection as a standing committee under our Rules, and enable the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs to have 12 members instead of 9.

Fifth, committees that are otherwise regularly scheduled to meet on Tuesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. would have permission to meet while the Senate is sitting. However, these provisions would only apply if we have completed government business for that sitting day. The same would apply to other committees using a Tuesday slot to study government business, subject to the approval of whips and liaisons.

Otherwise, if the chamber is still considering government business at the time those committees are scheduled to meet, they would have to seek permission from the chamber as part of our normal practice.

In addition, the motion would permit standing joint committees to meet in a hybrid format. This is to ensure consistency with the permanent hybrid model that exists in the House of Commons as part of their Standing Orders, though not ours in this place.

Therefore, this will enable senators who will sit on those joint committees to participate virtually with their colleagues from the House, ensuring and exercising the same privileges enjoyed by our colleagues in the House.

The motion would also permit any Senate committee to appoint senators who are not members of that committee to its subcommittees, excluding steering committees, otherwise known as the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure.

In addition, because of the unique and distinct mandate within our Rules, no member of Audit and Oversight can serve on the subcommittees of Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration, and vice versa, to avoid any conflict of interest.

Finally, this motion would empower the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources to include the Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative as a non-voting member of its steering committee. I understand this is an issue of some concern to some colleagues in the Canadian Senators Group. I wish to explain the rationale for this.

Put simply, this provision creates a procedural mechanism allowing the committee to appoint the Legislative Deputy — Senator LaBoucane-Benson — as a non-voting member of steering. To be clear, the current motion does not obligate the committee to do so; it simply allows for it should the committee so choose.

The reason for including this non-voting position in this motion is because to do so would deviate from our Rules and, therefore, it requires an order of the Senate to make this option a possibility should the committee choose to exercise it.

Ultimately, this is a request that we in the Government Representative Office made — and I made — to leaders. It was discussed with all leaders and facilitators. It was endorsed by all leaders and facilitators.

Colleagues, as the Prime Minister has stated in both his mandate letter and in the recent Speech from the Throne, Canada's ability to transition to an energy superpower in both clean and conventional energy, as well as expediting nation-building infrastructure, is a critical policy focus of this government.

It is because of the importance and emphasis that the government has placed on resource development, infrastructure and the environment during the election campaign that we have asked the leadership in the Senate to support allowing the Government Representative Office to have a seat at the table.

As an Albertan, an Indigenous senator and a representative of the government, we are confident that Senator LaBoucane-Benson's perspective and insight would be valuable to the committee's decision-making process, its work plans and direction.

• (1530)

After all, as the government is spearheading federal-provincial interactions and Crown-Indigenous consultations as we speak, it simply makes sense for the steering committee to have access to the perspectives and feedback of one of the government's representatives. Including the government's voice on issues that are at the core of the democratic mandate that Canadians have

bestowed upon it is legitimate, desirable and constructive. After all, an independent Senate is not a Senate in exile from other democratic institutions.

Therefore, colleagues, I hope we can adopt Government Motion No. 5 as it is presented to you today. Thank you for your very kind attention.

**Hon. Jim Quinn:** Will the senator take three questions?

**Senator Gold:** Of course.

**Senator Quinn:** Thank you, Senator Gold. When I read the sessional order, I was taken aback to see that the Government Representative Office, or GRO, wants a representative from that office on the steering committee for Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources. Why does the GRO need to be on this committee and not some other standing committee?

The Prime Minister has also emphasized in the mandate the importance of ports, transportation corridors, finding new trading partners, using transportation modes, so why not that committee? Why this committee?

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for your question. In the old days, before the changes introduced by the previous prime minister, the committees and the Senate were dominated by the government and opposition, and government always had, therefore, chairs and deputy chairs of committees and, hence, representation on steering committees.

In the evolution of the Senate to a less partisan, more independent Senate, and indeed one in particular that we are working in, the government has not had a position on any steering committees of any committees, for better or for worse. But it is because of the unique position of energy development and its relationship to the environment and to nation-building projects, as well as the special and ongoing relationships between the government and its partners in the provinces, territories and Indigenous communities, and the mandate given to this government, having run on this as its central policy focus, that we thought we wanted to at least give this particular committee — which will be seized, no doubt, with some, if not many, pieces of legislation to implement the government's policy — the opportunity to hear from and benefit from the perspectives of a government representative, who is deeply committed to and connected to the nation-building exercises that we're engaged in.

**Senator Quinn:** Thank you, Senator Gold.

One could make the same argument for the current times we're living in with tariffs and transportation corridors and transportation in general, trading policies under siege. But in any case, is this a one-off, or is it a start of a new practice of government having direct participation, voting or not, to have influence over steering committee discussions and decisions, to report back to the full committee, where GRO and other leaders have ex officio status? Couldn't those same concerns or advice or guidance be given in the presence of the full committee rather than influencing the independence of the steering committee?

**Senator Gold:** I don't want to make light of your question, although the government is being modest in its ask here. We are simply asking to authorize a committee in its wisdom to accede to our request; we're not asking for more than that.

To be sure, both the Leader of the Opposition and the Government Representative or our deputies have ex officio status at committees, and all senators can attend any committees we want, although ex officio for us gives us a right to vote. But that's different from providing input to the committee at the earliest stages as it develops its work plan.

The experienced senators and those of you who have sat — and many of you have — on steering committees know what an important responsibility it is to ensure the study of bills is done in a fulsome, balanced, effective and efficient way. If this motion passes and this committee chooses to act upon the authority that this motion gives it — again, a motion discussed and supported by all the leadership in this group, including your own — then I have every confidence that the committee will benefit from the early input from the representative of the government, who is and will be in possession of information relating to government-provincial-territorial discussions and the like, and will benefit the work of the committee as it conceives of its work.

**Senator Quinn:** Senator Gold, thank you for that answer, and I'll come back to the central principle of the independence that is embraced by all of us in this chamber and the importance of the steering committee to have the ability to have those independent discussions without undue influence from government representatives in the steering committee.

We haven't even struck the committees yet. It sounds like we may not have the committees struck before the fall. Why would we not allow the committees to be struck and have this very question discussed amongst the members of the committees so they have some level of understanding and comfort that this, in fact, would happen at steering committees? Why now? We're going to have a new Government Representative in the Senate by the end of the month. Why not deal with this when the committees are actually struck?

**Senator Gold:** I'm trying to be brief in my answer. This was a matter that was brought to the attention of the leadership table. It was discussed with the leaders. Leadership, their deputies and their chiefs of staff collaborated in the drafting, and suggestions were made, and adjustments were made. This point was not raised at any time. It is a reasonable request of the government to authorize a committee at this stage with a comprehensive motion to govern our procedures so that at such time as the committee is struck, it has the authority, notwithstanding the Rules, to accede to this request.

I've provided as best as I can the rationale for the request, the procedure which gave rise to the consensus amongst leaders and how this motion was brought forward as a government motion. Although it's in the form of a government motion, it is the product of the collaboration and consensus reached by the leaders and their staff over a series of meetings, and so I really cannot add anything more. I ask for the support of this chamber for the motion as presented.

**Hon. Denise Batters:** Senator Gold, a couple of things further on this point: First of all, I noticed that — and as you alluded to in your comments earlier — if the Liberal government had decided to have a government caucus, then, of course, the government would have at least one member at each steering committee meeting or on each steering committee that exists for Senate committees, but here, you don't have that. You don't have an actual government caucus per se. What you're asking for here is to have your government deputy leader named a "non-voting member" to the steering committee of that particular committee.

I'm wondering what the reason for that particular committee is. Some of the issues that you were discussing earlier for which you would like to see Senator LaBoucane-Benson be a steering committee member seemed to very much relate, potentially, to the Indigenous Peoples Committee, yet that's not the committee you're asking for here. It's the Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. So it makes me wonder what particular legislation is coming from the government to that committee.

Also, I'm wondering what the purpose of having the government deputy leader as a non-voting member is. Is that to send a signal that the government wants certain things to happen, so to send a signal to the Liberal-government-appointed senators who may also sit on that steering committee — to have that signal sent very directly and in an in camera way, not an open committee?

**Senator Gold:** Thank you. The answer to most of your questions is no. That is not at all the intent.

• (1540)

Although no legislation has yet been tabled in the other place, we fully expect, by virtue of the statements made by the Prime Minister and from the discussions with his ministers, that we will be getting a bill soon. That legislation will deal with projects of national interest, of which many, directly or indirectly, are focused on energy. In anticipation of that and not yet knowing specific details of the bill, we have made this request at this time.

When the bill is tabled, leadership, as is the practice, will also then discuss together what process we would recommend for the study of the bill. We have not had those discussions yet because I, as the Government Representative, have not been in a position to share the details of that bill. I do not know them yet. That's the next step.

This was in anticipation of the possibility that a bill dealing with major projects touching upon the mandate of this committee would, in fact, end up in that committee. If that's not the case, then the authority will stay dormant. But based on the best information we had and our best guess, this was the issue. It had to do with the particular legislative initiatives that would be brought forward to implement these projects once the legislation came forward to create a framework for that.

I hope that answers your question. Let me be clear: This is not about signalling, subtly or not so subtly, what the government wants. I've always been very transparent — not only with my Senate leadership counterparts, colleagues, but with everybody in this chamber — about the government's expectations.

I have also been very clear as Government Representative in the Senate that my role, in representing the Senate to the government, is to make clear what the Senate leadership and membership aspire to and what they request by way of time and processes to study bills. There's nothing different here except the specific and unique moment that we're in and, therefore, this particular request.

**Senator Batters:** Thank you. Another area where I have a couple of questions is with respect to ministers' Question Period. On that, I assume the wording of this may be the same as previously existed, but I'd like a little explanation about it. It details how it will be determined which minister comes to ministers' Question Period. It says:

... the Government Representative in the Senate, in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, and the leaders and facilitators of all recognized parties and recognized parliamentary groups, determine the minister to appear during such Question Period. ...

First, what does "... in consultation with ..." mean? What is the consultation? Is it merely being told which minister is coming, or is it the opposition — or maybe other groups — potentially providing lists of ministers they would like to see? How does that actually happen?

I'm also wondering about where it says the government will "... inform the Senate as soon as possible in advance ..." but then "... but no later than the sitting day that would precede the day on which the minister would appear ..."

Potentially, we're in a situation — which happened quite a few times during the previous parliament — where we're told only the day before what minister will come. It seemed there were times when the minister chosen by the government to appear was one who really did not address controversial topics being dealt with at that particular time. Certainly, as an opposition, that's what we don't want to see happen — ministers in that sort of situation being dealt with in that fashion.

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for your question. It gives me an opportunity to explain for those who may not know — certainly, new senators — the past practice. This carries forward that same practice.

You asked about consultation. At the beginning of a session, this office asks the leadership of every caucus and parliamentary group to submit their wish list of ministers whom they would like to see. We do our best to accommodate that. We have done a reasonable job under the circumstances and when we can. It's not always easy to get ministers who are everybody's first choice right away. Scheduling and other ministerial responsibilities sometimes get in the way. That can result in us not knowing which minister is coming until later than we — or, certainly, you — would like.

But that is real consultation. I can only assume, as I always have, that leaders share this with their colleagues so that the names they bring forward to us reflect what those who are not in the leadership teams of the different groups would like to see.

With regard to all of this, you're quite right, Senator Batters, that it hasn't always worked smoothly. We have sometimes had to wait a rather long time for certain key ministers to be available. As a result, there are clearly ways in which the system could be improved. At the suggestion of some of my leadership colleagues, we have decided it's a good idea to ask the Rules Committee to look at this. The Rules Committee, in studying this, will look at the past practice and see how it can be improved. They can then make a decision on whether they think it is a good idea to propose changes or include them in the Rules. That's a matter of which the Rules Committee will be seized if this motion passes.

**Hon. Andrew Cardozo:** Thank you, Senator Gold, for the motion you put forward. It's always useful to look at motions to make the functioning of our chamber more efficient.

I have a question with regard to paragraph 3, on the invitation of ministers. I find those particular Question Periods very useful. With no disrespect to you, sir, the Question Period with the Government Representative is a difficult one. You're not a member of cabinet and don't have a portfolio, so there are various issues you're not able to address. My sense is that many colleagues find the Question Periods with a minister to be particularly useful.

You suggested that there will be a ministerial Question Period at least every second week. I would suggest there be one every week so that we would know that, for example, every Thursday, there will be a ministerial Question Period. It's not a lot to ask. We only sit 26 weeks. There are 28 cabinet ministers and about 10 secretaries of state. There may be two or three from whom we would want to hear more than once a year. What I'm suggesting is not excluded here because you say, "... at least once every second week ..." Would you consider doing this more often so that we are able to have what I find to be very useful exchanges with ministers?

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for your question. I take no offence at your characterization at all.

The consensus among leadership, if there was a consensus — certainly the majority view — was that once every two weeks is an appropriate time frame. It's a matter that can always be revisited in the future. As it currently stands, there is support among the leadership of all the groups and my office, as well, if I can say so, to continue the practice of every second week, and that's what is in this motion. Thank you for your question.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Senator Cardozo, do you have a supplementary question?

**Senator Cardozo:** I will just repeat the question that I posed: Would you please consider this down the road? That is to you and to the other leaders with whom you meet, including my leader.

**Senator Gold:** Of course. I'm not here for much longer, but I think that this is an issue, if this motion passes, that could properly be discussed or at least put to the Rules Committee for discussion.

• (1550)

**Hon. Mary Jane McCallum:** I disagree with appointing Senator LaBoucane-Benson. It is a conflict of interest. When you are a government representative, you work for the government, but you don't work for First Nations. We are always at odds, and I have spoken to Senator LaBoucane-Benson about this. There's a conflict of interest, and in the committee, there are representatives — are we not good enough? There was one representative on the steering committee — an Indigenous representative — so I don't understand why you now want to put someone into the Energy Committee.

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for your question. I don't agree, with respect, that there's a conflict of interest. We represent the government. We don't work for the government. I have every confidence in my deputy — in both of my deputies — as I do in myself that we discharge our responsibilities and obligations honourably. I respect the difference of opinion that you have expressed transparently, and you can register that opinion, of course, in the vote, but I have to say, respectfully, that I simply do not see this request at all in the same way.

**Senator McCallum:** I agree with the majority of what you have written in the motion, except for that one specific part, so I am going to say “no” to this motion.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Do you have a question, Senator McCallum?

**Senator McCallum:** No. I'm saying “no” to the motion.

**Hon. Pamela Wallin:** I wanted to respond to the senator, if I could, and return to the issue of the request that you are making to have a seat at the steering committee table. I'm sure you have discussed this with leadership, but we all have our views in here, so we're just trying to gain some clarity. It is odd, as others have mentioned, that this request is specific to one committee. You have explained that you think a key piece of legislation may be sent there, but there will be lots of key pieces of legislation that come forward.

Given that it was the government's decision to restructure the Senate and take itself out of the role of the government and opposition having a place on committees and a seat at the table, then it seems a little odd to come back and request that for one committee alone. It troubles me a little bit about the precedent because if you, for some reason, want to brief any committee or any steering committee about legislation that is coming, you have mechanisms to do that, and you also have the right to simply ask any committee chair and deputy chair if you could come and present to them. I think that's what people are a little puzzled by, as this is a very specific request about a very specific committee.

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for your question, senator. I tried to explain it as best as I could in my text but also in my response to questions regarding the reason we raised this specific committee at this specific time in this specific period of still uncertainty as to what the content of the legislation dealing with national projects will be, but we're taking our cue from what was discussed during the election campaign, the Speech from the Throne and other remarks from the premiers and the Prime Minister most recently.

I'm unhappy to hear that people are troubled by it. This is not a precedent. This is a provision in a standing order that would authorize the committee — though not require it — to provide a seat, as I've already described. Eight and a half or nine years ago — or even some years before that — even before the government decided to change its relationship with senators, this place changed, and it continues to change and continues to evolve. This is not anything other than a request at this moment in time because of the particular circumstances of this time — notwithstanding that our Rules always require voting or treat steering committee members as voting members — in order to provide this opportunity, as I said, for a government representative to provide direct input and assistance to the steering committee, if they so wish, if and when this particular committee deals with a project of national importance.

**Hon. Marilou McPhedran:** Senator Gold, this is a short question, but I think it's a highly relevant question. At any point during these discussions, was it contemplated to make the work environment — through this proposal — be more inclusive and less discriminatory and less exclusionary to non-affiliated senators?

**Senator Gold:** Thank you for your question, and the short answer to your very legitimate question is that the focus of this particular sessional order was exclusively on the matters that you see contained herein. The question of what responsibilities are assumed by leadership and the groups, including the government — and we all have responsibilities to assume — to ensure that all senators have access to information, decisions and support is an ongoing conversation that we have. But this particular motion was focused very much on those issues that were brought to the table in order to facilitate these aspects of the work.

**Hon. David M. Wells:** One of the fundamental practices and principles of our system is the separation of powers — the judicial, the executive and the legislative branches. This seems to fly in the face of that by specifically inserting someone from the executive branch, the Government Representative — a government representative, as that's the name of your group — into a legislative body, or a committee. I see the confusion on your face, but tell me where I'm wrong on this.

**Senator Gold:** There is a very different connection between the executive that you described and the legislative branch in the parliamentary system than, for example, in a republican system. But let's be clear: The Senate has always had and recognized a special place and role for the government. The *Rules of the Senate* and the practices of the Senate continue that, as I described earlier, by virtue of giving me, as the Government Representative, an ex officio role, which is a voting role on each and any committee. As has been validated by former Speaker Furey's ruling, it also has the authority to invoke and move time allocation. There is nothing inconsistent with the way in which the Senate has evolved — even through this period of change that we've been living through for the last almost 10 years — by making a request to have a non-voting member of the Government Representative Office, and we are senators who represent the government. We are not the government. And there is a difference — a fundamental difference, in my opinion — but you may think differently. I don't see anything inconsistent with either the Senate traditions or, indeed, the Westminster traditions.

in asking the Senate to give a committee, which is otherwise the master of its own fate, the ability to invite and to appoint a representative of the Government Representative Office under the circumstances I've described.

• (1600)

**Senator D. M. Wells:** Just so there's clarity on this, who would decide whether the Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative would be permitted into the steering meeting? Would that be a steering decision? Are we now stamping this in stone? Or would it be a decision of the committee? Who decides whether this option is undertaken?

**Senator Gold:** I don't have the motion in front of me, but it simply authorizes the committee, whatever processes the committee itself decides.

To the newer senators here, every committee has a so-called steering committee, and they can delegate certain responsibilities to the steering committee. Depending on how this committee decides to organize itself, it will decide itself whether to avail themselves of the authority that this proposal would give. It would be up to the committee to decide.

**Senator Quinn:** Honourable senators, I'll start by saying that I fully appreciate the role of the leaders and of the Government Representative in the Senate, and I know that they undertake their work very seriously.

But I also know that each of us who were appointed by the previous government had our discussion with the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister told me and others whom I talked to — they had the same message delivered to them — that we look to you to work within the Senate and to see how the policies of government are progressing, and if you have a concern, you should raise those concerns. If you disagree with them, you should vote against them, but you should be independent. That's what the Prime Minister whom I spoke with was advocating, the independence of the Senate.

I know that we have leaders here who do their work, and the results of their discussions come back to our groups. Sometimes they consult in advance, and sometimes they come back and say, "This is what the discussion was, and here's where we're going." That doesn't take away from each of us as individual senators. We're the same as our leaders in that we're appointed senators. We have the right, if we have a concern, to raise it in the chamber so that our colleagues can take it under consideration. That's what I'm trying to do here.

The motion has 10 elements and subelements, and I'm raising concerns with one element because of the independence of the Senate that I think is being compromised to a degree.

At the federal level, there are three distinct branches of government that act as checks and balances: the judicial, the legislative and the executive. The comments forthcoming deal with the legislative and the executive. The important distinction between those two branches is that the Prime Minister and cabinet form the executive, which does not include other elected MPs.

In other places, members of the executive can be called before committees, but they are not part of the steering committee process of their committees. I believe this is to prevent undue influence of the executive over the work of the committee.

In the Senate, the GRO is the representative of the government in the chamber; ergo, as Senator Wells has indicated, they are representatives of the executive branch here in the Senate. The GRO's primary function is to advance the government's agenda.

The sessional order is proposing that the Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative would become a non-voting member of the Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources steering committee. Those of us who are on steering committees know that there are discussions that take place that influence recommendations that come back to the full committee. This would provide the GRO the opportunity to unduly influence those discussions or decisions that would come back to committee.

While I take no issue with the government having ex officio status on a Senate committee, I would argue that given Senator Gold's or his representative's right to be an ex officio member at the full committee, which he or one of his representatives exercises, that presence does, in fact, have an influence on processes such as clause-by-clause consideration of bills. This, of course, is their role. Quite frankly, it was something that I experienced first-hand as a new senator during the debates and committee work on Bill C-11 and Bill C-18, both of which I voted for at the end of the day, principally because of the debate and the things I learned through the views of other people in this chamber.

I think that this institution needs to practise the independence that has been bestowed upon us and that we don't risk any factor that could compromise that independence. Therefore, I believe that the GRO should not have the right to be on the steering committee of Energy or any other committee, because it does beg the question: If it's this committee now, what's to prevent it from another committee later?

After sober second thought, I believe this proposal is unnecessary in what is otherwise a very good motion. It is concerning due to its insertion of the executive branch into the very jewel that we, as senators, give most importance — the independent functioning of our Senate committees. Therefore, I respectfully move a motion to make an amendment.

[Translation]

MOTION IN AMENDMENT NEGATIVED

**Hon. Jim Quinn:** Therefore, honourable senators, in amendment, I move:

That the motion be not now adopted, but that it be amended by deleting point 10, dealing with the membership of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure of the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources.

[English]

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, I don't like to find myself in a situation where I feel empathy for the government leader, but here I am. This new Parliament is going from bad to worse.

For starters, I want to say for the record that I thought the agreement made among leaders was a compromise that was consistent with compromises that have been made in previous parliaments, very consistent on a wide range of issues. Nothing in here is new. All of a sudden, we have outrage because the government made what I considered a reasonable request.

We also have to understand that what is going on here is at the core of what I've been arguing about for a decade now in regard to this experiment. Honourable colleagues, when you play a hockey game, and you put 12 players on the ice simultaneously, and they're wearing 12 different coloured jerseys, it's pretty hard to play a hockey game. I think we all agree. Hockey in this country is played between two teams wearing usually red, blue or white jerseys, and usually the blue jerseys from Toronto are losing — or orange, yes, indeed. That is normally how we play our national sport.

I also want to remind colleagues that our Westminster system of Parliament, which includes this chamber because this chamber — I've said a thousand times — is modelled after the Westminster House of Commons. If you look at section 18 of the Constitution, we have the same rights, privileges, obligations and functionality as the House of Commons in Westminster on the other side and on this side.

As the government leader appropriately pointed out, in our system, there is no separation between the executive branch and Parliament. The executive branch, the Crown, has a fundamental place in the House of Commons on the other side and a fundamental place even on this side, despite the experiment of the previous prime minister. That's why the government leader, modelled as the Government Representative, and the GRO, have certain privileges in this institution that no one can take away, especially an appointed chamber, just like the opposition has a fundamental role to play.

I think, again, despite the fact that we have degrees of independence, the government and the opposition are in place in this parliamentary system based on a mandate from the electorate, the people in this country. Right now, when the government wants to have eyes and ears on the steering committee of an important committee — and I get the sense of why they want it. There's important legislation coming down the pipeline, if you excuse the phrase, because we clearly understood the people of Canada in the last election — the 45% plus who voted for the governing party and the 41% who voted for the opposition party — that's 87% of Canadians who clearly wanted a particular agenda advanced.

• (1610)

And the government is showing up to the upper chamber and the Parliament of Canada and they're saying, "We've allowed for a tremendous amount of flexibility, but we'd like to have some non-voting eyes and ears on a steering committee on Energy and

Natural Resources, which, of course, we hope will be fundamental going forward when it comes to the agenda of the government and that we can all contribute to making sure that it gets steered towards the right direction."

I think that the proposition of the government was interpreted in that fashion by all leaders, including your own, Senator Quinn. I don't think we looked that there was any nefarious agenda on the part of the government to circumvent this institution and try to belittle independent senators in any way, shape or form other than advance the agenda millions and millions of Canadians have given both political parties. And, I assume, once that agenda is tabled — even in the other house — you will find, I suspect, a great degree of unanimity.

So, at some particular juncture, we have to stop with this idea that somehow an independent group of senators will circumvent the will of this chamber and the role in this chamber of the government.

It's ridiculous — for the longest time we've heard this argument when it comes to the role of the opposition, but now it's even creeping in in terms of the role of the government.

Now, the previous Prime Minister decided to try something with goodwill, again, I suspect, and with good intentions, and they gave a lot of leeway and flexibility. But there comes a point in time when that leeway and flexibility become obstructionist to putting forward legislation.

I make an appeal to all members in this chamber that we should accept that we are not a republican parliamentary system. We're not the United States of America where there is a separation of the executive and the legislative branch, and I don't want to be like the United States of America. It was also crystal clear that the vast majority of Canadians don't want anything of the American parliamentary system.

Our parliamentary system is at the core of our identity, of our democracy. It's what we're all about. It's probably the greatest contribution that came from one of the two founding people, along with our Indigenous people, in this country. I think we should cherish it, we should protect it. I think the government has a significant role to play and it's incumbent on all of us to let them play that role.

Now let me just finish on this. The way it's always worked in this institution — and in the House of Commons on the other side and the other House of Commons, which we basically work off those principles — is that the government and the opposition not only have a role, they dominate the majority of chairs on committees in the Westminster system of government. The opposition has certain assigned chairs of particular committees in the Westminster system of government. Deputy chairs are assigned to the government and deputy chairs to the opposition, and then there's room for independent parliamentarians. That's how the system was born and geared to function.

Now, again, Senator Gold and myself — and I know the government and the opposition — want to continue to show deference and find a way to respect the fundamental principles of our system. Independence plays a significant role, but everybody has to understand their role and their place.



Thank you, colleagues.

[Translation]

**Hon. Raymonde Saint-Germain:** I would like to join with the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate in pointing out that this was a unanimous decision made jointly by all leaders to ensure the proper functioning of the Senate, considering the very particular situation currently facing the country, as well as the unique nature of the issues and questions that will be specifically discussed at the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources.

We accepted this request because it was presented to us as exceptional and well justified. It should be noted that, in the interests of independence, none of the three independent groups here represent the government on a steering committee. Those of us who sit on a steering committee cannot address the government or submit reports to it, because those committee meetings are held in camera.

Under the current circumstances, with these issues affecting the government and the entire country, the government leader's request is extremely reasonable and justified. Let's not forget that the government does not have a seat on the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources. For that reason, and to protect the independence of the different groups, I'm very comfortable continuing to support the government's exceptional and reasonable request. I believe that if we continue to block attempts to give the government its rightful place when appropriate, we will jeopardize the very essence of the independence that got us here — those of us appointed after 2016, anyway.

Thank you.

[English]

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** I'll be very brief. And I should have mentioned this in my response to questions, colleague, and I apologize.

For all colleagues, as the Rules now stand, it would be open to the Committee of Energy to invite Senator LaBoucane-Benson on steering — any committee can do that. But the rules would, therefore, give that selection member a vote.

And I thank you for your support, Senator Housakos and Senator Saint-Germain, and I hope Senator Tannas, but it was because the leadership collectively understood the request but did not want to give a vote to the deputy, that it found its way into this motion, otherwise it would not have been possible to appoint someone as a non-voting member of steering.

And it was, as Senator Housakos said, a fruit of compromise in order to meet this particular moment. Thank you.

**Hon. Scott Tannas:** I want to thank Senator Quinn for putting an amendment forward. I won't be supporting it. I will be voting against the amendment.

As other leaders have said, we do our best to craft a document and come to a consensus on what we think the majority of people will support. That doesn't mean that everybody will support it.

In the old days, the ones that Senator Housakos referred to, we weren't told about these kinds of deals, they were just passed. No document came in. There was an agreement that was made. We weren't briefed. There were questions from Conservatives that didn't appear they were briefed. Maybe that still happens. I don't know.

The point is this, we will have to take a little more time with leaders' deals from time to time in order to secure the majority will of the Senate. This isn't pearl-clutching time. This is exactly what is supposed to happen.

When I go to my group after a leaders' meeting, I am fully transparent. We read that document, twice. I reported on it. I heard some grumbling. When we got the document in front of them yesterday, there were people who felt strongly about this.

I don't have the ability or the inclination to say, "Well, that's too bad. We know the majority is going to pass this, so shut up." Say to them, "Come to the chamber. Air your concerns." We all have votes and independent minds. We'll listen. We'll vote today and we'll move on.

That, to me, is not in any way an aberration of the Westminster system, the American system or any other system of democracy. It puts the power where it's supposed to be: in the hands of each one of us. Thank you.

**Senator Housakos:** Senator Tannas, we have been serving in this place now for a very long time. Once upon a time, we were in the government caucus together. And you keep talking about this period of time when all these deals were being made in secret and it wasn't transparent. I'd like to know where those deals were made and what period you're talking about, because when we served together on the Energy Committee, for example, it was chaired, if I remember, by a Conservative senator in your caucus and mine. The deputy chair was a member of the official opposition. The steering member, when we had a majority in this chamber, was coming from the government.

• (1620)

Now, I don't know; when you have a steering committee made up of government and opposition and they're setting the agenda at the committee — and the committees were split at that particular point in time between government and opposition; we had a few independents as well, not many, as many as we have today, but we had a good number whom we were taking care of — where is the lack of transparency? Where were the deals being made that you and I were not aware of?

**Senator Tannas:** My leadership, colleagues, can testify to the stories we listen to frequently, not just at our leaders' meetings but here, about Senate leadership, including your predecessor, being able to discuss back and forth, and things got done; they just got done in a spirit of friendship between a government leader and an opposition leader.

We know that was the case. You know that was the case. I know that was the case. The point is this: We aren't in those days anymore, and we won't be in them, in all likelihood, for a few decades or at least a decade. They may come back, but right now we are where we are, and we have a significant majority of independent people.

You're right, by the way. It is kind of odd that we have committees where everyone is represented on the steering committee except for the government. Every group in here is represented. The opposition is represented. The government is not represented.

Now, there are members and lots of people in the different groups that support the government's point of view, and that gets compensated, but it is a different situation that we are in right now. I don't find it particularly troubling.

I think what's being asked for in this case is a little bit odd. Why wouldn't you ask for it in every single committee if that's what you want? But all I'm saying is I don't think there will be very many instances with 105 independent-thinking senators where we're going to be able to do comprehensive deals and not have somebody want to stick up their hand and object to one element of it and contest it and debate it. That's healthy. There is nothing wrong with that. Thank you.

**Senator Housakos:** Senator Tannas, I don't remember those dark days in the same fashion as you do. I remember we had robust and very aggressive discussions whenever there were disagreements in our respective caucuses. Sometimes we had so much disagreement that between the two caucuses there would be a bunch of cabals set up in order to drive the point home.

But the thing that's most important in the process when I compare the glorious 2025 to the dark days of 2012 is we weren't spending hours and hours on the Senate floor discussing operations — hours and hours, colleagues.

With all due respect, I think this is gloriously very inefficient. When it's all said and done, I also haven't seen much difference over the last 10 years. This place continues, when it's all said and done, to support the government agenda because none of us are so naive to think that an unelected chamber appointed by a couple of prime ministers who are no longer in the House of Commons has the right to curtail or delay the direction of a government and their agenda.

Again, the government can very easily tomorrow morning — and we all know it in here; let's be honest — create a government caucus in a snap, and they will be well served and they will have a number of people joining that caucus. Let's not fool ourselves. The only reason we're getting to play this independence routine in this unelected chamber is because the government is acquiescing to it.

All I'm simply saying, for the legitimacy of this institution, is have some deference towards the government that has given you the opportunity to try this out. That's the only thing I'm saying.

**Senator Tannas:** Thank you for that. And I appreciate exactly what you said, and I believe we'll get there.

**Senator Housakos:** You said much of this yourself.

**Senator Tannas:** I have. I believe we'll get exactly where we need to be, having allowed senators to act independently, ask questions, propose changes, and we'll get there. I'm sorry if it takes a little longer.

The one thing you didn't mention about the good days now is the number of amendments that have taken place in this chamber versus the number of amendments that took place prior. There has been independence shown by colleagues here in lots of examples; 20%, roughly, of all government business has been amended. So if this process takes a little longer to get ourselves oriented at the beginning of a session and allow everyone to have their say and propose their ideas, so be it. Thank you.

**An Hon. Senator:** hear, hear.

**Hon. Denise Batters:** First of all, regarding those amendments that Senator Tannas just spoke about, the vast majority of those have emanated from the government but were presented by independent senators to correct some of that.

But my question is actually dealing with your comment talking about the old days. You and I used to be seatmates when we were in the government caucus. When we were in the government caucus, wouldn't you agree that this exact kind of thing, these sessional orders happened then, just as they happen now? Sessional orders are not a brand new invention of this Parliament or the last 10 years. We had sessional orders then, under the Conservative government, just as we have sessional orders of this form now.

**Senator Tannas:** I agree that we did. Back in those days, I don't recall having this kind of debate where senators who don't agree with something in it would dare be brave enough to speak up.

**Hon. Mary Jane McCallum:** Honourable senators, Energy has done fabulous work, and there is diversity in there. Any senator can go into any committee and give their feedback. I'm concerned about why it needs to be in the steering committee. Like I said, I believe it's a conflict of interest, especially because these are primarily First Nations issues.

When we look at the government that's looking at fast-tracking projects now and given that the issues of consultation and free, prior and informed consent are already seen to be in jeopardy and that the chiefs across the country are upset about this, I don't understand why there needs to be a representative of the government on the steering committee. I support Senator Quinn's amendment. Thank you.

**Hon. Pat Duncan:** Honourable senators, if I might borrow Senator Housakos's analogy of ragging the puck, I don't want to prolong the debate. I do want to add a point that I don't believe has been made in that the Assembly of First Nation Chiefs, the federal-provincial-territorial premiers' table — the Prime Minister is the only person at both those tables. He's hearing those concerns.

One of the major issues right now and on debate is the country's agenda to deal with energy and the environment and that particular committee. To me, this is an absolutely reasonable request to have a government representative at the steering committee discussion to ensure that the information that has been heard by the Prime Minister at the first ministers' and First Nation Chiefs' tables is conveyed at the steering level when the agenda is discussed.

I do not support the amendment. I would like to see the question called. Thank you.

• (1630)

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

**Hon. Senators:** Question.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion in amendment will please say "yea."

**Some Hon. Senators:** Yea.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** All those opposed to the motion in amendment will please say "nay."

**Some Hon. Senators:** Nay.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** In my opinion the "nays" have it.

(Motion in amendment of the Honourable Senator Quinn negated, on division.)

#### MOTION TO AFFECT SENATE AND COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS FOR REMAINDER OF CURRENT SESSION ADOPTED

On the Order:

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

That, notwithstanding any provision of the Rules, previous order or usual practice, for the remainder of the current session:

1. with effect from the time the Senate adopts a report of the Committee of Selection concerning the membership of committees or the adoption of this order, whichever comes later, when the Senate sits on a Wednesday, it adjourn at 4 p.m., as if that were the ordinary time of adjournment provided for in the Rules, unless it has been suspended for the purpose of taking a deferred vote or has earlier adjourned; provided that if a vote is deferred to a Wednesday, or to later that same day on a Wednesday, it take place at 4:15 p.m., with the Speaker interrupting the proceedings immediately prior to any adjournment, but no later than 4 p.m., to suspend the sitting until 4:15 p.m. for the taking of the deferred vote, with the bells to start ringing at 4 p.m.;

2. when the Senate sits on a Thursday, it sit at 1:30 p.m.;
3. the Senate invite any minister of the Crown who is not a member of the Senate to attend the Senate, at least once every second week that the Senate sits, during Question Period at a time and on a date to be determined by the Government Representative in the Senate, after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition and the leaders and facilitators of all recognized parties and recognized parliamentary groups, and take part in proceedings by responding to questions relating to their ministerial responsibilities, subject to the rules and orders then in force, subject to the following conditions:
  - (a) neither senators when asking questions, nor the minister when answering, need stand;
  - (b) the Government Representative in the Senate, in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, and the leaders and facilitators of all recognized parties and recognized parliamentary groups, determine the minister to appear during such Question Period;
  - (c) at the beginning of Orders of the Day, the Government Representative in the Senate or the Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate inform the Senate, as soon as possible in advance, but no later than the sitting day that would precede the day on which the minister would appear, of the time and date for Question Period with a minister, and the designated minister;
  - (d) if a standing vote would conflict with the time for Question Period with a minister pursuant to this order, the vote be postponed until immediately after the conclusion of Question Period;
  - (e) if the bells are ringing for a standing vote at the time for Question Period with a minister pursuant to the terms of this order, they be interrupted for Question Period at that time, and resume thereafter for the balance of any time remaining;
  - (f) senators be limited to one minute for any main question, ministers have up to one minute and thirty seconds to respond to a main question, senators have up to 45 seconds to ask one supplementary question, and ministers have up to 45 seconds to respond to this supplementary question; and
  - (g) the Question Period last a maximum of 64 minutes;
4. during any other Question Period, main questions and responses be limited to one minute each, followed by a maximum of one supplementary question per main

- question, with these supplementary questions and responses being limited to a maximum of 30 seconds each;
5. the Committee of Selection be a standing committee;
  6. the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs be composed of 12 senators, in addition to the ex officio members, provided that if members have been named to the committee before the adoption of this order, the additional members be recommended by the Committee of Selection;
  7. without affecting any authority separately granted to a committee to meet while the Senate is sitting:
    - (a) committees scheduled to meet on a Tuesday be authorized to do so as of 6:30 p.m., even if the Senate is then sitting, provided that the Senate has completed Government Business for the sitting; and
    - (b) other committees that are meeting on government business be authorized to meet on Tuesdays as of 6:30 p.m. or the end of Government Business, whichever comes later, provided that a majority of the whips and liaisons have given their approval and subject to capacity and the availability of necessary resources; and
    - (c) for greater certainty, the authority granted to leaders and facilitators, or their designates, under section 3 of Chapter 5:03 of the *Senate Administrative Rules* be, subject to capacity and the availability of services, unaffected by the provisions of this order;
  8. joint committees be authorized, as far as the Senate is concerned, to hold hybrid meetings or meetings entirely by videoconference, with the following provisions applying in relation to any such meeting:
    - (a) all members participating count towards quorum;
    - (b) such meetings be considered to be occurring in the parliamentary precinct, irrespective of where participants may be located, subject to subpoint (d)(i);
    - (c) the committee be directed to approach in camera meetings with the utmost caution and all necessary precautions, taking account of the risks to the confidentiality of in camera proceedings inherent in such technologies; and
    - (d) subject to variations that may be required by the circumstances, to participate in a meeting of the committee by videoconference senators must:
      - (i) participate from a designated office or designated residence within Canada;
      - (ii) use a device and a headset with integrated microphone provided by the Senate and authorized for videoconferences with interpretation;
      - (iii) be the only people visible during the videoconference;
      - (iv) have their video on and broadcasting their image at all times, unless the meeting is suspended; and
      - (v) leave the videoconference if they leave their seat, unless the meeting is suspended;
  9. any Senate committee be authorized to appoint senators who are not members of the committee to its subcommittees, other than its Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, provided that, for greater certainty, no member of the Standing Committee on Audit and Oversight may be appointed to a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration under the terms of this order, and vice versa; and
  10. the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources be authorized to appoint the Legislative Deputy of the Government as a non-voting member to its Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, if it has such a subcommittee, without, for greater certainty, the limitation in point 9 applying;
- That the Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament:
1. be authorized to examine and report on the inclusion of provisions relating to Question Period with a minister into the *Rules of the Senate*, including recommendations for amendments; and
  2. submit its final report no later than December 18, 2025; and
- That a message be sent to the House of Commons in relation to point 8 of the first paragraph of this order, to acquaint that house accordingly.
- Some Hon. Senators:** Question.
- 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:** Is there agreement on the length of the bell?

**Some Hon. Senators:** Now.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Is leave granted?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

Motion agreed to on the following division:

YEAS  
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Adler	LaBoucane-Benson
Al Zaibak	Lewis
Arnold	Loffreda
Arnot	MacAdam
Ataullahjan	MacDonald
Batters	Manning
Black	Martin
Boudreau	Massicotte
Boyer	McNair
Burey	Mégie
Busson	Miville-Dechêne
Cardozo	Mohamed
Clement	Muggli
Cormier	Oudar
Dalphond	Pate
Dasko	Petitclerc
Deacon ( <i>Nova Scotia</i> )	Petten
Deacon ( <i>Ontario</i> )	Poirier
Dean	Prosper
Dhillon	Pupatello
Downe	Quinn
Duncan	Ringuette
Forest	Saint-Germain
Francis	Seidman
Fridhandler	Senior
Gerba	Simons
Gold	Smith
Greenwood	Surette
Hay	Tannas
Hébert	Varone
Henkel	Wells ( <i>Alberta</i> )
Housakos	White

Ince  
Karetak-Lindell

Wilson  
Youance—68

NAYS  
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Anderson  
McCallum

Richards  
Wells (*Newfoundland and  
Labrador*)—5

McPhedran

ABSTENTIONS  
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Moodie  
Verner

Wallin—3

• (1640)

**NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR A GUARANTEED  
LIVABLE BASIC INCOME BILL**

SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

**Hon. Kim Pate** moved second reading of Bill S-206, An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income.

She said: Honourable senators, the latest research reveals that Canada spends upward of \$92 billion per year paying for measures that keep people stuck in poverty instead of investing in approaches that would allow them to rebound. Canada spends billions policing access and monitoring recipients of social assistance schemes that provide too little. We spend billions on emergency health treatment for people who lack housing, health care and food security; the resources to treat preventable conditions; and on jail cells filled with those who are poor, homeless and dealing with mental health and addictions issues. We lose billions in undeveloped economic capacity and on tax revenue from those we have ignored instead of including and empowering.

It is difficult to fathom the full human, social and financial implications of poverty. Poverty is inextricably interconnected with and diminishes every aspect of Canada's economy. The impacts on society, health and humanity are massive. Too many existing financial services and systems are experienced as uncertain, unreliable, exhausting and demoralizing, reinforcing harmful and discriminatory stereotypes that wrongfully label as less capable and less trustworthy the people whom Canada chooses to abandon to poverty, homelessness and related crises.

Speaking today on the traditional, unceded, unsundered and unreturned territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg, I acknowledge that those whom our governments choose to abandon are disproportionately women, Indigenous, Black peoples and others who are racialized as well as persons with disabilities.

This chamber has long known that Canada can and must do better. For more than 50 years, across group and party lines, senators have advanced the idea of cash transfers sufficient to live on and available to anyone living in poverty. Cash transfers were seen as a smart, meaningful and cost-effective way to spend less on poverty and invest more in people in ways that benefit all of us.

In the 1971 report of the Special Senate Committee on Poverty, Senator Croll and his colleagues pressed for immediate action on a form of basic income because they "... felt the poor could not be asked to wait years for the help they so urgently need."

That was more than half a century ago. Since then, children in poverty have grown into adults and now seniors living in poverty. How much longer are we prepared to ask Canadians to wait for food, shelter and treatment? How many more nights, weeks, months, years and generations? How many more lives will be sacrificed?

Guaranteed livable basic income is not a new idea. As I reintroduce Bill S-206, a proposal for a national framework for implementing guaranteed livable income, I want to explore some of the reasons why Canadians of today support this bill. I also want to delineate what we mean by guaranteed livable basic income, debunk some persistent myths and misconceptions and discuss why now — as we face growing threats to Canada's economy and sovereignty from our neighbour to the south — is the right time to move forward with a guaranteed livable basic income.

I want to acknowledge, first, however, Canadians' collective work on this issue and our collective work in this chamber. I thank so many of you who similarly advocate the implementation of a basic income. We especially appreciate members of the Finance Committee for their study of the former incarnation of this legislation, Bill S-233. I recognize the vital incremental steps made at the federal level, driven by tireless advocacy from community groups, since this bill was last introduced.

In particular, in response to a provincial Progressive Conservative government proposal to launch a guaranteed livable basic income, the federal government has initiated a working group on this topic with the P.E.I. government. First Nations leaders on the Island, including Chief Darlene Bernard, Chief of Lennox Island First Nation and Co-chair of the Epekwit Assembly of Councils, have demonstrated incredible leadership on this issue. I want to acknowledge as well the work of past and present P.E.I. Senate colleagues across groups.

At a national level, alongside existing forms of basic income for families with children and older Canadians, the government has introduced the Canada Disability Benefit, though much work remains to ensure this program meets its promises and evolves beyond its current limited form.

Colleagues, many of us are seeing in our home communities the local and grassroots efforts driving support for guaranteed livable basic income. Many of us come from one of the multitude of municipalities across Canada that have passed resolutions in support of basic income. Ottawa is one of the most recent to join the call.

Community and civil society advocates of guaranteed livable basic income range from local health units and health associations to the Canadian Public Health Association; from local unions to the Public Service Alliance of Canada; from local women's shelters to Women's Shelters Canada, the Women's Legal Education & Action Fund, the National Association of Women and the Law; from local food banks to the national "Put Food Banks Out of Business" campaign and the Dieticians of Canada; from local churches to the Anglican Church of Canada, the United Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the late Pope.

This chamber benefited from the leadership of Senator Croll in the 1970s and the Conservative-Liberal dynamic duo of Senators Segal and Eggleton in the 2000s and 2010s. Decades apart, their work resulted in two outstanding, in-depth Senate studies of poverty, each with guaranteed livable basic income as its central recommendation. In 2020, the National Finance Committee chaired by Conservative Senator Mockler, a formidable advocate for those in poverty, added to this history a recommendation for priority government consideration of guaranteed livable basic income. That same year, 50 senators — the majority of the chamber at that time — signed their names to a letter to the Prime Minister with a similar proposal.

Guaranteed livable basic income is a natural fit for this chamber, an intersection of our duties to represent marginalized or so-called minority groups and to take a long-term perspective on Canada's best interests and the well-being of all Canadians. Today, with 1 in 4 Canadians unable to afford essentials, with 85% of Canadians living paycheck to paycheck and knowing the toll that this precariousness takes on Canadian communities and economies, I urge us, honourable colleagues, to ensure this chamber plays its part yet again. We can do so by returning this bill to committee as soon as possible.

In speaking with colleagues in this chamber and Canadians throughout the country, I am struck by the diverse yet interconnected reasons why people are interested in the potential of a guaranteed livable basic income. Most relate to the countless benefits that flow from redressing poverty and economic instability. I have heard from artists and entrepreneurs that a guaranteed livable basic income could give people space to innovate, allowing them to take creative risks without losing everything. For farmers and fishers, it could be a means of rebounding instead of losing one's livelihood between and after difficult seasons. For health care experts, it could mean reducing hospitalizations and, in particular, mental health crises. For environmentalists, guaranteed livable basic income could help people survive extreme weather and empower them to care for

our planet. For national security experts, it could help counter the deprivation and division that can lead to radicalization. For Black and Indigenous communities, guaranteed livable basic income could be a step toward redressing long-standing historic and ongoing economic inequities. For women in abusive relationships, either in their own homes or on the streets, it could provide the means to safety.

• (1650)

My own first steps toward my belief in the need for guaranteed livable basic income are inseparable from the decades I've spent working and walking with so many people — especially Indigenous women — ensnared in poverty and in the criminal legal system, child and social welfare system, as well as the mental health systems.

Today, social assistance programs across Canada are so inadequate and restrictive that it is virtually impossible for those most in need to access safe housing, food, medicine and other essentials. Paradoxically, social assistance programs impede rather than help people to extricate themselves from poverty. They push people into deep and often intergenerational poverty. Restrictions on recipients' ability to work — even volunteer — combined with limited funding for dental and pharmaceutical services, as well as limited access to subsidized housing and child care, keep people reliant by penalizing efforts to get ahead. It is little wonder that desperate efforts to survive such conditions too often result in people being penalized, even criminalized.

Poverty likewise increases the risks of victimization. People who are poor and otherwise marginalized are too often forced onto the streets, forced to leave mental health issues untreated or forced to stay in abusive relationships or other dire situations. For two in five women in Canada, leaving an abusive partner would mean becoming homeless. By staying in situations of abuse, women are at greater risk not only of further victimization but also of criminalization, especially if they respond with force to defend themselves or their children. Of the women in federal prisons, 9 out of 10 have histories of physical or sexual abuse, nearly always in a context where they lacked the financial resources to escape and had no safe place to go.

As Dr. Evelyn Forget reminds us, "Eighty percent of the women who are in prison are there for poverty-related crimes. . . ." Indigenous women represent half of the women in federal prisons and remain Canada's fastest growing prison population. Confronted with these realities, we cannot ignore the backdrop of poverty, inequality and violence against women, systemic violence and colonial violence.

Imagine a teenage girl running away to escape sexually abusive family members but having nowhere to go — no friends or family nearby to turn to, no money, no transport and perhaps not even any knowledge of the far-too-limited supports or social programs available. Where would you go? What would you do?

This teenage girl took shelter in a school. She was charged with breaking and entering and received a prison sentence. In jail, she fought back when staff strip-searched her. Staff responded with the harsh, punitive, inhumane and cruel

conditions of longer and longer isolation. The resulting irreparable physical, psychological and neurological harms were predictable. All of this was preventable.

Colleagues, we know what comes next in this story. You heard it in our debates on another piece of legislation before this chamber yesterday: Tona's law. This was part of Tona's horrific journey. It took three decades of relentless advocacy by Tona and her supporters to undo this — three decades before she was free from the prison system and the mental health system. Terminally ill and now in palliative care, Tona's health will never recover from what she experienced. The injustices she has lived remain, continuing to damage the lives of countless others.

I have worked and walked with Tona and so many others trying to find pathways to the supports and connections that they need to integrate and contribute within their communities. I have watched Canada instead waste hundreds of thousands of dollars per person per year on cages, cells and isolation that make none of us safer.

With our neighbours to the south pointing to fentanyl as a pretext for imposing punishing tariffs on Canada and with fear-mongering folk proposing mandatory life sentences as a solution to health and homelessness crises, including the fentanyl crisis, it bears repeating that so-called tough-on-crime and war-on-drugs agendas are always toughest on those who are most vulnerable. Not to mention that these agendas would gobble up tens of billions of tax dollars that could be far better invested for the benefit of all of us.

As the Parliamentary Budget Officer has calculated, existing tough-on-crime approaches cost Canadians billions of tax dollars, and Canada has nothing to show for these massive expenditures except jails filled not with those who cause the most harm or who have profited most from drugs or organized crime. Our jails are filled with those who are easiest to scoop up and criminalize because they are poor, racialized or homeless and, therefore, more visible. Those with addictions and mental health issues who are struggling on the streets and under the public gaze are the most likely to be arrested and jailed.

A national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income could work to address the root causes of criminalization while also making economic sense. When it comes to preventing crime and improving public safety, simplistic ideas dressed up as solutions just don't work, and they won't work. Instead of squandering money, we need our government to make smart investments in Canadians. We need to invest in communities to ensure that all of us can thrive and no one is left to make desperate and unthinkable choices.

I came to this place — with its long history of leadership on guaranteed livable basic income — to work on access to adequate housing and social, health and economic supports that would help not only redress but actually prevent the travesties and injustices I have witnessed in communities of the dispossessed, especially those failed by current social, economic and health systems and consequently entrapped in the criminal legal system.

Guaranteed livable basic income prevents crime. During a basic income pilot in Dauphin, Manitoba, in the 1970s, crime rates decreased by 17.5% compared to similar towns without the basic income. Per 100,000 people, that amounts to 350 violent crimes — and 1,400 total crimes — prevented. Researchers explained that violent crimes in particular decreased due to reduced financial stress overall and the financial empowerment of women in particular, which decreased the chances of inter-partner assault. Research also suggests that transitional aid programs for people previously incarcerated reduce crimes and include cost benefits. Particularly relevant to the fentanyl crisis, research in Vancouver has also demonstrated that when people who are homeless — including those with substance use and mental health issues — receive cash transfers, they are able to find and keep stable housing, and they also end up spending less on drugs and alcohol.

Guaranteed livable basic income can also support victims and survivors. The Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment reports that 95% of people with abusive partners have experienced economic abuse and financial control. Abusers frequently took out debts in their partner's name to harm their credit scores and restrict their ability to leave relationships.

Testifying at the National Finance Committee on the predecessor to this legislation, the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime emphasized:

The victims and survivors of crime in Canada report from 2009 showed that survivors were absorbing \$10 billion in costs. There has been significant inflation since then. Those are things that pull people out of the labour market and out of areas where they can contribute more fully. There's a whole science of crime prevention that would align well with the principles of guaranteed livable income . . . .

Research suggests the greatest barrier to ending intimate partner violence is a failure to reduce poverty and economic insecurity. Carefully designed cash transfers, including basic incomes, have decreased physical and emotional intimate partner violence, provided financial resources to escape violence, reduced sexual exploitation, increased autonomy in sexual decision making and increased feelings of empowerment and networks of support.

Based on abundant evidence and the lived experiences of victims and survivors, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls spotlighted the need for a national guaranteed livable basic income in its Calls for Justice 4.5 and 16.20 as a crucial means of supporting Indigenous women and girls, unravelling economic colonialism and preventing future harm.

• (1700)

Most people who have been victimized want to know that what happened to them will not happen again — to them or to anyone else. In this respect, current criminal law responses are woefully inadequate. Guaranteed livable basic income could be one step toward Canada fulfilling this promise to victims and survivors.

Guaranteed livable basic income has a lot to offer Canada. You may be wondering, though, if there is a catch.

The short answer is no. For a fraction of what Canadians currently spend to keep people in poverty, we could have a system that gives millions of people pathways out of poverty and empowers them with choices, opportunities and hope.

Bill S-206 would require the federal government to work to develop a framework for implementing guaranteed livable basic income, creating a mandate and home within the federal government for collaborative work and decision making across levels of government on how a Canadian guaranteed livable basic income could be developed and delivered.

This collaborative process emphasizes respect for the jurisdiction and decision making of governments, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, federal, provincial, territorial and municipal. It also recognizes that governments on the front lines of the housing and homelessness crises, responding to constituents who can't afford food or dealing with the impact of poverty on the health care system are often those interested in exploring guaranteed livable basic income but which require federal support to implement it.

This legislation does not prescribe a particular design or model. This would be for governments, as well as experts and communities, to determine. This approach reflects how crucial it is to get design questions right. The bill does, however, establish a few essential parameters to guide development, informed by decades of research expertise, evidence and lived experience.

First, guaranteed livable basic income must be universally accessible to people in need. Everyone whose income is below a certain threshold should be able to access these cash transfers. As a person's income from other sources increases — for example, through a new job — the amount of guaranteed livable basic income received would gradually decrease. A national program must be carefully designed to ensure that, unlike too many existing provincial and territorial social assistance programs, people are never discouraged from work and never have their health benefits cut because of paid work.

Unlike what is typically called “universal basic income,” in order to ensure the program has the greatest impact and is as cost-effective as possible, people who are well off and do not need assistance would not receive a cash transfer. The program is universal only with respect to those who need it.

Second, the income must be livable. It must provide an amount sufficient to afford essentials and permit people to rebound out of poverty wherever they live, including in remote communities, on reserve and in the North.



Current social assistance schemes do not provide enough to live on. Indeed, 98% of people receiving social assistance are unable to escape poverty and 71% are in deep poverty. This minimum subsistence means that people are trapped at the margins, making impossible and unacceptable choices — between food, medicine and shelter, for example. They live on the brink of urgent need and crisis.

The National Advisory Council on Poverty links this inadequate response to poverty to the pernicious opinion that people in need are trying to abuse the system by accessing benefits. Through consultations, they heard that:

... programs design their eligibility criteria with a focus on keeping out the “cheaters.” ... There is a perception that resources are carefully rationed and scrutinized to ensure that each qualifying recipient has “just enough” to survive.

As summarized by one participant in the consultations, “You’re just trying to put food on the table and you’re seen by others as cheating. It’s soul destroying.”

Research on the psychology of poverty, including that of Dr. Jiaying Zhao at the University of British Columbia, demonstrates the exhausting toll of making decisions under the constraint of inadequate resources. At every moment of the day, people in poverty are required to jump through extra cognitive hoops, trying to trade off, optimize and make ends meet. This moment-to-moment cognitive burden means they are less able to focus on long-term financial planning.

Dr. Zhao’s research demonstrates that providing people in poverty with financial training or coaching has no effect on their ability to save or spend money effectively. All the budgeting information in the world is of little use to someone who has no money. What helped was a cash transfer sufficient to get people out of survival mode.

A guaranteed livable basic income must be sufficient to break the cycle of having to put all one’s energy and resources into day-to-day survival — finding food, shelter and a place to warm up — so that people can plan and hope for the future.

A third and related requirement under Bill S-206 is that guaranteed livable basic income must be unconditional. Unlike current social assistance programs, people would not have to meet requirements that are too often unrealistic and ill-adapted to the realities of those living in poverty, that open every aspect of their lives to scrutiny and that place them at constant risk of losing what little benefits they are provided. These policies are dehumanizing. They are also financially costly. Testing people’s eligibility and policing their behaviour takes mountains of administrative resources and results in worse, not better, outcomes.

In one example provided by Dr. Evelyn Forget, a single mother of two on social assistance had a plan to improve her employment prospects and lift herself out of poverty by taking job training. Because she was on social assistance, she was expected to instead keep working or searching for low-paying jobs and required permission from a caseworker before she could attend training. The caseworker did not see the benefits of the woman’s plan and denied it.

For this woman, the Manitoba basic income pilot was a crucial turning point. Enrolled in the program and no longer subjected to the scrutiny of a caseworker, the woman enrolled in training, opening the door for increased earnings. She was proud to be able to model independence for her two daughters.

Guaranteed livable basic income would ensure people are empowered to make the choices they need to in order to rebound out of poverty and thrive.

Fourth and finally, Bill S-206 reinforces that guaranteed livable basic income must be one strand in a strong social safety net. While some less generous forms of income support like provincial and territorial social assistance might no longer be needed, guaranteed livable basic income would not necessarily replace programs and supports linked to specific needs — for example, for Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities or those retiring or losing jobs. The program must not and would not leave people with low incomes worse off.

Nor would it replace or remove the need for vital housing, social, health, education, labour and other programs and protections. Rather, it would ensure that access to these measures and decision making about how best to care for oneself and one’s family and community are not undermined by lack of resources.

We’ve spoken about what guaranteed livable basic income is. I also want to address what it isn’t — in particular, three persistent and pernicious myths and misconceptions.

First, guaranteed livable basic income is not untested. As we heard resoundingly at committee, there is ample data and evidence to demonstrate how a guaranteed livable basic income might be designed and what it can be expected to achieve in Canada.

Canada has a form of basic income for children, the Canada Child Benefit, and for older people, the Guaranteed Income Supplement. The Canada Disability Benefit was intended to provide similar support for those with disabilities.

Manitoba and Ontario have experience with temporary basic income pilots. The Cree Nation and the Quebec Government co-administer a permanent form of basic income, the Economic Security Program for Cree Hunters. Provincially, Quebec offers a form of basic income for those with long-term disabilities. Newfoundland and Labrador has forms of basic income for children leaving care of the state and people with disabilities and nearing retirement age. A cash transfer program for homeless people is ongoing in British Columbia. P.E.I. is pursuing its proposal for a federally supported, province-wide guaranteed livable basic income demonstration project through participation in a federal-provincial working group. Most recently, New Brunswick committed to exploring basic income for persons with disabilities.

In addition to these made-in-Canada examples, Canada can also look to the experiences of other countries. To provide just a few examples, Scotland continues to study guaranteed livable basic income with a goal of working toward implementation. Finland had a recent, well-known pilot. A small-scale pilot is in progress in England, while Wales has implemented basic income for “care leavers,” children transitioning out of state-run child welfare systems. In Germany, a recent pilot focused specifically on single adults under 40 with low incomes.

• (1710)

The evidence emerging from each of these programs should give us confidence that guaranteed livable basic income is not only achievable but, unlike too many existing programs and services, it is effective.

A second myth has to do with cost. Can we afford a national guaranteed livable basic income? The answer we heard at the National Finance Committee, as emphasized by recent research by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, is yes.

While Bill S-206 does not propose a specific model of guaranteed livable income that can be costed, all available evidence indicates that any cost would be relatively minor. The PBO concluded, for example, that guaranteed livable basic income could be implemented at a relatively low net cost of \$3.6 billion annually.

This amount is a small price to pay given that Canada currently expends more than \$80 billion per year on poverty. Dr. Jiaying Zhao’s research suggests the figure is more like \$92 billion. We spend that now on approaches, as discussed earlier, that keep people entrenched rather than alleviating their poverty, homelessness, mental health needs or addictions.

Canadian experiences with forms of guaranteed livable basic income demonstrate the potential for savings. Manitoba’s Mincome pilot decreased hospitalizations in Dauphin, Manitoba, by 8.5%. In recent years, a cash transfer project that provided \$7,500 to members of Vancouver’s homeless population, though not a full guaranteed livable basic income, paid for itself in less than a year through savings within the shelter system alone.

Other costings from P.E.I. and the Basic Income Canada Network reinforce that through careful consideration of which tax measures and income supports could be replaced or adjusted, guaranteed income could be fully paid — delivered at zero net cost — while leaving no one with a below-average income worse off and, most significantly, it would find them better off.

Other options for fully funding guaranteed livable basic income could include harnessing the dollars that currently escape Canada via offshore tax avoidance and evasion by the wealthiest individuals and corporations. We look forward to seeing if this is encompassed in the measures introduced by the government yesterday in Bill C-2.

By implementing guaranteed basic income at a near-zero net cost rather than creating new money through debt financing, we can also ensure that it does not contribute to inflation.

In terms of human, social, health and economic well-being, it is the cost of failing to address poverty, not the cost of effective support measures, that Canada cannot afford.

A third misconception, thoroughly debunked through the committee study of the last version of this bill, relates to whether guaranteed livable basic income will disincentivize work. In reality, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that hours worked would decrease by an insignificant amount: at most, 1.1%. A recent German pilot project showed no change in the number of hours worked by people who received a basic income.

Moreover, guaranteed livable basic income allows people to enter the workforce by ensuring stable access to housing and food and increasing their ability to afford child care, transportation and other employment costs.

During the Manitoba basic income pilot in the 1970s, most of those who worked less were caring for young children or took opportunities to complete high school or other training instead of having to work to support their families.

Participants in Ontario’s basic income pilot who were working before receiving basic income continued to work. Some took the opportunity to seek better jobs. Others were able to hone new job skills.

“Eddie” is one of many who saw their participation in the program as an opportunity not to quit work but to find work:

... some kind of gig or, you know, something modest . . . .  
Didn’t have to be CEO of some company or anything . . . .  
Just rebuild my confidence again . . . . Because that really took a kicking for a while.

A review of research on Canadian cash transfer programs to families, such as the Canada Child Benefit, demonstrates that these measures increase financial security of families, which leads in turn to increased employment.

The concern that people will not work is not based in evidence. Too often it is rooted in engrained and harmful assumptions that:

... poverty is [somehow] the result of personal failings, rather than the failure of systems, labour market challenges, and government policies and programs.

These discriminatory myths obscure the sheer amount of work and determination that go into surviving poverty. More than half of people below the poverty line have employment income as their main source of support — they are working, but they are not being paid enough.

Before participating in the Ontario Basic Income Pilot, “Bethany” said:

I was like working like crazy, still broke, never going out, never seeing anybody. Like, just worked to the bone, exhausted.

The National Advisory Council on Poverty notes that the time and effort required to negotiate inadequate and inaccessible anti-poverty programs has turned poverty into a punitive, permanent, dead-end full-time job. As one Ontario disability benefit recipient noted to our office, if navigating poverty is a full-time job, “the pay sucks.”

Guaranteed livable basic income is a proven, cost-effective way to reduce poverty and support people in building economic capacity and contributing to their communities. The time for Canada to act is now.

In recent years, support for guaranteed livable basic income has continued to grow, with the concept featured among the top official policies of the federal party that just won re-election. We keep hearing, however, that now is not the time — not when we are faced with the challenges of recovering from the pandemic, inflation crises and tariffs.

I urge us to challenge these assumptions. Now is not the time to continue wasting \$92 billion per year on poverty. Guaranteed livable basic income will save Canada money and shore up economic capacity.

As Canada faces a new reality of economic threats from our neighbour, Canadians — especially those with the least economic security — need and deserve reassurance that the economy will work for them.

Guaranteed livable basic income would mean that those affected by tariff-related threats to their jobs and income are not left behind but given opportunities to rebound. At a moment when leaders are urging Canadians to work and stand together, guaranteed livable basic income would ensure that all of us are in a position to do so. Particularly for those whom this country has too often let down — those struggling to find jobs, unable to afford food and rent, on the streets or in prisons — it would offer hope that, this time, they are not alone and that Canada will assist all to weather the economic challenges that we face together.

Honourable colleagues, let’s continue this next chapter of our work to make certain Canada builds communities where all are supported, resourced and empowered to contribute, where no one is allowed to fall through the gaps, and where all of us have a place to live and thrive. Surely it goes without saying that this is the Canadian way.

*Meegwetch*, thank you.

**Hon. Marilou McPhedran:** Senator Pate, would you take a question?

**Senator Pate:** Yes.

**Senator McPhedran:** Thank you. I know there are some time limitations around what you were saying to us. Could you say a little bit more about the research in terms of the impact on children and intergenerational continuance of a life in poverty if we don’t have a measure like this in society?

**Senator Pate:** Thank you very much for that question.

I think we see that. I tried to elucidate that a bit, but thank you for the opportunity to delve a bit more deeply.

We see the intergenerational impacts of poverty that are entrenched in our current social assistance schemes that keep people stuck in poverty. I think of the many examples of people who had an opportunity to get work but couldn’t actually afford to take a job because it meant they wouldn’t have any kind of health or prescription benefits as a result.

I also think of folks who couldn’t have access to subsidized housing if they took work. The idea that we would look at an approach that would encourage people to get on their feet is vitally important. When I was in some northern communities, I was struck by one Elder in particular saying to me that they wanted to develop an ecotourism business. They have all kinds of young people in the community who are unemployed and getting social assistance, but they can’t take them out on the land because then they’re not looking for the nonexistent jobs in the community and would lose the income they have.

• (1720)

This type of model would allow for those kinds of eventualities. It would be less judgmental. It would be less focused on blaming the individuals who, because of our decisions about policies that are currently implemented provincially, territorially and federally, are living in poverty on an intergenerational basis.

It impacts children; it impacts families and certainly many of the women I spoke to who talked about not being able to escape violence, in part, because they didn’t have the economic security to be able to take their children with them. That was a significant issue. Most recently, in my own community, I was speaking with

a number of individual women from the shelter movement, and they actually initiated a public discussion around this so that the entire community would get behind the idea of a guaranteed livable basic income to assist women fleeing abuse. Thank you very much for the question.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

## NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH BILL

### SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

**Hon. Rosemary Moodie** moved second reading of Bill S-212, An Act respecting a national strategy for children and youth in Canada.

She said: Honourable senators, what does an ideal childhood look like? We may differ on the specifics, but let me tell you my vision.

It is one where every child has access to the health care they need when they need it, where no child has to languish on a year-long wait-list for important surgery or go without their medication because their parents can't afford it.

It is one where every child feels safe both in their community and online, where protections are in place to keep children safe, and there are strong mechanisms to stop those who would seek to harm them.

It is one where every child is treated equitably, where they know that the colour of their skin or where they are from will never be used to belittle them or prevent them from reaching their dreams.

It is one where every child feels respected and heard, where they know their rights and they know what to do if they feel that their rights have been contravened.

It is one where every child grows up knowing that their economic situation won't prevent them from achieving their dreams, where everyone has equal access to opportunities to learn and grow. Every child deserves to grow up safe, happy and healthy.

Unfortunately, this is not our reality today in Canada.

When it comes to our children and youth, we design policies without clear outcomes in mind. We implement programs without the resources needed to make decisive change. We fail to support cross-sector collaboration or listen to those who need the most help.

Canada doesn't have a vision for the health and well-being of our children and youth. And so, our children are left to be supported by a patchwork of programs, supports and benefits, leaving far too many of them to fall through the cracks.

We are letting our children down. We are failing them. We can — and must — do better. This is why I am proud to reintroduce my bill, Bill S-212, the national strategy for children and youth act.

Colleagues, many of you are already familiar with this bill. I introduced it in the last Parliament as Bill S-282, where it reached committee stage on June 4, 2024 — a year ago today.

This bill does not create the strategy; let's be clear. Instead, it outlines a framework for the government to create a comprehensive strategy for children and youth in Canada. This strategy must identify the areas where we are failing children and where we are making important progress. We cannot improve if we do not know where we stand.

The bill requires that such a strategy identify clear outcomes we want to achieve and quantifiable indicators that can be used to evaluate the progress we are making on these goals.

Finally, the strategy must propose a detailed plan of action to meet our obligation to provide every child in Canada the childhood they deserve.

Colleagues, I want to state clearly that this bill respects the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In fact, it would ensure better protection of the rights of children and youth across Canada by ensuring a closer focus on their rights.

Bill S-212 does not appropriate money, as the bill does not dictate the strategy. It would be the government's role to determine the contents of the strategy and subsequently identify any required further investments later on, as is typical of framework bills.

Requiring the federal government to work with other levels of government on issues within their jurisdiction, this bill's scope fits within federal jurisdiction and our system of co-operative federalism.

Too often, when we talk about young people in policy spaces, we focus on individual programs — whether that be the Canada Child Benefit, Jordan's Principle or early learning and child care. We treat the issues facing children in silos and assume that individual solutions will suffice. However, when we take a step back, have these efforts added up to real progress?

Colleagues, I think it is clear to all of you, if you have listened to me speak in the past year, that we are not meeting the needs of children in Canada. In May of this year, UNICEF released its nineteenth Report Card, which measures child and youth well-being in wealthy countries across six indicators. The latest data is not encouraging. Canada is now ranked 19 out of 36 countries and has fallen behind many of our peer countries in most aspects of children's lives. It shows that progress for children in Canada has largely stalled. Frankly, this is not good enough.

Too many children are still being left behind, despite the many incredible programs that we have implemented and despite the investment in effort and money. The overwhelming reason for this is that we are not being strategic. We are trying to complete the puzzle without knowing what the image looks like or if we even have the right pieces.

To highlight what I mean, I would like to explore a few critical areas where our current approach is failing and demonstrate the transformative potential of a national strategy for children and youth. There are multiple examples in which Canada as a country has set targets but failed to follow through with a plan to achieve our goals.

One example is that in 1989, the House of Commons passed a resolution promising to end child poverty by the year 2000. Twenty-five years past that deadline, how are we doing in meeting this target? Well, the rates of child poverty in Canada have only become worse since we last spoke about this bill — not better.

Campaign 2000's 2024 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada noted that from 2021 to 2022, more than 195,000 children were plunged into poverty over the course of just one year. Alarming, the 2.5 percentage-point jump in child poverty during this period represents the largest annual increase in child poverty on record in Canada.

• (1730)

For children, growing up in poverty can have devastating impacts. Poverty means children's fundamental needs are not met — needs such as stable housing, access to high-quality education and food security. It can have a devastating impact on a child's well-being and investment, impacting their ability to learn, to acquire skills and to access opportunities. Poverty is a violation of a child's right to an adequate standard of living.

Yet, it is clear that federal programs to end child poverty have failed. More than 25 years after the deadline set in that 1989 resolution, nearly one in five children in Canada lives in poverty. This example demonstrates that simply setting a target is not enough. A strategy would go beyond simply setting a target and provide a clear plan of action, measured by a series of indicators. It would allow us to regularly assess the effectiveness of what we are doing and if we need to change course.

How about another example of how we are failing our children? In the time since this bill was last introduced, we've gained vital insight into the challenges facing children's health in Canada. In May 2024, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health released their long-awaited report on children's health. This report paints a disturbing picture of a health system buckling under the weight of long-standing, systemic issues that have been accumulating for decades, and it concluded that our pediatric health system is in crisis.

The report highlighted that in the area of mental health, approximately 1.2 million kids have a mental illness, but less than 20% of youth who need treatment actually receive it. It also noted that Canada has "one of the highest rates of adolescent suicide in the developed world," quoting UNICEF's Report Card that Canada ranks 33 out of 42 countries on adolescent suicide.

In 2022, over 20,000 children were wait-listed for surgeries according to 7 of the 16 children's hospitals here in Canada, and almost half of them were past the window for timely intervention, which often leads to inevitable long-term negative health outcomes. We rank 25 out of 43 countries on child mortality.

These problems plaguing our pediatric health care system are not isolated problems. They are interconnected symptoms of a system suffering from chronic underfunding and neglect. We need a strategic approach that puts children's health and well-being at the forefront. But more troubling is the fact that we often lack the needed data to understand these issues, the scale of the problem, and to seek evidence-based solutions. Canada is the only OECD country that doesn't annually collect data on the health and well-being of its children. This is profoundly irresponsible, frankly, because without that data, how can we have an accurate understanding, much less address it? How do we determine if we are making progress, or even if our interventions are effective?

This is why we need a national strategy that not only sets clear goals but also establishes a process for measuring outcomes. Without one, we are simply taking shots in the dark. The health of our children is too important to leave to chance, and a strategy would take us out of the dark and help us take targeted and effective action.

But, colleagues, it is not just the long-standing issues that we must pay attention to. We must also seek to understand and proactively address the rapidly evolving new issues facing children. While the rise in AI is in many ways an exciting development, it also poses clear risks for children and youth. I am referring to the increasing concern in children's use of AI chatbots. Children are more susceptible to the danger from AI chatbots. Young children exposed to hypersexualized content via chatbot conversation are a real problem. Chatbots can make recommendations to children that are not safe and can influence their behaviour, sometimes with tragic consequences, like the 14-year-old boy from Florida who took his own life after developing an intense, months-long virtual relationship with a chatbot. There is a lawsuit that is still before the courts set by his mother to contest that the chatbot contributed to her son's suicide. Another example is the 10-year-girl who was told by her family's Alexa device to stick a penny in a live electrical socket.

There is an increase in AI-generated child pornography, known by the technical term of child sexual abuse material, or CSAM. This AI-created realistic, explicit content involving children is both increasing in the amount and type of this content and is available online and is also being used to extort and exploit children. Experts have warned that the rapid growth of fake content could overwhelm investigative resources and make it harder for law enforcement to identify and protect real victims, so our children are in danger.

While there may be and will be a range of possible benefits from AI for children — from personalized learning systems to tools for enhanced accessibility for children with disabilities that could improve the lives of children in Canada — what we need is a balanced, child-centred approach that maximizes the benefits and mitigates the harms. A strategy could help us do that, understand the true scale of the issues impacting our children's safety, identify their causes and determine where our current efforts are failing.

Colleagues, our current approach is not working. We lack a unified vision for our children. We do not have a shared understanding of what we are working toward, and we need to establish clear national goals for our children's well-being. Without a clear, coordinated strategy, we will never make the lasting change that our children deserve.

With a national strategy, we can move from a patchwork system of short-term fixes to a plan that actually delivers for young people. This national strategy could do three main things. It would set clear goals that we want to achieve for our children; it would create a plan to achieve them; and it would include a mechanism for evaluation and enable us to systematically work towards a future where every child in Canada has everything they need to survive.

Clearly defining our priorities would also ensure that governments, service providers and civil society organizations are aligned and accountable.

We can maximize the effectiveness of our existing efforts by leveraging synergies between them, taking advantage of opportunities for coordination, tracking our progress, collecting data aligned to specific goals, understanding our return on investment and make informed decisions and adjust our approach when necessary. Imagine that.

It could align with a key priority for this government, which, as laid out by the Prime Minister's mandate letter, is to spend less on government operations. By clearly defining our goals and rigorously evaluating the effectiveness of our interventions to achieve them, we will ensure that every dollar is well spent and that no child is left behind while we're doing this.

We should not be afraid of accountability. We need to know when our efforts failing. Regularly collecting data on our efforts will ensure that our money is spent on what works, not just on what sounds good. An evidence-based national strategy would help us identify the most effective interventions, ensure resources are targeted towards them and close gaps that leave too many children behind.

Frankly, colleagues, this is not a new idea. In fact, Canada is behind the curve.

• (1740)

Over half of the 38 OECD countries have policy documents that outline their government's approach to supporting positive outcomes for children across several domains of well-being. Ireland is one example. In 2014, Ireland launched Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, a six-year national framework designed to improve the lives of young people in Ireland and be a shared set of outcomes for all government departments, statutory services and the community and voluntary sector to work together.

It embedded children's voices into their policy-making, ensuring their perspectives were heard and considered. It developed a framework built around key outcome areas, including health, learning and ongoing engagement. It adopted a

structured, outcome-based framework with clear indicators to track progress and regular reporting that analyzes emerging issues and provides recommendations for future change.

This diligent approach allowed the Irish government to track advancements, identify gaps and adjust policies accordingly. It resulted in achieving tangible improvements in key areas and identifying areas that needed improvement.

Ireland was able to gain a complete picture of the impact of their efforts. Their success lies not just in the progress they made, but in the establishment of a data-driven and accountable system that made plain what was and was not working.

This is the kind of approach Canada needs desperately. We must recognize the early work that has come before. A strategic approach was declared and proposed back in 2004. It was called A Canada Fit for Children and was spearheaded under the leadership of the Honourable Landon Pearson, who identified priority areas and sought to promote and protect children's rights.

While it was an important start and an incredible step forward at the time, it contained only general principles and areas for action. Frankly, it lacked specific, concrete interventions or outcomes and did not have a plan for data collection. Most importantly, it lacked longevity and mechanisms for accountability and regular updates.

Don't get me wrong. We owe our gratitude to those who did the work to make it possible. Now it's our turn to continue down the path they have paved.

Since then, we have developed several important programs that demonstrate how focused action can be taken and what can be accomplished with change. The Canada Child Benefit, or CCB, is a start. It's a prominent example. As a benefit that provides direct financial support to families with children, it has lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty since its introduction.

However, the recent rise in child poverty rates since COVID is a vital reminder that progress is often fragile. We can't afford to rest on our laurels. Despite knowing that the CCB is an effective tool, we do not fully understand its potential. How far do we need to go? How much further can we go? Are we using this tool in the most effective way possible? Are we leaving gains on the table?

Early childhood education and child care is another area where we have seen recent progress. This matters because access to high-quality, affordable, inclusive early learning is vital for children's development.

We are already able to track progress. More than half the provinces and territories have achieved regulated child care costing \$10 a day on average. Those still in progress have achieved fee reductions of 50%. However, without a long-term strategy, challenges remain. I have heard from child care providers across Canada that funding is not yet sufficient to maintain quality programs or retain workers.

If we are to succeed, we need a strategic approach centred on the well-being of children that sees early learning as one of the many tools and programs that will enable kids and youth to reach their full potential.

Jordan's Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative also highlight the impact of targeted action. These programs are designed to ensure that First Nations and Inuit children receive the health, education and social services they need without jurisdictional disputes causing harmful delays.

While these programs have made a difference in many lives, their implementation has been inconsistent, with delays in processing requests, stalled applications and concerns about eligibility. They are often applied too narrowly, and the result is that some children have been left behind without the support they need. These programs are essential but require a more robust framework to ensure that every eligible child receives timely, comprehensive support.

To underscore this point, if we set measurable goals, invest in effective programs and commit to not just tracking but evaluating our progress, we'll see results. So far, our success has been limited and our interventions reactionary. A national strategy would tie these efforts together, fill the gaps and ensure that every child can thrive. It is now Canada's turn to step up to the plate for our children.

In 2023, I published my collaborative, youth-focused report entitled *From Vision to Reality: On a Strategy for Children and Youth in Canada*. This report was the result of a series of roundtable discussions with young people and stakeholders across Canada on the need for a national strategy and what it would look like.

Participants included children themselves, representatives from organizations that advocate for children and representatives from Indigenous organizations. From beginning to end, this bill has been shaped by this report and the stakeholders it represents, and it fully aligns with their recommendations.

The participants gave us a clear message: Canada needs a national strategy. They said Canada's current government infrastructure for children and youth is failing young Canadians and that federal budgets fail to adequately focus on youth.

They made it clear that a lack of comprehensive strategy creates a patchwork system of support that is currently leaving many behind. They talked about what a strategy should include. They recommended that the government would need to do a comprehensive, countrywide consultation to answer this question in a fulsome way.

The stakeholders were clear that the strategy needs to take a rights-based approach led by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Paragraph 4(2)(a) of the bill — of clause 4, which outlines mandatory guidelines — reflects these comments. It notes that the strategy's objectives must include full compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the optional protocols to which we have signed on, as well as the provisions of UNDRIP relating to children and youth. I know we all agree on the importance of these measures, colleagues.

Another area of consensus was the need for specific, measurable and ambitious targets and outcomes for young people. They emphasized the need to collect, analyze and share data, especially disaggregated data. Thus, the remainder of subclause 4(2) outlines the remaining requirements for the strategy's content, including identifying objectives and quantifiable indicators to measure progress, creating a detailed plan to address unmet objectives and identifying the necessary resources for implementation.

Subclause 4(3) outlines who should be consulted. When asked who should be involved in the strategy's development, one participant said:

Young people have a difficult time getting authority figures to listen to them, respect their perspectives, and really consider their lived experiences.

This is why children and youth are first on the list of those to be consulted on the process of building a strategy.

• (1750)

Stakeholders were clear that unilateral action by the federal government would be an insufficient approach to fill the gaps for children in Canada. The bill calls on the minister to consult with provincial and municipal governments and representatives from Indigenous governing bodies, as well as other relevant stakeholders. In the process, the government must deliberately seek out voices that reflect the diversity of children and youth in Canada and their experiences, despite the challenges that exist in getting input from some of these communities. This list is by no means exhaustive, and the bill invites the designated minister to consult with whomever else they consider appropriate.

Accountability is also vitally important and was a major part of the concern for stakeholders. Therefore, clauses 5 through 7 lay out several oversight and accountability measures, including public monitoring, parliamentary oversight of the strategy's implementation and a mechanism to consider complaints from children and youth on its implementation. It requires the minister to table a progress report every six months until the strategy is published. This will give insight to the public on the progress of the strategy's development and give young people, stakeholders and others who feel their viewpoints were missed time to join in the consultations before they end.

The strategy must be published within two years of Royal Assent. Reflecting the stakeholders' call for regular strategy review periods, the bill calls for a review every five years so that it stays relevant as the challenges facing children and youth evolve.

Colleagues, from the moment children are born, they look to the adults in their lives as mentors and guides, to be helping hands and guiding stars as the children explore the world around them and their ability to shape it, to create a safe haven where the children can grow and learn and thrive.

As parliamentarians, we play a similar role but on a much larger scale. It is our job to clear the road of obstacles, to ensure that those who have fallen behind can be given the supports they need to catch up, to make sure every child feels that their dreams are within their reach. This is no small task. It will take considerable effort to do this job well and to ensure that the progress we do make is not lost. I know that we are up to the challenge, but we cannot continue as we have been.

For too long, we have been content with a patchwork of half measures. We have allowed our pediatric health system to buckle under the strain of decades of underfunding. We have left countless children to grow up in poverty. We have failed to adapt to the times and keep our most vulnerable safe online. In too many ways, we have let young people in Canada down, but it doesn't have to be like this.

A national strategy for children and youth would be transformative. With a vision for a future where every child can flourish and with a plan to get there, we can build a world fit for our kids. It is time to step up. If you agree, colleagues, I urge you to support Bill S-212. I look forward to hearing other colleagues debate this bill and sending it to committee for further study. Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

(On motion of Senator Ataullahjan, debate adjourned.)

### CANADA REVENUE AGENCY ACT

#### BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

**Hon. Percy E. Downe** moved second reading of Bill S-217, An Act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (reporting on unpaid income tax).

He said: Honourable senators, you will note that this is not the first time I have tabled this bill, the fairness for all Canadian taxpayers act, requiring the Government of Canada to disclose all convictions for overseas tax evasion and to measure the tax gap — the difference between what taxes should have been collected and what is actually collected. It would also require the Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, to provide the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO, with data it has collected on the tax gap, as well as any additional data that the PBO considers important so he can prepare his own independent analysis of the tax gap.

In the previous Parliament, this bill passed the Senate and made it to the second reading in the House of Commons, when the election was called.

Let me begin, as I always do, with this disclaimer: It is not illegal to have a bank account overseas. But it is illegal not to report any proceeds from those accounts to the Canada Revenue Agency.

It used to be that the Canada Revenue Agency didn't attract a great deal of attention, either from the public or from the government. As the one branch of government counted on to turn a profit, there has always been a temptation to simply let it go about its business: If it's not broken, don't fix it.

However, that confidence has been eroded as we have seen story after story about overseas tax evasion with no punishments and, unfortunately, little or no recovery of money, compounded by the repeated response of the CRA after each public disclosure that they are working hard to catch overseas tax cheats; that they take it very seriously; that they've identified, as opposed to collected, X amount of money; that work is ongoing; that "we have much work to do"; and so on.

Unfortunately, these comments from the CRA belie the fact that their efforts and results are disappointing in the extreme. One of many such examples is in the aftermath of the Panama Papers in 2016. In the nine years since the release of the papers, which identified hundreds of Canadians holding accounts, other countries with citizens identified in the documents as having accounts hidden in Panama have collected to date over \$1.8 billion in taxes that were owing to their countries.

A recent article, just a few months ago, by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, the body that broke the story on Panama Papers, indicates that Australia has already recovered \$44 million; Germany, \$87 million; Spain, \$175 million; and even Iceland, a country of 340,000 people, has recovered \$25 million. But for all the hundreds of accounts and dozens of audits, Canada hasn't announced the recovery of a nickel — zero.

According to the investigative journalists' consortium, the CRA expects to collect almost \$92 million in money, but, as we know, there's a considerable difference, particularly it being the CRA, between "expect" and "collect." Of the approximately 900 Canadians identified, including individuals, corporations and trusts that were named in the Panama Papers, not one person has been charged, much less convicted, of overseas tax evasion in this affair. That begs the question, if the CRA has identified them — they think there is \$96 million owing — why has no one been charged?

In October 2012, almost 13 years ago, I wrote to the then Parliamentary Budget Officer, asking him to investigate the economic impact of overseas tax evasion. At his suggestion, that investigation evolved into an effort to determine the tax gap, the difference between what should be collected by the CRA and what they actually collect. The PBO determined that it is indeed possible to provide an estimate of the gap, particularly given that so many other countries are doing it, and approached the CRA to secure the agency's cooperation in this effort.

• (1800)

Colleagues, the CRA refused to cooperate, and we know why when we realize that the tax gap not only measures what should be collected but also measures how effective our national revenue agency is in their duty and responsibility to collect money owed to the Government of Canada.



I am sure that the exposure, through a tax-gap analysis of the terrible job the CRA is doing in fighting overseas tax evasion, was a major factor in the agency's refusal to cooperate with the Parliamentary Budget Officer. But even without the cooperation of the CRA, the PBO was able to come to his own conclusion about the tax gap. He testified before a Senate committee in March 2020 stating that, based on his own analysis:

I am convinced . . . having worked both at the CRA and been PBO for a year and a half now, that there are hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars in taxes that go undeclared, unreported and that escape Canadian tax authorities, probably on an annual basis due to the international transactions that take place.

For its part, the well-respected Conference Board of Canada published a report in 2017 entitled *Canadian Tax Avoidance and Examining the Potential Tax Gap*. They concluded that up to \$47 billion worth of taxes is not being collected by the Government of Canada.

On its website the Canada Revenue Agency maintains a list of "enforcement notifications." These are press releases about investigations, charges and convictions for offences related to tax evasion. It does so, in its own words:

. . . to maintain confidence in the integrity of the self-assessment system, and to increase compliance with the law through the deterrent effect of such publicity.

It's hard not to laugh when you read that.

If you look at the list, colleagues, as I did recently, you will find a wide range of people from coast to coast charged and punished, almost all for domestic tax evasion. If you hide your money overseas, your chances of being caught are very low, whereas if you cheat on your taxes domestically, you are very likely to be caught, fined and, in some case, jailed.

To that end, of all the notices — and there were 65 going back to 2020 when I recently checked — only 3 were convictions for what one might call overseas tax evasion, and I am being generous with that figure.

This does not mean that recent years have been without some measure of success. The 2015 election platform of the Liberal Party contained a commitment that involved:

Directing CRA to immediately begin an analysis and stronger enforcement of tax evasion, or what the OECD calls the "tax gap."

The agency, for all its past reluctance, has been forced by the government — and with continuing reluctance — to begin releasing a series of reports on the tax gap starting in 2016, with the most recent one released in 2022.

However, Canada needs to study the effectiveness of the CRA to see what is working and what needs improving. The decision of whether or not to pursue this study should not be left to the CRA alone, given their refusal to cooperate with the PBO. It should be required by legislation, and that's what my bill would provide.

I wish to emphasize that a legislative requirement for the CRA to report on overseas tax evasion and the broader tax gap in general is not the result of mere curiosity. Many other countries — the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Sweden, even the State of California — measure their tax gaps and have found it to be a valuable policy-making tool. They all agree that the money hidden overseas must come home, and they need continued tax-gap information to identify the dollar amounts involved and to help bring that money back to their countries.

As I said, colleagues, in Canada there is essentially no risk to hiding your money overseas because your chances of being charged or convicted range from slim to none. And the "hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars" identified by the PBO will not, as if by magic, solve our financial problems. But if we collected even a portion of that money owing, it could reduce the deficit, taxes could be lowered and programs could be funded.

It is undeniable that a significant amount of money is lost to this country through overseas tax evasion. Beyond that, of course, is the simple fact that it is grossly unfair. Those of us who are playing by the rules and paying our taxes are being deceived by other Canadians who are skipping the system and hiding their money overseas. The failure to collect taxes owed undermines the confidence that everyone is being treated the same. If we are all in this together, then we all pay taxes. Otherwise, there is special treatment for some Canadians with the resources to hide their money while the rest of us must pay more to make up that shortfall.

Before I wrap up, I'd like to express my thanks to those senators who delivered speeches in favour of this bill in the past, and the bill currently before the Senate is the same bill that they supported. The support of Senator Paul McIntyre and Senator Pat Bovey — both of whom have since retired — Senator Galvez, Senator McPhedran and Senator Marshall is much appreciated. I thank them for that support. Indeed, I thank all senators who passed this bill in the Senate last time, and we hope for common sense to grip the House of Commons this time so they will pass it as well.

I will conclude with this comment: I always wonder, when people hide their money overseas, if they or a member of their family become ill, do they get their medical care in a place like Panama or do they return to Canada to take advantage of our publicly funded health care even if they don't want to pay a cent towards it?

Colleagues, I hope I can once again get your support for this bill.

**Hon. Colin Deacon:** Senator Downe, will you take a question?

**Senator Downe:** Yes.

**Senator C. Deacon:** Thank you. What reason does the CRA give for not responding to your inquiries? There must be some attempt at logic that they're putting forward in that regard. I'd love to know what it is.

Also, do you see any opportunity in this Prime Minister's decision to have one minister responsible for national revenue and finance to potentially get past the roadblock that you've faced for so many years?

**Senator Downe:** Thank you, Senator Deacon. To the first question, the CRA was asked by the PBO, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, for some data that would allow them to address the tax gap, but it was not any personal information on any individual Canadian. It was raw data. The CRA refused to provide that, even though, as I said, other countries are currently measuring their tax gap. They have this data and they know how to do it. That's why this legislation is required to overcome the roadblock that the CRA keeps putting up.

On your second question, I think it's a tremendous move. I remember years ago, when I had the honour to serve as Chief of Staff to former prime minister Jean Chrétien, I attended every federal cabinet meeting. There was never a meeting when anyone raised the CRA. Why would you? You assumed they were doing their job and the money was coming in. The CRA minister participated in agriculture and defence discussions, but there was nothing about the CRA.

This is a good move by this Prime Minister. The Minister of Finance will be able to keep oversight of the CRA, which desperately needs it. I think it's a very positive step.

**Senator C. Deacon:** They just said "no" to previous requests? There was no rationale given, no logic, no reasons at all? They just refused?

**Senator Downe:** These are actually good questions for the PBO. I've talked to him and his office, as well as the previous PBO and the PBO before that. This has been going on for a long time. This issue has been going on longer than the bridge tolls. This is now year 13, and bridge tolls only took 10.

• (1810)

The CRA makes the argument that they shouldn't be giving this data because somehow it could infringe upon Canadians' privacy, but they take great pride in not measuring the tax gap.

They were forced by the 2015 Liberal election platform to start measuring. They do one on the underground economy — one on this and one on that. We don't need that. We need the overall tax gap analysis.

As I said, if the State of California can do it, you don't have to look at all these other countries, such as Sweden and so on. If they can do it, why can't we do it?

And the reason you do it, of course, as I indicated in my speech, is you identify how much is owing. The Conference Board of Canada said up to \$48 billion could be possible. But you also measure how effective they are compared to their counterparts in other countries in collecting the money they should be collecting.

If the Conference Board of Canada is right, and it's up to \$48 billion, we assume we won't collect all that. But let's say you collect half of it. Senator Pate has a proposal here, and everybody else has a proposal of the first question to ask: That's a great plan, but how are you going to fund it? Well, there's a pot of money that's not being collected at the moment. It's a real problem.

And, as I indicated, it's a gross unfairness of the system. When I first stumbled upon this years ago, in Liechtenstein, there was one employee at one bank who stole the client list and sold it to the Government of Germany. And there were a hundred and some Canadians who had an account in that one bank in Liechtenstein. I had to look up Liechtenstein on a map; I didn't even know where it was.

Maybe those people had family members in Liechtenstein, and it could all be legitimate. But at the end of the day, the CRA did not charge anyone with the money that they found in those accounts. At the time, the argument from the CRA was that we're now learning how this works for future cases.

Since then, we've had the Paradise Papers, and we've had the Panama Papers — all of these and nobody has been charged. But if you're a waiter in Moncton or a carpenter in Saskatchewan and you're cheating, you're caught and you're charged, and some people go to jail.

There's nobody that the CRA can point to in Canada who has gone to jail for overseas tax evasion, even though in the Panama Papers, they indicated they think there's \$96 million. That's a clear indication that people were in clear violation of the law. Why is no one charged?

Just to go back and conclude, in Liechtenstein, when they released the information to all the countries, the Australian government took great action. They formed a task force of various departments to jump right on this overseas tax evasion. They started to charge people. They publicly indicated who was being charged. And they found that not only did they collect a whole bunch of money — unlike Canada — but the people who were publicly named and charged decreased the appetite of the rest of the population to hide their money overseas. There was a naming and shaming. None of that happens in Canada.

**Hon. Kim Pate:** Would you take a question, Senator Downe?

**Senator Downe:** Yes.

**Senator Pate:** Thank you very much for continuing to introduce this. As I think you may be aware, when I was on the National Finance Committee, I asked questions about the tax gap and why no investigations had been conducted into the Panama Papers, the Pandora Papers and the like.

I'd be interested in your comments on the response I received, which was that these are complex investigations. I received a similar response when I asked why corporations here in Canada weren't being investigated under some of the competition laws.

Do you have any other comments that you'd like to add to elucidate this area, seeing as it's your area of expertise?

**Senator Downe:** The CRA has a problem retaining a lot of people because once they've been there for a while and have built up a certain skill set, they actually go to the other side. Companies that are involved in hiding money overseas like to hire them. We have to adjust the pay scales of the CRA to recognize their unique skill sets. That's the first thing.

The second thing is this: I hear this complicated argument, and as I indicated in response to Senator Colin Deacon's question, in Liechtenstein they told us they were learning how these situations work. At the bank in Liechtenstein, which I referred to, you couldn't open an account unless you had \$500,000, so it's a certain clientele, if you will.

It's complicated for us, but it's also complicated for all these other countries, yet all these other countries have either collected the money or charged people. For example, I don't recommend this, but the Irish government would print your home address after you've been convicted of overseas tax evasion. I think that would be quite unpopular. But the naming and shaming have proven to be a valuable tool for people charged.

If they haven't figured it out now after 13 years, are they ever going to figure it out?

**Hon. Marilou McPhedran:** Senator Downe, with great thanks to you for never giving up on this and for developing such great expertise, I want to ask a question about what actually happens to the money. In the seemingly unlikely event that the CRA gets it together to actually return the money back to people in Canada, where does it go, and is there any way to track what happens to it?

**Senator Downe:** My understanding is it would go back — like all revenue from the CRA — into general revenue for the Government of Canada.

Part of the CRA's answer as to why they haven't recovered any of this \$96 million is — they told me in writing just recently — they don't track how much they collect in overseas tax evasion. It's laughable.

They're not tracking it because they haven't received any of it. The short answer to your question is it would go into general revenue.

**Senator McPhedran:** We've had a number of ministers responsible for those whom you refer to as "they," which I take to be officials. Can you share with us whether you've had an opportunity to brief any previous ministers? Perhaps you have not quite so quickly briefed the current minister. Has it ever become a priority for any minister whom you've interacted with on this issue?

**Senator Downe:** Thank you. No, I have met with CRA officials, and I kept saying to them, "Rather than defending the status quo, you should be asking how does this end?" It's like a chess game. You're going to be there eventually. You're going to have to do a tax gap analysis. At the time, they wouldn't even talk about doing a tax gap analysis. They were forced to do little ones.

At the end of the day, you're going to have to be charging people and convicting people to restore credibility. You're going to have to conduct a tax gap analysis. Why don't you simply jump over all the hurdles and get there so that you don't have this problem over you? But they don't see it as a problem. They see it as interference in their area and their self-contained group.

It is, without a doubt, the worst department I've ever encountered in government, bar none.

**Senator McPhedran:** I have a clarification for my question. I was asking you about ministers, if you could respond to that. Or do you want me to repeat that? It was regarding the ministers with whom you've interacted. Have any of the ministers made this a priority? And where is the ministerial responsibility in this scenario that you've outlined to us for years now?

**Senator Downe:** My experience has been the ministers are very defensive and defend the department exclusively.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

**THE LATE HONOURABLE MARC GARNEAU, P.C., C.C.**

SILENT TRIBUTE

**Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate):** Honourable senators, I rise on a very brief point of order. I want to advise the chamber that our former House colleague, the Honourable Marc Garneau, a true Canadian hero, has passed away. I hope very much that we'll have an opportunity to remember his life and his legacy in the future, colleagues. But I hope I can indulge the chamber in asking for a moment of silence at this point.

(Honourable senators then stood in silent tribute.)

• (1820)

That the Senate do now adjourn.

**BUSINESS OF THE SENATE**

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

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate):** Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-13(2), I move:

*(At 6:21 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.)*

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## CONTENTS

Wednesday, June 4, 2025

	PAGE		PAGE
<b>Business of the Senate</b> . . . . .	96	Meeting of the Commission on Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs of the APF and Economic Parliamentary Symposium, April 2-4, 2025—Report Tabled	
<hr/>		Hon. Éric Forest . . . . .	100
<b>SENATORS' STATEMENTS</b>			
<b>The Late Norman Mark Hiscock</b>		<hr/>	
Hon. Fabian Manning . . . . .	96	<b>QUESTION PERIOD</b>	
<b>Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler</b>		<b>Global Affairs</b>	
Congratulations on Outstanding Achievement Award		Canada-China Relations	
Hon. Sharon Burey . . . . .	96	Hon. Michael L. MacDonald . . . . .	100
<b>Visitors in the Gallery</b> . . . . .	97	Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	100
<b>Médecins francophones du Canada</b>		<b>Finance</b>	
Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie . . . . .	97	Fiscal Transparency	
<b>Visitors in the Gallery</b> . . . . .	98	Hon. Yonah Martin . . . . .	101
<b>Pride Season</b>		Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	101
Hon. Kristopher Wells . . . . .	98	<b>Environment and Climate Change</b>	
<b>Combatting Islamophobia</b>		Carbon Emissions	
Hon. Salma Ataullahjan . . . . .	98	Hon. Mary Coyle . . . . .	101
<b>Italian Republic Day</b>		Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	101
<b>Italian Heritage Month</b>		<b>Global Affairs</b>	
Hon. Toni Varone . . . . .	99	Support for Ukraine	
<hr/>		Hon. Stan Kutcher . . . . .	102
<b>ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS</b>		Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	102
<b>Adjournment</b>		<b>Infrastructure and Communities</b>	
Notice of Motion		Use of Agricultural Lands	
Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson . . . . .	99	Hon. Robert Black . . . . .	102
<b>L'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie</b>		Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	102
Anniversary of the Commemoration of the Rwandan Genocide, April 6-7, 2024—Report Tabled		<b>Public Safety</b>	
Hon. Éric Forest . . . . .	99	Canada Post	
Meetings of the APF Presidency, April 22-26, 2024—Report Tabled		Hon. Marty Klyne . . . . .	103
Hon. Éric Forest . . . . .	100	Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	103
Meetings of the APF Political Committee and Working Group on Reforming the APF Constitution, April 27-30, 2024—Report Tabled		Firearms Control	
Hon. Éric Forest . . . . .	100	Hon. Leo Housakos . . . . .	103
Regional Assembly of the Africa Region of the APF, May 28-29, 2024—Report Tabled		Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	103
Hon. Éric Forest . . . . .	100	<b>Finance</b>	
Session of the Regional Assembly of Europe, November 11-13, 2024—Report Tabled		Fiscal Accountability	
Hon. Éric Forest . . . . .	100	Hon. Leo Housakos . . . . .	104
		Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	104
		<b>Crown-Indigenous Relations</b>	
		External Review Process	
		Hon. Paul (PJ) Prosper . . . . .	104
		Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	104

## CONTENTS

Wednesday, June 4, 2025

PAGE	PAGE
<b>ORDERS OF THE DAY</b>	
<b>Speech from the Throne</b>	
Motion for Address in Reply—Debate Continued	
Hon. Iris G. Petten . . . . .	105
Hon. Judy A. White . . . . .	106
<b>The Senate</b>	
Motion to Affect Senate and Committee Proceedings for Remainder of Current Session—Debate	
Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	108
Hon. Jim Quinn . . . . .	111
Hon. Denise Batters . . . . .	112
Hon. Andrew Cardozo . . . . .	113
Hon. Mary Jane McCallum . . . . .	114
Hon. Pamela Wallin . . . . .	114
Hon. Marilou McPhedran . . . . .	114
Hon. David M. Wells . . . . .	114
Motion in Amendment Negatived	
Hon. Jim Quinn . . . . .	115
Hon. Leo Housakos . . . . .	116
Hon. Raymonde Saint-Germain . . . . .	117
Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	117
Hon. Scott Tannas . . . . .	117
Hon. Denise Batters . . . . .	118
Hon. Mary Jane McCallum . . . . .	118
Hon. Pat Duncan . . . . .	118
Motion to Affect Senate and Committee Proceedings for Remainder of Current Session Adopted . . . . .	119
<b>National Framework for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income Bill (Bill S-206)</b>	
Second Reading—Debate Adjourned	
Hon. Kim Pate . . . . .	121
Hon. Marilou McPhedran . . . . .	127
<b>National Strategy for Children and Youth Bill (Bill S-212)</b>	
Second Reading—Debate Adjourned	
Hon. Rosemary Moodie . . . . .	128
<b>Canada Revenue Agency Act (Bill S-217)</b>	
Bill to Amend—Second Reading—Debate Adjourned	
Hon. Percy E. Downe . . . . .	132
Hon. Colin Deacon . . . . .	133
Hon. Kim Pate . . . . .	134
Hon. Marilou McPhedran . . . . .	135
<b>The Late Honourable Marc Garneau, P.C., C.C.</b>	
Silent Tribute	
Hon. Marc Gold . . . . .	135
<b>Business of the Senate</b>	
Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson . . . . .	136