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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 4, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, November 4, 2026

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

SHOW YOUR 4-H COLOURS DAY

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, I rise today to highlight that today is Show Your 4-H Colours Day, 4-H Canada's biggest annual event in this country.

Every November, the 4-H community celebrates their accomplishments and the positive impact they have had, not only in Canada, but around the world. This month-long campaign is a testament to the incredible contributions that 4-H youth are making in their communities. The 4-H program produces responsible, compassionate and engaged young leaders.

Today, I can't help but reflect on my own 50-plus-year journey with this organization, which started with the encouragement, support and mentorship of my dear friend Gerald Townsend, who sadly passed away last month. Rest in peace, Gerry.

I am a proud alumnus and a former staff member at both the provincial and national levels. I served as president of the Canadian 4-H Council from 2011 to 2013. Moreover, I am honoured to have been recognized as an honorary member of 4-H Canada. 4-H truly is a cornerstone of my life and ultimately led me to the Senate of Canada.

The impact of 4-H on young Canadians cannot be overstated. For over a century, it has provided youth with a unique opportunity to learn essential life skills that go beyond traditional education. Through hands-on projects, leadership development and community engagement, 4-H empowers youth to become active and responsible citizens, instilling in them hard work, dedication and the importance of giving back.

As we look to the future and the world we are living in, the significance of organizations like 4-H in shaping responsible and caring leaders becomes even more evident.

Our world is facing many complex challenges, and the leadership, problem-solving and people skills instilled by 4-H are exactly what our society needs. The resilience, compassion and commitment fostered within the 4-H community are qualities that are essential in addressing issues such as environmental sustainability, social justice, economic development and peace.

Show Your 4-H Colours Day is not merely an event; it's a celebration of the positive effects instilled by 4-H. It's an acknowledgment of the hard work and dedication of countless young Canadians who have committed themselves to making a difference. It's a reminder of the potential that lies within.

As I wrap up, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to 4-H Canada for the profound influence it has had on my life and the lives of countless others.

Colleagues, please join me in recognizing Show Your 4-H Colours Day.

With that,

I pledge
My Head to clearer thinking,
My Heart to greater loyalty,
My Hands to larger service,
My Health to better living,
for my Club, my community, my country and my world.

Thank you.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of former president of Ireland Mary Robinson and her granddaughter Amy Purcell. They are the guests of the Honourable Senators Coyle and Muggli.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

HER EXCELLENCY MARY ROBINSON

FORMER PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

Hon. Mary Coyle: Honourable senators, I wish to extend my sincere thanks to the Speaker, the Honourable Raymonde Gagné, for the warm welcome extended to our very distinguished guest, Mary Robinson.

[*English*]

On behalf of all honourable senators and members of Senators for Climate Solutions, I am delighted and deeply honoured to be co-hosting Mrs. Robinson's visit to Canada, along with co-chair Senator Tracy Muggli.

Mary Robinson — or "Maryben," as we call each other — and I are connected through the remarkable Self Employed Women's Association of India, an association of 3.7 million women who are informal sector workers across that country.

Honourable colleagues, Mary Robinson must have many scars on her scalp due to all those glass ceilings she has shattered over the course of her illustrious career.

A true stateswoman, Mary Robinson was Ireland's first woman president, serving from 1990 to 1997, where she was known for championing women's and LGBTQ+ rights.

She served in the Irish Senate for 20 years.

Mary Robinson served the world as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy in three roles: on climate change in the lead-up to the Paris Agreement, on El Niño and climate, and for the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

Mary is a founding member of The Elders, a group of senior public leaders working together for peace, justice, human rights and a sustainable planet. It was founded by Nelson Mandela.

Her numerous honours include the Presidential Medal of Freedom, presented by President Barack Obama.

This afternoon at 4:30, please join us at the National Arts Centre's O'Born Room to participate in an exclusive conversation for parliamentarians with Mary Robinson.

Here it is: the day after the exciting U.S. midterm elections, a week after the EU-Canada summit and a day before our government tables Budget 2026.

Mary will provide opening remarks this afternoon about how to ensure that climate remains a priority on the government's agenda. This event will be co-hosted by the Canadian Climate Institute and the Pearson Centre.

Also, please come to the GreenPAC Breakfast on the Hill tomorrow at 7:30 a.m. at the Château Laurier hotel, where Mary will be delivering the keynote address.

Honourable senators, please join me in welcoming Mary Robinson to Canada, and expressing our sincere gratitude to her for taking the time to be here with us as we seek, as Canadians, the right green energy transition pathway for our country in this time of significant geopolitical upheaval, and, as of last night, a time of hope and promise.

[*Editor's Note: Senator Coyle spoke in Gaelic*.]

Thank you. *Wela'lioq*.

Hon. Tracy Muggli: Honourable senators, I also rise to join Senator Coyle in welcoming the former president of Ireland Mary Robinson to the Senate of Canada.

As Senator Coyle mentioned, former President Robinson has had an extraordinary career in public service.

She has become one of the world's leading voices on climate justice and brings decades of experience of working with organizations and countries that have developed practical and meaningful climate initiatives and policies.

I am so energized by her focus on the most vulnerable to climate change and strongly endorse her work to create space for those voices.

We spent much of this beautiful, sunny morning at Carleton University with faculty, students and young leaders, including members of the Canadian Youth Climate Assembly. We had an inspiring and thought-provoking question-and-answer session led by Diego Arreola Fernandez, a parliamentary intern with Environmental Leadership Canada.

The discussions centred on some of the important work that was accomplished when the global community worked together in the past, such as the healing of the ozone layer — one of the planetary boundaries.

It also focused on the daunting tasks that lie ahead in creating solutions and adaptation, now that we have reached the tipping point of 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming, which has led to irreversible damage to glaciers, snowpacks, oceans and coastal communities, and will influence the increasing intensity and frequency of climate-related events if further warming is not prevented.

• (1410)

Through Project Dandelion, a global campaign she co-founded, she is assembling women climate leaders and building connections to tackle complex climate challenges.

In this vein, she was elected to lead the governing bodies of the Global Green Growth Institute. GGGI is an organization that works with countries around the world, particularly in the Global South, to support cleaner, more sustainable economic growth.

I should also note that President Robinson has been calling for stronger international oversight of artificial intelligence, which is particularly timely and important today.

As a co-chair of Senators for Climate Solutions, I am pleased to join Senator Coyle in welcoming President Robinson, a self-proclaimed "prisoner of hope," to the Senate of Canada. Thank you, President Robinson, for your continued leadership and public service.

Thank you, *meegwetch*, *marsee*.

CANADA'S SPORTS HALL OF FAME

Hon. Marnie McBean: Honourable senators, sport, as you know, has a remarkable way of reflecting the country that we aspire to be. Through moments of excellence, perseverance and leadership, it can demonstrate that barriers can be challenged, opportunities can be expanded and people from every background can succeed.

At its best, sport is not only a test of skill but a powerful force for inclusion, equality and progress. These values are reflected in the work of Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, which, for 70 years, has celebrated those whose achievements have left a lasting mark on Canadian sport and society.

The 2026 honourees embody that legacy, demonstrating how athletic excellence can be matched by leadership, courage and a commitment to creating opportunities for others.

Through a lifetime of leadership and advocacy, Chief Dr. Wilton Littlechild has championed Indigenous representation and inclusion, demonstrating how sport can support reconciliation and empower communities.

The 1990 Canadian women's ice hockey team, led by Geraldine Heaney, Angela James and Vicky Sunohara, helped establish women's hockey on the international stage, accelerating its path to Olympic recognition and inspiring generations of girls and women to pursue great ambitions.

As a player, national team leader, coach and the first Canadian head coach in the NBA, Jay Triano helped elevate basketball in Canada and demonstrated that Canadian athletes and coaches could succeed at the highest levels of the game.

Collectively, their contributions have opened doors, challenged stereotypes and expanded opportunities for countless Canadians.

This year, the Order of Sport celebrations also recognize organizations whose contributions reach far beyond the field in the Legacy Awards. Tonight, Larry Tanenbaum will receive the Visionary Legacy Award for being a transformational leader of professional sport in Canada. The Southern Family will receive the Family Legacy Award for being visionary founders of Spruce Meadows. Special Olympics Canada, whom I've supported for decades, will receive the Sport for Good Legacy Award. Their long-standing commitment to inclusion has created opportunities for Canadians with intellectual disabilities to participate, compete and thrive.

Together, these honourees remind us the true value of sport cannot be measured by medals and championships alone. We are reminded that some of the most enduring legacies in sport are the barriers broken, the opportunities created and the generations inspired to dream bigger.

HYPERTROPHIC CARDIOMYOPATHY

Hon. Yvonne Boyer: Honourable senators, I rise today to bring awareness to a medical condition that is far more common than people realize, yet many who live with it have no idea they have it.

Growing up, I was an active, healthy kid. I played most sports and was fiercely competitive. As a young woman, my appetite for adventure grew. I climbed mountains and went hang-gliding from their peaks. I became a beekeeper and a horsewoman while raising my four children. My life was busy, physically demanding and full of adventure. I had no idea of the hidden risks I was facing.

When I turned 50, my family doctor suggested routine medical tests, including an electrocardiogram, or ECG. To my surprise, the results showed significant abnormalities. I was referred to the Heart Institute, where I was diagnosed with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, also known as HCM. HCM is the most common inherited heart condition, yet most people have never heard of it. Estimates suggest it affects as many as 1 in 200 people.

HCM has been compared to a honeycomb because of the changes within the heart muscle. In a healthy heart, muscle fibres are arranged in an orderly pattern. With HCM, these fibres become enlarged and disorganized, with scar tissue developing between them. The heart muscle becomes abnormally thick and stiff, interfering with its ability to function properly.

Some people experience shortness of breath, fatigue or chest pain. Others, like me, may live for years and decades without symptoms. Tragically, for some, the first symptom is cardiac arrest and death.

Today, in my seventies, I have lived with HCM for over 20 years. I am a member of the Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy Association, an international organization supporting research, awareness, education and those affected by HCM. Its members are affectionately known as "Big Hearted Warriors." I do like that name.

Initially, I had to give up all the physically demanding activities I loved. Then, 10 years ago, doctors detected dangerous changes in my heart's electrical activity. I was told I needed an implanted defibrillator that could deliver a life-saving shock if my heart developed a fatal rhythm. I remember being told it was necessary "just in case my heart stopped." Those are words you don't forget.

Most days, I feel pretty good, although my heart continues to change as I age. I am closely monitored at the Heart Institute, and my defibrillator will be surgically replaced later this month.

Every single morning, I am profoundly grateful that a routine examination uncovered a condition I never knew I had, and that a defibrillator and pacemaker now protect me. I know how fortunate I am. Not everyone gets that warning. Not everyone gets that second chance.

Honourable senators, I share my story because there are countless Canadians living with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy who have yet to be diagnosed. Don't take your heart or health for granted. Learn about this condition, explore your family's medical history and be proactive about your own health journey.

If my story can save even one life, then speaking out today may be one of the most important things I will ever do. Thank you, *marsee*, *meegwetch*.

[*Translation*]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

THE ESTIMATES, 2026-27

MAIN ESTIMATES—TENTH REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Éric Forest: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the tenth report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, entitled *Main Estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027*, 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 Forest, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (A)—ELEVENTH REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Éric Forest: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the eleventh report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, entitled *Supplementary Estimates (A) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027*, 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 Forest, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[*English*]

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 17, 2026, at 2 p.m.

• (1420)

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-235, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (increasing parole ineligibility).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, Question Period will begin at 2:30 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): With leave of the Senate, I move that the Senate suspend to await Question Period with the minister.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, is leave granted?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: Leave is granted, and the sitting is suspended.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, it is now 2:30 p.m. I will now ask the secretary of state to enter and take his seat for ministerial Question Period.

[*English*]

QUESTION PERIOD

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, to receive a Minister of the Crown, the Honourable John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour), appeared before honourable senators during Question Period.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, today we have with us for Question Period the Honourable John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State for Labour, to respond to questions concerning his ministerial responsibilities.

On behalf of all senators, I welcome you.

Before proceeding, I would like to remind you of the time limits the Senate established for questions and answers in the order of June 4, 2025. The length of a main question is limited to one minute and the answer to one minute thirty seconds. The question and answer for a supplementary question are both limited to 45 seconds. The reading clerk stands 10 seconds before these times expire. I ask everyone to respect these times. Question Period will last 64 minutes.

MINISTRY OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

IMMIGRATION LEVELS

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Secretary of State Zerucelli, welcome to the Senate. For more than a decade, Liberal governments justified higher immigration levels as a solution to labour shortages. The results speak for themselves. Canada now has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in a generation. Home ownership is increasingly out of reach for many Canadians, and labour shortages in critical sectors, including skilled trades, remain unresolved.

Now reports are suggesting that your government is preparing to increase immigration levels once again. My question to you is: Were you consulted by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship in developing the upcoming levels being planned? Can you assure this chamber and Canadians that your government will not return to the unsustainable immigration levels that have failed to solve many of these challenges and have also caused a scarcity crisis in so many sectors?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you very much, senator.

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will have to vote at 3:30 p.m. It is truly a pleasure to be here in the Senate.

[*English*]

Thank you for welcoming me here today. Senator, thank you very much for that question around immigration. As you know, the Government of Canada was elected to bring immigration down to a more sustainable level. As the Prime Minister has said on many occasions and shown with statistics, levels of temporary foreign workers, or TFWs, are down by 50%, as well as levels of students are down. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship will be tabling her levels plan, as she has confirmed. As a member of cabinet, we are notified and have discussions on levels of immigration.

With respect to skills shortages, this is a key plank, and it is central to our economic agenda. It is something that I am working on. As you know, just last month, we announced $430 million to the Union Training and Innovation Program, which is one part of our Team Canada Strong plan that will identify more opportunities to have higher levels of people in the skilled trades.

Senator Housakos: Have you been consulted, and are you involved in determining what an appropriate immigration level is? Thank you for bringing up the $430 million last month to the program for recruiting and training skilled trades workers. It is a good program, and it is important. If the government plans to significantly increase immigration levels, how will you ensure that your strategy on that front does not undermine those investments by relying on imported labour instead of creating opportunities for Canadian workers and apprentices?

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you again, senator. We have been elected to reduce levels to sustainable levels. I look forward to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship's levels plan, which will be tabled very soon, and I think you will see that it is consistent with what we have continued to say and have said as part of our campaign commitments.

UNION TRAINING AND INNOVATION PROGRAM

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Secretary Zerucelli, your government recently announced $430 million in funding for skilled trades training and recruitment. Canadians support efforts to recruit and train the next generation of skilled trades workers, but they also expect results.

What accountability measures will you put in place to ensure that this investment leads to more apprentices completing their training, more workers obtaining certification and more vacancies being filled rather than becoming another Liberal promise that falls short of its objectives?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you, senator. That's an excellent question. I appreciate the opportunity to raise it.

We have three streams under the Union Training and Innovation Program, which is consistent with what we campaigned on. The first stream is an equipment stream. That equipment stream is designed to support training and new innovative techniques. For unions, it is very challenging for them to be able to afford new and the latest cutting-edge equipment. That's the first stream.

We have made some changes to that program to ensure that unions in rural areas can have access to that equipment. We have changed the amount the Government of Canada will contribute from 50% to 70%. That is very welcome.

The second stream, which I will probably mention quite a lot today, is the innovation stream. The innovation stream is a new part of that program, and that stream is designed to do a number of things: first, encourage the best ideas in artificial intelligence, or AI, to help improve construction techniques; second, encourage more youth to get involved in the skilled trades, ensure more women's participation in the skilled trades and ensure more Indigenous participation in the skilled trades; and third, bricks and mortar. We need to grow capacity for the number of skilled trades —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you.

Senator Martin: With the three streams, will you commit to publishing annual results for the programs, including the number of trainees supported, apprenticeships completed and Red Seal certifications obtained, so Canadians can clearly assess whether this investment delivers the outcomes promised?

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you. I have to get used to the cadence here; it is different than the House of Commons Question Period. My apologies, Madam Speaker. I kind of want to jump very quickly, and I am sorry. It is a bit of a change in tone.

Senator, for the labour program, each one of these investments is highly scrutinized. There are clear score cards that are associated with these investments, and key to our economic agenda is ensuring that we have enough people to build. That is our goal. You are familiar with the major projects and the infrastructure investments that we are making. It is —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you very much.

INTERPROVINCIAL LABOUR MOBILITY

Hon. Hassan Yussuff: Welcome. We are nicer in this place than the other place.

Sean Strickland of Canada's Building Trades Unions recently appeared before our Special Senate Committee on the Building Canada Strong Act, which is studying Bill C-39. The government wants to accelerate major projects, which I support, but getting projects approved faster does not guarantee that we will have the skilled workers to build them. Mr. Strickland called for better coordinating between project developers, the government and the building trades to anticipate labour needs. What is the government doing to ensure we have the right skilled workers in the right place when these projects are ready to begin?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you, Senator Yussuff. I appreciate that question. Again, it is core to what we are trying to achieve.

• (1440)

About six months ago, I convened a table of provincial labour ministers that Sean Strickland attended. The purpose of that meeting was to discuss labour mobility. Labour mobility has several different channels of work that the government is undertaking. The stream that I am working on is the harmonization of health and safety, which is a significant barrier now for construction workers in the skilled trades. I will give you one key example.

The UA produced a study. An apprentice who had satisfied all health and safety regulations in Alberta was delayed from working in Ontario for several months because he had to redo health and safety regulations in Ontario. That's obviously not productive. It cost contractors and the apprentice time away from the ability to work, and the apprentice couldn't work during that time, obviously.

We are mobilizing on this. We have already harmonized first aid kits and personal protective equipment, or PPE, and we are working on a number of others. The next round of harmonized health and safety regulations, subject to —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary.

[*English*]

Senator Yussuff: My follow-up will also be in regard to this.

Canada's Building Trades Unions also proposed that a labour supply coordinating committee work alongside the Major Projects Office. The intent is to help ensure the projects will meet the criteria to have enough labour to complete each project. Is the government pursuing the proposal of workforce planning and apprenticeship training to begin well before the construction of major projects in this country?

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you, senator.

Just to finish the last thought, we are moving on to harmonize two or three: working from heights and confined spaces.

The Government of Canada is focused on major projects. We have significant investments in defence that are required as infrastructure. We have Build Canada Homes. There are a number of different aspects of the government that are funding infrastructure, and that is not considering what the provinces or the private sector are also doing.

The suggestion that Canada's Building Trades Unions has made is a good one, and I am certainly working closely with them on that. I would encourage us to think about what they are asking for.

CANADA INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BOARD

Hon. Rosemary Moodie: Secretary Zerucelli, welcome to the Senate.

As Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, I can report that we have closely studied the Canada Labour Code amendments in Bill C-31. Groups like the Canadian Labour Congress and Federally Regulated Employers – Transportation and Communications were generally supportive of the prohibition on most non-compete agreements in federally regulated private sector workplaces. However, they wanted to know that the Canada Industrial Relations Board, or CIRB, would be better resourced to enforce this ban. Will the government commit to the funding that is needed for the increased work that is expected and by when?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): "Yes" is the answer to that question. We are committed to ensuring that the CIRB is properly resourced to do the work it is required to do.

Since I know many senators are working on Bill C-39, the resourcing of the CIRB is absolutely a complementary piece to what is happening in that legislation. We want employers, unions and employees to have stronger relationships. The more backlogged the CIRB is, the less ability there is to resolve grievances and the more difficult all of those issues end up being at bargaining.

So the answer to that question is "yes."

Senator Moodie: Thank you, secretary.

Just last week, the Competition Bureau urged provincial and territorial ministers to restrict the use of non-compete agreements. Ontario remains the only province to have banned most non-compete agreements.

Will you commit today to raising this issue at your next meeting of the federal, provincial and territorial labour ministers?

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you very much, senator.

As you know, we have our own work to do in this area. We have committed to banning non-competes in the federally regulated sector. This is a really important piece of work. I was a former executive, and it unnecessarily restricts people's ability to work.

I will take that under advisement. I will have to consult with other territorial and provincial governments before we commit to that.

LABOUR FORCE

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you very much for being here, secretary of state.

There is a theme going on here. I want to speak about the ability of Canada's labour force to meet the demands that we anticipate with major projects and other infrastructure, as well as the training and attraction that are both necessary. Yesterday, at the major projects special joint committee hearing, we heard about the need to better coordinate the project demands with the existing labour force.

Can you expand upon your earlier comments about work that is under way? I am thinking of the testimony last night with respect to the barriers between provinces and territories that are adding costs and delays.

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you very much, senator. It is nice to see you.

There are a number of different aspects to that question. The starting point is just understanding the scope of the problem. We expect a number of retirements to take place over the next 10 years. There is also the scale of building, and you put that into a bit of a mix. There is also our ability and capacity to bring in new people and put that into the mix. In the next 10 years, we expect there to be a shortfall.

This is why, in the last budget, we then announced a multi-phase plan. Remember, apprentices are largely a provincial and territorial responsibility. We have to try to fill the gaps. One aspect of that is encouraging employers, through incentives, to bring on young apprentices and ensuring and encouraging young people to finish their Red Seal trades apprenticeship with a $5,000 grant. We are very excited about that, by the way.

There are those aspects of incentivizing, and I could go into more details about that plan, but that is part of it: ensuring we actually have people working —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary.

[*English*]

SKILLED TRADES

Hon. Peter Harder: My supplementary question goes back to Senator Yussuff's reference to Bill C-39 and the policy choice the government has taken with respect to section 107 regarding requirements of the minister to direct the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

We have heard testimonies and conversations with critics who suggest that you should have gone further. Could you elaborate on the policy choice that was taken and why going further was discarded?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you very much. I welcome this opportunity, so thank you for raising that question, senator. There are also people who said we went too far.

I know many senators here are studying Bill C-39, and it will come to you at some point for a vote. I think the starting point that I want senators to hear from me is this: The obligation to negotiate is on the parties. It is not the government's obligation. The obligation is on employers and unions to come together and

fix relationships they have. I know that Minister Hajdu has been in this chamber before, and she might have informed you that, after significant consultation and based on data from —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary.

[*English*]

SKILLED TRADES AND APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Welcome, Secretary Zerucelli. My question is a follow-up to an earlier question.

Your government has emphasized the need to encourage young people to complete apprenticeships in the skilled trades. Data from Statistics Canada show that, while the number of Canadians registering in apprenticeship programs is increasing, only 20% of them complete their programs within the expected duration, and roughly 30% of them do not finish their certification. Have you analyzed the reasons why so many apprentices fail to complete their program? What actions is the government taking to improve completion rates?

• (1450)

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you very much. I hope I get a chance to address that section 107 question after.

Thank you very much for that question. It's really important, and it is key to the policy choices that we made in the last budget and that Minister Hajdu and I are rolling out in the coming months.

I realize timing will be a problem for me, so I am going to address this more quickly. Let's take the completion of a Red Seal. What often happens is that the skills of an apprentice or a journey person get to such a level that they end up with an employer and don't finish their Red Seal. That is one key reason why people fall out of the system. Our policy choice on that has been to say, "Complete your Red Seal and you will receive $5,000 from the Government of Canada." That is to incentivize them directly. We want young people considering a second career to finish their Red Seals. That is one of a number of policy choices. The Team Canada Strong plan has taken interventions in various areas to address the reasons why people are falling out of the system and not completing the journey.

Senator Osler: Thank you. How are you measuring success? Are you targeting a specific rate of apprenticeship completion to achieve in the next year?

Mr. Zerucelli: That is an excellent question. Ultimately, the responsibility for apprenticeships lies with the provinces. In terms of measuring success, we will be able to monitor the demand for labour and the supply of apprentices. This is something we watch closely. There is an organization that we fund called BuildForce. If you are interested in understanding construction statistics, BuildForce collects data from provinces, publicly accessible information and data shared by the Government of Canada to monitor and assess labour needs, and it produces statistics on a monthly or yearly basis based on StatCan. So they will —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

SKILLED TRADES

Hon. Richard Martel: Secretary of state, your government recently announced $430 million to support skilled trades training. Manufacturers in many regions of Quebec are having a hard time recruiting welders, industrial mechanics and other skilled workers. Some are even being forced to turn down contracts because of a lack of skilled labour. How much of the $430 million will go to Quebec and how will you ensure that our regional companies are really able to benefit from that funding?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you for the question. I apologize, but I'll be answering in English.

[*English*]

The Union Training and Innovation Program works a bit differently as it relates to the Province of Quebec. We will negotiate an agreement with the Province of Quebec that will outline the terms and conditions for their portion of the $430 million. As you know, there was just an election in Quebec. Once the new government has established itself, we will then negotiate the terms and conditions of that money.

[*Translation*]

Senator Martel: Secretary of state, many of our small and medium-sized businesses, or SMEs, already have the equipment, expertise and know-how needed to train their own workers. Why not let them use those investments to provide on-the-job training so that they can meet their labour needs more quickly?

Mr. Zerucelli: Thanks again for the question.

[*English*]

As it relates to the Union Training and Innovation Program, the money will flow through the Government of Quebec to the CEGEPs and other institutions. It won't work directly with small- and medium-sized enterprises.

The money in Quebec will be more targeted toward apprenticeship training through the institutions that already exist in Quebec.

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Hon. Jim Quinn: Welcome, secretary of state. My questions relate to proposed changes under Bill C-39 and the Canada Labour Code. Could you elaborate on why the Government of Canada is removing the requirement for the Canada Industrial Relations Board, or CIRB, to obtain an enforcement order from the Federal Court for certain orders by the board? For reference,

there is no legal enforcement for parties in a labour dispute to follow a decision by the CIRB until it is filed in court, per section 23 of the act. Would you say that part of the issue is that the automatic enforcement of orders, as proposed under Bill C-39, is because the government viewed the additional time required to get an order as an unnecessary delay, in particular for labour disruptions that affect the national interest?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you, Senator Quinn, for the question. As you know, with respect to Bill C-39, this is under the responsibility of Minister Hajdu. My responsibility was with respect to the consultation, and I am here to support the Senate and address questions as best I can.

With respect to your question, it is quite technical, so I will commit to speaking to Minister Hajdu and getting back to you in writing very shortly.

Senator Quinn: Thank you. I look forward to the written response. What I am trying to get at is this: Is the policy rationale because the government is comfortable with a one- or two-day work stoppage, regardless of the national interest, or because the government feels constrained by the Charter and the ability to pre-empt a strike?

Mr. Zerucelli: I will take this opportunity to address some of the comments I was going to make to Senator Harder around section 107 to help provide some context for that. I committed to getting back to you in writing, so we will make sure that you get the answer that you require, senator. It is important that you feel you have the information you need to make decisions and fulfill the role that you are entrusted with here in this important place.

Section 107 is to be used in exceptional circumstances. The obligation is on the parties to get a deal. The best deals are the ones made at the table. With section 107, we put in some key aspects to try to encourage —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

UNPAID INTERNSHIPS

Hon. Manuelle Oudar: Good afternoon and welcome, secretary of state. I want to talk to you about young people. The "Building Canada Strong" plan provides for significant investments in the Student Work Placement Program to promote paid work experiences.

Nevertheless, the Canada Labour Code still allows for mandatory unpaid internships in federally regulated workplaces. That seems hard to justify in 2026. For many students, not getting paid presents a major financial barrier. Their training shouldn't depend on their ability to pay for it.

Secretary of state, since this exception is set out in federal legislation for which you are responsible, does your government intend to take real steps to ensure that the students in question are paid?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you very much for the question.

[*English*]

We believe a fair day's work deserves a fair day's pay. Previous Parliaments have taken important legislative steps to protect young people and Canadians entering the workforce. Bill C-59 extended workplace health and safety protections to interns. Bill C-63 restricted unpaid internships in federally regulated workplaces to students completing placements as part of their formal education. These changes enacted during previous Parliaments established important protections, limits on working hours, mandatory breaks and rest periods. Bill C-65 strengthened protections against workplace harassment and violence. These are all meaningful legislative changes. Thank you for raising this important issue. I will work with the department and consider what you have asked for.

[*Translation*]

Senator Oudar: Thank you for your answer. At a time when many sectors are trying to attract qualified young workers, internships are a vital first point of contact with the labour market. I was glad to hear your initial response. I hope that the government will continue to assess the extent to which the absence of remuneration may deter some young people from entering certain sectors, and how we can encourage employers to better acknowledge their contributions.

• (1500)

[*English*]

Mr. Zerucelli: The federally regulated sector has about 500,000 employees. That's the federal scope. Again, look, young people deserve to be paid for the work they're doing. We want them to have valuable experiences in life because that's the future of our country. I thank you for raising these issues. I will endeavour to look back at what you have suggested and consider it, so thank you.

SKILLED TRADES

Hon. Toni Varone: Secretary Zerucelli, it's a pleasure to have you here today in the Senate Chamber.

My question relates to the age disparity in apprenticeship entry when comparing Canada with high-performing European countries. The data indicates that the average age of a new apprentice in Canada is significantly higher, averaging between 26 and 28 years, while countries such as Germany, Switzerland and Austria sit between 16 and 19 years of age. This gap suggests that, in Canada, the skilled trades are frequently pursued as a second career rather than as a primary educational pathway.

Given the critical need to address our own homegrown skilled labour shortages here in Canada and the economic benefits provided by early entry into these careers, what factors does the federal government identify as the primary drivers of this age disparity?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you, Senator Varone, for that very important question. We need more young Canadians in the skilled trades. That is clear. And we need it as a first career choice, not as a second. We can learn from countries such as Germany and Switzerland, as you've raised. Young people are introduced to apprenticeships much earlier there.

I've travelled around our country and met with young people who are looking to go into skilled trades. There is an excellent program called The Educational Partnership Foundation, based in Alberta. They introduce kids in high school to the skilled trades. It's funded through the Union Training and Innovation Program. But what I hear from kids is this is partly cultural. We've encouraged young people to pursue university while overlooking the tremendous opportunity and reward that can come from a job in 54 Red Seal trades and from those skilled trades that are not Red Seal.

Part of that which will help is government messaging. Senators can tell young people that these are excellent careers, but we're investing in apprenticeships. Our message is clear: We're supporting the skilled trades. I speak about this all the time. We're supporting and training and recruiting over 100,000 —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

[*English*]

Senator Varone: To allow you to finish, are there any specific initiatives under way to incentivize earlier engagement with youth to enter the skilled trades, to ensure we're developing our own domestic workforce pipeline more efficiently?

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you very much. Yesterday, I met with Skills Canada. It's an organization funded by the Government of Canada with $10 million a year. Skills Canada, as part of their mandate, puts on skills competitions to promote the trades. They will do a major event in Toronto where they bring in high school students to introduce them to the trades.

That is one program that the Department of ESDC is working on to encourage young people to get into the trades. The Educational Partnership Foundation, of which I just spoke, is funded through the Union Training and Innovation Program.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

[*English*]

INTERPROVINCIAL LABOUR MOBILITY

Hon. Rodger Cuzner: Welcome, secretary of state. It's good to see you.

As has been said, I think the construction sector in this country is very excited about being on the cusp of something fairly significant. It's our responsibility to make sure that the workers are there. We want Canadians to benefit from the investments that are set to be made.

With a country so vast, it has always been a challenge getting workers to where the work is. Coming from Cape Breton, we've always been sort of a pool of a mobile skilled labour force. In order for Canadians to see those benefits, what steps has the government taken to ensure that the opportunities for mobility are there and that the disincentives are, at least, dealt with?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you, Senator Cuzner. I know you have long been a supporter of the building trades and unions in general, so this is an issue that you know quite well. Certainly, there are skilled trades workers from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia — well, a lot of people are now travelling to Nova Scotia because there's quite a lot going on in Nova Scotia. But, certainly, in Newfoundland and other Atlantic provinces, we find skilled trades workers who are travelling across the country to Alberta.

Labour mobility is an important key to what we are working on. The largest barrier faced by a skilled trades worker is the training and health and safety regulations. This is a barrier to them getting on the job right away. Some provinces have committed to a 10-day approval of recognition; others have not. We're working hard with our provincial colleagues. This is largely a provincial responsibility. The federal government has the ability to help influence this area relating to financial incentives.

Building on some of the previous answers, we have agreement to harmonize working from heights and working on mobile elevated work platforms. We're working on hoisting and rigging as well as trenching and shoring.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

[*English*]

Senator Cuzner: Thank you for that. As Senator Osler mentioned in her question, it's still a concern that a number of young apprentices start out but don't complete their apprenticeships. Red Seals can sort of move back and forth across the country without too much problem, but the inability to recognize credentials and training seems to be a barrier. Is there a formal table where the provinces and the federal government meet to address what could be done at that level?

Mr. Zerucelli: Yes, there is, Senator Cuzner. It is largely directed by federal-provincial labour ministers, but there's a subgroup of deputy ministers who are working alongside to reduce these barriers. They then report to the work that Minister LeBlanc and the Prime Minister are doing with the premiers. This stream of work is a subset of labour mobility, which is then part of the broader aspect of reducing barriers to trade across the country.

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Senator Cuzner and I are on the labour mobility wavelength today. Parliament passed the Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act in June 2025 to remove the federal barriers to labour mobility.

Secretary, you talked about the training, health and safety requirements. Despite the passage of the act, a TD Bank study, in September, found that roughly 25% of Canadian businesses report difficulties hiring workers from other provinces. Can you expand more on what the federal government is doing to improve labour mobility, in particular, in regards to working with provinces and territories regarding regulations?

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you, senator. We're moving a bit out of my level of expertise. I'm very much focused on a very particular stream of labour mobility. I'm happy to take your question and speak with Minister Hajdu and Minister LeBlanc, who have joint responsibility for this, to get you a more fulsome answer.

Senator Osler: I would much appreciate that, secretary. I think I'll keep you out of your regular stream with my next question, but hear me out. Labour shortages are especially acute in health care. This is expected to increase as Canada's population ages, yet health care is one profession where workers face the most barriers to labour mobility, with health care workers primarily regulated at the provincial and territorial levels. What actions is the federal government taking in collaboration with provinces and territories to improve labour mobility in the health care sector?

• (1510)

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you for the question, senator. You're absolutely right. This is something that we as a country need to keep our eye on. It is a bit out of my expertise, but what I will say is that I work closely with the Service Employees International Union, who have identified this as a significant challenge for them as well.

You'll be aware that, in the last budget, we approved an incentive grant for personal support workers. One of the barriers faced by personal support workers is, obviously, the salary they receive. They're one of the lowest-paid professions in the entire health care sector, and one of the solutions —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

[*English*]

CABINET MEETING ATTENDANCE

Hon. Denise Batters: Mr. secretary, you are the Secretary of State for Labour. For a secretary position, your Liberal government needs to invite you to attend cabinet meetings. How many cabinet meetings, not retreats but full regular cabinet meetings, have you attended since you were appointed by Prime Minister Carney to this position 18 months ago? Also, do you have your own department and departmental budget, and if so, does your department's deputy minister report to you or to a minister?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you very much, senator, for that question. I would like to say, regarding some of the other questions, that I invite any senator who wants to follow up on some of these topics to reach out to my office. I'd be happy to have coffee and talk about these issues. Just because I'm at Question Period doesn't mean I won't engage elsewhere, so please take that invitation as it is.

With respect to the number of cabinet meetings, I've been here for a year and a half. It's not clear to me how many cabinet meetings I've attended, but I'm happy to provide that answer to you. It's largely every third cabinet meeting or when there are topics that are important to my file.

We have a deputy minister and a department. Minister Hajdu is responsible for the department. As I've explained previously, there are files for which I have been delegated responsibility, and the deputy minister is responsible to me for those files.

Senator Batters: I would like to get the answer about the number of cabinet meetings because I think it varies considerably. I think you indicated that the deputy minister reports to you on certain matters but to Minister Hajdu for the vast majority of other matters.

One further question, Mr. Secretary. When the Harper Conservative government had ministers of state for a time, they sat on important cabinet committees, like Treasury Board. Prime Minister Carney's website indicates you do not. Frankly, in listening to your answers today, I think the government could benefit from having you at some of these meetings, so why don't they?

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you, senator. I'll take some compliments in there, I think. I'm invited to committees of cabinet when required. This is a question you'll have to ask other folks in the government. I, obviously, don't determine what committees or cabinet meetings I attend.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Secretary Zerucelli, young Canadians, as you know, are facing one of the most challenging job markets in a generation, with unemployment reaching 14.3% among youth prior to the summer months. For teenagers aged 15 to 19, the situation is even more concerning.

At the same time, representatives of the food service industry, one of Canada's largest employers of young people, continue to report up to 70,000 vacant positions. Mr. Secretary, why has your government failed to connect young Canadians who are looking for work with an industry that continues to struggle to fill so many available jobs?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): I'm not sure this is a question within my expertise, but I'll make a couple comments with respect to youth unemployment because it's such an important topic.

From a statistical standpoint, youth unemployment is generally double the general rate of unemployment in Canada, and we've seen that trend over a period of history. The most significant and important thing we can do to attack youth unemployment, other than fund programs like Canada Summer Jobs, which you're aware of, and other programs that help match youth to opportunities in the government or in the private sector, is to grow and strengthen our economy. As you know, senator, that is core to what this government is doing, given we're in a period of transition. The Prime Minister calls it a "cleavage."

We're focusing on what we can control, with investments in defence with the Defence Industrial Strategy and infrastructure investments right across the country. Those infrastructure investments are designed to help bring products to market and improve our supply chains. The proposed Productivity Mega Deduction focuses on improving the productivity of our businesses. These pieces and combinations will help grow our economy and bring down youth unemployment.

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): I know that the Canada Summer Jobs program is looked at as part of the solution, so did the government meet its target of supporting 100,000 young Canadians with the most recent Canada Summer Jobs program? More importantly, for young Canadians who are looking for work beyond the summer months, what concrete measures is your government taking to help them secure meaningful year-round employment?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): The Canada Summer Jobs program is the responsibility of another secretary of state and Minister Hajdu, but with respect to the Canada Summer Jobs program, I have no doubt that we hit those targets. It's notable.

What are other things we're doing about youth unemployment? Our Team Canada Strong initiative encourages apprentices and gets more young people into the trades, which are key elements of what I'm trying to do in terms of attacking youth unemployment.

Madam Speaker, I believe I have to go vote.

The Hon. the Speaker: I regret that I have to interrupt Question Period. I understand the secretary of state must attend to his parliamentary obligations. We will resume where we left off when it is possible to do so.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

• (1530)

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM

Hon. Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia: Welcome, Secretary of State Zerucelli. I hope you did the right thing with your vote.

Newfoundland and Labrador's seafood-processing industry is vital to our rural and coastal communities; yet, recruiting and retaining a reliable seasonal workforce remain ongoing challenges. I recognize the government's efforts to provide greater flexibility under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, including exemptions for eligible seasonal seafood processing positions. In Budget 2022, the government committed to developing a dedicated Agriculture and Fish Processing Stream, and consultations have since been undertaken with more than 300 stakeholders.

Could you provide an update on the anticipated implementation timeline for this stream and explain how it is expected to address the persistent recruitment and workforce challenges facing seafood processors in Newfoundland and Labrador?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you, senators, for entertaining my ability to interrupt the proceedings to vote. Thank you, senator, for your question.

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program is an important program for agriculture. I also recognize its importance to workers involved in fish processing. I do quite a lot of work with the United Food Commercial Workers, which is the union for some of those plants.

Let me speak a bit about the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. As you know, our government was elected to bring immigration to more reasonable levels. The Temporary Foreign Worker Program is less than 1%. The levels of those workers have come down in Canada. In certain areas of the country — Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and some other rural areas — we have seen challenges with labour. I am not particularly aware of the situation you are raising, but I am aware that both of the ministers responsible for this file are working with provinces to provide more flexibility on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, should the province elect that.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

[*English*]

Senator Ravalia: I will give you the additional time to complete your remarks. Thank you.

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you.

Senator, these are important questions because skilled workers are critical to businesses. The Minister of Immigration will be tabling her immigration levels plan, and when she does, we can have further discussions about the needs faced by particular communities across the country. I would be happy to follow up with you on this particular subject.

CYBERSECURITY

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Welcome, Secretary of State Zerucelli.

As you know, Employment and Social Development Canada administers some of the government's most important programs, including Employment Insurance, which require Canadians to share sensitive personal and financial information. As Secretary of State for Labour, you have a role in overseeing the department's labour-related programs and ensuring that workers can access these services safely and securely.

In its 2027 departmental plan, the department identifies cybersecurity as a top risk, warning that external cyberattacks and insider actions could compromise its systems, expose personal information and disrupt service delivery.

Given the growing sophistication of cyber-threats, what measures are being taken within your area of responsibility to strengthen cybersecurity, protect the personal information of workers and benefit recipients, and ensure that Canadians can trust the security of those essential programs?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Senator Loffreda, it is nice to see you again. Thank you very much for that question.

Cybersecurity is critically important for all government departments, especially at this time. I know this is a particular passion point for you. The best I can do today in terms of helping get you the answer you need is to commit to having the department responsible for actions on cybersecurity to provide you with the very clear steps they are taking to ensure that Canadians' data is protected. That is a shared responsibility for all of us. Thank you for raising that question.

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for that. I will await the answer.

I understand that Employment and Social Development Canada, or ESDC, is developing a new Identity Services and Access Management System, or iSAMS, to modernize identity authentication for clients accessing Old Age Security, the Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance.

Can you explain what specific safeguards are being built into this new system to prevent identity theft, unauthorized access and the misuse of Canadians' personal information? How will the government ensure that those protections are effective before the system is fully implemented?

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you again, Senator Loffreda, for putting that on the record. These are important issues.

The management of the department is the responsibility of a number of ministers who are responsible for it as well as the deputy minister. Certainly, I will mention to Minister Hajdu that you have raised these issues, and, again, I commit in writing to get back to you about these very specific questions relating to cybersecurity because they are important.

SUPPORT FOR CANADIAN WORKERS

Hon. Katherine Hay: Secretary Zerucelli, we have not yet met, so it is nice to meet you in this context.

Last week, The Plan for a Stronger Canada made it clear that economic security comes first. I mostly agree, noting that there are many facets to economic security, an important one of which is workers' rights. Canada's workforce is living through a period of enormous change. Technology is transforming how we work — as it always has — yet, the speed and nature of technology and AI today put us in somewhat uncharted territory. It is very unsettling to many.

Mr. Secretary, what is the government doing to ensure that Canadian workers have the training and support they need to adapt and find good-quality jobs to help the economy of the future?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you very much for that question.

We are facing a number of challenges in our country. You correctly note that the technologies are rapidly changing. I think about a trip that I just made to Fort McMurray, in the oil sands. Four hundred operating engineers operated those long, heavy-haul trucks. Those haul trucks are now fully automated; they travel using computers. There has been a workforce reduction there because not as many drivers are needed. Nevertheless, you do need people to help maintain them. That is something that is happening very rapidly.

We have to ensure that we, as a country, have a worker-first AI policy. You should know that I have joined with Senator Yussuff and the Minister of AI to create an AI labour advisory council. It has representatives from 12 unions, whose members are providing us with advice to ensure that workers have a voice in how artificial intelligence is introduced into the Canadian workplace. They will provide direct advice to the government. I would also note that Minister Hajdu has struck a number of Workforce Alliances —

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

[*English*]

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Hon. Katherine Hay: If you could follow up on the training and support in that scenario, I would appreciate that.

But I would like to pull on what you said around artificial intelligence and how it is shaping every sector. I want to talk about young people, which is a theme here. I think young people are potentially most at risk, with many entry-level jobs being the ones at high risk of being potentially cut. Canada ranks pretty low on AI training and literacy. How is the AI for All commitment to upskilling workers at every stage being built into your workforce strategy and investment so that every Canadian worker has an opportunity, particularly young workers?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thanks very much. I will build on that in a couple of ways. The Workforce Alliances that Minister Hajdu has struck are designed to provide the government advice directly on training and workforce solutions for the future of the job economy. That's why those have been struck, and that's an important piece of that.

With respect to the adoption of AI, the Minister of Artificial Intelligence has created a literacy program that, I believe, has been launched or will be launched very soon, which will be provided to every Canadian as free education on AI. More than that, part of that plan is ensuring that —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard: Thank you for being here. Last week in Question Period, Senator Moreau shared some great news about the Black Entrepreneurship Program that is in place to support the many Black entrepreneurs emerging in the Canadian economy. Many Black Canadians start their own businesses because they cannot gain access to meaningful employment or advancement in employment, including the trades, due to anti-Black racism.

While the government is supporting entrepreneurs, what is the progress on ensuring Black Canadians also have equitable access to employment in the public service, free from discrimination, through the necessary changes that are required for employment equity legislation?

Hon. John Zerucelli, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State (Labour): Thank you very much for that really significant and important question. You may or may not know, but my riding has one of the largest Somali populations in the country, and with respect to my area of responsibility, I reflect on many Somali youth who want to get into the skilled trades but don't have the mentorship or the knowledge on how to access the system.

I will note that unions like the carpenters' union are doing excellent work in this area, supporting programs like community benefits programs and through the Union Training and Innovation Program, particularly around the innovation stream. These are the types of programs that we are looking to support through our Team Canada Strong. The apprenticeship program — one of the key pillars of the program is to ensure that we are bringing various groups into the skilled trades, like Indigenous Canadians, women, people of colour. So it is core to what we are trying to do. There are a number of barriers. I would love to speak more about it with you, but it certainly —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, secretary of state.

[*English*]

Senator Bernard: Thank you, Mr. secretary. I'm from Nova Scotia, and I know from my work in the community there that there is a lot of sort of interesting community-based programs that are trying to leverage access to the trades for people of African descent, for example, but the programs are not adequately funded. I am wondering if you could speak to, again, that link between employment equity measures and the funding to ensure that those communities that are marginalized have more access to the trades.

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you for that question. I would love to learn more about some of those programs. What I would say is that the challenge for the federal government is that apprenticeship is largely a provincial responsibility, so with the Union Training and Innovation Program and some of the things we are doing with the Apprenticeship Strategy, the federal government is using resources to help supplement that responsibility. So if there are particular programs or things that you feel are important that could be scaled to a national level, we are all open for suggestions.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the time for Question Period has expired.

[*English*]

I am certain that you will want to join me in thanking the Secretary of State for Labour, Mr. Zerucelli, for joining us today.

Thank you.

Mr. Zerucelli: Thank you all. My office is open. If there are opportunities or things you want to discuss, please send my office an email, and we will find time to connect. Thank you very much.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: We will now resume the proceedings that were interrupted at the beginning of Question Period.

[*English*]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Joan Kingston: Honourable senators, I ask for leave of the Senate that Order No. 1 under the rubric Senate Public Bills – Reports of Committees and Motions No. 120 and No. 122 on the Notice Paper be brought forward and called now.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, is leave granted?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK ON FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER BILL

FOURTEENTH REPORT OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE ADOPTED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the fourteenth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (*Bill S-234, An Act respecting a national framework for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, with amendments and observations*), presented in the Senate on November 3, 2026.

Hon. Rosemary Moodie moved the adoption of the report.

She said: Honourable senators, I rise today in my capacity as Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology to speak to the adoption of the fourteenth report of the committee on Bill S-234, An Act respecting a national framework for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, as amended by the committee.

Bill S-234 was introduced by the Honourable Senator Ravalia in September 2025. The bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology in November 2025.

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD, is a lifelong disability that affects the brain and body of people who were prenatally exposed to alcohol. It affects individuals, families and communities in every part of this country, yet many of those living with FASD and those who care for them struggle to find diagnosis, support and understanding. Bill S-234 calls on the Minister of Health to develop a national framework designed to support Canadians with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, their families and caregivers.

The committee began its study of Bill S-234 on October 1. The committee held four meetings and heard 17 witnesses, such as the Honourable Senator Ravalia and former senator Dan Christmas, officials representing the Public Health Agency of Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, parents and caregivers with lived experience, as well as researchers and medical professionals, including an Indigenous assessment and treatment centre.

• (1550)

We received 24 written briefs. Some included the New Brunswick Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Centre of Excellence, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and the Centre of Excellence for Women's Health.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all those who appeared before us or submitted their briefs. Their testimony and expertise meaningfully informed our work. On October 29, the committee proceeded to clause-by-clause consideration of Bill S-234. Two amendments were proposed by Senators Muggli and Greenwood, and both were adopted. I would like to take a moment to walk you through each of them.

Amendment No. 1 was made to clause 2 on page 2. It replaces lines 22 and 23 and adds three paragraphs to the list of measures that the national framework must include.

Paragraph (e) provides that, as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action 33, the framework must include measures to develop, in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, FASD prevention programs that are culturally appropriate for those people.

Paragraph (f) provides that the framework must include measures to reform the criminal justice system in order to better address the needs of offenders with FASD and to address the recommendations outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 34.

Paragraph (g) reinstates the provision that the framework identify any other measures that the minister considers appropriate now as the final paragraph in the list.

This amendment was proposed to ensure that those developing the national framework put a strong emphasis on Calls to Action 33 and 34 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Both deal specifically with FASD. Call to Action 33 focuses on culturally appropriate prevention programs developed in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples. Call to Action 34 addresses the criminal justice system, including access to diagnosis, appropriate supports and sentencing reforms.

The amendment responds to witness testimony. Elder Noel Milliea told us it would be helpful to include intentional phrasing on Calls to Action 33 and 34 and emphasized that Indigenous communities must be directly involved in developing the framework.

Amendment No. 2 was also made to clause 2 on pages 2 and 3, and it has two parts. Part (a) of the amendment replaces line 28 on page 2. It adds new paragraph (h), which requires the framework to include measures to ensure that it can be

implemented in a manner that, first, is consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and, second, varies depending on the unique circumstances and needs of different Indigenous groups, communities or people.

Part (b) of the amendment replaces lines 7 and 8 on page 3. New paragraph (d) refers to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and to Indigenous governing bodies and organizations that serve or represent First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

Together, these changes reflect what the committee heard repeatedly: There is no single Indigenous approach to FASD. First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities have different needs, different governance structures and different ways of delivering care, and a distinctions-based approach is essential. The amendment also affirms that the framework should be implemented in a way that respects the rights recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and it ensures that Indigenous governing bodies and organizations have a recognized place at the table.

In addition to these amendments, the Social Affairs Committee made two observations regarding adults with FASD and consultation with Indigenous groups:

First, the Social Affairs Committee heard testimony about FASD as a lifelong disability, while supports are focused on childhood and adolescence. The loss of support in adulthood can lead to homelessness, substance use, involvement with the criminal justice system and preventable deaths. The Social Affairs Committee proposed that the framework include measures to support adults with FASD through the transition to maturity and for as long as they need support. The committee also encouraged meaningful engagement with adults with FASD in developing the framework, as well as including outcomes for adults in reporting.

Second, the Social Affairs Committee also emphasized that all effort should be taken to co-develop the framework with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and their representative institutions, while supporting their self-determination and contributing to better outcomes for Indigenous individuals and communities.

Before I conclude, I would like to take a moment to recognize the committee members and staff. I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to all the committee staff: our clerk, Ferda Simpson; our analysts, Diana Ambrozas, Mayra Perez-Leclerc and Eleni Kachulis; our law clerks, Marc-André Roy, David Groves and Sarah Wilson; and our administrative assistant, Lori McAlpine.

Honourable senators, Bill S-234 is an important step toward a national response to a disability that has too often been overlooked. The committee's amendments strengthen the bill by embedding Calls to Action 33 and 34, by requiring an implementation approach that is consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and responsive to the distinct realities of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, and by recognizing Indigenous governing bodies and organizations as partners.

The committee's observations call for support that does not end when a young person turns 18 and for the voices of adults living with FASD to be heard.

Colleagues, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology recommends that the Senate adopt the fourteenth report and pass Bill S-234, as amended by the committee. Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

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

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

SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO EXTEND DATE OF FINAL REPORT ON STUDY OF MATTERS RELATED TO THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Hon. Rosemary Moodie, pursuant to notice of November 3, 2026, moved:

> That, notwithstanding the order of the Senate adopted on Thursday, October 2, 2025, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology in relation to its study on matters related to the impact of artificial intelligence in Canada be extended from December 31, 2026, to May 31, 2027.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO DEPOSIT REPORT ON STUDY OF ISSUES RELATING TO OFFICIAL LANGUAGES GENERALLY WITH CLERK DURING ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE

Hon. Allister Surette, pursuant to notice of November 3, 2026, moved:

> That the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages be permitted, notwithstanding usual practices, to deposit with the Clerk of the Senate an interim report on

such issues as may arise from time to time relating to official languages generally, if the Senate is not then sitting, and that the report be deemed to have been tabled in the Senate.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

(*At 4 p.m., pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, the Senate adjourned until 1:30 p.m., tomorrow*.)

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