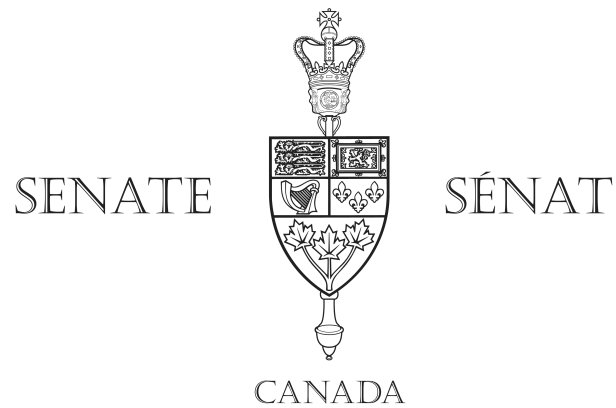




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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 28, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, October 28, 2026

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

OXI DAY

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, every Greek child in Greece, Canada and every corner of the diaspora grows up knowing one word before they understand what it means: *Oxi* — No.

Today, I rise to tell you why that single word still carries the weight of an entire civilization.

In the early hours of October 28, 1940, Mussolini's ambassador delivered an ultimatum to Greek Prime Minister Metaxas: "Open your borders to our armies or face war."

Greece was small. Greece was poor. Its enemy was one of the strongest military powers in Europe, backed by a Germany that had already swallowed a continent.

Even so, the answer was one resolute word: "*Oxi*."

That word was not a calculation. It was not diplomacy. It was a nation remembering who it was.

Honourable senators, that nation was, and is still today, the heir of Athens, Marathon, Thermopylae and the people who first dared to say that a citizen is not a subject, that free men can govern themselves and that reason and debate are stronger than the sword.

Democracy, philosophy, the rule of law and the very architecture of this chamber we sit in trace their lineage back to a hillside in Athens.

The Greeks did not merely inherit greatness. They built it, and they built it upward — in marble, in thought and in law. Twenty-five centuries later, it is still standing.

In 1940, the descendants of those ideals showed that they were not relics. Within hours, the streets of Athens were filled with people singing, cheering and ready for battle.

Farmers, shepherds and students marched into the snow-covered mountains of Pindus and pushed the invader back.

It was the first Allied land victory of the Second World War, delivered when the free world needed hope more than at any other moment. Greece would pay for that courage with occupation, famine and tragedy, but it never surrendered its soul.

Colleagues, I am proud to be a Canadian of Hellenic heritage. I was raised on these stories, and I believe they belong to all of us. I say that because the ideas Greece defended in the 1940s are the

same ideas that built this great country: liberty, the dignity of the individual and the conviction that no tyrant has the right to dictate how free people live.

Today, tyranny is again stirring in the world. Authoritarian regimes test the resolve of democracies, and too often, they find hesitation. We would do well to remember that freedom is never inherited whole. It has to be defended by every generation, one "no" at a time.

To the people of Greece and to the Hellenic community of Canada, who carry this flame with such pride and generosity:

[Editor's Note: Senator Housakos spoke in Greek.]

Thank you, colleagues.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VOICES OF YOUTH INDIGENOUS LEADERS

Hon. Brian Francis: Honourable senators, on behalf of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, it is my great pleasure to welcome eight extraordinary young Indigenous leaders to the Red Chamber.

This group of accomplished trailblazers are this year's participants in Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders. As many of you know, this event is hosted by the Indigenous Peoples Committee with support from the Communications, Broadcasting and Publications Directorate. The committee launched this initiative back in 2016 because we wanted to hear from Indigenous youth about their stories, their work to help and inspire others and their ideas for the future.

Selected participants are invited to travel to Ottawa to meet with senators and testify before the committee. Collectively, their testimonies have helped guide our committee's work and studies.

This week, we are proud to be hosting the ninth edition of the event, which received a record number of 140 applications, with applicants from every province and territory.

We already heard compelling testimony at our committee meeting this morning, and we look forward to learning more at another meeting this evening. I invite you all to join us there or to tune in and listen online.

I now have the honour of introducing the first two participants of Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders 2026.

Noah Pépin-Papigatuk joins us from the small Nunavik community of Salluit in northern Quebec.

This young Inuit leader wants to see more leadership opportunities created for Indigenous youth. He believes that if Indigenous youth are encouraged to participate in outings on their land and take part in day camps, such as Qaulirmat and Nurrat Jeunes Karibus, it could help prevent drug and alcohol addiction in young people.

We also have Summer Wabasse, an Oji-Cree from Webequie First Nation in Ontario. She was raised in Thunder Bay and is now based in Ottawa, where she works as a government relations specialist.

She serves as co-chair of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, or NAN, Oshkaatisak Youth Council and represents NAN youth on the Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council through the Chiefs of Ontario.

In these roles, she works alongside young people from remote and urban communities to strengthen governance, advocate for youth priorities and address barriers facing youth in remote northern First Nations.

Please join me in welcoming and learning from Noah and Summer, as well as other young Indigenous leaders, some of whom Senators Greenwood and Prosper will introduce shortly.

Thank you. *Wela'lin.*

Hon. Margo Greenwood: Honourable senators, I begin by recognizing the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Peoples and express my gratitude for the opportunity to work on their land.

As Deputy Chair of the Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, I'm thrilled to introduce another three amazing young adults who are participating in Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders 2026.

Dreyden George is from T'Sou-ke First Nation, which is on Southern Vancouver Island in my home province of British Columbia. He is the first Indigenous student to be elected president of the student government at Queen's University.

In addition to his studies, he serves as chair and president of the DAXET Development Corporation, which identifies and manages economic development opportunities in T'Sou-ke First Nation.

He also serves as chair of the community's Lands Advisory Board, which oversees issues regarding land development. His goal is to develop systems, businesses and activities within the community that allow youth to develop leadership skills.

Next, please welcome Jaylene Neisa Delorme from Hay River in the Northwest Territories. She is a member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and founder of Dēnegóth Naji, a

grassroots initiative dedicated to helping individuals and families navigate health care systems, government programs, educational opportunities and community resources.

• (1410)

Through this work, she has seen first-hand that one of the greatest barriers facing Indigenous youth is not a lack of resilience or potential but a lack of accessible support and guidance. She says that many Indigenous youths are already demonstrating leadership in their communities, but they need to be included in decisions that affect their futures.

Also here with us today is Makayla Mantla, a Tlicho citizen from Behchokò in Treaty 11, Northwest Territories, who now works as a nurse in Alberta. She recently graduated with an Honours Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Alberta, becoming the first person in her family to earn a university degree.

As part of her nursing education, she researched Indigenous-specific racism in Canadian health care, examining how colonial systems continue to affect Indigenous patients. She was also elected Director of Indigenous Health and Advocacy for the Canadian Nursing Students' Association.

Through her work, she has observed that Indigenous patients often feel more comfortable when they are cared for by someone who understands their experiences.

Please join me in celebrating these young leaders' accomplishments and their participation in Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders. *Hiy hiy.*

Hon. Paul (PJ) Prosper: Honourable senators, it is my honour to introduce to you three more inspiring participants in Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders 2026.

I am delighted to welcome Trinity Lafford-Desmond, an engineering student from Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation in Nova Scotia, where I served as Chief for seven years.

Trinity has developed leadership skills through her work with two community outreach programs at St. Francis Xavier University. She supports youth through science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, programming in Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian communities by facilitating community visits, workshops and summer camps that connect STEM to everyday life. She also works with a solar energy company to install and design systems for Indigenous communities across Nova Scotia. She hopes that, through sharing her own educational and career journey, she can inspire youth to pursue STEM pathways.

I am also excited to introduce Kyra Lustig, a Red River Métis woman who is now living and studying in Fredericton, New Brunswick. She advocates for Indigenous students at her university and works to amplify voices that often go unheard. She frequently experiences, in her own words, "an emotional tug-of-war" between longing for her home and feeling a responsibility to stand up for those who are part of the broader

Indigenous community. She wants to inspire others who feel isolated and disconnected to embrace their stories and support each other.

Next, please welcome Chantal Kyplain, a Métis woman and single mother in long-term recovery, from Saskatchewan. She describes her leadership journey as showing up for her community, creating space for others and using her lived experience to help others feel seen. In her role at the Saskatoon Indian & Métis Friendship Centre, she supports programs, events and initiatives that serve Indigenous community members.

A published poet and public speaker, she has also facilitated workshops focused on creative expression, wellness and healing. Her vision for fostering youth leadership begins with helping young people recognize their own strengths.

Please join me in welcoming these three remarkable young Indigenous women 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 youth from Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders. They are the guests of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Cassandra Mukamba and Valentina Torres, who are part of Plan International Canada's Girls Belong Here program. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Senior.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

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

I am pleased to have this opportunity to mark Women's History Month, which concludes this week. It is important that we reflect on the history of achievements, milestones and progress of women in Canada.

At the same time, it is imperative to recognize these important milestones have often excluded Indigenous, Black and racialized women, who have been historically left out of that progress. People experience different barriers depending on many elements of their identities, including their sexuality, race, gender identity, ability and age. Pursuing true equality means recognizing and

meeting all people's diverse needs. We need to always be thinking of intersectionality and applying that critical, gender-based analysis with the initiatives we take on in our work and apply that lens consistently.

To celebrate Women's History Month and International Day of the Girl Child earlier this month, I would like to highlight the Girls Belong Here program, a flagship youth leadership initiative by Plan International Canada. Through this program, girls, young women and gender-diverse youth step into spaces where decisions are made and influence is built. Through leadership experiences such as seat shares, mentorship opportunities and civic engagement, participants gain first-hand exposure to leadership.

I am pleased to also welcome Cassandra Mukamba, a Girls Belong Here program participant, to the Senate today. Cassandra is a Congolese-Canadian community builder, mentor and emerging leader, whose work spans corporate social responsibility, Indigenous housing advocacy, youth empowerment and much more, by the way. She does a lot. Through her work in youth mentorship, social impact, governance and community development, Cassandra has demonstrated a commitment to breaking down barriers and helping others thrive.

Honourable colleagues, please join me in welcoming Cassandra to the Senate and recognizing Plan International Canada for establishing the Girls Belong Here program. The program highlights the critical intersections of gender equity, youth leadership and public service. I think it is a fitting way to celebrate Women's History Month and applaud outstanding young women and gender-diverse youth who are helping create a future where every young person has the opportunity, confidence and support to lead change in their communities and beyond.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Christopher Stowell, Artistic Director of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet; Ernest Cholakakis, Chair of the Board of Directors; and the Honourable Patricia Bovey, former senator and Member of the Board.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

ROYAL WINNIPEG BALLET

Hon. Raymonde Gagné: Honourable senators, after celebrating the hundredth anniversary of Théâtre Cercle Molière, the oldest theatre company in Canada, this spring, today I would

like to pay tribute in this chamber to another great pillar of Manitoba's and Canada's cultural heritage: the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

Founded in 1939 as the Winnipeg Ballet Club, today, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet is the oldest continuously running ballet company in Canada. It became the Winnipeg Ballet in 1941 and received the first royal charter granted by Queen Elizabeth II shortly thereafter.

Its history is linked to the royal family.

[English]

In June 1939, the Winnipeg Ballet Club made its public debut as part of the celebrations surrounding the visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to Winnipeg, where 100,000 people gathered to welcome the royal couple at Union Station.

Nearly 90 years later, this young company has grown into a celebrated institution that continues to showcase Manitoba and Canada to the world. Generation after generation, its dancers have carried this tradition to stages across Canada and around the world. In my view, they are true ambassadors of Canadian talent and creativity.

[Translation]

Ballet is also an intimate, personal experience.

[English]

For many of us, ballet evokes memories of discovering *Swan Lake*, family outings to see *The Nutcracker* during the holiday season or watching a young person discover dance as a way to express their creativity and pride.

[Translation]

What's more, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet is constantly evolving. The company continues to perform the great classics while also making space for new works and new voices. Today, we celebrate its ability to honour the past while looking toward the future.

I hope the Royal Winnipeg Ballet continues to show the world what Canada can do, touch our hearts and, most importantly, inspire us to dream for at least another 100 years.

Thank you for bringing dance to Canada.

[English]

And long live the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

ADJOURNMENT

NOTICE OF MOTION

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

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, November 3, 2026, at 2 p.m.

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO EXTEND DATE OF FINAL REPORT ON STUDY OF ROLE OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD SECTOR IN FOOD SECURITY

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

That, notwithstanding the order of the Senate adopted on Wednesday, October 22, 2025, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry in relation to its study on the role of the agriculture and agri-food sector with regard to food security in Canada be extended from December 31, 2026, to June 30, 2027.

QUESTION PERIOD

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

TRADE DIVERSIFICATION

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, all of us in this chamber understand Prime Minister Carney's attempts to diversify trade. We definitely understand the need, especially under the precarious circumstances that we face with our biggest trading partner. However, you have to admit that the Prime Minister going to Türkiye and meeting with President Erdoğan — someone who is in competition with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, in Iran for who can violate human rights and liberties more and someone who has his political opponents in jail and journalists in jail and muzzled. There is no freedom of religion in that country whatsoever, and the treatment of the LGBTQ community is absolutely abhorrent. Yet the Prime Minister chooses to go there and give credence to one of the worst dictatorial tyrants who does not respect human rights whatsoever. In exchange for what — a case of figs or baklava more than we already have with that particular trading partner?

Will you agree that trading our soul for small benefits —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator Housakos.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Housakos, I'll mention the scale of the importance of trade diversification, especially with Türkiye, but I do not agree with your figures and with what you think we will have in exchange.

The government raised human rights issues, including labour rights and freedom of expression, consistently and directly with countries around the world, including with trading partners such as Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and every other trading partner. During trade negotiations, the government seeks to promote the principle of responsible business conduct among enterprises and informed by global standards. Engaging with a diverse set of partners enables the government to advance Canadian interests but also opens the doors to frank conversations in areas where our perspectives differ. Türkiye is one example.

Senator Housakos: Whom you hang with identifies who you are when it comes to fundamental rights, and the truth of the matter is that there are consequences when you cross that line and you go too far. Over the last day and over the last few hours, we have seen the consequences already. The Prime Minister has a dream of Canada being an associate member of the EU. We saw very recently, in the last few hours, France, Germany, Italy and Greece are saying to Canada: "No thanks."

Senator Moreau: Senator Housakos, the global economic order has changed, and it requires adaptation when it comes to our trading partners. That does not mean the government will waver on its commitment to human rights.

I repeat what I said: Every single time that we are discussing anything with trading partners, the government raises human rights issues, including labour rights and freedom of expression. Those values are dear to the Prime Minister and to all Canadians.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

MILITARY HONOURS

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Senator Moreau, as Canadians prepare to mark Remembrance Day, we are reminded of extraordinary acts of courage by our service members.

The Victoria Cross represents our military's highest honour, yet despite Canada adopting its own Victoria Cross in 1993, no Canadian has been awarded the medal since the Second World War. Fellow Commonwealth countries, Australia and New Zealand, also adopted their own Victoria Cross, but they have seen fit to award their honours collectively seven times.

In March, this chamber unanimously called for an independent military honours review board, and the government confirmed in May that it supported the establishment of such a board to review Afghanistan veterans' cases where new evidence might indicate that the Victoria Cross criteria were met.

Can the government tell this chamber what, if any, progress has been made toward establishing the board and when the review process will begin?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): My understanding, Senator MacDonald, is that the government is working on establishing the board. I have no specific information to give you at this time, but I will ask the minister, and I will get back to you with an answer.

Senator MacDonald: Senator Moreau, veterans' groups have been calling for this review for years. The initiative dates back much further than the motion this chamber adopted.

Will the government commit to announcing a firm implementation date for the review before Remembrance Day of this year so that we can ensure our service members receive the appropriate recognition for their sacrifice without any further delays?

• (1430)

Senator Moreau: Again, I will raise the question with the minister. I cannot make a commitment, but there is a commitment of the government to put that board in place. I will get back to you with the answer.

[Translation]

HEALTH

DIABETES RESEARCH

Hon. Marnie McBean: Senator Moreau, type 1 diabetes is a significant and growing health challenge in Canada. More than 300,000 Canadians live with this chronic disease, which requires continuous glucose monitoring, rigorous insulin management and constant vigilance to prevent potentially life-threatening complications. Aside from the heavy physical, psychological and financial burden this places on Canadians, diabetes also puts considerable pressure on the health care system. The direct costs of diabetes are estimated at approximately \$15.4 billion over 10 years.

In Budget 2026, will the government commit to supporting national action to accelerate research on type 1 diabetes, clinical trials, commercialization and biomanufacturing —

[English]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator McBean.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, Senator McBean, for your question. I cannot speculate on the measures that will be included in the 2026 budget; the finance minister would be very upset with me if I did.

However, I can tell you that the government recognizes the impact that diabetes has on Canadian families. Canada has a very proud history of research and leadership in the field of diabetes research.

Over the last five years, the government has committed \$25 million to diabetes research, surveillance and prevention and to supporting the development of Canada's first diabetes research initiative. This includes \$15 million specifically to renew partnerships with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and Breakthrough T1D, which have themselves raised \$30 million in private funding for research into —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

[English]

Senator McBean: Canada's life sciences sector turns world-class basic research into therapies, jobs and investment here at home. Organizations, such as Breakthrough T1D Canada, do important work, but building a "Canada Strong" innovation ecosystem will require coordinated public-private approaches to attract private capital, strengthen domestic manufacturing capacity and ensure that Canadian discoveries benefit Canadians.

What specific measures is the government considering to advance diabetes research and cell therapy innovation in Canada?

Senator Moreau: Thank you again. The government shares the objective of ensuring that world-class Canadian research can translate into new therapies, Canadian companies and good jobs here at home. That is why the government is continuing to strengthen Canada's broader life sciences and biomanufacturing ecosystem through Health Emergency Readiness Canada and the new Life Sciences Fund. Canada is supporting the path from early-stage research and clinical development through to commercialization and domestic production.

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

BUY CANADIAN

Hon. Martine Hébert: Government Representative, last week, we learned that the Canada Revenue Agency had awarded a \$12-million security contract to Allied Universal, an American company. This company was chosen over the Commissionaires, a Canadian company that, incidentally, employs a lot of Canadian veterans. We have a "Buy Canadian" policy. Can you explain why this decision was made, especially since, according to media reports, the difference between the two bids was only \$80,000? Out of \$12 million, that is not very much. Can you explain the reasoning behind this decision?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, Senator Hébert. That question has been asked several times in this chamber.

The Canadian government is committed to the Buy Canadian Policy. Under that policy, a Canadian supplier is defined as having a permanent place of business and regular activities in Canada. Allied Universal Canada, which is based in Mississauga, fits the bill. Under that same policy, a Canadian service must be provided by natural persons based in Canada. Allied Universal Canada meets this requirement by employing 8,000 Canadians across the country.

Your question is framed from the perspective of veterans. The Canada Revenue Agency offers veterans employment opportunities other than those awarded under the contract. The government continues to support several programs aimed at promoting hiring and entrepreneurship among veterans and supporting their transition following military service. These programs are listed in the —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

Senator Hébert: I understand your point of view, which is that the policy has been respected, but it's still an American company. This isn't the first time we've heard this complaint from the business community. They say that, when it comes to the Buy Canadian Policy, the government doesn't always walk the talk. What measures has the government taken to ensure that the Buy Canadian Policy is respected as well as —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator Hébert.

Senator Moreau: In this case, the government is walking the talk, since the company qualifies as a Canadian company because it employs so many Canadians.

The Buy Canadian Policy has been in place since 2025 and has produced a number of positive results. Here are three examples: the \$950-million investment to procure 55 new subway trains for Toronto's Line 2, to be manufactured in Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville and La Pocatière; the \$121-million contract to build a new Canada Revenue Agency building in St. John's —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

[English]

JUSTICE

CANADA'S BLACK JUSTICE STRATEGY

Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard: Senator Moreau, the United Nations General Assembly named the transatlantic enslavement of Africans as "the gravest crime against humanity," given the scale and duration of such a crime against a group of people. Canada abstained from the vote.

When asked about this by Senator Gerba a few months ago, you shared that the reason was a matter of the wording chosen and that “Our commitment to addressing the after-effects of slavery and supporting constructive dialogue on restorative justice remains firm.

Senator Moreau, as a form of reparatory justice, would the government be prepared to invest in the Black Justice Strategy for more than two years at a time?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you. It is a very important question.

The government continues to believe that slavery and the transatlantic trade of individuals are among history’s greatest tragedies.

As you know, I cannot speculate on future government spending; however, when the Black Justice Strategy was launched, the previous government attributed \$276 million to it in its 2024 Fall Economic Statement. This included investments that went beyond two years at a time, such as \$189 million over five years, starting in 2025, towards the Black Entrepreneurship Program to help Black entrepreneurs and business owners thrive.

In this program, there is, notably, \$105 million allocated to regional development agencies to continue delivering the Black Entrepreneurship Program Ecosystem Fund across Canada, \$67 million allocated to the Black Entrepreneurship Loan Fund to provide loans up to \$250,000 and \$7.5 million allocated to the Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

[English]

Senator Bernard: Senator Moreau, thank you for sharing those other financial commitments.

If there are indeed other actions that the government is taking to address the after-effects of slavery, we would appreciate hearing more about them.

Thank you.

Senator Moreau: Thank you, Senator Bernard.

Canada remains committed to addressing the after-effects of slavery and supporting constructive dialogue and restorative justice.

I would like to highlight that the government has invested \$200 million in its whole-of-government approach to tackling racism and discrimination. Diversity is a fact, and inclusion is a choice. The Canadian government will persist in its deliberate choice to be inclusive.

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

REGIONAL TARIFF RESPONSE INITIATIVE

Hon. Robert Black: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. Small and rural businesses across Canada face serious, uneven pressure from the ongoing trade dispute with the United States.

• (1440)

The government’s Regional Tariff Response Initiative is a welcome step. However, its \$1-million minimum revenue threshold excludes an estimated 90% of rural, small and micro enterprises, leaving them without an appropriate financing mechanism when they need it most.

During COVID-19, the Community Futures Stream of the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund showed that this gap can be closed cost-effectively, and national research compiled by the Community Futures Network of Canada found that 68% of recipients were businesses with fewer than five employees. Sole proprietorships accounted for over a third of approved loans.

Senator Moreau, will your government commit to allocating a portion of the Regional Tariff Response Initiative’s funding to a dedicated rural stream delivered through Canada’s 267 Community Futures organizations so that rural businesses can survive and thrive?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): You were right about the threshold for the Regional Tariff Response Initiative, but I repeat that I cannot speculate on future government policy.

However, the Regional Tariff Response Initiative is only one part of the government’s broader response. Rural small businesses may also benefit from the Canada Small Business Financing Program, which supports businesses with annual revenue of up to \$10 million without any threshold. Separately, businesses affected by tariffs may also be eligible for a range of tariff relief measures, including the Duties Relief and Duty Drawback Programs, as well as remission from tariffs in certain circumstances — again, without any threshold.

Other programs are available, but you are right about the program you mentioned earlier. There is a threshold, but other programs may benefit small businesses.

Senator Black: Thank you. I agree with that, Senator Moreau.

Rural communities are the backbone of Canada. We cannot, and must not, forget about the role they play in Canada’s success. Yet, they are often forgotten when funding and support programs are initiated, due to their remoteness or size of employee base. Will your government commit to lowering the Regional Tariff Response Initiative’s revenue threshold for rural businesses so they are not left without the support they so desperately need?

Senator Moreau: Thank you. You understand that I cannot speculate on future funding. However, I can assure you that the government is committed to supporting Canadian businesses facing tariffs. Although the Regional Tariff Response Initiative is currently tailored to businesses with an annual revenue of at least \$1 million, that does not mean that businesses below that threshold are without federal support. We will continue to support them.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

NATIONAL SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM

Hon. Denise Batters: Senator Moreau, an April 28 memo to cabinet from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research indicated that the government's claim of 400,000 kids helped by the Liberal school food program could not be substantiated, saying, "More data are needed."

Yet, Senator Moreau, since that April memo to cabinet, you have repeatedly used that faulty figure in response to questions from the opposition.

On May 5, in response to Senator Ataullahjan, you said:

... we are ... making the National School Food Program permanent for 400,000 children. So don't say that we are not acting on those important issues.

On June 9, you replied to Senator Housakos, saying, "The National School Food Program is now permanent and helping 400,000 children. Those are facts ..."

On September 28, in response to Senator Martin, you said, "We are making the National School Food Program permanent for 400,000 children. I think the plan is working."

So tell us, Senator Moreau, did you knowingly repeat this unfounded claim to this chamber, or did you miss that memo to cabinet?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Batters, I reject your insinuation that I am trying to mislead this chamber. I emphatically reject it. You and I rarely agree on many things, but I will say this: Your approach to the government never changes, and you believe that you're always right and that everyone else is always wrong. You should change your approach, because this one has left you sitting in exactly the same spot for the past 10 years.

[English]

Senator Batters: Senator Moreau, yesterday's House of Commons committee revealed that the government's \$200 million a year for the school food program represents the equivalent of 22 cents per student per day. A previous pre-inflation estimate was that lunch programs would cost \$6.45 per person. This is many times 22 cents per day. Yet, you and

your Liberal government repeatedly told this chamber that your school food program helps 400,000 kids, despite the data showing that claim doesn't add up. Who is right?

[Translation]

Senator Moreau: Senator Batters, since you enjoy talking about the Liberal government so much, I'm going to talk to you about the Conservative government. No Conservative government ever did more than the Liberal government has done to meet the needs of Canada's children. You can cite figures and make comparisons all you want, but the fact remains that this government supports children in Canada and Canadian families. If you won't recognize that, it doesn't matter, because others will.

[English]

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

MAJOR PROJECTS OFFICE

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, testimony at the Standing House of Commons Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development revealed that your government's Major Projects Office, or MPO, employs 200 people who are seconded and sponsored by private corporations that pay for a significant part of their salaries. Canadians are being asked to trust an internal conflict of interest review process, while the identities of the sponsoring companies remain confidential, and no independent Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner review was conducted.

Given the significant role this office plays in fast-tracking projects deemed to be in the national interest, how can your government justify this lack of transparency and assure Canadians that project approvals are free from real or perceived conflicts of interest?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, Senator Martin. The Major Projects Office is a very important tool for the government because it will serve as a single point of contact for governments, proponents and Indigenous communities to submit their proposals for national building projects that will grow and transform Canada's economy. Therefore, there will be transparency because there will be a decision-making process. Projects can be referred to the MPO by various members of civil society, and once a project is submitted, the MPO will conduct an initial assessment against five factors outlined in the Building Canada Act to determine if the project will be selected. There will be transparency throughout the projects implemented by the Major Projects Office.

Senator Martin: If there will be transparency, and if your government is confident there are no conflicts, why won't you commit to publicly disclosing which companies are sponsoring these employees and subject this arrangement to an independent ethics review for further transparency?

Senator Moreau: The way the Major Projects Office currently operates is very transparent. When a decision is made, we'll see public announcements. Therefore, I would say that there is plenty of transparency in the procedure at present.

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

SUPPORT FOR CANADIAN ARTISTS

Hon. René Cormier: Senator Moreau, resale rights for visual artists have already been recognized in a number of countries. A resale right is a royalty that gives visual artists and their heirs a percentage of the proceeds when their artwork is resold on the secondary market. This measure has widespread support within Canada's arts community.

In Budget 2025, the federal government promised that it would establish this mechanism. More than a year has passed since the announcement was made. Considering the financial challenges facing creators, when does the government intend to act on this commitment?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): You're right. The government recognizes that visual artists are still among the lowest income earners in Canada's arts sector, despite making major contributions to Canadian culture and identity.

In Budget 2025, the government did indeed promise to move forward with artists' resale rights, which are a form of copyright, based on a fair and balanced approach that takes the practicalities of the resale market into account. This is the measure's objective.

As I understand it, the consultations that started in 2023, before Budget 2025, are still in progress. I can't confirm the implementation timeline, but I can assure you that the government does want to implement this kind of program, which has turned out to be more effective than it had hoped.

[English]

CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

Hon. René Cormier: Senator Moreau, last September, Parliament appointed its first Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate, Mr. Paul Wong, recognizing the important role this art form plays in our society. However, despite significant investment by the Canada Council for the Arts, demand for funding in this field continues to exceed available resources. Senator Moreau, can the cultural sector count on you to bring its call to the Government of Canada to increase funding for the Canada Council for the Arts?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Yes. You are aware that I cannot speculate on future funding, but you can count on me to bring this proposal to the government's attention.

[Translation]

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

CANADA'S AFRICA STRATEGY

Hon. Amina Gerba: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. Senator Moreau, while Canada seeks to diversify its economic and trade partnerships, including with Africa as part of Canada's Africa Strategy, we are still waiting for a new special envoy for Africa to be appointed.

• (1450)

Can the government tell us where and when this appointment process will take place? When does it plan to finally appoint the next special envoy for Africa?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question, Senator Gerba. You've had the opportunity to raise a number of questions regarding Canada's interest in trade with the African continent. I've explained that Canada is committed to maintaining and expanding its trade with African countries, which are regarded as very important partners.

At this time, we do not have a specific date for the appointment of the special envoy. I will check with the minister responsible for international relations and get back to you shortly.

Senator Gerba: Yes, please check with the minister and provide us with a written response. Thank you.

Senator Moreau: I can provide a written response, and I will confirm it verbally as soon as I have it.

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

CANADA-MERCOSUR FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Hon. Mary Robinson: Senator Moreau, Canadians are facing historically high food prices, while our national cattle herd is at its lowest level in decades. The Prime Minister has emphasized that a nation unable to feed itself cannot be truly sovereign or secure. Rebuilding our cattle herd is an investment in Canada's future sovereignty and security. Yet, Canada is negotiating with Mercosur, potentially allowing cheaper beef produced under different labour, food safety, sustainability and animal care standards into our market. We produce some of the world's best beef, and that is a direct result of the high standards we hold ourselves to. Our focus should be on strengthening our domestic beef industry.

The Canadian cattle industry wants to know if the government will commit to excluding beef from any Mercosur agreement and to protecting Canadian cattle producers throughout negotiations.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): When you're quoting the Prime Minister, you are exactly right. The Prime Minister has emphasized that central to its mission is a stronger, more affordable food system. Therefore, it has launched Canada's first-ever National Food Security Strategy, backed by more than \$3 billion, including a \$150-million Food Security Fund that will help farmers upgrade their equipment, a \$1 billion Agri-food Project Finance fund to expand food processing capacity and a \$100-million Collaborative Food Innovation Fund to expand producers' agri-food processing.

You raise a concern that Senator Black has also raised with me. Signing trade agreements is meant to open markets to our producers and manufacturers, not to jeopardize them. If a hypothetical deal would be detrimental to the Canadian economy overall, the government would not sign it.

Senator Robinson: Canada's cattle herd requires years of investment, confidence and long-term commitment from producers. At a time when we need to strengthen domestic beef production and Canada's food sovereignty, how can the government justify trade policies that risk undermining that investment? What assurances will the government provide to Canadian cattle producers that its trade agenda will support, rather than compromise, their efforts to rebuild our national herd?

Senator Moreau: That is the reason why we have the National Food Security Strategy. Negotiations with Mercosur are restarting. The government is aware of the challenges and the importance of protecting Canadian ranchers in our agricultural sector. Central to the process is listening and engaging with Canadian workers, businesses, exporters, farmers and stakeholders and using that input to better inform trade negotiations. The Mercosur trade agreement would open markets of over 280 million people for Canadian businesses.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EXCISE TAX ACT

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) moved, for Senator Forest, third reading of Bill C-38, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (extension of the federal fuel excise tax relief).

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill C-38, the Canadian fuel affordability act, which extends the temporary suspension of the federal fuel excise tax.

Let me make our position clear right at the outset: When the government adopts a Conservative proposal that saves Canadians money, we welcome it. We support this bill because Canadians need the relief it provides, and they need it badly.

In March this year, Food Banks Canada recorded 2.35 million visits to food banks in that single month — more than double the figure for 2019. One third of those visits were for children.

Nearly 18% of food bank users are Canadians who work but still cannot afford to feed their families. In fact, half of employed Canadians say their spending equals or exceeds their take-home pay.

More than one in four report that a paycheque delayed by just one week would leave them struggling to pay their bills. And 44% of Canadian adults report that they are within \$200 of being unable to meet their monthly obligations.

There is precious little room left for another grocery bill hike, another repair bill or another jump in fuel prices. And that is why this relief matters.

Colleagues, as you know, when farmers pay more to run their tractors and trucks pay more to deliver our food, families face those costs at the grocery store.

Every dollar we can take off their fuel bill matters, and I am glad that the government has finally accepted that cutting fuel taxes helps with affordability. That is a significant admission, and I commend them for getting there, even if it did take some time. As you know, I've been asking about this for a decade.

However, having accepted that fuel tax relief helps Canadians, we must ask, "Why is the government already preparing to withdraw it?"

Bill C-38 extends the full suspension of the federal fuel excise tax until January 31, 2027. The tax will then return at half the regular rate on February 1, with the full rate reinstated on April 1. It is not an April Fool's joke. For gasoline, this means a five-cent-per-litre increase in February and a further five cents in April. For diesel, two cents will be added in February and another two cents in April.

Those amounts may sound small when expressed in cents per litre, but they add up with every fill-up, every delivery and every shipment. And the government has set the dates for those increases without any assurance that Canadians will be in any better position to afford them in just a few weeks.

Colleagues, that is the fundamental flaw in this bill. It provides relief today, but, at the same time, it is putting the tax increases back on the calendar. Yet, the government has given us no reason to believe that Canadians will be better able to afford them when those dates arrive.

Perhaps the government is taking too much comfort in its own announcements. If you listen to it congratulate itself, you would scarcely know how many millions of Canadians are struggling.

On October 8, the Prime Minister declared that across Canada there was "... a new energy, a new confidence." On October 20, his government was again celebrating its track record of lowering costs and building a stronger economy.

Colleagues, the government may be confident in its own performance, but Canadians have yet to see any evidence of this in their ability to make ends meet. They would like to have some confidence that their paycheque will cover their bills and that they can afford groceries without borrowing or going to food banks.

And that is why we have pressed this government repeatedly to make decisions that enhance affordability, including reducing the federal tax burden on fuel. Back on April 2 of this year, the opposition called for all federal taxes on gasoline and diesel to be removed for the remainder of 2026.

Twelve days later, the government announced a partial version of that proposal. It suspended the federal fuel excise tax, but only until Labour Day, and left the other federal costs in place.

The Conservatives kept pressing. On August 16, the Conservatives called on the Prime Minister to cancel the planned Labour Day increase and to remove all federal taxes on fuel until at least Canada Day 2027. On September 2, the government announced an extension.

That was the right decision, and I'm pleased that the government made it.

• (1500)

Canadians will now keep more of their own money because we kept on pressuring, and we will continue to make the case that lower taxes on fuels make for lower costs at grocery stores, allow Canadians to drive their cars and families around in a more affordable fashion and allow farmers in the agricultural sector to produce food at a more competitive price.

Colleagues, look at what is in front of us. The government is already scheduling the return of the tax. We must ask what will happen on February 1 that will make these costs easier for Canadians to bear. What changes on April 1? The answer is absolutely nothing. Families will still have the same mortgage and rent payments; they will still have grocery bills. Businesses will still need to transport their goods and meet payroll. The government has not established that any of these pressures will have eased by the dates it has arbitrarily picked. It provides relief at the pump with one hand while handing Canadians the bill with the other.

At the House of Commons Finance Committee, we proposed extending the full suspension until Canada Day, followed by a later period at half rates. Those amendments were defeated.

Let us be clear about where the limitations of this bill come from. They are no accident; they are choices. The government could have accepted prolonged relief but chose not to.

Our position remains clear: Remove all federal taxes on gasoline and diesel until at least Canada Day 2027 and permanently scrap the Clean Fuel Regulations and the industrial carbon tax. We support the relief before us but also believe Canadians deserve more than what this government is offering at this time.

Honourable senators, that brings me to the broader fiscal picture, and this is where I wish to spend the rest of my time.

Last week, the Parliamentary Budget Office, or PBO, published the report *Economic and Fiscal Outlook – October 2026*. It serves as a warning that deserves the attention of every senator and every Canadian. In the report, the PBO projects public debt charges of \$59.3 billion. By 2030-31, those charges are projected to reach \$83 billion. That is almost \$24 billion more in annual debt charges, an increase of approximately 40% in just a few years. By the end of that period, almost 14 cents of every dollar of federal revenue will go to servicing the debt.

The PBO report also noted that the federal debt is projected to rise from approximately \$1.4 trillion this financial year to almost \$1.7 trillion in 2030-31. When combined with the market debt of Crown corporations, our total borrowing requirements will exceed \$2.7 trillion by 2030-31.

The government tells Canadians that all this borrowing will strengthen the economy, but that is far from guaranteed. In fact, there are many days when I feel as though this government is gambling with billions of dollars and simply hoping for a return.

Parliament needs to closely monitor whether the government is actually delivering the results it has promised because our ballooning debt means there are fewer dollars left for other priorities, including tax relief.

Honourable senators, that is directly relevant to Bill C-38. The government says Canadians need a tax break today, but the accumulating debt load will put upward pressure on their taxes tomorrow. We are being asked to celebrate temporary tax relief even when the government undermines its ability to keep taxes low.

If the government accepts that Canadians cannot afford higher taxes today, why is it leaving them with an even bigger tax bill for tomorrow?

[Translation]

The government says Canadians need a tax break today, but the accumulating debt load will put upward pressure on their taxes tomorrow. We are being asked to celebrate temporary tax relief even when the government undermines its ability to keep taxes low.

If the government accepts that Canadians cannot afford higher taxes today, why is it leaving them with an even bigger tax bill for tomorrow?

Colleagues, let me be clear: Conservatives are well aware that extending tax relief reduces government revenue, but that is exactly why the government must spend less.

[English]

Our position is simple: Canadians should keep more of what they earn, and the government should not be mortgaging our grandchildren's future by leaving them an inheritance totalling trillions of dollars in debt.

This is not an impossible task. It requires making choices. It requires examining programs that do not deliver results, controlling administrative costs and ending the assumption that every new problem demands another federal spending commitment.

Families across this great country are making difficult choices every month to meet their obligations, and they are entitled to expect the same discipline from their government.

We cannot simply believe that future growth will cover the cost of spending decisions made today. At some point, the government must demonstrate that it has a realistic plan to control its debt load.

Colleagues, we will support Bill C-38 because every dollar Canadians save matters. We will continue to press for broader relief and prolonged relief. We will continue to demand that this government manage public money responsibly so that Canadians do not lose tomorrow what this bill allows them to keep temporarily today.

I also wish to take this time to thank our colleague Senator Forest, who is the sponsor of this bill. I thank Senator Forest for his stewardship on this bill. I thank him in particular for all the great service he does for this institution. He is always doing the heavy lifting at the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration and the Subcommittee on Senate Estimates and Committee Budgets. He has been a picture of fiscal responsibility in this institution, so I wish to again thank him for his work, and thank you, colleagues, for the time you have accorded me.

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.)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Clément Gignac: Honourable senators, I ask for leave of the Senate that Order No. 1 under the rubric Senate Public Bills – Reports of Committees and Motion No. 118 on the Notice Paper be brought forward and called now.

[Senator Housakos]

COMPETITION ACT

BILL TO AMEND—NINTH REPORT OF BANKING, COMMERCE
AND THE ECONOMY COMMITTEE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the ninth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy (*Bill S-239, An Act to amend the Competition Act, with amendments*), presented in the Senate on October 27, 2026.

Hon. Clément Gignac moved the adoption of the report.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to the ninth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy, concerning Bill S-239, An Act to amend the Competition Act.

• (1510)

I would like to begin by thanking Senator Klyne, the sponsor of the bill, for his cooperation during our study. Senator Klyne, your appearance before our committee greatly facilitated our study by helping us better understand the bill's scope and objectives. Bill S-239, An Act to amend the Competition Act, also known by its short title, the "Canadian Prosperity Act," was introduced in the Senate on October 30, 2025. It was passed at second reading on June 9, 2026, and was subsequently referred to our committee for in-depth consideration.

The bill aims to strengthen the Competition Bureau's role in conducting market studies. In particular, it would enable the Competition Bureau to recommend measures to reduce barriers to internal trade and enhance competition. It also provides for response and publication mechanisms to strengthen the transparency and accountability of the institutions concerned.

In addition to the bill's sponsor, we heard from six other witnesses, including the Competition Bureau, representatives of the business community and legal experts. Their testimony and written submissions greatly informed and influenced our deliberations, as well as the three amendments subsequently adopted by the committee. I will go over them briefly.

[English]

First, subsection 10.1(8) of clause 2 stated that the Commissioner of Competition could make a recommendation regarding any barriers to trade within Canada that unduly affect the state of competition in the market being studied. Our committee amended this provision by removing references to barriers to trade and widening the scope so that the commissioner may make any recommendations that would improve the state of competition in the market or industry.

Second, our committee added subsection 10.1(8.1) to ensure that any recommendation made by the Commissioner of Competition does not affect measures established under the Food and Drugs Act or any other act administered by the Minister of Health and introduced to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Third and finally, our committee amended subsections 10.1(10) and 10.1(11) to specify that a response to a recommendation is required within 120 days of the Commissioner of Competition's report being delivered — rather than within 120 days of it being published — and that any response must be published on the commissioner's website.

[Translation]

In closing, overall, these amendments seek to clarify the scope of the bill, preserve measures that are essential to the health and safety of Canadians, and strengthen government accountability in following up on the Competition Bureau's recommendations.

I would like to thank the committee staff who made our study of this bill possible, including our clerk, Matthieu Boulianne; our analysts, Brett Howard and Adriane Yong; our administrative assistant; our interpreters; our support staff; and our pages. Thank you on behalf of the committee members. On that note, honourable senators, I would invite you to adopt this report. Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[English]

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I wish to thank Senator Gignac for explaining the report. I am the critic of the bill, and I look forward to having a quick review of this tonight and coming back to the Senate tomorrow. I will take the adjournment for the balance of my time.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

[Translation]

BANKING, COMMERCE AND THE ECONOMY

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO STUDY PROMOTING ECONOMIC
FAIRNESS AND HOW FEDERAL APPROACHES CAN
REDUCE THE UNDERGROUND ECONOMY

Hon. Clément Gignac, pursuant to notice of October 27, 2026, moved:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy be authorized to examine and report on promoting economic fairness for all Canadians, specifically, how federal approaches can reduce the underground economy in Canada by supporting participation in the formal economy, fostering fair competition for businesses, protecting workers and preserving federal revenues;

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

That the committee submit its final report to the Senate no later than June 30, 2027, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

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

That the Senate do now adjourn.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(At 3:16 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.)

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