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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,  
Speaker

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## THE SENATE

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

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

Prayers.

[*Translation*]

### ROYAL ASSENT

The **Hon. the Speaker** informed the Senate that the following communication had been received:

RIDEAU HALL

June 17, 2026

Madam Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable Louise Arbour, Governor General of Canada, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2026, at 10:39 a.m.

Yours sincerely,

Ken MacKillop

*Secretary to the Governor General*

The Honourable  
The Speaker of the Senate  
Ottawa

Bills Assented to Wednesday, June 17, 2026:

An Act to amend the Criminal Code (*Bill C-225, Chapter 12, 2026*)

An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027 (*Bill C-32, Chapter 13, 2026*)

An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027 (*Bill C-33, Chapter 14, 2026*)

[*English*]

### BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The **Hon. the Speaker**: Honourable senators, I received a notice from the Facilitator of the Independent Senators Group, who requests, pursuant to rule 4-3(1), that the time provided for the consideration of Senators' Statements be extended today for the purpose of paying tribute to the Honourable Bev Busson.

Is it agreed that the time for tributes be extended into regular statements until the conclusion of the anticipated tributes?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

The **Hon. the Speaker**: I remind senators that pursuant to our Rules, each senator will be allowed only three minutes, and they may speak only once.

These times do not include the time allotted to the response of the senator.

[*Translation*]

### SENATORS' STATEMENTS

#### TRIBUTES

THE HONOURABLE BEV BUSSON, C.M., C.O.M., O.B.C.

**Hon. Raymonde Saint-Germain:** Honourable senators, today, I have the privilege of rising on behalf of the Independent Senators Group to pay tribute to Senator Beverly Ann Busson, a woman whose presence in this chamber, like her entire career in the public service, has been marked by a quiet strength, great humility and an enormous commitment to others.

Respect is the feeling that she inspired in us from the moment she was sworn into the Senate.

[*English*]

In this chamber, Senator Busson once shared the story of the day she became the commissioner of the RCMP. She recalled how her mother leaned over and said, "You know, darling, I never thought you'd get this far."

She recounted that moment with humour and grace but also with profound insight. What stayed with her was not the honour itself but the lesson behind it: to remember where you came from, to have the courage of those who have sacrificed themselves for a better life and to never waste the opportunity to pay it forward.

Senator Busson never forgot where she came from, and she certainly paid it forward. Through her leadership, mentorship and example, she opened doors for generations of women in policing, public service and leadership. That is why so many people trust and admire her.

Senator Busson understood something essential about leadership. As she once said, "It's all about the people around you." Throughout her career, she never sought the spotlight for herself. Instead, she focused on supporting others, building strong teams and helping people succeed.

[Translation]

The greatest people are often the most humble.

[English]

Just a few weeks ago, in the Rules Committee, sitting next to her — I see that she's nervous — I had the privilege of witnessing her composure first-hand.

Suddenly, I heard a loud bang. Looking up, I saw Senator Busson put her phone down sharply on the desk. As it turned out, Senator Busson was not expressing disagreement at all. She had simply spotted a spider and neutralized it before the rest of us had fully grasped what was happening. She then returned her attention to the meeting as though nothing had happened.

It was a small moment, but one that struck me as entirely fitting. After a distinguished career spent assessing situations and responding decisively, she had clearly not lost her instincts.

Senator Busson — dear Bev — thank you for your courage, humanity and lifetime of service to Canada. Throughout your remarkable tenure in this upper chamber, you have inspired well-deserved, immense respect from us since your very first day.

Stay safe and enjoy life. We offer you our best wishes in your next endeavours.

• (1410)

**Hon. Iris G. Petten:** Honourable senators, on behalf of myself and the GRO, I rise today to pay tribute to our remarkable colleague and dear friend Senator Bev Busson.

I came to know Senator Busson when the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans visited Newfoundland and Labrador during its study of the seal industry. During dinner at my home, her captivating stories left a lasting impression. I remember thinking that night that Senator Busson was someone with whom I would become close friends.

That first impression proved entirely accurate. We have shared countless laughs and wonderful times together. Some of my favourite memories involve evenings with Senator Busson, filled with warmth, humour and an endless supply of entertaining stories.

I must also admit that whenever Senator Busson was nearby, I always felt a little safer. Knowing her background, I was confident that if the situation ever required it, she could execute a very effective takedown in a matter of seconds. It serves as a reminder never to underestimate Senator Busson.

It is no surprise that she became the first female commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Senator Busson possesses a rare combination of strength and emotional intelligence. She connects effortlessly with people from all walks of life, and while her accomplishments command respect, it is her authenticity and genuine interest in others that leave a lasting impression.

Last year, Canadians witnessed the opening of the Forty-fifth Parliament by His Majesty King Charles III. The RCMP Musical Ride and its magnificent horses were proudly on display. What many may not know is that one of those horses was named “Bev” in her honour, a fitting tribute to a woman whose contributions to the RCMP and to Canada have been truly extraordinary.

There are two things I will forever associate with Senator Busson: an endless string of emojis, crowning her with the well-earned title “Emoji Queen,” and “FOMO,” or fear of missing out. Each captures her playful spirit and determination to embrace every opportunity and adventure. She has broken barriers and has inspired others to do the same.

Senator Busson, thank you for your service to Canada, for your leadership, for your friendship and for the example you have set for all of us. May retirement bring you every happiness. Although, knowing your lifelong case of “FOMO,” I suspect retirement will simply mean finding even more things to do.

Thank you, Senator Busson.

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, I rise today to pay tribute to our esteemed colleague Senator Bev Busson as she prepares to embark on her well-deserved retirement from this chamber.

Since she was sworn into the Senate in 2018, Senator Busson has brought to this place the very same dedication, integrity and grace that defined her legendary career long before she arrived on Parliament Hill.

To call Senator Busson a trailblazer is not an exaggeration. It is only a statement of extreme fact. Originally from Nova Scotia, where she attended the Nova Scotia Teachers College, she chose a path that would quite literally change the face of Canadian law enforcement.

Senator Busson was a member of the very first class of women to enter the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. From her early days in uniform to investigating complex frauds, drugs and serious crimes, as one of the first women to work in plain clothes, she didn't just break the glass ceiling; she completely shattered it.

Through her sheer merit, expertise and steadfast commitment to keeping Canadians safe, Bev rose steadily through the ranks. Her career became a “MasterClass” in leadership and a historic series of firsts: the first female commissioned officer, the first female criminal operations officer, the first female command officer of the province, the first female deputy commissioner of a region and, ultimately, the first woman to lead the force as the twenty-first commissioner of the RCMP. That is a lot of firsts, and those are only the ones that I could find.

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

**Senator Housakos:** Her incredible career challenging gender-based barriers earned her a rightful place among “Canada's Most Powerful Women” by the Women's Executive Network, but retirement from the force in no way meant retirement from service. Senator Busson continued to advise governments on critical national security matters, served on the RCMP Reform

Implementation Council and selflessly gave her time to organizations like the Justice Institute of British Columbia and the Okanagan College Foundation.

She has also spent years lifting up the next generation of female leaders through mentorship. Her life of service has been justly recognized with some of our nation's highest honours, including the Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff Commendation, the Order of British Columbia and her appointment as Member of the Order of Canada. Of course, the list goes on and on.

Honourable colleagues, the Senate has been incredibly fortunate to benefit from Senator Busson and her profound expertise, her collaboration, her spirit and wisdom, and her constant calm, cool and collected approach.

Senator Saint-Germain said she looked a little bit nervous. I've never seen this lady look nervous. I can tell you, colleagues, I don't get nervous very easily either, but when I see her at committee with those piercing eyes looking at me, I think long and hard.

I can tell you that Senator Busson didn't make many interventions, but when she did, you knew that it meant something. You had to listen attentively, and you had to make sure that you weren't the one being called to order. A couple of times, you did even call me to order, and I did take note, Senator Busson.

Senator, on behalf of all of us, thank you for your trailblazing service. The country that you've so deeply and loyally served thanks you. God bless you.

**Hon. Rebecca Patterson:** Honourable senators, today I rise to pay tribute to a colleague, a friend, a fellow veteran, my swearing-in sponsor — of course, who else could it have been? — and a trailblazer, whose impact on Canada will be felt for generations: Senator Bev Busson.

My tribute to you, Bev, is to share some words written by some of the people you see with us here today who know you far better than any of us do: Ruth Roy and Jane Hall of the RCMP Women Veterans Council. This is their message to you:

In May 1974, Bev, a newly graduated teacher, was driving to work when she heard an announcement that the RCMP would begin recruiting women. She drove to the nearest detachment to submit her application that very day.

As a member of Troop 17, the first female troop in the force's history, a career marked by courage and determination was soon under way.

Bev was young, but not naïve. She understood that she and her peers would not only have to meet the high standards expected of Mounties but also exceed them. But, like Newton's First Law of Motion, societal norms tend to resist change until an outside force is applied, and with Bev leading the charge, women were that outside force.

Bev exemplified the strengths women brought to policing: emotional intelligence, compassion, empathy and a desire for work-life balance.

As she advanced through the ranks, Bev achieved an impressive string of firsts and helped transform the culture. As deputy commissioner in 1999, she became the first woman to command E Division, the same division where she had begun her RCMP career 25 years earlier. It seemed to be the pinnacle of a remarkable career until the Prime Minister called Bev back from planned retirement in 2006 to restore credibility to the Office of the Commissioner.

At the time of her appointment as commissioner, she had widespread support from the RCMP rank and file. No one doubted that Bev could handle the challenge; they only worried she might not accept it.

During her years in the Senate, Bev has maintained her connection with the people and organization she served, supporting veterans initiatives, including the landmark study entitled *Invisible No More. The Experiences of Canadian Women Veterans* by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

On a personal note, I remember us standing together to speak with the women veterans in the audience, and like a well-rehearsed comedy duo, we conveyed a unified message about what including women in leadership roles and non-traditional positions can look like and how to accomplish it. I think we also showed them that they do have a voice.

• (1420)

Your work in the Senate continued your tradition of service, maintaining your standing as an exemplary role model and a trusted figure. Your quiet confidence and commanding presence ensured people listened.

Although your retirement from the Senate concludes another distinguished chapter, those who know you understand that service is not something you will simply depart from. Knowing you, everyone is confident that you will continue with your wisdom, encouragement and leadership in the ongoing pursuit of a just and fair society.

Senator Bev Busson, on behalf of all of us and on behalf of the Canadian Senators Group, we thank you for a lifetime of service to Canada.

Ma'am, you may now stand down and enjoy this new chapter in your life.

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

**Hon. Marty Klyne:** Honourable senators, I rise to pay tribute to Senator Busson, who has exemplified integrity, judgment and collegiality in our chamber of sober second thought. We are blessed to have shared in what is only the most recent chapter in her remarkable story.

In 1974, as a young teacher in Nova Scotia — as has already been covered here — she was driving to work when she heard news on the radio that would change both her life and the history of Canadian policing. The RCMP had announced that women could be accepted in operational roles. She immediately pulled into her local detachment to apply, and they denied it as she walked in. However, one of her future RCMP colleagues came in and said, “Actually, yes, we do. I just heard it on the news myself.”

That young woman was Beverley Busson, who was among the first women to join the RCMP at a time when the organization was still figuring out what that meant. Uniforms included skirts, high heels and pillbox hats, and there were even discussions of women carrying their service revolvers in purses. However, she navigated those early days with the humour, confidence and determination that would become her trademarks.

What is most striking when listening to Senator Busson reflect on those years is that she never dwells on the obstacles she faced or even the barriers she broke. In her telling, she was simply a police officer who wanted to do the job well.

That perspective carried her through an exceptional career. She became the first female commissioned officer, the first woman to command a province and, ultimately, the first female commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I assume that command was in F Division to start, correct? Yes.

It is fitting that her story is preserved at the RCMP Heritage Centre, a majestic building at Depot Division in Regina, where every Mountie is born and over which I had the privilege of presiding. It is a place dedicated to safeguarding the history of one of Canada’s most iconic institutions and is on the path to becoming a national museum, thanks to people like Bev Busson.

Following her retirement from the RCMP, she continued to serve Canada in the Senate, where she’s been a great example for all of us. Here, she has contributed her wisdom around policing, public safety and national security, as well as her profound respect for people, institutions and public service.

We are grateful for her sponsorship of Bill S-12 in 2023 to strengthen Canada’s sex offender registry and to stand up for victims of crime, as well as her leadership of the Busson-Massicotte group on Senate reform.

Senator Busson made many friends in Saskatchewan. Some of them will never be the same. Somehow, she infiltrated the Barber family. That would be Lloyd Barber, previously the president of the University of Saskatchewan, and the iconic family that put a lot of soul into the Regina Beach area. Senator Busson elevated the soul of that place.

Senator Busson, thank you for breaking down barriers, strengthening institutions, mentoring future leaders and inspiring generations of Canadians. We wish you every happiness in the years ahead and offer our deepest gratitude for your service. Never forget that you and I were sworn in on the same day and had our best friend from the RCMP show up. Thank you.

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

**Hon. Marty Deacon:** Honourable senators, it is with great pride and a good amount of sadness that I rise to pay tribute to my seatmate, colleague and friend Senator Busson.

With my three minutes, I will skip her incredibly impressive resumé and focus on how lucky I’ve been to have her by my side in this chamber for nearly a decade.

When I saw Bev was appointed, I was intrigued by her journey and thrilled to become her desk buddy shortly after. It did not take long for us to realize we are kindred spirits. Bev’s career has been defined by courage, integrity and trailblazing leadership. We shared our experiences of taking on leadership roles where women had not in the past, sometimes being the only women in the room in our pre-Senate lives.

We pushed each other’s thinking. We did not always agree on legislation — and that was fine — but we made sure we were always well informed through debate. I also observed my deskmate as she rose to quietly support the family of our beloved Josée Forest-Niesing. The loss of a colleague to COVID was devastating. Bev was one of the senators who met with Josée virtually during COVID. It was their goal to optimize the work of Senate committees as we adapted to the pandemic. Bev was trusted by Josée’s husband, Robert, and worked in the background to ensure the family’s wishes were granted in such a sad time. Bev is truly a class act.

We quickly learned to look out for each other. We read and critiqued each other’s statements and speeches and provided feedback. We even roamed around the Senate Chamber together as a pair. To this day, we’re not sure why, on that side of the Senate, we were placed behind former Senator Plett — prime camera view — and, on this side, we have been placed in the prime camera shot for two government representatives.

This, my friends, requires deskmate oversight — ensuring our facial expressions were appropriate and that we were in our desks and looking senatorial. That was challenging at times. We often had to fight the giggles, and we shared many laughs without saying a word or even cracking a smile.

Bev also made sure that we were well fed. She once brought a three-foot-long frozen salmon she had caught in northern B.C. Her catch beat the men’s in terms of size. She got it to Ottawa, and it was the best salmon I’ve ever had. This is fitting because she repeatedly tapped me to replace her at the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

When my husband, Bruce, and I travelled by RV out west, we tried to meet Senator Busson at her beautiful lakefront home. Alas, she was busy out of town — but not too busy to set us up in a perfect camp spot and at a waterfront restaurant, compliments of our colleague.

As my dear friend finishes her tenure here, her influence is felt throughout the Senate and way beyond this desk. Through committee work and through thought-provoking questions in debate, Bev has strongly influenced the efforts of this institution to become more modern and effective.

Bev, with your husband, Phil, your sister, Janice, your kids and those beautiful grandchildren — there are many photos to enjoy of Madison, Brooklyn, Jordyn and Ethan — enjoy every moment with them in Salmon Arm. The Senate gals will be keeping a close eye on you and your next chapter. However, for now, I will say so long but not goodbye, dear deskmate.

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

**Hon. Fabian Manning:** Honourable senators, as a child growing up in the small rural fishing community of St. Bride's in Newfoundland and Labrador, I often heard my parents refer to particular woman in our town by saying things like, "Ms. White is a lady," or, "Ms. Conway is such a lady."

As I was preparing my remarks last evening, I decided to reach out to my good friend Mr. Webster to review what he had to say about the word "lady." I found the *Webster's Dictionary* definition to be "a woman characterized by polite, refined behaviour and gentle manner."

Friends, today, I stand here in the chamber with mixed emotions to say a few words in tribute to one of the finest human beings I've ever had the honour and privilege to know and work with.

**Senator Housakos:** Hear, hear.

**Senator Manning:** She is a great Deputy Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, a passionate and hard-working senator, a dedicated family person, a very close and personal friend and — yes, indeed — a true living example of a lady. She is our colleague — and my friend — Bev Busson.

As someone who spent most of my life going in any other direction when I would see a member of the RCMP coming toward me, I have found it very strange, the close and comfortable working relationship I have built with Senator Busson, the lady representing British Columbia here in the Senate.

It was not long before I realized why Bev was such a unique and genuine person. I gained the knowledge that she had been born in Nova Scotia and, therefore, possessed a large amount of Atlantic Canada DNA. I then knew why she was so special.

• (1430)

While Bev has a very quiet demeanour and walks softly when she enters any room, please do not be fooled; she carries a big stick. As evident from our years of working together as Chair and Deputy Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, Bev is always well informed and meticulously prepared for any and all meetings, even after a night of, dare I say, sharing a bottle or two of wine with our good friend Senator Petten.

Seriously, though, I want to personally thank Bev for stepping up and chairing the committee for several months when I was unable to be here in Ottawa due to my several eye surgeries. Needless to say, she did not covet the chair's position, as some of my other colleagues do on the committee, but I will leave that discussion for another day.

Today is all about taking the time to pay tribute to a lady who has left an incredible mark on the Senate of Canada and a powerful and meaningful legacy on all of those who have shared this journey with her.

People come and go in this place all the time, and there are a few people that have left that I do not miss at all. But when it comes to Senator Bev Busson, I recall a note my mom sent me a long time ago:

You may forget someone's telephone number. You may forget their address. You may even forget their name. But you will never forget their kindness.

Bev, I will miss your humility, your gentle ways, your wicked sense of humour and, indeed, your kindness.

As you slide down the banister of life, may the splinters never point in the wrong direction.

I will not say goodbye to my friend Bev. I will send her off with an old Irish blessing:

May the road rise to meet you,  
May the wind be always at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
The rains fall soft upon your fields.  
And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Thank you.

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

**Hon. Baltej S. Dhillon:** Honourable senators, I'm not sure if I have anything else to say.

It is my privilege and honour to rise today in this august chamber to recognize and celebrate our colleague the Honourable Senator Bev Busson as she prepares to retire from the Senate.

Bev, I want to begin by saying thank you for your service, your leadership, your friendship and for the example you have set throughout your remarkable journey.

Long before the Senate, you had already made Canadian history. As has already been shared, you were part of the first class of women to join the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP, in 1974. What was missed earlier is that when she went to the detachment to apply and the constable said, "We're not hiring women," the sergeant who came around with the application was already crying. So Bev made men cry before she even joined the RCMP.

As the first woman to serve as Commissioner of the RCMP, you opened doors that others now walk through with pride.

But what stands out just as much as the history you have made is the person you have always been.

Donna Morse, your troopmate from Troop 17, remembered first knowing you as Beverley MacDonald, someone with pride, integrity and remarkable accomplishments. She also reminded us of your unforgettable smile, your humour and perhaps even a certain reputation behind the wheel, including, as the story goes, a gold-coloured Corvette that may or may not have attracted attention in Vancouver. As she said last night, “She lived for speed.”

Those stories make us smile, but they also reveal something deeper. You never used your position to place yourself above others. You led with humility, fairness and humanity.

Karen Adams also shared a beautiful reflection of your generosity during the fiftieth anniversary of women in the RCMP, when you gave her and her sister what she called the “VIP Bev Busson Parliament Experience.” That is so very Bev: giving your time fully, making others feel welcome and never making service feel like an obligation.

For me personally, it has been deeply humbling to serve alongside you in the Senate. I have admired you for many years, but to have you as my sponsor in this institution has meant more than I can properly express.

When I received the call from the Prime Minister about my appointment, it was deeply meaningful. But just as meaningful — and perhaps even more so — was the call I received from you. You congratulated me with such genuine joy, not only as a colleague but as someone who understood what it meant to see another RCMP officer appointed to the Senate.

That call will always stay with me.

Bev, you have served Canada in uniform, in leadership and in Parliament. You have broken barriers, lifted others and shown that true strength is found in courage, compassion and care.

And while you may be retiring from the Senate, I want to be very clear: I will continue to lean on your wisdom, your experience and your friendship. In fact, I fully intend to keep you on speed-dial, so I hope retirement comes with good cell reception.

Congratulations on an extraordinary career of service. May this next chapter bring you joy, good health, adventure and the deep satisfaction of knowing that your impact will continue for generations.

To my friend, my colleague and my mentor, thank you.

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

**Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, I should have gone before Senator Manning and Senator Dhillon. What a sincere honour for me to be able to add my voice and to rise and pay tribute to our colleague and friend the Honourable Senator Bev Busson as she prepares to conclude her exemplary service as a senator representing our province of British Columbia.

Though she retires from the Senate of Canada after her appointment in 2018, she does so after decades of service to Canadians.

Before her appointment to the Senate, she built a distinguished career with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. After joining the RCMP in 1974, she went on to hold a number of senior leadership positions and ultimately became the first woman to serve as Commissioner of the RCMP. Throughout her career, she helped pave the way for future generations of women in policing and public service.

Senator Busson brought her decades of experience in leadership, public safety and community service to Parliament in her work as a senator.

We have heard others speak of her incredible wisdom and insights that she was able to bring to the debates here in the chamber and at committee. Her sage and thoughtful voice on issues relating to public safety, national security, veterans, all things related to fisheries and many other important matters impacting the lives of Canadians are on the record for all Canadians to know the kind of impact that she had not just in the Senate of Canada but on our entire nation.

Public service takes many forms, but it is always rooted in a willingness to contribute to something larger than oneself. Senator Busson’s careers, both as a leader in policing and public safety and as a legislator, have been marked by that unwavering commitment.

As fellow senators representing British Columbia, like our other colleagues, we have shared the responsibility to ensure that the perspectives and interests of our beautiful province are heard in this chamber. You have served British Columbians and, indeed, all Canadians with an immeasurable sense of duty and honour.

As you prepare to leave the Senate, I want to thank you for your contributions to this institution and for the example that you have set throughout a lifetime of public service. It has been such an honour to serve with you and get to know you. While it was not in the same way as others, because I didn’t get to serve on the same committees per se, knowing that you are from the same province and the love that we share, it was an instant mutual friendship.

Best of luck in the next chapter, and I look forward to visiting you in the bright summers ahead. Thank you.

**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 Janice Scott, Senator Busson’s sister; Deb and Rex Henry, her friends; Staff Sergeant Kristan Filardo, her goddaughter; as well as Vega and Vigo. They are accompanied by Assistant Commissioner Sandra Conlin; Dr. Karen Breeck; Bryan Larkin, Senior Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP; and Corporal (Ret’d) Jane Hall.

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

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

• (1440)

**THE HONOURABLE BEV BUSSON, C.M., C.O.M., O.B.C.**

EXPRESSION OF THANKS

**Hon. Bev Busson:** Honourable senators, I have spent a long time trying to put pen to paper to express the overwhelming mixed emotions I am feeling as I rise for the very last time in this place. I am so honoured to have the chance to speak, given the important debates taking place this week, and I promise not to take too much of the valuable time we have left. As my hubby reminds me, it's not all about me.

Let me begin by expressing my wholehearted thanks to all who offered remarks and for their kind words. Thank you to the Speaker of the Senate, the Honourable Raymonde Gagné, for your unfaltering leadership and the respectful example you set for all of us each and every day.

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

**Senator Busson:** Thank you to my colleagues in the Independent Senators Group for their support and friendship, along with our facilitator, Senator Lucie Moncion, for her dedication. I want to sincerely thank the hard-working staff of the entire Senate Administration, led by the Clerk of the Senate, Shaila Anwar, along with Greg Peters, the Usher of the Black Rod, for his commitment to service, and for all the little extra things that you have done for us, Greg, over the years. Thank you to your team and to John Shand, along with his outstanding Senate pages, who all work so hard to keep us comfortable and find everything we need.

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

**Senator Busson:** I would like to thank all the members of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for the confidence they placed in me as deputy chair, even though there was the occasional coup by Senator Ravalia to step in and take my place. In particular, I thank the chair, Senator Fabian Manning, for his leadership in conducting one of the best committees in the Senate, but more importantly, I want to thank him for his friendship.

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

**Senator Busson:** I am also deeply grateful for the trust placed in me to serve as Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Ethics and Conflict of Interest for Senators, one of the other best committees in the Senate. I want to thank Senator Peter Harder for his service, wisdom, exemplary leadership and thoughtful stewardship.

I thank all my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament, another best committee in the Senate. I am proud of the important work we have done on Senate modernization, making it a stronger and fairer part of our democracy. The Senate has more important changes to come.

A special thank you to all my fellow senators who have become more than colleagues to me. I did not expect, when I began this journey, that this experience would bring so many lifelong friendships into my life. There are too many of you to thank individually, but you know who you are. To my Senate gals — Iris, Margo, Jane, Joan and Marty — and the occasional Senate guy, you've made difficult times much easier and much more fun. You turned my time in the Senate into a truly remarkable chapter of my life, and for that I will always be grateful.

How can I not mention my seatmate of eight years, Senator Marty Deacon? As she mentioned, we managed to remain inseparable, even though we often have differing opinions on debates and motions. I have come to value your advice, Marty, and your counsel, not to mention your amazing sense of humour.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not recognize and thank my Director of Parliamentary Affairs and friend, June Jones.

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

**Senator Busson:** Thank you, June, for your friendship, advice and unwavering support since my appointment in 2018. June, thank you for your years of service, your loyalty and your amazing ability to always be there when I called you, even with three time zones to deal with. You were always there to pick up the phone. I am deeply grateful for all that you have done for me, my dear friend.

I also had the good fortune to work with John Shand in my office before he was scooped by Greg Peters — actually, Greg and I planned his career and surprised him with a different option — and also with Gerry Byrne Jr., who is now in London, England, studying law. It is always exciting to mentor young people and watch them reach their true potential in life.

I am eternally grateful for the women and men of the Parliamentary Protective Service for their overwatch and dedication to keeping us all safe.

One of the things I learned the hard way about being a senator is how easy it is to spend your days being consumed by things that seem important and, indeed, are important, but if we don't stop to appreciate the small moments and special people along the way, the whole experience can be over before you know it. I am thinking of our dear friend and colleague, Senator Josée Forest-Niesing, gone too soon in the blink of an eye.

I'm also thinking of the small moments, like the friendly morning conversations with the maintenance staff or talking with Santa when he's cleaning the floors outside the chamber to keep the Senate crystal clean or the ladies in the cafeteria, careful not to put tomatoes in my sandwich, or the chats and moments of laughter with colleagues in the corridors between votes and

meetings, as well as the friendship and collegiality that makes this institution not just a workplace but also a close-knit community.

Above all, I want to thank and pay tribute to my family. I could not have done this without them. I owe you so much for the love and support you have sent my way over the years, especially when I missed birthdays, graduations and other special occasions because Grandma was “running the place,” as my granddaughter told her teacher when asked what her grandmother does in Ottawa.

I thank my son Brent and his wife, Mariko, and two of my four grandchildren, Brooklyn and Madison, along with my daughter Erin, an ex-member, and her husband, Greg, who is a serving member, with their children — my grandchildren — Jordynn and Ethan. They are back home in British Columbia, watching all of this on TV. My grandchildren think I am cool because I am on Wikipedia.

But above and beyond the call of duty, I want to thank my husband, Philip. From the time we wed, he has been my rock, my strength, my wise adviser and my best friend. Not all men can be married to a Mountie, support her through the transition from investigator to leading the force and, years later, in my second life here, still be there for me when I return after four days away and a 6,000-kilometre round trip to the centre of the universe and all that entails. I love you more than you know and promise not to be too bossy when I am home on a full-time basis.

Speaking of family, here with me today is my little sister Janice Scott. She flew in from Halifax for the occasion. Over the years, she has evolved from the little girl I used to babysit to an amazing woman, my travelling companion before I got married and even after and the best friend I ever had. Thank you for standing beside me over the years, sister, and for always being there. I can only hope that I was there for you in the same way. I love you so much.

Also here with me today are two of my best friends of over 50 years, Rex and Deb Henry. Rex and I were recruits together in our first posting of Salmon Arm, and soon after, he married Deb. They have two daughters, Erica and Kristan. Kristan is here today. Both of these young women are my goddaughters.

Staff Sergeant Kristan Henry runs the Undercover Internet Child Rescue Unit here at the RCMP headquarters. I am so very proud of her. She has two of her children here, Vega and Vigo. Another son is graduating today and could not be here. I cannot express how much it means to me to have you here to share this day with me.

• (1450)

As I thought about my time in the Senate, I came to fully appreciate the remarkable view from my office window, which overlooks the National War Memorial, and all that it represents. This time of year, the sound of bagpipes calls me to remember the fallen and those who returned alive but never quite the same, having served and sacrificed for the freedoms we often take for granted.

I think of my parents, who served in World War II. My father, at age 18, joined the navy and spent the war in Europe, doing the Murmansk Run three times. We heard about that a lot. He told us that these missions were death-defying, and I understand that they were.

He also saw action in the Pacific, and witnessed — from afar, thankfully — the mushroom cloud from the atom bomb at Hiroshima.

I think of my mother, who, at 16 years of age, “reinvented” her date of birth and enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces to also serve her country during the Second World War. Born in a small town in Nova Scotia, she grew up poor and was one of 13 children. Although this was an adventure for her, she was a proud member of the Armed Forces and sometimes spoke about friends of hers who never came back. Later, when the Canadian Women’s Army Corps, or CWAC, was disbanded, she finished her education, married my father and started our family.

Women like my mother were true pioneers, serving their country with dedication while breaking down barriers for those who would follow. They embodied the very meaning of service and sacrifice while proving their worth so that future generations of women could pursue their ambitions, reach their full potential and dream beyond the limits society placed on them at that time.

I suppose, in hindsight, I carry some of my mother’s spirit in my DNA, because after graduating from Nova Scotia Teachers College, as you heard, I too decided to pursue a career outside the gender norms of the day.

As people pointed out, I was driving past my local RCMP detachment on the day they announced that they were taking women. At that time, it was a surprise to everyone — except, I suspect, the higher echelons — that this was happening, and it really was quite a moment. Teaching was something that I was interested in, but that day it was as if destiny were calling me. I found out later that I am a bit of an adrenaline junkie, so I find that I made the right decision.

After writing a number of exams, taking interviews and having a medical — with a medical form for males, I might add. There was a part where I was supposed to cough as the doctor checked my prostate. I passed that somehow, but that is a story for another day.

Four months later, I was in training with 31 other incredible women who together formed Troop 17, the first class of women. We created a bit of a media storm, as you can imagine. When we were there, we had people from the CBC and other news agencies descend on Depot in Regina. The RCMP was completely unprepared for the introduction of women.

As was stated, the uniform, I found out later when I had access to some files, was designed by the same company that designed the Air Canada uniforms of the day. As you can imagine, it was all fashion and no function. It is true that there were purses designed to carry a snub-nosed revolver. Our instructor said, “Ladies, you had better learn to swing that purse because you will never get your gun out in time.” I am not making this up. Thankfully, they quickly reconsidered the gun thing. Before we graduated, we were allowed to have a Sam Browne with a real

gun, a six-shot Smith & Wesson, like the other Mounties. It took about 16 years for us to be allowed to wear the traditional red serge, stetson and high boots that we have all come to recognize as an international symbol of Canada.

I didn't realize at the time that I was changing history. I never thought of myself as a trailblazer. I just wanted to serve my community and make a difference.

In those days, over 50 years ago, portable radios did not exist. Members worked alone and covered midnight shifts with no backup. I, more than once, wondered if I should have stayed in that teaching job. However, I have to say, I worked with heroes who treated me like a sister and made me feel that I belonged. I know that was not everyone's experience, but it certainly was mine.

If I found myself in a situation where I had to arrest someone in a bar, the person had two choices: fight a woman or lose a fight with a woman.

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

**Senator Busson:** Both of these options would be made in front of their friends. Neither option would be elegant. Therefore, I learned early the art of de-escalation. On the odd occasion that the person did not agree to come with me voluntarily, the customers in the bar would stand up and help me.

I hear from my friends in the force that this is not necessarily the case today. Most people just pull out their cellphones and wait to see what will happen next — quite an alarming and disheartening change.

Over the years, after receiving my law degree from UBC, I rose through the ranks, as was mentioned, to be the first of this and the first of that. My son often teases me. Senator Klyne can attest to this. There is a whole stuffed horse in the museum in Regina. My son says that there is a place right next to that horse where they are going to stuff me and place me.

The biggest honour of my life was when I received a phone call from former Prime Minister Harper appointing me as the twenty-first Commissioner of the RCMP. I was completely awestruck. To be appointed to an office that I had always admired and respected so deeply felt almost like a dream. To sit behind the commissioner's desk, with my family's pictures on the walls, was an honour and privilege beyond anything I could have imagined.

When I assumed the role, the RCMP was in a dark place as far as morale was concerned, and a priority of mine was to let the members know that they had a commissioner who understood their struggles. I also wanted to remind Canadians that police officers are not simply uniforms and badges. They are real people. Every day, they show up and confront situations that most Canadians only experience in nightmares.

Often, they do so with limited resources, great personal sacrifice and little recognition. Yet they continue to answer calls for help, comforting victims and standing as the guardians between good and evil.

We should remember as senators today — and I remind myself that our position is both a privilege and a responsibility — that having an important status such as ours carries a rare opportunity to improve the lives of others. It is a call to action to make our community and our country better than we found it. We need to stay in touch with those we serve: the people of Canada. This can be difficult when we live in sheltered and privileged circumstances. When I was the commissioner, I would go to lunch in the cafeteria with the regular members rather than the officers' dining room, to hear first-hand about the experiences, struggles, aspirations and challenges of members who were serving and how best I could support them. The deer-in-the-headlights looks when I came with my tray to choose at which table I was going to sit were very entertaining.

There is value in saying that you have to be able to understand people before you can serve them.

Someone wrote a little proverb that I often use to remind myself about my place, which reads, "Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care." Compassion and trust are always the keys to success and credibility at any level.

More than 10 years after I received the call appointing me commissioner, I received another phone call from another prime minister, from a different party, appointing me as an independent senator for the province of British Columbia.

I never imagined that one day I would become a parliamentarian, but that attracted me again: the opportunity to serve and contribute, not directed by partisanship but by principle, with the freedom and responsibility to consider each issue based on its value to Canadians.

I feel privileged to have played a small part over the past eight years, engaged in this important work. From contributing to the landmark Fisheries and Oceans Committee report on the impact of seal populations on Canada's fisheries and the groundbreaking report on carbon sequestration; to giving voice to British Columbians who opposed the oil tanker moratorium legislation; to helping showcase Haida Gwaii and the Haida Nation's unique, rich Indigenous culture; and to sponsoring Bill S-12, a government bill substantially changing the Sex Offender Information Registration Act, it has been a true honour to be involved in these endeavours.

• (1500)

Beyond legislation, I was determined to use my voice to highlight the work of police and veterans, to speak to their experiences and give voices to those who serve but have no voice. It was also my way of reminding Canadians of the value of our precious institutions and our Canadian way of life. There is a reason that Canadian police officers are referred to in the Criminal Code as "peace officers," leaving law enforcement as the last resort.

Colleagues, I do not think it's a secret that this past decade has been difficult for law enforcement. I have been concerned about the increasing tendency by some to stereotype every police officer with criminal, or at least negative, motives. This has resulted in a wave of mistrust, disrespect and even violence toward our police officers, resulting in real and tragic consequences.

Our words matter — both in this chamber and beyond. What is said here is heard far and wide, and sometimes we need to realize that we have a responsibility to ensure that rhetoric does not drift away from reality. We must not allow public discourse around policing to be shaped by distortion or, even worse — and I believe this — the direct effects of foreign interference in an effort to attack and undermine our cherished institutions.

Throughout my years in the Senate, it has been my personal honour and privilege to rise in this chamber and highlight some of the heroes in policing. I have tried to recognize some of the outstanding members who have done amazing things, like going undercover to save children at risk of online danger, using their own funds to save children in Vietnam and Cambodia from sexual slavery or doing wellness checks at homeless encampments. Sadly, some police officers have died doing so.

When I joined the Senate, there were four former police officers serving in this hallowed chamber, including our beloved colleague Senator Gwen Boniface. Now, as I retire, I pass the torch to Senator Dhillon to continue being that strong and thoughtful voice for those who carry a badge.

I hope that I have made my parents, my family, the province of British Columbia and my country proud, and that I have been able to repay, even in a small way, the profound debt of gratitude I feel for the opportunities, trust and support that I have received throughout my life and career. As someone pointed out, my mother said to me that she never thought I'd get this far. I wish she could see me now.

Thank you, *meegwetch*.

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

#### DISTINGUISHED VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of our former colleagues the Honourable Jim Munson and the Honourable Brent Cotter.

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

**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 Ade Ekhaton and Biba Tinga, President of the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Canada. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Ince.

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

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

#### NATIONAL SICKLE CELL AWARENESS DAY

**Hon. Tony Ince:** Honourable senators, 6,000 Canadians: That is the approximate number of Canadians living with sickle cell disease.

June 19 marks eight years since National Sickle Cell Awareness Day, which was officially recognized through the leadership of the Honourable Jane Cordy through Bill S-211.

As with many conditions, we know that its impacts extend far beyond the individual; they affect entire families. In our gallery today, we welcome individuals who have dedicated their lives to improving the lives of those with sickle cell disease, including Ms. Biba Tinga, President of the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Canada, whose advocacy has amplified the voices of those living with this blood disorder. They are co-hosting the Sickle Cell Awareness Day Breakfast with me on Friday in the Senate lounge, alongside the Interdisciplinary Centre for Black Health.

It's a shameless plug, colleagues, but I hope to see you all there.

More importantly, I want to share with you the stories of individuals affected by sickle cell disease.

Ms. Ruth Kingner is a teacher and mother of two, who travels from Saint John to Halifax several times a year so that her daughter can access specialized care, often requiring time away from work.

Ms. Leanne Laylor is a mother living with sickle cell disease. Ms. Laylor had hoped to join us in Ottawa this week for the breakfast but was unable to travel because of severe pain. Her experience shows us the unpredictability and daily challenges of living with this chronic illness.

Finally, Ms. Ade Ekhaton was diagnosed at just 13 months old. As a child, her concerns were not about homework or sports but whether she would be healthy enough to attend school the next day. Despite these challenges, she became the first Black valedictorian in the 137-year history of Brockville Collegiate Institute.

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

**Senator Ince:** She went on to become a nurse and, last month, found out that she was accepted into medical school.

These stories tell us that sickle cell disease is a family disease; everyone is affected. They show us the challenges of living with sickle cell disease as well as the potential of those who refuse to let it define them. They are stories of pain, resilience and hope.

I hope we take the time to consider what more we can do to improve access to care, treatment and blood donations for the communities most affected. It should not take a personal story for us to recognize the seriousness of this disease, especially one that was recognized over 100 years ago.

Thank you, *wela'liq, meegwetch, todah* and *shukran*.

**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 Her Excellency Auðbjörg Halldórsdóttir, Ambassador of Iceland to Canada. She is the guest of the Honourable Senators McPhedran and Osler.

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

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

[*Translation*]

#### RACISM

**Hon. Amina Gerba:** Honourable senators, I solemnly stand before you today as a representative of Quebec and as a Black woman deeply concerned by the revelations concerning a team within the Montreal police service.

According to information made public, 16 police officers from Station 39 have been suspended from duty following allegations of racist and dehumanising behaviour. One of the things some officers are alleged to have done is cut and keep locks of hair from people who had been arrested, mainly Black people and people of Arab origin.

These acts, if confirmed, are not mere lapses in conduct. They constitute a direct affront to human dignity and are reminiscent of humiliating practices that carry a heavy historical burden for racialized communities. They undermine public trust in institutions and betray the fundamental oath to protect and serve.

• (1510)

As a senator from Quebec, I cannot remain silent. Institutional racism is not an abstract theory. It manifests itself in concrete actions, in organizational cultures that tolerate the unacceptable, and in practices that multiply and inflict harm on entire generations.

Honourable senators, we have a responsibility to demand thorough, transparent and rigorous investigations. We must ensure that victims are identified, heard and supported, and that police oversight mechanisms are strengthened.

[ Senator Ince ]

I want to say this to all Black, Arab, Indigenous and racialized people in Quebec and Canada: Your dignity is non-negotiable. Your dignity will never be optional. As long as I sit in this chamber, I will help make your voice heard firmly and unequivocally. Quebec and Canada deserve institutions that are beyond reproach and police forces that are worthy of the public's trust. We must respond to this crisis with courage, transparency and determination.

Thank you.

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

[*English*]

#### VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Senator Atallahjan's sister, Farrah Azam, from Pakistan.

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

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

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

#### JUSTICE

##### CHARTER STATEMENT IN RELATION TO BILL C-26— DOCUMENT TABLED

**Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate):** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a Charter Statement prepared by the Minister of Justice in relation to Bill C-26, An Act to authorize certain payments to be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the purpose of improving housing supply, pursuant to the *Department of Justice Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. J-2, sbs. 4.2(1).

##### CHARTER STATEMENT IN RELATION TO BILL C-30— DOCUMENT TABLED

**Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate):** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a Charter Statement prepared by the Minister of Justice in relation to Bill C-30, An Act to implement certain provisions of the spring economic update tabled in Parliament on April 28, 2026, pursuant to the *Department of Justice Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. J-2, sbs. 4.2(1).

**STUDY ON LOCAL SERVICES  
PROVIDED BY CBC/RADIO-CANADA**

FIFTH REPORT OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS  
COMMITTEE DEPOSITED WITH CLERK DURING  
ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

**Hon. David M. Wells:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on September 24, 2025, the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on June 17, 2026, its fifth report entitled *Local News Matters: Rethinking CBC/Radio-Canada's Role in a Changing Media Landscape* and I move that the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

(On motion of Senator Wells (*Newfoundland and Labrador*), report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

**MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING**

FIRST REPORT OF SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE TABLED

**Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying, entitled *Medical assistance in Dying and Mental Disorder as the Sole Underlying Medical Condition: A Complex and Challenging Conversation among Canadians*.

**PROTECTING VICTIMS BILL**

BILL TO AMEND—ELEVENTH REPORT OF LEGAL AND  
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PRESENTED

**Hon. David M. Arnot,** Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, presented the following report:

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

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

**ELEVENTH REPORT**

Your committee, to which was referred Bill C-16, An Act to amend certain Acts in relation to criminal and correctional matters (child protection, gender-based violence, delays and other measures), has, in obedience to the order of reference of Monday, June 15, 2026, examined the said bill and now reports the same without amendment but with certain

observations, which are appended to this report.

Respectfully submitted,

DAVID M. ARNOT

*Chair*

(For text of observations, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 1109.)

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 15, 2026, the bill was placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting.)

**CANADA-UNITED STATES  
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY GROUP**

CONGRESSIONAL VISIT, MARCH 17-19, 2026—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Michael L. MacDonald:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group concerning the Congressional Visit, held in Washington, D.C., from March 17 to 19, 2026.

[Translation]

**PARLAMERICAS**

GLOBE COP27 LEGISLATORS SUMMIT, NOVEMBER 6-18, 2022—  
REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Rosa Galvez:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas concerning the GLOBE COP27 Legislators Summit, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from November 6 to 18, 2022.

GATHERING OF PARLAMERICAS' OPEN PARLIAMENT NETWORK,  
APRIL 20-22, 2023—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Rosa Galvez:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas concerning the Seventh Gathering of ParlAmericas' Open Parliament Network, held in Santiago, Chile, from April 20 to 22, 2023.

GATHERING OF PARLAMERICAS PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK ON  
CLIMATE CHANGE AND GATHERING OF PARLAMERICAS  
PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY,  
SEPTEMBER 27-29, 2023—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Rosa Galvez:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas concerning the Seventh Gathering of ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change and

Fifteenth Gathering of ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality, held in Mexico City, Mexico, from September 27 to 29, 2023.

BILATERAL VISIT TO COSTA RICA AND DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,  
MARCH 11-15, 2024—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Rosa Galvez:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas concerning the Bilateral Visit to Costa Rica and Dominican Republic, held in San José, Costa Rica and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from March 11 to 15, 2024.

GATHERING OF THE PARLAMERICAS PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY AND GATHERING OF THE PARLAMERICAS PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY, OCTOBER 23-25, 2024—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Rosa Galvez:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas concerning the Eighth Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change and Sustainability and Sixteenth Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality, held in San José, Costa Rica, from October 23 to 25, 2024.

BILATERAL MISSION, NOVEMBER 13-15, 2024—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Rosa Galvez:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas concerning the Bilateral Mission, held in Guatemala City, Guatemala, from November 13 to 15, 2024.

• (1520)

[English]

#### BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

**Hon. Marilou McPhedran:** Your Honour, this is a tentative point of order. It is not clear to me how Question Period has become cancelled, and I wondered if there could be an explanation for that. Was that your ruling, Your Honour, or some other procedure?

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** The reason why it happened is because there was a consensus by all groups that, in order to speed up the very busy agenda we have right now down the stretch, it would be to the benefit of this chamber to use that time in order to focus on the very compressed legislative work we have before us.

Obviously, nothing falls off the Order Paper, which is the tradition and the rules of this institution, but there was a consensus between leaders and all caucuses that we have better things to do with that 30 minutes.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** If I called Question Period, would you have a question to ask, Senator McPhedran?

[ Senator Galvez ]

**Senator McPhedran:** I do, Your Honour, unless there has been a procedure.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Certainly, if you want to ask a question, Senator McPhedran, you may do so.

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## QUESTION PERIOD

### PRIVY COUNCIL

#### CANADIAN NUCLEAR SAFETY COMMISSION

**Hon. Marilou McPhedran:** Thank you. I very much appreciate that. It was quite a shock to see that it looked as if we didn't have this opportunity.

Senator Moreau, Canadians expect environmental assessments to be rigorous, transparent and truly independent, not a buddy system, but the government's recent report, *Getting Major Projects Built in Canada*, proposes a dangerous handover of nuclear impact assessments of projects already in progress from the independent Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, or IAAC, to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

The track record of the commission is concerning. It is a proponent of the nuclear industry. It has never denied a licence, and some communities allege that it secretly authorized the transport of radioactive fuel waste across provinces. Litigation by some Indigenous communities on nuclear waste dumps is under way.

Senator Moreau, can your government explain how stripping assessment powers from the independent IAAC and handing them to an industry-dominated commission will protect Canadians?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** There is a commitment from the government to make sure Canadians not only benefit from major projects everywhere in Canada but that those major projects will go through assessments beforehand. I am convinced the government will take into consideration whatever comments are made concerning a specific project when it does that.

It is possible to do two things — having major projects to make sure our economy is growing and protecting the environment — at the same time.

**Senator McPhedran:** Senator Moreau, where are the accountability and transparency measures in this handover from an independent agency to safeguard our communities and maintain public trust when the agency that is now proposed to do the reviews is not independent?

**Senator Moreau:** The accountability of the government remains to the population. Everything that will be done

concerning major projects will be going through consultation: consultation with First Nations, consultation with all the communities that are impacted by such a program. This will be broadly public, so that is where accountability remains.

[*Translation*]

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### FEDERAL LAW–CIVIL LAW HARMONIZATION BILL, NO. 4

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Clement, seconded by the Honourable Senator Kingston, for the third reading of Bill S-6, A fourth Act to harmonize federal law with the civil law of Quebec and to amend certain Acts in order to ensure that each language version takes into account the common law and the civil law.

**Hon. Claude Carignan:** Honourable senators, I rise today at the third reading of Bill S-6, a fourth act to harmonize federal law with the civil law of Quebec.

First, I want to thank Senator Clement for her work on this bill, and for her report on the work of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. I tip my hat to her for bringing such passion to a harmonization bill. I would add that my staff, like Senator Clement, is fresh out of harmonization jokes.

As you know, our role at third reading is to debate not only the bill's general principles, but also its final wording. You'll therefore be relieved — or not — to learn that there will be no debate on whether this bill goes too far, violates fundamental rights, or contains flagrant omissions.

The legislation before us is the same legislation examined at second reading. The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs tabled its report without amendments. The bill is highly technical, but its objective is entirely legitimate: to ensure the consistency of federal law in a bijural context. The study by the Legal Affairs Committee confirms this point.

The legislation that we're studying at third reading doesn't alter the substance of the law. Neither does it change any statutory directions. Rather, it aims to clarify the terminology used, make adjustments to certain concepts and ensure that the provisions in federal statutes achieve the same legal effect whether they're interpreted under common law or civil law.

Simply put, the idea isn't to reform the law, but simply to ensure that it functions properly. Although outwardly simple, this objective is crucial. Testimony before the Legal Affairs Committee clearly illustrated that these adjustments will have

tangible effects. The aim is to prevent certain provisions in various laws from creating confusion or giving rise to diverging interpretations. If that were to happen, the courts would have to intervene. This is precisely the purpose of Bill S-6: to prevent such situations from occurring.

Beyond the legislation itself, it's important to keep in mind that this bill is part of an ongoing process. The law, whether common law or civil law, evolves. Harmonization must keep pace with that evolution. Our task is to examine and adopt the bill with that in mind.

As mentioned, this is a substantial bill containing a considerable number of amendments. As was pointed out to us in committee, delaying its passage would risk making the process even more cumbersome and would require further updates to several provisions. We could face issues related to efficiency and consistency.

Beyond all that, this bill serves as a humble reminder that one of Parliament's fundamental roles is to uphold the quality of the law in both official languages.

Our role is not always to introduce major reforms. It also involves ensuring that our laws are clear, consistent, enforceable and accessible within both legal systems in this country. Given that Canada has a bijural and bilingual system, this responsibility is all the more important.

We had the opportunity to advance a similar bill, Bill S-11, in the previous Parliament. The Senate did a great job. I urge you to do the same thing by passing Bill S-6, with the sincere hope that, this time, it will make it through all stages of the legislative process in the other place.

Of course, I urge everyone to vote in favour of the bill. Thank you.

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

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read third time and passed.)

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

• (1600)

[*English*]

## BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Pursuant to the order of June 16, 2026, I leave the chair for the Senate to resolve into a Committee of the Whole on the subject matter of Bill C-26, An Act to authorize certain payments to be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the purpose of improving housing supply. The Honourable Senator Cormier will chair the committee.

**BILL TO AUTHORIZE CERTAIN PAYMENTS TO BE MADE  
OUT OF THE CONSOLIDATED REVENUE FUND FOR  
THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVING HOUSING SUPPLY**

CONSIDERATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IN  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

On the Order:

The Senate in Committee of the Whole in order to receive the Honourable Gregor Robertson, P.C., M.P., Minister of Housing and Infrastructure and Minister responsible for Pacific Economic Development Canada, accompanied by at most two officials, to consider the subject matter of Bill C-26, An Act to authorize certain payments to be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the purpose of improving housing supply.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended and put into Committee of the Whole, the Honourable René Cormier in the chair.)

**The Chair:** Honourable senators, the Senate is resolved into a Committee of the Whole in order to study the subject matter of Bill C-26, An Act to authorize certain payments to be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the purpose of improving housing supply.

Honourable senators, in a Committee of the Whole, senators shall address the chair but need not stand. Under the Rules, the speaking time is 10 minutes, including questions and answers, but, as ordered, if a senator does not use all of their time, the balance may be yielded to another senator. The committee will receive the Honourable Gregor Robertson, P.C., M.P., Minister of Housing and Infrastructure and Minister responsible for Pacific Economic Development Canada.

I would now invite Minister Robertson to enter, accompanied by his officials.

(Pursuant to the order of the Senate, the Honourable Gregor Robertson and his officials were escorted to seats in the Senate Chamber.)

**The Chair:** Minister, on behalf of all senators, welcome to the Senate.

As I have informed my colleagues, the question-and-answer period will be divided into 10-minute blocks. These blocks will be shared between two or three senators and will include time for your responses.

I would ask you to make your opening remarks of at most five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Gregor Robertson, P.C., M.P., Minister of Housing and Infrastructure and Minister responsible for Pacific Economic Development Canada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am very pleased to be here with you today.

[*English*]

Thank you, all senators, for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss Bill C-26 and for your willingness to study this important legislation on an expedited basis in particular, given that we are in a housing crisis. I would like to thank Senator McBean for sponsoring this bill and helping it move along.

I wish to note, before we start, that I may need to pause briefly to vote on my phone. I will need to take a time out in about 25 or 30 minutes. We are moving things along through the House, as are you. I appreciate your patience with that. I will signal you when I need to do that. It will only take a minute or two.

On the subject of housing supply, our government is focused on boosting housing supply all across the country. By implementing a range of measures across the housing system, we are seeing early signs of significant progress.

We are working alongside our partners in order to build more homes: provinces, territories, cities, Indigenous communities, the private sector and community builders. Creating more affordable housing is really the ultimate focus here. Affordability is obviously a top concern for many Canadians as well as reducing barriers so that Canadians can access housing.

Housing remains a pressing issue. We have had arguably 30 to 40 years of history during which we did not invest enough in housing. By implementing a range of measures, we will see movement, but there is a lot more work to be done.

Bill C-26 is a key part of addressing housing needs across the country. The legislation provides for \$1.7 billion directly to provinces and territories for the purpose of accelerating housing supply.

[*Translation*]

This bill will enable the Minister of Finance to make payments to the provinces and territories as long as the federal funds are used exclusively for measures aimed at increasing the housing supply. These funds can be tailored to address the specific circumstances and needs of each province and territory, which will help to make housing more affordable for all Canadians.

The provinces and territories are well positioned to determine how federal support can strengthen their efforts to increase the housing supply in the various regions.

Housing needs vary from one place to another across the country, and the measures that we are planning are designed to meet those different needs. The challenges faced by a growing urban centre are very different from those faced by a small community or one that is more remote.

Bill C-26 gives the provinces and territories the means to allocate the funding where it will have the greatest impact on increasing the housing supply.

[English]

Our partnerships with provinces and territories are focused on taking action to lower building costs and to accelerate the delivery of new housing. These measures can include, but are not limited to, reducing development fees or levies on new home construction. Funding can also be used for incremental investments in provincial and territorial programming that is already in place to spur housing developments.

The Government of Ontario's HST announcement on March 30 of this year is a key example of how these federal transfers will enable partnerships to improve housing supply. Ontario went first and set a great pace with this.

The partnership between the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario will reduce taxes and fees for a new home in Ontario by up to \$200,000 through a combination of reduced development charges and HST relief for new homebuyers. Ontario estimates that this measure will support an additional 8,000 housing starts in 2027.

Bill C-26 also complements the work that we are doing and deepens the impact of investments being made through Build Canada Homes.

Since Build Canada Homes was launched in September 2025, it has secured significant partnerships with Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, B.C., Quebec, Yukon and Nunavut. A tripartite agreement in principle has also been signed between the Government of Canada, the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, the housing agency. Negotiations are currently still under way with other provinces and territories, and more partnerships are being developed through Build Canada Homes.

**The Chair:** Thank you, minister.

We will now proceed to the question-and-answer period. We will begin with the first block, starting with Senator Housakos.

**Senator Housakos:** Minister, welcome to the Senate, particularly following the pre-study we did on Bill C-20. Now we are dealing with Bill C-26 here today.

As you may be aware, the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy tabled an observation on Bill C-20 last month. I understand that those observations have been shared with your department, and I hope that you and your officials give them serious consideration as the bill proceeds through its remaining stages.

Minister, Bill C-26 authorizes \$1.7 billion in payments to provinces and territories for the purpose of improving housing supply. That is the central phrase in the bill, but the bill does not define it.

Can you tell this chamber, in plain terms, what specific outcomes are expected from this \$1.7 billion? How many homes?

• (1610)

What is the time frame and how many homes will be purchased with the \$1.7 billion? What measures will be set as your success bar in terms of judgment?

Minister, if your government cannot tell Parliament how many additional homes this funding is expected to produce, how can senators responsibly conclude that this bill is a housing supply measure rather than simply another transfer of public funds with a housing label?

We want to know what your benchmarks are specifically in terms of how many homes, what the time frame is and what you consider as success.

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you for the question. With this transfer, as I mentioned, right out of the gate, we had an example of what the Province of Ontario has decided to do with their portion, which is to eliminate the HST in Ontario for the year 2026-27. They combined that with the previous initiative on development charges. This piece, in particular, for homes up to \$1 million is a \$130,000 reduction in the cost of a home, which is very significant. An additional \$70,000 is estimated as a reduction from the development cost charge change due to the investment that we have made as well.

Ontario is taking an approach of helping to get the housing market going, which has stalled significantly in the GTA, as well as getting builders building and ensuring new homebuyers have an opportunity to save significantly, given the challenges in the economy and with affordability. They figure that will flow through to developers building an additional 8,000 homes in the year ahead.

There is a knock-on effect as the equity that developers and builders have in the current stalled inventory can be redeployed into new homes being built.

We see an Ontario example. It will be different for other provinces and territories. We are keeping it flexible. We have many different tools right now between Build Canada Homes, Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy and the Canada Housing Benefit. We have a number of different tools working with the provinces and territories.

This is one that is targeted at the housing market crisis in Ontario and B.C. We assume — Ontario has already taken the lead on that — that they will deploy it accordingly to help solve the challenge in their markets, as well as the additional benefits that will accrue around affordability.

We will see different approaches in different provinces and territories. In good faith, this is an investment in housing supply.

I am certainly in touch with housing ministers across the country. We have a summit together this summer, and we will be checking in on what everybody is doing with their next steps. Certainly, the public will be asking questions, as well as the oppositions in their legislatures, of how they directed their funds and what the outcomes are.

**Senator Housakos:** I did not hear a specific answer to the question. I appreciate that you want to prime the wheels of provincial governments and their existing programs, which are clearly failing in every province across the country for well over a decade now.

The truth of the matter is more money into a bad structure isn't necessarily the solution. We're talking about getting an approval from us for \$1.7 billion.

I ask the question again concretely: As minister on a national basis, from coast to coast to coast, how many homes do you expect to get for \$1.7 billion at the end of this exercise?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you again.

To your question, we are not being prescriptive and setting targets for provinces and territories. In this case, we are making an investment in the provinces and territories to boost their housing supply, trusting that they will invest that wisely on behalf of the people who live in their provinces and territories.

This is a collaborative effort to direct funds and boost housing supply, trusting that the provinces and territories will deliver results on their own terms. We have many other programs that are much more prescriptive.

Through my colleagues in the House, it was felt that this was an opportunity to invest as a flexible tool in provinces and territories and, at the same time, complement our other programs, with Build Canada Homes being one significant example, which are now working in partnership with the provinces and territories through targeted measures to deliver specific numbers of homes.

This is more about covering a broad base and letting the provinces and territories come up with their own solutions to the problems that they have.

[Translation]

**Senator Carignan:** What I'm hearing is that \$1.7 billion is being transferred and that there aren't really any targets for achieving objectives. Is the reduction conditional? You announced that the measures could help reduce development and new housing construction charges. Is that reduction a condition for obtaining funds? Will achieving such reductions be mandatory?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you for the question.

[English]

There are no conditions on this funding provided to the provinces and territories. It is a direct transfer to them. It is clear and simple language: boosting housing supply.

For me, among my colleagues, the provincial and territorial ministers, I'm looking at this as a friendly competition. Who can deliver the most housing supply through the investments being made? We are leaving it to them to apply the dollars to the solutions as they see fit.

Ontario is a different context from many of the other provinces and territories.

[Translation]

**Senator Carignan:** I don't want to interrupt you, minister, but I don't have much time.

So, I understand that they won't be required to remove or reduce the various development charges. Will that be left to the provinces' discretion? QST proceeds go to the province, and the province has chosen to forgo them. Development and construction charges, as well as construction permit charges, go to the municipalities, which is different.

Will the province have a free hand? If extending water and sewer systems and infrastructure allows the development of a street, can the municipalities use these funds to build new housing?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you for the question.

[English]

It is an excellent example of what a province or territory may do with these funds. Given that discretion, they may choose to invest in housing-enabling infrastructure.

Many provinces and territories have challenges with increasing housing supply because they don't have the infrastructure to do that at the community level, such as water infrastructure, including waste water and stormwater infrastructure. They have the discretion to apply those funds toward the biggest housing supply impact. The expectation of my colleagues is they will be looking at the choices they can make and looking to get the best results from that.

It is not conditional, however, as I have said before. For the development cost charge reductions, there is a separate initiative through the Build Communities Strong Fund. The Provincial and Territorial stream of the new \$51-billion infrastructure fund requires matching funds from provinces and territories, and it is eligible for housing-enabling infrastructure. We will see investments tied directly to the dollars and the delivery, but in Bill C-26, with this pool of capital, they have the discretion to apply that.

I suspect some of them will, as you suggest, focus on housing-enabling infrastructure to be able to build more in their communities.

**Senator McBean:** Minister, the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy recently completed an extensive study of Canada's housing affordability crisis and heard from builders, municipalities, economists, housing advocates and financial institutions.

The committee concluded that increasing housing supply must be the centre of any serious affordability strategy and made several recommendations aimed at accelerating home building and supporting the infrastructure needed to enable new housing, including programs like the one you mentioned in Ontario about rebating the HST.

While Bill C-26 would provide significant funding to provinces and territories, as you said, the legislation does not prescribe how those funds should be spent.

• (1620)

How is the allocation of funding among provinces and territories determined, and what discussion took place with the provincial and territorial governments regarding the intended use of these funds?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you, senator, for the question.

What we're looking at, across this pool of capital, are different allotments for different provinces and territories that are tied more to their housing challenges. Ontario, far and away, has the largest challenge with housing supply right now, a combination of not enough affordable housing for those who need it and also market housing not selling. There is a lot of uncertainty in the market. There is a lot of condo product in the GTA that has stalled, and that has stalled the equity of many home builders who cannot move that product and build more.

In Ontario's case, they will get the largest amount of this \$1.7 billion. B.C. has a comparable problem on a smaller scale. The majority of the funds will go to those two provinces because it is being responsive to the crisis we have with housing supply and stalled markets. It will drop off from those provinces, which have the biggest challenges, but still have some proportionality to the populations of the provinces and territories.

We have a parallel approach with public transit funding, where we weight the ridership on public transit, but we also have a population formula. Here, it is a combination of housing supply challenges and population across the provinces and territories.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Younce:** Minister, my questions pertain to the efficiency, coordination and harmonization of codes.

At a time when innovation is emerging as a key driver, particularly with the creation of Build Canada Homes, how does the government intend to use these funds to encourage the adoption of faster and more efficient solutions — notably prefabricated and modular construction — while promoting greater harmonization of building codes across jurisdictions? For example, the Canadian Wood Council has pointed out that the CMHC is not funding modular construction because they are awaiting your ministerial directive.

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

There are a couple of components to that which I will respond to.

With this Bill C-26 funding, the provinces and territories have discretion. There may be provinces or territories that decide that investing in modern methods of construction and making the home building industry more productive and efficient are the best way to increase their housing supply. That's their decision.

We are focused on boosting those innovative home building techniques, manufacturing in particular, through Build Canada Homes. That is a very important part of the Build Canada Homes mandate — to require that modern methods of construction are part of proposals that come in to create the demand for the manufacturers, to create the demand for innovation in the home-building sector, more efficiency, lower costs and Canadian materials, so boosting our Canadian economy. That's part of the Build Canada Homes mandate.

With this bill, in particular, we leave it up to the provinces and territories to decide if they want to direct some of their investment at those innovations and changes.

The final piece you asked about was on National Model Codes or building codes. That, again, is something we have signalled in the Spring Economic Update as next steps to work with provinces and territories across the country to look at more harmonization between building codes so that we can be more efficient between provinces and territories with workers, trades, materials and manufacturers who are manufacturing in one province and wish to ship to another.

We are looking at that as a separate initiative but certainly aligned with these steps, all different tools that work together.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Younce:** My second question pertains to coordination between the various public stakeholders. Given that Bill C-26 provides for flexible transfers to the provinces, how will the government ensure that these investments will genuinely contribute to better coordination and that they will not exacerbate the fragmentation already observed in housing policies? When I say "fragmentation," I'm referring in particular to the responsibilities, standards and programs, but also to the stakeholders that are spread across various levels of government and institutions. How can the government ensure better coordination?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

The senator identifies arguably that the largest challenge we have with housing across Canada is not enough coordination between our federal tools, provincial and territorial, local governments, the private sector and the non-profit housing community.

In the case of Bill C-26, we're not seeing this as a direct contribution to solving the challenges we have around coordination. We do see that as a critical piece with our housing work going forward. We are looking at a new national housing strategy being crafted this year, as the 2017 National Housing Strategy is coming near to an end and the agreements related to it will expire in less than two years. Our partners are now asking, "What does it look like? We don't want it all to stop." None of us want that to happen. We're starting to have those conversations on coordination.

This investment in provinces and territories, and trusting that they will make good choices, is also a measure of good faith. We are committed to being good partners. We are committed to trusting our provinces and territories to do the right thing to boost housing supply.

We want to work with them to harmonize building codes to get more affordable housing built on the other programs that we have.

This piece is more flexible and more trusting. The others, we need to advance aggressively in the months and years ahead. They complement one another that way.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Youance:** For my last question, I'd like to pick up on the topic discussed by Senator Carignan.

The government has introduced a number of programs: the first-time home buyers' GST/HST rebate program, the Build Canada Homes program, and Bill C-26. So we have different tools that share the same objective of making housing more affordable. How do you intend to assess whether the various programs are meeting their objectives? Have you thought of introducing some overarching objectives, for example, rather than approaching these three actions separately?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

Assessment will be a combination of the extensive research that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, does. CMHC is the leading agency for doing research on housing and finance related to housing. We anticipate rigorous analysis of all of these programs and their overall outcomes from CMHC in their work.

There are, obviously, a number of independent bodies and industry-related bodies that are doing research and tracking.

We have seen some success from programs to date in that we have had 20 months in a row of average rents coming down across Canada, which is a great sign that the supply of rental housing is catching up and —

**The Chair:** Thank you, minister.

**Senator Ross:** Minister, welcome to the Senate. Thank you for being here with us.

[ Mr. Robertson ]

My questions today are not about the important work of improving the housing supply but about the process that you have taken with this bill. This is a one-clause bill to appropriate funds.

In a briefing yesterday, after a question about why this is stand-alone legislation, officials said that the government wants to move money very quickly. This reasoning seems somewhat confusing, considering that, yesterday, June 16, this chamber passed both Bill C-32 and Bill C-33, the supply bills for the Main Estimates and Supplementary Estimates (A), which were only introduced in the House of Commons on June 8. This bill, Bill C-26, was introduced in the House of Commons three months ago and only began second reading yesterday.

• (1630)

My questions are as follows: Why was this funding not done through the estimates process? Why has your government chosen stand-alone legislation as the vehicle for this funding? Does this not make it more difficult to follow and scrutinize government spending within the full fiscal picture? If this funding is so critical, why did it take your government so long — from March 26, when it was tabled, to yesterday — to move to second reading?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you, senator, for your questions. First and foremost, I don't have all of the answers to your questions relating to the process of the bill through the House of Commons, overseen by my colleague the Government House Leader and his team.

As I'm sure the senators here know, there is a lot of cut and thrust between the government and its opposition in terms of agendas, prioritization of bills, debate and committee time. I'm not directly involved in making those choices.

That said, this is a relatively expedited investment of housing funding for provinces and territories. It was announced in late March, and Ontario immediately had uptake, announcing that partnership between the Governments of Canada and Ontario at the end of March, with these funds in mind to reduce their HST, with the federal component of the GST being the allotment that they were projecting here.

Provinces and territories are seeing this as likely to come through, and they are making their plans. We expect deployment to be rapid. In the broader context of our government investing in housing, this is a relatively expedited process, and, at the same time, it's very simple. It's a simple bill that stands alone in terms of investing this funding in provinces and territories for the purposes of boosting housing supply and giving them the flexibility to direct that funding. I anticipate that we will all be tracking the outcomes of that.

**Senator Ross:** There is no argument about the purpose of the funding and its implementation. With a \$1.7-billion price tag, down the line, when the National Finance Committee, which I am a part of, continues to track the funding spent by this government through the estimates, this won't show up. I'm really thinking more about transparency and fiscal responsibility.

Do you agree that money could be tracked more easily if it were part of the regular fiscal cycle and if it were part of the —

**The Chair:** Thank you, Senator Ross.

**Senator Patterson:** I'm going to take a slightly different tack and talk about military housing. We know from the technical brief that housing on-base is covered under the Canadian Forces Housing Agency, but it's very important to note that the majority of bases in Canada are in rural or very small communities. The only government in charge of housing that actually affects military operational effectiveness is the federal government. Please note that there are bases located in places like Cold Lake, Alberta; Shilo, Manitoba; Bagotville, Quebec; and Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. These are places where we cannot even move people because there is no affordable housing or anything available on-base.

My question to you focuses on the challenges of growing a force rapidly and maintaining operational capability. We know that access to housing and child care are major retention issues in a growing force, and they are also reasons why people will not join.

Given the special relationship of the federal government with the Canadian Armed Forces, or CAF, in maintaining the defence and security of Canada, what discussions have happened between provinces and territories containing bases and the federal government that could encourage the investment of more funding into these smaller communities? Thank you.

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you, senator, for the question. Provinces and territories have the flexibility to direct this funding to build housing adjacent to bases in their various communities. I haven't heard from my fellow housing ministers across the country that it is a priority for them. Generally, they will point to the fact that it is a federal responsibility, for the reasons that you mentioned, and to the relationship between the federal government and the Canadian Armed Forces.

I work very closely with the Minister of Defence, and he has a robust housing agenda, recognizing that there is a housing shortage for CAF members on-base. Through the Pathfinder program that was launched in previous years, they have an approach to getting more base-supporting housing in lands adjacent to the bases in those communities.

We see a real opportunity for synergies and alignment, and for Build Canada Homes in particular to be able to partner with the Canadian Forces Housing Agency to get more housing built and to look at a combination of our forces to deliver more housing that benefits both the base and the community in which it is situated, especially in small communities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, minister.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Aucoin:** Thank you for being here, minister. In the answers you've given today, you talked a lot about agreements between the provinces and the federal government and, if I understood correctly, you confirmed that the provinces will be given a lot of flexibility.

How does the government plan to ensure an equitable distribution of funds between rural areas and large urban centres in the agreements with the provinces, particularly the agreement with Nova Scotia, where I'm from?

[*English*]

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you for the question. We have certainly heard, loudly and clearly, during my past year as minister, about the needs of housing in rural Canada, and I certainly hear it from my colleagues in Nova Scotia, which has a particular mix of rural housing outside of the Halifax region.

We do see the importance of ensuring that there is a floor for investment in rural communities. Build Canada Homes has a 20% floor with its funding for rural, northern and Indigenous housing. We want to make sure that we are investing in rural communities.

There is a good example next door to you, in New Brunswick. The Province of New Brunswick put together a portfolio of housing projects in their province that encompasses many small projects in rural communities, which makes it easier for us to administer one single investment in New Brunswick that they can then deploy across smaller communities. Those are many smaller projects that may have a big impact in those small communities. But, obviously, it's more work to go from one small project to another.

We are developing a system across some of our other tools — Build Canada Homes in particular — to make sure we are investing in rural housing. The housing affordability crisis and the shortage are impacting many rural communities. We're certainly seeing that in the North, and that is recognized in the agreements with Nunavut and Yukon.

I see this as a really important component. It's not direct, obviously. Bill C-26 is a very simple bill. I anticipate that some provinces will direct some of this funding toward boosting housing supply in rural communities. Those are provinces and territories that primarily consist of rural communities.

**Senator Wilson:** Thank you for being here, minister. It is fun to see someone from my own neighbourhood here in the chamber.

In your remarks, you made reference to Bill C-26 being just one piece within a more comprehensive housing plan that is being implemented across the country. In discussions like this, especially with the timelines we are facing on the bill before us, it can be easy to focus too singularly on particular pieces.

Would you be able to describe in more detail how this bill and its intended outcomes fit into the wider housing plan you referenced?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you for the question, senator. This is certainly complementary to the other tools in the tool box, and I would say that the most flexible and trusting way to deal with our partners at the provincial and territorial level is by giving them the discretion to apply this funding to boost housing supply.

• (1640)

Build Canada Homes, which senators have been deliberating on, is a new agency within my department that will hopefully soon be a Crown corporation with the flexibility and tools to be able to acquire real estate, to develop, to have federal land in the tool box and to focus on delivering affordable housing using Crown corporation tools if we empower it with that. That's a different model that's more based on proposals from all sorts of partners — provinces, territories, cities, private sector and community builders. It's a new tool that we think has flexibility, but also has a very clear mandate to deliver with those partners.

We have an array of tools that come from the National Housing Strategy that range from tackling homelessness, with Reaching Home and the Unsheltered Homelessness Encampments Initiative, to the Canada Housing Benefit and many other programs related that are in the National Housing Strategy that are more targeted.

What we anticipate here with Bill C-26 is much broader and much more flexible, and I think it will be really important for us to look at the outcomes and see if this is a good tool going forward. We recognize we're in a crisis —

**The Chair:** Thank you, minister.

**Senator Muggli:** My question relates to whether there has been consideration to require an agricultural impact assessment to establish land's agricultural value before any federal department or agency disposes of Crown land located in an agricultural area or converts such land into non-agriculture use, that is, for housing, especially where the land is fit for food production. We are losing food-producing land, and with the geographic expansion of cities, how do we manage the intersection of the need to build homes and the need to keep agricultural land in food production?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you, senator. I appreciate you flagging that concern. As a former farmer on land that was protected in B.C. by the Agricultural Land Reserve, I would have never had the opportunity to have a career in farming and food, which led to food processing and, ultimately, to me being here today. I have a very direct and passionate connection to the points you raise.

I would love to follow up in terms of an agricultural impact assessment tied to federal tools to make sure there is a balanced approach. Many of the provinces and territories do not have a system like B.C., which has protected agricultural land for 50-plus years. We're certainly looking at every opportunity to put housing on federal land where it makes the most sense, but it should be sensitive to ensuring that we are not taking away valuable farmland in a time when food security is paramount.

[Translation]

**Senator Gerba:** Thank you for being in the Senate today, minister.

[ Mr. Robertson ]

Bill C-26 seeks to stimulate housing construction across Canada. However, the housing crisis disproportionately affects Black communities. According to Statistics Canada, 29% of Black Canadians live in unsuitable housing and 15% have core housing needs, compared to 9% for the total population.

How will the government ensure that the new transfers benefit Black communities in particular in order to address these systemic inequalities in housing?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you for the question.

[English]

Thank you for your concerns. I'm very familiar with an existing program we have with the Affordable Housing Fund — a \$50-million carve-out of the Affordable Housing Fund for Black households — which is making sure we're supporting renter households and home ownership for Black families across the country.

As of the end of February of this year, that carve-out is fully committed. It supported nine projects, I believe, across the country, and more than 500 homes were created through that program. We're now looking at the renewal of the National Housing Strategy, so we have an opportunity to take that to the next level.

It's not directly related to Bill C-26 in this case, but I think there was good success with the Affordable Housing Fund program and certainly a desire to continue to scale that to meet the needs, noting that it is a significant challenge and Black households are disproportionately affected by affordability challenges. We need to rise to that challenge, and I do anticipate that with the renewal of the National Housing Strategy going forward.

**Senator Cardozo:** Thank you for being here, minister. I have a two-part question. Over the past four to five years, one of the reasons cited for the shortage of housing was immigration. Immigration levels have been reduced considerably in the last couple of years. I wonder what your thoughts are on the link between immigration and the shortage of homes and your thoughts about whether Bill C-26 helps in this regard.

My second question is regarding Build Canada Homes. Do you have numbers on how many houses have been built, or when do you think you will have numbers firmly?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you, senator.

With immigration, the priority of our government is to make sure we have our immigration system under control and that the housing ecosystem across Canada has an opportunity to catch up a bit, given there were very high levels of immigration, particularly in 2022-23. It was one of the factors contributing to challenges with people finding adequate and affordable housing. There are many others. The direct purpose of Bill C-26 is to boost housing supply. Supply has been a challenge all along.

I would say, as the circumstances change, we've seen really good outcomes with the changes with immigration in getting the system under control. But Canada is a country of immigrants, and

we are nearing a point where, I would say, we will start looking at the next steps with immigration. We need to ensure our housing decisions are informed by that.

To your second question, there are over 12,000 homes now in the works with Build Canada Homes. There has been a huge flow of proposals from across the country, with partners of all levels looking to have financing and investment in their projects — a very robust deal flow. Right now, there are about 12,000 already in the system, going for financing, and tens of thousands more coming. So those are good results right out of the gate in this first year.

**Senator MacDonald:** Thank you, minister, for being here today.

Bill C-26 says that the amount of each payment is to be determined by the Minister of Finance. Is there an allocation formula for these payments? Will it be based on population, housing starts, housing need, provincial commitments, municipal permitting reforms, affordability pressures or some other metric that I haven't mentioned?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you, senator. There is no prescriptive formula for this funding. I mentioned the approach being taken is one of looking at housing supply needs. Ontario and B.C. have the most critical needs right now and are having a real crisis in terms of the housing markets in the GTA and Metro Vancouver. That will be weighted alongside a broader population formula for the provinces and territories, but I anticipate Ontario and B.C. will be more heavily weighted given the challenges they have with housing supply.

• (1650)

**Senator MacDonald:** Would it be fair to ask whether you are going to create an allocation formula before the Senate is asked to pass this bill? If not, why would the Senate approve \$1.7 billion before knowing how the money is going to be divided among the provinces and territories?

**Mr. Robertson:** The money, as I said, will be divided on the basis of population with weighting on housing supply challenges.

The Ontario funding is what is driving Ontario's elimination of the HST this year. They have chosen to apply it to that. In my judgment, it is a very strategic and important decision to boost housing supply in Ontario and to offer a significant measure of affordability for new home buyers that boosts the housing market in Ontario.

At this point, we are giving flexibility to the provinces and territories on how they deploy that capital, but it will be proportionate to their needs. We'll have an opportunity on the other side of this to gauge the outcomes from this investment, as we do with the rest of our housing programs.

**Senator MacDonald:** Minister, the government has also pointed to Build Canada Homes and roughly \$40 billion in broader housing programming. Bill C-26 appears to add another \$1.7 billion of transfer authority.

How does this bill fit into the government's overall housing plan? What gap is it intended to fill that existing programs do not already address?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you.

The gap that this Bill C-26 funding fills is really around flexibility. Most of the instruments, tools and programs that we have are very prescriptive. In particular, with respect to project-based funding, which is the majority of what goes out through the Apartment Construction Loan Program, the Affordable Housing Fund and Build Canada Homes, most of the capital that is deployed is going through project-based analysis.

In this case, these are flexible funds for the provinces and territories to apply as they see fit for their particular challenges with housing supply. This is trusting our provinces and territories to invest this wisely where they see fit without prescribing to them, as with many of the other programs. Funding is subscribed in many of those as we go into the rollover of the National Housing Strategy.

Part of this is also gauging how successful we can be in working with provinces and territories and offering more flexibility with some of the funding. However, it's a small proportion of the overall investment and a very small proportion of what is being invested in housing overall.

**Senator MacDonald:** Minister, are you saying that Bill C-26 is not necessarily funding a clearly defined program within the housing plan but is more a flexible pool of money to be allocated later as negotiations with provinces and territories unfold?

**Mr. Robertson:** I anticipate provinces and territories moving swiftly to deploy the funding to address their housing supply challenges. We've certainly seen that with Ontario, who have been asking for that type of support so they can act.

I know we will see swift action from B.C. as well because they are in a comparable predicament.

**Senator Atallahjan:** Minister, Bill C-26 contains no clawback provision, no statutory reporting requirement and no requirement to demonstrate that the money actually produces additional housing supply.

What happens if a province or territory receives funding but fails to deliver measurable results?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you.

In terms of outcomes, we will be tracking the work that is done in each of the provinces and territories based on the funding, how they're utilizing it and what the outcomes are.

This is a new approach — one that hasn't been taken before — but it recognizes we're in very unusual circumstances in terms of being in a housing crisis and a housing supply crisis in some of our provinces.

The approach here is to give the provinces and territories an opportunity to prove what they can do when they are given the flexibility to deploy this capital. We can then measure the

outcomes from that and determine whether we do anything like this going forward or use different tools if the outcomes are not satisfactory.

The initial feedback from Ontario is very positive in terms of the immediate market signal that we had in April and May. It is very positive in terms of their action in reducing the HST. They feel strongly that it has been a great success out of the gate.

We need to look at that as we go through this program and go through the year and assess whether this is a tool that we need to continue using. However, it is an important next step to give the provinces and territories a chance to prove what they can do when they have flexibility with this funding.

**Senator Ataullahjan:** Minister, will the government withhold, reduce or recover funding if promised housing outcomes are not achieved? If there are no consequences for non-performance, how is this an accountable use of public money?

**Mr. Robertson:** I am not aware of a recovery mechanism regarding this funding, and I would say that we have a lot of other funding programs with the provinces and territories. They rely on us, in particular, for some of the major programs, with the Canada Housing Benefit being a very significant one.

It is incumbent on the provinces and territories to deliver good results with this investment. We are trusting them to do that, and we certainly have leverage with a number of other housing programs. If they're not getting results with this funding, then there is not likely to be any more of it to follow. It will certainly influence our decisions around the balance of our programs if funding invested in good faith is not being used for the outcomes we all share — or that I would hope we all share — and we can make decisions based on that.

**Senator Ataullahjan:** Minister, your government is asking Parliament to approve \$1.7 billion, but the bill contains no definition of improving housing supply, no allocation formula, no eligibility criteria, no public reporting requirements and no clawback if results are not achieved.

Why should senators not view this as a blank cheque?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you.

This is an investment in boosting housing supply with provinces and territories. The provinces and territories have been kicking down the door asking the federal government to invest and support their needs on housing.

We have, as a federal government, underinvested in housing for about 40 years now, as programs have been pulled back, eliminated and reduced. There has been a resurgence of investment.

We don't have a precise handle on what the array of new investments made over the past 5 to 10 years has been. There is a lot of analysis right now. We're still testing the tools, and I think the first National Housing Strategy has certainly done a good job of that —

**The Chair:** Thank you, minister.

**Senator Coyle:** Welcome, Minister Robertson.

Bill C-26 focuses on increasing our housing supply and making housing more affordable for Canadians. This is welcome and, as you have said, long overdue.

Last December, I met with the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. They outlined that almost 20% of households in Canada cannot afford shelter costs of more than \$1,050 per month, yet only 4.4% of our total housing stock is in affordable, non-market community housing. To stabilize the rental market and make housing more affordable, they suggested the government focus on doubling the proportion of community housing over the next 10 years.

Recognizing the flexibility that you've described and some of the issues that Senator Ataullahjan has mentioned about no mandatory reporting, audit or accountability frameworks, have you heard from provinces and territories who plan to build more non-market community housing with these funds?

• (1700)

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you, senator.

I have certainly heard from some of the ministers that their focus is on boosting the non-market housing supply, which is the biggest challenge in their province or territory. Ontario has chosen a different path, with their funding right out of the gate, recognizing that they have a major crisis with the housing market in the Greater Toronto Area, or GTA, in particular.

We will see some provinces and territories focus on non-market housing, and across the other tools — Build Canada Homes, notably — we are going to have a big focus on non-market housing and making that the top priority of the federal government. We have a huge shortage of non-market housing compared to our peer countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, or the G7. We have to catch up. Being at 3.4% is obviously inadequate. That is why there is a homelessness crisis and too many people who cannot access housing affordably. There has to be more of a focus on non-market or community housing, as it is often branded these days.

**Senator Coyle:** Thank you. That is wonderful to hear.

*The Chronicle Herald* in Halifax has recently reported that 32% of post-secondary students in Nova Scotia experience what is called "hidden homelessness," where they are couch surfing, sleeping in cars or staying overnight at campus libraries. The City of Halifax is also the fourth most expensive major city in the country.

How do you see this bill assisting the housing needs of the Province of Nova Scotia?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you. I will leave it to the ministers in Nova Scotia to determine their priorities with this funding in particular.

We have a great agreement with the Province of Nova Scotia. Initially, with Build Canada Homes, it has a real focus on non-market housing and supportive and transitional housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Many of the provinces and territories have also signalled that they want to build more student housing, which is a priority for them. We have had a lot of proposals for student housing at Build Canada Homes.

Some of this funding may end up in student housing in some provinces and territories. Certainly, Build Canada Homes will be focusing some of their investments in student housing as well.

**Senator Loffreda:** Welcome, Minister Robertson, and thank you for appearing before us today.

I welcome Bill C-26 and the government's ongoing efforts to address both housing supply and housing affordability across Canada. I'm hopeful that the \$1.7 billion in funding proposed through this legislation will help increase the availability of affordable housing.

As you know, the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy released a report earlier this year entitled *Out of Reach: Unlocking Canada's housing affordability crisis*. Among its recommendations, the committee urged the federal government to demonstrate leadership by working with other levels of government to establish best practices for municipal approval processes while using financial incentives to encourage their adoption.

Could you tell us what types of incentives the government is considering in order to help reduce approval delays, streamline permitting processes and address regulatory barriers, all of which are so important to speeding up and building homes?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you, senator, for your question.

We have incentives in the form of the Housing Accelerator Fund, which is a set of agreements with 241 local governments to reduce red tape, streamline approvals and do more rezoning for gentle density and transient-oriented density. We've seen really good success and uptake with that incentive program through the Housing Accelerator Fund.

I would say that the Bill C-26 investment of \$1.7 billion is a big incentive approach to provinces and territories boosting housing supplies in the ways they see fit. We certainly heard from Ontario that they wanted to see their housing market kick-started in the GTA, and they have chosen to eliminate the HST this year, which is a big incentive for new homebuyers in Ontario. It is up to \$1 million. That is a big saving for those homebuyers, and they are already seeing some fruits from those labours.

Across the rest of the provinces and territories, we don't know yet whether they will take an incentives-based approach with the capital that would be advanced by Bill C-26. As a former mayor, incentives are an important part of the program, certainly at the local or community level. They are definitely stretched to fiscal capacity, so having incentives to make the changes that are needed would be welcomed.

Around coordination, as was mentioned earlier, in terms of national building codes, with a more national approach to expediting approvals, permitting and licensing, there are many cities doing their own thing on this right now with different systems. Some are using AI.

It would be great to see incentives that try to get everyone on a more common platform with more advanced technologies to speed up the process of approvals, which will help make home building more affordable as well.

**Senator Loffreda:** Thank you for that answer.

In 2023, our committee also released an interim report on housing affordability that called upon the federal government to work urgently with provinces and territories toward the greater harmonization of building codes across Canada. We heard compelling evidence that innovation can play a critical role in increasing housing supply and reducing construction costs, yet officials from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, at the time noted that construction remains one of the least digitized sectors of our economy, highlighting the need for greater adoption of new technologies, modern construction methods and more efficient building practices. They told us that different building codes and regulations, sometimes even within the same region, can create significant obstacles to innovation and discourage investment in new approaches.

What steps is the government taking to modernize the housing sector, promote innovation and advance the greater harmonization of building codes across the country?

**Mr. Robertson:** Thank you, senator. I mentioned a few of these earlier, so thank you for the question on it.

We are looking at incentives. Based on Build Canada Homes' work, the proposals they are considering are weighted toward proposals with modern methods of construction. We want to see projects that are driving the demand for innovative building technologies, from the design through the materials to the on-site construction. Manufactured components are going to be essential to this. As a country, we are far behind our peer countries in Europe and Asia in terms of adopting these modern methods and off-site manufacturing technologies.

We are prioritizing that at Build Canada Homes to drive the market and create the demand.

Through the spring economic update, we are also embarking upon a process with the National Model Codes, working with provinces and territories to see more harmonization. We want to see support for off-site manufactured components. Right now, there are barriers and bottlenecks that make it much more difficult for home builders to use those manufactured components, not only on the permitting, licensing and regulatory side but also on the financing side. We want to remove those barriers and support this fledgling industry to grow and help to bring down the costs of home building.

That is what we've seen in other countries, and it makes for a more efficient home-building industry. Ultimately, that improves affordability.

We have a few initiatives like that, and I anticipate that work scaling in the months and years ahead.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Honourable senators, the committee has been sitting for 65 minutes. In conformity with the order of the Senate, I am obliged to interrupt proceedings so that the committee can report to the Senate.

Minister, on behalf of all senators, thank you for joining us today to assist us with our work on the bill. I would also like to thank your officials.

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

**The Chair:** Honourable senators, is it agreed that the committee rise and I report to the Senate that the witness has been heard?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

• (1710)

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, the sitting of the Senate is resumed.

[*English*]

#### REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Hon. René Cormier:** Honourable senators, the Committee of the Whole, authorized by the Senate to study the subject matter of Bill C-26, An Act to authorize certain payments to be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the purpose of improving housing supply, reports that it has heard from the said witness.

[ Mr. Robertson ]

## MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

### CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—MESSAGE FROM COMMONS—  
SENATE AMENDMENT CONCURRED IN

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that a message has been received from the House of Commons which reads as follows:

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

*EXTRACT, —*

That a message be sent to the Senate to acquaint their Honours that the House has concurred in the amendment made by the Senate to Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda, hate crime and access to religious or cultural places).

*ATTEST*

Eric Janse

*Clerk of the House of Commons*

[*Translation*]

### BILL TO AUTHORIZE CERTAIN PAYMENTS TO BE MADE OUT OF THE CONSOLIDATED REVENUE FUND FOR THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVING HOUSING SUPPLY

#### FIRST READING

**The Hon. the Speaker** informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-26, An Act to authorize certain payments to be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the purpose of improving housing supply.

(Bill read first time.)

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 16, 2026, the bill was placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading now.)

[*English*]

#### SECOND READING

**Hon. Marnie McBean** moved second reading of Bill C-26, An Act to authorize certain payments to be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the purpose of improving housing supply.

She said: Honourable senators, Canada's housing affordability crisis has become one of the defining challenges of our generation. For too many Canadians, the dream of finding good, affordable homes has slipped out of reach. Young families are delaying major life decisions; first-time homebuyers are struggling to enter the market; renters are facing rising costs and limited options.

In Toronto, where I'm from, and across the Greater Toronto Area, or GTA, the situation is particularly acute. While home prices have come down from their peak and borrowing conditions have improved somewhat, they remain misaligned with local incomes. As a result, many prospective buyers are still priced out or are choosing to wait on the sidelines.

At the same time, the GTA has experienced a growing inventory of unsold condominium units, as affordability challenges have pushed many prospective buyers out of the market. This imbalance has created the appearance of abundant supply, but the reality is more concerning. As sales have slowed, developers have pulled back on launching new projects, reducing the pipeline of future housing construction, which keeps prices too high. I see this to be like closing the doors to an event, with more and more people gathering in line but not more seats available for the show, and no one is getting in the door.

The consequences are already being felt across the construction sector, with tradespeople and skilled workers facing layoffs and reduced work opportunities. If this trend continues, we risk losing both housing supply and construction capacity at precisely the moment when more homes are needed.

This is the ripple effect: If carpenters, framers, plumbers, electricians, masons, roofers, drywallers, cabinet makers and many more lose their work, they will find other work, and we'll lose these important skills and we'll lose capacity. As they look to find new work, they may need to turn to government programs for EI supports. We are at a critical moment.

This situation is why I agreed to sponsor Bill C-26, An Act to authorize certain payments to be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the purpose of improving housing supply. Simply put, Canada needs to build more homes — homes that Canadians can actually afford — and Bill C-26 can help do that.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that 290,000 units per year are needed to close the supply gap. To restore affordability to 2019 levels, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation estimates the need for up to 480,000 units annually over the next decade. This is an achievable goal. In 2025, 258,000 units were built, so the bump required is 30,000 to 220,000 more units. This will take an "Own the Podium" type of effort.

Bill C-26 will help get projects moving, support construction workers and deliver more homes for Canadians. This legislation — a single provision in two parts — will deliver a \$1.7-billion federal investment to provinces and territories to support measures that increase housing supply. This is a one-time cash infusion that will be sent to the provinces upon Royal Assent. This is about moving quickly and supporting the provinces and territories in their quest to increase housing supply and affordability.

These funds could, for example, help lower development fees or levies on new home construction. They can also strengthen existing provincial and territorial programs already focused on building more homes through targeted, incremental investments.

This federal investment can also support provincial and territorial efforts to streamline regulations and boost productivity across the home construction sector. But different provinces and territories need different solutions; flexibility from coast to coast is essential.

A good example of these measures in action is Ontario's new HST rebate on homes. Backed by federal support through this bill, the province will eliminate the 13% HST on new homes up to \$1 million, putting up to \$130,000 back into buyers' pockets. Homes valued between \$1 million and \$1.5 million would receive a partial rebate more than this.

This is a significant measure. Housing taxes are ultimately embedded in the cost of new homes. When governments reduce those costs, they make housing more affordable for purchasers while also improving the financial viability of new housing projects. In a market where many developments are stalled because of high costs and tight margins, reducing the tax burden can help move projects forward and increase the supply of homes.

Although it is still early days, indications suggest that the measure is already having an impact. In the GTA, sales of new homes reached 1,100 units in April, almost three times higher than the 384 homes sold in April of last year, according to data compiled by the Altus Group for the Building Industry and Land Development Association, or BILD. This suggests that when governments take steps to reduce costs, buyers and builders respond.

The agreement with Ontario demonstrates exactly the kind of collaborative, supply-focused approach that Bill C-26 is designed to support. Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all solution, the legislation enables provinces and territories to pursue practical measures that respond to local housing challenges while advancing the broader national goal of increasing housing supply and improving affordability.

Colleagues, it is not one problem, so Bill C-26 does not prescribe one solution. Moving from building 258,000 units to 480,000 units won't happen without an agile plan. In some jurisdictions, excessive fees and charges are a major obstacle. In others, the priority may be supporting infrastructure, expanding existing housing programs or creating incentives that improve project viability and encourage new construction. Bill C-26 recognizes these regional differences while maintaining a clear national objective: increasing housing supply.

Importantly, the approach reflected in Bill C-26 is consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy's recent report, *Out of Reach: Unlocking Canada's housing affordability crisis*.

The committee, of which I am a member, heard from economists, builders, municipalities, housing advocates, financial institutions and other industry experts. Based on the evidence presented, the committee's report was clear: Improving housing affordability in Canada requires increasing housing supply, and policy efforts should prioritize building more homes rather than measures that simply enable Canadians to take on additional debt to compete for a constrained supply of housing.

The committee's top recommendation reflected that conclusion and is the primary focus for Bill C-26. The report called on the federal government to significantly expand the GST/HST rebate on new homes by providing a 100% rebate for homes valued under \$1 million, with a gradual phase-out for homes valued between \$1 million and \$1.5 million, with future indexation to inflation.

• (1720)

This recommendation recognized a simple reality. Existing GST/HST rebate thresholds were established decades ago and no longer reflect the price of housing in many Canadian communities. They are about as relevant as thinking that \$4,000 represents meaningful property ownership. As home prices have increased, the value of the rebate has diminished, reducing its effectiveness as a tool to support affordability and encourage construction.

The recent federal-Ontario agreement directly reflects this recommendation and demonstrates how evidence-based public policy can influence government action.

However, I will add that the committee's report did not stop there. One of its most important findings was that development charges, municipal fees and other government-imposed costs are contributing significantly to housing prices. In some major urban centres, these charges can add tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars to the cost of a new home.

Our Banking Committee recommended the federal government work collaboratively with provinces, territories and municipalities to reduce reliance on development charges, which have become a significant contributor to rising housing costs. Governments should explore alternative and more sustainable municipal funding models that can support infrastructure without placing an excessive burden on new home construction.

Options for provinces and territories could include removing capital costs from development charges in cases where builders already install infrastructure that municipalities would otherwise fund. It would also enable municipalities to recover certain infrastructure costs over time, particularly for revenue-generating services such as water, waste water and electricity, rather than requiring large upfront payments.

Another important recommendation from the committee focused on transparency. Homebuyers often have little understanding of how much of the purchase price of their home consists of taxes, fees, levies and other government-imposed charges. The committee recommended improving transparency so that policy-makers and the public can better understand the role these costs play in housing affordability. These items — commonly baked in — increase purchase price, down payment minimums, property tax and mortgage payments for decades to come.

Our committee also recognized the need for innovation within the housing sector. Canada has historically lagged behind other countries in adopting modular, prefabricated and factory-built technologies. These approaches can reduce construction timelines, improve productivity and lower costs. Encouraging greater adoption of innovative construction methods can help Canada build more homes faster.

Taken together, the recommendations contained in the Senate report *Out of Reach* provide a practical road map for addressing Canada's housing affordability crisis. They recognize that increasing supply requires more than government spending. It requires tax reform, regulatory modernization, reduced development costs, innovation and cooperation across all levels of government.

Colleagues, the housing crisis was not created overnight, and it will not be solved overnight. With sustained commitment, evidence-based policy-making and cooperation among all levels of government, we can make meaningful progress. We can move toward the podium and be part of putting housing back within reach.

Bill C-26 is not a complete solution to the housing crisis. No one piece of legislation could be. But it is an important step in the right direction. By enabling partnerships such as the HST rebate agreement with Ontario, the bill provides governments with additional tools to reduce costs and stimulate housing construction. By supporting measures that increase supply, it addresses the fundamental imbalance at the heart of Canada's housing crisis.

Canadians are looking for action. They want governments to move beyond rhetoric and pursue practical solutions. Solving Canada's housing challenges requires immediate action to bring down costs, cut red tape and build homes more quickly.

The government's approach focuses on expanding Canada's housing stock by reducing building and financing costs, improving productivity in the home building sector and boosting the supply of affordable housing.

The total suite of federal measures, estimated at over \$140 billion in spending and foregone revenues over the next five years, covers the entire housing continuum, from homelessness to market-rate housing.

Senators, I invite all of you to support the passage of Bill C-26 so that it can deliver support to Canadians in a timely manner. Thank you.

**Hon. Denise Batters:** Would Senator McBean take a few questions?

**Senator McBean:** Yes.

**Senator Batters:** First, Senator McBean, why does Bill C-26 authorize the Minister of Finance to access the Consolidated Revenue Fund to make this \$1.7-billion payment “. . . at the times and in the manner that the Minister of Finance considers appropriate”?

That’s what Bill C-26 says. It is my understanding that this is an unusual occurrence to allow a minister to access the Consolidated Revenue Fund like this.

**Senator McBean:** Yes, I believe it is unusual. There are other instances where it has happened.

During the pandemic, the minister accessed similar funds to help during the pandemic. One of those programs was to help schools improve their HVAC systems in a timely way. I believe the minister sees this housing issue as a crisis and is moving quickly.

With these funds, the idea is to unlock in an immediate manner both Canadians’ ability to purchase homes and developers’ ability to sell these homes so that future permits and housing starts will kick-start affordable housing.

**Senator Batters:** Yes, it’s interesting that the government would use a COVID-level pandemic response in this way for this bill.

Bill C-26 contains only one clause with two subclauses. The first subclause says only this:

The Minister of Finance may make payments to the provinces and territories, the total of which is equal to \$1.713 billion, for the purpose of improving housing supply. The amount of each payment is to be determined by the Minister of Finance.

What are all of the amounts that the Minister of Finance has determined to pay each province and territory? Why aren’t these listed in the bill or a schedule? Are payments to only some provinces determined right now? Why does this bill leave these payment amounts to the sole discretion of the Minister of Finance?

**Senator McBean:** I asked a similar question in my briefing. I was told that the allocations and distributions to all of the provinces and territories have been communicated to the provinces and territories. They are aware of it, but it is not public at this time.

**Senator Batters:** It’s not public, but we’re being asked to approve a bill.

I would like to know for my home province: What is the amount for Saskatchewan?

**Senator McBean:** I am afraid I cannot answer that question at this time. Based on the conversations I had in my briefing, I was told that the Province of Saskatchewan would know this, but it has not been made public at this time.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Claude Carignan:** Will the senator take a question?

**Senator McBean:** Yes.

**Senator Carignan:** There are different ways of allocating funding under federal-provincial agreements. It can be based on the percentage of the population or it can be based on the share of wealth. Can you give us the criteria that will be used to fairly divide this money up?

**Senator McBean:** Yes.

[*English*]

As the minister said, funding is being directed where housing demand and housing supply pressures are the greatest. That is how it is being distributed. One could assume that, as the minister said, a significant amount will go to Ontario, as it is experiencing the largest pressures for housing affordability right now.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Carignan:** Perhaps something was lost in the interpretation, so I will repeat my question.

When the \$1.7 billion is distributed among the provinces, will it be done based on the relative weight of the population of each province? For example, if Quebec represents 23% of the population of Canada, will it be entitled to 23% of the \$1.7 billion, or will other criteria be taken into account, such as the provinces’ level of wealth or the number of square kilometres per province? How will the criteria for distributing the funding among the provinces be determined?

• (1730)

[*English*]

**Senator McBean:** I believe, as the minister said here, that the allocations will go to where the greatest pressures are. He did say in front of us here that a large portion would be going to Ontario, followed by British Columbia, and the rest of the allocations would follow to the provinces and territories as the housing supply crisis and demand dictate. So, no, it is not based on population; it is based on need.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Carignan:** From what I understand, the richer the province and the more expensive the housing, the more money that province will get. That means that poorer provinces will not get any money.

[English]

**Senator McBean:** No, I don't think that's the situation. The minister is looking at a housing crisis where the supply gap and the affordability gap are making it next to impossible for Canadians to find their homes. The question isn't who has the money, but who needs to find a home to live in and where the home development has been stalled.

This money will be released almost immediately into the provinces and territories where the agreements and the disbursements have been made. The minister has expectations in those conversations with them; the expectation is this money is to unlock housing supply, and that is not based on population or square miles or square kilometres. It is based on where Canadians are living and working and where they need to find homes.

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

**Some Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**An Hon. Senator:** On division.

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

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 16, 2026, the bill was placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting.)

(At 5:33 p.m., pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 11, 2026, the Senate adjourned until 1:30 p.m., tomorrow.)

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