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The Honourable GEORGE J. FUREY,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, November 18, 2020

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

Prayers.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I received a notice from the Leader of the Progressive Senate Group who requests, pursuant to rule 4-3(1), that the time provided for the consideration of Senators' Statements be extended today for the purpose of paying tribute to the Honourable Robert W. Peterson, former senator, whose death occurred on November 5, 2020.

I remind senators that pursuant to our Rules, each senator will be allowed only 3 minutes, they may speak only once and the time for Tributes shall not exceed 15 minutes.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

TRIBUTES

THE LATE HONOURABLE ROBERT W. PETERSON

Hon. Jane Cordy: Honourable senators, Canada has lost a kind and well-respected man, the Honourable Bob Peterson. I am pleased today that we are honouring his legacy in the Senate of Canada.

It was a privilege to work with Bob during his time in the Senate. While no one would ever doubt his loyalty and love of the Liberal Party, Bob practised politics in a principled way. He might not have liked the political views of other parties but he did enjoy working across party lines, and he never made those differing political views personal.

Bob loved Canada, and he especially loved his province of Saskatchewan. He was born in Rose Valley, and even when he moved to Regina, he never left behind his rural roots. He was a fierce defender of the Canadian Wheat Board, as many in this chamber may remember. He was involved in many organizations in his community because he understood the importance of community service and of giving back.

Bob took his job as senator very seriously, but he had a wonderful sense of humour. He sat behind me, and he would tap me on the shoulder to tell me something funny, followed by that great laugh of his. This sense of having fun was even in his obituary, which noted that:

If Bob were here I'm sure he would say, "In lieu of flowers, please vote Liberal."

Honourable senators, Bob Peterson will be remembered as a loyal Liberal and a hard-working senator for his province of Saskatchewan, but I will remember him as a wonderful colleague and a gentleman. My best wishes to his wife, Muriel, and to his children and grandchildren. Thank you.

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today on behalf of our Conservative caucus to pay tribute to the Honourable Robert "Bob" Peterson, a former colleague and a friend to many.

Bob Peterson was a successful entrepreneur, professional engineer, community activist and respected leader. He served as Director and President of Regina Jaycees and Director of the Saskatchewan Home Builders' Association. He was also Director of Ranch Ehrlo Society, an organization very dear to his heart. In addition, he served as Director and Vice Chair of the Regina Economic Development Authority and as a member of the City of Regina Planning Commission.

On March 24, 2005, Bob Peterson was appointed to the Senate of Canada by then-Prime Minister Paul Martin and began a new chapter of his life. For seven years, he proudly served Saskatchewan and all Canadians to ensure their voices were represented in the Senate Chamber. He played an active role on the Aboriginal People's Committee and the Energy and Environment Committee, and was a fierce advocate of the Canadian Wheat Board, as mentioned by Senator Cordy.

On a personal level, I didn't have the opportunity to work closely with Bob Peterson, as we served on different committees, but what I distinctly remember is his genuine friendliness, warmth and strong presence in the chamber. I learned a lot in those days from the experienced Liberal opposition caucus of which Bob was a valued member.

I realize now upon completing some research about him for this tribute that the strong, gentle man with whom I had served for the first three years of my Senate life was a giant in his community and province and a champion to many. I am proud to have served with him in this place.

Bob Peterson spent his life serving his community and country, but above all, he was a devoted husband, father and grandfather. To his beloved wife of over 61 years, Muriel; their children, Laurie, Lee-Anne and Drew; and their grandchildren, we express our deepest condolences. May you find comfort in the memories and love you shared with your beloved husband, father and grandfather.

Honourable senators, please join me in saying a final farewell to the late Honourable Robert Peterson. May he forever rest in peace.

Hon. Yuen Pau Woo: Honourable senators, it is my honour on behalf of the Independent Senators Group to pay tribute to the Honourable Robert Peterson. Affectionately known as "Senator

Bob,” he was a highly regarded member of the Upper House who will be remembered for his hard work, honesty and many contributions to his community.

After earning his Engineering degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 1961, he became a member of the Association of Professional Engineers and spent 25 years as a civil and municipal engineer. In 1979, Senator Bob joined Denro Holdings as Vice-President of Residential and Commercial Development. He became President and COO in 1994, a position he held until he was nominated by former Prime Minister Paul Martin to serve as a senator in 2005.

Senator Peterson was a culinary ambassador for his province. He enjoyed inviting his parliamentary visitors to sample pickerel from northern lakes, and he was known for bringing wild rice from the banks of the Saskatchewan River to give to his Ottawa staff. As a senator, he sat on several committees, including the Aboriginal People’s Committee and the Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

As former Senator Jack Wiebe noted, “All of Bob’s efforts were directed to produce the best laws and policies” for every Canadian.

Our thoughts and condolences go out to Bob’s wife of over 61 years, Muriel; his daughters, Laurie and Lee-Anne; his son, Drew; and their respective families.

• (1410)

Hon. Leo Housakos: I’m honoured to rise today to pay tribute to a former colleague, someone whom I didn’t know for very long but I the privilege and opportunity to cross paths with when I was first named to the Senate in 2009. Bob and I crossed paths over a few years, primarily because we were neighbours when I my first office was here in the Victoria Building. He happened to be right around the corner. A quiet gentleman, unassuming at the beginning, my memories of Bob Peterson are very fond ones because we all know he had great success as a professional back in his province of Saskatchewan and a great career in business. Ultimately, what I remember of him when I got here is a fiercely partisan Liberal, someone who had the reputation of being the go-to guy in Saskatchewan.

He was a loyal Liberal. Back then, of course, when the Liberals were Liberals before they became Independents, he had no qualms about expressing his views, but he was someone who came from the business world, like I did. We had a few opportunities to talk, and many times he said to me:

Leo, you come from a business world where things are black and white. In the political world, you have to adjust yourself because it’s all grey.

That was a good piece of advice. Over time, I had to adapt. I recognized in him a man who was kind, pleasant, incredibly funny, incredibly honest, and ultimately he had a deep love for his province. This is what all senators are sent here to do, represent their province. He had a deep respect for the country.

The best piece of advice he gave me as a young senator — and I’ve tried to put it in my pocket, and when I heard he had passed away, it just brought back those fond memories — he said:

Look, in this place, it’s a place of politics. It’s a place where we vigorously discuss the ideas that we believe in, and the values and principles that we believe in.

But he said, “It’s important never to lose track” — and he would say it with a big, warm smile — “of your sense of humour, your character and your integrity.”

I look at the few years when I happened to work with Senator Robert Peterson, and he was a man of all of that. He left this place exactly how he came in: with integrity, with character and with honour. God rest his soul. To his loved ones and family, God bless you. Thank you for allowing him to serve this great institution.

Hon. Terry M. Mercer: Honourable senators, it was with sadness that I learned of the death of our former colleague and friend Senator Bob Peterson. An engineer by trade, Bob was so proud of his beloved province of Saskatchewan and worked tirelessly here in the Senate for its people.

I’m one of the few people who had the privilege of working with Bob for many years prior to him coming to the Senate. A proud Liberal, Bob and I shared many a story about the back room where politics all too often plays out. It was where he shined and where he cut his teeth — lessons learned through his political work would help bring him here to the Senate.

He has left a legacy many of us should, and do, emulate: hard work, diligence, honesty, and with that famous sense of humour. Honourable senators, as a member of this place, Bob vigorously worked for the agricultural sector, Indigenous Canadians and the energy sector. But he also had a lighter side — we had such good times on the committees we shared from time to time, and I always appreciated Bob’s positive outlook.

My condolences go to his wife Muriel, his children and grandchildren, and the entire Peterson clan. Bob Peterson was a great guy, always had a smile and constantly strove to help his community, his province, his country and most importantly, people. We will miss you, Bob.

Hon. Marty Klyne: Honourable senators, Canada and Saskatchewan have lost a champion with the passing of the Honourable Robert W. Peterson, who we all knew as Bob. I knew Bob for close to 40 years, having first met him in the early 1980s when he was a senior executive of Denro Holdings Ltd. Thirteen years later, I really got to know Bob when I was running the Regina Economic Development Authority as its COO with Bob as vice-chair of the board of directors.

He was, to say the least, a real gentleman. To work with him was to experience, appreciate and benefit from his integrity and his strategic approach to getting things done with a positive attitude and competence. Socializing with Bob was also a pleasant experience. He had a great sense of humour, loved to laugh and was a joy to be around. It was always a nice visit, whether in person or over the phone.

As his colleagues in this chamber know, Bob had significant ties to the Liberal Party of Canada and worked very hard for the LPC through the local and provincial constituencies, as well as at the federal party level. As a result of successfully conducting good relations with the back channels, you can find Bob's fingerprints on numerous projects that have made Regina, Saskatchewan and Canada a better place.

Bob had a positive impact on many people's lives, mine included, and I feel privileged to call him a good friend of mine. My heartfelt condolences to his spouse, Muriel, and their family; close, dear friends Pam and Ralph Goodale; and his golf crew, the curmudgeons. Rest in peace, Bob, knowing our province and nation is a better place because of you.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, please rise and join me in a minute of silence in memory of our former colleague.

(Honourable senators then stood in silent tribute.)

THE LATE REVEREND JOHN EMMETT WALSH, O.C.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I rise today to pay tribute to Father John Walsh, who died suddenly on November 9 in Montreal. Father John was a man of deep faith, and how he viewed his faith informed everything that he did: his openness to all, his commitment to interfaith dialogue and his commitment to the most vulnerable. Father John was the ultimate parish priest. He was a mentor, an adviser, a friend, a confidante, a confessor and a pillar of kindness.

From the pulpit or from his weekly radio show, he always preached the message of cooperation and unity. He was a friend of the Jewish community, the Muslim community, an advocate for reconciliation with our Indigenous peoples and a spokesperson for the poor and the homeless. He worked tirelessly to advance the role of the laity and the role of women in the Catholic Church. He was a larger-than-life personality. He knew everyone in the room by name. No one ever forgot him.

Father John lent his support to causes that were close to his heart, particularly that of the homeless in Montreal. He was especially engaged with the Nazareth Community, a home environment supporting men and women struggling with mental health issues, homelessness and addiction. Just last week, a third house opened, and it was named John's House in his honour. He was deservedly inducted into the Order of Canada in 2017 for his tireless work with a myriad of causes but especially for his work on behalf of the homeless.

Father John was a learned and very sophisticated person, but he was so down-to-earth. He was very serious about his calling, but he had a delightful and indeed mischievous sense of humour. He was so unpretentious, so caring. The title of his autobiography was *God Is Calling, Don't Leave Him On Hold*. Father John picked up the phone each and every time and he listened; and more importantly, he acted. Our community was elevated thanks to his good works.

Father John was one of the most beloved figures of all of Montreal. He was an inspiration to me and many others, and I was proud to call him my friend. Rest in peace, Father John.

• (1420)

TOUR OF ALBERTA

Hon. Douglas Black: Honourable senators, over the last several weeks, I've been on a virtual tour of Alberta. I rise today to share with you, and all Canadians, what I learned. In normal times, I frequently travel throughout Alberta to stay connected to Albertans. It helps me do my job.

This year, of course, a physical road trip was impossible, so I got in my virtual car and headed to Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Hinton, Fort McMurray, Lloydminster and Olds.

The virtual road trip took me to over 60 meetings with over 100 Albertans and more than 14 media outlets. I had the privilege of meeting a wide variety of Albertans: labour leaders, social service leaders, chambers of commerce and mayors. In every community, I saw nothing but deep resiliency when confronting our challenges, and the compassion of Albertans looking out for their families, workplaces and communities.

We Albertans may be knocked down, but we're not down for long. Hinton is finding ways to meet the challenge of displaced coal workers. YouthComputing in Fort McMurray is teaching high school students the fundamentals of coding. The Medicine Hat homeless shelter is expanding their services in meaningful and needed ways. And the number of start-up companies sprouting up throughout the province and tackling environmental, health, agricultural and other issues and opportunities is impressive.

As I have been saying, Albertans aren't giving up; they're getting up. But there were two recurring issues that I want to bring to the attention of senators. The first issue relates to the need for stronger mental health support. While much is being done, I unfortunately witnessed a deficiency in mental health support in every community I visited.

The second issue is the unreliable and insufficient rural broadband service. Society has moved online, and if Canadians can't work, learn or shop online, we will limit our creativity and prosperity. While I applaud the Government of Canada's recent announcement in respect of broadband internet service, we must ensure that commitment is translated into efficient and equitable action. I'm sure it will be.

I want to thank Albertans for welcoming me into their communities. This virtual road trip has strengthened my resolve to help Albertans get squarely back on our feet. Thank you, senators.

INDIGENOUS DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: Honourable senators, I am very pleased to speak to you today to raise awareness and to recognize November 2020 as the sixth anniversary of Indigenous Disability Awareness Month, or IDAM, in Canada. As you may be aware, Indigenous peoples in Canada experience a rate of disability significantly higher than that of the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous persons and families living with disabilities face unique barriers when trying to access disability-related services and supports necessary to ensure their social and economic inclusion and well-being.

A few of the barriers experienced include jurisdictional and mandate issues, remoteness, ongoing and intergenerational effects of residential schools, Indian day schools, the Sixties Scoop and, as was highlighted recently, the systemic racism and discrimination towards Indigenous peoples within many of the very systems and institutions designed to help them.

Despite these overwhelming and, at times, seemingly insurmountable barriers, the resiliency and strength of Indigenous peoples living with disabilities have shone through. They are our leaders, elders, knowledge keepers, grandparents, mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers, professionals, employees and employers and so on. The roles they hold and the contributions they bring to each of our communities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, across Canada cannot be properly conveyed.

In 2015, to help convey these contributions and the initiatives to recognize, raise awareness and celebrate Indigenous peoples living with disabilities, the British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS) created Indigenous Disability Awareness Month. BCANDS is an internationally recognized and award-winning Indigenous disability organization, holding special consultative status with the United Nations and is the only Indigenous disability organization of its kind in Canada. As noted, BCANDS created IDAM to raise awareness of and bring priority to Indigenous disability in Canada but, more importantly, they created it to celebrate the overwhelming contribution that Indigenous people living with a disability bring to each of our communities daily.

Indigenous Disability Awareness Month is the only Indigenous disability-specific recognition of its kind anywhere in the world. I would like to acknowledge their leadership, advocacy and ongoing national and international work. Thank you.

DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Judith G. Seidman: Honourable senators, I rise today to tell you the story of three Canadians, whose innovation — indeed discovery — changed the course of history.

In the autumn of 1920, a young physician and surgeon from London, Ontario, Dr. Frederick Grant Banting, conceived an idea for an experimental procedure that would lead to the discovery of a life-saving drug. He presented his idea to John J.R. Macleod, a renowned physiologist from the University of Toronto, who equipped Dr. Banting with a laboratory and a research assistant named Charles Best.

Before the 19th century, diabetes was scarcely understood by the medical community. Patients were often prescribed strict diets, leaving them starved and frail and on the brink of death. There was no viable treatment option or cure.

In the spring of 1921, Dr. Banting and Charles Best began their experiments, which yielded truly remarkable results. Using extracts from a pancreas, they were able to alleviate the symptoms of diabetic dogs, and in January 1922 a 14-year-old boy by the name of Leonard Thompson became the first diabetic patient to be injected and treated with this extract. It was evident that this experimental treatment, renamed insulin, would become the future of diabetes therapy.

The discovery of insulin is a source of pride for our nation. Its impact on individuals with diabetes across the globe has been transformative. Most are able to live full and active lives. And while insulin has helped save the lives of many, diabetes remains a significant health challenge in Canada today.

According to the latest reports released by Statistics Canada at the end of 2018, close to 8% of Canadians over the age of 12 were diagnosed with diabetes. The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially difficult for Canadians living with diabetes, who experience greater risk of more severe symptoms of the virus.

November marks Diabetes Awareness Month, which aims to educate and raise awareness about this chronic disease.

Honourable senators, as we look forward to the upcoming centennial anniversary of the discovery of insulin, it is important that we continue to support the global search for better therapy options and a cure. Our collective efforts can redefine the next century for those who live with diabetes. Thank you.

RELIABLE HIGH-SPEED INTERNET ACCESS

Hon. Michael Duffy: Honourable senators, we are able to meet today in a hybrid session only because the Senate has access to reliable high-speed internet service. However, millions of Canadians — our neighbours, friends and business associates — are not able to do their jobs because they do not have adequate reliable access to this vital public utility.

In my home community of Cavendish, tourist operators report that many families won't book accommodations unless they can be assured that they'll have access to Wi-Fi, and it's not only the tourism industry. Farming, fishing, aerospace and our growing biotech sector all need a fast, reliable connection to the internet.

On November 9, the federal government announced a \$1.75 billion Universal Broadband Fund. That's a lot of money on top of the millions that have already been spent, but many Islanders remain skeptical. They've seen this movie before.

• (1430)

In P.E.I., the previous provincial government spent more than \$30 million — we're a province of 150,000 people — promising high-speed internet from tip to tip. Today, too many Islanders still don't have reliable high speed and it's costing our province dearly. Don't get me wrong: Islanders appreciate the federal government's grand gesture. But you'll understand many remain skeptical that doing more of the same old, same old, with the same old players, will simply prolong the problem and not solve it. As we emerge from COVID, we need innovation, and we need it now. Colleagues, thank you very much for your time and attention.

DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Nancy J. Hartling: Honourable senators, I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking to you today from my home in Riverview, New Brunswick, on the traditional unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

November is Diabetes Awareness Month in Canada and there are 11 million Canadians, or 1 in 3, who are currently living with diabetes or pre-diabetes. Many of us know someone who is affected. My 8-year-old grandson Max was diagnosed with Type 1 when he was just 2 years old. That's why it makes it more real and serious to me.

There are three major types of diabetes. The first is gestational diabetes, which occurs during pregnancy and is usually temporary. The second is Type 2, which is the most commonly diagnosed and usually develops during adulthood; 90% of people living with diabetes cannot properly use the insulin made by their bodies or they do not produce enough of their own. The third is Type 1, an autoimmune disease often known as insulin-dependent diabetes, which usually develops in childhood or adolescence. Their body attacks the pancreas, since they're not able to produce their own insulin and aren't able to regulate their blood sugar. Because of this, they must inject insulin or use an insulin pump to regulate amounts.

During the ongoing pandemic, there is even more urgency to develop a national diabetes framework, which I intend to speak to in more detail at a later date. According to Diabetes Canada, if infected with COVID-19, those living with diabetes are at a greater risk of developing serious symptoms and complications, such as pneumonia, and they are almost three times more likely to die in hospital. Access to new technologies, especially for Type 1, is crucial to better manage their disease during the pandemic.

Recently, I had the privilege to virtually meet with some Atlantic Canadian youth with Type 1 through a Kids for the Cure meeting hosted by JDRCF. I had an interesting and lively conversation with Colby, Mariah and Chloe, and their parents, about the issues they experienced around Type 1. Their ask was

straightforward: More funding for Type 1 research so there will be a cure in the very near future, making Type 1, type none. Mariah Inglis, age 11, said:

I control my Diabetes. Diabetes does not control me. I dream of a day that I can say "I had diabetes."

Colby Ryan from Newfoundland, age 14, said:

I will never let Type 1 diabetes stand in my way of doing the things I love and accomplishing the dreams I have, but finding a cure would make these tasks so much easier. By putting money into research and finding new ways to make this disease a little less terrible would be amazing.

100 years ago, Doctors Banting and Best discovered insulin right here in our country, and this is what is now saving us, but is not a cure.

Their words struck me. If they aren't giving up, neither should we in trying to find a cure, so it won't be another 100 years until this happens. Will you please join me? Thank you.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

THE ESTIMATES, 2020-21

NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO STUDY MAIN ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B)

Hon. Raymonde Gagné (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-5(j), I move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance be authorized to examine and report upon the expenditures set out in the Main Estimates and the Supplementary Estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

[Translation]

ADJOURNMENT

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Raymonde Gagné (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 24, 2020, at 2 p.m.

[English]

LINK BETWEEN PROSPERITY AND IMMIGRATION

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Ratna Omidvar: Honourable senators, I give notice that, two days hence:

I will call the attention of the Senate to the link between Canada's past, present and future prosperity and its deep connection to immigration.

QUESTION PERIOD

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Senator Gold, my question is for you as the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

I recently met with the Canadian Canola Growers Association. Their industry contributes \$26.7 billion to the Canadian economy per year and employs 250,000 Canadians. In 2019 alone, canola exports were worth \$9.3 billion. This is probably well known to you. What is little known is the sustainability efforts canola farmers have implemented on their own initiative.

They have set targets for 2025 that include an 18% reduction of fuel use per bushel, a 40% decrease in the amount of land required to produce a tonne of canola, and the sequestering of 5 million tonnes of GHG emissions per year. Yet, in spite of these efforts, the government has not given them a break on the carbon tax, even during the pandemic.

Senator Gold, I have a question for you and I hope the answer will not simply be, "This government supports our Canadian farmers." We have heard that and they tell us they are important, but they just don't show it. Did the government take into account

the enormous and environmental efforts made by our farmers, such as those I have just described, before imposing an onerous carbon tax on them? If so, why in these exceptionally difficult times, when the government is handing out so much money to so many people, do they continue to impose such an additional burden on the canola growers?

• (1440)

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. The government understands the important role canola farmers play in Canada's economy and is grateful for the efforts they're taking to reduce their carbon footprint, as all Canadian businesses should be doing in a responsible way.

The concerns of the agriculture community generally, and canola farmers in particular, with regard to the carbon tax are well known to the government. Representations have been made continuously. The government has taken them very seriously and will continue to take them seriously as it modulates its approach going forward.

MARKET DIVERSIFICATION

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Senator Gold, many of us in this chamber — and I think on all sides of the chamber — would be happy to come to Ottawa and debate a government bill to help Canadian farmers, and doing it with the urgency we are again putting on a bill today to help so many Canadians.

Ninety per cent of canola produced in Canada is exported. The second-biggest market for Canadian canola producers is China, accounting for \$2.1 billion in exports. In 2019, canola seed exports to China were down two thirds from 2018 due to the ongoing dispute between our two countries. Again, you say the government is well aware.

What is this government doing either to help canola farmers diversify their market or to compensate them? Is your government open to the idea of making changes to AgriStability to help them weather this ongoing trade disruption?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, thank you again for your question. The government continues to work with stakeholders and with all sectors to try to find the best ways to target their assistance. As the government announced recently on a number of occasions, as we move into this next wave and phase of the pandemic and with the need to maintain our economy and social fabric, the government is increasingly focused on measures that will target specific industries. Indications of that thinking have been made public for some time now. I have every confidence that when specific measures for the agricultural industry, or any other, are ready to be announced, they will be with dispatch.

PUBLIC SAFETY

HUAWEI—5G TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I have a question for the government leader. On May 1, 2019, then Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale said the Trudeau government would make a decision on Huawei's role in the building of the 5G infrastructure in Canada before the 2019 federal election. Just a few months later, on July 30, 2019, he did a flip-flop and said the decision will be made after the 2019 election.

Leader, it has been more than a year — not as long as this chamber has been waiting for the federal budget and fiscal update we have been asking for, but still more than a year — actually, multiple years since the government has said they would make a decision on this issue. We have our Five Eyes intelligence alliance, which is very important to Canada. They have all made a decision.

Leader, when will your government join our allies and announce that Huawei is barred from participating in the 5G infrastructure in Canada?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. The emerging 5G technology is a challenge not only for our country but for the entire globe. I won't elaborate on that. That is well known. The government continues to examine the matter of Huawei's implication in our system. It continues to consult — not only with the Five Eyes, which you referred to, but with our allies more broadly — to make sure that all relevant security and economic considerations are taken into account.

Senator Martin: This is one of the topics discussed in the opposition motion debate yesterday. There was quite a robust debate in the House. As you say, we're consulting our allies. We have many allies around the world. One of those allies is South Korea, with whom we have the only free trade agreement in Asia — a gateway to the rest of Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

In considering what will happen with Huawei, I'm wondering if the government has looked at Samsung, for instance, who also has capabilities. We have these security concerns and our allies have already made the decision. Would you look carefully at these options and let the chamber know?

Senator Gold: I certainly will. I can assure this chamber that the government is considering all the options — the technological options and the potential partners, of which there are a number — Samsung being one, amongst others. I will report back as soon as a decision is made.

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED
INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Honourable senators, my question is to the representative of the government in the Senate.

Senator Gold, it was good news that the government established 10 working groups to accelerate completing the national action plan on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I know you agree that action on the Calls for Justice of the inquiry is a crucial national priority 18 months after they were released.

However, it is concerning that some groups, including the Ontario Native Women's Association, report being excluded from the development of the action plan, expressing concern that in developing the action plan the government must not take a limited, distinctions-based approach. What about the intersectionalities at play? ONWA noted that they saw evidence that other factors disproportionately impact Indigenous women, including disability, mental health and racialization.

Leader, November is Indigenous Disability Awareness Month, and November 25 begins the Global 16 Days Campaign to end violence against women. As Senator McCallum stated earlier today, an estimated 30% of Indigenous people are living with a disability, 2.3 times the national average.

Will the government's national action plan in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls address the needs and circumstances of Indigenous women and girls with disabilities, with action and resources to match, like a national awareness campaign, and funding for research needed on the extent and outcomes from targeting Indigenous women and girls living with disabilities for sexual abuse and violence?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, thank you for raising this important aspect of the ongoing national tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people.

I can confirm with you and the chamber that the national action plan, which the government continues to work on with provincial and territorial governments, as well as Indigenous leaders, survivors and families, will also address issues faced by Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people with disabilities.

Thank you for your advance notice of this question. I was able to inquire about the national awareness campaign and research funding. I have yet to receive a response. However, I can say broadly that the government is committed to taking disability-inclusive approaches to public policy issues — for example, creating the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group in April — that will guide the government's emergency response and to ensure that Canadians with disabilities are both supported and empowered.

Senator McPhedran: Senator Gold, given what you've just said to us in the chamber today, may I take it as a commitment that you will come back to the chamber with more information on research funding and a national awareness campaign?

Senator Gold: You have my commitment that as soon as I receive the information I have requested, I will share it with the chamber at the first opportunity.

HEALTH

COVID-19 VACCINE

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Honourable senators, my question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, in the last two weeks we've heard news of possible vaccines, whose preliminary results are very promising. We all know the importance of planning and execution. Can you share with us some of the work that is being done behind the scenes at the government level on planning and execution? Canadians would welcome some reassurance that logistical challenges are being well planned and we are ready for mass deployment.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, senator, for your question. How timely and important it is. The Government of Canada, as you know, initially reached out and entered into agreements with a large number of suppliers of vaccines to make sure that, if and when those prove promising, Canada will be well equipped. Of course, the implementation is everything. In that regard, I'm advised the government is nearing the final stages of securing its third-party logistics support that it needs for vaccine distribution that would begin early next year.

• (1450)

Indeed, in that regard, the Canadian Armed Forces continue to work closely with federal, provincial and territorial partners to support Canada's COVID-19 response, including support to the Public Health Agency of Canada as they coordinate the national strategy for vaccines and distribution.

Senator Loffreda: Thank you, Senator Gold, for that reassurance. As we all know, once we have properly addressed the planning and execution, communication becomes key. We have heard from our public health office yesterday that the vast majority of the Canadian population will be vaccinated by the end of 2021. There is a possibility that we may receive our first shipments of the vaccines early in the new year.

My concern is managing expectations and COVID fatigue. Some Canadians will want to be vaccinated early in the year and some will be vaccinated at the end of the year. Can you give us some reassurances? Is the government considering implementing a targeted communication plan to address the expectations and — also very importantly — to keep reminding us of the risk of COVID fatigue, which at this point in time we are all already feeling?

Senator Gold: Thank you, senator, again for reminding us all of the importance of keeping, as we say in French, *les mains à la pâte* and to keep focused on what we need to do to push back against this wave that is overcoming us.

The government and the Public Health Agency of Canada and, indeed, all health officers from across the country have been communicating regularly with Canadians for many, many months now, indeed since the beginning of this pandemic, and will continue to do so as we enter the next phase.

In terms of the COVID fatigue to which you allude, the government continues to rely on Canadians to continue to respond to the public health measures, such as physical distancing, hand-washing and the wearing of masks. The government understands, as we all do here, that this is difficult for Canadians, especially as we approach the holiday season and our long winters. The fact remains that stopping and slowing the spread of COVID-19 requires a continued effort and diligence on all of our parts, and the government is counting on us to do our part.

TREASURY BOARD

PUBLIC SERVANTS

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Honourable senators, my question is for Senator Gold, the spokesperson for the government in the Senate.

I would like to chat about a couple of national policies that need adjustment for our region of Canada. The first one is federal government employees continuing to work from home. As you know, in Atlantic Canada we have been very fortunate to have low levels of COVID infection. Provincial governments have arranged in Prince Edward Island for a number of provincial government employees to return to their offices to continue their work. This has a tremendous impact on the business community in Charlottetown, Summerside and other places in Prince Edward Island.

Would the Government of Canada consider instructing the head of the public service to relax the rules on a province-by-province basis depending on the level of COVID in those regions?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, thank you for raising this, as you did with the minister, if I recall. Rest assured that your intervention and your request will be considered seriously by the government.

Senator Downe: Thank you. That's very helpful. As you know, the bill before us today, Bill C-9, is a tremendous assistance for businesses with rent and wage subsidies. This is also a tremendous assistance for businesses. I hear it all the time in Charlottetown: If you can get people back downtown, having lunch and spending money and so on, it would be helpful. At the same time, of course, safety is a concern.

CANADIAN RADIO-TELEVISION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Honourable senators, my second question on national policy is one I asked you on October 2, about the decision by the CBC to cancel local dinnertime TV newscasts. That had an impact not only on Prince Edward Island, but also in northern Canada and rural Canada. That decision was reversed. Unfortunately, the CBC violated the terms of their licence when they cancelled the shows. When they were awarded their broadcasting licence by the CRTC, they promised a number of things. Two of them were that there would be no cancellations without public consultation and the approval of the CRTC, and they committed to a minimum number of programming hours in each area. Both of those conditions were not met. Then we find the CRTC saying, “Well, they violated their licence but there’s nothing we can do about it.”

You were going to check on October 2 to see what the government could do to make sure that, in a future crisis, this never happens again.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, Senator Downe. I do recall, but I do not yet have a response, unfortunately. When I do, I’ll be sure to bring it to the attention of the chamber.

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF
VIOLENCE IN QUEBEC

Hon. Pierre J. Dalphond: My question is for the Government Representative, Senator Gold. Two weeks ago I asked some questions about the funding the federal government had announced for women’s shelters and sexual assault centres in Quebec.

In Quebec, unlike in the other provinces, federal money is not given to an association that distributes it to the shelters. It is given to the Secrétariat à la condition féminine du Québec, a provincial organization that then chooses recipients and distributes the federal money. As a follow-up to your responses, I asked two questions about the second round of funding, the \$50 million that was announced in October 2020. The shelters in Quebec have informed me that they have not yet been contacted or been able to apply for grants. Time is running out. December is just around the corner and you told me in your previous response that Quebec was to distribute the money and report back by March 31, 2021. Would the government agree to extend the deadline for the second, \$50-million tranche that was announced but that has not yet been distributed?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. I have done some research and have been informed that the second funding tranche you refer to, the \$50 million announced in October, was given a deadline

extension. Previously, the province had until December 31 to disburse all the funds. The deadline of March 31, 2021, is therefore already an extension and, according to my information, there are no plans to provide another.

Senator Dalphond: My understanding is that March 31 was an extension of the deadline, from December 31 to March 31, for the first tranche of \$50 million. However, the deadline for the second tranche of \$50 million was also March 31. I believe it is impossible to meet these deadlines, which means that they will not be able to spend this money and prepare the report in that time frame.

Senator Gold: I will follow up to see if that is indeed the case, but according to my information, the deadline is the one I described. I have not received any information about a possibility of the money being spent by that date.

[English]

INTERNAL ECONOMY, BUDGETS AND ADMINISTRATION

BUSINESS OF THE COMMITTEE

Hon. Denise Batters: Honourable senators, my question is for the chair of the Internal Economy Committee, Senator Marwah.

From mid-August, when Prime Minister Trudeau prorogued Parliament, until last week, the Senate’s Internal Economy Committee held six meetings. All of those six meetings were held solely by video conference, as specified on the Notices of Meeting. In those meetings, CIBA approved the \$100 million Senate financial statements; at long last, payment of \$500,000 to the victims of Don Meredith; and the expenditure of millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money.

Senator Marwah, what was your authority to hold those six meetings since prorogation only by Zoom?

Hon. Sabi Marwah: Thank you, senator, for that question. I didn’t realize it was six meetings. We’ve been busy, so thank you for reminding me.

You’re right. After prorogation took place, steering did meet and we were concerned about two things. We were very concerned that there were some very urgent issues that had to be dealt with over several weeks. We were also concerned about the pandemic and the fact that we didn’t want to get all the senators in here in person and potentially have them and the staff exposed to the virus.

So steering met. We consulted, if my memory is correct, extensively with the interim Clerk of the Senate and the procedural team. We consulted with the clerk of the committee and the Law Clerk. Based on those deliberations, we came to the conclusion that the best way to proceed is for us to authorize CIBA to use the delegated powers that steering has, to allow CIBA to sit virtually, and that’s what we did. That was basically unanimous at steering, and we conveyed that to CIBA at the next meeting.

• (1500)

So if you look at the process, there was extensive consultation with the experts. It was unanimous at steering, and what we were doing was fully transparent because we communicated that to the Senate. As far as I know, no one really raised any issues at CIBA, and the Conservative caucus was fully present at every single meeting. I hope that helps, senator.

Senator Batters: Well, Senator Marwah, thank you for that context, but under the Parliament of Canada Act, CIBA as a committee continues to exist and its membership continues until it's changed. But the unusual method of meeting for three Senate committees, which was contained in that April sessional order, ceased with prorogation.

In a media article last week, you claimed that the Conservative opposition was putting the Senate at risk by refusing unanimous consent to hold CIBA meetings solely by Zoom, which would have prevented senators from attending in person. But what really puts the Senate at risk, Senator Marwah, is stunningly bad governance.

How can taxpayers in Canada trust the Senate's wise expenditure of their money when CIBA continued to meet only by Zoom and without proper authority?

Senator Marwah: I respectfully disagree that we didn't have the proper authority. And I would point out, if it is bad governance, the Conservative caucus is as much responsible for bad governance as I am, so thank you.

PUBLIC SAFETY

HUAWEI—5G TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Leo Housakos: Honourable senators, my question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. It's a supplementary question to the question asked by my colleague Senator Martin in regard to Huawei.

We've not seen the government table a budget for close to two years, and we all just assume that's because they can't count. But why are they dragging out for years a simple decision in regard to our national security and intelligence, which is to ban Huawei from our 5G network, and for that matter, from the marketplace altogether? We've had reports tabled in Parliament by security agencies in this country warning the government about the security risks, yet the government continues to drag its feet. Is there something more nefarious going on here?

We've seen over the last few months, government leader, a plethora of former government leaders in the Liberal Party — prime ministers, provincial premiers, ministers of Foreign Affairs — going as far as to call on the government to contravene a legal extradition treaty with the United States and engage in hostage trading.

Could the pressure from all these prominent Liberals on the government be the reason why the government is dragging its feet in taking what is a simple action to protect our national interest and our national security?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Well, senator, the simple answer is that Canada takes its security and the security of all Canadians and its infrastructure very seriously. Despite the adjectives you sprinkled throughout your question, our relations with China are complex, as we've discussed on many occasions, but the implication that there is something nefarious going on is not something that I would dignify with a response.

Canada continues, as I said, to look seriously at the issue of Huawei and to consult with its allies, and it will make a decision in the best interests of Canadians.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Leo Housakos: Well, for the record, government leader, we still haven't heard over a number of years when that decision will take place. We keep hearing dates and promises by the Prime Minister, and that line in the sand always seems to be moving along the beach as the days go by.

I have another question for you, government leader, because you know I'm an ardent defender of the Westminster parliamentary system. From time to time these days, I engage in Zoom round tables with university students of politics across the country. A couple of days ago, there were a few of them who asked me, "Why are Senator Gold and Senator Gagné misleading the public?" And I said, "Hold on there, I know them both to be very honourable people, so I take exception to your claim," but they wanted me to put this question forward.

They simply had this question: How could the two government representatives in the chamber, who are not members of any other caucus in this place except representatives of the government — of course, the government leader is summoned here by a letter of the Prime Minister to act as government leader, modelled as representative of the government. They themselves found it peculiar. I didn't know this, but when you stand up in this place to answer questions, the Government Representative is identified on CPAC as non-affiliated.

These students found it peculiar and unusual that in the Parliament of Canada, a Government Representative who sits on a cabinet committee, but who is not a minister, is non-affiliated. I was perplexed. I could not give them an answer, and I promised that I would give you an opportunity to do so because they do follow Question Period of the Senate.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): I'm humbled and gratified that the students to whom I've devoted a good part of my professional life are following our proceedings.

I have no knowledge of how CPAC labels, but I do know that for Senate purposes, the three members of the Government Representative's office are identified as non-affiliated for the purpose of Senate rules, and it may very well be that they're simply adopting the conventions of this place to describe us. But I will be happy to look into this matter with CPAC and report back to you and your students.

CITIZENSHIP, IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES

[Translation]

SKILLED WORKER PROGRAM

Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer: Honourable senators, my question is also to the leader of the Senate.

Leader, I would like you to convey my gratitude to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship for unveiling an ambitious program, encouraging up to 1.2 million immigrants to Canada. The plan will target bringing skilled workers, family members and refugees to Canada.

The minister went on to say that over 60% of the 1.2 million will be from the economic class. Those are skilled workers. To bring in skilled workers, to integrate them into the profession for which they have been selected, for a skilled immigrant to be able to implement their skills in Canada, they have to be taught professional English language.

Leader, I work with many skilled immigrants and understand they would like their professional organizations to recognize their qualifications. The skilled workers that I have been in contact with often say to me that they are not able to integrate into our Canadian society.

My question to you, leader, is: What plan does our government have in place to ensure that when we bring skilled workers to Canada, we make sure that they are able to work in their chosen profession and do not end up working as cab drivers? There is nothing wrong with that, but they didn't come here and we didn't bring them here as skilled immigrants to do that.

What does the government have in place to make sure skilled immigrants are able to work in the field for which we brought them here?

The Hon. the Speaker: I'm sorry, Senator Gold, but the time for Question Period has expired.

Dear colleagues, I am sorry that I cannot deliver my speech in French.

[English]

I want to start by thanking all senators who have intervened and participated in the debate here in the chamber during Committee of the Whole and during the subject-matter study of the bill at the National Finance Committee. The Canadian public can be assured that throughout the chamber, at National Finance and yesterday, individually and collectively, senators have been diligent in bringing the concerns of the constituents they represent before the Senate and before government, as well as the views and concerns of minorities, regions and those who are not always heard.

Again, I'm looking forward, colleagues, to your remarks, support and advice on this bill. I've recommended Bill C-9 in this chamber, as I believe it recognizes the needs of Canadians and it is responsive to Canadians.

• (1510)

The rent subsidy addresses the underperformance, if I can use that term, of the previous CECRA, and the issue of tenants rather than landlords being solely able to access the funds.

I'm truly confident that government and, administratively, the Canada Revenue Agency and the hard-working public servants are able to implement the intent of Bill C-9, ensuring the funds can be paid efficiently and quickly to the applicants that need them. The Lockdown Support is additional much-needed support.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INCOME TAX ACT

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING—
DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Pat Duncan moved third reading of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy).

She said: Honourable senators, I rise today as the bill's sponsor to speak to third reading of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy).

Colleagues, may I briefly, in my role as sponsor of Bill C-9 and as the senator for the Yukon, address the importance of the extension of the CEWS program, the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy.

In the previous session of this Parliament, the National Finance Committee studied some of the pandemic-related emergency measures offered by the federal government. Joe Sparling of Air North, Yukon's Airline, representing the Northern Air Transport Association, was very clear. He was grateful for the support they had received, and he told the committee that the wage subsidy, among other supports, was vital for them to be able to keep their employees and maintain service standards without having to cancel routes or increase prices. Remember, colleagues, air service is essential in many smaller Canadian communities in the North and throughout Canada. Mr. Sparling asked for the wage subsidy to be continued until June 2021, which is what Bill C-9 ensures.

Showing the northern spirit of independence and perseverance, as our colleague Senator Tannas put it yesterday, speaking very plainly, Joe Sparling put it straight to the committee. He said:

Financial relief can't go on forever, and it is going to take a long time for air travel demand to recover. In the North, we need to find ways to become self-sufficient in the new post-pandemic environment and make relief dollars go further in the current pandemic-impacted environment.

While a healthy and growing economy was able to support a competitive market with a 50-year-plus backslide in traffic, gateway route competition now has the effect of driving up our required financial relief by more than 30%.

I would like to emphasize the point about gateway route competition, colleagues, as it relates directly to observations of the Finance Committee regarding Bill C-9.

Colleagues, throughout this pandemic we have heard that we are all in this together; together, we're going to get through it. In Air North's market, with 100% market share on their gateway routes, Joe Sparling stated they would be able to repay every dollar in relief funding received, thus creating opportunities to provide funding for other struggling businesses — that's if they had 100% market share on their gateway routes. The gateway route competition that Air North is experiencing, despite best efforts by everyone to work with their competition, is a similar challenge to that expressed by representatives of Restaurants Canada. During the Finance Committee's pre-study of Bill C-9, Ontario's Premier, the Honourable Doug Ford, for example, urged food delivery companies to work with restaurants so that they might all share in the revenue from consumer expenditures and not have one sector profit at the expense of another.

CEWS and other government support enabled Air North to survive. And I would stress to you, colleagues, that it is owned by the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and Yukoners. That said, when governments negotiate supports for larger mainline carriers and other sectors, please consider bringing these issues up and encourage recipient businesses of government support to cooperate rather than compete.

In the case of airlines, specifically those that are currently seeking support, we must ensure that no part of our country is left underserved and that when we are through this pandemic, air carriers and, indeed, all businesses, have survived and all Canadians, no matter where they live, have access to a healthy quality of life and access to services. We must remember — all of us — that we're all in this together and we're all part of Team Canada.

Honourable senators, I would be remiss if I did not also speak briefly to other observations of the National Finance Committee's report. We clearly expressed that businesses that received support from taxpayers' money should not concurrently pay out dividends to shareholders. We must not forget that there are some sectors that are doing very well these days. If a company has a large enough profit margin to pay dividends, public funds should not be needed to assist them. Those taxpayer dollars are much needed elsewhere.

There is also concern expressed about program predictability. This has been an issue for some senators as the details are only available on the programs until December 19, 2020, and I understand and appreciate those concerns. I also believe that the wording in Bill C-9 will enable the responsible adjustment of the programs through regulation to provide appropriate responses and shifts in how the COVID-19 pandemic affects our economy and our lives in general.

The committee did note with concern that there should be support available for those businesses and organizations who fall between the cracks. I'm optimistic; I do believe that something will be forthcoming from the government to assist those.

Honourable senators, I want to restate my gratitude to all of you for all the hard work that has been done to ensure we have studied and thoroughly considered Bill C-9 promptly. Senators' staff, Senate Administration staff, interpreters, Library of Parliament analysts — everyone has put in extra hours to support our work, our work being to make sure that Canadians will receive the support they need to weather this pandemic, while keeping human health and safety as our top priorities. Everyone has ensured that we senators have been able to do our job and study the government's initiative with a fair and critical lens. We know how important this legislation is and the need to adopt it. I thank you all for ensuring that Canadians will receive the support they need in a timely and appropriate fashion. *Gùnálchish, mahsi'cho*. Thank you.

Hon. Larry W. Smith: Honourable senators, I rise today in my capacity as critic to speak to Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy).

Bill C-9, in extending the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and introducing the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy — an updated version of the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance, or CECRA, program — has brought much-needed relief to small business owners and entrepreneurs across Canada.

I thank Senator Duncan, the sponsor of the bill, for outlining how it will help those who need assistance most.

[Translation]

However, I want to note some concerns about this bill to ensure that they are recorded in the Hansard. For the past few weeks, I have heard several stakeholders speak to Bill C-9 at committee meetings and I have come to the conclusion that this legislation still has major shortcomings.

[English]

First, representatives from various sectors expressed their disappointment with the reduced wage subsidy rate. The original wage subsidy's rigid eligibility criteria punished businesses that saw modest increases in revenues just above the minimum revenue decline threshold, deeming them instantly ineligible. This unintended consequence provided a disincentive for businesses to stay open and keep staff on payroll, the alternative being they would rather shutter their operations until all public health orders were rescinded and they could return to their normal levels of operation.

As a result, the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, in its study of the relief programs, recommended the government introduce “... a progressive, or scalable, eligibility threshold for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, and extend its duration for particularly hard-hit sectors.”

To its credit, the government did indeed introduce scalability to the CEWS, and although complex in its nature, it did allow businesses to continue their operations without fear of losing access to the much-needed payroll support.

• (1520)

However, the government has taken a step backwards in its update of the CEWS this time around. It has lowered the wage subsidy rate from a maximum support level of 75% to 65%, and it has failed to provide targeted support to sectors hardest hit by this pandemic, notably accommodation, hotels and food services.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which represents over 200,000 businesses across Canada, wrote in a submission:

The reduced CEWS rate of up to 65% is out of step with the support provided in the first wave and over the summer. New job numbers show that the food services and accommodations sector lost jobs in October for the first time since April. These sectors, and others also still struggling, need additional wage support as they grapple with new restrictions after 8 months of record revenue losses, not less.

The September job numbers from Statistics Canada did certainly show the negative impact of the second wave of the pandemic on Canada's hotels and restaurants. Gains in employment across the country were offset by losses in the accommodation and food services sectors. These sectors, being dependent on the physical presence of people, and unable to pivot like some other industries, recorded losses of 48,000 jobs, mostly due to the additional public health closures in Quebec and Ontario.

[Translation]

There could be even more job losses in the hardest-hit sectors during the second wave. Doug Porter, chief economist at the Bank of Montreal, recently told investors the following, and I quote:

[English]

... job gains are going to be increasingly tough to come by, especially in the face of renewed restrictions in many provinces.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, although many industries, such as wholesalers and technical and scientific services, have recovered, many others aren't out of the woods yet. To give you an idea of the disproportionate damage that this pandemic has caused in certain sectors, I'd like to draw your attention to Statistics Canada's quarterly financial statistics. These numbers show that the arts and entertainment industry and the accommodation and food services industry, which represent 2.5% of overall corporate income in Canada, recorded a decline of 173.9% in net income before taxes in the second quarter.

[English]

In English, for those who are not listening in French, the food service and lodging/accommodation businesses which represent 2.5% of the total budget, or money earned in Canada from industry, had a loss of 173.9% in the second quarter of 2020, which is unbelievable.

It is for these reasons I urge the government to take on more of a proactive role in providing more targeted relief to sectors hardest hit by this pandemic, especially in the wake of further public health lockdown orders.

The wage subsidy rate needs to be set higher in order to prevent additional layoffs. The current one-size-fits-all method to the wage subsidy is not the right approach.

The new CERS is a welcome improvement over the now-abandoned CECRA program, as it shifts its focus to tenants, allowing them to apply directly for rental assistance. Under the original program, the government entered into agreements with landlords, providing them with funds once they agreed to lower rental fees. This left many small businesses at the mercy of their landlords, and in many cases larger landlords simply refused to take part in the program altogether. According to figures from the Minister of Finance, of the \$3 billion allotted, the CECRA program distributed just over 60% of that money.

The key flaw with the CERS, however, is its alignment with the CEWS, which creates a major impediment to accessing rent relief for many commercial tenants. Under the new program, the Canada Revenue Agency will retroactively provide funds to businesses who have paid rent, thus barring access to businesses that have not paid rent or entered into rental deferment agreements.

The Canadian Survey on Business Conditions put out by Statistics Canada on a monthly basis shows 16.1% of businesses in Canada have their mortgage or rent payments deferred. This figure is disproportionately higher in the accommodation and food services at 41.8%, followed by the arts, entertainment and recreation at 32.6%. These speeches have been given by other senators in the house to show the weaknesses and problems that these industries have.

Dan Kelly, the President of the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses told our Finance Committee:

This creates a giant chicken-and-egg problem for small businesses. The reason they need the subsidy is they don't have the money to pay their rent, yet requirements are that you have to pay it and then get it retroactively.

[Translation]

When she testified before the National Finance Committee last week and when she appeared before this chamber, the Minister of Finance explained that the government planned to introduce a bill that would consider rent as an eligible expense, which would give more businesses access to subsidies. The minister claims that Bill C-9 would be implemented without delay once it receives Royal Assent; however, months have gone by since the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy replaced the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program and tenants are still waiting. They cannot wait much longer.

I therefore urge the government to find solutions quickly in order to address the shortcomings in this bill.

[English]

Colleagues, I would like to shift the conversation to a topic that I feel is missing in many of our deliberations, with respect to providing assistance to businesses. While Bill C-9 will undoubtedly prevent bankruptcies and help businesses stay afloat, it does not guarantee their survival until some form of an end to this pandemic. As someone with a family member in the restaurant business, I have heard concerns that these programs will simply delay the inevitability of bankruptcy and permanent closures if governments do not find solutions which would allow them to remain open during this pandemic.

Mr. Kelly quite bluntly told our committee:

In my view, there are hundred of thousands of zombie businesses right now, businesses that are essentially dead, but they haven't finalized their closure process altogether Our research shows that one in seven small businesses will fail before the end of the pandemic.

Rising infection rates across the country are compounding the pressure on policy-makers as they try to balance the health and economic risks associated with additional closures, grappling with the daunting task of reducing the spread of the disease but also ensuring that the economic damage is not irreparable. What is currently missing is a system of open, transparent and accessible data from all three levels of government. I must compliment Senator Marshall who brought this point up multiple times during our hearings.

[Senator Smith]

In its first annual report published in October, the Canadian Statistics Advisory Council underscored how this problem is negatively impacting our ability to fight the pandemic, stating:

Critical data gaps and a lack of coordinated data in Canada seriously undermine the ability of decision makers and governments at all levels, as well as the general public, to understand and address the key social, health, economic, environmental and energy issues facing Canadians.

Jan Kestle, a member of the council and President of Environics Analytics further highlighted the antiquated systems of reporting used by the public health agencies, which includes the use of fax machines rather than digital tools to share COVID-19 related information, which severely slows the ability of governments to monitor and assess how the pandemic is developing, but also how it's impacting Canadians.

Not only are these data gaps hindering the ability of governments to make timely and effective decisions related to the pandemic, they are also exacerbating the problems already facing small-business owners coast to coast. As an example, statistics from Restaurants Canada show their members have collectively spent \$750 million since March of 2020 retrofitting their establishments with barriers, purchasing personal protective equipment, and training staff in preparation for safe reopenings across Canada. With months of preparation and safeguards in place, these businesses have been given 24 to 48 hours notice to close down in some parts of the country, without data justifying the closures.

• (1530)

So you get your \$40,000 or \$50,000, whatever you get, you're investing it all in protective equipment, but where are all the people in your restaurant, eating the food and bringing in revenue? It doesn't exist. Therefore what we're doing is giving money to people, and they know if they keep trying to operate, they're going to go belly-up anyways.

Lauren van den Berg, from Restaurants Canada, told our committee:

. . .when we were being asked to shut down with relatively no notice . . . we're not getting the data.

Restaurants are the safe alternative to the private gatherings that are the source of this community spread

It's not the restaurants, it's private parties held in enclosed places that create the problem.

Where data has been made public regarding transmission rates . . . as spreader events — it's those private gatherings.

This frustration was echoed by other stakeholders in our committee. In their presentation, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business made it clear that their members are increasingly starting to:

... feel like they are the scapegoat or essentially being shut down in order to send a message to the public that they need to take COVID seriously, not because the spread of COVID is coming from the businesses themselves

Make no mistake, I'm not advocating against lockdowns and closures. In fact, I believe targeted lockdowns backed by data are essential in our fight against this deadly virus. What I'm advocating for and urging the federal government to do is step in and fill the critical data gaps that exist in our health system today. For example, providing open and transparent data about where this virus is and isn't being transmitted will allow Canadians to make more informed decisions. It will also provide businesses with some much-needed certainty.

[Translation]

Esteemed colleagues, the National Finance Committee's pre-study clearly shows that we must vote in favour of Bill C-9 because businesses need support if they are to survive. It's also clear that small business owners and entrepreneurs are frustrated by governments' lack of transparency. Closing their doors permanently isn't an option for them.

[English]

To conclude, I would like to echo the words of Dr. Vera Etches, Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health, who recently suggested the Province of Ontario find a more balanced approach to fighting the pandemic, and also learn to co-exist with the virus cautiously. In a letter to the mayor of Ottawa she said:

I've looked at the levels of unemployment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic response, I've looked at indicators of the mental health of our community and the challenges arising from a backlog in surgical and medical procedures. I'm concluding more needs to be done to enable people to return to more of their usual supports and services in their lives.

If we are to learn how to co-exist with this virus and learn how to manage this pandemic with a more balanced approach, the federal government must redouble its efforts around data collection, data sharing and innovation in order to foster an environment that will keep Canadians safe, but also ensure our small businesses can remain open. Thank you very much.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Smith, would you take a question?

Senator Smith: Certainly.

Hon. Lucie Moncion: You said in your speech that "one size fits all" is not the right approach for the rent subsidy. When we met with the minister, she said that although this solution doesn't correct all problems, it is one that reaches the majority.

Since you mentioned that "one size fits all" is not the right approach, what would the right approach be to correct the problem that Bill C-9 is trying to address?

Senator Smith: I think there are hot spots and industries, and if you take the example of restaurants and accommodation and you compare that to high-tech industries, many of the high-tech industries have made a fantastic comeback after the initial influx of the COVID-19 malaise, if you like. However, other industries have been so negatively affected that their comeback will be retarded and much slower than in some other industries.

I am suggesting industry-specific examples and what came from the committee, because it's obviously not from me but from listening to our witnesses. They clearly said that we need to make sure we can analyze and understand who is the most severely impacted and give a larger proportion of help to them, as opposed to those already doing well. I believe that could be the answer to that question.

That is also related to the quality of data, the quality of leadership and the involvement of the federal government working with provincial and local governments. There needs to be strong leadership. It's not just one person doing something, another person doing something, and suddenly you have everyone trying to do something. It's not coordinated with strong leadership. People need to see the leadership, and I truly believe it lies in the hands of the federal government at this point to lead and support provincial governments. This balancing act is not necessarily easy, but is something that needs to be done.

Senator Moncion: You're talking about leadership here, and I would like to understand how. Minister Freeland has been consulting with the industry to find the right balance. She understood that they could not answer for 100% of situations. You're talking about leadership here, and I wonder how you can actually question the leadership of the minister in this situation.

Senator Smith: Thank you for the question. I'm not questioning Minister Freeland's leadership. I said to her that there's an opportunity for strong leadership to coordinate, like a *rassembleur*, and bring the provinces and the various industry groups together so people can see clearly that, for specific industries that potentially need extra help, it will be there.

Of course, the other issue is that the Minister of Finance said to the former Auditor General of Newfoundland in our committee — in response to her saying we need more transparency, data, up-to-the-minute information — that we're going to give economic updates but not budgets. We understand there is a need to get out into the market and help people. However, at the same time, there is a need to do the accounting because everything you spend is going to come back and bite you unless you know exactly what you've done and where you're going to go.

Again, this is a balancing act and an opportunity for leadership. This is not a personal criticism — certainly not a personal criticism by me. Who am I to criticize what the Minister of Finance is doing? It's an observation. We need data. We need information. We're parliamentarians. We should have it. We

have many people with a lot of skill, and Canadians and business people deserve to have the truth in terms of making sure we get information.

Again, it's not a criticism; it's an opportunity. That's how I look at it. I try to look at things positively as opposed to negatively. There is opportunity to take; now who is going to step up and put it all together? To my mind, it has to be the federal government.

Hon. Donna Dasko: Will the senator take another question?

Senator Smith: I will try. I'm getting so excited, my blood pressure is going up.

Senator Dasko: Here we go then; wonderful. First, if you don't mind me correcting, it's Jan Kestle of Environics Analytics.

Senator Smith: I tried to say that word five or six times, and I actually pre-read it. Thank you very much.

Senator Dasko: I wanted to correct that because Environics is the firm where I spent my career. I wanted to get the name right here.

I absolutely agree with you with respect to everything you've said about data collection. You've made some good observations, and there always seems to be frustration. Minister Freeland was here yesterday and talked about data. It's always a negotiation between the provinces and the federal government with respect to collecting data. They are often not able to collect the data they want in terms of the actual specific data, the level, and the timeliness of the data seems to be a real issue.

I have been told that the federal government actually has constitutional powers, if it wanted to use them, to almost force data collection. They have the power to do so if they wish, but have never invoked such power.

• (1540)

What is your view about this? Do you think the federal government should do that, given the frustration you and others have expressed?

Thank you.

Senator Smith: Are you suggesting they would use something like the War Measures Act or an emergency act?

Senator Dasko: That's potentially there, yes.

Senator Smith: The way I've always looked at business situations — because that's where I come from — is that you have an evaluation process where you intensify consequences as you move forward through a case.

This is, again, an opportunity for the government to analyze where it is and what corrections need to be done. Obviously, we've tried to position potential improvements at the Finance Committee. It's up to the government to take a look at what we presented and assess where they are, what they need to do and how they can create this new balance.

[Senator Smith]

As we look at the United States today and see their situation and how COVID is spiking, that's exactly one of the things they're taking a serious look at: What type of planned lockdowns do we implement to stimulate an improvement in our situation?

As we look at Canada, it all comes down to continuous analysis, discussion, dialogue and making sure you're addressing the key areas and pockets that may not be getting what they need to survive. You have to keep the wheel going in a certain direction. You're going to steer and maybe veer a bit, but you have to go toward a goal. That goal has to be the balance of living with COVID and rebooting our economy. I certainly believe we have the brainpower to do that, as well as the economic and business leadership, but we have to get together.

Again, I will say it simply: this is a great opportunity for the minister and the Canadian government to step up and take the leadership required. This is a huge opportunity, but it's a big challenge.

[Translation]

Hon. Rosa Galvez: As Senator Smith said, the magic word here is "opportunity."

[English]

Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill C-9, which extends the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and implements a redesigned commercial rent subsidy. This is another COVID-19 pandemic emergency bill, aimed at attenuating economic stress. Yet, both the sanitary and economic crises are interdependent, thus efficient legislation must consider them as such.

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is well under way, as was widely predicted by scientists in the public health field. Canada now counts thousands of new cases, and my province of Quebec is the hardest hit. As a country, it seems that we were, again, ill-prepared for the second wave, and now chances are that COVID-19 will remain with us, eventually, as endemic.

Citizens and businesses are running out of endurance and wonder if there are other ways to manage the crisis. Despite that, SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19, is not like smallpox, SARS, MERS, the Spanish flu or swine flu; there are multiple lessons we should have learned from these previous diseases. However, managing COVID-19 goes beyond the poorly understood concepts of herd immunity, elimination or learning to live with the virus, with some politicians pushing for the last option.

Countries that managed the pandemic well have two key things in common: One, they identified people who have the infection in a matter of hours through rapid, reliable testing and contact tracing — how many of us have it in our cells — thus reducing the numbers affected by a particular outbreak; and two, they had much stronger and more flexible public health systems.

Canada still lags in both rapid testing and contact tracing, and our confinement is not tight; hence, we are failing at rapidly identifying places where contagion occurs and evaluating the risk of spread venues.

[Translation]

Small-and medium-sized businesses provide the basic services that make them the cornerstone of local activities and gatherings, and the government needs to find ways to enable them to operate safely.

Bill C-9 attempts to overcome challenges facing businesses by addressing their two biggest expenses: wages and rent. The government needs to give businesses the flexibility they need to pivot so they can meet urgent needs for products and services.

Bill C-9 would extend the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy until the end of summer 2021. The subsidy was crucial to saving many businesses from closing, and it maintained the employer-employee link because it allowed workers to keep collecting their pay. That's a good thing that will make the recovery process easier.

The new Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy will address problems with the previous program by, among other things, eliminating the need for landlords to get approval before financial assistance becomes available. To date, only 22% of small businesses have accessed the program, and the government wants to improve that dismal rate.

[English]

However, as our thoughtful witnesses at the National Finance Committee pointed out, small businesses are still falling through the cracks. We have a duty to find a better compromise and balance between sanitary requirements, services offered and business bankruptcies. We have a duty to carefully design and redesign these assistance programs according to their feedback and experience from the initial bills from the first wave, starting with Bill C-14.

Stakeholders have asked that programs be more specifically targeted to the needs of various sectors. Some sectors require help navigating the bureaucracy of the programs, while others, such as restaurants, face the extraordinary challenge of the beginning of a Canadian winter. While terraces were allowed to open during the summer and fall, they will be closed during winter months. Their only option is to deliver food and assume high delivery service charges.

Bill C-9 lets businesses fall through the gap, including new businesses, seasonal businesses, professional services and independent professionals. They have been gravely hurt by the pandemic, but they struggle to meet the specific requirements of these programs. Despite their flaws, Bill C-9 and previous emergency bills are essential to keep workers and basic services afloat, but they are very costly and won't last forever.

There is also the increasing abyss creating two types of businesses. When looking at economic recovery, it is easy to conclude that the pandemic has enriched very few sectors while driving many others to bankruptcy. Indeed, global corporate

billionaires have managed to increase their collective wealth by 27.5% just during the last four months of the pandemic. This wealth has increased to \$10.2 trillion, based on PwC's data on billionaires and UBS sustainability ratings.

In Canada, the total wealth of the country's 20 richest billionaires has grown by \$37 billion since March 2020. Those are the richest of the rich, not small and local businesses. As explained in my white paper, despite having 0.5% of the world's population, Canada is home to the eighth greatest number of millionaires.

A September 2020 poll from Abacus Data showed that 85% of people think it is at least important to include new or increased taxes on the richest Canadians as part of the recovery. Given this overwhelming consensus among Canadians of all political affiliations, I lament that the motion to tax extreme wealth was defeated by partisan politics in the other place on Monday.

Are we then surprised to learn that people distrust government and politicians, or that they resist mandatory lockdowns? Rich people have fled big cities, such as Toronto and Montreal, and have relocated to the suburbs when they are not teleworking from a beach, as reported by *The New York Times* and *HuffPost*.

[Translation]

We're all facing the same storm, but we're not all in the same boat. Some of us are navigating the waves on luxury yachts, while others barely have a dinghy.

Nations that have managed to control the spread of the virus have already begun planning and implementing their recovery, even though the virus is still present. Canada also needs to do this if we are to come out of this crisis healthier and more prosperous.

• (1550)

[English]

The predatory capitalism approach has failed us, and as decision makers we now need to confront the tough decision of which businesses should be supported and which should not. Should we continue propping up businesses who haven't adapted to a COVID-conscious world, or those who have a doubtful future regardless of the pandemic since they are incompatible with a sustainable and resilient future?

Around the world, the advice is that support should be provided to businesses so that they can innovate and effectively transform to the new reality by either making changes to the services they offer or making changes to the way their services are offered. One approach is to implement a framework that would promote and compensate companies for their social contributions. Rather than having to bail out the hotel business, for example, the government can properly incentivize them to expand their services, including accessible rentals, health services, rental of their space to local schools, academies and gyms, et cetera.

Support should be preferentially offered to businesses and corporations that can demonstrate meaningful contributions to social and environmental well-being so that we can meet ongoing

and future crises with resilience. This crisis, as many of us have said, is an opportunity to truly put people before greed and profits, and it is high time we start focusing on how we will recover from this pandemic.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, Bill C-9, and all the other emergency bills, have focused on workers and businesses. None of these measures have addressed homelessness. Perhaps certain types of businesses could have been encouraged to help house the homeless by changing their business model, which would have solved two problems at once.

We should have started planning better five months ago to respond to today's reality. Our failures are having a very serious impact as we face new lockdown measures. We should learn from the fact that we seem to be perpetually failing at accurately predicting what might come next. This has become abundantly clear in this pandemic. We have to stop failing and start properly planning for the future and for our recovery.

As tax incentives are offered, we need to think about our collective goal and how best to achieve it. Honourable colleagues, rather than returning to the old norms of systemic racism and growing inequality, more severe climate change and environmental degradation, we have an opportunity to move forward more positively, by increasing reconciliation efforts, taxing extreme wealth, making polluters pay rather than subsidize them, and promoting conditionality and transparency when financial assistance is offered.

[English]

Colleagues, last week I sent you a copy of a white paper on the recovery in which I outline social, environmental and economic considerations of the recovery and offer specific recommendations for stimulus measures. I really hope the new COVID committee will look at that. The paper proposes a transformative vision to achieve greater overall collective well-being and solidarity among all Canadians, drawing inspiration from over 150 civil society observations and proposals, and government responses around the world. It addresses the downfalls of traditional stimulus measures, a poor governance and transparency track record, unnecessary exposure to financial risk, contribution to climate change and increasing inequality, as well as the benefits of clean and just stimulus, increased social and environmental justice, economic resilience and low-carbon growth.

Honourable senators, I hope that after voting in favour of Bill C-9, we will work together on building the future we want for us, but also for the next generations. Thank you very much, *meegwetsh*.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

[Senator Galvez]

[Translation]

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE
COMMITTEE ON SUBJECT MATTER—DEBATE

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the first report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance (*Subject matter of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy)*), tabled in the Senate on November 17, 2020.

Hon. Percy Mockler moved the adoption of the report.

He said: Honourable senators, Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act with regard to the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy is very important for Canadians.

I invite you, Mr. Speaker, and all senators, to take the time to read the report to see that we are on the right track. However, we still have many concerns.

Last week, the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance received authorization from the Senate to examine the subject matter of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act with regard to the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy.

I want to thank all the witnesses, who worked very hard at these meetings and were very informative. We all have one thing in common: We want to make sure that the process of the pre-study of Bill C-9 is all about transparency, accountability, predictability and reliability in the current Canadian economic context.

Canadian businesses and many Canadians have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and during our meetings, businesses clearly indicated that they need predictability in these uncertain times in order to try to plan ahead in a climate of uncertainty.

Honourable senators, too many Canadians across the country are still worried about COVID-19, and the economic and financial situation, not to mention the social tensions in our communities.

[English]

Honourable senators, we want to bring to your attention that we must look together at means and ways, and be mindful of transparency, accountability, predictability and reliability. As chair and on behalf of the National Finance Committee, I want to thank all the witnesses who were very informative; we have a common denominator to make sure that the process will be available from coast to coast to coast. Canadian businesses and many Canadians, honourable senators, have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. During our meetings, businesses indicated to us and brought to our attention the need for predictability in uncertain times in order to help the business community — and all Canadians — revive the Canadian economy.

Honourable senators, your committee also believes in transparency in government spending. To this end, the federal government should publish updates of all of its COVID-19 programs. As chair, I want to raise this particular statement and thank Senator Marshall and, on behalf of my colleagues of the steering committee, Senator Forest, Senator Klyne and Senator Richards, to say thank you to all senators who are members of the National Finance Committee, along with senators who are not members of the Finance Committee but who did participate. We want to applaud your presence.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Mockler, I'm sorry to interrupt you. It's now 4 o'clock and, pursuant to the order adopted on October 27, 2020, we have to adjourn.

(At 4 p.m., pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on October 27, 2020, the Senate adjourned until 2 p.m., tomorrow.)

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