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(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 23, 2025

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,  
Speaker

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## THE SENATE

Thursday, October 23, 2025

The Senate met at 1:30 p.m., the Speaker in the chair.

Prayers.

### SENATORS' STATEMENTS

#### MARÍA CORINA MACHADO

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, I rise today to honour María Corina Machado, a courageous defender of democratic rights, the leader of the Venezuelan opposition and the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

While the Maduro dictatorship continues to suppress the democratic and human rights of Venezuelans, silencing free speech, crushing peaceful assembly and denying free and fair elections, Ms. Machado's leadership shines like a beacon of hope. Her courage inspires millions of Venezuelans who still dream of a nation that is peaceful, free and stable.

Most importantly, colleagues, María Corina Machado pursues her cause through peaceful, democratic means — through words, through civic action and through the moral strength of non-violent resistance.

While the Carney government seems eager to engage with and even reward groups that glorify violence under the guise of liberation, I believe Canadians expect better. We should stand with peaceful, democratic activists like María Corina Machado, especially in our own hemisphere, because when people are denied free and fair elections, when government institutions are used to entrench power rather than to represent the people, they strike at the fundamental values we hold dear — the dignity of the individual, the right to be heard, the principle of accountability.

For far too long, Venezuela has languished on this government's back burner. The awarding of this Nobel Peace Prize gives new momentum to the Venezuelan people's struggle for freedom. Canada must seize this moment, together with our allies across the Americas, to take a firmer, principled stand against the Maduro regime and to help restore democracy and dignity in Venezuela.

For too many years, we have looked away as the Chávez and Maduro regimes dismantled Venezuela's democratic institutions piece by piece. Now is the time to speak up. Canada must stand shoulder to shoulder with the Venezuelan people in their fight for freedom, justice and the restoration of democratic order.

Thank you, colleagues.

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

### SURVEY OF SENATORS

**Hon. Colin Deacon:** Honourable senators, I absolutely love the responsibility of this role. In the context of my career, I cannot imagine ever having a greater honour than serving as an independent senator in this chamber.

However, there are days when I do not love every aspect of this job and the countless rules and constraints. It's a challenge that we share with Canada's entrepreneurs — red tape that can prevent us from achieving our full potential.

When I'm struggling with our 150 years of rules, I often hear a clerk gently reminding me that it's senators who make those rules. It's in this light that Senator Lewis and I were asked by our Canadian Senators Group colleagues to survey all senators in order to capture the diversity of views relating to our sitting schedule; the use of hybrid mode in sittings and committee meetings; whether we would consider a voting practice beyond that used in 1867; and what goals might guide the modernization of these and other practices, potentially in ways similar to the House of Commons.

We gladly accepted the challenge.

Consequently, we'll be creating and sharing a survey of senators that we hope you'll thoughtfully complete. Its primary objective is not to advocate for a particular outcome, but rather to gauge levels of support or concern regarding possible changes to the operation of the Senate.

And, clearly, for any changes to even be considered, we must ensure that all Senate and committee business would be adequately supported and staffed in a sustainable manner.

We will survey all senators because the financial and personal cost of weekly travel is not equally distributed across this chamber. Some of us live here in Ottawa. Others travel weekly from the interior of B.C. or an outport in Newfoundland, from above the Arctic Circle or from Canada's deep south, Windsor, Ontario.

There is a wide range of possible opportunities and limitations for us to consider. With each, we need to identify guardrails that will help to ensure each potential change could be implemented effectively, cost-efficiently and in ways that strengthen our ability to serve Canadians.

As we all know, the House of Commons continued to hold hybrid meetings post-pandemic. We did not. We may find that our collective position on this issue has changed simply because out of 99 current senators, 48 — or almost half — have been appointed since COVID.

Let's consider our diversity of viewpoints and see if there's an approach that might better serve our diversity of needs.

Thank you, colleagues.

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

#### VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Casey Broughton, board member for the organization TransParent Okanagan. She is the guest of the Honourable Senators Wilson and Wells (*Alberta*).

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

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

[*Translation*]

#### BLACK ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM

**Hon. Amina Gerba:** Honourable senators, when we celebrate Small Business Week, we celebrate the people who are building our country's economy every day.

Today, I want to draw attention to the announcement by Minister Rechie Valdez on October 20, 2025, confirming a renewed investment of \$189 million over five years in the Black Entrepreneurship Program.

[*English*]

This renewed investment reflects Canada's commitment to inclusive and sustainable growth. Since 2021, the Black Entrepreneurship Program has provided concrete tools such as funding, mentorship and business networks to help Black entrepreneurs overcome systemic barriers.

Of this new funding, \$67 million will go to the Black Entrepreneurship Loan Fund, administered by the Federation of African Canadian Economics, or FACE, providing capital that enables Black-owned businesses to innovate, grow and build generational wealth.

[*Translation*]

As a past entrepreneur myself and after working with many other entrepreneurs, I realized that systemic barriers are not a thing of the past: Even with comparable diplomas and solid business plans, Black entrepreneurs still struggle to earn the trust of financial institutions. For them, success demands additional effort and exceptional resilience.

[ Senator Deacon (Nova Scotia) ]

• (1340)

[*English*]

That is why the Black Entrepreneurship Program is essential. It must be maintained, expanded and made permanent to ensure equitable access to capital, mentorship and networks so that these entrepreneurs can fully contribute to Canada's economy.

[*Translation*]

Honourable senators, as we celebrate Small Business Week, let's renew our commitment to fostering an environment where every Canadian gets the chance to succeed. Let's celebrate the resilience, creativity and determination of Black entrepreneurs and all small business owners whose contributions enrich and strengthen our country.

Thank you.

[*English*]

#### VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Barbara Grantham, President and Chief Executive Officer of CARE Canada, and Tara Newell, Chief Programs Officer. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Senior.

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

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

#### FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

**Hon. Paulette Senior:** Honourable senators, I rise today on the unceded, unsundered territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation.

I'm pleased to have this opportunity to shine a light on Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, or FIAP. This policy applies a human-rights-based, intersectional and transformative approach to Canada's development assistance, focusing on tackling systemic barriers to equality.

Why is this focus on gender equality so essential? Because investing in women and girls delivers some of the highest returns on development investments. We know that when women thrive, communities prosper, economies grow and societies become more peaceful and resilient. The evidence is clear: When women are a part of peace processes, agreements are far more likely to last. When girls stay in school, their future earnings rise 10% to 20%, and their families rise with them. When women farmers have equal access to land, supplies and finance, chronic hunger drops by double digits. Equality is not an accessory to development; it is the condition that makes development possible.

Through partnerships with international NGOs like CARE Canada, we have seen how Canada's FIAP's targeted support for women and girls can transform lives and benefit their families and communities. By centring gender equality within their humanitarian programming, for example, CARE was able to get critical services and support to those most marginalized and in need, gaining access as a direct result of women's leadership.

These outcomes abroad also benefit Canadians at home. Effective assistance creates more stable partners, healthier markets and fewer crises that spill across borders. It creates the foundations to diversify and improve our trade partnerships.

We have heard this government's foreign policy priorities laid out last month at the UN General Assembly and we commend Minister Anand's commitment to not shrinking and not retreating from duty on the international stage. And yet, rolling back or watering down FIAP would do exactly that. It would undermine years of progress, weaken Canada's reputation as a global leader and signal to the world that we are retreating from the very principles that have defined our leadership for generations.

Colleagues, let us stand firmly behind the Feminist International Assistance Policy, support our partners like CARE Canada and continue to invest in a future where everyone can live with dignity, opportunity and hope.

Please join me in thanking Barbara Grantham and Tara Newell of CARE Canada, who are here today, for their outstanding efforts and leadership. Thank you.

#### VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Pankaj Kumar Bhowmik, Team Lead for the Advanced Plant Biotechnology team at the National Research Council Canada. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator Muggli.

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

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

#### WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

**Hon. Donna Dasko:** Honourable senators, during October we celebrate Women's History Month. I trust that you will join me in acknowledging the contributions of all women in Canada, past and present, through acts large and small, to the life of our nation.

October is also the month in which we mark the anniversary of the 1929 decision in the Persons Case, on October 18, which legally recognized women as persons and held that women were qualified to be appointed to the Senate. I am inspired every day by the beautiful and powerful statue of the Famous Five that graces our front garden here at the Senate building. At the start of this session, women held 55 of the 103 occupied seats in this Senate. Yes, it has taken almost a century to reach parity here, and it should never be in doubt again.

Today, I choose to honour these events by calling attention to the women's work we still have before us, here and abroad. As has often been said, women's work is never done.

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, or CEDAW, normally meets in October to review progress on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This year's session would have been particularly important, as it is also the thirtieth anniversary of the Beijing UN World Conference on Women and the tenth anniversary of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development. The committee session, however, was cancelled due to the lack of funds at the UN Secretariat.

I urge parliamentarians and Canadians to review the recent report entitled *Missed Opportunities*, on Canada's implementation of the Beijing Declaration, prepared by a network of over 70 women's rights organizations, trade unions and independent experts, which articulates areas of progress as well as the remaining critical issues to be addressed, such as gender-based violence.

I also urge parliamentarians to act on the CEDAW recommendation No. 40 from last year regarding the equal and inclusive representation of women, calling for 50-50 parity between women and men in all decision-making systems, including elected legislatures. There is work to be done here so that some day, hopefully soon, we can celebrate reaching that milestone in both of our chambers of the Parliament of Canada.

Thank you.

#### VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of students from the UBC Women in House Program. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Martin.

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

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

#### UBC WOMEN IN HOUSE PROGRAM

**Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, I rise today as a proud alumna of the University of British Columbia, or UBC, to recognize the outstanding students from UBC who are taking part in the 2025 UBC Women in House Program. They are Lindsay Burlie, Elizabeth Semowo, Rebecca Zuk, Ashley Macdonald, Christy Lim, Bahaar Abbas, Salina Dolmo Lama, Concha Sousa, Lindsey Eiwanger and Simi Sahota. A special thank you as well to Rebecca Monnerat, Tina Alexander and Gerald Baier, who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this year's program.

UBC has long been a cornerstone of excellence, innovation and leadership in the province. Since its founding in 1908, UBC has evolved from a small provincial institution into one of the world's leading public universities, a place where learning meets purpose and research drives real-world impact.

The UBC Women in House Program stands as a shining example of that commitment, empowering young women to step into spaces of leadership, policy and public service. Established in 2019, the UBC Women in House Program has become a proud initiative of the UBC School of Public Policy and Global Affairs and the Liu Institute for Global Issues, underscoring UBC's enduring dedication to women's leadership, mentorship and experiential learning.

• (1350)

Through this program, delegates gain valuable mentorship, form meaningful professional networks and develop a deeper understanding of public service, all within a setting designed to break down barriers and amplify women's voices in decision-making roles.

This morning, I had the honour of co-hosting a networking breakfast for the 2025 UBC Women in House delegates. These bright, resilient and determined women have spent the day shadowing female parliamentarians, observing their work and learning first-hand about the challenges and rewards of public life. I extend sincere gratitude to my fellow parliamentarians who have welcomed the UBC students to shadow them for the day and to offer them insights they could only gain by being here inside the Ottawa bubble. Thank you, Senators Busson and White.

As this year's UBC Women in House is taking place in October — Women's History Month in Canada — this program has taken on even greater significance. Each October, we celebrate the women who have shaped our nation's history, from the Famous Five, who fought for equality under the law, to the countless women who continue to lead in government, education, science and every facet of society. Women in House embodies that same spirit of courage and progress, creating pathways for young women to follow in their footsteps and build on their legacy.

Honourable senators, please join me in applauding the UBC Women in House class of 2025!

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

#### VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Melissa Feld, Laura Robinson and the young Afghan women they helped bring to safety in Canada, Shaima Kirimi and sisters Selsela Naseri and Dr. Rangina Naseri. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator McPhedran.

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

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

[ Senator Martin ]

[Translation]

#### BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, allow me to remind you to be careful when you rise and to make sure to keep your papers away from your microphone to prevent acoustic shocks.

[English]

Keep your papers as far as possible from the microphone so that it does not injure our interpreters. Thank you.

#### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

##### NATIONAL FRAMEWORK ON SICKLE CELL DISEASE BILL

FIRST REPORT OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE PRESENTED

**Hon. Rosemary Moodie,** Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, presented the following report:

Thursday, October 23, 2025

The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology has the honour to present its

##### FIRST REPORT

Your committee, to which was referred Bill S-201, An Act respecting a national framework on sickle cell disease, has, in obedience to the order of reference of June 12, 2025, examined the said bill and now reports the same without amendment.

Respectfully submitted,

ROSEMARY MOODIE

*Chair*

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

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GORE MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY

#### PRIVATE BILL—MESSAGE FROM COMMONS

**The Hon. the Speaker** informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons returning Bill S-1001, An Act to authorize Gore Mutual Insurance Company to apply to be continued as a body corporate under the laws of the Province of Quebec, and acquainting the Senate that they had passed this bill without amendment.

### ADJOURNMENT

#### MOTION ADOPTED

**Hon. Iris G. Petten**, pursuant to notice of October 22, 2025, moved:

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, October 28, 2025, at 2 p.m.

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

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

### BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, before proceeding to Question Period with the minister, I would like to remind you of the time limits the Senate established for questions and answers in the order of June 4, 2025.

When the Senate receives a minister for Question Period, as is the case today, the length of a main question is limited to 1 minute, and the answer to 1 minute and 30 seconds. The supplementary question and answer are each limited to 45 seconds. In all these cases, the reading clerk stands 10 seconds before the time expires.

I will now ask the minister to enter and take her seat.

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[Translation]

### QUESTION PERIOD

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, to receive a Minister of the Crown, the Honourable Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, appeared before honourable senators during Question Period.)

### BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, today we have with us for Question Period the Honourable Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, to respond to questions concerning her ministerial responsibilities. On behalf of all senators, I welcome the minister.

Minister, as I have noted to the Senate, a main question is limited to 1 minute, and your response to 1 minute 30 seconds. The question and answer for a supplementary question are both limited to 45 seconds. The reading clerk stands 10 seconds before these times expire. I ask everyone to respect these times. Question Period will last 64 minutes.

• (1400)

[English]

### MINISTRY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

#### USE OF PSYCHEDELICS IN THERAPY

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** Minister, welcome. Two days ago in Ottawa, veterans and experts said during a press conference that little progress has been made during the past two years on psychedelic-assisted therapy. Yet the Senate report in 2023 urged immediate action, citing alarming suicide rates among veterans: It was 50% higher among men, 200% higher among women and 250% higher for men under 25 years of age — the statistics are terrible.

In December 2024, your own briefing said that Veterans Affairs Canada had examined the Senate recommendation and was open to all treatment options. The question is simple: What concrete steps has your department taken since then to address this issue?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you very much, senator, for the question and thank you for the opportunity to be here before you.

I am very grateful for the work that the Senate has done and that the committees have done, including the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs in the previous Parliament when conducting the study about this topic.

Obviously, ensuring veterans receive the supports and benefits to which they are entitled is core to my mandate and that of Veterans Affairs Canada. This includes ensuring that veterans have access to the right treatments, including emerging treatments, as well as responsibly addressing their health concerns, whether those are related to physical or mental health.

Veterans Affairs Canada reimburses treatments that are backed by scientific and clinical evidence. My officials work closely with their counterparts at Health Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to monitor emerging treatments and evaluate their appropriateness for veterans. That would include the psychedelics that you're referring to.

Research into psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy is ongoing, and, at present, evidence remains limited. We know that people diagnosed with military or combat-related PTSD may respond to varying degrees of treatments, including this. Health Canada continues to assess the safety, efficiency and quality of new drugs and treatments before regulating them.

**Senator Housakos:** Minister, I heard a lot about assessing, observing and monitoring, but fundamentally your department has the responsibility to show leadership and coordination in addressing the mental health crisis that directly affects our veterans.

Yet, for the past two years, we've seen mainly that: just an observational approach and monitoring while following the research without taking any concrete initiative to move it forward.

My question, minister, is this: Why hasn't Veterans Affairs Canada taken the initiative to bring together Health Canada, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to establish a joint program on psychedelic-assisted therapy rather than waiting for others to act? Take the lead and align all these organizations together to take action.

**Ms. McKnight:** Thank you, senator. We are continually working with our partners in some of those other fields, such as Health Canada, as I mentioned. We are continually engaging with health experts and regulators as the research for this, particularly, evolves. We will continue to look at timely and evidence-based treatments as they move forward. We will continue to evaluate these opportunities as there's evidence for the decisions.

#### KOREAN WAR VETERANS

**Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Minister, I've had the privilege of meeting and working very closely with many of your predecessors, so I look forward to doing the same with you.

I just wanted to take this opportunity to highlight that, as you know, this is the start of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Korean War years for our veterans. It started on June 25 and will go on until July 27 — the Armistice Day of the Korean War. On the sixtieth anniversary, I remember former minister Steven Blaney at the time declared 2013 as the Year of the Korean War Veteran. With the seventy-fifth anniversary — which we are in now — and with the significant battles that have happened, what will the government do to really commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary in a way that our veterans deserve?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you very much for that question. The commemoration of these significant events is incredibly important. I know that some activities have been starting already, and we are going to be continuing more throughout the year, working specifically with the Korea Veterans Association of Canada. While reviewing

some of my briefing notes, I actually saw the opportunity that something will be taking place at some point in my home province, specifically in Langley, and ceremonies have taken place there. Our commemorations team works very closely with the Korea Veterans Association, and we will continue to do so — they have regular engagements — so that we can ensure that we are acknowledging these significant dates and recognizing these veterans.

**Senator Martin:** For instance, commemorative stamps were something that wasn't done in 2013, but there was a commemorative coin. These things all mean so much to the veterans.

On that note, Remembrance Day is fast approaching. I was so disappointed with the Throne Speech when the King was in the chamber because the Korean War was not mentioned alongside the other wars, and I'm sure our veterans heard the absence of the mention of the Korean War.

For your Remembrance Day remarks and statements, I just wanted to say that I hope that our Korean War veterans, especially given it's the seventy-fifth anniversary, will be part of those official statements.

**Senator Housakos:** Hear, hear.

**Ms. McKnight:** Thank you very much for that feedback. I understand that, and I will certainly be taking that back to my team.

You have identified a few opportunities, and I will certainly be sharing that with my department to see what might be possible.

**Senator Martin:** Thank you.

#### REMEMBRANCE DAY

**Hon. Donna Dasko:** Welcome, minister, to the Senate. We all received your communication on Wednesday of this week, which urged parliamentarians to lead efforts in our communities to promote Remembrance Day activities. As someone who studied Canadian attitudes, beliefs and behaviours throughout my career, I'm interested in the research your department may have undertaken or research you're familiar with about Canadians' participation in remembrance activities. What percentage of Canadians wear a poppy or other commemorative symbols? Do you have any data on how many Canadians participate in Remembrance Day activities? Further, can you speak to any trends you are aware of in these behaviours? Thank you.

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you very much for the opportunity. It's nice to hear that the communication has made it out. I appreciate that.

**Senator Dasko:** We knew you were here today.



**Ms. McKnight:** Thank you. Specific to data on the number of individuals who possibly wear a poppy, I don't have that information available to me right now, but I would be happy to follow up with you at a later time.

As it relates to the topic of commemoration in general, for me it is so important that we acknowledge our veterans more than on one day of the year. For some people, it is a focus around Remembrance Day, and for others it is a Veterans' Week experience, but the service, commitment and sacrifice that our veterans have made — and that our current service members make — is a 365-day commitment. I'm very much committed to making sure that we have the opportunity to have these conversations on a recurring and even daily basis to acknowledge their contributions so that it's more than just wearing a poppy as our sign of commemoration.

#### COMBATTING MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

**Hon. Donna Dasko:** Minister, I'm going to switch topics entirely because I want to ask you this question: This past summer, according to the organization DisinfoWatch, Canada's Memorial to the Victims of Communism was the subject of a smear campaign by a Russian account known for amplifying Kremlin disinformation and propaganda. Are you aware of any other Russian disinformation campaigns targeting Canadian memorials, and how does your department deal with these kinds of issues? Thank you.

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** I am not aware of any additional circumstances that you've inquired about.

• (1410)

Our focus is on ensuring the veterans who have served this country are honoured and commemorated with respect for the contributions, services and sacrifices they have made for us, and ensuring that is how we are acknowledging them throughout this country.

#### MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Hon. Stan Kutcher:** In 2021, the Veterans Ombudsman made a number of key recommendations addressing mental health care needs of families of Canadian Armed Forces, or CAF, veterans — though unfortunately not those of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP, whom we also need to consider. They included that:

... the Government ensure that family members, including former spouses, survivors and dependent children, have access to federal Government funded mental health treatment in their own right when the mental health illness is related to conditions of military service experienced by the family member ...

In a CBC article published on August 21, 2024, the Veterans Ombudsman reported that families continue to be denied critical mental health care.

What is being done to address this issue? It seems to be taking a long time.

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** I would like to acknowledge the Ombud for her ongoing advocacy and her previous service with the Canadian Armed Forces.

The work of the Veterans Ombud is incredibly important. The contributions they bring to the discussion about strengthening supports and benefits are invaluable.

We have some programs available to support family members, including spouses, children and caregivers, with immediate access to 20 sessions of support through the VAC Assistance Service, which is staffed by mental health professionals and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This is in addition to other resources offered through the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund, which are also available to family members in these communities.

We are working hard to address this. Most importantly, there is still more for us to do.

**Senator Kutcher:** Minister, thank you for that answer and for assuring us you're working on these issues. It's so important they are addressed in an expeditious way.

This recommendation captures a key issue that many military spouses have raised. The phrase "... in their own right ..." in this recommendation recognizes the spouses and family members of veterans need to be treated as people with their own inherent and constitutionally protected rights, not as dependents of the veteran. That does not seem to be the case. Would you share your thoughts on this?

**Ms. McKnight:** You've touched on something important here: When a veteran serves, they do not serve alone. Their family, caregivers, children and spouses also serve with them.

To return to one of the key things about the VAC Assistance Service — it is available to the spouses or other family members without the veteran necessarily having an open file. It is available independently, which I believe speaks to what you were addressing there. It is independent of the veteran's file. Again, there is more for us to do.

#### REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Hon. Rebecca Patterson:** Minister, my question relates to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs June 2024 report entitled *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans*, and specifically the first recommendation, which says:

That Veterans Affairs Canada, together with the Canadian Armed Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the allied countries, fund and implement a structured long-term research program on servicewomen and woman Veterans, and that this research be women-specific.

In the government's official response, it appeared you agreed to this recommendation. Could you please confirm this is still the position of the government, the Department of Veterans Affairs and you as Minister of Veterans Affairs?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you, Senator Patterson, and thank you for your service as well.

I acknowledge the service experience of women veterans is often significantly different from others. As such, we need to develop services and benefits specific to their needs, both during and after service.

I thank the members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, both past and present, and the witnesses who participated and contributed to the *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans* report that generated the recommendations. This year, we will be able to say we are in the process of either starting or implementing all of those recommendations, including ongoing research that is being undertaken.

One example I know of, the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research — or CIMVHR — conference, has been taking place this week. I know there are a number of research projects being undertaken.

Continuing to move forward with this is one of my priorities.

**Senator Patterson:** Thank you. That relates to my follow-up question. At this Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research conference, CIMVHR was identified as a collaborator on this study. Following the presentation at the CIMVHR Forum on Monday, one of the Veterans Affairs Canada, or VAC, officials said in response to an audience member's question that, while there is a plan in place, there is no dedicated funding for implementation.

Can you confirm whether funding will be forthcoming in next month's budget, or in any other appropriation acts in the current supply period?

**Ms. McKnight:** I know that VAC does give funding to CIMVHR for research projects. I don't have the specifics of that here with me now. I could follow up on that specifically.

#### MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Hon. Marty Klyne:** Minister, our office has heard from a group of surviving dependents of service members who lost their lives due to enemy action or service-related illness. They've been lobbying for enhanced survivor benefits — particularly access to regular grief and mental health therapy — through Veterans Affairs.

Right now, they fall under the public health system, which doesn't provide this kind of ongoing support, leaving the PSHCP as their only option.

If a member's death is deemed service-related, shouldn't the purview of care, including mental health supports, fall squarely under Veterans Affairs Canada, or VAC?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** I appreciate the question. Again, speaking to some of the remarks I've made already, the care of the families is of significant importance, as we acknowledge that no veteran serves alone. We need to be supporting the families that have served alongside them.

My conversations with veterans, family members and — in some cases — survivors have only reinforced for me the vital role that spouses and families play in supporting our veterans. I will continue advocating for services that support veterans and their families because, as I said, we need to continue to do better.

**Senator Klyne:** Minister, five years ago, the federal government restricted access to mental health counselling for veterans' families. Since then, families have continued to face significant gaps in care, particularly after the death of a veteran or following a family breakdown.

Spouses and children lose access to counselling once they're no longer legally connected to the veteran, even though the toll of service and loss continues.

The Veterans Ombud's 2021 report called on the government to ensure that family members, including former spouses and dependent children, have access to federally funded mental health or treatment independent of the veteran's status. Veterans Affairs Canada agreed with this recommendation, and your department has publicly stated that families deserve this level of care.

Minister, can you please update us on when you intend to legislate the changes needed to ensure veterans' families have access to mental health supports in their own right?

• (1420)

**Ms. McKnight:** Thank you again.

I return to my previous comments that there is more for us to do in continuing to support mental health both for our veterans and their family members. In the past 10 years, we've seen a 92% increase in the number of new cases coming to Veterans Affairs, and we are continuing to deliver benefits and services to all eligible veterans.

I am going to continue to advocate and advance the modernization of the service-delivery system and improvements that we can continue to make to address opportunities where we could do more.

[Translation]

#### RECRUITMENT LEVELS

**Hon. Claude Carignan:** Minister, my question is to you in your capacity as Associate Minister of National Defence.

The Auditor General released a troubling report on military recruitment this week. Despite thousands of applications, only one in 13 applicants was recruited. Between 2022 and 2025, 15,000 military personnel were recruited, 25% less than the target of 19,700 new recruits. The report notes that these gaps:

... could affect the Canadian Army's, the Royal Canadian Navy's, and the Royal Canadian Air Force's abilities to respond to threats, emergencies, or conflicts and to accomplish their missions.

The Departmental Plan for 2025-26 set a target of 101,500 military personnel.

What concrete measures have been taken and implemented since this plan was announced to address the crisis? When will Canadians see tangible results?

[English]

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you very much for the question. I will do my best to answer, and I acknowledge there may be more information that I will need to follow up with you on and share specifics.

This government has made a tremendous investment in our service members with the increase in pay that was announced earlier this year. This is something that we had heard was an opportunity to acknowledge those who are currently serving and that this would be a deciding factor for why individuals may or may not join the Canadian Armed Forces. This is step one as we are building out the strength of our forces to protect Canada.

We've also heard that the investments in equipment, training and opportunities are some of the things that contribute to that, and we are making those investments with the steps that we're taking right now.

[Translation]

**Senator Carignan:** Thank you.

In an increasingly unstable geopolitical context, it is essential that recruitment efforts meet our specific strategic needs. The same report by the Auditor General states that:

... the Canadian Armed Forces was experiencing a challenge of attracting and training enough highly skilled recruits to reach full staffing levels for many occupations, such as pilots and ammunition technicians.

What is the department doing to ensure that the measures implemented meet not only the Canadian Armed Forces' operational requirements but also the expectations of our allies with whom we share common security commitments?

[English]

**Ms. McKnight:** Again, I think we are in the midst of a clear plan that is helping us reach the 2% NATO target this year. We know that is a necessary step, and this is part of how we demonstrate our commitment with our partners regarding how we are investing and engaging in building our Canadian Armed Forces.

We've invested with the well-deserved pay raise, the steps we are taking to support Ukraine with what they need, and we're investing in our core military capabilities. These are all parts of the process that we are undertaking to advance this.

#### FUNDING FOR VETERANS

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** Minister McKnight, while the government plans major new investments in defence readiness and equipment, there remains a troubling imbalance between funding for current operations and long-term care for those who served. For example, thousands of veterans still face months-long waits for disability decisions, transition support or access to mental health care. As Canada increases defence spending, will the minister commit to ensuring that a fixed and transparent proportion of that spending is set aside specifically for veterans transition, rehabilitation and family supports so that those who defend Canada are not forgotten once they take off the uniform?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you for the question.

You made mention of some of the waits that veterans may experience when waiting for services. The department has been working very hard to reduce those times, because we know that when a veteran has gotten to the point of submitting an application they may have already gone through a period of suffering at that point. Therefore, any time there's a wait, it can really make it feel impossible.

That is part of the steps that we're taking with our service modernization on service delivery to be able to respond in more timely ways to veterans so we can get them the services and benefits that they're eligible for in a quicker fashion. This also leads to the component about making sure that we are meeting the needs of the families who stand with our veterans in their service.

**Senator Housakos:** Minister, I didn't hear a commitment to a shared percentage of funding. I didn't hear a number, and it's worrying.

Can you at least commit to embedding transparent, measurable veteran care and transition outcomes into all future defence-budget planning so that Canadians know how much of the new spending directly benefits veterans and their families rather than being absorbed by bureaucracy or procurement? It's nice to have these aspirational talking points, but we need to have a concrete number and a percentage of the new funding that will be allocated to this problem.

**Ms. McKnight:** One of the important things to keep top of mind is that 94% of the funding that Veterans Affairs receives goes to delivering benefits and supports to our veterans. I can commit to making sure that we are putting the needs of veterans at the top of our priorities and that we are ensuring that veterans are able to receive all the benefits for which they are eligible.

[Translation]

**Hon. Suze Youance:** Minister, according to your briefing notes from last June, when the 2025-26 budget is tabled, your department should be receiving \$7.8 billion towards its mission of supporting Canada's 163,000 veterans. Roughly speaking, that is just under \$50,000 per veteran and for their family members, caregivers and survivors, and I really should be multiplying that by the 94% you talked about.

How could the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of National Defence and perhaps even other departments that provide services work together to better support our veterans and their families?

[English]

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Veterans Affairs is very committed to working with our fellow ministries to ensure we are able to support veterans in as many ways as possible.

I've made reference to some of the work that we do with Health Canada with regard to new, emerging treatments. Certainly, we work together with the Minister of National Defence. This is something that I'm working closely on, particularly as it relates to ensuring a seamless transition for those who are serving and are moving into their role as a veteran.

We are looking to ensure we have that continuum of experience. These are individuals who have served our country, and we are focused on working together to ensure they have that smooth transition.

We are looking for all of those opportunities to work with our fellow ministries.

[Translation]

**Senator Youance:** Minister, with the budget restrictions announced in conjunction with the increase in NATO military spending targets, can our NATO commitments include Veterans Affairs budgets while maintaining services for veterans? If so, how? If not, why not?

• (1430)

[English]

**Ms. McKnight:** Veterans Affairs spending does count towards NATO spending. I believe \$7.3 million last year was contributed to it, and we are actually the second-largest contributor to the NATO calculation for Canada's contribution.

#### POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

**Hon. Hassan Yussuff:** Thank you for being here. I'm going to try again because I was a member of the committee that looked at the issue. The time is now with regard to dealing with PTSD.

My colleague across the aisle just gave you the statistics, which speak to the failure of how we are dealing with PTSD in this country, more specifically, how we are dealing with our veterans. New treatments have emerged, and other countries have taken steps to ensure that those treatments are offered with scientific evaluation and support.

Our plea to you as the minister is that you need to be the strongest advocate so we can have other ways to treat our veterans and their PTSD symptoms because they are begging and crying for help. I've heard their voices first-hand.

Can you commit to the Senate that you are going to take this back and plead with your colleagues to fund a study working with Health Canada and the Health Data Research Network to ensure we can get veterans the help that they need?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you, senator, for your question.

As I referenced, Veterans Affairs is committed to reviewing all new scientific information that comes forward as it relates to possible treatments. Our Table of Disabilities, with which department staff are equipped so that they can make decisions, undergoes regular review as new information comes forward and as we have the opportunity to go back and look at all items over a period of time. This is a continuous, ongoing process to ensure that we are responding to the best available information and scientific research.

**Senator Yussuff:** Minister, if I may follow up, the evidence that we need and the scientific work that needs to be done must be supported and funded by the government on behalf of our veterans in this country. It is not going to happen magically; it will happen because the department is supporting and advocating for this to happen. If we are going to have new evidence on how to treat PTSD, we need to fund those studies to make that available.

Can you commit that you will challenge your colleagues to provide some of the funding to ensure that this scientific study is done rigorously so we can have the evidence to support our veterans?

**Ms. McKnight:** As I mentioned, we do have funding that goes towards supporting research that is done. The Atlas Institute has been mentioned, as well as the supports that we give to CIMVHR by bringing together research that is taking place and publishing it around the world.

I will continue to advocate to ensure that the needs and benefits of our veterans are at the top of my priority list and that we are making sure those voices are heard.

#### REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Hon. Krista Ross:** Thank you for being here with us, minister.

As referenced by Senator Patterson, in 2024 the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, or ACVA, produced its fifteenth report entitled *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans*, which provided 42 recommendations to Parliament. Some of those included funding and implementing long-term research on servicewomen and women veterans, that Veterans Affairs Canada be more flexible in its assessment of secondary medical conditions resulting from military sexual trauma, and that Veterans Affairs Canada identify the barriers women veterans face in accessing benefits and services.

Would you tell me the number of recommendations from this report that have been implemented, or are in progress, and provide an update on your priorities in this regard?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you, senator, for the question.

Again, I would just like to acknowledge the work that was done by the ACVA in undertaking that study, but even more so, the women veterans who came forward and participated in that process. I had the opportunity to meet with a number of those individuals on June 12 this year, on the one-year anniversary of that report. Their willingness to share their stories was so incredibly important, and their willingness to continue advocating is important.

Of the 42 recommendations, by the end of this year, all will be either implemented or in progress so that we can continue to move this forward. We acknowledge that this is part of a continuing discussion to expand on how we can best serve women veterans.

**Senator Ross:** Thank you, minister. I know you hail from the West Coast, but I come from the East Coast. We have many important veterans organizations and service providers in Atlantic Canada, and we have Canadian Forces bases in Gagetown, Halifax, Greenwood, Gander and Goose Bay.

Could you share with us how many visits you have been able to make to Atlantic Canada in your capacity as the Minister of Veterans Affairs since you were appointed in May of this year? What are your plans for future visits to our region?

**Ms. McKnight:** Thank you for the question. Yes, I have had the opportunity to visit Atlantic Canada once since my appointment. I've had the opportunity to be in Prince Edward Island to engage both with those working with and those serving our veterans in the delivery of services and benefits. I've also had the opportunity to connect with some veterans while I was on Prince Edward Island.

I have also been connecting with veterans across the country — in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia — and those efforts will be ongoing. There was a reference earlier to the upcoming Veterans' Week, and I will certainly be taking that opportunity to connect with veterans in a number of locations across the country.

#### NATIONAL VETERANS EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY

**Hon. Duncan Wilson:** Minister, welcome. I'm so pleased to see a minister from the beautiful province of British Columbia, particularly one who represents one of the country's most important port complexes, given the amount of Canada's international trade that goes through your riding.

My first question is on an issue that I believe is near and dear to the hearts of all Canadians, the matter of ensuring that veterans are able to pursue meaningful post-service careers. This issue is one that your party had prioritized in its platform commitments to veterans and seems to be an issue that your government appears to be seized with. I think we would all agree on the critical importance of ensuring that our veterans go on to having fulfilling careers once their active service has come to an end.

Given this, can you please elaborate on your work around this issue and what evolution we should expect to the government's strategy in the near and medium term?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you very much, senator. This is something that is incredibly close to my heart, coming from a business background and knowing the importance of creating meaningful opportunities for veterans in their post-service civilian life. Canadian Armed Forces members who are transitioning to civilian life have an incredibly broad and extensive set of skills and experiences that they can bring into the workforce.

In 2024 Canada launched its first National Veterans Employment Strategy with the goal of connecting the skills that veterans have with the opportunities that are out there. The strategy is going to focus on expanding employment supports, recognizing veteran-ready employers and strengthening our public service hiring of veterans who have these incredible skills.

We are very committed to moving that forward and being able to bring these opportunities to our veterans because we know that the sense of community that can come in one way from employment is a great way to support our veterans.

**Senator Wilson:** Thank you. As a quick follow-up, minister, I know you bring a personal passion for entrepreneurship, having been an entrepreneur yourself and having had extensive engagement with the B.C. chambers of commerce and the chambers of commerce movement.

In the course of your continued learning about this file and the challenges that veterans face, have you had the occasion to meet with veteran entrepreneurs?

**Ms. McKnight:** Thank you. Yes, entrepreneurship is another part of our National Veterans Employment Strategy. I have had a couple of really amazing engagements with some veterans. I would love to share one with you.

• (1440)

Earlier this year, when I was in Atlantic Canada, I had the opportunity to meet a father and son veteran combo who own two different businesses in the area, and through this conversation I realized how much of their skills that they had translated over. One of the skills that might not have landed if you were to look at their formal job description in the CAF was project management, and yet that's very much what they are doing every single day in their roles.

[Translation]

#### PROGRAM SUCCESS METRICS

**Hon. Claude Carignan:** Minister, your government launched a veterans homelessness strategy in April 2023. As you just pointed out, a Veterans Employment Strategy was also created in June 2024. More than two years after the first strategy, and more than a year and a half after the second, what concrete results can your department show? How many veterans have found jobs since the strategy was launched, and how many homeless veterans have been rehoused since 2023? I would like the numbers.

[English]

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** I would need to come back to you with the direct numbers, and I'm happy to follow up on that. What I can speak to are some of the examples where I have seen these programs at work and making a difference in the lives of veterans.

So if we specifically start with the housing, you mentioned the Veteran Homelessness Program, which is a pilot program that's in its second year. We've been able to take the learnings from year one, and we are now applying those to strengthen the results.

I had the opportunity to recently attend a few of the different projects that received funding from this program to support the need for permanent housing for our veterans and the wraparound supports that go with it. It's about more than just putting a roof over the individuals' heads, but it's also supporting them for success in that.

One example is Veterans' House here in Ottawa, which I was recently at. I had the incredible opportunity to meet an individual who was a more senior veteran who, prior to coming to live at Veterans' House, did not have a home. He welcomed me into his home. This is an example of the program at work.

[Translation]

**Senator Carignan:** Your government presented these strategies as government priorities. I'm very surprised that you don't have the figures with you. Despite the time that has passed

since the strategies were launched, you don't have any data with you about the number of veterans who have found a job or who have been rehoused. How can your department measure the success of these strategies if you don't have any data or numbers on the results being achieved? Is this really a government priority?

[English]

**Ms. McKnight:** Thank you. Data will take time to collect. I will use one example of that. The first time we had a veteran identifier question on the census after 50 years was in 2021. Our next opportunity for a veteran identifier will be in 2026. That will give us some input on the progress that is being made surrounding things like homelessness and such.

Additionally, not every veteran chooses to self-identify as a veteran after their service.

#### COMMEMORATIVE WREATHS

**Hon. David M. Wells:** Thank you, minister, for appearing.

In a letter that you sent to all parliamentarians, you said, "... in addition to providing two standard wreaths to each member of Parliament and one wreath to each senator." I wanted to ask, first of all, were you aware that in Newfoundland and Labrador, which I represent and some colleagues here represent, we have a Memorial Day and commemorate veterans on July 1 as well as our standard Remembrance Day, November 11? Would there be allowance for additional wreaths for senators who want to lay wreaths to commemorate on July 1?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you very much, senator, for the question. I was not aware of that particular occurrence on July 1. I would need to take that back and come back to you with an answer.

**Senator D. M. Wells:** I have to say that shocks me. That's fairly surprising, in fact. On July 1, it's traditional in Newfoundland and Labrador to not begin celebrations for Canada Day until noon because we're commemorating those lost in wars that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians had fought in. When my office sent a note back to your office to the email address that was given, it was essentially an out-of-office reply saying:

The Veterans Affairs Wreath for Parliamentarians campaign ended on November 8. Please note that this mailbox is not monitored outside of the annual scheduled campaign.

Is that something that you could look at, because there are more than just November 11 remembrance days? We've heard from Senator Martin, who is a strong advocate for commemorating the Korean War and other wars in which Canadians have fought.

**Ms. McKnight:** I can certainly take that away to look into it and follow up with you.

## REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

**Hon. Marty Deacon:** Thank you for being here today, minister. I appreciate that. This will be probably a third go at a similar question that started with Senator Housakos earlier. I am coming back to the report entitled *The Time is Now* and the whole area around psychedelic therapies.

We build a culture of trust in committee. These folks tell their stories and will come in believing that we don't care and that nothing is really going to change. So I add to my two colleagues who have spoken to this: This is a desperate situation. Because we build a culture of trust and because we provide these opportunities to listen. That takes work with folks who are that traumatized. They now inform us each time a veteran takes their life. They now inform us each time they fundraise \$15,000 to get these treatments in another country. We are really, urgently desperate to be able to do the things that other countries are doing successfully. We won't have the trust, and now I have a question.

**The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore:** Minister, sorry, time is up. I must remind senators that you have 1 minute for the first question and 45 seconds for the second, and that the minister has 1 minute and 30 seconds for the first answer and 45 seconds for the second answer. Thank you. Minister.

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** I appreciate the continued advocacy, senator, that you are raising. As I mentioned, we want to make sure that every veteran with an illness or a condition is able to access the best possible care, and we are continually monitoring ongoing research in the field of developing treatments.

## VETERANS HOUSING

**Hon. Marty Deacon:** Thank you for that. The other area that we are looking at — and we have looked at — is unhoused veterans and homelessness. Certainly, at the committee we had the privilege of hearing again from a number of very vulnerable veterans, including visiting their homes. The whole unhoused area — one is the inability of advocacy groups, private or public, in accessing them and finding out and identifying who they are. Many don't self-identify for one reason or another.

Do you agree that this is a significant hurdle, and if so, what is your department trying to do to overcome this access and identification?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Specifically for the housing, we are working in collaboration with Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada because we are committed to improving housing supports for veterans and their families.

As I said, this pilot project is in its second year, and we are taking the learnings from the first year so that we can continue to grow and adapt the program. That includes strengthening partnerships with community organizations and engaging

veterans and their families to help with that outreach so that we can ensure that we are working together with the veterans who are in need of this housing.

**The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore:** Thank you, minister. Senator Loffreda.

## TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

**Hon. Tony Loffreda:** Madam Minister, thank you for being with us today.

• (1450)

As our economy evolves, veterans bring valuable leadership and technical skills to the workforce. How is Veterans Affairs Canada, or VAC, collaborating with Employment and Social Development Canada or private sector partners to expand job opportunities and training for veterans, especially in high-growth sectors such as green energy, technology, infrastructure and so on?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you very much for the question.

These are conversations that I am having daily with veterans in identifying opportunities where they would like to build on their skills and build a post-service career of their choice. This is also part of the conversation that I am having with business across the country about the opportunities to connect with veterans.

I have had the opportunity to speak with some post-secondary institutions. We are looking at how, again, skills recognition can take place, between the skills as they are identified under the Canadian Armed Forces, or CAF, what they can translate into in the business community and what opportunity there is to add supplemental learning so they can then qualify, perhaps, for some of the skilled trade designations, such as a Red Seal, adding to the experience and expertise that they already have.

**Senator Loffreda:** Thank you for that. Purpose is so important. We say, "What's measured improves."

My question is this: Are there measurable targets or performance indicators being used to track successful transitions by our veterans into the civilian labour market?

**Ms. McKnight:** Some of the metrics we have right now are via the engagement we are getting on our employment-supporting portals. For example, we have a veterans LinkedIn group through which we are able to connect veterans with employers that have opportunities available. We are able to monitor some of it through there.

We are also working with feedback, both through some of our community partners that work to support veterans in the transition to employment through those programs and then also, again, overlaying the information that we have coming out of the —

**The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

#### REDUCTION OF SERVICES

**Hon. Percy E. Downe:** Minister, I was very surprised to hear the questions from Conservative senators regarding their concerns about veterans and their benefits when we all remember that it was the previous Harper government that laid off a quarter of the employees at Veterans Affairs Canada — 900 people. They closed nine service centres and impacted disability payments for veterans.

Many of us fought those, including Senator Cuzner, who led the charge on having this restored by the Liberal government. You are now back to 3,700 employees, and 1,600 of those are at the national headquarters in Charlottetown. Given the history of cutbacks in the department, how would the expenditure review impact your department going forward?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** I would like to start by acknowledging the incredible department staff, and you have made reference to the individuals who show up with empathy and dedication for our veterans every day. We must ensure that we are starting by acknowledging them.

Canadians expect us to be responsible with our public funds, and veterans want us to ensure that we have benefit delivery that is accessible, timely and responsive.

We have, as I mentioned, seen an increasing number of veterans coming forward with applications, and 94% of our funding goes to delivering supports and care for veterans and their families. My commitment remains the same: I will keep working to ensure that veterans receive the benefits and supports they are eligible for.

#### POLICY ON HIRING MEDICALLY RELEASED VETERANS

**Hon. Percy E. Downe:** Minister, qualified RCMP members and Canadian Forces veterans who were medically released for conditions related to their service are eligible for priority employment appointments in all federal government departments. In other words, individuals who suffered serious injuries in service to Canada and cannot retain their present employment have priority for other jobs in the Government of Canada.

How many qualified medically released RCMP members and Canadian Forces veterans are currently working at Veterans Affairs Canada?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you very much for that question.

I am able to specifically answer regarding the number of CAF veterans working in the department, and right now we know that that number is reported at 280. We also believe that number is underreported because not every veteran chooses to self-identify as a veteran, and that is their choice. Additionally, previously we had not specifically asked the question about previously serving in the RCMP, so 280 is the reported number we have.

#### DISABILITY BENEFITS

**Hon. Marty Klyne:** Minister, there continue to be reports of surviving family members struggling to navigate the VAC system, with many facing such barriers that they simply give up. This affects their financial stability and the recognition of their loved one's service and sacrifice.

In 2021, Veterans Affairs conducted an internal audit on disability benefits for survivors. The findings were deeply concerning. The audit revealed that the decision makers in the benefits adjudication and processing unit had no official processes or guidance for handling survivors' applications and no formal training specific to these cases.

The audit concluded that the processing of disability benefits for survivors requires improvement. It recommended implementing a performance monitoring and quality assurance program, with a target completion date of July 31, 2022.

Minister, can you please confirm whether the recommendation has been fully implemented, as well as what measures are now in place to ensure that surviving family members receive fair, consistent and timely treatment when applying for benefits?

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** We are continually reviewing service delivery to our veterans. We are constantly looking for opportunities to improve, enhance and expedite while ensuring that each individual veteran's case receives care and attention, because each one is unique and needs that individual care.

We are now helping to enhance that by looking for ways to modernize and streamline our process to ensure that the time we have available to decision makers can be spent focusing on the elements of delivering services to our veterans.

#### MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Hon. Marty Klyne:** Minister, can you please update us as to when you intend to legislate the changes needed to ensure veterans' families have access to mental health supports in their own right? If you run out of time, we'll take a letter.



**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** As you may be familiar, with respect to supports for families, Veterans Affairs must take those steps in partnership with a number of other departments throughout government so we have a cohesive approach.

I can follow up with more information.

#### TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

**Hon. Mary Coyle:** Welcome, minister.

Minister, on January 2, 2017, just down the road from my home, Lionel Desmond, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, shot his wife, Shanna; their 10-year-old daughter, Aaliyah; and his mother, Brenda, in Upper Big Tracadie. He then took his own life.

These tragedies led, as you know, to the Desmond Fatality Inquiry, which released its report in 2024 with recommendations for the governments of both Nova Scotia and Canada.

We're told an internal file review by Veterans Affairs led to changes in case management, transition services in cooperation with the CAF and ensuring front-line staff are equipped to deal with domestic violence and have trauma-informed training.

Minister, could you update us on the status of the implementation of those changes? Are veterans being assigned case workers and receiving the care and services they need in their transition from the CAF?

• (1500)

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** First, let me acknowledge the tragedy that occurred and the impact it has for a family, for a community, and that continues.

You made reference to the trauma-informed care approach. The team at Veterans Affairs, for example, the House of Commons Veterans Affairs Committee, myself — trauma-informed care is something we all receive training in as we are engaging with veterans and with family members and those connected to veterans.

Progress is being made to ensure that training is incorporated, and we continue to do so.

**Senator Coyle:** I hope to have a little more detail on the specifics of those recommendations, but thank you for that.

Veterans Affairs Canada is the leading coordinating entity at the federal level on this matter, the inquiry matter, and our member of the Government of Nova Scotia's working group. Earlier this year, front-line health care and social workers who gave evidence at the Desmond Fatality Inquiry said there's a lack of transparency of where and how work is being done to address the inquiry recommendations.

How are you working with the province to ensure that these recommendations are being addressed in a timely manner, including the accessibility of services to African Nova Scotians?

**Ms. McKnight:** We continue to support veterans and to make sure that care is available. One of the steps that has been implemented, as it relates to mental health supports, is that a veteran may receive up to two years of coverage while they have paperwork pending on a disability case. We ensure mental health supports are available immediately, without barriers. That is one of the steps in place to make sure we are able to provide that care right away.

In terms of more specific steps, I would be happy to follow up at another time.

#### ACCESS TO PROGRAMS

**Hon. Rebecca Patterson:** Minister, I'm going to talk about veterans who are over 65 years of age. We have a number of policies for veterans that are outdated. A 65-year-old is relatively young. Specifically, I want to talk about those Canadians who have served in the RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces who have service-related injuries requiring rehabilitation. We know disability creates lifelong diminished earning capacity, and as people age, they're more likely to live in poverty as older persons.

While there are policies and programs in place to support veterans up to 65 years of age in terms of rehabilitation, there are a number of veterans now who are realizing they have service-related injuries and whom these programs will not cover but can work.

As these veterans reach that age, they are vulnerable, and we are trying to make sure they don't continue the poverty cycle —

**Hon. Jill McKnight, P.C., M.P., Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence:** Thank you, senator, for the question. Again, ensuring that veterans have access to any and all benefits they're eligible for is one of our top priorities; it's something that we are focused on every single day.

I would certainly encourage anyone who may come to you who is experiencing challenges with accessing supports to reach out to Veterans Affairs so we can work to see what is available to support them. There may be a program they have not accessed before that is available. There are things such as the Veterans Independence Program and a few others we can work with them on.

**Senator Patterson:** So to follow up on that, paragraph 20 in the Veterans Affairs Canada policy from 1971 allows the granting of a de facto reasonable delay. Can we consider someone over the age of 65 and knowing that they can meet the criteria for rehabilitation to have access to these programs?

**Ms. McKnight:** Thank you. I don't have the specific information in front of me right now, but I would be happy to follow up with you with a specific answer.

[Translation]

**The Hon. the Speaker:** I am certain that you'll join me in thanking Minister McKnight for being with us today.

We will now resume our proceedings where we left off at the start of Question Period. Thank you, minister.

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

[English]

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

#### SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Pate, seconded by the Honourable Senator Duncan, for the second reading of Bill S-206, An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income.

**Hon. Michael L. MacDonald:** Honourable senators, I rise to contribute to the debate at second reading of Bill S-206, the national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income act, sponsored by our colleague Senator Pate. This bill directs the Minister of Finance to develop a national framework to implement a guaranteed basic income program throughout Canada for any person over the age of 17.

Before I proceed, I again want to commend Senator Pate for her long-standing advocacy on behalf of those struggling in poverty. Her dedication to these difficult issues enriches the discourse in this chamber. I may not always agree with Senator Pate's prescriptions, but her persistent work on these issues is valuable, and I wish to acknowledge it.

I spoke at length as the critic for the previous incarnation of this bill, Bill S-233, and although I will not repeat every point I made during the last Parliament — even though I do have 45 minutes to do so — the legislation before us is of significant consequence, and if you'll indulge me, I believe many of the points bear repeating.

The idea of a guaranteed income is not new. Nobel Prize laureate Milton Friedman once championed it as a simpler and less paternalistic alternative to sprawling welfare bureaucracies, essentially providing support directly through a negative income tax. Robert Stanfield studied it when he led the Progressive Conservative Party in Ottawa, and our former colleague Hugh Segal was one of its most articulate advocates.

At its best, the concept promised efficiency, fairness and a reduction in bureaucracy, but, crucially, those earlier models always assumed that in return for establishing a basic income, redundant welfare programs would be eliminated. That is not, however, what some modern advocates propose. Instead, they want to add a new entitlement on top of the existing system, undermining the very simplicity and efficiency that made the idea attractive in the first place.

• (1510)

A guaranteed basic income, or GBI, cannot just be layered onto our welfare state; it must replace it. Moreover, although temporary workers, permanent residents and refugee claimants have been removed from this edition of the bill, the suggestion that income payments should begin at age 17 is, to me, a non-starter. Such a policy risks discouraging ambition and personal drive precisely when young people should be working to build their futures.

Guaranteed income models vary widely in both their administration and expense, but the costs are staggering. Without a full-scale replacement of our current tax system and welfare programs, the costs of GBI are, in my view, far beyond attainable. Estimates from the Basic Income Canada Network range from \$187 billion to \$637 billion annually.

For perspective, in 2024, the federal government collected \$217 billion in personal income tax revenue, and the total federal budget was \$450 billion. That is to say, without the overhaul and replacement of our current welfare programs, even the most modest of estimates for basic income programs would consume a significant portion of our federal budget, if not all of it.

The Fraser Institute examined several models, including one based on the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, or CERB, payments of \$2,000 per month. Providing every working-age Canadian with \$24,000 annually would cost \$464 billion. Unsurprisingly, the report concluded this was unsustainable. Even with clawback models, the trade-off remains the same: Lower costs mean higher marginal tax rates and weaker work incentives — the so-called welfare wall — with recipients potentially discouraged from moving off social assistance.

The report illustrates the competing interests in the design of guaranteed income models. Understand that there are three key features of any guaranteed basic income model: the cash transfer, the reduction rate and the income threshold. Three competing variables are seeking three competing interests: large enough transfers to alleviate poverty, while minimizing cost and avoiding disincentives to work. As the report rightly observed, no design can achieve all three goals of generosity, affordability and strong work incentives simultaneously.

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute likewise concluded that unconditional cash transfers, however well intentioned, often do more harm than good. Such schemes require higher taxes, higher spending, and still end up providing less to those who need help most. As their report put it, spending less on Canadians with severe disabilities so we can spend more on able-bodied working-age people is “. . . an indefensible use of scarce public resources.” And I agree.

Common sense dictates that giving people large unconditional cash payments is bound to make work less attractive and rewarding, not least because now recipients are only working for the difference between their basic income entitlement and wages. This is not only an issue of cost but also an issue of sustainability. Our former colleague Senator Bellemare, with her expertise in economics, warned that funding a guaranteed income program would require a wholesale overhaul of the tax system. The tax changes it would take to fund such a program would have a negative effect on labour market participation not because people are lazy but because they are rational.

In essence, the number of people supported by the program would exceed the number of people the government set out to help initially. Fewer hours worked mean fewer hours taxed, and that means less revenue for the government. In short, paying for guaranteed basic income appears to be unsustainable.

Providing money to Canadians without requiring work, and with little incentive to seek it, creates serious problems. It undermines labour participation, leading to fewer hours worked, less income earned, lower tax revenues and, ultimately, less funding available to sustain what was intended to be an anti-poverty initiative.

Evidence from provinces echoes this. British Columbia commissioned one of the most comprehensive reviews of guaranteed income worldwide. Its expert panel concluded that basic income was not the most just or effective way to reduce poverty, finding the claims of its proponents unsubstantiated and warning against disincentives to work. The panel rejected even pursuing a pilot project.

The needs of people in this society are too diverse to be effectively answered simply with a cheque from the government. A basic income is a very costly approach to addressing any specific goal, such as poverty reduction. Proponents will argue otherwise, but countless reports and economists have raised red flags about the likely effectiveness of guaranteed basic income as a solution to fighting poverty.

It would seem to me that one of the essential requirements for the creation of a guaranteed income would be a stronger, responsible financial management by the federal government, regardless of its political stripe. Well, the national debt in this country has doubled from \$650 billion in 2015 to over \$1.2 trillion today. In less than 10 years, this administration has added more to our national debt than all administrations combined since Confederation, and we are a country that spent the better part of the first half of the 20th century engaged in international wars.

Because of this debt, the federal government is now spending a staggering \$53 billion on debt service charges alone — \$53 billion just to service our debt. For perspective, that is more than the entirety of the 2024-25 Canada Health Transfer of

\$52 billion and significantly more than the \$35 billion being spent on child care benefits in Canada. In short, the most expensive government program in Canada today is now debt servicing.

I want to appeal for caution in highlighting the fragility of our economy and the danger of introducing sweeping new entitlements without a solid fiscal foundation. Liberal taxes, inflation and ever-expanding red tape continue to drive investment and opportunity south of the border while steadily weakening the value of the Canadian paycheque. The government's own data shows that the federal tax take is now at a 22-year high. At the same time, in terms of real gross domestic product, or GDP, per capita growth from 2015 to 2024, Canada ranks at the bottom of all 40 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD — excuse me, thirty-ninth out of 40, ahead of only Luxembourg. That is an appalling record for a country as resource-rich and industrious as ours.

Almost every major economic indicator since 2015 paints the same picture. Productivity growth is stagnant; private sector investment has fallen sharply; capital flight continues to send Canadian wealth abroad; housing affordability has collapsed. The cost of living has soared, while the Canadian dollar hovers near 20-year lows. Interest payments on our national debt now exceed federal health transfers. Budget deficits are widening, and our real GDP per capita lags behind every other G7 nation. Industrial production is stalling. Colleagues, this is not the profile of a healthy, competitive economy. It is the record of decline under this government.

Worse still, Canadians are losing faith in the future. Seventy-eight per cent of Canadians now believe their children will be worse off than they are. It shouldn't be this way in Canada. Canadians deserve a government that makes life affordable again, restores opportunity and secures a better future for our children, not one that piles on taxes and debt while pretending that bureaucratic experiments like a guaranteed basic income will solve the very problems that government policies have produced.

We should be one of the richest countries on earth, harnessing our abundant resources, our talent and our enterprise to generate the prosperity that funds sustainable social programs and real poverty reduction. That is the kind of lasting foundation this bill claims to pursue, but it cannot be achieved through yet another costly, untested federal scheme.

• (1520)

From the evidence I have read and the precarious position of Canada's finances, I cannot conscientiously support a bill that seeks to mandate this government to create a framework for a program with such a potentially monumental price tag.

Senator Pate, in her speech last spring, rightfully referenced the update of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO, on expenditures associated with a guaranteed basic income, which provided some modest estimates.

While the PBO's projections may appear modest, they rest on the assumption of nothing less than a wholesale overhaul of Canada's tax and benefit system, sustained through the elimination of existing supports, the restructuring of our federal tax system and the imposition of heavier burdens on taxpayers. That is not fine-tuning. It is a fundamental re-engineering of our fiscal framework, and it carries risks to work incentives, fairness and provincial jurisdiction that far exceed the tidy models presented in the report.

Let me be clear: This is not a minor policy adjustment. We are not discussing minor technocratic tweaks.

A guaranteed basic income would represent a fundamental transformation of our social and economic framework. It would redefine how Canadians pay taxes, how government provides support and how we conceive the role of the state in our life. The framework for such a sweeping change cannot, and should not, be decided through a private member's bill in the Senate. It requires the clear consent of Canadians expressed through an electoral mandate.

In my view, major changes of this magnitude belong on the campaign trail, not in the backrooms of Parliament. If the government wishes to implement a program that could cost tens to hundreds of billions of dollars annually and replace existing pillars of our social safety net, then it must put that proposal squarely in front of the Canadian people. Let Canadians see the numbers. Let Canadians debate the trade-offs. And above all, let Canadians decide at the ballot box whether this is the direction they want for their country. Anything less risks undermining the trust and legitimacy that are the foundations of this country.

The Senate has an important role: to review, scrutinize and improve legislation, and to provide sober second thought. However, it is not our role, in my opinion, to launch sweeping social experiments without the consent of the governed. We are an unelected chamber, and our legitimacy depends on respecting the boundaries of that role.

If this government believes in the merits of a framework for a guaranteed basic income, let them make their case in an election campaign and seek the mandate to govern accordingly. That is the proper, democratic path forward.

However, as I've said in the past, I believe most bills deserve a chance to go to committee. Although I may not agree with the appropriateness of this bill, I do find it to be an important and interesting topic. I'll leave it to the chamber to determine whether or not this bill should be referred to committee.

(On motion of Senator Patterson, debate adjourned.)

[ Senator MacDonald ]

## CHIGNECTO ISTHMUS DYKELAND SYSTEM BILL

### SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Quinn, seconded by the Honourable Senator Osler, for the second reading of Bill S-216, An Act to declare the Chignecto Isthmus Dykeland System and related works to be for the general advantage of Canada.

**Hon. John M. McNair:** Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill S-216, An Act to declare the Chignecto Isthmus Dykeland System and related works to be for the general advantage of Canada.

I listened carefully to Senator Quinn's second reading speech and felt compelled to speak, given the recent decision from the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal on the reference question.

Colleagues, as a reminder, the Chignecto Isthmus is the only land connection linking Nova Scotia to New Brunswick and the rest of mainland Canada. Beginning in the late 1600s, the area was dyked for agricultural purposes. Since then, significant infrastructure of various kinds has been built in the area.

As temperatures and sea levels rise because of climate change, the Chignecto Isthmus is at greater risk of flooding and experiencing other damage. The dykeland system needs to be raised in order to be protected, and the project is expected to cost \$650 million.

On March 20 of this year, the Governments of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick announced that they had reached an agreement on the Chignecto Isthmus project. The provinces each committed \$162.5 million to support the project, while the federal government committed to footing the remaining \$325 million.

Despite this agreement, the Government of Nova Scotia submitted a reference case to the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal. The specific question was:

Is the infrastructure which protects the interprovincial transportation, trade and communication links across the Chignecto Isthmus within the exclusive Legislative Authority of the Parliament of Canada?

On June 13, 2025, the three-member panel of the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal gave its decision: The court declined to answer the question. In my view, this was a very significant decision. Colleagues, let us take a moment to look at the context in which the court made this decision.

In 2023 Nova Scotia and New Brunswick submitted a "without prejudice" application to the federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund, or DMAF, for project funding in order to raise the existing dykeland system on the isthmus.

The court indicated that the “without prejudice” nature of the DMAF application arose from a dispute between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick with Canada over who was ultimately responsible for paying the remediation costs for the isthmus.

The court stated that the Provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have specific legislation enabling and authorizing the construction, alteration and maintenance of works to protect lands from tidal flooding.

Colleagues, this is not a new issue. For at least the last 150 years, both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have developed legislation in respect of the building, repair, maintenance and management of dykes and aboiteaux to defend against encroaching waters.

The court further indicated that in the 1930s and early 1940s, farmers and local marsh organizations reported that the original structures at the head of the Bay of Fundy protecting farmland were failing, and economic circumstances made it difficult for them to maintain these dykes and aboiteaux.

In response, Canada, in collaboration with the two provinces, created the Maritime Marshland Rehabilitation Administration. As part of the same process, in 1948 Canada also legislated in respect of building dykes, aboiteaux and breakwaters in the region with the Maritime Marshland Rehabilitation Act, or MMRA. Projects to be undertaken pursuant to the act were conditional upon provincial involvement and provincial responsibility for them and their future maintenance.

By the time it was wound up in 1970, the MMRA had shored up existing structures, replacing or repairing 373 kilometres of dykes and over 400 aboiteaux and constructing 5 tidal dams. By that time, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick had taken over all responsibilities for the dykes and other works undertaken pursuant to the MMRA. Canada repealed the act in full in 1983.

Colleagues, the court clearly indicated that the restoration, repair and maintenance of the dykes in this region have traditionally been the responsibility of the provincial governments.

The court then turned to why they declined to answer the reference question. They stated:

As the case law indicates, a court has a broad discretion not to answer a Reference Question for a wide variety of reasons, including where the Question is vague, inappropriate or where answering it would be problematic.

The court went on to say:

This Reference is unique in that it was not initiated by Canada, whose jurisdiction is directly implicated by the Question. Typically, a reference on division of powers

would have draft (or actual) legislation or at least a proposed legislative scheme, or some governmental action which would bring the legislative authority into question. None of that was before us.

• (1530)

The court determined the reference question was vague and that they:

. . . would have to engage in speculation as to the pith and substance of the legislation Nova Scotia says would fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of Canada.

The court indicated “The inability to distinguish between valid schemes of provincial legislation and federal legislation is especially significant in this case.”

It stated:

Appendix A and B set out in detail the legislation that has been enacted by both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. It is extensive. We are being asked to opine on whether Canada has exclusive . . . jurisdiction with respect to the infrastructure of the Isthmus. We do not have any federal legislation to determine whether it is a valid exercise of the federal jurisdiction under s. 91 of the Constitution Act, 1867. This is fatal to our ability to answer the Question. Any answer would be neither precise nor useful.

The court further stated:

The background leading up to the Question suggests it is an attempt to enlist the Court in a political dispute – that is – who is responsible to pay for the remediation of the Isthmus?

In their Disaster Mitigation Adaptation Fund application, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick took the “without prejudice” position to invoke the “legal determination” of the “constitutional authority” of the provincial and federal governments.

The court indicated it is clear that, “This language is obviously referring to the Question which was referred to us the next day.”

Both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia made the argument in their application that the constitutional responsibility for payment of the cost of the work falls solely with the federal government.

The court stated:

In their funding application, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia say the issue of who will pay is either expressly or by implication going to be determined by the Question, despite counsel for Nova Scotia emphatically stating in argument before us the Question has nothing to do with funding.

The court found that the position taken in the application is consistent with what Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston said in a letter dated March 19, 2025, to Prime Minister Mark Carney, which read as follows:

I am seeking confirmation that a Government led by you will accept the decision of the Court, should the Court decide that paying for the Isthmus is a Federal responsibility.

In considering this evidence, the court concluded that “. . . any opinion we give would be used as a political tactic – as was argued by Canada at the hearing.”

They stated:

The submissions before us by Nova Scotia were on the basis of legislative authority and not on the issue of who was going to pay for the remediation of the infrastructure. However, it seems clear at the political level our opinion would be relied on as establishing that exact point. We recognize our obligation to provide advice when a reference is made to this Court, however, the Governor in Council should not be using the reference process for a political purpose. The reference process is not a mechanism for achieving political ends.

The court went on to say:

The purpose of the answer being sought is unclear. Counsel for Nova Scotia said it was to “inform” conversations. We infer that to mean conversations with Canada over the funding dispute discussed above. Counsel for Nova Scotia also said it would provide “context” for any debates in Parliament should an Act to declare the Chignecto Isthmus Dykeland System and related works to be for the general advantage of Canada . . . be reintroduced in Parliament.

The court stated:

It is difficult to envision how members of Parliament would be guided in their deliberations by an advisory opinion requested by a provincial government from its Court of Appeal.

The court indicated that they:

. . . fail to see how an answer to the Question would be useful in that context.

Finally, Nova Scotia’s argument, in part, relied on what it referred to as “unwritten constitutional principles”. As it described them, the principles create a constitutional obligation on Canada to maintain a link between Nova Scotia and the rest of the country. New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island say similar principles apply to them.

The court indicated:

Canada says this does not fall within the scope of the Question and it did not deal with this alleged obligation in its submissions. Canada also says if this issue was in play, it would have included additional materials in the Record. We

agree with Canada that this was not included in the scope of the reference as drafted, and we should not be addressing it. Legislative jurisdiction and constitutional obligations are not the same.

In summary, the court found that:

. . . the vaguely worded Question intended to foist jurisdiction on Canada concerning a subject in relation to which the provinces have been legislating for decades would be too problematic to answer. There are undercurrents suggesting the answer is intended to be used for a political purpose. The alternative explanations for the utility of the reference are thin at best. The ramifications for past and future legislation are unclear. The unasked question about Canada’s obligation to maintain the link between Nova Scotia and the rest of the country should not be addressed under an alternative argument about unwritten constitutional principles.

Honourable senators, I think the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal got it right.

Senator Quinn, in his second-reading speech for Bill S-216, referred to a March 22 New Brunswick *Telegraph-Journal* article right before the election in which Minister Dominic LeBlanc made an additional political commitment with respect to the cost sharing of any additional expenses above and beyond the funding under the DMAF, or Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund. Senator Quinn indicated Minister LeBlanc said the deal also comes with a pledge from a future Liberal government that it will split the bill of any cost overruns for the project that will take up to 10 years to complete. Senator Quinn indicated this is a welcome development and, in his mind, puts to rest the question of finances.

Colleagues, if the question of financing the remediation of the dyke system on the isthmus is settled, with the federal government covering 50% of the costs and the Provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick each covering 25% of the costs, I fail to see why it is necessary to proceed with Bill S-216.

My colleague indicated in his speech that declaring the dykeland system to be for the general advantage of Canada enables the Government of Canada to take a leadership role on working with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia for the rehabilitation of the dykes. In my view, the ability to take a leadership role is not conditional on the exercising of the declaration.

Exercising the declaratory power is, in my view, both unnecessary and ill-advised. It would essentially send a signal that Parliament disagrees with the decision of the court and believes that the project should be completely funded by the federal government.

I believe, quite frankly, that time is better spent with the respective parties focusing on the actual remediation of the isthmus, which, by the way, I support completely.

For the reasons set out above, I will be voting against Bill S-216.

Thank you, *meegwetch*.

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

**Hon. Michael L. MacDonald:** I thank Senator McNair for a very fulsome explanation of what the court decision was, and I appreciate and respect his opinion on what we should do. I think people from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia who are so familiar with that piece of land know how important this remediation is. It has to be done soon. I am somewhat surprised that we don't think that we should continue with the bill and put it through.

I would like to speak to Senator Quinn about this, because I wasn't expecting to respond to it in this manner. The most important thing for sure is to get the work done. I couldn't agree more.

The one thing we have to do with the court is respect the opinion of the courts. We don't always have to agree with them, but we have to respect them, so I will leave the matter at that for the moment.

(On motion of Senator MacDonald, debate adjourned.)

## CANADA REVENUE AGENCY ACT

### SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Downe, seconded by the Honourable Senator Prosper, for the second reading of Bill S-217, An Act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (reporting on unpaid income tax).

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

• (1540)

## THE SENATE

### MOTION TO CALL ON GOVERNMENT TO CREATE A NATIONAL STRATEGY TO ENGAGE CANADIANS ABROAD— DEBATE ADJOURNED

**Hon. Yuen Pau Woo,** pursuant to notice of May 28, 2025, moved:

That the Senate call on the Government of Canada to create a national strategy to engage Canadians abroad.

(On motion of Senator Woo, debate adjourned.)

(At 3:43 p.m., the Senate was continued until Tuesday, October 28, 2025, at 2 p.m.)

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